



Foreword
by
the President of Iceland
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Photographs are a powerful medium. They can catch nature's beauty and the splendour of human achievements, a castle by a tranquil lake, a grand city upon a hill. Photographs can also tell a story of the image within the frame. They can catch memorable events, make sure that they are not forgotten. But they can also deceive. Rarely has that fact been established as well as in the opening lines of Milan Kundera's masterful tale, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, where a dramatic tale is told, of people who fell out of favour being erased from a photograph and history as well.

We Icelanders cherish literature. We like to claim that our ancient poetry and the Icelandic Sagas, medieval tales of feuds, voyages and valour, comprise our contribution to global culture. But we also have our land, our nature. "Land, nation and language." With those words begins the poet's Snorri Hjartarson's epic ode to Iceland, Icelandic and the Icelanders. Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, Snorri was sometimes pessimistic about the future of humankind. But nature, in all its honesty and unpretentiousness, gave him hope.

Yes, photographs can of course provide a simplistic or skewed image of a place. It does rain in Iceland, it can be annoyingly windy, and you can find rubbish and waste in even its most secluded spots. Not all of our farms, villages and towns are postcard-perfect. Some fjords have factories, some heaths are marked with power cables, many wetlands were turned into pasture by manmade ditches. We need to live on the island, utilize its resources in a sensible manner. At the same time, we must acknowledge the need to protect nature. We must advance sustainability and sound respect for our environment, and we need to keep constantly in mind the needs and rights of future generations.

In all this, testimonies to natural beauty can help. But there is no need to erase anything, to tell untruths that will ultimately fail and fall. Jíri Kolbaba's photographs give us a good glimpse of Iceland. He has visited us on many occasions. He knows the island and its people. His photos are not fake, they are not photoshopped. They provide a true image of my country, the country I love. I hope that you, dear reader, will enjoy this wonderful collection of photographs and even share some of that sentiment with others. We live on this globe together and need to work together for its protection.