



# OF CATS AND MEN

VESTURBAER  
BY ELIZA REID

Vesturbaer sometimes seems more like a feline monarchy than a vaguely bohemian residential enclave of the capital. Cats of all colors and sizes roam the wide side streets and apartment parking lots. They peek into gardens, and brazenly wander into former fishermen's corrugated iron homes, whose doors have been left open to let in the summer breeze.

Their domain extends as far as the neighborhood itself – on either side of the region's traffic artery, Hringbraut, along to the University of Iceland and the domestic airport, and as far west and north as the sea. Ears tattooed for identification and embedded microchips separate the domesticated from the vagabonds – but they all have the power to stop traffic.

The cats also have their own entourage: children chase them from one gray cement semi-detached to another, between prams with sleeping infants left on the front lawns and through the occasional climbing structure.

I live in one of Vesturbaer's old multicolored timber houses, close enough to hear the cheers of the home crowd when **KR football club** scores a goal in the summer season. The relaxed nature and strong community identity of the neighborhood is appealing.

A leisurely stroll around the neighborhood is its best introduction. The salty air blows strongest along the many cycling paths snaking the rocky shoreline. It's my favorite place to watch the peachy hues of a spring sunset.

Vesturbaer is a popular home for students, many of whom live in the soulless concrete blocks that line Hringbraut. It's full of artsy types who like the community spirit and the proximity to the city center. Successful businesspeople are also quick to purchase the stately former skippers' homes that lie in the heart of Vesturbaer, in the central 101 postcode. To round off the assortment, an increasingly international group of migrants has generated a relatively new multicultural component.

Vesturbaer's children, even more common than the cats, also have their own fiefdom. It includes the local thermal pool, **Vesturbæjarlaug**, open early and shut late, where kids splash each other in the outdoor pool while adults gossip with their acquaintances and soak in the 40°C circular "hot pots".

Their realm extends to the city's best ice cream parlor, **Ísbúðin**, whose soft vanilla cones – preferably dipped in chocolate with licorice sprinkles – nourish a waterlogged soul.

I wouldn't want to live anywhere else – except when a corpulent stray cat ambles along to knock over my flowerpots.

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