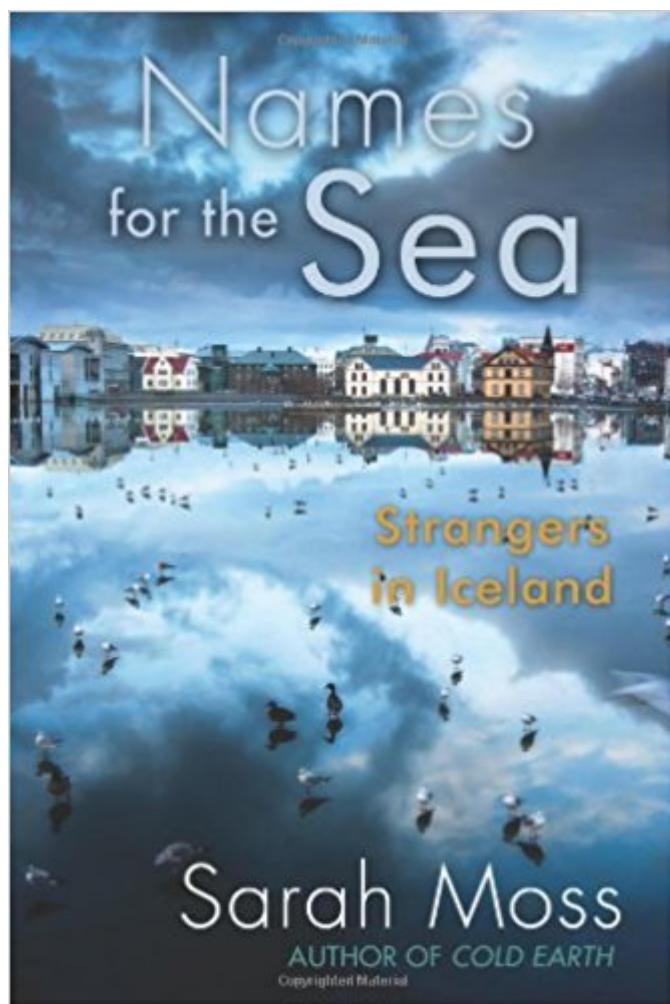


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Names For The Sea: Strangers In Iceland



Synopsis

Sarah Moss had a childhood dream of moving to Iceland, sustained by a wild summer there when she was nineteen. In 2009, she saw an advertisement for a job at the University of Iceland and applied on a whim, despite having two young children and a comfortable life in Kent. The resulting adventure was shaped by Iceland's economic collapse, which halved the value of her salary, by the eruption of Eyjafjallajokull and by a collection of new friends, including a poet who saw the only bombs fall on Iceland in 1943, a woman who speaks to elves and a chef who guided Sarah's family around the intricacies of Icelandic cuisine. Moss explored hillsides of boiling mud and volcanic craters and learned to drive like an Icelander on the unsurfaced roads that link remote farms and fishing villages in the far north. She watched the northern lights and the comings and goings of migratory birds, and as the weeks and months went by, she and her family learned new ways to live. *Names for the Sea* is her compelling, beautiful and very funny account of living in a country poised on the edge of Europe, where modernization clashes with living folklore.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author's domestic adventures, challenges in understanding and adjusting to life in a cold and strange place, and admiration for the beauty of Iceland fill this meandering travel memoir of the year she and her family (husband and two small children) lived in Reykjavik while teaching at the University of Iceland. Moss, an Oxford-educated British novelist, captures the fierce beauty of the Arctic landscape, the hardships of establishing family life as foreigners on a local salary in a nation suffering an economic collapse, and most interestingly, the paradoxes of the national character.

Icelanders seem both outward-looking and insular, a nation of deeply provincial voyagers • who welcome foreigners but remain stoic, taciturn, and, at times, inscrutable. Moss is at her best when trying to make sense of the great pride and shame-filled inferiority that coexist within the people she meets. Her admirable prose on the weather, the light, volcanoes, and Icelandic folklore is interspersed, sadly, with repetitive laments about the subpar quality of imported fruit, lack of fresh vegetables, and Icelanders' dependence on the automobile in a climate that is subfreezing nine months a year. --Jonathan Schwartz

Praise for Names for the Sea"An infectious memoir from someone engagingly candid about her temporary homeland's limitations and her own." Kirkus"Moss . . . captures the fierce beauty of the Arctic landscape, the hardships of establishing family life as foreigners on a local salary in a nation suffering an economic collapse, and most interestingly, the paradoxes of the national character." Booklist

For those interested in what it might be like to live in Iceland for a person not born there, this is a good memoir. It is the story of a British woman and her family who live in Iceland for a year while she is teaching British Literature in a college in Reykjavik just after the crash when Iceland almost went bankrupt. Very insightful comments about everyday life and people's attitudes toward children, food, recreation and education. An engaging story.

I visited Iceland this year as a "foreigner" and loved it, so this lovely book about Iceland deepened my experience and taught me more about this resilient people.

Both loved the author's look at Iceland as a foreigner trying to live there, and tired of her perfectly understandable discomfort. Now I may never rent a car and drive there--and I'm glad of the warning--but disheartened. She did all armchair travelers a service as she investigated certain impenetrable Icelandic traditions (invisible 'little people'?) and shared the frustration of being unable to fly out during a volcanic eruption or easily rent a condo instead of buy. Iceland's economic rise and fall as global liquidity first found it and then left it came alive for me briefly and then seemed all too familiar a human story. Basically, I'm glad to have read more about Iceland, but some of it was a bit of a chore for the reader as well as the writer who had to live the story.

This memoir reveals the author's love for Iceland as well as some quirks that only a stranger's

perspective could discern. Sarah Moss found beauty in exquisite vistas and the arctic sky. As a mother she also discovered some customs about children that were not her cup of tea. She was in Iceland just after the financial collapse. She was astounded by Reykjavik's residents' dislike of walking, taking the bus, riding a bike, and even thinking of buying second-hand items. I wonder if the financial bubble, good-times spoiled Reykjavik's younger generations. My favorite author, Bill Holm ("The Windows of Brimnes"), said that opinions of Iceland could not be made from just Reykjavik, which is a large city (based on Icelandic standards). I loved Sarah Moss' book ending with her journey up Ring Road. I can't wait to spend several weeks enjoying a similar Icelandic adventure. Like Sarah Moss, after one visit to Iceland, I yearn to return.

Perfect book to read when planning to visit Iceland. Easy, enjoyable read.

Interesting insights into life and recent history of Iceland. Sarah Moss spent a whole year teaching near Reykjavik and interviewed many different local people. A great introduction before a tourist trip to Iceland.

I bought this book because I, too, have an interest in Icelandic history and culture, and I particularly like human interest stories. Unfortunately, this book had no story and the narrative in present tense bothered me throughout. While I initially found the descriptives to be rich and detailed, eventually they became repetitive (if not in word, at least in meaning) to the point that I started skipping. The book would also gain by more dialogue (and not in present tense, as the reader is never part of the scene) as well as more open space between paragraphs, and by deletion of the writer's political commentary. In the end I was left with the impression that this was a self-indulgent effort by a university professor to justify her year abroad.

I think the author has penned a perfectly fine book for those who look at relocating to Iceland through the eyes of a mother and an educator. However if you're looking for a portrayal of Iceland's (and particularly Reykjavik's) absolutely remarkable and cosmopolitan mix of rock and roll and fashion and art and progressive politics (and incredible healthcare system) this definitely isn't the book for you. I recently spent a few weeks in Reykjavik as I hope to retire there in five years, fell head over heels in love with the country and its people, and the Reykjavik the author describes is almost unrecognizable to me. But this isn't intended as criticism. It's not the author's fault that I bought the wrong book.

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