

# **Viking Voyager: An Icelandic Memoir by Sverrir Sigurdsson with Veronica Li EXCERPT**

I left Iceland to pursue university studies in Finland in August 1958. I was a nineteen-year-old embarking on my quest to see the world. In my youth I had deeply admired the adventures of the Vikings. Even after the Viking Age was over, young Icelanders often did a stint in Norway, serving a king or nobleman and performing heroic feats in battle. In the modern era, this tradition takes the form of studying overseas and competing in international business and professional arenas. Like my forefathers, I needed to travel to distant lands to prove myself, and then I would return home and use my skills to help make my country one of the greatest in the world.

I was giddy with optimism in those days. Actually, it wasn't just me. The whole nation was in a state of euphoria. Everything was going right for our newborn republic. With financial aid from the U.S. Marshall Plan, the country reconstructed the ageing fishing fleet that had been decimated by war and neglect. The World Bank, a United Nations affiliate that would employ me many years later, provided loans to Iceland to build the groundwork for an economic boom. Many more bonuses came our way during the Cold War, when the two superpowers contended for our loyalty. Iceland played hard to get, driving the rival suitors to shower her with gifts.