

20°W

Arctic Circle

Reykjavík

Akureyri

Egilsstaðir

Höfn

Vík



mazda

Denmark Strait

GREENLAND SEA

★ Main active volcanoes since settlement (AD 874).

ALL-NEW MX-5 AND MX-5 ICON SPECIAL EDITION: ICELAND DRIVE



In celebration of the sheer driving pleasure offered by the all-new MX-5 and MX-5 Icon special edition, ahead of you lies more than 800 miles of exhilarating and captivating road trip through the stunning, often stark, occasionally tempestuous and always breathtaking Icelandic landscape.

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Denmark Strait

GREENLAND SEA



ATLANTIC OCEAN

ALL-NEW MAZDA MX-5

With a superior power to weight ratio, rear-wheel drive, perfect 50:50 weight distribution and more comfort and technology than ever before, the all-new Mazda MX-5 is pure roadster. Offered with a choice of two SKYACTIV-G petrol engines it comes with generous standard equipment and new levels of safety technology.

The all-new Mazda MX-5 has reaffirmed Mazda's dominance of the affordable sports car sector. Maintaining the driver-focused ethos that has made it the world's bestselling two-seater sports car of all time, the latest MX-5 was conceived and developed under the concept of 'innovate in order to preserve'.

This engineering philosophy has allowed Mazda to maintain the agility, fun and engagement that has always defined the MX-5, while at the same time meeting ever-increasing safety and efficiency requirements, alongside improved refinement.

The lightest MX-5 since the iconic original, the all-new Mazda MX-5 is shorter, lower and wider than the outgoing car, with the smallest overhangs and lowest centre of gravity yet. These dynamic proportions combined with Mazda's KODO: Soul of Motion design philosophy ensure that the all-new Mazda MX-5's styling reflects its focus on driving pleasure in an unmistakably contemporary and dynamic way.





Featuring Mazda's award-winning SKYACTIV technology, the all-new MX-5's ultra-efficient, lightweight, 1.5-litre 131ps and 2.0-litre 160ps SKYACTIV-G petrol engines deliver new levels of performance and economy. Maintaining the same sporting 40mm shift stroke a previous MX-5s, Mazda's highly-praised SKYACTIV-MT six-speed manual transmission has been adapted for front engine, rear drive layout for the first time.

The all-new Mazda MX-5 is also the first MX-5 to feature a dual-pinion electric power assist steering system. Placed closer to the front wheels to deliver even more direct feedback and feel, the system's steering ratio has changed from 15.1 to 15.5, with the overall result being lighter, faster and more precise steering.

Mazda's weight saving 'gram strategy' played a huge part in chassis development. Retaining a front double wishbone and rear multi-link suspension set-up, the all-new Mazda MX-5's SKYACTIV-Chassis is 12kg lighter than that of the previous model, and stiffer and more driver-focused than ever.

With its lightweight design, sleek cabin, beautifully engineered mechanicals and balanced handling, the all-new MX-5 continues an award-winning tradition that has seen the model garner over 30 global awards to date, including, most recently, 2106 World Car of the Year, World Car Design of the Year and UK Car of the Year.



MX-5 ICON SPECIAL EDITION

Joining Mazda's award-winning sports car line up this month, the Icon is the first special edition version of the fourth-generation MX-5 powered by the 1.5-litre 131ps SKYACTIV-G engine. Based on the all-new MX-5 SE-L Nav, the Icon is hallmarked by unique, contrasting design cues and enhanced standard equipment.

Available in a choice of Meteor Grey Mica or Crystal White Pearlescent paint, the Icon makes a bold visual statement with a Soul Red Metallic finish to the wing mirrors, rear spoiler, side stripe decals and front skirt. The unique look is further boosted by 16-inch Gunmetal alloy wheels, while the increased equipment tally also includes black leather seats, rear parking sensors, dusk-sensing lights and rain-sensing wipers.

Priced at only £20,995 on-the-road, the fourth MX-5 to wear the Icon badge will be limited to a production run of just 600 vehicles. Previous Icon special editions were sold in the UK in 2000, 2005 and 2007, with limited production runs of 750, 1,563 and 1,250 units respectively.

'We are delighted that the UK media will have the opportunity to drive the Icon special edition in such a stunning setting as Iceland', said Jeremy Thomson, Managing Director of Mazda Motors UK. 'With over 120,000 sales since its launch in 1990, the UK has played a huge part in the MX-5 success story, and the Icon follows a long tradition of special edition MX-5s that allow customers to have a stand out vehicle which is truly affordable.'

THE LAND OF ICE AND FIRE

Despite the fact that no one appears to have told the climate, the island of Grimsey off the north coast is actually the only part of Iceland that lies within the Arctic Circle, and then by just a scant few yards. As a result, Icelanders deride the kudos of the Circle and are fond of saying that only one man in Iceland can be bothered to cross it: He is the vicar of Grimsey, and he only does so because the circle runs through the middle of his bed...

Iceland is still very much the geological toddler of the planet; a volcanic hot-spot on the Mid-Atlantic ridge -the dividing line between the Eurasian and North American continental plates- less than 20 million years old.

The rift between them running South-west to North-east through the middle of the island, each of the two continental plates is taking its leave of the other at the rate of about one centimetre a year; something of a gallop in geological terms. Within this rift, the earth's crust is replenished by magma flowing up from below, and plays host to some 35 active volcanoes, including the Angry Sisters, Hekla and Katla and the ever-grumpy Grimsvotn.

Nowhere else in the world do lava deserts, active volcanoes and kilometre-thick ice caps jostle for position on an island smaller than England. And nowhere else in the world does one harbour the distinctive feeling that, were you to run a Stanley knife across the ground, it would promptly bleed molten lava.





Terra here being anything but Firma, then, the tenacious Icelanders have survived countless, appalling natural catastrophes over the years. None worse than between 1783 and 1785, when the volcanoes Laki and Grimsvotn joined forces to produce the largest volcanic eruption in recorded history.

3.4 cubic miles of lava - a deal of it fountaining over 4000ft into the air - was accompanied to the surface by some 128 million tons of noxious gases over an eight month period, creating a dust cloud - the 'Haze of Hunger'- which blocked out the sun.

The resultant famine and poisoning killed about 9,000 people - a quarter of the population - 80% of the island's sheep, and 50% of all cattle and horses. A thick haze spread across Western Europe, resulting in many thousands of deaths. And it has even been suggested that the resultant build up of famine and poverty may have contributed to the French revolution of 1789.

The weather was even affected as far away as North America, where the winter of 1784 was so severe that the Mississippi River froze and there was ice in the Gulf of Mexico.

More recently, Katla erupted in 1918, Hekla for a period of 11 months between 1947 and 1948, the island of Surtsey was born in 1963 and Eldfell erupted on the island of Heimaey so spectacularly in 1973 that the entire population had to be evacuated for seven months.

Grimsvotn, meanwhile, loses its temper more frequently than Colin Montgomery on a golf course, most recently in 2011 with an eruption that somewhat dwarfed that of the famously unpronounceable Eyjafjallajokull which, in 2010, threw so much ash into the atmosphere that airspace was closed over much of Europe for six days.

Grimsvotn's 2011 tantrum, its largest eruption for 100 years, released some 2000 tons of ash per second, totalling 120 million tons in the first 48 hours; that's more in the first 24 hours than Eyjafjallajokull managed during its entire eruption the year before. Happily, the ash proved heavier than the latter volcano's and did not spread far from its 9 mile high plume.

Today the threat of each new eruption from one of Iceland's volcanoes is the cue for a mass exodus of petrified tourists and a clamouring influx of curious natives who -despite the fact that even the smallest dollop of magma on the head won't stop travelling south until it exits your shoe leather- are famed for converging on each fresh eruption from far and wide.

Of greater concern to the locals is the danger of an outburst flood caused by volcanic activity under one of the island's ice caps. The six mile wide crater of Katla, for example, is buried up to 2,300ft below the gleaming dome of Myrdalsjokull ice caps.

When an eruption melts ice this thick, the weight of ice above will force flood water out at a rate of up to 14 million cubic feet per second -a volume comparable to the average discharge of the Amazon, Mississippi, Nile and Yangtze, all at once. So the rebuilding of bridges and roads in the vicinity is an all too frequent occurrence.





ICELAND - A POTTED HISTORY

Fleeing political upheaval and Viking raids in the early 9th century, Irish monks are thought to have been the first temporary settlers of Iceland. In 825 AD, the Irish monk Dicuil noted that Iceland saw little winter sun but nights so bright in summer that 'whatever task a man wishes to perform, even picking lice from his shirt, he can manage as well as in clear daylight'.

History suggests that bossing Vikings around can be very hazardous to the health indeed. Yet, in 870, it was precisely such meddlesome behaviour by the incumbent king of Scandinavia, Harald, that put a fistful of Norwegian longboat crews to sea, in search of pastures new.

Sadly, then, one of the tasks those hapless Irish monks clearly failed to perform was putting enough distance between themselves and the legendary navigational skills of the Vikings.

From 874, many settlers followed from Norway and the Viking colonies in the British Isles. Land in Iceland was free to whoever wanted it: A man could claim as much land as he could light fires around in one day; a woman as much as she could lead a heifer round in the same period.

A combination of excellent fishing grounds and land well suited to sheep saw the population soar to some 60,000 souls by around 930, at which point over a millennium of democratic tradition began with the creation of a national assembly called the Althing -now the world's oldest parliament.

During the 11th century, the arrival of Christianity from Norway elicited a bitter clash, verging on civil war, with many islanders already happy with their pagan society. Lob into the equation a severe deterioration in conditions due to overgrazing and deforestation, and it rapidly became obvious that the only way to maintain peace was to submit, in 1262, to the king of Norway.

The 14th and early 15th centuries did Iceland no favours; the climate growing colder early in the former, and the Black Death wreaking havoc in the latter. Prosperity returned thereafter, however, through a huge demand for Icelandic cod throughout Europe.

Meanwhile, in 1397, Norway was united with Denmark and, thereafter, Iceland was ruled by the Danish crown. The arrival of the Reformation in the 16th century brought further bother. Denmark became Protestant in the 1530s, and Iceland's resistance was frowned upon with the aid of troops.

In 1602, the king made all trade with Iceland the monopoly of certain merchants in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Malmo, and the island's economy suffered severely. In 1661, the Danish king made himself an absolute monarch, and the Althing became effectively powerless. Icing the cake of misfortune, an outbreak of smallpox early in the 18th century killed a large part of the population.

In the 19th century, the growing tide of Nationalism throughout Europe began to slowly weaken ties between Iceland and Denmark. But it was not until 1904 that the post of governor was abolished and Iceland was granted home rule; something of a misnomer given that in 1918 the island was made a sovereign state sharing a monarchy with Denmark.

In 1915 Icelandic women were allowed to vote, and the first woman was elected to the Althing in 1922. Finally, in 1944, after occupation by first the British and then the Americans during the war, Iceland broke all links with Denmark.





ICELAND TODAY

Today, this long history of hardship - allied to long, dark winters during which farmers had little to do except read and relate the famous Viking sagas (still read and discussed daily on Icelandic radio) - has spawned a culture of hardiness allied to acute awareness of artistic heritage and universally high levels of education amongst a population of just 332,000.

Almost 50% of all Icelanders live in Reykjavik; at first glimpse, the world's most colourful collection of corrugated iron. The climate destroys every effort to keep the outside of buildings tidy here, so that even the smartest hotels boast bare concrete external walls. Roofs, however, are all made of crinkly tin, which has to be regularly painted to keep it rust and leak free -bright colours are cheapest, so the whole place looks as if it has been built by primary school children.

Forget ruddy complexions, stout hiking boots and thighs like tugboats; such couture is strictly for tourists. Rarely stooping to anything as technologically mundane as hiking, the Icelander drives everywhere, preferably waiting until the weather is truly vile before piling aboard convoys of vast 4x4s boasting satellite navigation, CB radio and tyres like over inflated Space Hoppers, in the direction of the nearest glacier.

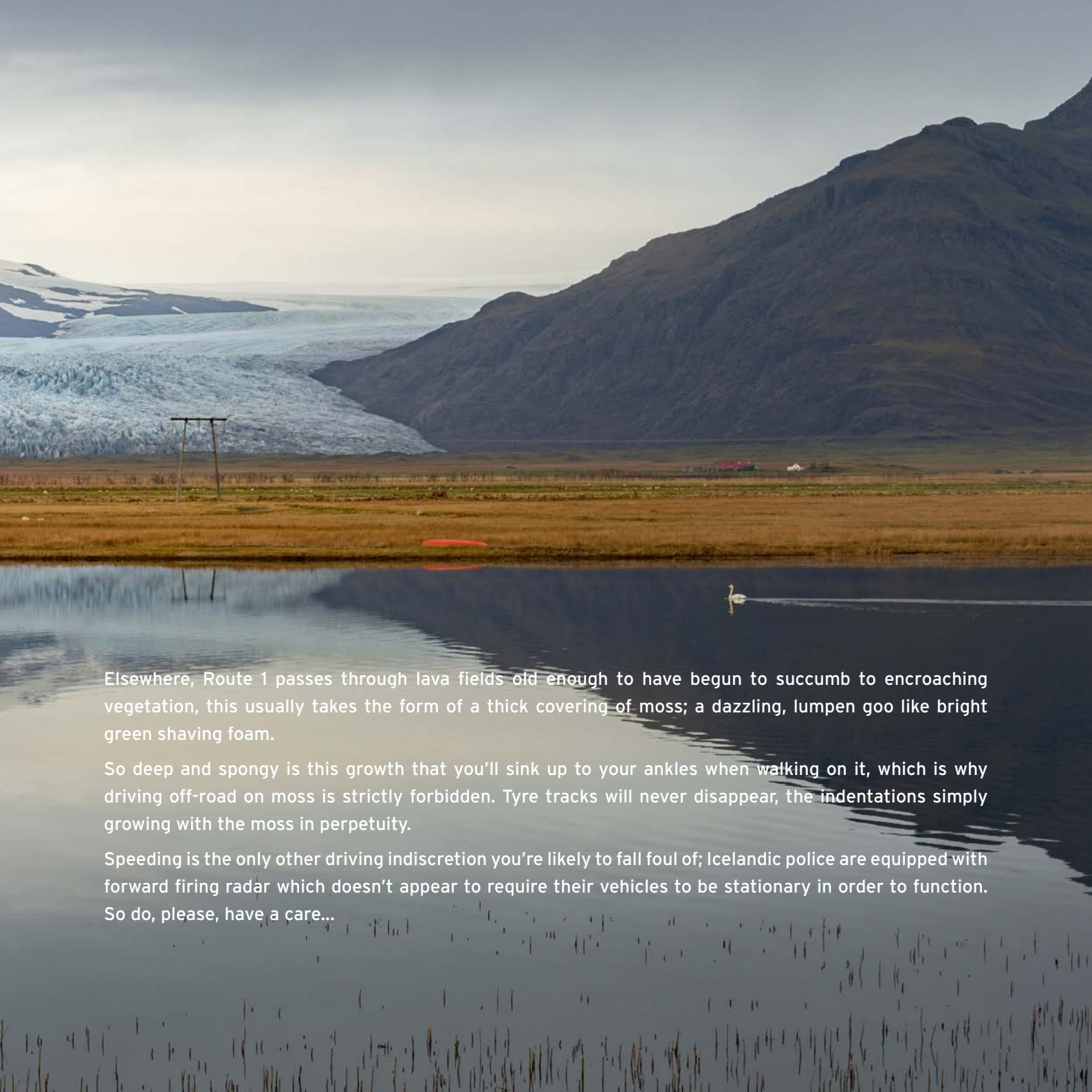
Once there, they'll lower tyre pressure to a feeble 2lbs per square inch to give maximum footprint and grip, and happily biff about all day dodging crevasses.



Happily, driving conditions along the 828 miles (1,332km) of Route 1, which circumnavigates the island, are less hazardous. Nonetheless, though billed as pretty much the only tarmac clad surface on the island, even the Ring Road submits to the occasional bout of unmade bed.

90kph is the maximum speed limit anywhere on the island; what seems wounded tortoise pace on tarmac so empty of traffic you're lucky to pass another car once every hour becomes more than challenging on an unmade surface which, though largely remarkably smooth, offers all the grip of the Keystone Kops let loose in a marble factory.

In some areas, so utterly devoid of colour and lunar-like is the landscape that NASA bought its astronauts here to prepare for the moon landing.



Elsewhere, Route 1 passes through lava fields old enough to have begun to succumb to encroaching vegetation, this usually takes the form of a thick covering of moss; a dazzling, lumpen goo like bright green shaving foam.

So deep and spongy is this growth that you'll sink up to your ankles when walking on it, which is why driving off-road on moss is strictly forbidden. Tyre tracks will never disappear, the indentations simply growing with the moss in perpetuity.

Speeding is the only other driving indiscretion you're likely to fall foul of; Icelandic police are equipped with forward firing radar which doesn't appear to require their vehicles to be stationary in order to function. So do, please, have a care...



It's said that God's gift to the Icelanders was a virgin land of incomparable beauty and diversity. But the price they have to pay for that gift is the cost of alcohol. Beer was banned until 1989, and the locals appear to have been making up for it ever since: March 1st is still National Beer Day, marking the end of prohibition.

Dancing is tackled with equal enthusiasm because it too was once illegal; outlawed by Iceland's previous rulers the Danes who, recognising it as the vertical expression of a horizontal desire, believed it to be responsible for the high level of illegitimate births on the island.

Due to the cost, most Icelanders don't leave home for an evening out until the rest of Europe is on its way back to bed. Which gives the visitor plenty of time to sample the delights of Reykjavik cuisine before staggering off to as many as possible of the disproportionately large number of bars and night clubs on offer.

Finally, abandon all hope of learning to speak Icelandic, immediately. No foreigner has ever fully mastered the language. Correctly pronouncing a place-name which sounds like a cross between the last inch of water leaving a bath and a man who's inadvertently inhaled a fruit fly comes under the fat chance category...

So play it safe; if you ever decide to settle in Iceland, make the local taxi driver happy and live in Vik. As in vapour rub.

WILDLIFE - AKA THE MENU

With the arctic fox the only indigenous creature of any size that was here before the Vikings, and discounting the respectable squadron of reindeer escapees that today populate parts of eastern Iceland, most of the island's wildlife lives beside, or in the sea.

Hard to believe, then, that Reykjavik boasted no restaurants at all until 1980, because almost all of said wildlife the locals know as 'lunch'.

Some 80% of the island's economy revolves around fishing. However, in a fit of perversity, Icelanders only eat the tender cheeks of the cod on which their economy is all but founded: Ever style conscious, they consider it an ugly fish and would rather eat haddock - felt to be far better looking...

Everywhere, you'll come across timber structures festooned with pungent sides of drying haddock or catfish; the local, equally chewy equivalent of biltong, which the natives call 'hardfish'.

Though the whaling debate rages every bit as heatedly in Iceland as it does throughout the rest of the world, the greatest single benefit to an Icelander in catching a whale is that it merely means he doesn't have to go fishing again for an especially long time.

Both humpback and minke (pronounced as Inspector Clouseau would say monkey) whales populate these waters in some abundance, cuts of which now appear on the menus of a number of Reykjavik restaurants. Not in the least like the blubbery lump of ocean-going fat you'd expect, it actually resembles, and carves like, a slice of lean pork, whilst tasting faintly of liver.





On a less than leviathan scale, the ocean still teems with all manner of life: Fulmars, past masters of the low-level fly-past, are so numerous it's a wonder they don't occasionally bang together in a puff of outraged feathers. Fleets of eider duck sporting extraordinary mullets of a day-glo green hue more usually associated with a ditch-digger operative's waistcoat bob disconsolately along fretting about TOG values.

And, everywhere, ineptly flap some 10 million fish with wings - puffins. Puffin is usually smoked, and served with a light mustard sauce. Whether you'll like it or not depends on how you feel about a dish that looks and cuts like duck breast, but sneaks up on the taste buds with the full-on flavour of anchovies.

The truly daring can even hunt down one or two traditional, Viking delicacies: Ram's testicles pickled in whey, soured seal flipper, boiled and pressed sheep's head, or perhaps putrefied shark meat...

Buried below the high water line on the shore and then left to, um, mature for 6 months, the resultant rotten flesh is eaten in finger-joint sized bites and washed down with a huge slug of Icelandic vodka to ensure both that you don't taste it, and that it stays put.

Legend has it that this dish was eaten to bring strength and bravery to fishermen before setting sail. But, surely, anyone who can swallow something this revolting already has all the strength and bravery they'll ever need.

HOTELS

Hotel Borg
Posthusstraeti 11
101 Reykjavik
www.keahotels.is/en/hotels/hotel-borg

Lake Hotel Egilsstadir
Egilsstöðum 1-2,
700 Egilsstöðum, Ísland
www.english.lakehotel.is

SPECIFICATIONS

For full Mazda MX-5 Icon
press release and UK pricing
go to www.mazdamx-5press.co.uk

MAZDA PERSONNEL

Graeme Fudge
PR Director
M: +44 7702 666 886
E: gfudge@mazdaeur.com

Owen Mildenhall
PR Manager
M: +44 7833 358 558
E: omildenhall@mazdaeur.com

Lois Cavanagh
Press Officer
M: +44 7900 678 437
E: lcavanagh@mazdaeur.com

Martine Varrall
Press Officer
M: +44 7464 486 478
E: mvarrall@mazdaeur.com

Written, designed and produced by Anthony ffrench-Constant (anthony@ff-c.com) with New England (andy@newengland.design)



Written, designed and produced by Anthony ffrench-Constant (anthony@ff-c.com) with New England (andy@newengland.design)

