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Iceland's Deplar Farm is a one-stop shop for adventure, offering angling, heli-skiing, surfing, trekking, horse-back riding and more.



The resort's heated pool and staffed swim-up bar provide an amazing vantage point for viewing the Northern Lights.

## Deplar Farm

Stunning Luxury  
at the Top of the World

Story by Eric Kallen  
Photos courtesy of  
The Eleven Experience

In the 1984 mockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap*, guitarist Nigel Tufnel (played by Christopher Guest) proudly revealed an amplifier with a volume of zero to 11, exceeding the typical range of zero to 10. Why? Because 10 isn't enough; the band wanted to be one better than the rest, one level above the norm.

Inspiration often comes from the most unlikely sources. The film and its idiom, "these go to eleven," helped inspire my good friend Chad Pike to create The Eleven Experience in 2011.

"The Eleven Experience creates customized outdoor experiences that impact the people who impact the world," Pike said. "Eleven inspires adventure and gently pushes people outside their comfort zones, all while having fun with down-to-earth guides."

Today, Eleven operates exclusive resorts catering to adventure travelers in Colorado, France, Florida, Chile, the Bahamas and Iceland; it also offers clients a 74-foot Hatteras luxury yacht, *The Mothership*, for overnight fishing expeditions in the Florida Keys,



Sea and barren landscape offer beauty and serenity.

Deplar honors authentic Icelandic architecture with 13 guest rooms and suites. Turf-roofed structures with black-timber cladding and floor-to-ceiling windows offer an other-worldly view.





Many of Deplar's public spaces offer floor-to-ceiling windows with dramatic views of the surrounding 3,000-foot peaks. The lounge (above) and bar are perfect places for casual gatherings. Well-appointed guest rooms (right) and suites offer luxury and comfort.



Everglades, Marquesas and South Andros, Bahamas. From *The Mothership*, clients fish and explore some of the most remote and rewarding waters in custom-designed Beavertail skiffs. From angling and heli-skiing to mountain biking and family adventures, Eleven offers experiences for people of all ages who love life in nature.

In the Spring 2018 issue of this publication, I shared my earlier Eleven experience fly-fishing in Iceland. I was so taken by the beauty and hospitality of its people that I decided to return to the Arctic nation last year with my wife Beth Ann and our three children – Claire (16), Thomas (14) and Gray (12) – so we could share the experience as a family and as individuals. The Pike family felt the same way and suggested we meet there for a vacation.

For many, the idea of a family vacation invokes images of unhappy

teenagers, missed flights and unrealized expectations. (What teenager doesn't roll their eyes and immediately escape to an iPhone at the mention of a family trip?) Let's face it, in the age of electronics, it's difficult to impress our children and even harder to find a way to connect with them. For our family, Eleven's Deplar Farm resort, on the Troll Peninsula in northern Iceland, was an opportunity to create a truly memorable vacation. With our oldest children now in high school, the need to create lasting memories as a family made the decision to travel to Iceland a simple one.

The journey to Deplar, a former sheep farm transformed by Eleven into a world-class lodge, involved a direct flight from Washington Dulles Airport to Iceland's capital and largest city, Reykjavik. After a brief stay in the capital, we took a

45-minute flight north to the city of Akureyri. There, we met Dani Kristjansson, our Eleven Experience driver, for the 90-minute drive to Deplar.

Kristjansson met us in an all-terrain Mercedes-Benz Sprinter; with its massive tires, this one-of-a-kind vehicle garnered attention at the airport and set the tone for the trip. The Sprinter was modified by Arctic Trucks Iceland specifically for extreme conditions crossing snow-covered terrain.

My son Thomas summed up our first encounter with Eleven perfectly: "Dad, these guys don't mess around."

During the drive, Kristjansson educated us on the remote Fljot Valley, his home and the location of Deplar Farm. A man of few words but immense knowledge, Kristjansson spoke freely about landscape, weather and the history of the region.



Situated on the Troll Peninsula, Deplar offers stunning views of mountains, rivers, and waterfalls.

Jack “Griff” Griffiths (far right) along with fellow guide Emily Priece (far left), showed Gray, Thomas and Miles a great time.



The overland journey to the resort was enlightening and breathtaking. We wound through mountain passes and small towns, trusting Kristjansson to keep his eyes fixed on the road as my family and I stared with wonder at deep, glacier-carved fjords.

“Look, a whale,” Kristjansson casually reported, directing our attention to the fjord far below the roadway. The five of us rushed to the windows on the passenger side of the bus; the sighting foreshadowed what would become a memorable vacation. Even our teenagers failed to hide their excitement as they watched the tail of a humpback whale rise from the sea.

We were equally impressed when we arrived at our destination. Surrounded on all sides by tall peaks, the resort was designed to blend into the natural beauty of its rugged surroundings. Deplar honors authentic Icelandic architecture with 13 guest rooms and suites. Turf-roofed structures, black-timber cladding and floor-to-ceiling windows offer an other-worldly vibe.

Deplar’s environs are striking;



Kayaking through glacial fjords

The author, far left, takes a break from mountain biking with his wife Beth Ann and Blake Pike, owner of #12 Interiors, who is responsible for Eleven-properties' interior design.



mountains, rivers and a stunning lake please the eye and overwhelm the senses. The resort is a one-stop shop for adventure, solitude and mystery, offering angling, heli-skiing, surfing, trekking and horseback riding. High-end amenities include an elegant spa with views and pools heated by geothermal energy. Meals are prepared by top chefs using ingredients, provisions and spirits provided by local farms, fishermen and brewers.

My family was greeted with refreshments by resort staff; our luggage was taken away while we were getting acquainted with Eleven guide Jack “Griff”

Griffiths. In fact, as we soon learned, guides are a fundamental element of the Eleven Experience.

“It’s about getting after it, finding your comfort zone and taking one step out of it,” Pike explained at the resort. “That’s why we hired an international team of highly trained, outdoor and adventure specialists covering a range of disciplines. The connection with your guide is a major part of the experience and it’s what really differentiates our product.”

Our experience with Griffiths validated Pike’s philosophy and promise. The introduction was direct: “My name is Griff.



Eleven owner Chad Pike bonds with his daughter Phoebe on the way to one of Iceland’s beautiful salmon rivers.

Relaxing around a fire after an afternoon hike



I am your guide, and my goal is to make sure at the end of every day on this trip, you can say it was the best day ever.”

Originally from Wales, Griffiths spent most of his youth hiking and exploring the rugged Welsh mountains. His preliminary guiding experiences were in the Himalayas, where he developed an affinity for extreme environments. Later, over drinks, Pike told me he first met Griffiths while the man was living in a tricked-out van in the French Alps, where he worked as a ski and mountain guide. Impressed with Griffiths’ unflappable persona and his experience in the mountains, Pike convinced his new friend to leave the



Cliffs on the rocky island of Drangey serve as nesting grounds for puffins.



Iceland's ponies complement amazing scenery and are a great way to tour the local area.

The author's son Thomas proudly displays his first North Atlantic salmon caught on a fly rod.



van for a role on Eleven's International Guide team. (Griffiths still owns the van.)

Beth Ann and I found immediate comfort in watching our children see and do new things in a safe, supervised environment. While the children were off on their pursuits, we adventured on our own, spending quality time as a couple. We strolled amongst the sheep in the majestic Flojt Valley and engaged in a good-natured contest to see who could catch the largest salmon (it wasn't me). In our singular "alone" times, we found solace by relaxing in the heated pool and enjoying one of the many books in Deplar's library. That's the nice thing about Deplar; the resort offers limited, yet well-

appointed lodging with tastefully decorated communal dining areas and secluded areas for introspection.

The spa's full-time massage therapist tended to exhausted muscles and helped us recover from outdoor pursuits. These often extended into the evening as we took advantage of Iceland's long summer days, which offered nearly 24 hours of daylight. The heated pool presented views of 3,000-foot peaks; a fully staffed swim-up bar and built-in submerged lounge chairs completed the package.

Ultimately, our children had access to thousands of acres of pristine, Icelandic tundra, a playground for trying

new activities and developing skills they never knew they had. They were unplugged, challenged by the wild. Under the care and watchful eye of Eleven guides, the boys fly fished for Atlantic salmon and Arctic char, caught (and released) Atlantic puffins with nets. They rafted through glacial rivers and climbed volcanic mountains. Claire and her brothers rode fat-tire mountain bikes across the valley's barren landscape and saw new vistas on horseback atop Iceland's ponies.

Sometimes we engaged in these pursuits as a family; on occasion, we separated to enjoy Iceland as husband and wife, sister and brother or as individuals. We



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didn't use electronics and gadgets. We didn't lose ourselves online. At the end of each day, we came together to celebrate our experiences, offline.

"So many kids today operate under the constant scrutiny of their parents," Pike said over adult beverages in Deplar's heated pool. "They don't get an opportunity to be kids. They aren't allowed to try new things, to fail and try again. At Eleven, we want to safely provide opportunities for them to behave like this. We want people, young and old, to have fun in beautiful parts of the world and hopefully experience something they will never forget."

I'll drink to that.

For more information, visit [elevenexperience.com/experiences/hideouts/deplarfarm](http://elevenexperience.com/experiences/hideouts/deplarfarm)

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Eric Kallen is an avid sportsman who spends his time between his home in Charlottesville, Virginia, the mountains of western North Carolina and the shores of Mobile Bay, Alabama.

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