

Travel: Around the World

PEEN SCENE

The long and the short of Iceland's famous Phallogical Museum.

We've all known folks who've let it be known that they like collecting things like salt and pepper shakers or cookie jars and then that's all they ever get as gifts from their friends until they cry uncle and scream, "No more!"

Pity poor Sigurður Hjartarson of Iceland. In 1974, he was given a pizzle, a long and limp dried bull's penis that's used in the Icelandic countryside to whip farm animals. He was pleased to get it and said so; he'd had one as a boy. Soon, his fellow teachers started gifting him with other bull penises, and then friends who worked at the country's whaling stations started bringing him whale penises.

Hjartarson didn't cry uncle. Instead, he resolved to continue collecting until he had a specimen from every mammal species in Iceland. Eventually, his penis collection was in the hundreds.

What to do with a jumble of genitalia so gigantic? Hjartarson's solution was to open the Icelandic Phallogical Museum in central Reykjavik. Located at one end of the city's main shopping street, it's now one of the principal tourist attractions in Iceland's capital. As a T-shirt in the museum's gift shop will attest: "This Museum Is Not for Pussies."

That's not to say Hjartarson's collection is peep-show pornographic. One step inside the front door demonstrates otherwise. Dozens of vials filled with formaldehyde contain most of the meaty, misshapen specimens that frequently bear little resemblance to penises and, to be completely honest, can prove a wee bit nauseating to behold. Many of the dried whale penises are mounted on plaques like hunting trophies, erupting from their bases like pointy spikes.

No worries. They're high enough on the walls there's no danger of tripping and poking your eye out.

All told, there are nearly 300 specimens from about 100 animal species. The smallest is a 2-millimeter hamster phallus that must be viewed with a magnifying glass. The largest is from a blue whale and is nearly 6 feet tall and weighs about 150 pounds. It's kept in a huge glass tank bolted onto the floor. You'll be stunned to learn that this is only the tip of the whale's full penis, which was originally about 16 feet long and weighed more than 700 pounds.

Could this be Moby's Dick itself? No, Melville's whale was white, not blue.

Surprisingly, there are few jokes like that exchanged in this museum. Perhaps it's the scholarly nature of the place that keeps visitors quietly studying the specimens, the occasional snicker quietly stifled, the urge to guffaw suppressed.

Not that merriment is discouraged. Just the opposite. There are many mirthful exhibits to offer much-needed comic relief. You'll find plaques with naughty limericks, cartoon depictions of celebrity genitalia (Thomas Edison's is sporting lightbulbs for testicles), a photo of Hjartarson talking on a phone shaped like a penis. In one quiet alcove a motion-activated flasher figurine drops his drawers, and nearby, there's an empty jar with a sign reading "Elf Penis" (the legendary elves of Iceland are reputedly invisible to most people).

Might there be any human penises, you may well wonder? There's an eye-catching set of silver sculptures of 15 penises of the Icelandic national handball team, supposedly so accurate their wives would recognize the one honoring her husband.

And though it's hard to find, there is indeed one set of human genitalia, from a 95-year-old Icelandic man reputed to be a Casanova his entire life, remaining active both vertically

and horizontally until his final months. He'd eagerly signed a certificate of donation years in advance, but the posthumous operation to remove his member was so horribly botched you'll be forgiven if you avert your eyes in horror after glancing at it. It's been charitably described as a "grayish brown mass of flesh."

Don't expect that mistake to be made with future human donors, three of whom have also signed certificates displayed on the museum's walls. One of them is from the American writer and actor Jonah Falcon, whose letter of donation states that his is the "longest penis ever measured in a documentary film," nearly 10 inches long when he's uninspired and 14 when he is. He was even stopped once by security at the San Francisco airport by guards who believed he was carrying a weapon of mass destruction inside his pants.

Falcon was born in 1970 so his donation may be decades into the future, but when the time comes, the museum plans to honor his request by placing his pecker alongside one of the whales with a sign that reads—"Jonah and the Whale."

