

Travel Time: Reykjavík Edition!

The Chess Friends

The Man Benji, The Myth Sarang, and The Legend Vivi

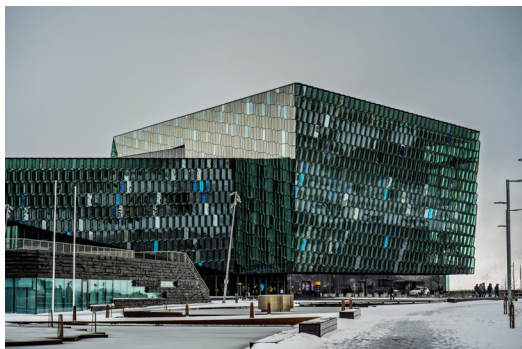
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The full Chess Friends Crew with our illustrator and The Man Benji's Mom Sasha (left) and our editor and The Myth Sarang and The Legend Vivaan's Dad Siva (right). Photo credit: Tómas Tandri Jóhannsson

Howdy! It's The Chess Friends!

If you read our blog, chessfriendsbooks.com/blog, you've probably read our article, [Eyes on Iceland!](#) from March 19th. That was no coincidence! With our families, we all traveled to Iceland to compete in the nine-round, seven-day 2026 Reykjavik Open, at the beautiful Harpa Concert Hall in downtown Reykjavik, an adventure we will never forget! By our count, 11 brave Pacific Northwest players competed in the strong 422-player field at the tournament.



This photo of the Harpa building was taken by the event's photographer, Tómas Tandri Jóhannsson. Icelandic Chess Federation (or Skáksamband Islands) graciously allowed us to use [the event photos](#) to write about our experiences, so huge shoutout to them. One of our favorite and one of the most viewed photos of the entire event (well, after the photos of legendary GM Vasyl Ivanchuk, because he is the GOAT!) was this one (see photo on the article title page to the left):

Folks loved our hoodies as well as our crazy-looking hair! We kind of felt like celebrities! See the person behind taking another photo?! Wow. We promoted our blog, shared many bookmarks and stickers, and had tons of lovely conversations. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. First, let's introduce the tournament!

To give you a bit of history, the very first Reykjavik Open, won by the legend GM Mikhail Tal, was held in the year of 1964. At that time, it was a closed event held biannually, but then converted to an open format running on a yearly basis. Over the years, the tournament grew in size, and featured many famous super GMs. For example, Vasily Smyslov won the event in 1974; Seattle legend Yasser Seirawan was a co-champ in 1990; Levon Aronian, also co-champ, won in 2004; Fabiano Caruana

in 2012; Anish Giri in 2017; Praggnanandhaa Rameshbabu in 2022; and last year in 2025, Parham Maghsoodloo. Icelandic chess legends, Hannes Hlifar Stefansson and Friðrik Ólafsson won Reykjavik Open titles many times too!

This year, in its 39th edition, the Reykjavik Open was held from March 25th to March 31st. Some favorites were GM M. Amin Tabatabaei from Iran; GM Bogdan Daniel Deac from Romania; GM Vasyl Ivanchuk from Ukraine; GM Maxime Lagarde from France; GM Aryan Tari from Norway, and Benjamin Frederick, Sarang Sankrithi, and Vivaan Sankrithi, all from the USA! OK, just kidding about the last three! In the end, M. Amin Tabatabaei, after seven wins in a row and two draws,

Title	Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Score	Place
GM	Bryce Tiglon	1 ½	1	0	1 ½	1	1 ½				6.5	16
CM	Nikash Vemparala	1	0	1	0 ½	1	0	1	1		5.5	85
CM	Neeraj Harish	0	1 ½	1	0	1	1	0	1		5.5	87
FM	Stephen Willy	½	½	1	1 ½	0	1	0	1		5.5	107
WGM	Zoey Tang	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	5	113
	Isaac Vega	1 ½	0 ½	½	½	½	0	1	1		5	153
	Benjamin Frederick	0	1 ½	0	0	1 ½	½	½	1		4.5	207
AFM	Sridhar Seshadri	0	1	0 ½	0	1	0	0	1		3.5	322
ACM	Siva Sankrithi	0 ½	½	½	0 ½	0	1	½			3.5	348
AFM	Sarang Athreya Sankrithi	1	0	0	0 ½	½	½	½	0		3	360
AFM	Vivaan Krishna Sankrithi	0 ½	0 ½	½	½	0	0	½			2.5	402

was crowned the tournament winner! Congratulations to him!

Also, congratulations to everyone from the Pacific Northwest who played in this tournament! We all deserve a shoutout, but Sridhar Seshadri especially, who, having participated in the event many times before, provided lots of reassurance and support to us all, and whose Sri Chess Academy sponsored pens for all 422 participants!

From the PNW, 11 of us cheered each other on, while hoping we wouldn't get paired against one another (it didn't happen, phew!). Here's a summary of how we all did round by round, compiled via Chess-Results.com:

As you can see from the table above, Bryce, Nikash, and Neeraj all finished in the top 100, an outstanding achievement given the field that featured over 120 titled players! Bravo! Here are notable results from some of our PNW players, "overperforming" their rating. There were many more but we picked one each to highlight.

Zoey won against GM Leon Livaic (2571) from Croatia!

Stephen drew IM Zhandos Agmanov (2463) from Kazakhstan!

Isaac won against Snorri Vikanes Bjarnason (1988) from Norway!

The Man Benji won against Shardul Paricharak (1895) from Netherlands Antilles!

The Myth Sarang won against Luigi Ardu (1804) from Italy!

The Legend Vivaan drew Emil Jacobsen Jamil (1769) from the Faroe Islands!

Siva drew Michael Schimmer (1797) from Germany!

Sridhar drew Runar Isleifsson (1860) from Iceland!



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The amazing thing about the tournament is that there were people representing 51 different countries/territories! In fact, the three of us Chess Friends played players from 15 different countries/territories during the event, which is almost 30% of the countries/territories in the tournament! In this article, we would like to reflect on our trip and share with you the vibes of the event, where the global chess community got together in a beautiful country to become part of chess history! We'll also share some information about Reykjavik and next year's event, in the hopes that you too could enjoy the wonder of chess and Iceland!

The Man Benji

What were your expectations before the trip?

The Reykjavik Open was a chess tournament I was dreaming about for a few years, but I thought I wasn't strong just yet to enter the field of international players. This year, after playing in the highest sections of the Oregon Open and North American Open, I felt ready to compete among top-level players. It would be my first international tournament, in a country I had never been to before, and I was excited to learn about chess and Iceland, and do my best, with friends by my side!

What things didn't you expect coming to Iceland?

Before this trip, I knew Iceland was a cold country, but, oh boy, I didn't expect it to be that cold in March! When we were leaving Seattle, spring had already sprung, the trees were in full bloom, and it felt silly to wear a heavy coat and boots on the plane. When we landed in Keflavik airport, on an early morning, there was snow on the ground and a snowstorm on the forecast! Good thing I packed my alpaca socks! I love the snow and being in the cold, but I had to remember why I was there and focus on chess. I also didn't expect that Icelandic water could taste so refreshing! You can literally refill your water bottle from the sink in the bathroom! How cool is that? *Pro-tip:* In Iceland, bathrooms are even called Water Closets, abbreviated WC, like World Champion!

What were highlights of your trip?

Many chess players would agree with me that one of the most important things to have during a long chess tournament is ... good food! The food in Iceland was exceptional! I loved trying pizzas from different restaurants (Padre's pizza, Rossopomodoro, and BakaBaka) and other food from local grocery stores. Icelandic yogurt, called skyr, and milk, called mjólk, are the best!

Walking around the city, and along the water, was out of this world! That feeling, when you step outside, the sudden cold air surrounding you, and crispy snow crunching under your feet makes you want to walk for miles! I remember how before round two, early in the morning, the weather status had a Yellow Warning, meaning severe snow and wind. I stayed at a hotel about a ten-minute walk from Harpa, and it was a unique experience getting to the playing site while battling the weather, walking in a snowstorm with strong gusts of wind and snow blowing into your face, making your skin tingle.

But the biggest highlight was sharing this all with my friends, spending time at the [Hafnartorg Gallery](#) food court—pizza, pasta, burgers, tacos, sushi, all you can ask for—never mind a win, draw or loss, still having fun. Those moments together made the trip an unforgettable event!

What did you learn about Iceland?

During the tournament, on days when we had only one game in the evening, we usually had time to walk around Reykjavik and explore its museums to learn about the country. In [Perlan Museum](#), I learned about volcanic activity, ice caves, and the Northern Lights. In the [Settlement Exhibition](#) and the [World in Words](#) exhibit at the University Library, I learned about vikings and Ingólfur Arnarson, who was the first settler of Reykjavik, a place covered in trees at that time! I also learned about sagas (old Icelandic manuscripts), and how life was back in the early days!

What are your chess reflections?

The tournament felt like a festival. In a colorful building, where a large playing hall overlooked the bay, 200+ chessboards were set up, and over 400 players—strong amateurs to super grandmasters—from all over the world, met, played, and had fun. On and off the board, many stories were being unraveled, and I was happy to be part of it all. I met some nice people, made friends, and learned a lot about chess. In my nine rounds, I played people from nine different countries, like Australia, Germany, India, and even Netherlands Antilles! In my first round, I was paired up against a streamer from Australia, Hannah Sayce, who we even talked about in [one of our blogs](#)! I got to play on a DGT board, in front of a camera! Not gonna lie, it was a bit stressful at first. Before the round, I told Hannah about The Chess Friends blog, gave her our bookmark and Peshka stickers, and she was really nice!

Can you share one of your chess positions?

In Round seven, I was paired up as Black against a player



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from France, Benjamin Spagnoli, so the game quickly became known as “The Battle of Benjamins.” I found myself facing the Scotch game, which is not the most common opening in classical. Nevertheless, I think I held pretty well, even entering the endgame two pawns up, but French Benjamin’s passed pawn was worth my two, and his pieces were more coordinated. I was on the defending side. When we reached move 41, I exhaled, having 15 extra minutes on the clock, but White was pressing. His c-pawn was dominating, and his rook was about to start munching my pawns. If I don’t find the right move, my position collapses.



How do I break the tension? The answer: Sacrifice THE ROOOOOK!

41... Rbxc6! (Rcxc6 also works)

42. Nxc6 Rxc6

Which side do you prefer here? Eventually, we traded all the pawns, and I had to hold a R+R vs R+N endgame, and, after almost 5 hours, the game ended in a draw. Perhaps as it should be, because, I mean, in a Battle of Benjamins, who do you root for?

The Myth Sarang

What were your expectations before the trip?

I had the pleasure of visiting Reykjavik briefly while returning home from the 2024 Paris Olympic games. Even then, it captured my heart as the best city in the world! When this opportunity presented itself to attend the Reykjavik Open, one of the most prestigious chess tournaments in the world, in my favorite city, I was ecstatic! Going into the event, I knew I was near the bottom of the field but also knew my capability. I was excited to prove myself.

What things didn't you expect coming to Iceland?

I didn't expect it to be so cold in March, just like The Man Benji. For some reason, I wore four layers on the plane, which felt weird: a short sleeve shirt, a black hoodie, the Chess Friends hoodie and my blue jacket. Good thing I brought a bunch of Merino wool long-sleeve shirts, socks and underwear! I really recommend Merino wool if you are going to Iceland as it doesn't get smelly and you can re-wear it and save space!

What were highlights of your trip?

It was very nice meeting my Dad's former student, my

friend, and the one who introduced me to my coach, GM Bryce Tignon. He gave me one of the greatest pieces of advice I will carry forward into my future chess games: ***There is no such thing as a drawn position.*** He explained to me that even in positions that are “dead drawn,” it is important to trust your training and push to find advantages and break through, as he did in several of his games this event. I also climbed the Þúfa hill together with Bryce and Dad in the wind, ice, and snow, to take in some incredible views of Reykjavik and share stories and insights. It was also lovely to spend lots of time with my Mom, Dad, and brother and take in the sights of a beautiful city.

What did you learn about Iceland?

The food in Reykjavik is the best! So much variety! I recommend [Posthus food hall](#) feat. Yuzu, Funky Bhangra, Fukumama, and more, with different culinary twists at every restaurant. Ramen Momo, the first ever Ramen house in Iceland, was a great surprise, and super traditional. I highly recommend the yuja tea. Lastly, I would highly recommend [Gandhi](#), a lovely Indian restaurant with incredible paneer tikka masala and delectable onion pakoras. Overall, it was my favorite tournament experience and travel experience, and I can't wait to return again for a future event!

What are your chess reflections?

I ended up “playing up” all nine games this tournament, and scored a solid 3.0/9 with four draws and a win, along with four close losses. I felt I did a great job using my time and calculating deeply and thought more positionally than ever. Upon reflection, the moves I played too quickly were my biggest mistakes, giving opponents small advantages they converted well. I will improve on this. I was also pleased by my resilience, in that I was worse in many games and fought hard to come back and get a result.

Can you share one of your chess positions?

This position came versus Luigi Ardu from Italy. Do you all see the plan for Black, aka me? ...fxe5, Rxc6 Qxc6 and Black is much better. This happened and Black converted the advantage for the win.



The Legend Vivaan

What were your expectations before the trip?

I am eight, and I knew I would be one of the youngest players in this edition of the Reykjavik Open. I am really into basketball right now, play every day, and was hoping to hoop, at least a little, while in Iceland.



What things didn't you expect coming to Iceland?

The underground passages to get from place to place and avoid the crazy wind were a nice surprise. I like a blizzard as much as the next guy; in fact Blizzards is the name of my basketball team, but I'm not a super big guy yet, so the wind can push me pretty hard!

What were highlights of your trip?

Perlan Museum was AMAZING! It's all about the wonders of Iceland, like ice caves, volcanoes, and aurora. I also loved that we got to sit courtside at a professional Icelandic basketball game, a crazy match between KR Reykjavik and Tindastoll! We also got to play on that court the day after. As you may know, I love basketball, and am a little crazy, like my dad, so we went out and hooped in snow multiple days as well! Fortunately, our bathroom floors were heated so we could dry our socks after!

What did you learn about Iceland?

If you don't mind the snow, there are many lovely parks in Reykjavik, like Hallargarðurinn, which has the half-frozen Tjörnin pond where you can say hi to ducks and swans! There is also Klambratún, which has a playground and was the main place I went to play snow basketball. If you're looking for some swimming but don't want to go all the way to the Blue Lagoon, try out [Laugardalslaug Pool](#), which has geothermally heated pools, beach volleyball, and basketball courts, plus the Reykjavik Zoo is right next door.

What are your chess reflections?

I loved meeting people from all over the world and making new friends. It was super cool to watch many top players play as I was walking around, including Super GM champion Amin Tabatabaei, top 30 in the world!

Can you share one of your chess positions?

Instead of highlighting my games, I want to give a shoutout to our WGM/IM Zoey Tang! In Round five, Zoey, playing White, faced GM Leon Livaic of Croatia, on one of the top DGT boards. In an equal endgame, under time pressure, Leon made a mistake. Zoey, also with little time on her clock, found a lively finish. Can you spot the winning plan for White?



55. Nd4 is crushing! The knight is having too much fun! The game proceeded


55... Rb2, 56. Nf5 Bxf5, 57. h7 and Black resigned. Note if Bxh7, White has Rh6#!

Are you imagining yourself at next year's Reykjavik Open? We hope so! The dates are already set: March 17th to March 23rd, 2027! It will be the 40th anniversary! Follow the website <https://www.reykjavikopen.com>, where the organizers will announce registration and open the payment link once they are ready. The fee for the tournament is prorated based on your rating and birth year, so click on the right link! The website will also have links to discounted hotels near the playing venue, and discounts to take bus excursions if you choose to do so. Icelandair has good deals to direct flights to Reykjavik from Seattle, usually in November, so don't miss those (our tickets cost around \$500 roundtrip). Also, when you arrive at the Keflavik airport, you still have a 50-minute drive to downtown Reykjavik. You could get a taxi, which is very expensive, or you could take the Flybus, which is also discounted for chess players, and you can pre-book your tickets through the Reykjavik Open website! Pack warm clothes and be ready for lots of good chess! Watch out, Iceland! The Pacific Northwest chess crew is coming to town once again!

Three Cheers, Fellow Future Master Chess Friends!

The Man Benji, The Myth Sarang, The Legend Vivaan





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