

Iceland Practical Information

Iceland is not only closer than you think but is also far different than you've ever imagined. Where else can you witness such marvels of Mother Nature as a tremendous icecap with several glaciers, spouting geysers, volcanoes, raging rivers and magnificent waterfalls? Summers are surprisingly warm, and winters are not as cold as you might expect. Regardless of when you visit, be assured that the warmth shown by Icelanders, their desire to share their culture and the efforts made to make your stay as pleasant as possible will, like the spectacular landscape, never be forgotten.



Documentation



Canadian/USA Passports are required for visitors to travel to Iceland and must be valid for at least three months beyond your intended stay. For nationals of other countries please check your documentation requirements online at www.utl.is/english/visas/no-visa

Airports - Keflavik International



The Leifur Eiriksson International Air Terminal in Keflavik is located about 50 km from the capital city of Reykjavik. It is the gateway for most passenger flights and air-freight flights to and from Iceland. The airport is open 24 hours per day. Duty-free items may be purchased upon arrival to Iceland as well as upon departure.

Location and Geography

Iceland is a European island midway between North America and mainland Europe. It is almost 40,000 square miles, the same size as Ohio. Iceland's highest peak, Hvannadalshnjukur, is 6,500 feet. It has the largest glaciers in Europe - in fact, 11% of the country is covered by glaciers. The coastline is dotted with more than one hundred fjords and green, fertile valleys extend from many of them. Iceland also has more than 10,000 waterfalls and countless hot springs. A lot of the country is technically uninhabitable, with the moss-covered rocks of ancient lava flows and tall treeless mountains, but these moonscapes – the NASA astronauts trained in Iceland before the first moon landing – are perfect for exploring another-worldly looking place.





Situated on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Iceland is a hot spot of geothermal activity. Thirty volcanoes have erupted in the past two centuries, and natural hot water supplies much of the population with inexpensive, pollution-free heating. Rivers are harnessed to provide inexpensive hydroelectric power. For visitors, this also means access to the country's hundreds of clean and friendly geo-thermally heated outdoor swimming pools, a true Icelandic experience.

Population

Out of a population of around 334,000, half live in the capital Reykjavik and its neighboring towns in the southwest. A small percentage of the population was born outside of Iceland. The largest minority groups in the country come from the other Scandinavian countries, Eastern Europe and South-East Asia. Iceland is the most sparsely populated country in Europe with an average of about three inhabitants per square km. Almost four-fifths of the country is uninhabited and mostly uninhabitable, the population being concentrated in a narrow coastal belt, valleys and the southwest corner of the country.



People and Culture



The Icelanders are descended from both the Vikings and the Celts, so while there are many blond, blue-eyed locals, there are also many with brown eyes and red or dark brown hair. Perhaps because of centuries of difficult living in the rough north Atlantic, the Icelanders are often a reserved and stoic group, sometimes even appearing shy at first. But they are proud



of their country and very welcoming to visitors from all over the world. Many will want to know what you think of their homeland. Expect to be asked “How do you like Iceland?” many times on your trip. Iceland is a progressive, modern European society with a high standard of living and a high level of technology and education. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in Iceland by the Constitution.



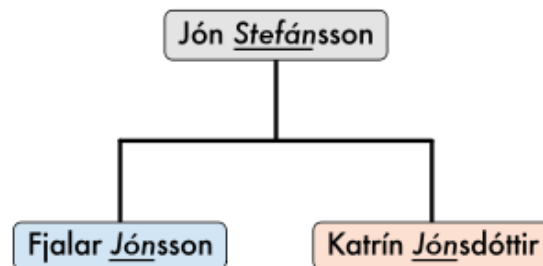
The National Church of Iceland, to which 97 percent of the population belongs officially (if not always in practice) is Evangelical Lutheran. In addition to the many Lutheran churches, there is a Roman Catholic Cathedral in Reykjavik, which holds regular Sunday Mass, often in English.

The level of education is high in Iceland. Literacy has been universal in Iceland since the end of the eighteenth century. In 1907 school attendance was made obligatory for all children aged 10-14. In 1946 compulsory school attendance was extended, and at present it covers the ages between seven and 16. Those who wish to continue their education go either to various specialized schools or to secondary schools.

Icelandic Language and Family Names

The Icelanders still speak the language of the Vikings (Old Norse, now called Icelandic). It is in the same family of languages as Norwegian, Danish and Swedish but English is widely spoken. Iceland also keeps the ancient Norse tradition of using patronyms rather than surnames. Meaning, someone called Magnus Petursson is Magnus, the son of Petur. If Magnus has a daughter, she might be called Margret Magnúsdóttir, or Margret, the daughter of Magnus.

Women do not change their names when they get married and so a husband, wife, son and daughter of the same family can all have different last names. That’s why people almost always use only first names in Iceland.



Economy

Iceland’s economy is heavily dependent upon fisheries, which are the nation's greatest resource. Seventy-two percent of all exports are made up of seafood products. Yet only a small proportion of the workforce is active in this sector (4.4% in fishing and 5.6% in fish processing). About 66% of the workforce is employed in services. Icelanders enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world.



Climate & Weather

The Icelandic climate is warmer than the name suggests, thanks to the Gulf Stream. Summers in Iceland are rather cool and unstable with possible rain and frequent weather changes. During summertime the

nights are bright due to the midnight sun. Conversely, during winter daylight hours are few, although there are spectacular opportunities to view the infamous Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis).



Temperature

Daily temperatures can fluctuate from a minimum 5°C at night to a maximum of 25°C during the day. July and August are the warmest months in Reykjavik with an average temperature of 11°C. The coldest months are December and January with average temperatures just below 0 °C, which is warmer than what you see in New York!

Average Monthly Temperatures

Month	Mean Temperature °C		Mean Total Precipitation (mm)	Mean Number of Precipitation Days
	Daily Minimum	Daily Maximum		
Jan	-3.0	1.9	75.6	13.3
Feb	-2.1	2.8	71.8	12.5
Mar	-2.0	3.2	81.8	14.4
Apr	0.4	5.7	58.3	12.2
May	3.6	9.4	43.8	9.8
Jun	6.7	11.7	50.0	10.7
Jul	8.3	13.3	51.8	10.0
Aug	7.9	13.0	61.8	11.7
Sep	5.0	10.1	66.5	12.4
Oct	2.2	6.8	85.6	14.5
Nov	-1.3	3.4	72.5	12.5
Dec	-2.8	2.2	78.7	13.9

Daylight

Summer visitors who arrive to a bright midnight sky and ask when it gets dark in Iceland are sometimes told "in the middle of August". The sun barely sets in the summer in Reykjavík and it is light round-the-clock in the north at the peak of summer. In mid-winter, expect only about four to five hours a day of daylight. Spring and autumn daylight hours are, more or less, "normal".



Sunrise & Sunset (Reykjavik)

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
11:19	09:55	08:21	06:42	04:39	03:15	03:07	04:50	06:16	07:36	09:24	10:51
15:44	17:29	18:59	20:22	22:12	23:39	23:55	22:15	20:37	18:57	16:58	15:44

Clothing & Footwear

When travelling in Iceland you should always be prepared for both cold and wet weather, all times of the year, as the weather can be extremely changeable. Icelanders often say, "If you don't like the weather, just wait 15 minutes!" Be sure to bring along lightweight clothing, a sweater or cardigan, a rainproof coat and sturdy walking shoes. Travellers who are camping or heading into the interior will need warm underwear and socks, rubber boots and a warm sleeping bag. Always bring a bathing suit no matter what time of the year you visit. There are countless geothermally heated pools and lagoons with a typical temperature of 25-28°C.



Electricity

Icelandic electrical standards are European (50Hz, 220 volts) so many North American electrical devices will require converters, and all will require plug adapters. Most laptop computer and phone and MP3 player chargers have the converter built in, so you just need a plug adaptor to fit in the outlets. These are usually available at airports. For the converters, it's best to buy one in North America and bring it with you. They are usually found at US and Canadian electronic specialty stores.



Currency

The unit of currency used in Iceland is the Icelandic krona or "crown," abbreviated ISK. You can exchange your money at banks, airports and currency exchanges. Cash machines are very common in all cities and towns and Visa and MasterCard are also accepted almost universally. It is best to exchange your money into ISK in Iceland, and re-exchange any surplus before you leave, as foreign banks may not deal in ISK.

Credit Cards



They are accepted by most shops, restaurants and organizations and are widely used. The major credit cards in Iceland are Visa, MasterCard and EuroCard, although other cards are widely accepted as well.

Business and Banking Hours



The opening hours of most businesses are from 9:00 until 17:00. Some institutions and companies change their work hours to 8:00 to 16:00 in the summer months. Shopping hours are generally from 10:00 until 18:00 during the week (Monday to Friday). On Saturdays, most shops are open from 10:00 until 16:00. Most shops are closed on Sundays, but shopping centers, supermarkets, some bookstores and various shops catering to tourists have longer opening-hours and are mostly open every day. If you suddenly find yourself hungry in the middle of the night, there are even a few 24-hour stores. Fancy dine-and-dance restaurants, discothèques and dance clubs in Reykjavik and larger towns are open on weekends until 03:00. Bars are open daily.

Shopping, Tax & Duty Free

Below are the two tax-free logos to keep your eyes open for:



High fashion, designer jewelry, cutting edge music and sturdy outdoor wear – Iceland's got it all! Reykjavik may very well be the best-kept secret of the cosmopolitan shopping enthusiast. Despite rumors that Reykjavik is an expensive city its prices are generally on par with those in New York. As a visitor to Iceland, whenever you buy goods for more than 4,000 ISK in one shop, you are entitled to a [15% tax-free refund for tourists](#). Participating shops normally display a Tax-Free Shopping sticker in the window. When you buy the products in the shop you pay the full price, but make sure to ask for a "tax-free" form, which entitles you to a 15% refund on the goods you just bought. The money can be refunded at two places in the city centre before you leave: at the Iceland Refund desk at the Reykjavik Tourist Information Centre on Adalstraeti or at the Global Refund desk at the Forex bank on Bankastraeti. You can also get your refund at Keflavik Airport before you leave.

If the amount of your refund is more than 5,000 ISK, you must have the cheque stamped by the Customs Authority Office at the airport. You may be asked to produce your purchases (except woolen goods), so you should carry them as hand luggage.



Iceland has a great selection of goods available for purchase including warm woolens, beautifully crafted pottery and outdoor wear. The nation's best buys include: outdoor wear, wool wear, fashion and accessories, CDs and books, jewelry, Icelandic couture and artwork.

Outside the city centre, you'll be able to do some shopping in the warm comfort of the city's two main shopping malls; Kringlan, a couple of minutes drive from the heart of the city, and Smaralind in the adjacent town of Kopavogur. In the nearby harbor town of Hafnarfjordur, you can satisfy all your shopping needs in Fjordurinn Shopping Centre and surrounding small shops and galleries in the town centre. The Skeifan area also has many great outlet stores, outdoor wear stores, supermarkets and toy stores.

Price tags in Iceland always include Value Added Tax (VAT).

Tipping

Service and VAT are invariably included in prices in Iceland and tipping is never required. However, if you are very pleased with the provided service, Icelanders are generally not offended if they are offered a tip, including tour guides.

Telephone and Emergency



The code to call Iceland from overseas is +354 plus a seven-digit number. There are no area codes. To call out of Iceland, dial 00 and then the respective country code and telephone number. International phone cards can be purchased at the Tourist Information Centre, where there is also a phone centre. Mobile phone "start packages" (including an Icelandic mobile number and limited call credit) can also be purchased at the Centre.

The **emergency telephone** number for police, ambulance or fire is **112**. Note that phone calls to 112 from coin-operated phones do not require payment.

Most European cell phones work on Iceland's GSM network; North American ones use a different standard. You can rent cell phones in Iceland. Iceland now has the highest rate of cell phone use in the world. Mobiles work in towns and on virtually all main travel routes.

Health Information

Iceland has modern hospitals and well-educated health personnel in most towns. The main hospital, the National University Hospital of Iceland, is in Reykjavik. The Akureyri Hospital is located in Akureyri. There is at least one healthcare institution or clinic located in every region as well. Travellers should take out sufficient health and travel insurance, including emergency evacuation coverage and bring regularly prescribed medicine, as your brand may not be available in Iceland.

Public Holidays & Events

January:

New Year's Day - Almost everything is closed.

February:

Þorrablót - Food & drink festivities held in the old winter month of "Þorri". People gather to sing songs, drink and eat traditional Icelandic food.

Winter Lights Festival - An annual 3-day event that brightens up the dark hours.

Food & Fun Festival - Annual week-long festival featuring foreign chefs visiting Iceland.

March – April:

Easter - Holy Thursday (Thursday before Easter Sunday), marks the start of the Easter holidays for Icelanders, who enjoy a 5-day weekend. Businesses, banks, government institutions and most shops are closed.

First Day of Summer – Thursday between April 19-25, a public holiday.

May:

May 1 – Labour Day - A public holiday in Iceland.

Whit Sunday – Seven weeks after Easter, a public holiday.

Whit Monday – Monday following White Sunday, a public holiday.

Reykjavik Art Festival – An annual 2-week festival promoting Icelandic, Scandinavian and international culture. A variety of exhibitions, concerts, theatre, dance and opera performances.

June:

1st weekend – Festival of the Sea - Annual event based on an old Icelandic tradition to honour those who make their living from the sea. This holiday includes numerous cultural activities, parades, arts and crafts activities for kids, food fairs and sailing competitions.

June 17, Independence Day – This is the day Icelanders celebrate independence.

June 21, Summer Solstice – The longest day of the year. On this day the sun rises at 02:54 and doesn't set until 24:04!

August:

First Monday – Tradesmen's Day, a holiday commemorating the traditional shopkeeper's summer break. Celebrated wildly by those young at heart, with music and camping festivals all around the country.

Gay Pride (2nd Weekend) – Thousands of people gather in a large, international parade to march through the streets of the city. Includes an outdoor concert with Icelandic and international artists, along with dances and other activities.

Reykjavik Marathon (3rd Weekend)

Reykjavik Cultural Night (3rd Weekend) – The celebration takes place in the city centre with the participation of many artists, cultural institutions, shops and cafés. The evening ends with a big firework display down by the harbor.

September & October:

Reykjavik Film Festival - Icelandic and international films are screened.

Reykjavik Jazz Festival - National and internationally recognized artists play in city-wide venues.

October & November:

Iceland Airwaves – A four-day musical event bringing bands from all over the world to Reykjavik to play in small venues all around the capital.

December:

December 1 - "Independence" Day - On this day 1918, Iceland was officially declared an independent nation. A school holiday in Iceland.

December 21 - Winter Solstice - The shortest day of the year, sunrise 1122, sunset 1530.

December 23 - Þorláksmessa - This day pays tribute to one of the few indigenous saints of Iceland, St. Þorlákur. Christmas preparations reach highpoint and shops are open until 11 p.m.

December 24 - Christmas Eve - At 6 pm the church bells toll to mark the beginning of Christmas. Many people go to church and a Christmas mass is broadcast live on radio. A public holiday from noon.

December 25 - Christmas Day - A public holiday.

December 26 – Boxing Day.

December 31 - New Year's Eve - Icelanders say goodbye to the old year with an enormous firework display which illuminates the whole city around midnight. Public holiday from noon.



Tourist Information Centers

Icelandic Tourist Board

Tel.: (212)885-9700 · Fax: (212)885-9710

E-mail: usa@icetourist.is Web: www.goiceland.org

Tourist Information Centre - Reykjavik Complete

Aðalstræti 2 · IS-101 Reykjavík

Tel.: +354-590-1500 · Fax: +354-590-1501

E-mail: info@visitreykjavik.is Web: www.visitreykjavik.is

West-Iceland - Tourist Information Centre

At Brúartorg · IS-310 Borgarnes

Tel.: +354-437-2214 · Fax: +354-437-2314

E-mail: tourinfo@vesturland.is Web: www.vesturland.is

Westfjords - Tourist Information Centre

Aðalstræti 7 · IS-400 Ísafjörður

Tel.: +354-456-5121 · Fax: +354-456-5185

E-mail: info@vestfiridir.is Web: www.akademia.is/vestfiridir/

North-Iceland - Tourist Information Centre

Hafnarstræti 82 · IS-600 Akureyri

Tel.: +354-462-7733 · Fax: +354-461-1817

E-mail: tourinfo@est.is Web: www.eyjafjordur.is

East-Iceland - Tourist Information Centre

Kaupangur 6, P.O. Box 144 · IS-700 Egilsstaðir

Tel.: +354-471-2320 · Fax: +354-471-1863

E-mail: east@east.is Web: www.east.is

South-Iceland - Tourist Information Centre

Hafnarbraut 25 · IS-780 Höfn

Tel.: +354-478-1500

E-mail: markadsrad@southeast.is Web: www.east.is

South-Iceland - Tourist Information Centre

Sunnumörk 2-4 · IS-810 Hveragerði

Tel.: +354-483-4601 · Fax: +354-483-4604

E-mail: tourinfo@hveragerdi.is Web: www.southiceland.is