

Overview of Iceland

Home to glassy glaciers, hot thermal springs, spectacular geysers, active volcanoes, lava fields, stunning waterfalls and snow-capped mountains, Iceland is indeed the 'Land of Fire and Ice'. The second largest island in Europe, Iceland lies close to the Arctic Circle northwest of Scotland and south of Greenland, and its primary draw for visitors is its unique and wonderful natural phenomena.

The hardy Icelandic people, descendants of ancient Norsemen and Celts, are intriguing too, having spawned what is now renowned as the oldest-surviving parliament in the world (called the *Althing*), founded in 930 AD. Iceland also boasts a much-revered literary heritage of the best medieval works, mostly based on heroic sagas.

Most of the country's popular tourist features are in the south of the island near the capital, Reykjavik, and can be explored on the much celebrated 'Golden Circle' route. Top of the list for scenic splendour are the Gullfoss double-tiered waterfall and the spouting hot springs of Geysir.

Reykjavik means 'smoky bay' but, in the case of Iceland's pristine capital (which is Europe's most northerly capital city), the smoke is not smog but rather steam from the underground springs that warm the city.

Reykjavik has a well-deserved reputation for being one of the cleanest, most invigorating cities in Europe, and boasts one of the highest standards of living in the world. The city may be small, but it is full of interesting attractions, from galleries and museums to thermal bathing spots, and the nightlife is second to none.

Iceland is steadily increasing in popularity as a travel destination, and offers so much to see and do that repeat visits may be necessary, particularly as the country seems so different in summer and winter.

The summer weather enables all sorts of outdoor fun in the gloriously unique landscapes, but the icy winter months bring with them the spectacle of the Northern Lights, truly one of the most magical experiences the world has to offer.

Key Facts

Language:

Icelandic, but English is widely spoken.

Passport/Visa:

The borderless region known as the Schengen Area includes Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All of these countries issue a standard Schengen visa that has a multiple entry option, and which allows the holder to travel freely within the borders of all the aforementioned countries. Additionally, foreign passengers to Iceland must hold return or onward tickets, the necessary travel documentation for their next destination, and sufficient funds to cover their stay in Iceland. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The unit of currency is the Icelandic kronur (ISK). Almost all banks offer foreign exchange facilities and can be found in even the tiniest villages. Most have ATMs on their premises and they're available after banking hours, which are usually Monday to Friday from 9.15am to 4pm. Credit cards are widely used in Iceland for purchases and cash advances.

Electricity:

Iceland's electricity supply is 230 volts, 50Hz, as it is in most European countries. Plugs and sockets are of the two-pin type typical of Europe.

Travel to Iceland

Overview

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Although it is one of the most exciting outdoor travel destinations in the world, more conventional sightseeing in Iceland is also possible, with Reykjavik providing an impressive selection of museums and galleries, a famously fun nightlife, good shopping, and a mouth-watering array of restaurants.

Reykjavik is commonly the starting point for Icelandic holidays and the most well-beaten tourist route on the island, the Golden Circle, starts in the city. This 186-mile (300km) loop can be driven in a day and covers many of Iceland's most popular tourist attractions and activities, including the Gullfoss waterfalls, the geysers of Strokkur and Geysir, and the beautiful landscapes of Thingvellir National Park. For a longer trip, and to experience more of the island than the popular south, travellers can drive Iceland's Ring Road, which circles the island and takes about a week to travel.

Many travellers will find the Reykjavik City Card useful as it covers not only the major sightseeing attractions in the city but also a few excursions nearby, including a ferry ride to nearby islands and discounts for activities such as whale watching and horse riding. The tourist card also allows unlimited bus transport and even includes discounts at some restaurants. The Reykjavik City Card is available in one-day, two-day, or three-day packages.

Climate in Iceland

As the name suggests, Iceland's climate is cold, but not as cold as might be expected because of the passing warm waters of the Gulf Stream, which regulate the climate. The summer temperatures in Reykjavik, between June and August, range from 41F (5C) at night to as high as 77F (25C) during the day. The average mid-winter temperature, in January, is 31F (-0.5C).

The south is the wettest part of the country, but snow is rare. Coastal areas tend to experience winter gales and are generally windy. During the summer months, there is almost continuous daylight; early spring and late autumn feature long twilights. The opposite is true in the darkness of winter from mid-November until the end of January, when the country only experiences a few hours of daylight each day.

The Northern Lights are often visible in autumn and early winter. The best time to visit Iceland depends on the desired activity. Generally summer is the most pleasant time to visit but the Northern Lights are a big draw card in the colder months.

Health Notes when travelling to Iceland

There are no specific health risks associated with travel to Iceland, and no vaccinations are necessary for entry. Travellers should, as a precaution, be up-to-date on routine vaccinations before every trip, and should consider getting vaccinated for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and measles. Medical care in the country is of high quality and payment is usually expected in cash from visitors. Travel health insurance is highly recommended.

Safety Notes when travelling to Iceland

Iceland is an extremely safe country to visit. The only threats are a low level of petty crime and rapidly changing weather conditions, so travellers should keep an eye open if they are on the road.

Customs in Iceland

Smoking in bars, restaurants and on public transport is illegal in Iceland, and penalties for the possession of drugs are steep. Travellers should note that although whale meat is legally available in Iceland, it is not legal to bring it across borders into the UK or EU.

Duty Free in Iceland

Travellers to Iceland over 18 years do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes or 250g of other tobacco products. Travellers over 20 years are also allowed 1 litre of spirits and 3 litres of beer, or 3 litres of wine and 6 litres beer, or 1 litre spirits and 6 litres beer, or 1.5 litres of wine and a 12 litres of beer, or 18 litres of beer; and food items up to 3 kg not exceeding ISK 25,000. Permits from Post & Telecom Authorities are required for cordless phones, remote controls or radio transmitters, but not for a GSM mobile phone. Prohibited items include narcotics and drugs, uncooked meat products, weapons and powdered or moist snuff.

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Doing Business in Iceland

Most business in Iceland tends to take place in the capital, Reykjavik, and business meetings are usually formal, with smart dress essential. It's worth handing out business cards, and initial greetings are usually accompanied by a handshake. Punctuality should be respected; meetings are usually conducted in English when dealing with foreigners. Visiting business people should note that Icelanders generally go by their first name, and telephone directory listings are alphabetical by first name. Business hours are usually from 8am to 4pm (summer) and 9am to 5pm (winter); most offices are closed on weekends.

Communication in Iceland

The international country code for Iceland is +354. Travellers should note that Icelanders are listed by their first name in the telephone directory, not the last. Visitors can rent WiFi hotspots; WiFi is easy to access and free calls can be made using WiFi connections.

Tipping in Iceland

Service charges are included in bills and tipping is not expected in Iceland.

Passport/Visa Note

The borderless region known as the Schengen Area includes Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All of these countries issue a standard Schengen visa that has a multiple entry option, and which allows the holder to travel freely within the borders of all the aforementioned countries. Additionally, foreign passengers to Iceland must hold return or onward tickets, the necessary travel documentation for their next destination, and sufficient funds to cover their stay in Iceland. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond the period of intended stay in Iceland. No visa is required for stays of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond the period of intended stay in Iceland. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

Passports endorsed 'British Citizen', 'British Subject' (containing a Certificate of Entitlement to the Right of Abode issued by the United Kingdom), and 'British Overseas Territories Citizen' issued by Gibraltar, must be valid on arrival. British passports with other endorsements must be valid for three months beyond the period of intended stay in Iceland. A visa is required.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond the period of intended stay in Iceland. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days within a 180 day period. Passport issued more than 10 years prior to date of travel are not accepted.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish citizens must have a passport that is valid on arrival in Iceland. No visa is required for nationals from the Republic of Ireland.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond the period of intended stay in Iceland. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond the period of intended stay, and a valid Schengen visa, to enter Iceland.

Tourist Offices

Reykjavik Tourist Information Centre, Reykjavik: +354 454 2000 or <http://www.reykjaviktouristinfo.is>

Iceland Embassies

In the United States:

Embassy of Iceland, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 265 6653.

In Canada:

Embassy of Iceland, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 482 1944.

In the United Kingdom:

Embassy of Iceland, London, United Kingdom (also responsible for Ireland) : +44 20 7259 3999.

In Australia:

Embassy of Iceland, Beijing, China (also responsible for Australia): +86 1 8531 6900.

In Ireland:

Honorary Consulate of Iceland, Dublin: +353 1 872 9299

In New Zealand:

Consulate of Iceland, Auckland, New Zealand: +64 9 528 3932.

In South Africa:

Honorary Consulate of Iceland, Johannesburg, South Africa: +27 11 305 8954.

Foreign Embassies in Iceland

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Reykjavik: +354 595 2200.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian Embassy, Reykjavik: +354 575 6500.

British Embassy

British Embassy, Reykjavik: +354 550 5100.

Australian Embassy

Australian Embassy, Copenhagen, Denmark (also responsible for Iceland): +45 7026 3676.

Irish Embassy

Irish Honorary Consul, Gardabaer: +354 554 2355.

South African Embassy

South African Honorary Consulate-General, Reykjavik: +354 561 7181.

Currency

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Exchange rate for 1 ISK - Icelandic Krona

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.01 EUR Euro	0.01 USD U.S. Dollar	0.01 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	1.09 JPY Japanese Yen	0.01 CAD Canadian Dollar
0.01 CHF Swiss Franc	0.01 AUD Australian Dollar	0.28 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	3.17 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	665.33 LBP Lebanese Pound	0.03 LYD Libyan Dinar
0.05 BOB Bolivian Boliviano	0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	0.01 SGD Singapore Dollar	0.08 SEK Swedish Krona
0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar	0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	0.42 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	0.12 MXN Mexican Peso	4.36 XOF West African CFA Franc
0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina	0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	0.96 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat
0.00 BWP Botswana Pula	0.03 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	6.71 CLP Chilean Peso	2.77 AMD Armenia Dram	0.17 CZK Czech Koruna	0.13 MDL Moldova Lei
89.94 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	0.03 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.01 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	0.27 UYU Uruguayan Peso	0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee
0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	0.08 NOK Norwegian Krone	0.03 PLN Polish Zloty	0.03 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	0.26 THB Thai Baht
0.03 AED U.A.E Dirham	0.04 BRL Brazilian Real	0.03 RON Romanian New Leu	0.06 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	4.36 XAF Central African CFA Franc	181.61 VND Vietnamese Dong
6.28 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	0.07 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar	0.01 PAB Panamanian Balboa
0.01 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	28.02 COP Colombian Peso	0.63 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	2.59 HUF Hungarian Forint	0.08 TJS Tajikistan Ruble	114.90 IDR Indonesian Rupiah
0.34 EGP Egyptian Pound	9.71 KRW South Korean Won	53.30 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	0.03 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	3.63 CRC Costa Rican Colón	0.01 NZD New Zealand Dollar
1.99 PKR Pakistani Rupee	0.65 RUB Russian Rouble	0.13 ZAR South African Rand	0.02 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	0.01 BGN Bulgarian Lev
0.23 TRY Turkish Lira	0.41 PHP Philippine Peso	0.23 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	8.33 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	0.78 RSD Serbian Dinar	0.05 CNY Chinese Yuan	0.05 DKK Danish Krone
0.02 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	0.60 INR Indian Rupee				

Overview of the Attractions in Iceland

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Public Holidays in Iceland

	2023	2024
New Year's Day	Mon. January 1	Mon. January 1
Maundy Thursday	Sat. April 6	Thu. March 28
Good Friday	Sun. April 7	Fri. March 29
Easter Monday	Wed. April 10	Mon. April 1
First Day of Summer	Sat. April 20	Thu. April 25
Labour Day	Wed. May 1	Wed. May 1
Ascension Day	Sat. May 18	Thu. May 9
Whit Monday	Wed. May 29	Mon. May 20
National Day	Mon. June 17	Mon. June 17
Commerce Day	Wed. August 7	Mon. August 5
Christmas	Tue. December 24 to Wed. December 25	Tue. December 24 to Wed. December 25
Boxing Day	Thu. December 26	Thu. December 26
New Year's Eve	Tue. December 31	Tue. December 31