



# Iceland

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## Why Go?

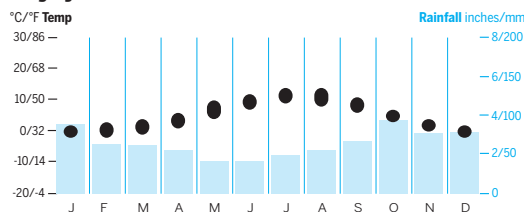
Iceland is literally a country in the making, a vast volcanic laboratory where mighty forces shape the earth: geysers gush, mudpots gloop, sulphurous clouds puff from fissures and glaciers grind great pathways through the mountains. Experience the full weirdness of Icelandic nature by bathing in turquoise pools, kayaking under the midnight sun or crunching across a dazzling-white ice cap.

Iceland's creatures are larger than life too: minke, humpback and even blue whales are common visitors to the deeper fjords. Record-breaking numbers of birds nest in the sea cliffs: cutest are the fearless puffins who flutter and bill here in their millions.

The landscape is infectious: hidden energy and a desire to shape the world are Icelandic traits. Clean, green Reykjavík must contain the world's highest concentration of dreamers, authors, poets and musicians. The recession hit Iceland particularly hard, but natives are facing it with stoicism; and for visitors, at least, a weaker króna means a cheaper holiday.

## When to Go

### Reykjavík



**May & Jun** Prime birdwatching season happily coincides with the two driest months of the year.

**Aug** Reykjavík runs at full throttle, culminating in the Culture Night arts festival and firework display.

**Nov–Apr** The best months for viewing the aurora borealis (Northern Lights).

## Connections

Little Iceland, way out on the edge of nothing, is nevertheless connected by regular flights from Keflavík airport to Denmark (Copenhagen), Finland (Helsinki), Norway (Bergen, Oslo and Stavanger) and Sweden (Göteborg and Stockholm) – see p309 for details.

For those who like more romance, the ferry from Denmark (p310) along the jaw-dropping fjord to Seyðisfjörður is the most stylish way to arrive.

## ITINERARIES

### Three Days

Arrive in Reykjavík on Friday to catch the decadent *runtur* (pub crawl). Sober up in Laugadalur geothermal pool, admire the views from Hallgrímskirkja, then absorb some Viking history at the National Museum. On Sunday, visit Gullfoss, Geysir and Þingvellir on a Golden Circle tour. Stop to soak in the Blue Lagoon on the way home.

### One Week

Head for the countryside: chill out on serene Snæfellsnes in the west; view the volcanic Vestmannaeyjar with their immense puffin colonies; or drive east to Skaftafell for wonderful hiking and glacier walking.

## Essential Food & Drink

» **Traditional Icelandic dishes** These reflect a nightmarish historical need to eat every last scrap: brave souls might try *svið* (singled sheep's head), *súrsaðir hrútspungar* (pickled ram's testicles) and *hárkarl* (putrefied shark meat), bought from the butcher, fishmonger or old-school workers' canteens. More palatable offerings include *harðfiskur* (dried strips of haddock with butter), *plokkfiskur* (a hearty fish-and-potato gratin) and delicious yoghurt-like *skyr*.

» **Succulent specialities** Icelandic lamb is some of the tastiest on the planet – sheep roam free in the mountains all summer, grazing on sweet grass and wild thyme. Iceland also takes great pride in its fishing industry, and superfresh fish dishes grace most menus. Pink-footed goose and reindeer meat from the eastern highlands are high-end treats.

» **Whale meat controversy** Although whales are a protected species, many Icelandic restaurants serve whale meat: the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) points out that only 1.1% of Icelanders regularly eat whale, and that tourists consume an appreciable proportion of the catch.

» **Favourite drinks** The traditional alcoholic brew *brennivín* is schnapps made from potatoes and caraway seeds. It's fondly known as *svarti dauði* (black death). Coffee is a national institution.

## AT A GLANCE

- » **Capital** Reykjavík
- » **Area** 103,000 sq km
- » **Population** 318,200
- » **Country code**  
☑354
- » **Language** Icelandic
- » **Currency** króna (lkr)

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	lkr121.04
Canada	C\$1	lkr116.63
Europe	€1	lkr164.67
Japan	¥100	lkr136.15
New Zealand	NZ\$1	lkr88.92
UK	UK£1	lkr184.97
USA	US\$1	lkr111.06

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room**  
lkr17,000
- » **Two-course evening meal** lkr4000
- » **Museum entrance**  
free–lkr1000
- » **Beer (500mL)** lkr800
- » **Reykjavík bus ticket**  
lkr280

## Resources

- » **Icelandic Tourist Board**  
(www.visiticeland.com)  
With links to regional websites
- » **Reykjavík Tourist Office**  
(www.visitreykjavik.is)