



ICELAND

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES



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Welcome to Iceland

Hitting headlines, topping bucket lists, wooing nature lovers and dazzling increasing numbers of visitors – there seems no end to the talents of this breathtaking northern destination.

An underpopulated island marooned near the top of the globe, Iceland is, literally, a country in the making. It's a vast volcanic laboratory where mighty forces shape the earth: geysers gush, mudpots gloop, ice-covered volcanoes rumble and glaciers cut great pathways through the mountains. It's the power of Iceland's nature to turn the prosaic into the extraordinary. A dip in a pool becomes a soak in a geothermal lagoon; a casual stroll can transform into a trek across a glittering glacier; and a quiet night of camping may mean front-row seats to the aurora borealis' curtains of light, or the soft, pinkish hue of the midnight sun.

The counterpoint to so much natural beauty is found in Iceland's cultural life, which celebrates a literary legacy that stretches from medieval sagas to contemporary thrillers by way of Nobel Prize winners. Live music is everywhere, as is visual art, handicrafts and locavore cuisine. The warmth of Icelanders is disarming, as is their industriousness – they've worked hard to recover from financial upheaval, and to transform Iceland into a destination that, thanks to its popularity with visitors, can host more than six times its population each year.

“It's the power of Iceland's nature to turn the prosaic into the extraordinary.”



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Bárður Snæfellsás sculpture

LAUREN PIASECKI/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

Plan Your Trip

Iceland's Top 10

CHRISTIAN GEHRIG/500PX ©



Reykjavík

Embrace the world's most northerly capital

Historic Reykjavík combines colourful buildings, quirky people, eye-popping design, wild nightlife and a capricious soul in an endearingly compact package. For all its new-found fame and creative cosmopolitan air, Reykjavík remains an overgrown village at heart, where walking is still the best way to get around but world-class arts, culture and museums abound, and quality bars, restaurants and coffee houses appear on every street corner.



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Top left: Harpa (p57); Top right: Laugardalslaug (p61)

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The Golden Circle

Geysers, waterfalls and the world's oldest parliament

Only a couple of hours' drive from the capital, the Golden Circle is beloved of tour groups but should be visited by all: even after you've ticked off the mega-attractions of spurting Geysir, the dramatic waterfall Gullfoss and Þingvellir, site of Iceland's original parliament, there is much to explore. Save time for rock climbing, rafting, soaking in geo-pools and exploring a 6500-year-old explosion crater. Strokkur geyser (p75)

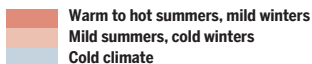
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Plan Your Trip

Need to Know



When to Go



High Season (Jun–Aug)

- Visitors descend en masse, especially to Reykjavík and the south. Prices peak.
- Endless daylight, many festivals, busy activities.
- Highland mountain roads open to 4WDs from mid-June or later; hikers welcome.

Shoulder (May & Sep)

- Breezier weather; occasional snows in the highlands.
- Fewer crowds and lower prices.

Low Season (Oct–Apr)

- Mountain roads closed; some minor roads shut.
- Winter activities on offer include skiing, snowshoeing and visiting ice caves.
- Long nights with possible Northern Lights viewings.

Currency

Icelandic króna (plural krónur)

Languages

Icelandic, English

Visas

Generally not required for stays of up to 90 days.

Money

Iceland is an almost cashless society where credit cards reign supreme, even in the most rural reaches. PIN required for purchases. ATMs available in all towns.

Mobile Phones

Mobile (cell) coverage is widespread. Visitors with GSM phones can make roaming calls; purchase a local SIM card if you're staying a while.

Time

Iceland's time zone is the same as GMT/UTC (London); there's no daylight savings time.

Daily Costs

Budget: Less than 18,000kr

- Camping: 1500–1800kr
- Dorm bed: 4000–7000kr
- Hostel breakfast: 1800–2000kr
- Grill-bar meal or soup lunch: 1500–2200kr
- One-way bus ticket Reykjavík–Akureyri: 10,120kr

Midrange: 18,000–35,000kr

- Guesthouse double room: 18,000–28,000kr
- Cafe meal: 2000–3500kr
- Museum entry: 1000kr
- Small vehicle rental (per day): from 8000kr

Top End: More than 35,000kr

- Boutique double room: 30,000–45,000kr
- Main dish in top-end restaurant: 3500–7000kr
- 4WD rental (per day): from 15,000kr

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	79kr
Canada	C\$1	81kr
Eurozone	€1	124kr
Japan	¥100	97kr
NZ	NZ\$1	73kr
UK	UK£1	141kr
USA	US\$1	107kr

For current exchange rates, see www.xe.com.

Useful Websites

Visit Iceland (www.visiticeland.com)
Iceland's official tourism portal.

Visit Reykjavík (www.visitreykjavik.is)
Official site for the capital.

Icelandic Met Office (<http://en.vedur.is>)

Best resource for weather forecasts.

Icelandic Road Administration (www.road.is) Road openings and conditions.

Reykjavík Grapevine (www.grapevine.is) English-language newspaper and website.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/iceland) Destination information, hotel bookings, traveller forum and more.

Arriving in Iceland

Keflavik International Airport Iceland's primary international airport is 48km southwest of Reykjavík. The most common method of transport to the capital from the airport is bus (journey time 45 to 60 minutes). Flybus and Airport Express will deliver you to their terminals (2700kr to 2950kr) or to your city accommodation (3300kr to 3950kr; a bus change at the terminal is usually required). Flybus can also deliver you to the domestic airport in Reykjavík (3950kr). Taxis from Keflavik are possible, but pricey. Car rental from the airport is also popular.

Seyðisfjörður ferry port The weekly Smyril Line car ferry that connects Denmark with Iceland via the Faroe Islands arrives in the pretty town of Seyðisfjörður in East Iceland. Buses run year-round between Seyðisfjörður and Egilsstaðir, and from Egilsstaðir northwest to Akureyri and on to Reykjavík.

Getting Around

Car Vehicles can be expensive to rent but provide great freedom. A 2WD vehicle will get you almost everywhere in summer. Driving into the highlands and on F roads requires a 4WD.

Bus A decent bus network operates in July and August. Outside these months, services are less frequent (and even nonexistent). Find an invaluable online map at www.publictransport.is.

Air If you're short on time, domestic flights can help you get around efficiently.

