



### THE ICELANDIC PLEDGE

I PLEDGE TO BE A RESPONSIBLE TOURIST.

WHEN I EXPLORE NEW PLACES, I WILL LEAVE THEM AS I FOUND THEM.

I WILL TAKE PHOTOS TO DIE FOR, WITHOUT DYING FOR THEM.

I WILL FOLLOW THE ROAD INTO THE UNKNOWN, BUT NEVER VENTURE OFF THE ROAD.

AND I WILL ONLY PARK WHERE I AM SUPPOSED TO.

WHEN I SLEEP OUT UNDER THE STARS, I'LL STAY WITHIN A CAMPSITE.

AND WHEN NATURE CALLS, I WON'T ANSWER THE CALL ON NATURE.

I WILL BE PREPARED FOR ALL WEATHERS, ALL POSSIBILITIES AND ALL ADVENTURES.

TAKE THE PLEDGE AT ICELANDICPLEDGE.IS



# **ICELAND IN BRIEF**

### FLAG

Blue with a red cross outlined in white. The colours are symbolic for Iceland: Red represents the volcanic fires, white recalls the snow and glaciers, and blue is for the skies above, the sea and the mountains.

#### SIZE

103,000 km² (40,000 sq. miles).

#### POPULATION

350,000 (May 2018). Mean age: 38 years.

### **CAPITAL CITY**

Reykjavík.

The largest municipalities are Reykjavík\* (130,000), Kópavogur\* (36,000), Hafnarfjördur\* (30,000), Akureyri (19,000) and Reykjanesbær (18,000). \*Cities in the capital region.

#### GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary constitutional republic.

### **CURRENCY**

The Icelandic króna (plural krónur) –ISK.

#### TIME

Iceland is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) all year round.

### GLACIERS

Glaciers cover 11,922 km<sup>2</sup> of the surface.

**HIGHEST POINT** Hvannadalshnjúkur peak at 2,110 m.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Fish, hydropower, geothermal energy.

#### **USEFUL WEBSITES**

- Inspiredbyiceland.com
- Safetravel.is
- En.vedur.is (Icelandic Met Office)
- Road.is
- Postur.is/en (Post Office)

#### **EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS**

- Emergency number: 112
- Police: 444 1000
- Medical assistance: 1770

# **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### PASSPORT AND VISA REGULATIONS

Iceland is an associate member of the Schengen Agreement, which exempts travellers from personal border controls between 26 EU countries. For residents outside the Schengen area, a valid passport is required for at least three months beyond date of entry. For information on passport and visa requirements as well as the Schengen area regulations, visit the website of the Icelandic Directorate of Immigration: **utl.is** 

### **ARRIVAL IN ICELAND**

Bus services are operated between Reykjavík and Keflavík International Airport in connection with all arriving and departing flights, and seats are guaranteed. Buses depart to and from Keflavík every 45-60 minutes. The drive between the airport and Reykjavík takes about 45 minutes. For departing flights, it is recommended that you take a bus leaving at least 2.5 hours before your scheduled departure. It is possible to arrange hotel pickup. Taxi services are available to and from the airport. The car-ferry MS Nörrona sails weekly between Denmark, and Seyðisfjörður in East Iceland giving visitors the option of bringing their own vehicle.

#### LANGUAGE

Icelandic is the national language. English is spoken widely and Danish is the third language taught in schools in Iceland.

### **MEDICAL ATTENTION**

Pharmacies are called "Apótek" and are open during normal business hours. Only a few are open at night. Medical Care can be obtained by visiting a Health Care Centre, called "Heilsugæslustöð" in Icelandic, during opening hours. For information, call +354-585-1300 or see **heilsugæslan.is** 

Medical help: There is a medical centre or hospital in all major cities and towns in Iceland. The emergency phone number (24 hours) in Iceland is 112.

Health insurance: Citizens of EEA countries must bring their EHIC card (European Health Insurance Card), otherwise they will be charged in full. Non-EEA citizens are not covered by the EEA regulations and will be charged in full. For further information, contact the Icelandic Health Insurance. Tel.: +354-515-0100. Office hours: 10:00–15:00. **sjukra.is** 

Special vaccinations are not required to enter Iceland.

### **AKSTUR** DRIVING

Iceland's most famous highway is Route 1 – the Ring Road, going around the island. Travelling full circle can be done in a matter of days, but there is a lot to see along the way, so plan time accordingly. For an even fuller experience, there are plenty of opportunities to venture off the ring to experience local culture. Extend the trip to include the Westfjords, a beautiful area outside Route 1, and experience all seven regions of Iceland. We have collected some helpful tips to keep in mind while driving around the country.

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Icelandic nature offers magnificent scenery, and it is easy to get distracted by the sheer beauty of the surroundings. When a breathtaking photo opportunity comes into view, please find a safe place to stop, outside of the road you are on. You may be tempted to stop in the middle of the road. Don't. This will endanger you and other travellers.

All roads are not created equal. In Iceland, you may encounter gravel roads, single-lane bridges, sharp curves, and steep hills. During winter, you can also expect ice, roads that are impassable due to snow, and limited visibility. Always drive in accordance with road conditions, and make sure you have a vehicle that is up to the task. Always exercise caution.

All off-road driving and driving outside of marked tracks is prohibited by law. This includes sandy beaches. Icelandic nature is delicate, and tire tracks from off-road driving can cause substantial damage to the vegetation and leave marks that will last for decades. Respect nature and tread carefully.

If you are planning a trip into the highlands and the interior of Iceland, keep in mind that a 4x4 vehicle is essential. You will probably come across rough terrains and unbridged waters. The highland roads are closed during winter, and weather sometimes causes these roads to be closed during other seasons as well. For some mountain tracks, it is strongly advised that two or more cars travel together.

Driving under the influence of alcohol or while talking on a mobile phone is banned, and passengers are required by law to use seatbelts. The general speed limit is 50 km/h in urban areas, 80 km/h on gravel roads in rural areas, and 90 km/h on asphalt, rural roads.

For information on road conditions, visit **Road.is.** For safety information, be sure to visit **Safetravel.is.** 

# **ÁFRAM ÍSLAND** GO ICELAND

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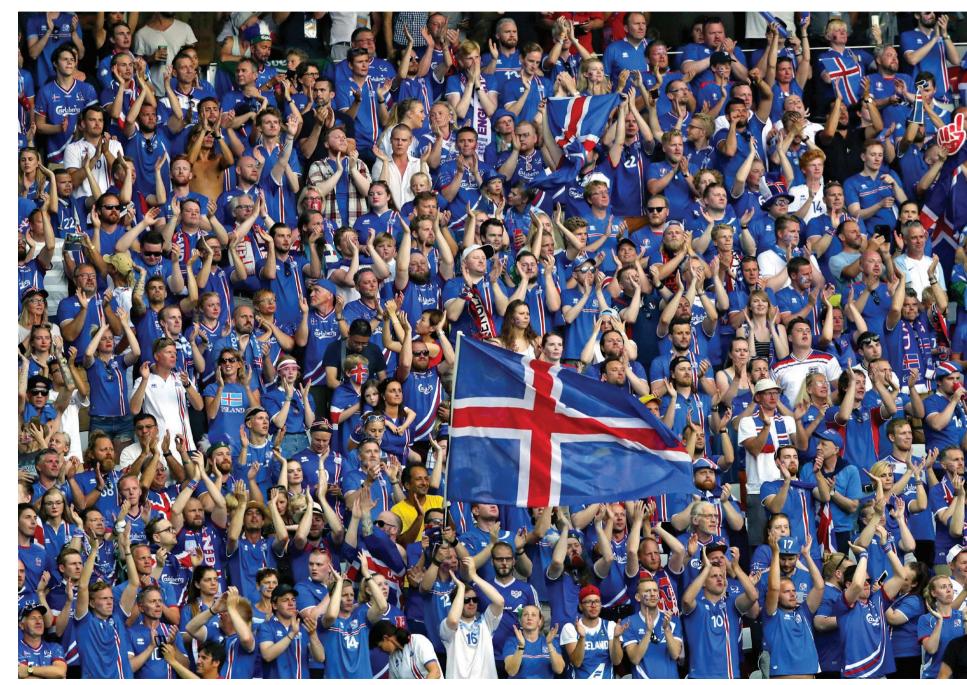
The official national sport of Iceland is Icelandic wrestling, a grappling technique that dates to the days of settlement. The sport is not widely practiced but was once an exhibition sport at the Olympic games.

Team handball has often been considered the unofficial national sport, with Icelandic teams consistently qualifying for major tournaments. When the men's national handball team reached the finals at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, pandemonium broke out. Their silver medal was one of four medals won by Icelanders at the Olympics.

In 1981, Iceland's Pétur Guðmundsson became one of the first European players to join the NBA as a member of the Portland Trailblazers. Icelandic basketball has grown by leaps and bounds (pun intended) since, and the Icelandic national team has represented the country in the last few EuroBasket finals.

Iceland's much-beloved national football team has also risen to prominence. The men's national football team reached the World Championship in 2018 and advanced to the quarterfinals of the 2016 European Championship, and Icelandic supporters made the news for their good sprit and thunderous "Viking Clap." The women's team has qualified for the European Championship three consecutive times, cementing its place as a force in European football.

Icelandic athletes have also excelled in gymnastics, track and field, crossfit, judo, and golf, to name a few, but the most random fact about Icelandic sports is that the country has the highest number of chess grandmasters per capita.



# **BÓKMENNTIR** Literature

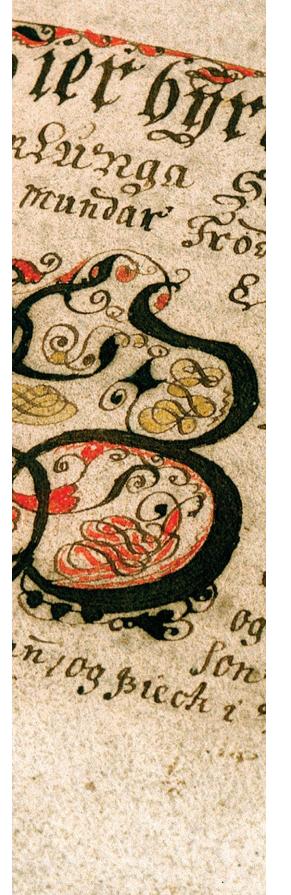
Throughout the centuries, Iceland has developed a unique tradition for storytelling and literature. More books are written, published, and sold per person per year in Iceland than anywhere else on the planet.

The most famous books that Icelandic literature boasts of are the esteemed Icelandic Sagas from the tenth and eleventh centuries. After being passed down orally, they were likely committed to paper in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Thanks to this, Icelanders can trace their history to the first settlers in the country through literature, and other Nordic countries can find descriptions of their old kings.

Iceland has also produced a number of talented writers, including 20th-century Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness, whose home-turned-museum Gljúfrasteinn can be visited in Mosfellsdalur. More recently, crime fiction writers Yrsa Sigurðardóttir and Arnaldur Indriðason have had their books translated into many languages, and they are now read around the world.

There is a strong tradition of giving books as gifts on Christmas, with a slew of releases scheduled every holiday season. It's no accident that in 2011, Reykjavík became the first non-English speaking city in the world to be named a UNESCO City of Literature.

You can read the country's finest literature available in translations at the many bookstores around the country. As the saying goes, "blindur er bóklaus maður" – blind is a bookless man.





# **DJÚP** DEEP

For Icelanders, going to the swimming pool is not just a way to cool down on hot summer days - it's a way of life.

Honestly, there really wouldn't be enough hot summer days in Iceland to warrant such a habit to begin with, but public pools can be found in nearly every town, and the locals will go there for a soak, no matter the weather. A hot soak on a cold day beats a cold soak on a hot day, anyway.

For hygienic purposes, there is a strict etiquette for visiting a public swimming pool in Iceland. Everyone is required to wash thoroughly without swimwear before entering the pool. Learning to swim is part of the school curriculum, and people of all ages meet up at the pool and enjoy a relaxing time in the geothermal hot tubs, which also function as the local version of the pub in some other countries, where you are most likely to catch upon all the town gossip. With warm water flowing continuously from the earth in many places around the country, natural hot springs have been popular gathering places for as long as people can remember. Man-made geothermal lagoons are also popular, such as the famous Blue Lagoon and the Mývatn Nature Baths, whose high levels of silicates and other minerals have an especially rejuvenating effect on the skin. And as unlikely as it may sound, Reykjavík sports its own geothermal beach, Nauthólsvík, with white sands and warm ocean water (assisted by a little geothermal injection). Still, there are those who swear by the health benefits of swimming in the cold ocean, so every day, you will find Icelanders enjoying a swim in the cold Atlantic.













# **VÍÐA** IN MANY PLACES

Iceland is typically divided into seven different geographical regions, including the Reykjavík capital area. Each region differs slightly with respect to both culture and landscape, but all are uniquely Icelandic.

West Iceland is one of Iceland's most geologically diverse regions. Its natural wonders offer a nice window to everything that Iceland has to offer, ranging from slumbering volcanos, glaciers, and majestic waterfalls to a variety of flora and wildlife.

The Westfjords are one of Iceland's best-kept secrets, a sparsely populated area in the country's northwest corner, where isolation has preserved the region's unspoiled wilderness. The Westfjords are frequently distinguished by travel guides as a destination of excellence and are a must-see for any serious explorer.

The North of Iceland is a land of contrasts. Its long valleys and peninsulas are interspersed with mountains, lava fields, and smooth hills carved out by rivers. The deep and numerous indentations in the coast of the North are at times lush with vegetation, at others barren. As one nears the Arctic Circle in the northern latitudes, the midnight sun is invariably awe-inspiring. The east coast of Iceland is home to the country's largest forest, lush farmlands, and a range of small fjords and islands. Thanks to the East's many natural harbours, a variety of fishing villages and small seaside communities border the coast.

Iceland's south coast is home to some of the country's most visited tourist attractions. The coastline itself is renowned for its beauty, and the towns along the coast are famous for their fresh seafood.

The Reykjanes peninsula is a geothermal wonder, where lighthouses outnumber villages. Besides hosting the Keflavik International Airport and just a few minutes away, the spectacular Blue Lagoon, the Reykjanes peninsula is a destination in its own right.



West Iceland

🚡 Seyðisfjörður

east.is

East Iceland

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Akureyri church North Iceland northiceland.is



Westfjords westfjords.is

### ELDGOS ERUPTION

Volcanic activity is a fact of life in Iceland. In 2010, the world collectively attempted to pronounce Eyjafjallajökull as the long-dormant volcano spewed its ashes into European airspace. But for Icelanders, it was something they've come to terms with. The island sits on top of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a crack 40,000 km long in the ocean floor caused by the separation of the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. Iceland is growing by about 2.5 cm per year, it widens at the points where the two tectonic plates meet. Accordingly, the western part of Iceland belongs to the North American plate and the eastern part to the Eurasian plate, which means that Iceland is actually located on two continents.

Iceland is one of the most active volcanic areas on Earth and usually experiences a volcanic event every 5 years on average. Since the Middle Ages, a third of all lava that has covered the Earth's surface has erupted in Iceland. The largest recorded lava flow in world history occurred during the summer of 1783, when a 25 km row of craters, Lakagigar, southwest of Vatnajökull, poured out 14 km<sup>3</sup> of lava.

While volcanic activity has obvious drawbacks, it also has considerable advantages, such as geothermal energy and a dramatic natural environment. The mountainous landscapes, black lava fields, and geothermal pools and geysers are the result of continuous interplay between volcanic activity and other natural elements such as water. Icelanders have reaped the benefits of this mix in the form of vast resources of geothermal energy. Over 90% of housing in Iceland is heated geothermally, one of the cheapest and cleanest forms of energy available. With all this power residing just beneath the earth's crust, safety is top concern in Iceland. All seismic activity is closely monitored, and infrastructure is designed to deal with natural catastrophes. As a result, serious threats are extremely rare.

Eyjafjallajökull, South Iceland



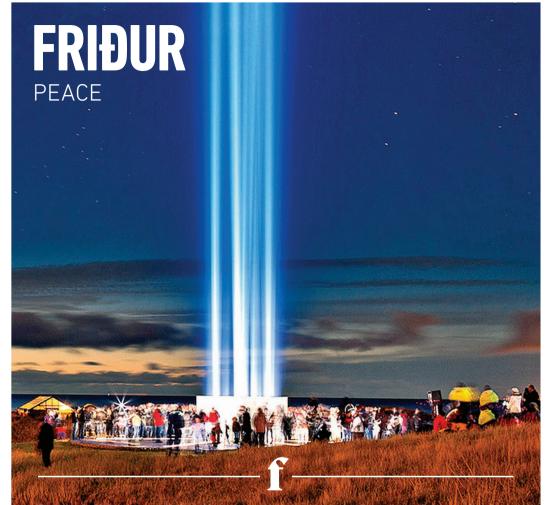


Icelanders have many words for snow, depending on its size, consistency, speed, and age. In fact, "él" doesn't have a perfect English equivalent, as it's best described as a short period of snowfall, usually with considerable wind. However, snowfall is not the constant state of Icelandic weather. Oftentimes, snow is even welcomed, especially when it ushers in the holidays.

Thanks to the Gulf Stream, Iceland enjoys a temperate maritime climate. The summers are cool and the winters mild. However, the weather is notoriously unpredictable. It's important to come prepared for any conditions, whatever time of year. Bring sturdy shoes and several layers of clothing to add or take off according to each situation. Windand water-resistant outer layers are a good idea.

Rain or snow is just as likely to fall sideways, rather than down, so repellent outerwear is much more helpful than umbrellas, which strong gusts may quickly destroy. At any rate, it's best to be well prepared, especially when outside populated areas.

Disafjörður, Westfjords



'Peaceful' is one of the first words most people use when asked to describe Iceland. That's understandable, seeing they are describing a country with vast stretches of uninhabited terrain and the lowest population density in Europe.

Iceland is also the most peaceful nation in the world according to the Global Peace Index. Although the US Army maintained a base in Keflavík during World War II and a small military presence until 2006, Iceland itself has never had its own standing army. Iceland's crime rate is one of the lowest in the world. Violent crime is rare, though taken seriously by the Icelandic police. Automatic riftes and handguns are illegal, and the Icelandic police do not generally carry firearms. In wintertime, a beacon of light invites the people of Reykjavík to "Imagine Peace," as is engraved on the Imagine Peace Tower, an outdoor work of art conceived by Yoko Ono in memory of John Lennon. It was unveiled by Ono in Viõey on 9 October, 2007, Lennon's 67th birthday. It projects a light up into the sky annually from Lennon's date of birth to 8 December, the anniversary of his passing, along with select dates throughout winter.

Voko Ono Peace Tower, Viðey Island, Reykjavík

# **GÓÐGÆTI** DELICACY

Surrounded by the world's finest fishing grounds and enjoying a clean natural environment, Icelandic restaurants have access to the purest ingredients imaginable. You might even say that the best thing Icelandic cuisine has going for it is location.

In the past few years, Iceland has emerged as one of Europe's most dynamic gastronomic destinations, full of exciting places to taste thrilling new recipes. Chefs create modern dishes with traditional ingredients, influenced by the philosophy of New Nordic Cuisine, where freshness and local, seasonal ingredients play a vital role.

Nature, people, and culture all influence Icelandic food traditions. There is a variety of quality restaurants in Iceland. Many of them specialise in using Icelandic ingredients. Some offer traditional cuisine, while others choose to explore new ways of preparing food. They often intertwine their family's culinary traditions with an innovative way of thinking and their professional skills to offer memorable and delicious meals.

For centuries, fishing has been an essential part of both Icelandic history and culture. It has been the lifeline of the nation, both as a vital part of the diet and as the primary export product. Rigorous standards are in place to maintain sustainable fisheries and optimal treatment of the catch. Try one of the many Icelandic fish restaurants, and you will understand why the locals will have you believe they invented the thing.

Free-grazing Icelandic lamb is also a source of national pride, known for its tender meat. Organic vegetables are grown in geothermal greenhouses around Iceland and supply much of the country's own demand. Skyr—a tasty low-fat, high-protein dairy product similar to yoghurt—is another delicacy unique to Iceland. These and other fresh ingredients serve as the basis for a rich Icelandic food culture.



# **INNBLÁSTUR** INSPIRATON

There has always been a lively arts and culture scene in Iceland, reaching back as far as the settlement of the country. Some people believe it is because Icelandic artists seek out inspiration in the dramatic Icelandic nature. Others believe it has more to do with the external conditions, such as nature or a small population.

Icelandic music has reached a large audience on a global scale. Icelandic visual artists are internationally recognised, and modern Icelandic writers have been translated across the world. Performing arts are also a staple of Icelandic culture. Many of the country's most respected writers create works exclusively for theatre or adapt their previous works for the stage. Icelandic theatres enjoy great local interest, and the relatively young Iceland Dance Company is quickly gaining respect, both domestically and abroad.

More people in Iceland are employed in the socalled creative industries, as compared to most other countries, more than 5% of the workforce. This is a larger share than that of the fishing and agriculture industries combined—and generates a larger share of the GDP than agriculture.

Let Iceland inspire you too!

The amount of festivals in Iceland is Staggering for such a small population, as the locals enjoy a good gathering to celebrate shared interests. All year-round, you will find creative festivals dedicated to music, film, and fashion. During summer, town festivals attract large groups of

people around the country, dominating the event calendar, especially during the first weekend of August. With abundant daylight hours during summer, and the long after hours of winter, nothing beats a good festival in Iceland. For a list of festivals: inspiredbyiceland.com

Dikulsárlón, South Iceland



The Icelandic language has always been a vital part of the nation's identity. Icelandic most closely resembles the Old Norse once spoken across the Nordic countries. This is due to centuries of isolation in addition to the nation's conscious struggle to preserve its language.

Rather than adopting foreign words for new concepts, an effort has been made to create new and unique lcelandic words or repurpose old words that have lost their relevance over time. The word for computer, for instance, is tölva, which is the combination of tala ("digit") and völva ("seeress"). And the word for iPad is spjaldtölva, which is the combination of spjald ("tablet") and tölva ("computer"). Another attempt to protect the language is a law stating that every lcelandic baby must be given a name from a database of preapproved names or else must send their proposal to a special naming committee, which either accepts or denies the name based primarily on whether or not it complies with lcelandic rules of orthography and grammar.

Resisting the European convention of using family names, Iceland also maintains a patronymic and matronymic naming system. Everyone – the President and Prime Minister included – is addressed by their first given name, as their last name simply says that they are the son or daughter of their father or mother, with the latter growing in popularity.

To use a very famous physicist as an example, Albert Einstein's Icelandic name would have been Albert Hermannsson (son of Hermann), for his father was Hermann Einstein. Albert Einstein's son, however, Hans Albert Einstein, would have been named Hans Albert Albertsson. His son, however, whose name was Bernhard Caesar Einstein, would have been Bernhard Caesar Hansson. Now, on the other hand, Albert Einstein's sister, Maria Einstein, would have been Maria Hermannsdóttir (daughter of Hermann). Her partner was Paul Winteler. Had they married (they did not), Maria would have kept her patronymic name Hermannsdóttir. Their hypothetical children would have been Paulsdottir or Paulsson. Now what would your Icelandic name be?

Seyðisfjörður, East Iceland



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In the northern hemisphere, Christmas is a special time. Not just because of religious connotations, but because it marks a new beginning. Winter Solstice, has long been celebrated in Iceland, even before the country adopted Christianity.

Iceland is a magical place to celebrate the holidays. The culture is rich in Christmas traditions, and to be honest, for a festival of lights, darkness is an asset. Icelanders add extra emphasis on bringing light into their Yuletide festivities, decorating their houses with bright Christmas lights both inside and out. And as in many other parts of the world, a brightly decorated tree is an important living room fixture during this celebration.

Icelanders celebrate 13 days of Christmas, and traditionally, the celebration is centred on good food and family. Loved ones gather to share food and have a good time. We have somewahat peculiar traditions rooted in old folklore.

Icelandic children do not wait for St. Nicholas to fly in from the North Pole on his reindeer sleigh to bring them presents. In his place, there are 13 brothers, endearingly referred to as the Yule Lads. They live in the mountains and walk to town one by one until Christmas Eve and leave small gifts for children who put their shoes upon a window sill. This has not always been the case. According to Icelandic folklore, they are a mischievous sort, which may have something to do with fact that they are descended from trolls; they are the children of a three-headed ogress named Grýla, whose favourite dish is naughty-kids stew, and her third husband, a comparably ugly ogre called Leppalúði. Perhaps even worse though, is their cat, the Yule Cat, who isrumouredto eat children who don't receive new clothes to wear on Christmas Eve.

New Year's Eve is probably the biggest party night of the year. Fireworks are lit all night long, reaching their peak at midnight, when the sky lights up for a few minutes as the fire trucks and harboured ships ring their bells and blow their horns to welcome the New Year. It is certainly the grandest display of fireworks you will ever see.



## **KVIKMYND** MOVIE

Filmmakers have long been lured to Iceland, inspired by its beauty, long daylight hours, and the varied landscapes that make it possible to create different worlds within a short distance of one another. In fact, many big-name film and television shows have been shot in Iceland.

Fans of the HBO series Game of Thrones may know that the scenes that take place north of the Wall are often shot in Iceland, but Icelandic nature also plays a part in other parts of Westeros. The unique landscape is also a defining feature of films such as Darren Aronofsky's Noah, the Wachowski sisters' Jupiter Ascending, and Clint Eastwood's Flags of Our Fathers as well as Ben Stiller's The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.

Iceland offers a great setting for fantasy as well. Scenes in the Star Wars films The Force Awakens and Rogue One were shot in Iceland, and superheroes roamed the island in both Justice League and Captain America: Civil War. Two Bond movies include scenes filmed in Iceland, as well as Christopher Nolan's Batman Begins. Ridley Scott's Alien prequel, Prometheus, was largely shot in Iceland, with the riveting opening scene shot by the waterfall Dettifoss. In Oblivion, Tom Cruise was also seen racing along the black sands of the Icelandic interior, which served as a version of a New England following a nuclear war.

The Icelandic film industry is gaining a worldwide reputation thanks to the strong voice of Icelandic directors, noted for their firm grasp on drama and deadpan humour. Don't miss the opportunity to enjoy Icelandic cinema during your stay.

### LYĐRÆĐI Democracy

Icelandic democracy has deep roots. The country was first settled by Norse farmers and sailors who sought new lands where they could be their own lords. With no king or formal ruler, decisions were reached at regional and national assemblies after discussion and deliberation. Although Iceland spent 700 years under the colonial rule of Norway and Denmark, the national assembly, Albingi, continued to convene during this time. It now serves as Iceland's primary governing body, making Iceland the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world.

Despite old traditions, the Icelandic political mentality is progressive, with the country repeatedly receiving a top ranking in studies measuring political freedom, gender equality, and human development. Icelanders elected the world's first female president in 1980. The country has topped the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report in recent years. This rating means Iceland is the country where women enjoy the most equal access to education and healthcare. It is also where women are most likely to be able to participate fully in the country's political and economic life. Women rank highly in political empowerment and have achieved near equal participation in professional and technical jobs.

Iceland is also a leader in LGBT- rights. In 2009 Icelanders elected the first openly gay prime minister in the world. Domestic partnerships for same-sex couples have been legally recognised since 1996. A new bill in 2010 not only made samesex marriage legal, but also rendered marriage a gender-neutral institution, which means that there is no legal distinction between oppositesex marriage and same-sex marriage. The nation has wholeheartedly embraced Reykjavík's Pride festival, with about a quarter of the population attending each year.

Gay Pride, Reykj



# MIÐNÆTURSÓL MIDNIGHT SUN

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The island of Grímsey is the northernmost inhabited part of Iceland, so far up north, in fact, that it straddles the Arctic Circle. During summer solstice, the sun is visible for twenty-four hours straight. On winter solstice, it's reversed, with no sun at all. This phenomenon, along with excellent conditions for bird watching, has made Grímsey a popular tourist destination. The midnight sun isn't limited to Grímsey though, as the whole country enjoys close to constant daylight in the peak of summer. Nature changes colour with new lighting, and the population senses the magic in the air. It's the perfect time for a camping trip, a midnight soak in an outdoor hot tub or just a stroll by the seaside, taking in the sight of the sun's rays lighting up the waves and mountains.



# NORÐURLJÓS NORTHERN LIGHTS

The extreme darkness of the Icelandic winter has a lot of bright spots. Between September and April, Iceland is treated to a magnificent natural display: the Aurora Borealis. Named after the Roman goddess of dawn, Aurora, and the Greek name for the north wind, Boreas, the phenomenon is often simply referred to as the Northern Lights given that they keep to the far-northern latitudes.

The northern lights are created by particles from There are no guarantees that you will see the the sun that are released in solar explosions. When these particles interact with the atmosphere in Earth's magnetic field, energy is released, causing the skies to light up in an array of colours. The northern lights occur high above the surface of the earth where the atmosphere has become extremely thin, at an altitude of 100-250 km. On clear winter nights, many sightseeing trips are organized around this spectacular-though fickle-natural phenomenon. The ideal location for sightings varies, and excursion leaders are skilled in "hunting" for the lights and finding locations where the conditions for sightings are 2 is sufficient to catch the dazzling lights. the best on any given night.

aurora borealis during your stay, but your chances are immediately improved outside populated areas, especially away from the brightly lit capital. To gauge whether it's worth staying up and staring out the window, there are several factors to consider, including the time of sunrise, sunset, and moonrise as well as the cloud cover present. The Icelandic Met Office provides this information along with a handy aurora activity forecast on its website (En.vedur.is). The forecast is computed on a scale of 0-9, with 0 being quiet and 9 being loud. Given dark, clear skies, a moderate forecast of 3 or even a low

**Kolgrafafjörður**, West Iceland



# **ORKA** ENERGY



# ÓBYGGÐIR WILDERNESS

Isolated in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, Icelanders have become self-sufficient in many respects. Thanks to its geographical location, Iceland is rich in renewable energy sources, and their careful utilisation has been of utmost importance for the nation. Today, 99% of Iceland's electricity comes from hydro- and geothermal resources as well as approximately 85% of the country's total consumption of primary energy. This makes Iceland the world's largest producer of green energy per capita.

In 1930, the first public building in Reykjavík was heated with geothermal energy. Now, 90% of buildings in the country are heated in this way. Geothermal energy also accounts for a share of the country's electricity production, although most of it comes from hydropower. The water from geothermal springs is also used for bathing spots such as the Blue Lagoon and Mývatn Nature Baths. These renewable energy sources are not only emission free, but also relatively inexpensive, making electricity prices in Iceland lower than in most countries.

Local hydro- and geothermal power stations are engineering marvels. Larger power stations often have visitor centresand guided tours available for those who want to experience the raw power of Iceland.

**Mývatn Nature Baths**, North Iceland

Iceland is a hiker's paradise. More than half of the country lies above 400 metres (1300 feet), and the landscape is extraordinarily diverse, with large areas covered with colourful mountains, lava fields, glaciers, hot springs, lakes, and black sands. The rugged nature has been shaped by the elements to form a majestic scenery unlike any other place in the world.

Hiking is a popular activity in Iceland, and beautiful trails can be found in all parts of the country, from short day hikes to multi-day treks across the interior of Iceland. When heading into the wilderness, make sure not to drive off the road. It's forbidden and punishable by law, and even worse, it leaves a mark on nature for centuries. To ensure that hikers don't get lost, mounds of stones, known as cairns, lead the way. Make sure not to disturb them or build new ones, as doing so could put other travellers in harm's way.

Organized hiking tours are available all around the country. Day tours are popular during wintertime, and longer tours are organized during summer. You can also go hiking yourself. If you organize your trip independently, exercise caution. Make sure you bring adequate clothing and provisions and ensure that someone knows where you are going each day. Visit Safetravel.is for further safety information and to register your travel plan in case of an emergency.

POP MUSIC

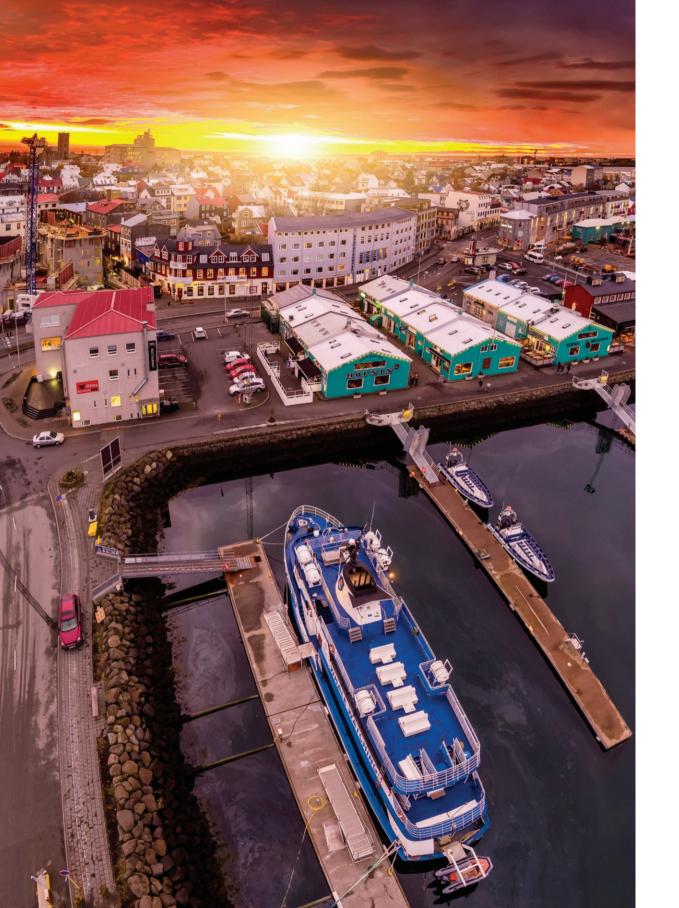
There is no doubt that Björk, the legendary singer and songwriter, is the most famous Icelandic person in the world. Icelandic music has reached a large audience on a global scale thanks to the efforts of international pop stars such as Björk, Sigur Rós and Of Monsters and Men. Exciting new artists join their ranks every year, most of whom play regularly at concert venues around the country. The number of music festivals in Iceland is a testament to the energy of the Icelandic music scene. So make sure to take in some live music in Iceland and support the talented emerging artists on display.

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### REYKJAVÍK Smoky bay

The name of Iceland's capital, Reykjavík, literally translates to "Smoky Bay." The origins can be traced to the first permanent settler in Iceland, Ingólfur Arnarson, who named the area for the steam coming from nearby hot springs. He could not have foreseen the impact geothermal energy would have on the country's culture and quality of life.

The Reykjavík capital region has grown to a lively city, full of culture and recreation. With about 220,000 inhabitants, it has all the advantages of an exciting urban center, without the bustle of a major metropolis. On sunny days, locals will gather at Austurvöllur square in front of the parliament building or go sunbathing at the geothermal beach at Nauthólsvík. The streets of downtown Reykjavík, the area commonly referred to by its postal code 101, are lined with cafés, restaurants, and bars, while playful murals and street art testify to the city's sense of creativity and fun.

Art galleries showcase the works of classic Icelandic artists, while smaller independent galleries display the projects of cutting-edge, contemporary Icelandic and international artists. Various museums preserve the culture and history of both the city and the country at large. Designated as a UNESCO City of Literature, Reykjavík safeguards a treasure of literary works and a wealth of talented poets and authors.

A short walking distance from the main shopping area of Laugavegur and Skólavörðustígur is the revitalized Old Harbour, which offers artisanal stores in close quarters with the fishing industry. Harpa, the concert hall and conference center, towers over the downtown area next to Arnarhóll, a grassy hill that fills up during festivals, topped with a statue of Ingólfur Arnarson himself.

Mt. Esja, or Esjan as locals call it, dominates the Reykjavík skyline at 914 m in height. This beautiful mountain looks different every time you see it – golden with deep shadows at sunrise, blue and cloud-capped on a dreary day, or startling hot pink during a snowy sunset. It is wonderful up close, with popular hiking trails that are ideal for a daytrip from Reykjavík.

# STEYPIREIÐUR

BLUE WHALE

The clean waters off the coast of Iceland play host to diverse marine life. During summer, the shores become a feeding ground for multiple species of large marine mammals such as seals and whales, giving visitors a chance to observe these magnificent creatures in their natural habitat.

The best time for whale watching in Iceland is from April through September, when more than 20 species can be seen in the ocean around Iceland. Blue whales are largest animals to have ever lived on Earth and extremely rare. Iceland is one of a few places in the world where there is a chance to see them if you're lucky.

Whale watching excursions are available all around the country. Daily tours depart from many seaside towns, and most excursions and whale watching vessels are small and personable. Tours are less frequent in the winter months, but at that time of year, the scenery is even more pronounced, offering views of snowcapped mountains and beautiful sunsets.

O Blue Whale

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### TORFBÆR TURFHOUSE

Harsh winters and lack of building materials made construction difficult for the first settlers in Iceland. About 30% of the country was forested when they arrived, so birch and stones quickly became the building blocks of the turf houses they erected. The roofs would be turfed to provide additional insulation.

In Þjórsárdalur in the south of Iceland, an ancient turf house named Stöng has been unearthed. The reconstructed farm is from the so-called Commonwealth Era and provides visitors with an opportunity to study the buildings and daily life of early generations of settlers, Stöng is believed to have been destroyed in the Hekla eruption in the year 1104. A more recent example can be found in the north, Glaumbær in Skagafjörður. People still lived in the turf houses there until 1947.

Burstafell, East Iceland



### ULL WOOL

Icelandic sheep have distinctive fleece, made of two layers. There is a water-repellent outer layer with long coarse fibers and a finer, softer layer closer to their bodies that insulates them from the cold. Lopi, Icelandic knitting yarn, made from this wool is considered extremely warm and ideal for clothing in a cold, harsh climate. The Icelandic wool sweater started to take shape in the early 20th century, and the distinctive patterns and shape of the sweater became dominant during the Second World War. The patterns are an important part of Icelandic design heritage.



There are many options for accommodation in Iceland. Camping has always been a popular choice for travellers in Iceland, although it is probably best left for summer. There are about 200 registered campsites in Iceland, some open year-round, but most are open from the beginning of June until late August or mid-September, depending on their location. Many of these also offer service for camper vans.

Icelandic laws on nature preservation specify where you can camp in Iceland if you find yourself away from registered campsites, which are always the best option. In residential areas, you can pitch up to three camping tents in uncultivated land for one night only if there is no campsite in the area. If you wish to camp on cultivated land or near residential buildings, fenced off farmland, or such, you must have permission from the landowner before you pitch a tent. The same rule applies if you intend to stay longer than one night.

In the highlands, you have permission to pitch camping tents. This applies only to a regular camping tent; if you are travelling in any sort of mobile camper, you must always seek permission from a landowner or other beneficiary before camping, whether in a residential area, on uncultivated land, or in the highlands.

**O** Skaftafell, South Iceland



Iceland is carved by powerful glacial rivers making their way from mountaintops to the ocean. Iceland's rich water supply and mountainous landscape also means that waterfalls are a defining feature of Icelandic scenery.

Waterfalls come in all shapes and sizes in Iceland. In North Iceland, you will find Dettifoss, the most powerful waterfall in Europe, and the lovely Goðafoss, where pagan statues were symbolically destroyed when Iceland turned to Christianity.

In the west, Iceland's second highest waterfall, Glymur, is located deep in Hvalfjörður. It is worth the 4-hour hike to get there, but if you are not up for hiking, you can visit a nearby series of waterfalls called Hraunfossar instead. In the Westfjords, you will find the spectacular Dynjandi, a set of waterfalls with an accumulated height of more than 100 metres and which looks a bit like a wedding cake.

In the east, you will find Hengifoss, the third highest waterfall in the country. It cascades 128 metres from a plateau into a beautiful gorge.

South Iceland is home to many of Iceland's most well-known waterfalls. Gullfoss, part of the Golden Circle route, and the beautiful Skógafoss, further south, are two of the most photographed waterfalls in Iceland.

There are plenty of smaller waterfalls in Iceland that you will surely encounter during your travels.

Dettifoss North Iceland



The Icelandic horse is a unique breed, descended from the horses brought by the first settlers from Norway over a thousand years ago. Since then, the breed has become extinct outside of Iceland, leaving only those preserved here in isolation from the outside world for centuries.

The Icelandic, as it is commonly referred to, is known for being sure-footed and able to cross rough terrain. It displays two gaits in addition to the typical walk, trot, and canter/gallop commonly displayed by other breeds. The first additional gait is a four-beat lateral ambling gait known as the "tölt," a gait known for its explosive acceleration and speed, while also being comfortable and ground-covering. The other gait is a pace called "skeið." It is used in pacing races and is fast and smooth, with some horses able to reach up to 50 kilometres per hour. However, it is not suitable for long-distance travel. The Icelandic language has over 100 words to describe the horses' colours and colour patterns. Many mistakenly refer to the horses as ponies, due to their short stature, with a standing average of 132 to 142 centimetres and weight between 330 and 380 kilograms. Horseback tours are offered everywhere in Iceland, a great way to explore nature. They're suitable for beginners as well as experienced riders and can last anywhere between half a day to ten days.

For further information, visit: Horsesoficeland.is

### **YRÐLINGUR** FOX CUB



Before the arrival of humans, the volcanic island now known as Iceland was devoid of terrestrial animals, except for one species: the Arctic fox. Having walked across the frozen sea during the last ice age, this small mammal with deep thick fur is the only land mammal native to Iceland. It changes colour with the seasons, with its fur turning from brown in the summer to white in the winter.

With the arrival of humans, other species of mammals were introduced to the ecosystem.

The domestic ones include sheep, horses, pigs, and goats, but some were stowaways on the settlers' ships, such as mice and rats. Others were initially imported as pets or for farming purposes but later were either set free or escaped. These include rabbits, minks, and most noticeably reindeer, which now congregate in the east of Iceland. Last, the occasional polar bear may wash ashore, having floated over on an iceberg from the Arctic, but Iceland is too warm for them to enjoy extended stays.



Location is the most important element of Icelandic cuisine. Blessed with an abundance of fresh water, clean nature, and fertile fishing grounds, the nation was built through fishing, and we serve our catch with pride. Fishermen would row their boats out to the unforgiving sea, risking their lives to feed their families.

The fishing industry remains one of the building blocks of Icelandic society, providing us with fresh ingredients of the highest quality. Haddock has always been a popular choice in Iceland, possibly because cod was reserved for export due to its higher price abroad.

A staple of Icelandic cuisine is fresh-caught fish. Some of the richest fishing grounds in the North Atlantic can be found off the coast of Iceland, where cool and warm ocean currents meet to create the ideal conditions for fish stocks to thrive.

Stykkishólmur, West Iceland

# ÞJÓÐGARÐUR

NATIONAL PARK

The mystical volcano Snæfellsjökull glacier towers over the Snæfellsnes peninsula in the west of Iceland. Visible from Reykjavík, the glacier has inspired artists from all over the world, most famously author Jules Verne. In his 1864 science fiction novel Journey to the Center of the Earth, he describes how a group of scientists kicks off its adventure by descending into the volcano. Icelandic Nobel taureate Halldór Laxness also centres a novel on the supernatural aspects of the glacier in his 1968 delve into magical realism Under the Glacier. The glacier and its surroundings have been designated a national park, covering an area of 170 km<sup>2</sup>, with magnificent wildlife and aweinspiring lava caves. The glacier itself is accessible for mountaineers and snowmobile enthusiasts.

Vatnajökull National Park covers an incredible 13% of Iceland. The park is named after the glacier it surrounds, which is the largest glacier in Europe, It offers a diverse landscape, from the stunning depths of Ásbyrgi canyon and Askja and Víti crater to the heights of Jökutsárgljúfur and Hljóðaklettar cliffs. The park is also home to Dettifoss, Europe's most powerful waterfall, and Holuhraun, the newest lava field in the country. Hvannadalshnjúkur, Iceland's highest peak, protrudes from Öræfajökull, at 2,110 metres above sea level. There are endless possibilities for adventure here, but caution and careful planning are paramount.

Alþingi, the Icelandic parliament, was established in 930 AD at Þingvellir. In 1939, a millennium later, the site was designated as a national park. Located where the tectonic plates of Europe and North America separate, you will find Silfra fissure, a popular spot for scuba diving. Þingvallavatn is also the largest natural lake in Iceland.

O Snæfellsjökull, West Iceland

# **ÆVINTÝRI** ADVENTURE

The volcanic landscape of Iceland was made for the extreme experience. From the rugged mountains to the rapid rivers, there's an incredible range of terrain for outdoor enthusiasts to explore. After all, nature is not something best observed from afar.

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The Icelandic hillsides provide opportunities for skiing and snowboarding. Around the country, you will find excellent skiing resorts, in particular in the Westfjords, North Iceland, and East Iceland.

For those who prefer motorized adventures, it's possible to choose between guided snowmobile trips around Iceland's glaciers or jeep safaris across the highlands, Iceland's largely untouched interior. There is no need to be afraid of the cold water of the ocean or a glacial river if you're prepared. Whitewater river rafting is a classic activity. More advanced rafters can tackle 4+ grade rapids on Jökulsá River in East Iceland. In safe spots, surfing is a popular pastime, and the waves can be first class for those brave enough to hit the water.

As one of few islands sitting on the mid-Atlantic ridge, Iceland offers the rare opportunity to see this geological phenomenon and the even rarer opportunity to snorkel or scuba dive between continental plates. By Þingvallavatn, the cold water offers some of the best visibility in the world, allowing you a clear view of the earth's youngest crust.

# ÖRYGGI SAFETY

Nature is one of Iceland's main attractions. It can be both beautiful and unpredictable. So always be prepared for different weather and different conditions as well as different adventures.

The weather in Iceland can vary greatly between When driving in Iceland, make sure the road different regions or even different times of the conditions are good, as is the condition of your day. Always pay attention to weather forecasts and travelling conditions. This applies especially in the highlands and in winter. Natural hazards, such as earthquakes, eruptions, flash floods, storms, and and unbridged rivers. The highland roads are closed avalanches, are uncommon, but they do happen.

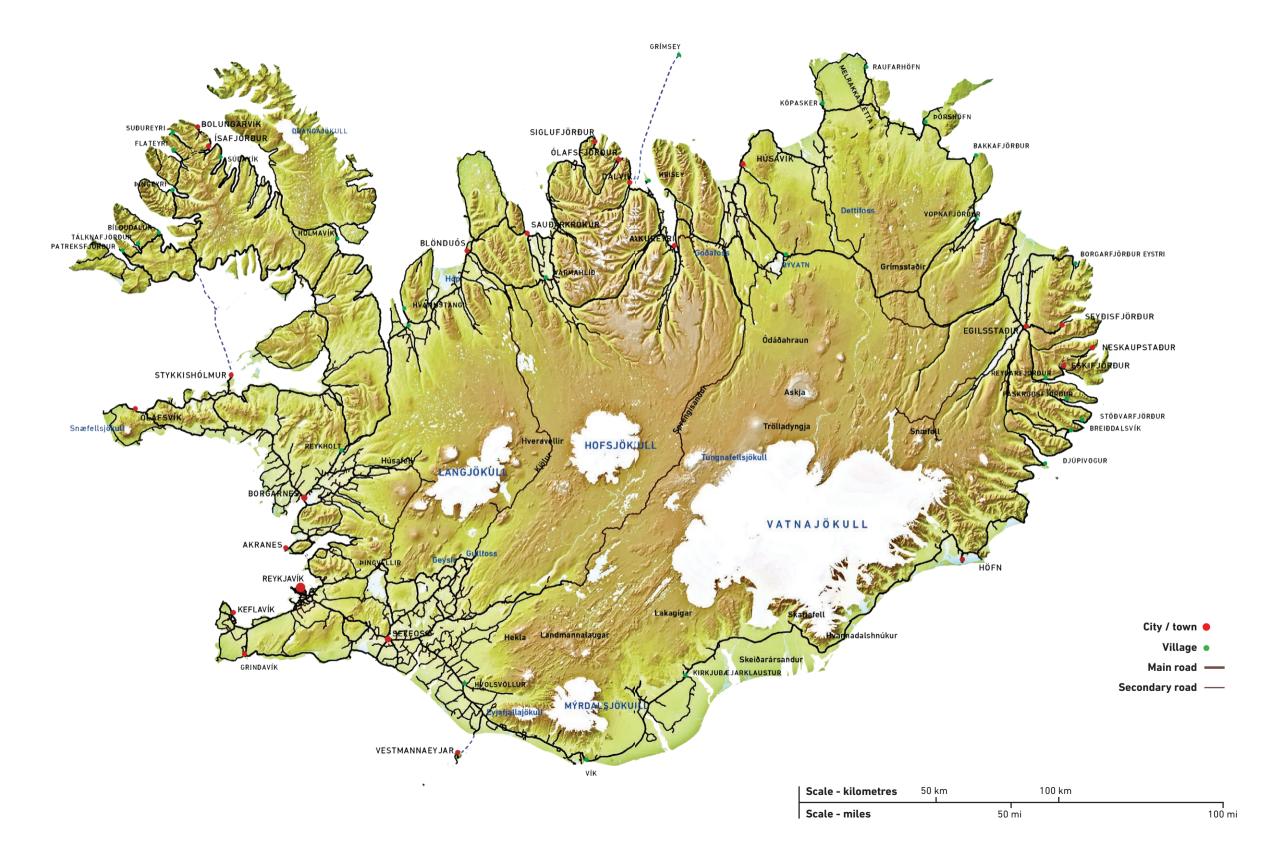
Always bring appropriate equipment. Hiking requires special equipment, glacier exploration different equipment, and jeep safaris yet another set. These should always include warm clothes and a communication device.

When travelling in the Icelandic interior, it is crucial that someone knows your exact travel plans. You can save your travel plan at Safetravel. is. Alternatively, make sure you leave a plan with your host or tour operator. A map, a compass, and a GPS are important, particularly in isolated area Such travels should not be undertaken without consulting experts. Knowing exactly where to go can be of vital importance in rough conditions.

vehicle. Also ensure that it suits your journey. For example, a 4x4 vehicle is essential in the highlands, where you might encounter rough terrain during winter, and other roads sometimes close due to weather conditions. Information about road conditions is accessible on the website Road.is.

Do not be distracted by your surroundings. Losing oneself in the other worldliness of Iceland is easy, but always remember to watch your step and keep your eyes on the road. Should you get lost, do not wander off. Staying in the same place will make it easier for rescue teams to locate you.

Safe travels





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