

ICELAND

Practical Information

CLIMATE

Tempered by the Atlantic Gulf Stream Iceland has surprisingly mild winters for a country at that latitude. Winters are mild and windy while summers are cool.

Generally the south coast of the country is warmer, wetter and windier than the north and snowfall in winters is more common in the north. Winters also experience a period of no sunlight called 'The Polar Nights', and in midsummer daylight takes over and there is no night darkness during June and July. This is called the Midnight Sun. Typical summer temperatures in the capital, Reykjavik range from 5 degrees Celsius to 25 degrees Celsius during the day and winter temperatures drop to minus 5 degrees Celsius.

Snow is not common particularly in Reykjavik, and it is only in northern Iceland that skiing conditions are generally guaranteed. However the weather can change at all times of the year and rain, sunshine, snow and drizzle can all be experienced in the same day.

CURRENCY

Iceland has its own currency, the Icelandic Krónur. Icelandic VAT is included in the prices of goods. However, if you spend over ISK4000 in a shop offering 'Iceland Tax-Free Shopping', you can claim back up to 15%. Shop staff will give you a taxrefund form: hand it in at the tourist office, the airport or the ferry terminal for a rebate. If you spend over ISK40, 000, take your forms and goods to customs before checking in.

You can draw cash from any bank using MasterCard or Visa;

and from Íslandsbanki using Diners Club. Exchange rates for ATM cards are usually good. MasterCard and Visa are accepted every-where; Diners Club and American Express are less commonly used. Icelanders use cards for grocery shopping and other small purchases.

Traveller's cheques in foreign denominations, postal cheques and banknotes may be exchanged for Icelandic currency at banks for a small commission (commission-free at Landsbanki Íslands). Beware of using other exchange offices; commissions can reach 8.75% and exchange rates are lower.

ENTERING & DEPARTING ICELAND

Citizens from Australia, New Zealand, America, Japan and Canada can travel in Iceland without a visa for up to three months within any six-month period, with the time limit beginning on the first entry to any Schengen Agreement nation.

HEALTH SYSTEM

Iceland has a reliable and high quality health system although rural cities might be less dependable.

Urgent issues often get moved to Reykjavik. Travel health insurance is strongly recommended. No vaccines are required for travel in Iceland. Iceland allows travellers to bring personal prescription medicines (up to a 100-day supply) without a customs declaration. A dated doctor's note may be requested by Icelandic customs officials, though, so it can be helpful to bring one. For severe illnesses, wear a medical bracelet

COMMUNICATION

Iceland has a modern telecommunications infrastructure, and it is possible to access the internet at most hotels and many net cafes. The country code for Iceland is 354 and mobile coverage is good. Pre-paid GSM phone cards can be purchased at petrol stations throughout the country.

TIME ZONE

Iceland is in the Western European Time Zone. Western European Standard Time (WET) is Greenwich Mean Time (UTC+0). Unlike most states in Europe, summer (Daylight-Saving) time is not observed in Iceland.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity in Iceland is 230 Volts, 50 Hertz. If you travel to Iceland with a device that does not accept 230 Volts at 50 Hertz, you will need a voltage converter. Outlets in Iceland generally accept 1 type of plug with two round pins. You may want to bring an adapter.

MIDNIGHT SUN AND NORTHERN LIGHTS

The midnight sun is present north of the Arctic Circle during the summer, but even towns located further south tend to be light at night. The northern lights can be seen at its best from October to April.

TIPPING

Tipping is not compulsory nor expected, but always appreciated. If a service charge is not already included in your restaurant bill, you might wish to leave the small change that is returned to you.

ACCOMMODATION IN ICELAND

- Hotel rooms in the Nordic Region are normally furnished with twin beds, which can be moved together to form a double bed or placed separately. Please note that single rooms are generally smaller than doubles, and are often equipped with a shower instead of a bath. Purpose-built triple or family rooms are likewise unusual in Scandinavian hotels. Whilst it is possible for 3 persons to share a room, this will normally be a double room with an extra bed, with correspondingly less space to move about in.
- It is also unusual to have a porter at hotels to carry your luggage.
- There is free wi-fi in many hotels in Scandinavia and Iceland. In the larger cities, this should be reliable and fast so don't hesitate to ask the reception if there is a problem.
- Unexpectedly, all forms of Icelandic and Scandinavian accommodation rarely provide tea and coffee facilities in their rooms. If you are lucky, a kettle will be supplied but nothing else. Please ask at reception for some provisions when you arrive or just carry a small selection from home.
- On the same note, often you will not find amenities such as soap, shampoo and conditioner in cabins or if they are there, they will be in containers stuck to the wall. Even hair dryers sometimes aren't there! Just ask at reception and they will happily provide you what you need.
- During summer, the daylight hours stretch well into the evening and hotels often do not have black out curtains. Bring an eye mask with you if you are a light sleeper.
- Please also note that in Scandinavia - in particular, during winter - the included lunch will often be a hearty warm soup with bread.
- More remote hotels in Lapland will offer dinner at an additional cost. In some spots, there will be limited choices else where. Generally, you get a very nice home-cooked dinner. However, you may sometimes find only one or two choices only for your main course.
- It is normal for washing and laundry facilities to be in the basement. If you are staying in apartment type accommodation, check downstairs or ask for assistance.

BUDGET SURPRISES

Scandinavia has a few items that typically surprise travellers when visiting Norway for the first time. Alcohol and luxury items are heavily taxed and therefore prices are higher than you would expect. On the other hand, necessities such as bread and milk, are taxed low and therefore are great value. If you are planning to self-cater in Norway or Finland, please ask us for our grocery shopping guide.

BRIEF ICELANDIC PRONOUNCIATION CLASS...

There are some special characters in the Icelandic language, learning a how they are pronounced will always be appreciated by the locals.

Þ þ	Like "th" in "thing"
Ð ð	Like "th" in "that"
Ó ó	Like "o" in "snow".
Ú ú	Like "oo" in "moon".
Ý ý	Same as Icelandic "i": like "ee" in "meet".
Æ æ	Like "i" in "mile".

For more basic phrases to prepare for, here's a good article www.wikitravel.org/en/Icelandic_phrasebook

PACKING FOR TRIPS IN ICELAND

An unforgettable trip and a bag packed with the right clothing go together! Clothing in Iceland is always practical! This applies whether you are travelling across the highlands or you are at a restaurant. Be prepared for sunny days but also for cold, fresh mornings and evenings. Be aware of the layer-upon-layer principle. This enables you to make fast and easy adjustments for the temperature so you can make yourself more comfortable. The inner layer keeps the body warm. The outer layer is for protection against rain and wind. For example, a pair of rain-proof outer pants can provide protection against wind. On mountain trips, we recommend that you also bring a warm cap, gloves and a scarf.

Note that on some trips staying in mountain hut accommodation you will require a sleeping bag. If needed this is stated in the 'Important Information' section of our online Trip Notes. If you do not want to bring this with you on your longer holiday please notify us and we can arrange for you to hire one in Iceland.

PROTECTING A VULNERABLE ENVIRONMENT

The Arctic environment is home to many unique and vulnerable species and habitats. Walking tours in Iceland take you through undisturbed and remote landscapes, where the water in the streams is drinkable and in many places, there is not another human being in sight. We would like it to stay this way.

To help protect these fragile ecosystems from the impact of alien species, we ask everyone who visits and uses nature in Iceland and the Arctic to take care of the surroundings. Please brush, Hoover, and clean clothes and any equipment prior to departure—especially outerwear and footwear. This request

is in accordance with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research.

Learn more at www.stoparcticaliens.com.

RECOMMENDED PACKING LIST

- Warm wind and water proof jacket and trousers large enough to fit thick woollen jumper/clothing underneath
- Rain trousers – waterproof and breathable material
- Warm windproof cap/hat
- Warm gloves or mittens
- Windproof gloves or mittens, which you can pull over the warm gloves
- Warm scarf
- 2 pairs of long woollen underwear (Merino wool in a few different thicknesses is perfect)
- 1-2 warm woollen jumper(s), or one jumper and a warm fleece
- Woollen or fleece trousers
- 2-3 pairs of warm woollen socks
- Warm & sturdy footwear with good grip (see over)
- Clothes for indoors, i.e. a shirt, T-shirts and jeans or cotton trousers
- Back pack for day trips (approx 30 litre) Light footwear/trainers (mainly for indoors)
- Sun screen & Lip salve (The sun reflects off the snow and the air is dry)
- Sunglasses Personal medication
- Water bottle - thermo, or include a cover to keep warm (or you can stick it into a warm sock)
- Travel documents (including insurance) Photo ID
- Note book and pencil
- Camera, memory cards and charger
- Binoculars
- Adapters

On our Iceland trips we recommend packing in a soft bag (e.g. a duffel bag) or rucksack, rather than a hard shell suitcase. If you're on one of our coach tours, hard shell suitcase is fine.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES

When travelling with us you will have access to a 24-hour emergency number in Norway. Our Lillehammer office will look after you if anything arises during your trip that affects your travels or the enjoyment of your holiday. We will always be just a phone call away.

24-hour emergency number: +47 21 04 01 00

www.fiftydegreesnorth.com