



# Iceland Travel Guide

*Alan Miller*

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Iceland is a mountainous island nation in the north Atlantic Ocean, between Europe and North America. Though not part of the continental mainland, the country is considered European. The name of the country – Iceland – may not be that appropriate: although 10% of Iceland is covered by glaciers, it has a surprisingly mild climate and countless geothermal hot-spots. It's a shame most visitors don't stray far from the capital as some of the most memorable sights in Iceland are further afield. There are many excursions offered by tour companies, readily available from any of the main centres such as Reykjavík and Akureyri. They will fly you around and take you out to the glaciers and to the big volcanoes for a reasonable price. However, the cheapest option is to drive around with a rented car since none of these sites have entry fees. Iceland is a stunningly beautiful place if you enjoy strange and desolate landscapes. Because it is so close to the Arctic Circle, the amount of daylight varies dramatically by season. The sun sets briefly each night in June, but it doesn't get fully dark before it comes back up again. In the March and September equinoxes, days and nights are of about equal length, as elsewhere in the world. If you go in December, it's almost 20 hours of darkness. Summer is definitely the best time to go, and even then the tourist traffic is still mild. The midnight sun is a beautiful sight and one definitely not to be missed. It is easy to lose track of time when the sun is still high in the sky at 11PM. Early or late winter, however, can be surprisingly good times to visit. In late January, daylight is from about 10AM to 4PM, prices are lower than in the high season, and the snow-blanketed landscape is eerily beautiful. (Some sites are, however, inaccessible in the winter). Despite its name, Iceland has surprisingly mild winters for a country at that latitude owing to the warming effect of the Atlantic Gulf Stream, especially when put into comparison with the Russian one. Iceland enjoys a maritime temperate climate and the winters are often compared with those of the Pacific Northwest (though the winds in winter can be bitter). However the rapidly changing weather has given rise to the local saying: 'If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes!' It's the kind of place where it's not unusual to get rained on and sunburned at the same time - some Icelandic people also believe that if the winter is hard and long then the summer will be good and warm. The summers are usually cooler and more temperate than elsewhere at the same latitude (the effect of the ocean again) and 20 to 25°C is considered quite warm. Iceland is not in the EU. This means arriving passengers arriving from outside Iceland whose final destination is Iceland or who have to recheck baggage will have to go through customs controls at the port of entry (usually at Keflavík), regardless of place of origin. However, a duty-free store is present in the arrivals baggage claim area, and one can purchase duty-free products when in transit to the European mainland. The official language of Iceland is Icelandic (íslenska), which remains very similar to, although not quite the same as 13th-century Norse. Most Icelanders also speak English and Danish, as both languages are compulsory in schools, and because of their Danish knowledge also understand Swedish and Norwegian. Icelandic college students choose a "fourth language" to study, usually Spanish, German, French, or Italian, but proficiency is most often nonexistent. Even though the majority of Icelanders are competent in English, attempts at speaking Icelandic are always appreciated, and learning some basic greetings and phrases in Icelandic will make your trip much smoother. Iceland travel guide travel guide Iceland Iceland guide Iceland guide book

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