

## ⇒Iceland Facts & Figures



### Capital City

Reykjavík

### Biggest Cities

Reykjavík (120,000)\*

Kópavogur (32,000)\*

Hafnarfjörður (27,000)\*

Akureyri (18,000)

Reykjanesbær (14,000)

\*Cities in the capital region



### Official Name

Iceland (Ísland)

### National Flag

Blue with a red cross outlined in white. \_

The colors of the flag are symbolic for Iceland: red is for the volcanic fires, white recalls the snow and glaciers, and blue is for the mountains in the distance.



### Population

325,000 (Jan 2014)



### Temperature

January 0,4

March 3,1

May 6,3

June 10,7

July 12,5

August 12,3

October 4,4

December 1,2



### Government

Parliamentary constitutional republic.



### Language

Icelandic.

English is widely spoken and understood.



### Religion

Predominantly Christian.



### Time Zone

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) throughout the year. Unlike most states in Europe, Summer (Daylight-Saving) Time is not observed in Iceland.

## ⇒Geography of Iceland



### Iceland is the youngest country in the world

Iceland is relatively large island in the Atlantic Ocean. The nearest neighboring country is Greenland, just 286 km (180 miles) away, followed by the Faroe Islands 420 km (260 miles), Scotland 795 km (495 miles) and Norway 950 km (590 miles).

Iceland is located near the Arctic Circle, and in fact, half the landmass of Grímsey Island, an island off the north coast of Iceland, lies within the Arctic Circle.

It takes approximately five hours to fly from New York to Reykjavík, and three hours from London.



Iceland is the second largest island in Europe, following Great Britain, and the 18th largest island in the world. The island itself stretches across 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> (40,000 square miles), which is about the same size as **Hungary and Portugal, or Kentucky and Virginia**. In its widest parts Iceland measures 500 km (305 miles) east to west and 300 km (185 miles) north to south. The coastline is 4,970 km, and Iceland maintains a 200 nautical-miles exclusive economic zone. It is possible to drive right around the island on the lovely coastal route on a 10-day holiday.



With almost 80% of the country uninhabited, much of Iceland's terrain consists of plateaus, mountain peaks, and fertile lowlands. There are many long, deep fjords and glaciers, including Europe's largest, Vatnajökull Glacier.

Waterfalls, geysers, volcanoes, black sand beaches and otherworldly steaming lava fields characterize the landscape.

Iceland's highest peak is Hvannadalshnjúkur, standing 2,119 m (6,852 ft.) over sea level. Glaciers cover more than 11 percent of the country. Its landmass comprises glaciers (12,000 km<sup>2</sup>), lava (11,000 km<sup>2</sup>), sand (4,000 km<sup>2</sup>), water (3,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and pasture (1,000 km<sup>2</sup>).

Formed about 25 million years ago, Iceland is one of the youngest landmasses on the planet, and consequently home to some of the world's most active volcanoes. The island owes its existence to a volcanic hotspot created by a fissure in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where the Eurasian and American tectonic plates meet. The landmass is still growing by about 5 cm per year, as it splits wider at the points where the two tectonic plates meet. The last volcanoes to erupt were Eyjafjallajökull Glacier in 2010 and Grímsvötn in Vatnajökull Glacier in 2011. Iceland even has the world's newest island, Surtsey Island, formed in a volcanic eruption in 1963.

## ⇒People and Language



Iceland was the last country to be settled in Europe, when emigrants from Scandinavia and the British Isles first came to live on the island in the ninth and tenth century. It remains the most sparsely populated country of the continent with less than three inhabitants per square kilometer. Shaped by the unrelenting forces of nature, Iceland's harsh natural environment has bred a resilient nation that has learned to exist under extreme conditions, and harness the natural resources they create for its own prosperity.

Today, Iceland is a progressive, modern society that continuously ranks at the top of measurements for quality of life, such as the United Nations Human Development Index. Iceland is annually considered to be one of greenest countries on the planet, due in large

parts to its vast renewable energy resources.



The Icelandic language is the cornerstone of Icelandic culture. It has spawned a literary tradition that dates back to the ancient Icelandic Sagas. Violent tales of blood feuds, traditions, family and character. A strong literary tradition still thrives in modern Iceland and Icelandic authors publish more books per capita than in any other country in the world.



Iceland also prides itself of a prospering music scene, a burgeoning film industry, and Icelandic design that is coming of age.



Icelandic customs and traditions are inspired by centuries long insular existence and a curious mixture of pagan influence on a Christian religion. Icelandic folk tales are ripe with mysticism, ghosts and elves and trolls, and further shaped by the natural forces and a taxing environment.



Icelandic is the official language of Iceland. It is an Indo-European language, belonging to the sub-group of North Germanic languages. It is closely related to Norwegian and Faroese, although there are slight traces of Celtic influence in ancient Icelandic literature.



Icelandic is an insular language, and as such, has not been influenced greatly by other languages. As a result, the language has changed very little from when the country was settled in the ninth and tenth centuries. It did not become markedly different from Norwegian until the 14th century, when its neighboring languages, Swedish and Danish, increasingly influenced Norwegian. Because of this resistance to change, texts from the 12th century are still more or less understandable to Icelandic schoolchildren.

Since the 18th century, when the Icelandic language was under threat from Danish influence, a movement of language purism rose, and has since been the dominant linguistic policy in the country. Icelandic does not usually adopt foreign words for new concepts, opting instead to coin new words, or give old words new meaning, to keep the language free of outside influence.

## ⇒Get to know Iceland



Iceland is a country of extreme contrasts. Widely known as "**The Land of Fire and Ice**", Iceland is home to some of the largest glaciers in Europe, and some of the world's most active volcanoes.

Iceland is also the land of light and darkness. Long summer days with near 24-hours of sunshine are offset by short winter days with only few hours of daylight.



Iceland is also a very young country with old traditions. In fact, it is the youngest landmass in Europe with the continent's oldest parliament, formed in 930 AD. Þingvellir, the site of said parliament, is a designated UNESCO world heritage site. Commonly said to be located at the juncture between the North American and Eurasian continental plates, Þingvellir are in fact at the juncture of the North American continental plate and a smaller plate (approx. 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>) called the Hreppar Micro-plate. No need to worry though, the juncture between the North American and Eurasian continental plates can be experienced on many other places in Iceland, for example at the wildly popular Blue Lagoon.

From the moss covered lava fields in the southwest, through the barren highlands in the center, to the soaring fjords in the northwest, a drive around Iceland will attest to the great diversity of landscape, which changes with every turn in the road, and of course with every changing season, each with its own charm.