

Destination Guide- ICELAND

Created by Toccara from [Forget Someday](#)

This guide is designed to make the planning of your upcoming trip a little easier!

This is not a comprehensive guide of everything in Iceland, as I can only give reviews based on what we experienced.

*Note, we were **based in Reykjavik** and only **explored the east and south sides** of the country during our brief stay in Iceland.*



Keflavik Airport (KEF), located about 45 minutes from Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, is the primary airport serving the island of Iceland.

Iceland has extremely limited public transportation, and it would be necessary for you to rent a car/jeep if you plan to visit and explore locations other than Reykjavik. (**Tip:** Book your rental car early if traveling in the summer, as many companies become completely booked.) If you plan to stay only in the capital city, there is bus transportation that will take you from the airport to the bus terminal in downtown Reykjavik. Buses and taxis run throughout the city and much of the city can be seen by foot. There are also bus companies that will take you to many of the popular destinations in and around Reykjavik.



However, we preferred to see Iceland on our own and rented a 4WD vehicle through [Geysir Rental](#). We couldn't have been happier with our decision and with the service provided by Geysir! Everything from the booking to the airport pick-up, to the obviously well-maintained vehicle was top notch! (There is an additional fee for airport pick-up; although the office is only a 5-minute walk from baggage claim. We simply weren't sure what the weather conditions would be when we landed during the winter month of March.) Having our own vehicle allowed us to see parts of Iceland we would have never been able to see on a bus tour. It also gave us the freedom to spend as much time as we wanted at any given destination. I highly recommend that you rent a car during your visit to Iceland and I strongly recommend you consider renting with **Geysir**.



[Guide to Iceland](#) is a great resource for everything you need to know about visiting Iceland!

* When is the best time of year to visit Iceland?

There are certainly pros and cons to visiting Iceland at various times throughout the year. **Summer** (June-August) brings endless daylight, green and lush landscapes as far as the eye can see, but also a plethora of other visitors from all over the world. **Winter** (October-April) is considered the off-season for obvious reasons- it's cold! Some roads shut down due to harsh weather conditions, but the winter sky allows visitors a possible rare glimpse at the stunning Northern Lights! There is less daylight during the winter months; expect only about 4-5 hours of sunlight per day in mid-winter. If you're looking for decent weather, to avoid crowds, and to save money on accommodations, the best time to visit would be the months of May and September. However, if you don't mind the crowds, summer months (June-August) would be your best bet!

* What is the weather like in Iceland?

As you can imagine with its close proximity to the Arctic circle, Iceland can get very cold! While the majority of visitors come in the summer, the temperature rarely reaches over 60 degrees F (15C) even in the "hottest" of months. The weather varies drastically from season to season and within minutes can change from pouring rain to sunshine. Inclement weather conditions can be expected throughout the year and visitors must always be prepared for unpredictable weather. We visited during the first week of March and despite it still being winter, we had fairly mild weather (until our last day)! The temperature was always right around freezing, but we were prepared with plenty of layers. What we were not prepared for was the wind! The week after we left, however, the country was covered in snow and rain!



* Where should I stay during my visit to Iceland?

Where you stay depends on what your objective is when visiting Iceland. Do you want to stay close to Reykjavik and experience the city and nightlife? Do you want to get away from the city and explore the beautiful scenery that inspires people to want to visit the land of fire and ice? We wanted to do a little bit of both, so we stayed in the capital for 3 nights, taking little day trips to the surrounding areas while also exploring the quaint little town of Reykjavik. We then stayed on the south coast for 2 nights exploring Ring Road in all of its splendor! Two days was not nearly enough time to take in the south side of the

country. I strongly recommend you add a few more days to your trip, if possible. (See our sample itinerary on the last page for recommendations of places to go and see!)

Places to Stay in Iceland

For our first 3 nights in Reykjavik, we stayed at the [Best Western](#), located near the heart of downtown. I did not pick this hotel, as it was part of a package deal we booked with [Gate 1 Travel](#), but I certainly wasn't disappointed. The room was spacious and the bed—very comfortable. All rooms were equipped with the basics that made our stay away from home a comfortable one. In our room was a mini-fridge, coffee/tea maker (w/ supplies), and complimentary WiFi connectivity. A full traditional Icelandic breakfast buffet was included in the price of the room, so we were able to head out for each day's adventure comfortably full!



During our first night in the south (east) side of the country, we stayed at [FossHotel Nupar](#), near Kirkjubæjarklaustur. The hotel may not look like much from the outside, but is surrounded by lava fields and has a spectacular view of Vatnajökull (glacier). The hallways aren't fancy and the rooms just come with the basics, but we thoroughly enjoyed our stay here! The bed was insanely comfortable and the breakfast buffet, again included in the price, was outstanding! If you are looking for a place to stay for a night or two along your journey on the south side of Iceland, I strongly recommend FossHotel Nupar.

For our final night in Iceland, we traveled a little further west on the south coast to be closer to Jökulsárlón (glacier lagoon) and stayed at [Guesthouse Skalafell](#). We stayed in one of the cozy cabin rooms, and while the bed was not as nice as at the other places we stayed, it certainly did the trick after a long day of exploring! We could occasionally hear our neighbors, as the wall between the rooms in the cabin was a little thin. The shower was somewhat of a nuisance and got water all over the bathroom floor, but other than these minor disturbances, overall it was a pleasant stay. A wonderful, fresh breakfast was included in the price and an outstanding traditional Icelandic dinner, with fresh ingredients from the family farm, was served for an additional cost.

Restaurants We Visited While in Reykjavik



- [Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur \(\\$\)](#)
 - According to many, Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur has the best hotdogs in all of Europe. Order it with "the works" ("eina með öllu" in Icelandic), which includes ketchup, sweet mustard, fried onion, raw onion and remoulade, a mayonnaise-based sauce with sweet relish.
 - Long lines at this popular stand are common, including both tourists and locals alike.
- [Laundromat Café \(\\$-\\$\)](#)
 - Varied menu with homemade food, cakes, juices, milkshakes, coffee, wine and a wide selection of beer. Many vegetarian options available- the veggie burger was amazing!
 - Fun place to hang out- Great selection of magazines, newspapers, books and games.
- [Café Paris \(\\$-\\$-\\$\)](#)
 - Hamburgers, pasta dishes, chicken, fish, lamb, steak, salads, crepes, delicious home baked cakes and pastries.
 - Wide assortment of coffee and tea drinks, wine, beer, and creative cocktails!
- [Icelandic Fish & Chips \(\\$-\\$-\\$\)](#)
 - Incredible spelt-battered fresh fish, making this delicious meal gluten-free; served with flavorful Skyr-based dipping sauces. Also, try the oven-roasted potato wedges! Mmm!
- [Sægreifinn \(\\$-\\$-\\$\)](#)
 - Fresh assortment of catch of the day, displayed on skewers ready to be placed on the grill.
 - World famous lobster soup, served with freshly baked bread. Soooo good!

Average Entrée \$= <\$10 \$\$= \$10-\$20 \$\$\$= >\$20

Recommended Activities for You to Consider While in Beautiful Iceland

(We were able to do some of these activities and plan to do the others mentioned on our next visit to Iceland!)

For the Romantic



- Watch the sun set at **Jokulsarlon** (glacier lagoon)
- Put some coffee/hot chocolate in a thermos and go off in search of the **Northern Lights** (winter)
- Get pampered and soak in the **Blue Lagoon** with your loved one

For the Adventurous



- Hike on a glacier/Go on an ice cave tour (winter only) or a lava cave tour
- Snorkel the **Silfra Fissure** in **Pingvellir National Park** (year-round)
- Go on a helicopter ride over various parts of this beautiful country with **Heli Iceland**

For the Wanderer



- Hike the **Highlands**; camp wherever you feel like resting your head for the evening!
- Explore the **Snæfellsnes Peninsula** and all of its wonderful fishing villages, beaches, and waterfalls

For the Shutterbug



- Everywhere you look, a picture is waiting to be taken! Bring extra batteries and memory cards for your camera! To capture the **Northern Lights** (winter) use a wide aperture and a slow shutter speed.
- Drive the picturesque **Ring Road** taking in waterfalls, beaches, cliffs, glaciers, mountains, and lagoons

Money-Saving Tips for the Frugal Traveler



- Plan to visit during the “shoulder” season (May & September) to save on airfare, rental car and other accommodations. You could also visit during winter to save, but weather conditions can be harsh!
- Camping is available in Iceland. Campgrounds are usually open June-August, depending on location. Reservations typically do **not** need to be made in advance.
- If you’re staying at a hotel/guesthouse/farmhouse with a kitchen available to you, buy groceries to save money by cooking some meals at “home”. **Bonus** is the country’s budget grocer. Or, you can always book accommodations that include breakfast, so at least one meal for the day is covered!
- What attracts visitors to Iceland is the natural beauty... all of which is free! Get out and explore!
- Plan ahead and create a budget for how much you want to spend on your vacation (i.e.- transportation, food, activities, etc.)
 - When we don’t plan in advance, we tend to spend well over our intended amount

Iceland Facts

In 2012, the Global Peace Index (GPI) declared Iceland as the most peaceful country on earth! (*Based on crime rates and political stability.*) Iceland also has one of the world’s highest life expectancies. They’re obviously doing something right!

Many Icelanders believe their country is populated by *huldufolk* (hidden people) and ghosts, including gnomes, elves, fairies, dwarves, spirits, and angels.

Currency: Icelandic Krona / Credit cards are widely accepted

Languages spoken in Iceland: Icelandic, German, & English

Driving: Unlike some countries in Europe- in Iceland, traffic circulates on the right side of the road and the driver is seated on the left side of the vehicle.

Common Icelandic Expressions/Greetings:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ○ Hallo- Hello | ○ Takk- Please | ○ Eg heiti- My name is... |
| ○ Bless- Goodbye | ○ Takk fyrir- Thank You | ○ Skal!- Cheers! |



Sample 7-Day Itinerary for a Self-Drive Tour of East & South Iceland

(Rental Car Required; GPS Strongly Recommended)

This guide is intended to help you plan your time in Iceland! Keep in mind, these are items I recommend based on personal experience and this is in no way intended to be a comprehensive list of everything there is to do in the beautiful country of Iceland!

Day 1

- Fly into **Keflavik** airport, pick up your vehicle from **Geysir Car Rental** and get ready for adventure!
- Visit the **Blue Lagoon** to soak in the geothermal spa and melt away the jetlag!
 - Many flights from the U.S. arrive early in the morning, so the Blue Lagoon is a great first stop!
- Drive into **Reykjavik** and explore the capital city by foot
 - Peruse shops, enjoy a cup of coffee in a local cafes, grab a hot dog at **Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur**
 - For great views, pay the small admission fee to ride the elevator to the top of **Hallgrímskirkja**
 - Visit the iconic **Sun Voyager** sculpture along the waterfront and stop by the beautiful **Harpa** building
 - Enjoy a traditional Icelandic meal with fresh fish at **Sægreifinn**. Don't forget to try the lobster soup!
- Stay at the **Best Western Reykjavik** (affordable, free breakfast, and located near the heart of downtown)

Day 2

- Take a day trip to the **Snæfellsnes Peninsula**
 - **Snæfellsjökull** (glacier), **Búðir** (beach/black church), **Anarstapi** (fishing village), **Gatklettur** (natural arch), **Hellnar** (interesting rock formations), **Dagverðará** (abandoned house), **Lóndrangar** (basalt cliffs), **Malaríff** (lighthouse/beach), **Djúpalónssandur** (beach w/ shipwreck pieces), **Mt. Kirkjufell** (iconic mountain/waterfall)
- Pack a picnic lunch and enjoy it at one of the many beautiful locations along the peninsula route
- Whenever you get the opportunity, if the weather cooperates, stay out late to try to see the Northern Lights (winter months only)
- Stay at the **Best Western Reykjavik**

Day 3

- Drive the "**Golden Circle**" (186 miles (300 km) popular loop from Reykjavik into central Iceland and back)
 - Main stops along the route: 1) **Thingvellir National Park** 2) **Gullfoss Waterfall** ("Golden Falls") 3) **Valley of Haukadalur (Geysir & Stokkur)**
 - Geysir has been inactive for a long time, although Stokkur erupts every 5-10 minutes
 - Other stops can include: **Kerio** volcano crater, **Hveragerdi** greenhouse village, and **Skalholt** church
- Grab dinner at the **Laundromat Café** as you arrive back in Reykjavik. Hang around, grab some coffee, play games and/or read a book. Heck, even do some laundry while you're there, if needed!
- Stay at the **Best Western Reykjavik**

Day 4

- ROAD TRIP: Drive the beautiful **Ring Road** (No. 1) on the south side of the country
 - Enjoy some of Iceland's most beautiful waterfalls: **Seljalandsfoss**, **Gljúfrabúi**, and **Skogafoss**
 - Stop by **Dyrhólaey** (natural arch), **Reynisfjara** (beach/basalt sea stacks)
 - Visit **Vik í Mýrdal** (village and beach) and time permitting, **Fjaorargljúfur** (canyon)
- Stay at **Foss Hotel Nupar** (Simple ambiance, comfortable beds, and a great free breakfast!)

***NOTE:** This was a lot to see in one day. If your holiday permits, add an extra day and stay in Vik, so you can spend more time at each location without feeling rushed! We had so much we wanted to see and so little time!*

Day 5

- Go on a glacier hike/ice cave tour (winter only; make reservations way in advance!) in **Skaftafell**
- Watch the sunset over the **Jökulsárlón** glacier lagoon
- Stay at **Guesthouse Skalafell** (cozy, isolated, incredible breakfast (included) and dinner (additional cost))

Day 6

- On your way back to Reykjavik, do a little off-roading (vehicle permitting) to find the DC plane that crashed on the beach in 1973 (Coordinates: 63.459523, -19.364618)
- Enjoy whatever you missed during your previous days in Reykjavik! Try out **Icelandic Fish & Chips**! Mmm!

Day 7

- Return your rental vehicle, catch your flight home and cherish the wonderful memories you just created!