

## **General Information about Iceland**

Iceland is located in the North Atlantic Ocean, between the rest of Europe towards east and Greenland towards west. It is the second largest island in Europe, with an area of about 103,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Its location on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge makes Iceland volcanically and geologically active and the volcanism has defined Icelandic landscapes in various ways with different types of volcanoes, lava plates, glacial rivers, glaciers and sand fields. The frequent volcanic activity makes Icelandic landscapes change rapidly. A new island, Surtsey, was formed south of the mainland in 1963, and a major eruption took place in 1973 when a volcano on the island Heimaey spilled lava into the town of Vestmannaeyjar. On the 21st of March 2010 a eruption started in the Volcano Eyjafjallajökull, a little danger was from the eruption but a big disturbance was on air traffic in Europe due to the Eyjafjallajökuls eruption.

About 75% of Iceland is more than 200 meters high with most of the land being high plateaus and mountains. Its highest peak, Hvannadalshnúkur, rises to 2,110 m. Glaciers cover 11,200 km<sup>2</sup>, including Vatnajökull the largest glacier in Europe, while suitable agricultural land is about 1,400 km<sup>2</sup>. Only the coastline is inhabited, and there are no inhabitants in the central highlands. The population of Iceland is just over 300,000 (319.368 Januar 1st, 2009) with more than 60% of the population, approximately 200,000 people living in the capital area.

### **History – The republic of Iceland**

Iceland was settled by Nordic people in the years around 874 AD and in about 930, the Icelandic settlers founded one of the world's first republican governments. The Old Commonwealth Age, described in the classic Icelandic Sagas, lasted until 1262, when Iceland lost its independence. In 1918 it regained its independence and in 1944 the present republic was founded. Iceland has a written constitution and a parliamentary form of government. The president is elected by direct popular vote for a term of 4 years, with no term limit. The president's role is mostly ceremonial. Most executive power rests with the Government. Althingi is a legislative body of 63 members from 6 districts elected for a term of 4 years by popular vote. A cabinet of ministers stays in power until the next general election or a new government is formed. There are currently 11 ministers and 1 prime minister. The ministers sit in Althingi, but if they have not been elected, they do not have the right to vote in parliament.

According to Iceland's constitution, ratified in 1944, the government is divided into 3 branches; the legislative, the judicial, and the executive branches. Althingi, where laws are made and amended, is the legislative branch. Executive branches, such as the Ministries, Directorates and various other government agencies, carry out laws. Judicial power lies with the Supreme Court and the district courts.

### **Administration**

Ministries, committees and government institutions are the administration. The administrative authorities make various decisions regarding the rights and obligations of individuals. In order to protect the rights of individuals there are various laws that the administration must adhere to.

## The Mother Tongue

**The origin of the Icelandic language.** Iceland was settled in the period A.D. 870-930. Most of the settlers came from Norway, especially Western Norway, a few of them from Sweden and some from the British Isles, including Ireland. The language, which came to prevail in Iceland, was that of the people of Western Norway. It is commonly agreed that a considerable part of the immigrants was of Celtic stock (estimates, based partly on physical-anthropological studies, vary from 10 to 30 percent). However, the Icelandic language shows only insignificant traces of Celtic influence. The only evidence is a few Celtic loan words and a few personal names and place-names. Icelandic and Norwegian did not become markedly different until the fourteenth century. From then onwards the two languages became increasingly different. This was for the most part due to changes in the Norwegian language, which had in some cases begun earlier in Danish and Swedish, while Icelandic resisted change, no doubt thanks in part to the rich Icelandic literature of the 12th and following centuries. Resistance to change is one of the characteristics of the Icelandic language, which explains the fact that a twelfth-century text is still easy to read for a modern Icelander. However, Icelandic has undergone considerable change in its phonetics. Another characteristic of the language is its uniformity, i.e. absence of dialects.

**Grammar.** Like the old Indo-European languages, Icelandic has a complicated grammar: Nouns are inflected in four cases (nominative, accusative, dative and genitive) and in two numbers (singular, plural). The same is true of most pronouns and adjectives, including the definite article and the ordinal and the first four of the cardinal numerals: these are also inflected in three genders, while each noun is intrinsically either masculine, feminine or neuter. Most adjectives and some adverbs have three degrees of comparison and most adjectives have two types of inflection, called strong and weak, in the positive and superlative. Verbs are inflected in three persons (1st, 2nd, 3rd), two numbers (singular, plural), two simple (non-compound) tenses, three moods (indicative, subjunctive, imperative) and two voices (active, medio-passive); in addition, by means of auxiliary verbs, the verbs enter into several constructions (including the so-called compound tenses) to represent the perfect, the future, the conditional, the progressive, the passive etc. The verbs also have three nominal forms, i.e. the infinitive (uninflected) and two participles, present and past (including supine).

**Vocabulary innovations.** In the late eighteenth century, language purism started to gain noticeable ground in Iceland and since the early nineteenth century, language purism has been the linguistic policy in the country. Instead of adopting foreign words for new concepts, new words (neologisms) are coined or old words revived and given a new meaning. As examples may be mentioned *sími* for telephone, *tolva* for computer, *thota* for jet, *hljóðfrar* for supersonic and *geimfar* for spacecraft. The Icelandic language committee is an advisory institution which is to "guide government agencies and the general public in matters of language on a scholarly basis."

**Icelandic in other countries.** There are Icelandic language communities in North America. They came into being because of emigration from Iceland to Canada and the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The earliest of these settlements was established in Utah in 1855, but it was around 1870 that continuous emigration began. In 1870, a small Icelandic settlement was established on Washington Island in Lake Michigan. Later, an Icelandic settlement arose in North Dakota. In 1875, the first Icelandic settlement was established in Canada, on the Western shore of Lake Winnipeg

("New Iceland"). Such settlements arose also in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Until the end of the 20th century, tens of thousands of people in these areas still could speak the Icelandic language. For further details regarding the Icelandic language, see the publication *Iceland* 1986.

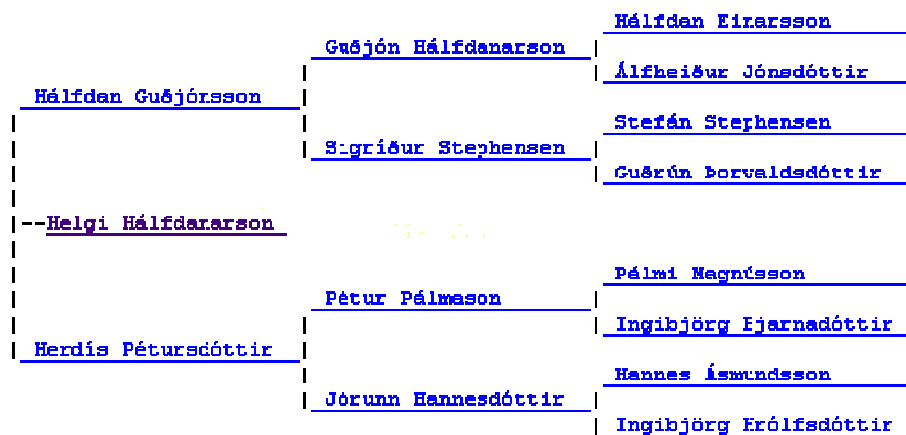
**The Icelandic alphabet.** As in so many other countries, Latin script followed in the wake of the adoption of Christianity in Iceland. This took place in the year 1000 A.D., by an act of the Althingi. (Although the oldest Icelandic manuscripts preserved are from the second half of the twelfth century, it is likely that the first attempts at adapting the Latin script to the Icelandic language were begun not long after the conversion). Today, the alphabet of the Icelandic language is the same as that of English, with the following exceptions:

- (a) Icelandic has four letters, which are not used in English: Ð, ð (similar to th in gather), Þ, þ (similar to th in thirsty), Æ, æ (like i in like) and Ö, ö (similar to u in fur);
- (b) The letters c, q, w and z are used only in marginal cases;
- (c) Except for æ and ö, each vowel letter appears in two forms, with or without an accent mark: a, á, e, é, i, í, o, ó, u, ú and y, ý.

However, the accent mark does not mean that the vowel is stressed, but marks it as different in quality from the unaccented vowel.

**Icelandic names** Most Icelanders still follow the ancient tradition of deriving their last name from the first name of their father.

Study the structure below:



Helgi Hálfðanarson is son of Hálfðan Guðjónsson and Herdís Pétursdóttir. Marrying Hálfðan, Herdís did not take his last name, Guðjónsson, she continued to be Pétursdóttir, i.e. daughter of Pétur Pálmason (dóttir = daughter). The same goes for her mother, Jórunn Hannesdóttir, though marrying Pétur, she continued to be Hannesdóttir.

OK, no rules without exception: A limited number of Icelanders do have family names.

**Remember: Icelanders are always referred to by their given name**, not by their surname which is never used alone

Trying to find someone in the Icelandic telephone catalog? It's ordered by the given names!

**Courses** Teaching language with the aid of computers has become more common in the last few decades. This online Icelandic course aims to create an interesting, entertaining and useful learning environment that utilizes the latest theories in the pedagogy of languages and the best technology available.

<http://icelandic.hi.is/>

**Electronical dictionaries:** Icelandic – english dictionary

<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/IcelOnline/Search.TEId.html>

FREELANG Icelandic-English and English-Icelandic online dictionary

<http://www.freelang.net/online/icelandic.php>

## Research

The Icelandic system of research and development is a multilevel system with a dispersed decision-making structure. It has a number of fully-fledged research institutions, essential funds and a strong force of well-trained scientists, and covers all major fields in science and technology. Icelandic scientists face a challenging task of maintaining the quality and range of research activities. Concentration of research in key areas is important in order to optimize resources. Science and technology have been divided at an institutional level, reflecting a particular historical development and institutional division of labour.

## Religion and churches

More than 80% of all Icelanders officially belong to the state supported national church of Iceland, an Evangelical Lutheran denomination. **Services are held every Sunday at 11:00 in the summer.** However, many Icelanders do not attend church services on a regular basis.

Holy mass is sung in the **Roman Catholic Cathedral** in Reykjavik, Mon-Sat. at 18:00 and in English every Sunday at 20:00Sun, information Phone: 552-5697.

The Muslim Association of Iceland is located in Ármúli 38, 3rd floor (entrance from Selmúli), 108 Reykjavík. The President is Salmann Tamimi, telephone: +354 895-1967, E-mail: [salmannt@gmail.com](mailto:salmannt@gmail.com) The Islamic Center is open every day after 8 pm.

## Weather/Climate

Iceland enjoys a much milder climate than its name and location adjacent to the Arctic Circle would imply. A branch of the Gulf Stream flows along the southern and the western coast greatly moderating the climate. However, this brings mild Atlantic air in contact with colder Arctic air resulting in a climate that is marked by frequent changes in weather and storminess. Furthermore this leads to more rainfall in the southern and western part than in the northern part of the island. The summer tourist season is from late May to early September. During the first half of this period the sun stays above the horizon for almost 24 hours and the interplay of light and shadows on mountains, lava fields and glaciers yield an ever changing landscape. However, even during the middle of summer the sky is frequently cloudy or overcast and the sunshine does not warm the air much. Hence, during daytime the air is usually cool (“refreshing“ is the local euphemism) and cold during nighttimes.

## Energy

Situated on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Iceland is a hot spot of volcanic and geothermal activity. Thirty post-glacial volcanoes have erupted in the past two centuries, and natural hot water

supplies much of the population with cheap, pollution-free heating. Geothermal heating of houses began around 1930, and today all of Reykjavik is heated by the Reykjavík Energy district heating system. Throughout Iceland, about 90% of the population now enjoy geothermal heating (not all parts of the country have utilizable hot water resources). The hot water that comes running from the crane in houses in Reykjavik comes from Nesjavallavirkjun and can be up to 80°C so people should be very careful when using it. Rivers are, moreover, harnessed to provide inexpensive hydroelectric power. The electrical current is 220 volts, 50 Hz.

### **Economy**

The economy is heavily dependent upon fisheries, which are the nation's major resource, and almost 60% of all exports are made up of seafood products. Yet only a small proportion of the workforce is active in this sector (5% in fishing, 6.2% in fish processing), and over 50% of the workforce is employed in services, public and other.

Iceland is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA).

### **Currency**

The unit of currency used in Iceland is the krona or „crown,“ abbreviated ISK. All banks can exchange currency, and some shops (especially those catering to tourists) will accept payment in US dollars or Euro.

Most shops and businesses accept major credit cards and debit cards so it is not generally necessary to carry much cash. Debit and credit cards are commonly used in Iceland even for quite small transactions. It is best to exchange your money into ISK in Iceland, and reexchange any surplus before you leave, as foreign banks may not deal in ISK. You can exchange your money at the bank at the airport on arrival and departure and in all major banks.

### **Time**

Local time in Iceland is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) all year round. One hour later than Central European Time during winter but two hours later in the summer time as Iceland does not go on daylight saving time. When it is noon in Reykjavík during the summer, the time is 08:00 in New York City, 13:00 in London, 14:00 in Paris, 14:00 in Oslo, 14:00 in Luxembourg, 14:00 in Rome and 21:00 in Tokyo

### **Calling someone in Iceland.**

To Iceland: + 354 number. In Iceland all phone numbers have seven-digit numbers, both home telephones and cell telephones.

No area codes are necessary, you dial the number directly.

If you are trying to find an Icelandic person in the Icelandic Phone Book, please be aware that names are listed alphabetically by Christian/first name, not family names. If you cannot find the person in the phone book, you can dial 118 for help of go to **ja.is**. There you can also find good roadmaps (kort).

## **International calls.**

When calling a country outside Iceland, you dial without interruption the international code (00), then the country code, the area code, and finally the number. If you need help in finding a phone number abroad, you can call 114 for information.

## **Emergency telephone number**

**The emergency telephone number for police, ambulance or fire etc. is 112. Note that phone calls to 112 from coin-operated phones do not require payment.**

## **Emergency ward**

City Hospital (Borgarspítalinn), 24 hrs service, phone. 525 1700. Bus 11, 13, 14 and 18.

## **Embassies**

Information on foreign consuls in Iceland may be obtained at the *Icelandic Foreign Ministry*, 25 Rauðarárstígur, Reykjavík, Phone. 560 9900, see also [http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/PDF/Diplomatic\\_list\\_2009\\_-\\_des2.pdf](http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/PDF/Diplomatic_list_2009_-_des2.pdf)

## **About Reykjavik**

The population of the city is about 200,000 including its suburbs and nearby villages. Reykjavik is spread across a peninsula with a panoramic view of the mountains and the Atlantic Ocean on almost all sides.

It's been called Europe's hottest capital. Slick advertising campaigns have championed the city's famed nightlife during weekends. But there is more to Reykjavik than pubs and clubs. Reykjavik held the prestigious title European City of Culture in the year 2000; a welcome recognition of the energetic and colourful cultural life of the capital.

Reykjavik has the best of both worlds: the qualities of a modern, forward-looking society are complemented by a close connection to beautiful and unspoilt nature in the city's vicinity. In the summer, you can sit by the harbour at midnight and watch the sun dip slightly below the horizon before it makes its way up again.

## **Bus (Strætó)**

The capital area has a bus system (Straeto): most buses run every 20 minutes, and every 30 minutes in the evening and at weekends. Bus information is available at the bus stations at Hlemmur and Laekjartorg, at the Tourist Information Centre, Adalstraeti 2.

A flat fare (ISK 280) is charged on the buses (no change given so exact fare is needed). You may need to change buses: ask for a skiptimidi (transfer ticket) on the first bus and you will not have to pay again on the second bus within a certain time limit (normally 45 min).

We will give you a pass for the bus when you arrive, the pass is valid for zone 1 (see map at bus.is).

Further information: <http://www.bus.is/> and fore maps see <http://www.straeto.is/leidakort/>

## **Business Hours**

The opening hours of most businesses are from 9:00 until 17:00.

Shopping hours are generally from 10:00 or 11:00 until 17:00 or 18:00 during the week (Monday to Friday). On Saturdays, many shops are open only for a few hours from 12:00, while some are closed on Saturdays in summer. Most shops are closed on Sundays.

The cheapest groceries stores like Bonus, Krónan and Netto do not open until 12:00 and close at 18:30 except Saturdays and Sundays they close at 18:00

However, shopping malls, supermarkets, some bookstores and various shops catering to tourists have longer opening hours, and are mostly open every day.

Wine, liquor and beer can only be bought at the state liquor outlets called "VÍNBUÐIN" Most liquor stores in Reyjavík are open Mondays to Saturdays from 11 until 18.

## **Pharmacies**

Pharmacies are listed in the telephone directory (yellow pages) under "Apótek" and are normally open: Mon.-Fri. 9:00 -18:00. The opening hours are variable on Sat., however further information can also be obtained by calling 551 8888 or 533 2300.

## **Automatic Teller Machines (ATM) Card**

An ATM card may be the most convenient way to obtain money in most countries. You can use an ATM card to withdraw money from a bank account in your home country.

The money withdrawn will be in Icelandic currency of the country you are in. Check with your home bank to find out what their fees are for foreign withdrawal, as it varies from bank to bank. In Reykjavík there are numerous ATM's (automatic telling machines). Open 24 hours. The unit of currency in Iceland is the króna (IKR) (plural: krónur, usu. abbreviated kr.). Icelandic bank notes are issued in denominations of 500, 1000, 2000 & 5000 kr.

## **Credit Cards**

The major credit cards used in Iceland are VISA and Eurocard/Mastercard but Diners and American Express are also accepted in Iceland. Credit Cards are widely used and accepted throughout the country.

## **Banks and foreign exchange**

Banking hours are Mondays to Fridays, 9:15-16:00. Some shopping malls have longer banking hours.

Money exchange service is provided at the Tourist Information Centre in Bankastræti 2 Monday–Saturday from 09.00–17:00, closed on Sundays.

## **About Driving in Iceland**

All mountain roads and roads in the interior of Iceland have a surface of gravel. The same applies to large sections of the national highway, which also has long stretches of asphalt. The surface on the gravel roads is often loose, especially along the sides of the roads, so one should drive carefully and slow down whenever approaching an oncoming car.

In Iceland all driving off roads or marked tracks is forbidden.

**Speed Limits:** Most country roads are unmade and not suitable for fast driving. 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 roads. Fine fee for driving above speed limit is not less than **10,000** Isl. Kr. and can be more than **100,000** Isl. Kr.

Right turn on a red light: It is not allowed according to Icelandic driving rules to take a right turn on red light.

Blind Spots: Blind spots at the top of hills are common and not always marked. They are, however usually marked with a "danger ahead" sign and the word BLINDHÆÐ below.

Bridges: Bridges usually only allow one lane of traffic. Many unabridged rivers appear quite safe at first sight but can prove extremely difficult once the crossing has been embarked on. Check carefully before fording the river, especially if there are no accompanying vehicles.

Headlights: One is obliged by law to use headlights at all times day and night.

Safety-Belts: Passengers in the front and back seats of an automobile are required by law use **safety-belts**. Fine fee for not using safety-belt is 5000 Isl. Kr per person.

Alcohol: The laws are strict in Iceland with regard to driving under the influence of alcohol. They are also strictly enforced. A driver will lose his license if the alcohol content of the blood reaches 0.5‰ and he/she will have to pay a heavy fine.

## **Feasts in Iceland from 15th of April to October in 2011**

### **First Day of Summer (21<sup>st</sup> of April)**

Thursday during the period 19 to 25 April

In the old days, the Icelanders divided the year into only two seasons, winter and summer. After the long winter they still celebrate this first day of "summer" with parades, sporting events and organized entertainment, held in various places around Iceland.

### **Maundy Thursday (21<sup>st</sup> of April)**

### **Good Friday (22<sup>nd</sup> of April)**

### **Easters 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April)**

### **Ascension Day (Holy Thursday, this year 2<sup>nd</sup> of June)**

Six weeks after Maundy Thursday.

### **Whitsun and Whitmonday (this year 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of June)**

Seven weeks after Easter.

### **Sjómannadagur or Seamen's Day (First Sunday in June)**

This holiday is marked by festivities such as parades, rowing and swimming races, tugs of war, and sometimes sea rescue competitions.

### **Icelandic Republic Day (June 17<sup>th</sup>)**

In 1944 Iceland declared independence from the Kingdom of Denmark. June 17th was chosen as the official holiday because it was the birthday of Jón Sigurðsson, who is regarded as Iceland's leader in the campaign for independence in the 19th century. The greatest celebrations are held in Reykjavík with parades, street theatres, sideshows and dancing, but throughout the country the day is filled with picnics and various organized festivities as well.

### **Verslunarmannahelgi (Labour Day Weekend, this year 30<sup>th</sup> of July to 1<sup>st</sup> of August)**

First weekend in August is a long weekend as the Monday is a holiday. During that weekend, Icelanders by the thousands take to their cars and head out of town to camp in the wilderness or join in one of the many organized events that are held throughout the country. These range from family-style gatherings to outdoor rock festivals.

### **Reykjavík Cultural Night (this year it will most likely be on the 20<sup>st</sup> of August)**

On this enchanted evening museums, galleries, churches, cafes, restaurants, stores and other establishments in downtown Reykjavík stay open into the night and present a variety of exhibitions, concerts, performances, theatre and other cultural events.

Websites for further information

[http://www.whatson.is/whats\\_on/](http://www.whatson.is/whats_on/)

<http://www.visitreykjavik.is/>

<http://www.iceland.com/>

[http://www.thjodmenning.is/index\\_english.htm](http://www.thjodmenning.is/index_english.htm)