



THE ROUGH GUIDE to Iceland

EXPERT ADVICE • FULL COVERAGE • EASY TO USE



INSIDE THIS BOOK

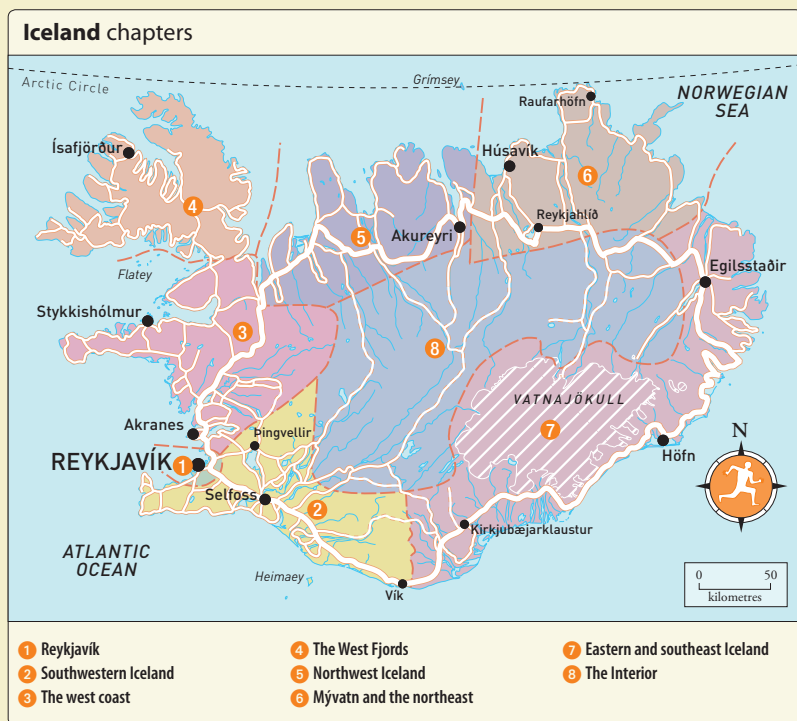
INTRODUCTION What to see, what not to miss, itineraries and more – everything you need to get started

BASICS Pre-departure practical information

THE GUIDE Comprehensive, in-depth guide to Iceland, with area highlights and full-colour maps throughout

CONTEXTS History, landscape and geology, wildlife and the environment, plus recommended books covering modern fiction, Icelandic classics and the Sagas, and a useful language section

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide with the ★ symbol



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

Iceland

written and researched by

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Introduction to **Iceland**

Resting on the edge of the Arctic Circle and sitting atop one of the world's most volcanically active hot spots, Iceland is an inspiring mix of magisterial glaciers, bubbling hot springs and rugged fjords, where activities such as hiking under the Midnight Sun are complemented by healthy doses of history and literature.

Iceland is a place where nature reigns supreme. Aside from the modern and cosmopolitan capital, **Reykjavík**, population centres are small, with diminutive towns, fishing villages, farms and minute hamlets clustered along the coastal fringes. The **Interior**, meanwhile, remains totally uninhabited and unmarked by humanity: a starkly beautiful wilderness of ice fields, windswept upland plateaux, infertile lava and ash deserts and the frigid vastness of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier. Iceland's location on the Mid-Atlantic ridge also gives it one of the most volcanically active landscapes on Earth, peppered with everything from naturally occurring hot springs, scaldingly hot bubbling mud pools and noisy steam vents to a string of unpredictably violent **volcanoes**, which have regularly devastated huge parts of the country. The latest events came in 2010, when Eyjafjallajökull erupted and caused havoc across Europe; and in 2015, when the eruption at Holuhraun created a huge new lavafield.

Historically, the **Icelanders** have a mix of Nordic and Celtic blood, a heritage often held responsible for their characteristically laidback approach to life. The battle for survival against the elements over the centuries has also made them a highly self-reliant nation, whose former dependence on the sea and fishing for their economy was virtually total. Having spent years being dismissed as an insignificant outpost in the North Atlantic (Icelanders gave up counting how many times their country was left off maps of Europe), the eruption under Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 saw the tourist industry, at least, wake up to Iceland's potential. Now close on a million foreigners visit annually – three times the national population – and Iceland is on a steep learning curve as it struggles to cope with tourist-driven inflation and sagging infrastructure at popular sights.

HIKES AND HOT SPRINGS

In a country whose scenery is so iconic, and whose historical events are inextricably wrapped up with its landscape, the only real way to get to grips with Iceland is to get **outdoors**. It's where many Icelanders choose to spend their free time, too, though they often seem to have a fearless disregard for the weather, geological events and other natural hazards that foreigners take sensible precautions against.

Iceland's **hiking** trails are easy to get to, yet feel wonderfully remote and wild: on some of them it's possible to walk for days and not see anyone. The country is also small enough that it's feasible to simply pick two points on a map and walk between them – assuming, of course, that you're suitably equipped for any natural hazards along the way – though there are also many well-marked trails heading off across the landscape. After a hike, take the plunge in one of Iceland's many naturally heated outdoor **"hot pots"**, often in stunningly scenic locations, where you can peel off your clothes and soak any aches away while admiring the surrounding mountains, volcanoes and seascapes. The top three spots for an outdoor soak are Landmannalaugar in southwestern Iceland (see p.119), Grettislaug in the northwest (see p.234) and Krossneslaug in the West Fjords (see p.221). And if you prefer more formal arrangements, just about every settlement across the country has its own geothermally heated swimming pool, too.

ICELANDIC HIKES: SIX OF THE BEST

Laugavegur An epic four-day hike over snowfields, moorland and desert between hot springs at Landmannalaugar and the highland valley of Þórs mörk: see p.120.

Jökulsárgljúfur Straightforward though lengthy trails follow a glacier river canyon down to Europe's largest waterfall: see p.275.

Hornstrandir You can spend days hiking across this totally unpopulated peninsula, which is probably the wildest, most remote corner of Iceland that is still accessible: see p.200.

Þórs mörk Isolated glacier valley in the southwest, covered in dwarf birch and wildflowers, with almost limitless hiking potential: see p.129.

Skaptafell Easily reached moorland plateau between two glaciers, with plenty of well-marked trails of up to a day's duration: see p.315.

Skógar to Þórs mörk Relatively straightforward 25km hike over mountains and snowfields, passing solidified lava from the 2010 eruption: see p.134.



Arctic Circle



ATLANTIC OCEAN



NORWEGIAN
SEA

Faroes & Denmark

Metres

1500
1000
400
200
100
0

0 50
kilometres

FACT FILE

- Though geographically as big as England, Iceland's **population** is tiny – at barely 323,000, it's no bigger than many towns in other countries. Two out of three Icelanders live in and around the capital, Reykjavík.
- Iceland sits atop the **Mid-Atlantic Ridge**, the fault line where two of the Earth's tectonic plates are slowly drifting apart; as a result, Iceland is getting wider at a rate of roughly 1 cm per year. Either side of this ridge, from the northeast to the southwest, **earthquakes** and **volcanic activity** are commonplace.
- There are no motorways or railways in Iceland. The country's only main road, the **Ringroad** which circumnavigates the island, was completed in the 1970s following several unsuccessful attempts to bridge treacherous glacial rivers on the south coast.
- Iceland is home to the third-biggest **glacier** in the world, Vatnajökull, covering an area equal to that of the English county of Yorkshire. One of the country's greatest sources of **geothermal energy**, the Grímsvötn caldera, sits directly beneath the ice cap.
- Thanks to the existence of countless medieval documents, many Icelanders can trace their ancestors back to the time of the **Viking Settlement**, around 800 AD. Low **immigration** over the centuries means that today's Icelanders have one of the purest gene pools in the world, providing an invaluable research opportunity for scientists.

Where to go

Inevitably, most people get their first taste of Iceland in **Reykjavík**, rubbing shoulders with over half the country's population. It may be small, but what Reykjavík lacks in size it more than makes up for in stylish bars, restaurants and shops, and the nightlife is every bit as wild as it's cracked up to be: during the light summer nights, the city barely sleeps. Reykjavík also makes a good base for visiting **Geysir**, the original geyser, the ancient parliament site of **Pingvellir**, spectacular waterfalls at **Gullfoss** and the famous and sublime **Blue Lagoon**.

Beyond Reykjavík, Route 1, the **Ringroad**, runs out to encircle the island, and the wilder side of Iceland soon shows itself – open spaces of vivid green edged by unspoiled coastlines of red and black sands, all set against a backdrop of brooding hills and mountains. The **west coast** is dominated by the towns of **Borgarnes** and **Reykholt**, both strongly associated with the sagas, while the **Snæfellsnes Peninsula**, with views of the monster glacier at its tip, is one of the country's most accessible hiking destinations. Arguably Iceland's most dramatic scenery is found in the far **northwest** of the country, the **West Fjords**, where tiny fishing villages nestle at the foot of table-top mountains. **Ísafjörður** is the only settlement of any size here and makes a good base from which to strike out on foot into the wilderness of the **Hornstrandir Peninsula**. Beautifully located on the north coast, **Akureyri** is rightfully known as the capital of the north and functions as Iceland's second city. With a string of bars and restaurants, it can make a refreshing change from the small villages hereabouts. From Akureyri it's easy to reach the island of **Grimsey**, the only part of

Icelandic territory actually within the **Arctic Circle**; and the country's biggest tourist attraction outside the capital, **Lake Mývatn**. The lake is a favourite nesting place for many species of duck and other waterfowl and is surrounded by an electrifying proliferation of volcanic activity. Nearby **Húsavík** is one of the best places in the country to organize summer whale-watching cruises, while just inland, the wilds of **Jökulsárgljúfur National**



superlative hiking along deep river gorges to the spectacular **Dettifoss**, Europe's most powerful waterfall. Then there are the East Fjords which, despite easy access, remain the least toured part of Iceland, perhaps because there are no major sights – just plenty of calm, quiet, grand scenery.

South of here, **Höfn** is a good base from which to visit Europe's biggest glacier, the mighty Vatnajökull, either on a skidoo trip or on foot through Skaftafell National Park, while the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon offers the surreal chance to cruise alongside floating icebergs.

The south coast is marked by vast stretches of black, volcanic coastal sands punctuated by charming villages such as Vík, Iceland's southernmost settlement. Inland are more mighty waterfalls, including Skógarfoss and Seljalandsfoss; the wilderness surrounding Hekla, a highly active volcano which last erupted in 2000; at least one thermal outdoor pool to soak in; and a landscape central to *Njál's Saga*, one of the nation's great, visceral Viking romances. Iceland's most rewarding hiking route can also be found here: the five-day Laugavegur trail between extraordinary hot-springs scenery at Landmannalaugar and the beautiful highland valley of Þórsmörk, worth a visit in its own right. Just a quick ferry ride offshore from all this lies Heimaey, at the heart of the Westman Islands, which

TO WHALE OR NOT TO WHALE

The Icelandic government's decision to resume **commercial whaling** in late 2006 drove a wedge through Icelandic public opinion. Most of the population views whaling as a virtual birthright and is only too keen to turn a nationalistic blind eye to international protest, but it is also true that the nation's burgeoning **tourism industry** has led to a decline in its near-total dependence on the fishing industry. Consequently, promoters of tourism lost no time in pointing out that foreigners have flocked to Iceland in recent years to **watch whales** in their natural habitat, not to see them unceremoniously sliced up for the dinner table – and despite a seeming nonchalance, Icelanders are painfully aware that their tiny country on the very edge of Europe can ill afford any kind of international boycott.



ABOVE WHALE WATCHERS SPOTTING A MINKE WHALE **OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** FISHERMAN IN TRADITIONAL SEAL-SKIN SUIT; REPLICA VIKING LONGSHIP; SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR



SEXUAL EQUALITY IN ICELAND

Regardless of the tongue-twisting name, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir put Iceland on the map when she became the world's first female president in 1980, high-profile proof of Iceland's approach to **sexual equality**. However, treating women as equals was nothing new in Iceland. Ever since Viking times, when every pair of working hands was required to farm, fish and simply exist in such a harsh climate, the nation's small population base has catapulted women into positions that for centuries were seen solely as a man's preserve in many other countries. Today, things are no different: both women and men often work long hours, fulfilling several roles, to keep the Icelandic economy ticking over. Generous childcare facilities provided by the Icelandic welfare state have also enabled women to re-enter the labour market shortly after having children, and work their way up the career ladder, often to the very top. Even the **Icelandic language** reflects the equal nature of society; there's often no specifically male or female word for a profession – just one term applied to both men and women.

hosts one of the world's largest puffin colonies and carries evidence of a catastrophic eruption during the 1970s which almost saw the island abandoned.

Iceland's barren Interior is best tackled as part of a guided tour – it's much easier to let experienced drivers of all-terrain buses pick their way across lavafields and cross unbridged rivers than to try it yourself. Pick of the options includes a traverse of Sprengisandur, an eye-numbing desert of black sand; Askja, a huge caldera close to the recent Holuhraun eruption site; and Herðubreið, a stark, awe-inspiringly beautiful table-top mountain crowned with ice.

When to go

Icelandic **weather** is notoriously unpredictable. In **summer** there's a fair chance of bright and sunny days, and temperatures can reach 17°C, but good weather is interspersed with wet and misty spells when the temperature can plummet to a chilly 10°C. Most museums and attractions are only open from late May to early September, and it's at these times, too, that buses run their fullest schedules. Although almost all of Iceland lies south of the Arctic Circle and therefore doesn't experience a true **Midnight Sun**, nights are light from mid-May to early August across the country; in the north, the sun never fully sets during June. Between September and January the Aurora Borealis or **Northern Lights** can often be seen throughout the country. In winter temperatures fluctuate at 7–8°C either side of freezing point and daylight is limited to a few hours – in Reykjavík, sunrise isn't until almost 11am in December; the sun is already sinking slowly back towards the horizon after 1pm.

TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

The table below shows the average maximum and minimum **temperatures** in Reykjavík, and average **monthly** rainfall.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max/min (°C)	2/-2	3/-2	4/-1	6/1	10/4	12/7	14/9	14/8	11/6	7/3	4/0	2/-2
Rainfall (mm)	89	64	62	56	42	42	50	56	67	94	78	79

Author picks

Our hard-travelling authors visited every corner of Iceland, from the sandy beaches of the south coast to the remote villages of the West Fjords, to bring you some unique travel experiences. These are some of their own personal favourites.

Classic journeys Walking the four-day Laugavegur trail is a great way to see the wilds of Iceland, and for the less adventurous, the views unfolding from high-clearance bus tours across the Interior are just as unmissable. **See p.120 & p.325**

Best beaches The empty, golden strands at Breiðavík in the West Fjords are sublime on a sunny day, and the black volcanic sands near Vík on the south coast are equally compelling. **See p.213 & p.136**

Look for leviathans Whale watching from Reykjavík, or from Húsavík on the north coast, is a great way to get up close to the giants of the sea. **See p.74 & p.274**

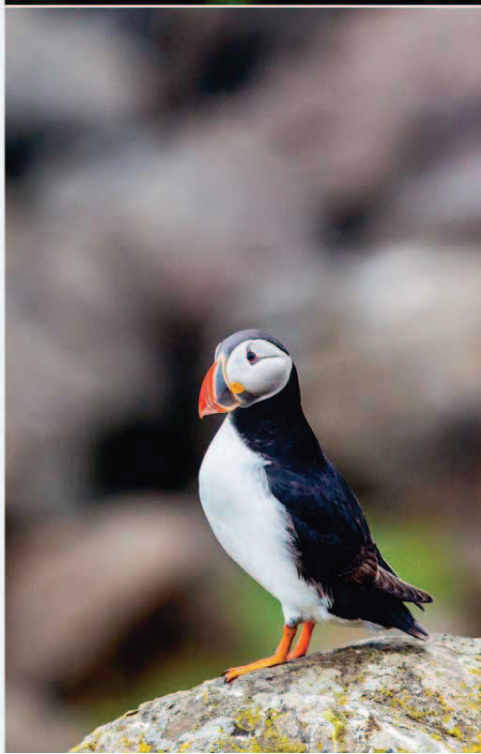
Northern Lights Thanks to its northerly location, Iceland is a great place from which to see the Aurora Borealis. Take one of the special tours which operate from Reykjavík and prepare to be amazed. **See p.75**

Island idyll Off-the-beaten-track Flatey on the west coast, and Heimaey on the south coast, offer splendid rural scenery aplenty and a rich birdlife to boot. **See p.176 & p.139**

Amazing views There's mountain scenery to blow your mind along any road in the West Fjords, and on the devastated lava plains surrounding the flooded Askja caldera. **See p.188 & p.328**

Greatest landscapes For mountain backdrops and ready access to real wilderness, Ísafjörður is Iceland at its most alluring, while the highland valley of Þórsmörk offers trees, wildflowers and rugged, glacier-capped hilltops. **See p.191 & p.129**

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.



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things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Iceland has to offer on a short trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective taste of the country's highlights: fantastic scenery, fascinating museums, spectacular buildings and a few ways to simply indulge yourself. All highlights are colour-coded by chapter and have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.



1 THE BLUE LAGOON

Page 95

A dip in the sublime waters of the Blue Lagoon is a quintessentially Icelandic experience.

2 LANDMANNALAUGAR

Page 119

Landmannalaugar's bubbling hot springs, wildly coloured hills and rugged hiking trails are the Interior's best-known features.

3 HIKING IN HORNSTRANDIR

Page 200

The total remoteness and majestic landscape make isolated Hornstrandir a fantastic destination for dedicated hikers.





4

4 ASKJA

Page 328

Scramble down the stark sides of this volcanic crater in the Interior and take a quick dip in the lukewarm geothermal lake, Viti.

5 JOIN THE RÚNTUR

Page 82

Sample Iceland's legendary nightlife, starting with a pub crawl round Reykjavik's bars.

6 FLATEY

Page 176

Admire the drama of the West Fjord mountains from the green, flat meadows of this tiny, peaceful island haven.

7 THE SAGAS

Page 58

Reykjavik's Landnámssýningin museum boasts some of Europe's oldest and finest medieval manuscripts.

8 AKUREYRI

Page 244

Iceland's second town offers an engaging mix of urban sophistication, with great bars and restaurants and some decent museums.



5



6



8

9



10





11

9 LAKE MÝVATN

Page 260

Mývatn's placid spread of water is a haven for wildfowl, while the lake's surrounds abound in volcanic formations, both extinct and highly active.

10 THE INTERIOR

Page 322

A trip into the desolate, uninhabited Interior is an unmissable opportunity to see the raw side of Iceland.

11 ÞÓRSMÖRK NATIONAL PARK

Page 129

Hike 25km over the mountains between Þórsmörk and Skógar, right past the steaming site of the 2010 volcanic eruption at Eyjafjallajökull.

12 BREIÐAVÍK

Page 213

This sweeping stretch of golden sand and turquoise water is Iceland's most beautiful beach.



12



13 THE SETTLEMENT EXHIBITION

Page 58

Travel back in time to the year 871 and see the remarkable remains of one of Reykjavik's earliest houses.

14 GEYSIR

Page 108

See Strokkur erupting at Geysir, after which all geysers are named.

15 PINGVELLIR NATIONAL PARK

Page 101

The dramatic site of Iceland's first parliament, set in a mighty rift valley where the Eurasian and American continental plates are slowly tearing apart.

16 WEST FJORDS

Page 188

Remote, forbidding yet totally compelling, the West Fjords are Iceland at its most scenically amazing.





17 THE PHALLOLOGICAL MUSEUM, REYKJAVÍK

Page 68

A chance to size up Iceland's most offbeat museum, containing the penises of both Icelandic man and beast.

18 WHALE WATCHING

Pages 74 & 274

Get up close to minke and humpback whales on a whale-watching tour from Reykjavik or Húsavík.

19 SKAFTAFELL NATIONAL PARK

Page 315

Skaftafell's blend of highland plateau, summer meadows and ice-blue glaciers is best explored by hiking, biking or climbing.

20 HALLGRÍMSKIRKJA

Page 67

Reykjavik's best-known landmark, the striking Hallgrímskirkja offers unsurpassed views of the capital from its tower.

21 DETTIFOSS

Page 278

Deep inside Jökulsárgljúfur National Park, encounter nature in the raw at Europe's most powerful waterfall.



17



18







Itineraries

Iceland's difficult terrain takes time to negotiate, and you can't cover the country in a single trip. Our Grand Tour concentrates on Iceland's main sights, while our other suggested routes focus on two fascinating regions, the island's west and north, and the south and east.

GRAND TOUR OF ICELAND

Two weeks in Iceland and no idea where to start? Our Grand Tour puts you on the right track.

- ➊ **Reykjavík** Though one of Europe's smaller capitals, the vibrant heart of Iceland offers everything from style-conscious bars and restaurants to great museums and galleries. **See p.50**
- ➋ **Blue Lagoon** Take a dip in the sublime waters of this famous open-air swimming pool, fed by geothermal water and set in the middle of a lavafield. **See p.95**
- ➌ **Golden Circle** See Þingvellir, site of Iceland's original open-air parliament, hot waterspouts at Geysir, and a stunning two-tier waterfall at Gullfoss. **See p.101**
- ➍ **Akureyri** Chill on the north coast in Iceland's second-largest town, renowned for its sunny summer days and thriving bar and restaurant scene. **See p.244**
- ➎ **Húsavík** Whale watching is on everybody's list of must-dos in Iceland, and the expertly run tours from Húsavík offer virtually guaranteed sightings. **See p.274**
- ➏ **Lake Mývatn** A proliferation of geological oddities, from bubbling mud pools to steam vents, clustered around a beautiful lake teeming with birdlife. **See p.260**

➐ **Dettifoss** Europe's largest waterfall plunges over bare granite into a deep, sunless chasm on the edge of the Interior. **See p.278**

➑ **The Interior** Venture into Iceland's uninhabited Interior to witness some truly awe-inspiring scenery: from glaciers to lava deserts, the views are jaw-dropping. **See p.322**

➒ **Heimaey** A steaming volcano cone, grassy cliff-top walks and abundant wildlife make this small, self-contained island community an essential overnight stopover. **See p.139**

THE BEST OF THE WEST AND NORTH

This one-week tour guides you through the best destinations between Reykjavík and Akureyri, including a detour into the West Fjords.

- ➊ **Borgarnes** Step into Iceland's stirring past at the Settlement Centre and learn more about the country's Saga heroes. **See p.154**
- ➋ **Stykkishólmur** Skim across the waters of Breiðafjörður in a rigid inflatable, checking out the myriad islands and rich birdlife in this part of the west. **See p.170**
- ➌ **Flatey** A night on this idyllic island provides a taste of rural Iceland: stroll through flower meadows down to the shore to watch the thousands of birds that call Flatey home. **See p.176**

④ **Ísafjörður** Explore the West Fjords' most agreeable town, and try a spot of sea kayaking too. **See p.191**

⑤ **Ósar** The place to get up close to entire colonies of seals, lolling on the black volcanic sands. **See p.229**

⑥ **Hofsós** Take a restorative swim in the new oceanside pool and drink in the extraordinary coastal vistas. **See p.236**

⑦ **Akureyri** Iceland's second town offers a profusion of bars and restaurants, and the beautiful surroundings in Eyjafjörður are perfect for exploring on horseback. **See p.244**

THE SOUTH AND EAST

A one-week tour from Reykjavík to Mývatn via the south and east coasts, with an excursion into the fringes of the Interior.

① **Borgarfjörður Eystri** This tiny, isolated community has plenty of puffins, hiking trails

and spiky mountains to investigate – you might even spot a Greenland shark being landed at the harbour. **See p.297**

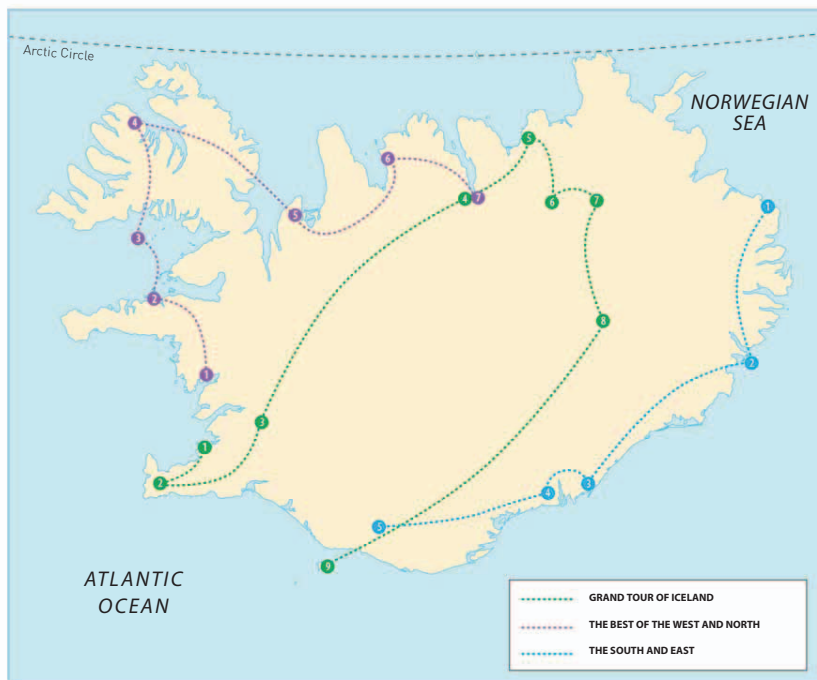
② **Papey** Spot seals, razorbills and puffins on this half-day outing to a tiny islet, once home to reclusive monks. **See p.308**

③ **Jökulsárlón** Glacial lagoon just above a black-sand beach, where you can cruise between powder-blue icebergs as they shear off the front of the ice sheet. **See p.314**

④ **Skaftafell** Waterfalls, glaciers, peaks, moorland and almost unlimited hiking potential at this popular national park. **See p.315**

⑤ **Vík** Pleasant village near Iceland's southernmost point, with bracing sea breezes, black-sand beaches and some easy scenic walking trails. **See p.136**

⑥ **Þórsmörk** Camp and hike at this isolated highland valley, thick with summer wildflowers and hemmed in by spectacular peaks and glaciers. **See p.129**





THE ROAD TO SKAFTAFELL NATIONAL PARK

Basics

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- 38 The media
- 38 Festivals
- 39 Sports and outdoor activities
- 41 Travel essentials

Getting there

Iceland's Keflavík International Airport, about 40km west of Reykjavík, is connected by an ever-increasing quantity of flights to Europe, the UK, Scandinavia, the US and Canada. It's also possible to reach Iceland year-round by sea via the Faroese superferry Norröna, which performs a regular crossing of the North Atlantic.

Airfares always depend on the **season**, with the highest being around June to August, when the weather is best; fares drop during the "shoulder" seasons – September to November and April to June – and you'll get the best prices during the low season, November to March (excluding Christmas and New Year).

An all-inclusive **package tour** can sometimes turn out to be the cheapest way of doing things. Deals range from a weekend city-break to Reykjavík and its surrounds to all-singing, all-dancing adventure holidays involving snowmobiling across Vatnajökull and whale watching in Húsavík. Check the specialist tour operator websites (p.28).

The cheapest **airfare deals** are always available online, either direct through the airline website or via a discount travel website.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

The cheapest deals from the UK are with **WOW** from London Gatwick (from £100 return) and easyJet from London (£120), Bristol (£120), Manchester (£70) and Edinburgh (£160).

Icelandair flies daily to Keflavík from London Heathrow, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. Return fares from London Heathrow start at £200, whereas from Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester they cost from £150.

The only direct flights between **Ireland** and Iceland are from Dublin with WOW (from €200); otherwise you'll need to travel via mainland Britain with Aer Lingus or discount masters Ryanair, and then pick up a connecting flight to Keflavík.

Flights from the US and Canada

Icelandair flies out of many cities across the US and Canada. The **frequency** – and cost – is reduced during the winter months; schedules change each year, depending on demand, and some routes are suspended altogether. Broadly speaking, you're looking at fares upwards of US\$1500 return from the western US, or US\$500 return from the eastern US or Canada. Budget airline WOW also fly from Boston or Washington DC from US\$500 return.

Flights from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

There are **no direct flights** to Iceland from Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, so you'll need to find a discounted airfare to somewhere that does – such as London – and arrange a flight to Reykjavík from there.

All return airfares to London **from Australian East-Coast gateways** are similarly priced, with the cheapest deals via Asia costing around AU\$2000/2400/2800 (low, medium or high season). From Perth or Darwin, scheduled flights via Asia cost AU\$110–220 less than if departing from eastern gateways, while flights via the US cost around AU\$400 more. **From New Zealand** you can fly from Auckland to London via mainland US or Asia for NZ\$2600/2900/3200. From Wellington and Christchurch all options cost NZ\$200–300 more. To get to London **from South Africa**, count on around 6000/6400/6800 ZAR for a Cape Town–London return.

Airlines, agents and operators

AIRLINES

Aer Lingus 🇮🇪 aerlingus.com

Air China 🇨🇳 airchina.com

Air France 🇫🇷 airfrance.com

Air New Zealand 🇳🇿 airnz.co.nz

British Airways 🇬🇧 ba.com

Cathay Pacific 🇭🇰 cathaypacific.com

China Eastern 🇨🇳 flychinaeastern.com

easyJet 🇬🇧 easyjet.com

A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

Emirates 🌐 emirates.com
Icelandair 🌐 icelandair.com
KLM 🌐 klm.com
Lufthansa 🌐 lufthansa.com
Malaysia Airlines 🌐 malaysiaairlines.com
Norwegian 🌐 norwegian.com
Qantas 🌐 qantas.com.au
Ryanair 🌐 ryanair.com
SAS 🌐 flysas.com
Singapore Airlines 🌐 singaporeair.com
Thai Airways 🌐 thaiairways.com
Virgin Atlantic Airways 🌐 virginatlantic.com
WOW 🌐 wowair.com

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50°N Australia 🌐 fiftydegreesnorth.com. Nordic specialist offering trekking, cycling and Northern Lights tours.

Activity Iceland 🌐 activityiceland.is, 🌐 buggy.is. Interior adventures by 4WD or ATV quad bikes.

Bentours Australia 🌐 bentours.com.au. Handles Icelandair ticket sales; also offers fly/drive and seven-day Iceland packages.

Borton Overseas US 🌐 bortonoverseas.com. Adventure-vacation specialists, offering a variety of Iceland tours with biking, hiking and rafting activities, plus farm and cabin stays.

Cave.is 🌐 cave.is. Lava tubes and cave tours around Reykjavik.

Discover the World UK 🌐 discover-the-world.co.uk.

Well-established Nordic holiday specialist, with groups led by naturalists to Iceland, plus city breaks, fly/drive holidays and independent travel.

Explore UK 🌐 explore.co.uk. Cruises, small-group tours and super-jeep expeditions.

Extreme Iceland 🌐 extremeiceland.is. Hiking, caving and glacier-climbing packages.

Gray Line 🌐 grayline.is. Golden Circle, Blue Lagoon and other tours around southern Iceland.

Iceland Adventure US 🌐 icelandadventure.com. Small escorted tours to Iceland, including rafting and horseriding holidays.

Iceland Saga Tours US 🌐 reykjaviktours.com. Specializes in short breaks to the Icelandic capital including trips out to the Golden Circle attractions and the Blue Lagoon.

Macs Adventure UK & US 🌐 macsadventure.com. Self-guided walking and cycling holidays, including the classic Laugavegur trek.

Nordic Experience UK 🌐 nordicexperience.co.uk. Good deals on city breaks and fly/drive holidays.

Nordic Travel Australia 🌐 nordictravel.com.au. This long-established operator can book you onto pre-existing tours within Iceland or tailor special-interest packages – from driving, hiking or cycling around the highlights to snowmobiling across Vatnajökull.

Nordic Visitor 🌐 nordicvisitor.com. Reykjavik-based operator able to organize self-drive packages, guided hikes, and all manner of specialist and personalized tours.

North South Travel UK 🌐 northsouthtravel.co.uk. Competitive travel agency, whose profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially in sustainable tourism.

Regent Holidays UK 🌐 regent-holidays.co.uk. Good package operator specializing in Iceland and Greenland.

Scanam World Tours US 🌐 scanamtours.com. Group and individual tours and cruises, plus cheap weekend breaks.

STA Travel US 🌐 statravel.com, UK 🌐 statravel.co.uk, Australia 🌐 statravel.com.au, New Zealand 🌐 statravel.co.nz, South Africa 🌐 statravel.co.za. Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental and more.

Taber Holidays UK 🌐 taberhols.co.uk. With over forty years' experience, this company specializes in regional tours of Iceland as well as city breaks to Reykjavik.

Trailfinders UK, Ireland and Australia 🌐 trailfinders.com. One of the best-informed and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

Travel CUTS Canada 🌐 travelcuts.com. Canadian youth and student travel firm.

TREX 🌐 trex.is. Coach charters and tours for sightseeing and trekking around Iceland. Also operates summer bus to Landmannalaugar and Þórsörk.

USIT Ireland 🌐 usit.ie. Ireland's main student and youth travel specialists.

Getting around

Iceland's small scale makes getting around fairly straightforward – at least during the warmer months. From Reykjavik, it's possible to fly or catch a

THE NORRÖNA FERRY

It's possible to travel by sea to Iceland aboard the luxurious **Norröna ferry** (🌐 smyriil-line.com), but you'll need a cast-iron stomach – the gales, storms and colossal swell of the North Atlantic will quash any romantic images of following the Vikings' sea-road. One huge advantage, however, is that you can bring your own vehicle into Iceland this way (see p.30).

The ferry departs once a week, year-round, from **Hirtshals** in Denmark, travelling via **Tórshavn** in the Faroe Islands to Seyðisfjörður, in Iceland's East Fjords. Facilities include en-suite cabins, a swimming pool, a shopping arcade and even a fitness centre.

High season (mid-June through to late August) one-way fares from Denmark to Seyðisfjörður are €427 per person for one vehicle and two people sleeping in a couchette; a private cabin costs €574 per person.

bus to all major centres, and in summer there are even scheduled buses through the Interior. In winter, however, reduced bus services and difficult road conditions might make flying the only practical way to travel. It's also easy enough to rent cars, camper vans or four-wheel-drives, though those on a budget will find cycling a cheaper alternative.

On the ground, you'll probably spend a good deal of time on Route 1, or the **Ringroad** (known in Icelandic as the *Hringbraut*), which largely follows the coast in a 1500km circuit of the country via Reykjavík, Akureyri, Egilsstaðir and Höfn. Virtually the entire Ringroad is sealed, and in winter snowploughs do their best to keep the route open to all vehicles.

Elsewhere, while stretches around towns might be surfaced, the majority of Icelandic roads are **gravel**. While many of these are accessible to all vehicles, some – such as most **roads through the Interior** – are only negotiable in high-clearance four-wheel-drives.

By air

Flying in Iceland is good value: the cheapest single **airfare** from Reykjavík to Egilsstaðir, for instance, is 10,500kr, far less than the cheapest bus fare for the same journey – and takes just one hour instead of two days. As an added bonus, you'll get a different take on Iceland's unique landscape from above – flying over Vatnajökull's vast expanse of ice is about the only way to get a grasp of its scale.

The main **domestic airline** is **Flugfélag Íslands** (✉airiceland.is), which flies all year from Reykjavík to Akureyri (from 13,500kr), Egilsstaðir (15,500kr), the Westman Islands (15,500kr) and Ísafjörður (10,500kr), with connections between April and October to Grímsey (9700kr), Vopnafjörður (19,200kr) and Þórshöfn (19,200kr). Their various **ticket types** are Full Flex, which are the most expensive; Semi Flex, which are twenty percent cheaper; and various Net fares, which are cheaper again but can't be altered.

Their competition is **Eagle Air** (✉eagleair.is), flying from Reykjavík to the Westman Islands (from 13,000kr), Höfn/Hornafjörður (16,500kr) and Húsavík (16,000kr); again, there's a three-tier pricing system depending on how much flexibility you need.

Note that bad weather can cause cancellations at short notice and that it's best to book well ahead for summer weekends and holidays. **Luggage allowance** is 20kg, and you need to **check in** thirty minutes before departure.

By bus

Four **bus companies** provide regular long-distance services around Iceland. Three are based in Reykjavík: **Reykjavík Excursions** (✉re.is), at the BSÍ terminal; **Sterna** (✉sternatravel.com), at the Harpa Concert Hall; and the long-distance arm of Reykjavík's city bus operator, **Strætó** (✉straeto.is), whose terminal is 5km south of the city centre at Mjódd. **SBA-Norðurlæið** (✉sba.is), which shares some routes with Sterna, is based in Akureyri. Between them, these companies cover the entire Ringroad, the West Fjords, local routes in the northeast and summer-only tracks across the Interior – including many places you could otherwise only reach in your own four-wheel-drive. A fifth operator, **Trex** (✉trex.is), runs summer-only transfers between Reykjavík and Þórsmörk.

Bus travel is convenient but expensive: one-way **fares from Reykjavík** are 15,500kr to Akureyri; 11,000kr to Höfn; and around 25,000kr to Egilsstaðir. In purely point-to-point terms it costs less to fly, and if you can get a group together, car rental might work out cheaper, depending on how far you're going and for how long. Between October and June, the range of buses is also greatly reduced: Interior roads close, local services dry up, and even along the Ringroad there is no single bus service between Egilsstaðir and Höfn.

Bookings for main-road services can be made online or at the various terminals, though they're not really necessary as you can always pay on board, and extra buses are laid on if more than one busload of passengers turns up. Buses into the Interior, or local tours, will require advance booking, however.

Bus tours and buses through the Interior

Many of the bus companies also run **tours**, from year-round excursions along the Golden Circle to explorations of the Interior in summer. Though most tours only last a single day, you can get off along the way to camp or make use of mountain huts, and pick up a later bus – let the company know your plans in advance so a space can be

BUS SCHEDULES

Unless otherwise stated, **bus schedules** given throughout the Guide are for summer only, approximately June to mid-September. Winter timetables can vary considerably, so always check with the relevant bus company websites outside these months.

reserved for you. Make sure, too, that you know when the next bus is due.

Interior routes covered by bus tours include the **Fjallabak route from Landmannaugar to Skafatafell** via Eldgjá's wild gorge system; and trips across the country to Mývatn either via the impressively barren **Sprengisandur route** or the easier and slightly more scenic **Kjölur route**. Local tours tackle the trip to the mighty **Askja** caldera south of Mývatn; and **Lakagígar**, site of a massive eighteenth-century eruption in the south of the country.

By car

Driving around Iceland allows far greater flexibility than taking the bus. **Car rental** is expensive for solo travellers but can work out a reasonable deal in a group, and it's also possible to **bring your own vehicle** into the country by ferry from Denmark (see p.31). UK, US, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand **driving licences** are all valid for short-term visits.

In summer you don't necessarily need a **four-wheel-drive** to experience the heart of the country, when both the Kjölur (Route 35) and the Kaldidalur (Route 550) open up to carefully driven conventional vehicles; these roads, however, are still very rough, and rental agencies do not allow their cars to be driven along them. Four-wheel-drive is essential for other Interior routes, most often because of sticky sand and numerous rivers (again, note that rental agencies – and their insurance companies – will not cover you for accidents at river crossings). Whatever you're driving, and wherever you are, note that you must not pull off the road or track, apart from at designated passing places or car parks: aside from the often unstable verges, you can cause serious erosion damage.

Fuel pumps are almost always automated: you pay at the pump using your credit/debit card with

PIN. If you don't have a credit/debit card, buy a **dedicated card** for a particular brand of station (N1 is probably the most widespread). Fuel currently **costs** 225kr per litre for standard unleaded petrol (95 Octane, or *blýlaust*).

Car rental

Car-rental agencies, offering everything from small economical runarounds to camper vans, motor homes and gas-guzzling four-wheel-drives, are found in settlements across Iceland, though in smaller places the selection will be limited. Rental rates are highest June–August; book ahead and online for the best deals.

Rental options boil down to two types: a **daily rate** which covers the first 100km, after which you pay per additional kilometre; or an **all-inclusive rate** with unlimited mileage. **Add-on fees** insure against windscreen damage, gravel damage, and how much of the **CDW** (Collision Damage Waiver) you'll be liable for; altogether, these can sometimes double the daily rental cost. **One-way rental** (picking up the car in Reykjavík and leaving it in Akureyri, for instance) attracts an additional relocation fee. Also note that many agencies will lean on you to take out cover for **windscreen damage** (worth considering) and ash protection (which you really shouldn't need). Beware of washing a dirty car down before returning it, as grit and gravel can scratch the paintwork as you scrub away – better let the agency handle things.

Including CDW and unlimited kilometres, peak season (June–August) **prices** for a small sedan such as a Toyota Yaris start around 9,000kr per day. For a four-wheel-drive, you're looking at upwards of 20,000kr per day, plus heavy fuel consumption. **Camper vans** – while 25,000kr and up per day – do at least help you save money on accommodation. Expect thirty percent discounts if renting outside the peak season (Sept–May).

BUS PASSPORTS

Bus Passports – open tickets allowing you unrestricted travel on certain routes – are currently offered by Reykjavík Excursions (☎re.is) and Sterna (☎sterna.is), and are a lot cheaper than paying for the same fares as you go. They're only available through the summer and are subject to roads being open.

Reykjavík Excursions' seven options range from their Hiking Passport (12,500kr), covering a return trip to Landmannaugar and Skógar, to the Circle (42,000kr), which lets you orbit the country in either direction along the Ringroad, though you're not allowed to double back on your route; and the Combo, which covers the Ringroad and Interior routes but is valid between 7 days (58,000kr) and 15 days (91,500kr). **Sterna's** offerings cover a similar Hiking option (12,300kr), the Full Circle around the country via the Ringroad (35,100kr), and an East Circle via Kjölur (41,600kr).

CAR-RENTAL AGENCIES IN ICELAND

Avis ④ avis.is

Budget ④ budget.is

Caravan ④ caravan.is

Car Rental Iceland ④ carrentaliceland.is

Europcar ④ europcar.is

Geysir ④ geysir.is

Hasso ④ hasso.is

Happy Campers ④ happycampers.is

Hertz ④ hertz.is

Kúkú Campers ④ kukucampers.is

National ④ nationalcar.is

Saga ④ sagacarrental.is

Sixt ④ sixt.is

Bringing your own vehicle

The *Norröna* vehicle ferry from Denmark to Seyðisfjörður in the East Fjords (see p.28) makes **bringing your own vehicle** into Iceland fairly straightforward, though obviously you have to get it to Denmark first. Assuming you have been living outside Iceland for the previous twelve months, you're allowed to import the vehicle and 200 litres of fuel (in fuel tanks, not jerry cans) duty free for up to one year starting from the date of entry. You'll need to produce proof that the vehicle is registered or rented by you, and has third-party insurance. Overstay and you'll be liable to full import duties on the vehicle.

Driving regulations and road conditions

Icelanders have a cavalier attitude to **driving** in conditions that most other people would balk at – they have to, or would probably never get behind the wheel – and take dirt tracks and frozen twisting mountain roads very much in their stride. There's a national tendency not to use indicators, and to gravitate towards the road's centre. Low-volume traffic makes for few problems, though an increasing number of visitors have been involved in accidents caused by poor weather and road conditions – know your own abilities and the limits of your vehicle.

Cars are left-hand drives and you **drive on the right**. The **speed limit** is 50km an hour in built-up areas, 90km an hour on surfaced roads, and 80km an hour on gravel. **Seat belts** are compulsory for all passengers, and **headlights** must be on at least half-beam all the time.

Roadsigns you'll soon become familiar with – even if you stick to the Ringroad – are “Einbreið bru”, indicating a single-lane bridge sometimes also marked by flashing yellow beacons; and “Malbik endar”, marking the end of a surfaced road. **Bright orange signs** marked “Varuð” or “Hætta” (warning or

hazard) alert you to temporary local problems, such as roadworks, ground-nesting birds on the road (“fuglar á vegi”) or **sandstorms**.

Other common problems include having other vehicles spray you with windscreen-cracking **gravel** as they pass – slow down and pull over as far as possible to minimize this, especially on unsurfaced roads. Most fields are unfenced so always beware of **livestock** wandering about. When there's snow – though you'd be unlucky to come across much around the Ringroad during the summer – you'll find that the road's edges are marked by evenly spaced yellow poles; stay within their boundaries. **Avoid skidding** on gravel or snow by applying the brakes slowly and as little as possible; use gears instead. **In winter**, everyone fits studded snow tyres to their cars to increase traction, so make sure any vehicle you rent has them too. Pack a good blanket or sleeping bag in case your car gets stuck in snow, and always carry food and water.

Rough roads and four-wheel-driving

Iceland's Interior routes, plus some shorter gravel tracks off the Ringroad, can be really rough, even if not requiring four-wheel-drive. **Four-wheel-drive-only roads** – on which you may encounter stretches of sand, boulders, ice or river crossings – are designated with an “F” on road maps (for instance, the Sprengisandur route is F26), and it's illegal to drive conventional vehicles along them.

Precautions for four-wheel-drivers include never tackling roads alone; being properly equipped with all rescue gear and tools (and knowing in advance how to use them); and always carrying more than enough fuel, food and water. Leave your details with **Safe Travel** (see box, p.32) or tell someone reliable where you're going and when you'll be back, so that a rescue can be mounted if you don't show – but don't forget to contact them when you do get back safely. You'll also need **advance information** on road and weather conditions (see box, p.33).

INTERIOR ROAD DATES

Interior roads only open between June and September each year. But the exact dates depend on weather conditions; after the long winter of 2014/15, many opened a month later than usual. Be aware that, as bus travel through the Interior is entirely dependent on the **roads being open**, advertised services can be cancelled in bad weather.

Vehicles easily **bog down** in snow, mud or soft sand, and if that happens it is vital to maintain **forward momentum**: while you're still moving forward, resist the temptation to change gear, as you'll lose your impetus by doing so. If you do stop moving forward, spinning wheels will quickly dig the vehicle in, so take your foot off the accelerator immediately. Hopefully you'll be able to reverse out – otherwise, start digging. Reducing tyre pressure to around 10psi increases traction on soft surfaces, but you'll need to pump tyres up again once you're back on harder surfaces.

Rivers are potentially very dangerous – many people have drowned in their cars in the Interior. They come in two types: **spring-fed rivers** have a constant flow, while **glacial rivers** fluctuate considerably depending on the time of day and prevailing weather conditions. These are at their lowest during the early morning and after a dry spell of weather; conversely, they can be much deeper in the afternoon once the sun has melted the glacial ice that feeds them, or when it's raining. Some rivers are bridged but many are not; **fords** are marked with a "V" on maps. You need to assess the depth and speed of the river first to find the best crossing point – never blindly follow other vehicle tracks, in case the crossing conditions have changed – and to wear a **lifejacket** and tie yourself to a lifeline when entering the river to check its depth. If the water is going to come more than halfway up the wheels, slacken off the fan belt, block the engine's air intake and waterproof electrics before crossing. Be sure to engage a low gear and four-wheel-drive before entering the water at a slow, steady pace; once in, don't stop (you'll either start sinking into the riverbed or get swept away), or change gear (which

lets water into the clutch). If you stall mid-stream in deep water, turn off the ignition immediately and disconnect the battery, use a winch to pull the vehicle out, and don't restart until you've ensured that water hasn't entered the engine through the air filter – which will destroy the engine.

Cycling

Bad roads, steep gradients and unpredictable weather don't make Iceland an obvious choice for a **cycling** holiday, but there are plenty of people who come here each summer just to pedal around. If you're properly equipped, it's a great way to see the country close-up – you'll also save plenty of money over other forms of transport.

You'll need a solid, 18- or 24-speed **mountain bike** with chunky tyres. You can **rent** these from various agents in Iceland for around 4000kr a day. If you're **bringing your own bike** to Iceland by plane, or getting it from one end of the country to the other by air, you'll need to have the handlebars and pedals turned in, the front wheel removed and strapped to the back, and the tyres deflated.

There are bike shops in Reykjavík, Akureyri and a couple of the larger towns, but otherwise you'll have to provide all **spares** and carry out **repairs** yourself, or find a garage to help. Remember that there are plenty of areas, even on the Ringroad, where assistance may be several days' walk away, and that dust, sand, mud and water will place abnormal strains on your bike. You'll definitely suffer a few **punctures**, so bring a repair kit, spare tyre and tubes, along with the relevant tools, spare brake pads, spokes, chain links and cables.

Around the coast you shouldn't need excessively warm **clothing** – a sweater and waterproof in addition to your normal gear should be fine – but make sure it's all quick-drying. If travelling through the Interior, weatherproof jackets, leggings, gloves and headwear, plus ample warm clothing, are essential. Thick-soled neoprene **surf boots** will save cutting your feet on rocks during river crossings.

It's not unfeasible to cover around 90km a day on paved stretches of the Ringroad, but elsewhere the same distance might take three days and conditions may be so bad that you walk more than you ride. Give yourself four weeks to circuit the Ringroad at an easy pace – this would average around 50km a day. Make sure you've worked out how far it is to the next store before passing up the chance to buy **food**, and don't get caught out by supermarkets' short weekend hours (see p.45). **Off-road cycling** is prohibited in order to protect the landscape, so stick to the tracks.

SAFE TRAVEL

If you're planning to hike, cycle or drive into Iceland's remoter corners, sign up first with safetravel.is. The website provides alerts for hiking trail and highland road conditions, plus advice on how to prepare for your trip, and allows you to leave a travel plan and contact information with them, which will be followed up if you fail to report back at the appointed time.

Call 112 in case of an **emergency**. For those with smartphones, there's also a free **112 Iceland app** available which, when activated, transmits your location and nominated contact information to the Rescue Services.

If it all gets too much, put your bike on a **bus** for 3500kr. If there's space, bikes go in the luggage compartment; otherwise they are tied to the roof or back. Either way, protect your bike by wrapping and padding it if possible.

For help in planning your trip – but not bike rental – contact the **Icelandic Mountain Bike Club** (Íslenski Fjallahjólaklúbburinn, or IFHK; fjallahjolaklubburinn.is), which organizes club weekends and has heaps of advice for cyclists. You can download most of the latter and contact members through the website, which has English text.

Hitching

Hitching around Iceland is possible if you have plenty of time. Expect less traffic the further you go from Reykjavík, though you're unlikely to have to wait too long for the next vehicle if you stick to the Ringroad. In the past, hitchers were rare and often the first car would stop; nowadays, Icelanders have become hardened to the sight of foreigners thumbing lifts, and you certainly shouldn't take rides for granted.

Though Iceland is probably a safer place to hitch than elsewhere in Europe, Australia or the US, it still carries **inherent risks**. If you must hitch, never do so alone and remember that you don't have to get in just because someone stops. Given the wide gaps between settlements, it will probably be obvious where you are heading for, but always ask the driver where they are going rather than saying where it is you want to go.

The best places to **line up lifts** are at campsites or hostels; many hostels advertise available car space on their noticeboards. It's also worth checking out the **national car-sharing website**, samferda.net, to see if anyone in the town you're in is going your way.

Tours

Everywhere you go in Iceland you'll find **tours** on offer, ranging from whale-watching cruises, hikes, pony treks and snowmobile trips across southern glaciers to bus safaris covering historic sites, Interior deserts, hot springs and volcanoes or even sight-seeing flights over lakes and islands. Some routes – like the popular Golden Circle via Þingvellir, Geysir and Gullfoss – you can also do independently easily enough, but in other cases you'll find that tours are the only practical way to reach somewhere.

Tours can last anything from a couple of hours to several days, with the widest range offered

WEATHER AND ROAD WEBSITES

English-language weather forecasts can be found at en.vedur.is, which predicts conditions over the forthcoming week. vegag.is shows continually updated road maps, with routes colour-coded according to their condition, along with views from roadside web-cams and information on safe driving in Iceland.

between June and September. **Booking in advance** is always a good idea; **details of tours** and operators are given throughout the Guide. In winter – which as far as tourism is concerned lasts from October to May – many operators close completely, and those that remain open concentrate on Northern Lights, four-wheel-driving and glacier exploration along the fringes of the southern ice caps, as the Interior itself is definitely off-limits by then. While bigger agents in Reykjavík offer trips almost daily in winter, don't expect to be able to just turn up at a small town off-season and get onto a tour – most will require a few days' advance warning in order to arrange everything.

Accommodation

Every settlement in Iceland has somewhere to stay in the shape of a hotel, guesthouse, hostel or campsite, with farms and some rural schools providing accommodation in between. Almost all formal lodgings are found around the settled coastal band; if you're heading into the wilds at any stage, you'll need to camp or make use of hiking huts.

Always **book accommodation in advance**. Tourism to Iceland has rocketed in recent years – in 2015 the country clocked up an incredible million visitors, three times the national population – and during the peak season (June–August) the industry is struggling to cope with demand. The only exceptions here are campsites which – aside from Reykjavík's – don't usually require advance reservations.

City hotels tend to stay open year-round, and though the habit is spreading to smaller settlements, many places still **shut down** in winter, or at least through December. Where accommodation does stay open, winter rates are around 25 percent cheaper than summer ones.

ACCOMMODATION PRICES

Unless otherwise stated, **accommodation prices** quoted in this Guide are for a **double room** in hotels and guesthouses; **per person** for made-up beds or sleeping-bag accommodation; and **per person** for camping.

Budget accommodation options in Iceland include **made-up beds** (with linen supplied) and cheaper **sleeping-bag accommodation** (where you bring your own bag). In both cases you're paying for a bed in a dorm or shared room for less than the price of a single room. So, even if you don't intend to camp, consider bringing a sleeping bag to Iceland.

It's worth picking up the **Áning** and **Icelandic Farm Holiday** (📄farmholidays.is) booklets from tourist information outlets, which between them cover the majority of accommodation and campsite options across the country.

ACCOMMODATION ORGANIZATIONS

Contact details for specific places to stay are given throughout the guide, some of which are run by the following organizations:

Edda 📄hoteledda.is. Twelve schools around the country open as hotels during the summer holidays (see below).

Fosshótel 📄fosshotel.is. Ten strategically located hotels, including at Reykjavík and Akureyri.

Hostelling International Iceland 📄hostel.is. Thirty-three youth hostels, most of them within range of the Ringroad (see opposite).

Icelandair 📄icelandairhotels.com. Nine upmarket hotels, mostly in southern Iceland.

Icelandic Farm Holidays 📄farmholidays.is. Agent for 170 farms offering accommodation around Iceland.

Kea Hotels 📄keahotels.is. Eight top-notch hotels in Akureyri, Mývatn and Reykjavík.

Hotels

Icelandic **hotels** are typically bland, modern, business-oriented blocks, though rooms are comfortable and well furnished as a rule. Bigger establishments might have their own pool, gym or sauna, and there will always be a restaurant, with breakfast included in the cost of a room. **Rates** begin around 30,000kr for an en-suite double; rooms with shared facilities are about 10,000kr cheaper.

A few country schools open up during the summer holidays as **hotels**, twelve of which come under the **Edda** banner (📄hoteledda.is). They're aimed at the mid-range end of things, though a few also provide sleeping-bag accommodation with

shared facilities. Most have a thermally heated pool in the grounds and there's always a restaurant. **Prices** start at 23,000kr for a double and, where available, 10,000kr for a made-up bed and 5000kr for sleeping bags.

Guesthouses

Guesthouses (*gistiheimilið*) tend to have more character than hotels, and they're often family-run. Rooms range from the barely furnished to the very comfortable, though facilities are usually shared, and you'll often find some budget accommodation available too. A breakfast of cereal, toast, cheese and coffee is included, or offered for an extra 1750kr; some places can provide all meals with advance notice. Doubles cost upwards of 18,000kr; made-up beds are around 9000kr per person and sleeping-bag accommodation will be about 6500kr.

Farms

You'll find plenty of **farms** in Iceland (some with histories going back to Saga times) which offer accommodation of some kind, ranging from a room in the farmhouse to hostel-style dormitories or fully furnished, self-contained cabins. Many also encourage guests to take part in the daily routine, or offer horseriding, fishing, guided tours or even four-wheel-drive safaris.

For the most part, farm **prices** are the same as for guesthouses; cabins sleeping four or more can work out a good deal for a group at around 25,000kr. Come prepared to cook for yourself, though meals are usually available if booked in advance.

Hostels

Hostelling International Iceland (📄hostel.is) runs 33 hostels, ranging from big affairs in Reykjavík to old farmhouses sleeping four out in the wilds. All are owner-operated, have self-catering kitchens and either offer bookings for local tours or organize them themselves. Some provide meals with advance notice and have laundry facilities. Many open all year too, though you'd be hard-pushed to reach remote ones until winter is well and truly over – turn up out of season, however, and you'll often receive a warm welcome.

Dormitory sleeping-bag accommodation is the norm (at around 4500kr), though doubles are sometimes offered (around 12,500kr).

Youth hostel associations

Holders of a Hostelling International card get a 25 percent discount – you can buy cards at Icelandic hostels or from hostelling associations in your own country.

US AND CANADA

Hostelling International–American Youth Hostels

🌐 hiusa.org.

Hostelling International Canada 🌐 hihostels.ca.

UK AND IRELAND

Youth Hostels Association (YHA) UK 🌐 yha.org.uk.

Scottish Youth Hostels Association UK 🌐 syha.org.uk.

Irish Youth Hostel Association Ireland 🌐 anoi.ie.

Hostelling International Northern Ireland Northern Ireland

🌐 hini.org.uk.

AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND SOUTH AFRICA

Australia Youth Hostels Association Australia 🌐 yha.com.au.

Youth Hostelling Association New Zealand New Zealand

🌐 yha.co.nz.

Camping

Camping is a great way to experience Iceland, especially during the light summer nights, when it's bright enough in your tent at midnight to feel like it's time to get up. You'll also minimize expenditure, whether you make use of the country's 150 or so campsites or set up for free in the nearest field.

Official campsites are only **open** between June and some point in September – though you're welcome to use them out of season if you can live without their facilities (just shower at the nearest pool). They vary from no-frills affairs with level ground, a toilet and cold running water to those sporting windbreaks, hot showers (always 500kr extra), laundry and sheltered kitchen areas. Electricity for motorhomes costs 600kr a night. On-site shops or cafés are unusual, so stock up in advance. Campsites in the Interior are very barely furnished, usually with just a pit toilet.

While a few campsites are free, **prices** are usually around 1200kr **per person** per day. If you plan to spend every night in a tent, a **Camping Card** (🌐 campingcard.is; €105) might save a lot of money: valid for 28 nights at **selected campsites** around the country, the one card covers up to two adults and four children.

If you're doing extensive hiking or cycling there will be times that you'll have to **camp in the wild**. The main challenge here is to find a flat, rock-free

ACCOMMODATION ALTERNATIVES

Useful websites that provide alternatives to standard hotel and hostel accommodation.

Airbnb 🌐 airbnb.com.

CouchSurfing 🌐 couchsurfing.org.

Vacation Rentals by Owner 🌐 vrbo.com.

space to pitch a tent. Where possible, always **seek permission** for this at the nearest farmhouse before setting up; farmers often don't mind – and might direct you to a good site – but may need to keep you away from pregnant stock or the like.

Note, however, that after years of having to repair damaged verges and tidy up campers' garbage, toilet paper and raw sewage, some understandably irate landowners have erected "No Camping" signs on their properties. When camping wild, you must bury anything biodegradable and carry all other rubbish out with you. It's also forbidden to camp in reserves and at many popular tourist destinations, except at designated areas.

Camping equipment

Your **tent** is going to be severely tested, so needs to be in a good state of repair and built to withstand strong winds and heavy rain – bring along a good-quality dome or tunnel design, with a space between the flysheet and the tent entrance where you can store your backpack and boots out of the weather. Whatever the conditions are when you set up, always use guy ropes, the maximum number of pegs and a flysheet, as the weather can change rapidly; in some places, especially in the Interior, it's also advisable to weight the pegs down with rocks.

Also invest in a decent **sleeping bag** – even in summer, you might have to cope with sub-zero conditions – and a **sleeping mat** for insulation and comfort. A waterproof sheet to put underneath your tent is also a good idea. Unless you find supplies of driftwood you'll need a **fuel stove** too, as Iceland's few trees are all protected. Butane gas canisters are sold in Reykjavik and at many fuel stations around the country, but you're possibly better off with a pressure stove capable of taking a variety of fuels such as unleaded petrol (*býlaust*) or kerosene (*steinolía*). White gas/Coleman Fuel, a naphtha-based product recommended by several pressure stove manufacturers, is increasingly available; don't confuse it with the widely available thinner, white spirit/shellite.

As for **food**, never buy purpose-made freeze-dried stuff from specialist camping stores – most