

Your swimsuit might not be the first item that comes to mind when packing but the Blue Lagoon is one steamy fantasy spot in which you can delight. Before you go, read and take this Inside Scoop with your travel documents.

travel: delighting in the spirit of adventure • a vacation from home to explore places that are not your home • knowing life is different, knowing this is a joy of travel • enjoying the journey, not just the destination • a privilege best used with patience, humour and curiosity • fun • coming home with great tales •

A Guide to Safe Selfies and How to Avoid Hot Tub Awkwardness are just two online videos done by locals. Tutorials enlighten visitors on the country's lesser known aspects, often amusingly, www.inspiredbyiceland.com/icelandacademy.

Trivia: colours in Iceland's flag depict volcano fire (red), mountains (blue) and—as Canadians well know—snow.

Your Counsellor

Our knowledge and experience help turn dreams into first-rate vacations. Ask about any details, including:

- stopovers between Canada and Europe
- seasonal activities & festivals
- booking the best tours
- full insurance coverage.

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Inside Scoop: ICELAND

Know before you go: travel isn't just your destination, it's also the journey

Taking just over four hours to fly from Canada's east coast, three hours from Europe, Iceland is not only the perfect stopover, it's a unique and truly stunning destination. If you're considering Europe, ask your counsellor; you can usually get free stopovers under seven days on Icelandair. Helpful tips:

- Let family/friends know how to reach you in an emergency. Especially if you're hiking, give them your itinerary and contact info.
- Take a valid passport www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/index.asp.
- While Europeans are covered by Iceland's health insurance, Canadians are charged. We recommend Maritime Travel medical and cancellation/interruption insurance.
- Icelandic is the official language; English is spoken widely, as is Danish.
- Internet access is easy and affordable. Check with your cell provider for roaming.
- The Icelandic Króna (ISK) is the currency (check exchange rates). ATMs and banks are common—look for a Hraðbanki. Major credit and debit cards are widely accepted; for security, notify your bank and credit card companies when you'll be away.
- Iceland uses 220 volt/50Hz; take a converter/adaptor. Most hotels have hair dryers.
- Explore the many lodging choices: camping, farm holidays, guesthouses, cottages, mountain huts and five-star hotels.

Above all, travel with a positive attitude—having patience and a spirit of adventure will carry you through any experience!

Totally Cool Trivia: The First Lady of Iceland is Canadian Eliza Reid.

Pack Strategically

The world is overrun with black bags; put coloured tape or ribbon on your luggage to spot it quickly. Put your name outside and inside and remove old tags. In your carry-on, pack valuables; over-the-counter and prescription drugs in original containers with dosage and your doctor's phone number. Pack liquids/lotions/gels in checked bags (inside plastic bags)—due to carry-on restrictions, the maximum size container is 100ml(3.4oz). All must fit in 1 clear/resealable plastic bag of no more than 1 litre (often available at start of screening), then place the bag in the tray. You may take baby formula, food/milk for a child under 2 years (0-24 months).

In carry-on pack pens/notebook, hand wipes, munchies. Permitted in carry-on: laptops, cell phones, disposable razors, umbrellas, canes and nail clippers. Items you can't carry on include knives, sports equipment and corkscrews. Check with your airline and www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca/en for restrictions.

No Matter the Season, Layer!

If you're hoping for a heat wave, this isn't the place (even in summer, temperatures can be 14C/57F); in spring and fall 55C/42F and winter .4C/33F. (Iceland shares a weather joke with Nova Scotia: "If you don't like the weather, just wait five minutes.") Pack layers and be prepared for rain with sturdy weatherproof walking shoes and windbreakers for cool periods (even under the Midnight Sun). If you don't sleep until well after the sun sets, be prepared to be awake most of June when the sun never entirely sets (like an eternal sunset), followed by the beautiful bright nights of summer.

Getting Around

Renting a vehicle is a terrific way to get around so take your provincial driver's licence and make sure your insurance is valid. The Highway 1 ring road is indeed that—the most travelled road, ringing around Iceland for a gorgeous 1,332km drive. You'll encounter all types of roads from paved to loose gravel, so be careful especially on rural and narrow mountain roads. Use seat belts, don't use a cell phone while driving and note that driving under the influence of alcohol is forbidden. Although it's easy to, don't be distracted by scenery and check weather forecasts in advance, especially if you plan to go to the highlands. If going into the interior, have appropriate gear and report travel plans to www.safetravel.is. Ferries and bus routes (to more than 40 towns) are convenient. **Trivia:** Blue Lagoon bathing took top spot in 2017's No Regrets bucket-list travel experience in a Contiki survey of 5,000 people worldwide aged 18 to 35.

Your Airline

Sign up online for your airline(s) email or text flight notifications as your flight could be delayed (the plane might be flying in). CATSA notes "Travellers should arrive at the airport earlier than usual, exercise patience and **contact their airline for further information on their flight(s).**" Airline staff are on duty some 3hrs prior: due to staffing and security, check-in closes 1hr before departure. If late, you're not entitled to board (or a refund). Unless booked ahead, seats are first-come first-served. **Baggage:** Size/weight restrictions for checked and carry-on varies: check with your airline. If you plan on taking sports gear, Icelandair has three categories of prices (small to large): see their website as "special" baggage must be paid in advance. **Entry & Departure:** keep a separate copy or cell photo of your passport's ID page. Duty free stores are on arrival at Keflavik International Airport. **Tip:** Shuttle services to Reykjavik take some 45 minutes; some stop at the Blue Lagoon where you can enjoy a lovely welcome (and/or departure).



Get Packing Checklist and General Planning & Packing Tips

at www.maritimetravel.ca/inside-scoops

- Your sense of adventure & humour!

Coming Home

Travellers come home with more than great memories, but many things can't be brought in: plants, meat/animal products, drugs or endangered species parts. One concern in Iceland is protecting the environment—visitors are asked to explore with care and respect the land (don't even take a pebble). Know your limits and exemptions, www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/travel-voyage/bgb-rmf-eng.html such as on duty free alcohol and tobacco.



Websites and emails in blue are hyperlinked; just click!

Canadians: Emergency? Canada's embassy is at Tungata 14, 101 Reykjavik, 9am to noon (afternoon by appt), tel: +354 -575-6500, rkjvk@international.gc.ca www.canadainternational.gc.ca/iceland-islande/index.aspx. Or call Global Affairs (collect if needed) 613-996-8885 sos@international.gc.ca.

What To Do...What To Do...

There's a huge array of activities here for an island with a population between that of Saskatoon, SK and Windsor, ON (approximately 320,000). Before you go, talk with your counsellor about the myriad tours and pre-book—besides better budgeting, you'll get to your must-see sites, e.g., tours to 2014's **Holuhraun** volcano eruption site sell out well in advance and **Blue Lagoon** has limited capacity. If you're a **Game of Thrones** fan, book a specialty tour of sites where filming took place. Some of the most popular (for darn good reasons) and once-in-a-lifetime excursions:

- There are eight regions ranging from **Reykjavik**—with its nightlife and own geothermal beach with white sands—to the largely uninhabited **Westfjords** in the north west and interior **Highlands** (in summer months) with the **Holuhraun**. If you're a hiker, you'll see every type of landscape here and unspoiled discoveries around every cliff, such as the geothermal **Landmannalaugar** (take a bathing suit). The woodland nature reserve **Pórsmörk** is a "hidden" valley, a popular base camp.
- The **West, Sagaland**, is geographically diverse, with craters, mountains and the highest waterfall, **Glymur in Hvalfjörður fjord**, under an hour from Reykjavik.
- If you're a birder, visit **Látrabjarg**; it hosts nearly half the world's population of certain species (and is the westernmost point of Europe).
- The **South coast Golden Circle** route has the most visited glaciers, **Gullfoss** waterfalls and **Geysir** hot spring area. The **East** has small fjords, islands and fishing villages—a hub for summer's music and art festivals (check the festival calendar as they (Vikings anyone?) run all year. Fore anyone? The **North** is home to summer's **Arctic Open Golf Championship**, also **Húsavík's Whale Museum** and **Akureyri**, Iceland's second largest urban area with a sweet downtown for strolling.
- Consider a cycling tour: It's a terrific way to see the landscape. Bike paths are not common and you'll be sharing the road with vehicles, some on gravel roads. Stay on paths (to not damage the environment) and note that hilly terrains and distances between towns can be considerable—as with car travel, keep apprised of weather forecasts, have proper gear and let people know of your travel plans.
- **Reykjanes**, the main airport's region, has a rugged landscape with caves, craters and in one lava field, that famous dreamy **Blue Lagoon**. Spend all day swimming, napping, eating, relaxing, drinking, did we mention relaxing? If you don't want to swim, there's a well-priced Visitor Pass. Bathing in thermal baths is tradition that goes back to at least the 12th century: this is one of the finest with spa amenities, a tour, science lesson and onsite accommodations. You can go ice climbing and caving year round, also whale watching or horseback riding.

Tip: Before you go, watch the charming movie *The Girl in the Café*—it largely takes place in Iceland with neat scenes especially near the airport.

More Cool Stuff (not just because it's Iceland...)

The Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) are spectacular bright waves of colour that illuminate night skies. Once you've seen them, you never forget. Being a natural phenomena, there's no guarantee when they'll appear: the best months are between September and March and they appear in certain conditions—a clear sky with cold temperatures. Iceland is a haven for cultural and artistic activities, so go to local events. If you buy gifts or souvenirs, many items are shipped in so look for specialties made there such as ceramics and knitwear (*How to knit like an Icelandic man*, <https://vimeo.com/16783518>). Local food and drink make terrific gifts. As anywhere you visit, calculate taxes into purchases as sales taxes can range from 7% to 25.5% VAT.

Ask a Guðmundur...huh? More than 98% of the people in the world named "Guðmundur" live here. Whether you want tips on activities, food or culture, they're "qualified to help you discover all the wonderful little secrets that Iceland keeps," <https://www.inspiredbyiceland.com/ask-gudmundur>.

Our 24/7 Emergency Service

We constantly survey airlines, local tour companies and hotels to ensure they meet our customer service standards, so don't let a problem ruin your holiday. Nearly all issues can be handled quickly on site—first seek help from the venue's local staff. Otherwise, call our Emergency Travel Service at 1-888-551-1181. Deposits are non-refundable and non-transferrable. Schedule changes can occur and airlines and tour operators have the right to change flight and/or tour times, alter, combine services or substitute accommodations. Your counsellor will work with you to ensure you receive information as soon as possible and ensure satisfaction. See your brochure and ticket terms and conditions.

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