

Arctic Circle



Visit North Iceland
THE ARCTIC NORTH



#NorthIceland

Welcome to the Arctic North Iceland

Hiking and Cycling

During recent years, services for walkers and hikers have increased significantly in North Iceland tourism. The hallmark of North Iceland for walkers is its wide variety of trails. Trail maps and special programmes have been set up in many areas and can be found at tourist information centres. Cycling is a mode of travel which gives you the chance to be in close contact with nature all year round. Renting a bike is a great way to explore this land of fire and ice.

Whitewater Rafting

Enjoy the excitement of whitewater river rafting in Vestari-Jökulsá, (West Glacial River) or Austari-Jökulsá, (East Glacial River) which has earned the reputation of being one of the most exciting rivers in Europe. Besides the excitement of white water river rafting there are more relaxed family tours on offer in Vestari-Jökulsá (West Glacial River).

Volcanic Area

One of Iceland's most visited places is the Lake Mývatn region with hot springs, craters, geothermal nature baths and amazing lava formations, as well as Mývatn Nature Baths, the unique geothermal lagoon.

Northern Lights

Northern lights are often enjoyed in North Iceland. From end of August to April the blackness of the sky may be suddenly riven by dancing, flickering veils of light, in green, white or red. The area offers locations where conditions for observation are excellent. Favourable weather conditions create unusually high chances for catching the lights.

The Highlands

Highland excursions taking you to Herðubreið the "Queen of Mountains", Kverfjöll or Hveravellir are extremely popular. Walking in the fresh mountain air or driving along unmade trails in super jeeps and other rough terrain vehicles is an amazing experience. In Arnarvatnsheiði, south of Húnaflói, trout fishing in the wild, lonely nature is a special enjoyment for the keen angler.

The Icelandic Horse

Riding tours for any ability, horse shows and exhibitions are widely available in North Iceland, including Skagafjörður, the centre of Icelandic horsemanship. Be sure not to miss the opportunity to experience "tölt", the unique gait of the Icelandic horse.



Whale Watching

Whale watching is a unique experience in Eyjafjörður or Húsavík which is known as the whale watching capital. Surrounded by birds and beautiful scenery, you can observe dolphins and minke, humpbacks or even blue whales.

People

North Icelanders are known for their pride and pure spirit. They love the outdoors and this can easily be seen in the wide variety of outdoor activities available, from quiet meditation and historic walks to mountain skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, birdwatching, horseback riding and enjoying local food or folk museums, to name but a few.

Vatnajökull National Park

Jökulsárgljúfur was declared one of Iceland's National Parks in 1973 and is now part of Vatnajökull National Park which extends from Ásbyrgi to Dettifoss along the canyon of the glacier river Jökulsá. Jökulsá is one of the most powerful glacial rivers in Iceland and the second-longest, 206km. There are several interesting places to visit in the national park, such as Dettifoss, Europe's most powerful waterfall, Hljóðaklettar, Ásbyrgi, Askja and Iceland's newest lava field Holuhraun which is 80 times larger than the expanse of lava formed by the Eyjafjallajökull eruption.

Birding Iceland

The rich bird life of North Iceland, distributed over widely varying habitats, displays a diversity seldom surpassed anywhere else in the country, and accessible areas abound for seeing species such as the Barrow's goldeneye, harlequin duck, gyrfalcon, rock ptarmigan, the great northern gannet and the guillemot. Three Birding Trails have been mapped out for North Iceland, each one having its own character.

Seal Watching

Seals can be observed throughout the year in their natural habitat, either from land or by boat around Hvammstangi and the beautiful Vatnsnes peninsula where you also find the Hvítserkur sea cliff.

Arctic Circle

North Iceland lies just south of the Arctic Circle, with Hraunhafnartangi being the northernmost point of the Icelandic mainland and Grímsey Island straddling the Arctic Circle.



Winter Magic

Ski Areas

North Iceland is the number one winter destination for Icelanders. Seven ski areas, including Hlíðarfjall, the country's most popular one, offer slopes and lifts of all levels, the season extending from the end of November to May. Facilities for cross-country skiers, with prepared trails, can be found in many locations. Whether you are a beginner or an extreme skier you have the opportunity to experience a unique natural environment while skiing.

Troll Peninsula

Possibilities for backcountry skiing, alpine ski touring, cat skiing and heli skiing are endless, with the Troll Peninsula being the centre of activity. Skiing on virgin slopes all the way down to the Arctic Ocean is what characterizes this skiers' paradise, where snow conditions remain favourable well into spring.

Snow Adventure

Super Jeep and Snowmobile adventure tours enable you to experience the unique highlands of North Iceland. Tours include guided tours through the rough terrain of the mountains and fjords of the North, or tours to natural attractions such as Dettifoss waterfall or Askja Caldera. The breath-taking beauty of North Iceland's highland wilderness will remain in your memory forever. Snowmobile tours let you breathe in fresh air while travelling through unspoilt nature and maybe even get some adrenaline running if that is what you want.

Aurora Borealis

The Northern Lights – also called Aurora Borealis – are among the most spectacular shows on earth and can frequently be seen in North Iceland from September through April on clear and crisp nights. White and green are usually the dominant colours but sometimes there are considerable colour variations, as the pressure and composition of the atmosphere change at different altitudes.



Geothermal Bathing and Swimming

Icelanders love visiting the 32 outdoor swimming pools at least one of which is found in every village, each one with its own unique aspects. Soaking in a hot outdoor pool after a day spent outdoors skiing or hiking is a magical experience. North Iceland's favourite lagoon, the Mývatn Nature Baths, is surrounded by the volcanic nature and lava fields of the Mývatn area. The historic Grettislaug geothermal pool, named after Grettir the Strong, gives you an opportunity to relax while surrounded by the ocean and a black sand beach.

Yule Lads

North Iceland is the home to the 13 Yule Lads (Santa Clauses) who live in Dimmuborgir lava field. They are the cheeky sons of the trolls Grýla and Leppalúði. 13 days before Christmas they turn up one by one during the night and give presents to children who behave well. In Dimmuborgir they can be visited in November and December, but watch out as they tend to tease you when least expected.

Christmas

In December you can expect a white Christmas in North Iceland and from October to April the North is truly a winter wonderland. Icelanders celebrate Christmas on Aðfangadagur (Christmas Eve), the 24th of December. Church bells ringing mark the start of Christmas at six o'clock in the afternoon and people enjoy the evening at home with family and friends, celebrating old traditions and generally having hangikjöt (smoked lamb) for dinner. On Christmas Day, the 25th of December, people tend to go out for family gatherings, often playing cards and enjoying cakes and hot chocolate. On New Year's Eve Icelanders like to gather together with families and friends for a more vibrant evening, partying, shooting up fireworks and watching a traditional comedy show on TV that recaps the main items of news from that year in a satirical way.



Experience Nature

Hvitserkur

A 15 m high monolith just off shore on the eastern side of Vatnsnes peninsula. Many bird species live on the rock and leave their mark which is evident in the whiteness of their droppings.

Kolugljúfur

In Víðidalur valley, the river Víðidalsá flows by the farm Kolugil down into a magnificent gorge, Kolugljúfur. The powerful waterfalls the gorge creates, Kolufossar, are named after the Troll-woman Kola.

Borgarvirki

Borgarvirki is a volcanic plug and stands at 177 m above sea level dominating the surrounding landscape. It is a unique natural phenomenon and has been altered by civilisation through the centuries. The Icelandic Sagas tell that in earlier times Borgarvirki was used as a fortress for military purposes.

Hveravellir

A unique nature reserve situated on the Kjölur route through the middle of the west highlands between the glaciers Langjökull and Hofsjökull. Hveravellir ranks among the most beautiful geothermal areas in the world with smoking fumaroles and hot pools with sky-blue boiling water.

Drangey Island

This rocky island in Skagafjörður is a flat topped mass of tuff, rising almost 200 metres out of the ocean. The cliffs serve as nesting sites for millions of sea birds and have been used throughout Iceland's history for egg collection and bird netting. Grettis Saga recounts that both Grettir and his brother Illugi lived in Drangey, for three years and were slain there.

Goðafoss

The "Waterfall of the Gods" is in the glacial river Skjálfandafliót, just off the Ring Road by Fosshóll. The name of the waterfall refers to an incident in one of the Icelandic Sagas where Þorgeir the Lawspeaker threw his symbolic likenesses of the old Nordic gods into the waterfall.

Aldeyjarfoss

In upper Bárðardalur valley, in the glacial river Skjálfandafliót, one of Iceland's most photogenic waterfalls flows over a layer of intriguing basalt columns.

Ásbyrgi

Ásbyrgi is a densely wooded horse-shoe shaped canyon in Öxarfjörður where you find numerous hiking tracks. Ásbyrgi is part of the Vatnajökull National Park. The national park reaches from highway 85, by Ásbyrgi, south to Dettifoss, covering an area of 120 km².



Dettifoss in Jökulsárgljúfur

Dettifoss has the greatest volume of any waterfall in Europe, 500 cubic metres of water per second plunging over its edge. Dettifoss is 45 m high and 100 m wide. A pleasant hiking trail, 34 km in length, winds along the canyon from Dettifoss to Ásbyrgi.

Melrakkaslétta

A remote headland between Óxarfjörður and Þistilfjörður. On the western side is the red coloured, 73 m high rock formation Rauðinúpur. Further north, the small peninsula Hraunhafnartangi is the northernmost point of the Icelandic mainland, being only 3 km south of the Arctic Circle.

Rauðanes

The headland Rauðanes is located south of Viðarfjall mountain, midway between Raufarhöfn and Þórshöfn. This small but scenic peninsula is endowed with off-shore sea stacks, an exposed rock face called Stakkatorfa, caves and steep cliffs which are home to numerous nesting birds.

Langanes

A narrow peninsula between Þistilfjörður and Bakkaflói shaped like a goose with a very large head. A rough road leads to Fontur at the tip of the peninsula which is characterised on the northern and southern shores by steep sea cliffs known as Skoruvíkurbjarg and Skálavíkurbjarg.

Askja

Askja is a 50 km² caldera in the Dyngjufjöll mountains. In an eruption in 1875, an area of 11 km² on the south-eastern side of Askja caved in to form Lake Öskjuvatn, which is 217 m in depth making it the deepest lake in Iceland, and, to the north of it a tephra crater known as Víti (Hell).

Lake Mývatn Geothermal Area

In the Lake Mývatn region, located on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the most interesting sights are of a volcanic or geothermal nature, the centrepiece being the 37 km² lake Mývatn itself, which averages a depth of only 2.5 m. The lake contains over 50 islands and islets, mostly pseudo craters formed when molten lava flowed into the lake. Places of interest include the pseudo craters at Skútustaðir, Höfði peninsula, Dimmuborgir lava formations, Hverfell crater, Hverir hot spring area, Krafla volcanic area and Mývatn Nature Baths. The area is also considered one of the best bird watching locations in Iceland. During the summer months there are more species of duck gathered in and around the waters of Lake Mývatn than anywhere else on the planet. Mývatn and its wetlands are protected as a nature reserve, the Mývatn-Laxá Nature Conservation Area.



Culture and Sagas

Local Food

Northern Icelanders are renowned for being great gourmets, and their food customs and traditions have a long history. The north has a diverse range of restaurants where the main emphasis is on cooking varied dishes from fresh and local produce, including both local and international traditions.

Museums and Visitor Centres

Every town has museums representing many different aspects of life in Iceland. The culture and way of life from past centuries is commemorated in historical museums showing artefacts of olden days, mostly relating to the traditional occupations of agriculture and fishing. Natural science museums focus on representative samples and noteworthy characteristics of Iceland's geology, flora and fauna.

Turf Houses

The traditional country architecture of natural stone and turf houses is well represented in North Iceland where you can visit both old turf houses and churches. The tradition of using turf as a building material dates back to the settlement of Iceland in the 8th century, but the last known records of residents of turf dwellings in North Iceland are from the middle of the 20th century. These old houses are well preserved and recreate some of the atmosphere of those far distant times. They also shed light on the facilities available in Iceland in bygone days.

History and Culture

The local people have a genuine and friendly nature which makes visitors feel at home, and they are rightly proud of their history. North Iceland has numerous sites of historical interest and a number of museums where visitors are introduced to the art of storytelling, poems and sagas stretching back to the Viking Age.

Mount Herðubreið was voted The Queen of Icelandic Mountains in 2002



Folklore and Traditions

Icelandic folklore is a rich tapestry, with stories of magic, elves, trolls, ghosts and spirits of all kinds. Every story starts with a description of the landscape and animals to colour the storyteller's mind. Traditional celebrations have lived on through the centuries. "Þorrablót" is a midwinter festival where people feast on traditional food, celebrating the return of the rising sun after a long dark winter. "Réttir" are gatherings of people, horses and sheep and are an important aspect of life in Iceland signalling the successful roundup of sheep from their mountain pastures. They also mark the onset of winter.

Culture and Art

Art has a huge presence in the area and you can choose between visits to the artists in their studios or viewing larger art galleries and exhibitions. Be sure to check out the various musical events or theatre productions that are offered throughout the year. Akureyri boasts one of the most vibrant music scenes in Iceland, attracting local people and visitors into town each weekend.

Local People

North Icelanders are genuine, friendly and proud of their history and culture. The area boasts numerous sites of historical interest and a number of museums where visitors are introduced to the art of storytelling, poems and sagas stretching back to the Viking Age.

Akureyri Botanical Garden is the northernmost botanical garden in the world, displaying almost every Icelandic plant there is and around 7000 foreign species. In the garden, rare Icelandic plants and protected species are preserved.



The Icelandic Horse

Why not go on a riding adventure in North Iceland — a truly unique experience. When one considers the total lack of roads in former times, it is not surprising that these horses were referred to as man's most necessary servant. Winding through the untouched, charming nature of North Iceland, riding trails follow the coast, lead off into the scenic mountains, or revive the use of age-old trails with their varied history.

Icelandic horse shows demonstrate this beautiful creature's special gaits, temperament and traditional uses. These shows are set up by many companies that also offer short or long riding tours, ranging from 30 minutes along scenic local trails, and up to several days taking you into the highlands.

Experiencing an autumn roundup by the owners of free-ranging horses is no less of an adventure. Sitting on the corral fence and watching the action, you will see excitement, hear singing, and find happiness in every face.



The Icelandic horse has 5 gaits; the fifth and unique one, called "tölt", is known for its comfort and speed.

Local Food

A Local Food Festival is held every second year during the first weekend of October. The purpose of the festival is to promote the diverse selection of restaurants, food producers large and small, and of course the food culture in North Iceland in general.

The biggest single event is The Local Food Festival Exhibition to be held in Akureyri the first Saturday in October. There we have food producers and restaurants coming together, inviting local people and visitors to come for a taste of what is on offer, and a selection of small competitions related to food.

This weekend restaurants all over North Iceland invite guest chefs to take part and set up special events, local menus etc., so that you are able to travel around the area and learn about the different traditions of each district.

The Local Food Festival exhibition is held to reflect the strength of the North as the country's largest food production area. It is, therefore, an ideal presentation platform for companies and individuals in the sector where they can draw attention to their production, cuisine, catering, food tourism and trade associated with this industry.

Laufabrauð, fried thin flatbread with beautiful carved decorations has been the signature side dish at Christmas for families in North Iceland from the 17th century. Families still have the tradition of coming together to prepare this special type of bread while enjoying the Christmas spirit. This tradition has now spread throughout Iceland.



Whale Watching

Observing whales in their natural surroundings has become one of the most common activities among visitors to North Iceland. In fact, Húsavík and Eyjafjörður were among the first places in Iceland to offer whale-watching excursions.

In North Iceland, you can easily get up close to humpbacks, dolphins and minke, or even blue whales. Whale watching options include trips in oak-boats, rib safaris, schooners, boats run only by renewable energy and various vessels perfectly renovated for the purpose of whale watching. These tours are a unique experience available both in Húsavík, known as the whale watching capital, or in the calm waters of Eyjafjörður fjord, sheltered by surrounding mountains.

The number of species, along with favourable weather and sea conditions, make North Iceland one of the best Icelandic areas for spotting whales. Skjálfandi Bay and Eyjafjörður fjord are both blessed with sheltered waters, beautiful scenery and teeming bird life – perfect for a boat ride on a summer's day. The experience becomes complete when observing dolphins, minke, humpbacks or even blue whales play alongside one of the particularly appealing oakwood boats used exclusively in North Iceland or other types of boats specially designed and set up for whale watching.

Húsavík Whale Museum offers a comprehensive exhibition on whales, their habitats and way of life. It now exhibits a 22 m long skeleton of a Blue Whale that drifted from the open sea to beach on Skagi peninsula.





Birding Iceland

Birding trails, bird watching hides and bird exhibitions are available throughout North Iceland. You can see up to 80 species of birds on trails depending on the season. Among the specialities that can be found all year round are the Barrow's goldeneye, harlequin duck, gyrfalcon and the rock ptarmigan.

The rich bird life of North Iceland, distributed over widely varying habitats, displays a diversity seldom surpassed in Iceland and offers accessible areas for seeing species such as the Barrow's goldeneye, harlequin duck, gyrfalcon, rock ptarmigan, the great northern gannet and the guillemot. Wetlands are famed for rich bird life, constituting an important habitat for many Icelandic breeding species, and several of the most renowned of these areas are in North Iceland.

Three Birding Trails have been mapped out for North Iceland, each one having its own character. North East Iceland, including the famous Lake Mývatn region, provides you with more species than anywhere else found in Iceland. This is one of the best duck spotting environments in the world where you easily find the Barrow's goldeneye and harlequin ducks and areas unique for their dense populations of gyrfalcon and rock ptarmigan. The steep cliffs of Skoruvíkurbjarg present the only breeding grounds of the northern gannet in mainland Iceland, as well as accessible puffin colonies in their natural surroundings moulded by volcanic activity.

In Northwest Iceland many species of birds are accompanied by rich local wildlife. In Vatnsnes peninsula you can come up close to seals without disturbing them, either from sea or land. Skagafjörður is often named the cradle of Icelandic horsemanship as it has the highest number of horses per capita in Iceland. On Drangey Island you find a protected area with flocks of seabirds such as the puffin and Brünnich's guillemot. Gauksmýri Lake is ideal for spotting the horned grebe and the red-necked phalarope.

Eyjafjörður fjord and Tröllaskagi Peninsula are characterised by high mountains surrounding deep valleys. Birding areas include the protected wetlands of Húsabakki, calm seas for seabirds and the tranquil islands of Hrísey, Pearl of Eyjafjörður, where the rock ptarmigan behaves in an unusually tame manner, and Grímsey Island on the Arctic Circle which provides excellent opportunities for watching great flocks of puffin and other seabirds.

Did you know that two groups of astronauts trained in the moonlike, volcanic terrain at Askja Caldera, Drekgil and near lake Mývatn in 1965 and 1967?





Seal Watching

Seal watching is a fascinating experience and there is no better place to see these beautiful animals than where they are most at home; that is, in their natural habitat. Seals are naturally curious creatures and therefore, if one is equipped with a good camera, it should be relatively easy to get some excellent pictures of them in their proper environment.

Seal watching is a memorable experience and certainly gives one a new perspective on life and nature. The Icelandic Seal Center at Hvammstangi offers an educational exhibition on seals, and provides information to people seal watching in Vatnsnes peninsula.

Sellátur is the Icelandic name given to coastal breeding grounds for seals; these are to be found wherever seal colonies have settled. The breeding grounds are usually close to the tidemark and seals can be seen lying on the beach or splashing around in the sea at high tide. In each colony there can be as few as one or two animals or as many as several hundred. Vatnsnes peninsula is the best place in the north to study these fascinating creatures.

The last execution in Iceland took place at Þristapar on Vatnsnes Peninsula January 12th 1830, where Agnes and Friðrik were decapitated after being found guilty of murdering two men. Their dramatic story is told in the novel Burial Rites by Hannah Kent.



Swimming and Bathing

Swimming is a very popular activity all year round in Iceland and Icelanders love visiting the 32 outdoor swimming pools, at least one of which can be found in every town or village — each one with its own unique aspects. Everyone enjoys a dip in a swimming pool, whether you choose to splash around in the children's pool, swoosh down the chute, swim a few lengths or just sit around lazily in the hotpot. Floating is a popular activity which can be enjoyed in pools, whether on your own or as part of an organized programme often including massage and gazing at the northern lights.

Geothermal Bathing

Few things are more pleasant than relaxing in a hot pool out in the middle of nature. Iceland has an abundance of easily accessible natural pools. Soaking in one of those after a day spent outdoors skiing or hiking is a magical experience. There are natural bathing places in the north, such as the nature pool in Hveravellir geothermal area, the Mývatn Nature Baths and the crater Víti in Askja.

North Iceland's favourite lagoon, the Mývatn Nature Baths is surrounded by the volcanic environment and lava fields of the Mývatn district. The historic Grettislaug geothermal pool in Sauðárkrúkur, named after Grettir the Strong, gives you an opportunity to relax while surrounded by the ocean and a black sand beach, while looking out to Drangey Island, known for its puffins and rich birdlife. The nature pool at Hveravellir and the pool at Laugafell are located in the highlands where there is no better place to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of Iceland.

Icelanders keep themselves warm in winter by building sturdy concrete houses heated by geothermal water.



Northern Lights

Northern lights can be seen in North Iceland from end of August to mid-April. Enjoy the clear skies by simply looking upwards towards those dancing, flickering veils of light in green, white or red, or take a guided northern lights tour to excellent observation and photography locations. These tours can include a visit to geothermal bathing areas, evening boat tours, snow cat tours or sightseeing in unique locations.

The Northern Lights – also called Aurora Borealis – are among the most spectacular shows on earth and can frequently be seen in North Iceland and its surroundings on clear and crisp nights from September through April. The Northern Lights occur high above the surface of the earth where the atmosphere has become extremely thin, at an altitude of 100-250 km. This phenomenon occurs in the outermost layer of the atmosphere, created by electrically charged particles that make the thin air shine, not unlike a fluorescent light. The Northern Lights can be seen in aurora belts that form 20-25 degrees around the geomagnetic poles, both in the north and the south.

What causes this spectacular phenomenon, so characteristic of our northern lights here in Iceland? Well, electricity is the answer – and of course it all goes back to the sun. Tiny particles, protons and electrons caused by electronic storms on the sun (solar wind) are trapped in the earth's magnetic field where

they begin to spiral back and forth along the magnetic lines of force – circle around the magnetic pole, so to speak. While rushing around endlessly in their magnetic trap, some particles escape into the earth's atmosphere. They begin to hit molecules in the atmosphere and these impacts cause the molecules to glow, thus creating the auroras.

White and green are usually the dominant hues but sometimes there are considerable colour variations, as the pressure and composition of the atmosphere varies at different altitudes. At extremely high altitudes where the pressure is low, there tends to be a reddish glow produced by oxygen molecules when they are struck by the tiny particles of the solar wind. At lower altitudes, where there is higher pressure, the impact-irritated oxygen molecules may glow with a greenish tinge and sometimes there is a reddish lower border created by particles colliding with nitrogen molecules in the immediate vicinity.

The phenomenon is easily explained by modern science. What our ancestors may have thought when they gazed into the brightly-lit winter sky is quite another matter. But by all means don't let any scientific explanation spoil your appreciation of the beauty of the Northern Lights. They are a truly impressive spectacle, whatever their cause.

In North Iceland we have bright nights from the first week of April until mid September. The longest day every year is on the 20-22 of June when we have sun for 23 hours and 40 minutes in Akureyri. The shortest day of the year is on the 20-23 of December when we have only 3 hours and 6 minutes of sunlight in Akureyri. On Grimsey Island which straddles the Arctic Circle we have a whole month during summer when the sun never sets.



Ski Iceland

In North Iceland there are five well-equipped and flood-lit ski resorts open from November to May, offering ski rental and ski schools for everyone. Akureyri ski resort is Iceland's number one ski area, only 5 minutes away from the town centre.

The ski areas in North Iceland all occupy their own niche in the region's magnificent landscape. They offer slopes and lifts suited to both children and adults, and the season can extend from Mid-November to May.

The 5X5 Ski pass is available at every resort and you don't need to buy it in advance. The ski pass allows you to ski in 5 areas for 5 days, or if you prefer you can spend more days in one area.

Off Piste and Heli Skiing

Outside the organized ski areas, the possibilities for backcountry skiing are endless, with the Troll Peninsula being the centre of activity. The terrain looks as though it had been specially created for Alpine ski touring, Cat skiing and Heli Skiing, all of which are activities currently on offer for the avid skier. Skiing on virgin slopes all the way down to the Atlantic Ocean is what characterizes this skiers' paradise and never having to worry about trees blocking the way. Snow conditions remain favourable well into spring, the season lasting from mid-February to the end of May.

Facilities with prepared trails for cross-country skiers can be found in many locations and also some organized cross country and alpine ski touring trips.

Winter in the North offers a true family paradise, promising pleasure and spiritual renewal in the embrace of snow-covered mountains.

Statistics

	Akureyri	Sauðárkrókur	Dalvík	Siglufjörður	Ólafsfjörður
Vertical metres	480 m	245 m	322 m	480 m	160 m
Skiable hectares	200	115	85	170	20
Number of ski lifts	7	2	2	4	1
Number of ski slopes	23	5	4	10	2
Total length of ski slopes	16 km	8 km	9 km	6 km	2 km
From Akureyri Airport by car	10 min.	1.5 hour	45 min.	1 hour	45 min.

Beer was banned in Iceland until 1st March, 1989. The country's first micro brewery was set up in North Iceland and we now have the highest number of micro breweries in the whole country.

In Iceland we drive on the right hand side of the road but occasionally we come across narrow, one lane bridges, where we politely give way to the traffic travelling in the opposite direction.



Towns and villages

North Iceland has a population of 36 thousand, including the capital, Akureyri, a town of 18 thousand people. Akureyri is the largest town outside Reykjavík and offers services equivalent to those of a small city; hotels and guesthouses, restaurants, culture, arts and a lively music scene. North Iceland is also well known for a number of historic coastal towns, each with its own character that builds on the history and culture of the locals.

Borðeyri, one of the smallest villages in Iceland with a population of only 30, is a former important trading and commercial village on the west coast of Hrútafjörður, the longest fjord of Húnaflói Bay.

Laugarbakki with a population of 41, is on the east bank of the Miðfjarðará river. According to the Saga of Grettir the Strong, horse fights were performed on the river banks, at Langafit. From Laugarbakki, the road leads to the highland region and the heathland of Arnarvatnsheiði.

Hvammstangi, with a population of 545, is the centre for seal watching in the Vatnsnes peninsula and a stopover for those visiting Hvítserkur cliff, Borgarfirki and Kolugljúfur canyon. The town's commercial history spans more than 100 years, and here you are offered the opportunity of visiting a wool factory shop.

Blönduós straddles the river Blanda and surrounds Hrútey Island which is protected as a country park with a wide variety of vegetation and birdlife. Access to the Island is by a trusty pedestrian bridge. Population 796.

Skagaströnd with a population of 481, provides a stunning view of sea and shoreline from walking paths on Spákonufellshöfði and Spákonufell. The local prophesying centre, offering fortune telling, focuses on Þórdís the fortune-teller, the first named inhabitant of Skagaströnd.

Sauðárkrókur has a population of 2,546. The ski area, Tindastóll, is popular during wintertime and among other attractions are the Tannery Visitor Centre and a natural pool, Grettislaug, in Reykjaströnd just outside the town with a view over Drangey Island.

Varmahlíð, a village of 125 people in Skagafjörður is a popular stop-over for travellers. In the vicinity are Glaumbær turf house and the old Viðimýri church. The district is characterised by relatively mild weather and offers hiking trails in a wooded area and to Reykjahóll hilltop with its stunning view.



Hólar in Hjaltadalur, one of Iceland's best-known historical sites, has a population of 62. From 1106 -1801 it was an episcopal see, as well as being the main regional centre. The current cathedral at Hólar was consecrated in 1763.

Hofsós was once the main trading centre in Skagafjörður and has over 400 years of history but today it has a population of only 156. Here you find the Emigration Centre, an exhibition about the mass migration of Icelanders to North America in the late 19th century. There is also a geothermal swimming pool, often named "Infinity Pool" because of its stunning design and unbroken ocean view.

Siglufjörður stands on the Tröllaskagi Peninsula between Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður. For years Siglufjörður was the largest herring centre in Iceland and now the Icelandic Herring Era Museum shows us how the "silver darlings" were processed. An 11 km long tunnel connects Siglufjörður directly to its sister town of Ólafsfjörður creating a very popular tourist destination. Population 1,191.

Ólafsfjörður has a population of 799 and was first settled in the beginning of the 19th century, when increased emphasis on fishing attracted people to its sheltered natural harbour. Now the ocean is enticing a growing number of surfers, enjoying the thrill of riding the waves, and skiers looking for varied cross-country skiing opportunities or off-piste adventures.

Dalvík is a fishing town with a population of 1,362, famous for its annual event the Great Fish Day. Besides short and long hiking trails there is whale watching, bird watching, sea angling, skiing, heli-skiing, a geothermal swimming pool and horse rental. The ferry to Grímsey Island plies from the harbour in Dalvík.

Hrísey Island, the pearl of Eyjafjörður, has a small fishing village with a population of 154. This beautiful, natural attraction is characterised by rich birdlife, several hiking paths and is also known as a tranquil energy point where you can recharge your batteries by tapping into the mysterious power emanating from the great Mount Kaldbakur on the mainland. The ferry to Hrísey leaves from Árskógssandur every two hours and takes 15 minutes.

Árskógssandur with a population of 91 and Hauganes with 107 inhabitants, are located on the west coast of Eyjafjörður. In both communities the economy is based on fishing and fish processing. Recreation on offer includes hiking, whale watching, a visit to a bacalao bar and production facility, as well as a tour to the local brewery.



Hjalteyri has a population of 43. In the early 20th century this used to be one of the centres of the herring industry. Art exhibitions and performances in the old herring factory have become popular. There is a diving centre and a stunning view of the ocean, often giving travellers a chance to see whales in the fjord.

Akureyri is the biggest town in Iceland outside the capital area with a population of 18,139. It is the service base for North Iceland and bustles with rich cultural life all year round; it also boasts a variety of restaurants and cafés. A stroll through the picturesque old town and lovely town centre is popular, visiting the blossoming botanical garden or one of the many museums in town. You can also go whale watching, relax in hot geothermal pools or have a go at the northernmost 18 hole golf course in the world. Above Akureyri is Iceland's most popular ski resort, Hlíðarfjall.

Hrafnagil is a community of 260 people, well-known for its annual August event, featuring arctic handicraft and design. Eyjafjarðarsveit has many attractions, such as the Christmas Garden, the Sundry Collection of Small Items and several beautiful old churches.

Svalbardseyri is situated on the eastern shore of Eyjafjörður, overlooking Akureyri and offering a popular vantage point with a spectacular view of Eyjafjörður. This is an agricultural community with a population of 322.

Grenivík is located in a cove of the same name on the eastern shore of Eyjafjörður fjord. The small fishing village has a population of 278. Among popular attractions to be found in Grenivík are the old turf farmhouse and vicarage Laufás, Kaldbakur snow cat tours and a geothermal swimming pool.

Laugar is a small community of 122 people, which has sprung up in the active geothermal area of Reykjadalur valley, midway between Akureyri and Mývatn. It has a district school which also serves as a summer hotel and numerous guest-houses. At Laugar you find an open air geothermal swimming pool, offering Northern Lights bathing under a starry sky.

Húsavík, on the eastern shore of Skjálfandi bay, is considered to be the oldest settlement in Iceland, dating from 870 AD. Húsavík is known for whale watching and often named the Whale Watching Capital. The Húsavík Whale museum now exhibits a 22 m long skeleton of a Blue Whale that drifted on to a beach in Skagi. A botanical garden is in the heart of town and many marked hiking trails. Population 2,182.



The Lake Mývatn region is one of the highlights of North Iceland, known for its geothermal activity and the exceptional beauty of its natural phenomena. Reykjahlíð is a small village by Lake Mývatn with 163 inhabitants. Craters and volcanoes have sculpted the landscape of the region. Places to visit include the pseudo craters at Skútustaðir, Höfði peninsula, Dimmuborgir lava formations, Hverfjall crater, Hverir hot springs, Krafla volcanic area and the Nature Baths. Birdlife by the lake is abundant boasting the Barrow's goldeneye and harlequin duck among other species. Numerous marked hiking routes extend out from Reykjahlíð. The population of the region is 371.

Kópasker is a fishing village on the eastern shore of Óxarfjörður with a population of 124. In Kópasker you find an exhibition focusing on an earthquake of great magnitude which shook the region in 1976 and hiking trails showing the effects of earthquake activity on nature.

Raufarhöfn on Melrakkaslétta peninsula, the Arctic Circle Village, is the northernmost village in Iceland. The Arctic Circle lies just off shore, across Hraunhnartangi, the northernmost point of the Icelandic mainland. The Arctic Henge, a unique stone sculpture with a stunning ocean view is under construction and already well worth visiting. Population 189.

Þórshöfn is a fishing village with a population of 350. Visitors can enjoy guided walks, and a visit to Rauðanes Point in the fjord of Þistilfjörður, with its offshore sea stacks, Stakkatorfa Rock, caves and steep cliffs. Þórshöfn is gateway to the bird watchers' paradise Langanes, with special focus on the cliffs of Skoruvíkurbjarg and Fontur where you find a bird watching platform suspended from the high cliff over Stóri-Karl.

Bakkafjörður is a small fishing village on the south coast of the fjord of the same name, population 85. A pleasant walking route takes you to the isolated farm Steintún and from there to the Digranes lighthouse placed in an exciting location with impressive ocean views.

Grimsey Island is the northernmost settlement in Iceland with a population of 66. Those who go there can cross the Arctic Circle and are then awarded a certificate to prove their northern travel achievement. The island, 41 km off the north coast of Iceland, is one of the best places to enjoy the midnight sun during summer and ideal for bird watching, where the main attraction is the puffin. A 3 hour ferry tour from Dalvík connects to Grimsey three times a week and 25 minute flights are offered from Akureyri, sightseeing tours are also available.



Akureyri International Airport

Akureyri International Airport is well located between Europe and the US for international flights to the Arctic North. Akureyri airport has scheduled flights to several locations in Iceland including Reykjavík in the South, Grímsey Island in the North as well as Þórshöfn and Vopnafjörður in the North-East. International flights from Akureyri airport include scheduled and charter flights to Greenland. Charter flights are also available to several destinations overseas.

Akureyri International Airport is the centre for ambulance and emergency flights in Iceland. Akureyri Aviation Academy and the Aviation Museum of Iceland are located at the airport.

Akureyri International Airport has one runway which is 2,400 m long, 45 m wide and can safely accommodate the largest airplanes. The airport is controlled by highly qualified air traffic controllers (ATC). The airport is very well equipped for snow removal and other winter services and is open all year round. Further information can be found on www.akureyriairport.is

The Icelandic government has established a Route Development Fund for Akureyri Airport. In addition, Isavia offers discounts on airport charges for new routes. Visit North Iceland and North Iceland tourism companies also offer their support and co-operation in developing new routes for the airport.

When landing at Akureyri airport, you can choose between product offers from 22 travel agencies and 280 tour operators, including several car rentals. North Iceland offers 6,800 beds in hotels, guesthouses and other forms of accommodation. Its 200 restaurants, cafés and take-aways present a great variety of choice when it comes to food.



Reykjavik / Keflavík
Int. Airport





Experience North Iceland all year round



Christmas and New Year Celebrations
Meet the Yule Lads
December



Orkugangan
The longest cross-country ski race in Iceland
April



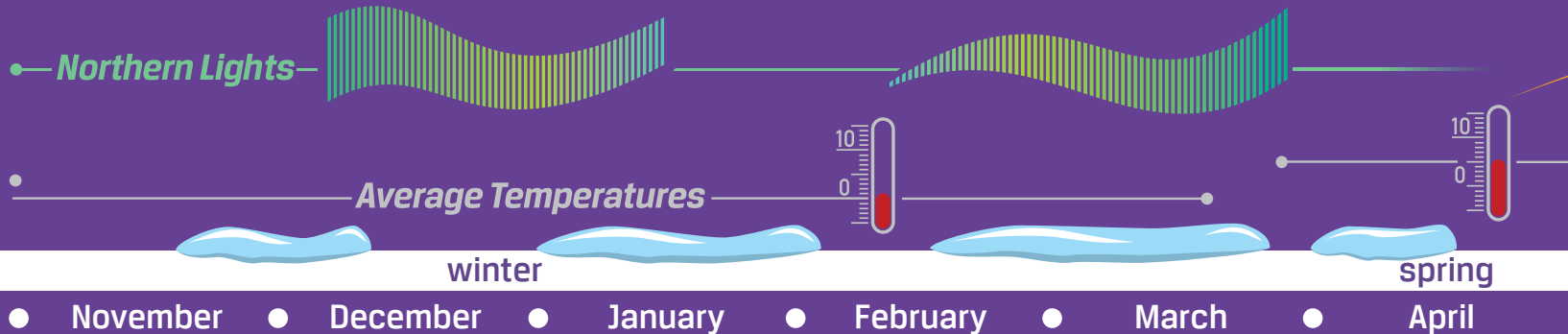
Pink Ladies Days
October



Mývatn Open
Horses on Ice
March



Iceland Winter Games
Winter sports and activities
March-April





Gásir

Medieval Trading Place and Live performances
Mid July



Dettifoss Trail Run

Located in Europe's largest National Park
August



Arctic Handcraft and Design

August



Arctic Open

Midnight Sun Golf Competition
Mid June

Town Festivals *June-August*



Iceland Summer Games

Summer sports and activities
Beginning of August



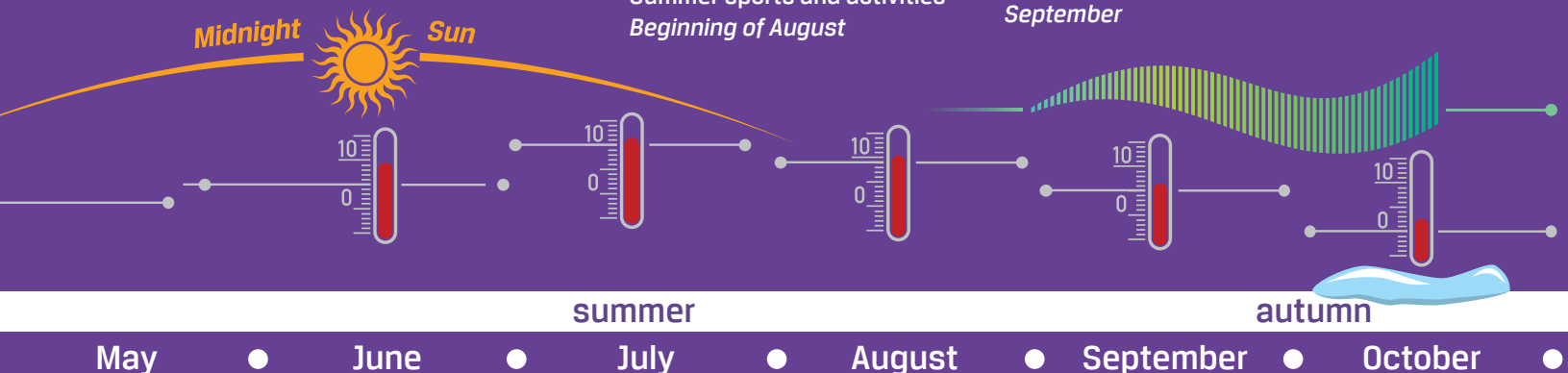
Horse and Sheep Roundups

Skrapatungurétt, Laufskálarétt and Viðíðalsrétt
September



The Great Fish Day

August



How to get to North Iceland?

Direct connecting flights via Keflavík International Airport are available to Akureyri International Airport from Europe and USA by Icelandair from June to September.

From Reykjavík two airlines offer scheduled flights to North Iceland. Air Iceland flies to Akureyri several times a day and Eagle Air flies to Húsavík. To continue further north, flights are available from Akureyri to Grímsey Island and Akureyri to Þórshöfn.

Scheduled bus tours are available every day. Renting a car and driving yourself is another possibility. The Ring Road no. 1, lies right round the island and is mostly an asphalted two lane road. Check the homepage of the Road Administration at www.vegagerdin.is for distances and road conditions.

During the summer months it is possible to cross the highland using a 4x4 vehicle. The two most common routes are the Sprengisandur route, road no. F26 and the Kjölur route, road no. 35

Road conditions are generally good but keep in mind that due to snow and ice, driving conditions during winter can be difficult at times, so log onto Safetravel. is before travelling.

North Iceland offers mild winter temperatures, the days being amazingly light due to the magical illumination of snow, moon and northern lights that are frequently seen so near the Arctic Circle. From May to August you enjoy bright summer nights when the sun never sets.

If you are coming from Europe it is possible to bring your own vehicle on the Smyril Line ferry. The ferry sails from Denmark via the Faroe Islands to Seyðisfjörður, on the east coast of Iceland.



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The Arctic midnight sun

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Holuhraun lava tours

Three tunnels

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Farm visits

Kajak

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Visit North Iceland - Hafnarstræti 91 - 600 Akureyri - ICELAND - Tel. +354 462 3300 - info@northiceland.is - northiceland.is