

Iceland Highlights

Reykjavik & Golden Circle



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1. Introduction

Iceland is of volcanic origin and you see lava fields just about everywhere unless they are hidden under glaciers. This truly makes for a moon-like scenery. Iceland is still volcanically active and this gives rise to hot springs (pools) and geysers. The hills and lava fields make perfect conditions for spectacular waterfalls. And then there are large ice caves that you can explore.

If you go in late fall, winter or early spring, you may see the aurora borealis, the Northern lights, which make for a truly special experience and truly memorable moments.

Not to forget, there are only 360,000 people on the island and there is plenty of solitude and untouched nature to admire.



This “**Iceland Highlights**” guide is primarily written for short term vacationers who like to explore Reykjavik and the Golden Circle by themselves instead of joining expensive guided tours.

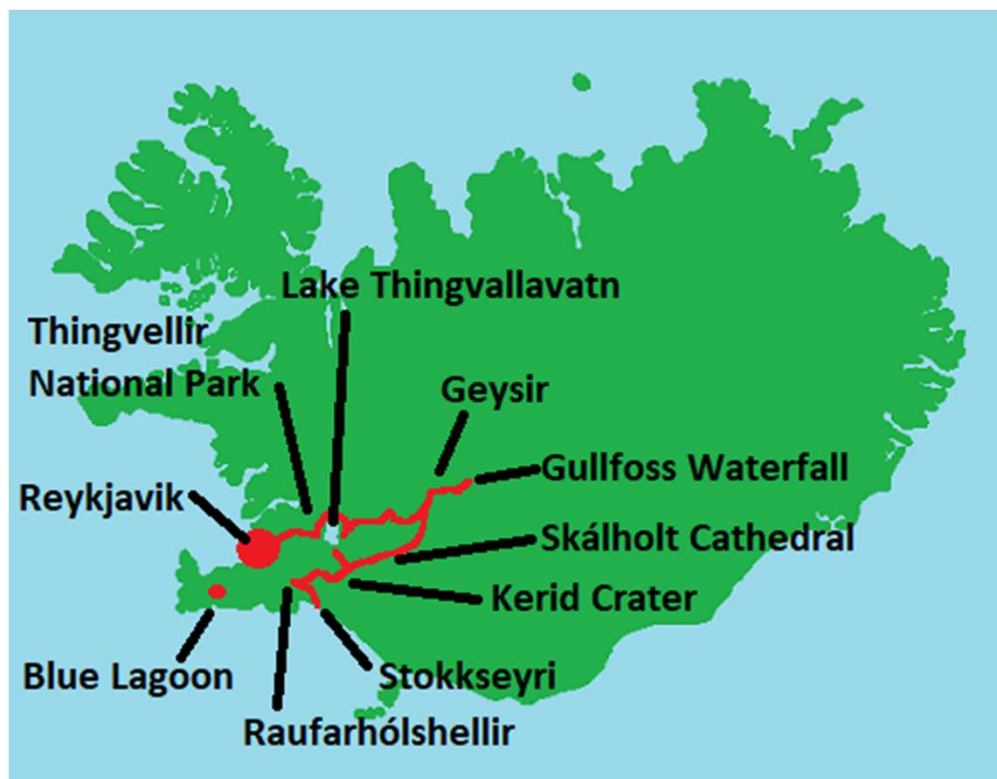
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I will tell you what those attractions are, provide a google maps link to help you get there, my experiences and often links to the attractions.

To help you find out what best fits you, I have added lots of photos and links to additional reviews.

This is not an in-depth Iceland guide. You can buy those from the big travel guide companies.

My goal is to help you Make Memorable Moments on a relaxing Iceland trip by helping you build the perfect itinerary for you.



Please also check out the other exciting destinations and travel guides on our [Backpack & Snorkel](https://backpackandsnorkel.com) website.

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2.1 Disclaimer

In this guide I am doing my best to give you the most accurate information. Over time, however, prices, times, and even attractions are subject to change. Therefore, I and backpackandsnorkel.com cannot be held responsible for the experiences of users while traveling. I strongly suggest that you write or call the attractions you plan to visit for confirmation when you make your travel plans.

Also, please stay alert, be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings. Pickpockets and other criminals can easily ruin even the best planned vacation.

2.2 Copyright

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3. Best Time To Visit Iceland

JUNE - AUGUST

Summer and the warmest and most expensive time of the year - I said warm as in mid-50F or 10-13C and most expensive as in prices going through the roof. You get 20-21h of sunlight per day. This is also the best time of year to go whale watching. Puffin viewing season ends in mid-August. June is the month of the midnight sun with the longest day being on June 21. July and August are the best times for e.g. scuba diving in Þingvellir or hiking around the country.

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

Shoulder season with lower hotel rates and temperatures in the mid-30s to low 50s (2C-11C). The fall colors make September especially colorful and the rain is not too bad yet.

NOVEMBER - MARCH

Temperatures will be in the mid-20s to lower 30s (-10C to 8C) and this is also the rainiest time of the year. If the sky is clear, then now is your best chance to see the Aurora Borealis. Now is the time for glacier hiking and ice caving. December and January only have about 4-5h of sunlight. In December you will see Reykjavik light up for Christmas and Santas scattered throughout town.

APRIL - MAY

Shoulder season. The snow is melting and giving rise to green landscapes. The days are getting longer and the temperatures are going up. Puffin viewing season starts in late April. April is also the start of the whale watching season.

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3.1 Best Time To Visit Drive The Golden Circle

May through October is the best time to self-drive the Golden Circle. With the weather being at its best in July and August; this will also be the busiest time.

3.2 Best Time To Visit The Blue Lagoon

The best time is in winter as you have the largest temperature contrast. The Blue Lagoon is busiest from May - September.

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9-TJOERNIN ([MAP](#)) ([REVIEWS](#))

Tjörnin, which means "Lake" or "Pond" is a prominent lake in downtown Reykjavík. We took a stroll around part of the scenic frozen lake and then, right before we were frozen stiff, got into the warm city hall.

The lake, which is said to be frequented by 40-50 water bird species only had a dozen or so ducks or geese sitting and walking on the ice and being fed by locals. Apparently bird feeding is so popular here that the pond is sometimes referred to as "the biggest bread soup in the world".



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12-HALLGRIMSKIRKJA ([MAP](#)) ([REVIEWS](#)) ([WEBSITE](#))

Hallgrímskirkja, the church of Hallgrímur, is a Lutheran parish church in Reykjavík. The church with its unique design stands 244ft (74.5m) tall and is the largest church in Iceland and one of the tallest structures in Iceland. It has an observation deck from which you have a fantastic view of Reykjavik, the bay and faraway snow covered mountains. The church is named after the Icelandic poet and clergyman Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674).

Hallgrímskirkja is one of the city's best-known landmarks, but Domkirkjan (City Cathedral) that you visited earlier the seat of the Bishop of Iceland and the central church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland.



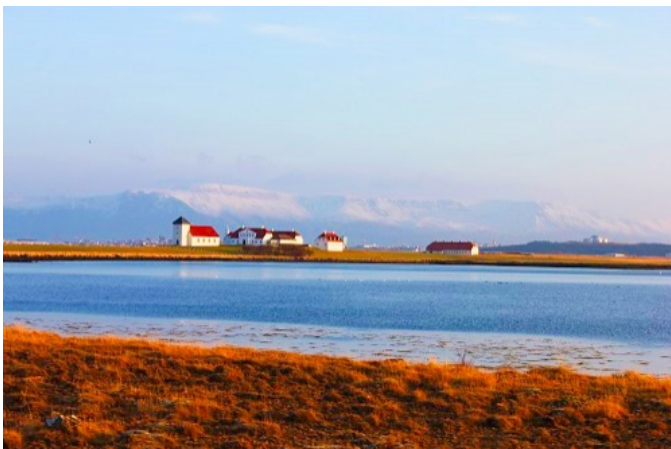
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Now get back in your car and drive towards the Keflavik airport and stop at the Presidential residence at Bessastaðir.

PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE AT BESSASTAÐIR ([MAP](#)) ([REVIEWS](#))

Located in Álfanes outside of Reykjavik. Bessastaðir is the official residence of the President of Iceland. Bessastaðir was settled since the year 1000 and in the 13th century it was one of Snorri Sturluson's farms. Snorri Sturluson was an Icelandic politician, poet and historian who was elected law speaker to the Icelandic parliament (Althing) twice. After his assassination in 1241, Bessastaðir was claimed by the King of Norway who housed his highest-ranking Icelandic officers here. In the 18th century, Bessastaðir was briefly converted into a school and then used as a farm which was purchased in 1867 by statesman and poet Grímur Thomsen. In 1940, Bessastaðir was bought by Sigurður Jónasson and donated a year later to be used as a residence for the regent and then President of Iceland.

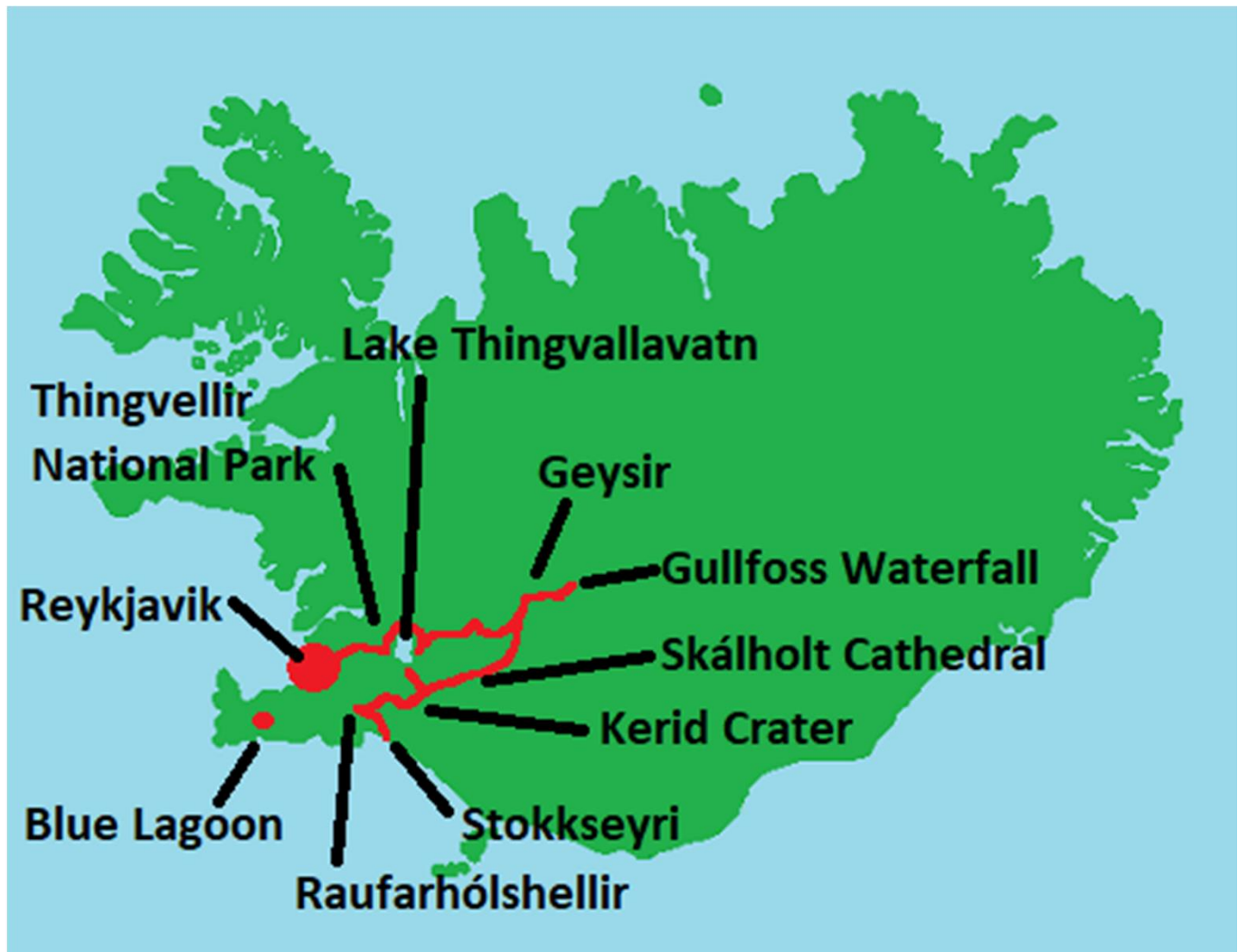
We found it interesting that you can drive up close to the residence without ever seeing anyone, no guards, no nothing.



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THE GOLDEN CIRCLE TOUR

We started our one-day Golden Circle tour in the morning from our hotel by the airport. The map below shows where we went; if you click on the map, then you will be taken to google maps with more details.



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Pingvellir National Park is also a place where cracks in the earth's surface are silent witnesses of the continental drift between the North American and Eurasian plates. The largest crack (fault) is Almannagjá, which is actually a canyon. The tectonic plates keep moving and result in Iceland growing by 0.8in (2cm) per year. As a result of the movement, you may feel small earthquakes every now and then. Some of the faults have filled up with water over time. The water is so clear that you can snorkel and dive in them. The Silfra fissure is probably the best known snorkeling site. I just find it amazing to know that you are diving between the tectonic plates of North America and the Eurasian plate.

It was too cold when we were there, but if you feel like it, go ahead and join a guided snorkeling tour and let me know how it was.

Another fissure, Nikulásargjá, is known as the "coin fissure". It started when King Frederick VIII of Denmark was visiting in 1907 and visitors began throwing coins from the bridge that was built for the king.



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There are an upper and lower viewpoint. The views from the upper viewpoint are amazing, but you get closer and wetter at the lower viewpoint.



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KERID CRATER (KERIÐ) ([MAP](#)) ([REVIEWS](#))

Kerið Crater is believed to be a cone volcano which erupted and the collapsed into its empty magma reserve. The water at the bottom of the crater is at the same level as the water table of the surrounding area and therefore not caused by rainfall, but groundwater.

Kerið Crater is one of several crater lakes in Iceland's Western Volcanic Zone, which was formed when the land moved over a localized hotspot. The caldera is the same red color as the other volcanic rock in the area and it measures approx. 560ft (170m) x 890ft (270m) across and 180ft (55m) deep. The water is fairly shallow and only 20-50ft (7-14m) deep. Its deep color is caused by minerals dissolved in the water. Kerið Crater is about 3,000 years old, which makes it half the age of most other volcanic features in this area.

If you want to hike down to the water, you can do this as one of the walls is less steep than the others. The crater is privately owned and you will need to pay admission.



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MORE PHOTOS TAKEN DURING OUR GOLDEN CIRCLE TOUR

