

= Icelanders =

Icelanders are a Germanic ethnic group and nation , native to Iceland .

On 17 June 1944 , when the Icelandic republic was founded , the Icelanders became independent from the Danish monarchy . The language spoken is Icelandic , a North Germanic language , and Lutheranism is the predominant religion . Historical and DNA records indicate that around 60 to 80 percent of the settlers were of Norse origin (primarily from Western Norway) and the rest were of Celtic stock from Ireland and peripheral Scotland .

= = Iceland = =

Icelanders have had a tumultuous history . Development of the island was slow due to a lack of interest from the countries controlling it for most of its history : Norway , Denmark ? Norway , and ultimately Denmark . Through this time , Iceland had relatively little contact with the outside world . The island became independent in union with Denmark in 1918 . Since 1944 , Iceland has been a republic , and Icelandic society has undergone a rapid modernisation process in the post @-@ independence era .

= = History = =

Iceland is a geologically young land mass , having formed an estimated 20 million years ago due to volcanic eruptions on the Mid @-@ Atlantic ridge . One of the last larger islands to remain uninhabited , the first human settlement date is generally accepted to be 874 , although there is some evidence to suggest human activity prior to the Norse arrival .

= = Initial migration and settlement = = =

The first Viking to sight Iceland was Gardar Svavarsson , who went off course due to harsh conditions when sailing from Norway to the Faroe Islands . His reports led to the first efforts to settle the island . Flóki Vilgerðarson (b . 9th century) was the first Norseman to sail to Iceland intentionally . His story is documented in the Landnámabók manuscript , and he is said to have named the island Ísland (Iceland) . The first permanent settler in Iceland is usually considered to have been a Norwegian chieftain named Ingólfur Arnarson . He settled with his family in around 874 , at a place he named " Bay of Smokes " , or Reykjavík in Icelandic .

Following Ingólfur , and also in 874 , another group of Norwegians set sail across the North Atlantic Ocean with their families , livestock , slaves and possessions , escaping the domination of the first King of Norway , Haraldur Harfagri . They traveled 1 @,@ 000 km (600 mi) in their Viking longships to the island of Iceland . These people were primarily of Norwegian , Irish or Gaelic Scottish origin . The Irish and the Scottish Gaels were either slaves or servants of the Norse chiefs , according to the Icelandic sagas , or descendants of a " group of Norsemen who had settled in Scotland and Ireland and intermarried with Gaelic @-@ speaking people " . Genetic evidence suggests that approximately 62 % of the Icelandic maternal gene pool is derived from Ireland and Scotland , which is much higher than other Scandinavian countries , although comparable to the Faroese , while 37 % is of Nordic origin . About 20 @-@ 25 % of the Icelandic paternal gene pool is of Gaelic origin , with the rest being Nordic .

The Icelandic Age of Settlement (Icelandic : Landnámsöld) is considered to have lasted from 874 to 930 , at which point most of the island had been claimed and the Alþingi (English : Althing) , the assembly of the Icelandic Commonwealth , was founded at Þingvellir .

= = = Hardship and conflict = = =

In 930 , on the Þingvellir (English : Thingvellir) plain near Reykjavík , the chieftains and their families met and established the Alþingi , Iceland 's first national assembly . However , the Alþingi

lacked the power to enforce the laws it made . In 1262 , struggles between rival chieftains left Iceland so divided that King Haakon IV of Norway was asked to step in as a final arbitrator for all disputes , as part of the Old Covenant . This is known as the Age of the Sturlungs .

Iceland was under Norwegian leadership until 1380 , when the Royal House of Norway died out . At this point , both Iceland and Norway came under the control of the Danish Crown . With the introduction of absolute monarchy in Denmark , the Icelanders relinquished their autonomy to the crown , including the right to initiate and consent to legislation . This meant a loss of independence for Iceland , which led to nearly 300 years of decline : perhaps largely because Denmark and its Crown did not consider Iceland to be a colony to be supported and assisted . In particular , the lack of help in defense led to constant raids by marauding pirates along the Icelandic coasts .

Unlike Norway , Denmark did not need Iceland 's fish and homespun wool . This created a dramatic deficit in Iceland 's trade , and no new ships were built as a result . In 1602 Iceland was forbidden to trade with other countries by order of the Danish Government , and in the 18th century climatic conditions had reached an all @-@ time low since Settlement .

In 1783 ? 84 Laki , a volcanic fissure in the south of the island , erupted . The eruption produced about 15 km ³ (3 @. @ 6 mi ³) of basalt lava , and the total volume of tephra emitted was 0 @. @ 91 km ³ . The aerosols built up caused a cooling effect in the Northern Hemisphere . The consequences for Iceland were catastrophic , with approximately 25 @-@ 33 % of the population dying in the famine of 1783 and 1784 . Around 80 % of sheep , 50 % of cattle , and 50 % of horses died of fluorosis from the 8 million tons of fluorine that were released . This disaster is known as the Mist Hardship (Icelandic : Móðuharðindin) .

In 1798 ? 99 the Alþingi was discontinued for several decades , eventually being restored in 1844 . It was moved to Reykjavík , the capital , after being held at Þingvellir for over nine centuries .

= = = Independence and prosperity = = =

The 19th century brought significant improvement in the Icelanders ' situation . A protest movement was led by Jón Sigurðsson , a statesman , historian , and authority on Icelandic literature . Inspired by the romantic and nationalist currents from mainland Europe , Jón protested strongly , through political journals and self @-@ publications , for ' a return to national consciousness ' and for political and social changes to be made to help speed up Iceland 's development .

In 1854 , the Danish government relaxed the trade ban that had been imposed in 1602 , and Iceland gradually began to rejoin Western Europe economically and socially . With this return of contact with other peoples came a reawakening of Iceland 's arts , especially its literature . Twenty years later in 1874 , Iceland was granted a constitution . Icelanders today recognize Jón 's efforts as largely responsible for their economic and social resurgence .

Iceland gained near @-@ full independence in 1918 after World War I , and retained only formal ties with the Danish Crown . This move to independence was completed on 17 June 1944 on what would have been Jón Sigurðsson 's 133rd birthday . After a national referendum , Iceland broke all ties with Denmark , after nearly six centuries of Danish rule , and declared itself independent .

= = Demographics and society = =

= = = Genetics = = =

Most mitochondrial DNA lineages found today in contemporary Icelanders can be traced to the native populations in Ireland and Scotland and Scandinavia . Another study shows that a tiny proportion of samples of contemporary Icelanders carry a more distant lineage , which belongs to the haplogroup C1 , which can possibly be traced to the settlement of the Americas around 14 @, @ 000 years ago . The same study used preliminary genealogical analyses which revealed that C1 lineage was present in the Icelandic mtDNA pool at least 300 years ago . Due to their small founding population and considerable history of relative isolation , Icelanders have often been considered

highly genetically homogeneous as compared to other European populations . For this reason , along with the extensive genealogical records for much of the population that reach back to the settlement of Iceland , Icelanders have been the focus of considerable genomics research by both biotechnology companies and academic and medical researchers . However , one study of mitochondrial DNA , blood groups , and isozymes revealed a more variable population than expected from these genetic standpoints , comparable to the diversity of some other Europeans . Another study shows that quite a big group of Scandinavian males , in particular Norwegians and Icelanders (up to 31 % of samples) , carry Haplogroup R1a1a (Y @-@ DNA) .

Results of the mitochondrial DNA studies have been consistent with the genealogical records that trace the ancestry of most Icelanders to Scandinavia , Ireland and Scotland , though there may have been a minor contribution from other European groups . Founder effects and the effects of genetic drift are more pronounced for the Icelandic gene pool than other nearby populations , supporting the assumed genetic isolation of the population .

= = = Emigration = = =

= = = Greenland = = =

Greenland was first settled by some 500 Icelanders under the leadership of Erik the Red in the late 10th century , CE . Isolated fjords in this harsh land offered sufficient grazing to support cattle and sheep , though the climate was too cold for cereal crops . Royal trade ships from Norway occasionally went to Greenland to trade for walrus tusks and falcons . The population eventually reached a high point of perhaps 3 @,@ 000 in two communities and developed independent institutions before fading away during the 15th century . A papal legation was sent there as late as 1492 , the year Columbus attempted to find a shorter spice route but instead found the Americas .

= = = North America = = =

According to the Saga of Eric the Red , Icelandic immigration to North America dates back to 1006 , when Icelandic Snorri was born in Vinland . This colony was short @-@ lived though and by the 1020s the Icelanders abandoned it . Icelandic immigration to North America would not resume for some 800 years .

One of the first new instances of Icelandic immigration to North America occurred in 1855 , when a small group settled in Spanish Fork , Utah . Another Icelandic colony is Washington Island , Wisconsin . Immigration to the United States and Canada began in earnest in the 1870s , with most migrants initially settling in the Great Lakes area . These settlers were fleeing famine and overcrowding on Iceland . Today , there are sizable communities of Icelandic descent in both the United States and Canada . Gimli , in Manitoba , Canada , is home to the largest population of Icelanders outside of the main island of Iceland .

= = Culture = =

= = = Language and literature = = =

Icelandic , a North Germanic language , is the official language of Iceland (de facto ; the laws are silent about the issue) . Icelandic has inflectional grammar comparable to Latin , Ancient Greek , more closely to Old English and practically identical to Old Norse .

Old Icelandic literature can be divided into several categories , of which three are best known to foreigners : Eddic poetry , skaldic poetry , and saga literature , if saga literature is understood broadly . Eddic poetry is made up of heroic and mythological poems . Poetry that praises someone is considered skaldic poetry or court poetry . Finally Saga literature is prose , ranging from pure

fiction to fairly factual history .

Written Icelandic has changed little since the 13th century . Because of this , modern readers can understand the Icelanders ' sagas . The sagas tell of events in Iceland in the 10th and early 11th centuries . They are considered to be the best @-@ known pieces of Icelandic literature .

The elder or Poetic Edda , the younger or Prose Edda , and the sagas are the major pieces of Icelandic literature . The Poetic Edda is a collection of poems and stories from the late 10th century , whereas the younger or Prose Edda is a manual of poetry that contains many stories of Norse mythology .

= = = Religion = = =

Iceland embraced Christianity in c . AD 1000 , in what is called the kristnitaka , and the country , while mostly secular in observance , is still predominantly Christian culturally . The Lutheran church claims some 84 % of the total population . While early Icelandic Christianity was more lax in its observances than traditional Catholicism , Pietism , a religious movement imported from Denmark in the 18th century , had a marked effect on the island . By discouraging all but religious leisure activities , it fostered a certain dourness , which was for a long time considered an Icelandic stereotype . At the same time , it also led to a boom in printing , and Iceland today is one of the most literate societies in the world .

While Catholicism was supplanted by Protestantism during the Reformation , most other world religions are now represented on the island : there are small Protestant Free Churches and Catholic communities , and even a nascent Muslim community , composed of both immigrants and local converts . Perhaps unique to Iceland is the fast @-@ growing Ásatrúarfélag , a legally recognized revival of the pre @-@ Christian Nordic religion of the original settlers . According to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Reykjavík , there were only approximately 30 Jews in Iceland as of 2001 . The First Lady of Iceland Dorrit Moussaieff is an Israeli @-@ born Bukharian Jew .

= = = Cuisine = = =

Icelandic cuisine consists mainly of fish , lamb , and dairy . Fish was once the main part of an Icelander 's diet but has recently given way to meats such as beef , pork , and poultry .

Iceland has many traditional foods called Þorramatur . These foods include smoked and salted lamb , singed sheep heads , dried fish , smoked and pickled salmon , and cured shark . Andrew Zimmern , a chef who has traveled the world on his show Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern , responded to the question " What 's the most disgusting thing you 've ever eaten ? " with the response " That would have to be the fermented shark fin I had in Iceland . " Fermented shark fin is a form of Þorramatur .

= = = Performance art = = =

The earliest indigenous Icelandic music was the rímur , epic tales from the Viking era that were often performed a cappella . Christianity played a major role in the development of Icelandic music , with many hymns being written in the local idiom . Hallgrímur Pétursson , a poet and priest , is noted for writing many of these hymns in the 17th century . The island 's relative isolation ensured that the music maintained its regional flavor . It was only in the 19th century that the first pipe organs , prevalent in European religious music , first appeared on the island .

Many singers , groups , and forms of music have come from Iceland . Most Icelandic music contains vibrant folk and pop traditions . Some more recent groups and singers are Voces Thules , The Sugarcubes , Björk , Sigur Rós , and Of Monsters and Men .

The national anthem is " Ó Guð vors lands " (English : " Our Country 's God ") , written by Matthías Jochumsson , with music by Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson . The song was written in 1874 , when Iceland celebrated its one thousandth anniversary of settlement on the island . It was originally published with the title A Hymn in Commemoration of Iceland 's Thousand Years .

= = = Sports = = =

Iceland 's national football team has yet to participate in the FIFA World Cup . However they have qualified for the finals of the 2016 European Championship . Their first Olympic participation was in the 1912 Summer Olympics ; however , they did not participate again until the 1936 Summer Olympics . Their first appearance at the winter games was at the 1948 Winter Olympics . In 1956 , Vilhjálmur Einarsson won the Olympic silver medal for the triple jump . The Icelandic national handball team has enjoyed relative success . The team received a silver medal at the 2008 Olympic Games and a 3rd place at the 2010 European Men 's Handball Championship .