[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect) [Template:Pp-pc1](/wiki/Template:Pp-pc1) [Template:Pp-move-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-move-indef) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Infobox country](/wiki/Template:Infobox_country)

**Iceland** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); [Template:Lang-is](/wiki/Template:Lang-is) [Template:IPA-is](/wiki/Template:IPA-is)), also called the **Republic of Iceland**,[[Note 1]](#cite_note-1) is a [Nordic](/wiki/Nordic_countries) [island country](/wiki/Island_country) between the [North Atlantic](/wiki/North_Atlantic) and the [Arctic Ocean](/wiki/Arctic_Ocean). It has a population of [Template:Ispop](/wiki/Template:Ispop) and an area of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), making it the most sparsely populated country in Europe.[[1]](#cite_note-2) The capital and largest city is [Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík). Reykjavík and the surrounding areas in the southwest of the country are home to over two-thirds of the population. Iceland is [volcanically](/wiki/High_island) and [geologically active](/wiki/Geothermal_(geology)). The interior consists of a plateau characterised by sand and [lava fields](/wiki/Lava_field), mountains and glaciers, while many [glacial rivers](/wiki/River) flow to the sea through the lowlands. Iceland is warmed by the [Gulf Stream](/wiki/Gulf_Stream) and has a temperate climate, despite a high latitude just outside the [Arctic Circle](/wiki/Arctic_Circle). Its high latitude and marine influence still keeps summers chilly, with most of the archipelago having a [tundra climate](/wiki/Tundra_climate).

According to [*Landnámabók*](/wiki/Landnámabók), the [settlement of Iceland](/wiki/Settlement_of_Iceland) began in the year AD 874 when the [Norwegian](/wiki/Norway) chieftain [Ingólfr Arnarson](/wiki/Ingólfr_Arnarson) became the first permanent settler on the island.<ref name = tomasson/> In the following centuries, mainly [Norwegians](/wiki/Norwegians) and to a smaller extent other [Scandinavians](/wiki/Scandinavia) settled Iceland, bringing with them [thralls](/wiki/Thrall) of [Gaelic](/wiki/Gaels) origin.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) From 1262 to 1814, Iceland was ruled by [Norway](/wiki/Norway) and afterwards by [Denmark](/wiki/Denmark). Until the 20th century, the country relied largely on fishing and agriculture. Iceland became [independent in 1918](/wiki/Danish–Icelandic_Act_of_Union) and a [republic in 1944](/wiki/Founding_of_the_Republic_of_Iceland). Industrialisation of the fisheries and [Marshall Plan](/wiki/Marshall_Plan) aid following [World War II](/wiki/World_War_II) brought prosperity and Iceland became one of the wealthiest and most developed nations in the world. In 1994, it became a part of the [European Economic Area](/wiki/European_Economic_Area), which supported diversification into economic and financial services.

Iceland has a [market economy](/wiki/Market_economy) with relatively low taxes compared to other [OECD](/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development) countries.[[2]](#cite_note-3) It maintains a [Nordic social welfare system](/wiki/Nordic_model) that provides [universal health care](/wiki/Universal_health_care) and tertiary education for its citizens.[[3]](#cite_note-4) Iceland ranks high in economic, political and social stability and equality. In 2013, it was ranked as the [13th most-developed country](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index) in the world by the [United Nations' Human Development Index](/wiki/Human_Development_Index).[[4]](#cite_note-5) Iceland runs almost completely on renewable energy. Affected by the ongoing [worldwide financial crisis](/wiki/Financial_crisis_of_2007–2008), the nation's entire banking system [systemically failed](/wiki/2008–2011_Icelandic_financial_crisis) in October 2008, leading to a [severe depression](/wiki/Depression_(economics)), substantial [political unrest](/wiki/2009_Icelandic_financial_crisis_protests), the [Icesave dispute](/wiki/Icesave_dispute), and the institution of [capital controls](/wiki/Capital_control). Many bankers were jailed[[5]](#cite_note-6) and the economy has made a significant recovery, in large part due to a surge in [tourism](/wiki/Tourism_in_Iceland).[[6]](#cite_note-7)[[7]](#cite_note-8)[[8]](#cite_note-9) [Icelandic culture](/wiki/Culture_of_Iceland) is founded upon the nation's Scandinavian heritage. Most Icelanders are descendants of [Germanic](/wiki/Germanic_peoples) and Gaelic ([Celtic](/wiki/Celts)) settlers. [Icelandic](/wiki/Icelandic_language), a [North Germanic language](/wiki/North_Germanic_languages), is descended from [Old Norse](/wiki/Old_Norse) and is closely related to [Faroese](/wiki/Faroese_language) and [West Norwegian dialects](/wiki/Norwegian_dialects). The country's cultural heritage includes traditional [Icelandic cuisine](/wiki/Icelandic_cuisine), [Icelandic literature](/wiki/Icelandic_literature) and [medieval sagas](/wiki/Sagas_of_Icelanders). Iceland has the smallest population of any [NATO member](/wiki/Member_states_of_NATO) and is the only one with [no standing army](/wiki/List_of_countries_without_armed_forces), its lightly armed [coast guard](/wiki/Icelandic_Coast_Guard) being in charge of defence.[[9]](#cite_note-10)

## Contents

* 1 History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]
  + 1.1 Settlement and Commonwealth 874–1262[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]
    - 1.1.1 Economic boom and crisis[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]
* 2 Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]
  + 2.1 Geology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]
  + 2.2 Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]
  + 2.3 Biodiversity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]
* 3 Politics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]
  + 3.1 Government[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]
  + 3.2 Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]
  + 3.3 Foreign relations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]
  + 3.4 Military[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]
* 4 Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]
  + 4.1 Economic contraction[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]
  + 4.2 Transport[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]
  + 4.3 Energy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]
  + 4.4 Education and science[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]
* 5 Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]
  + 5.1 Urbanisation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]
  + 5.2 Language[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]
  + 5.3 Health[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]
  + 5.4 Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]
* 6 Culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]
  + 6.1 Literature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]
  + 6.2 Art[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]
  + 6.3 Music[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]
* 7 See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]
* 8 References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=36)]
* 9 Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=37)]
* 10 External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=38)]

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

### Settlement and Commonwealth 874–1262[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[thumb|left|Norsemen landing in Iceland – a 19th-century depiction by](/wiki/File:Norsemen_Landing_in_Iceland.jpg) [Oscar Wergeland](/wiki/Oscar_Wergeland). [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|](/wiki/File:Ingolf_by_Raadsig.jpg)[Ingólfr Arnarson](/wiki/Ingólfr_Arnarson) (modern Icelandic: *Ingólfur Arnarson*), the first permanent Scandinavian settler in Iceland According to both [Landnámabók](/wiki/Landnámabók) and [Íslendingabók](/wiki/Íslendingabók), Celtic monks known as the [Papar](/wiki/Papar) lived in Iceland before Scandinavian settlers arrived, possibly members of a [Hiberno-Scottish mission](/wiki/Hiberno-Scottish_mission). Recent [archaeological](/wiki/Archaeological) excavations have revealed the ruins of a cabin in [Hafnir](/wiki/Hafnir) on the [Reykjanes peninsula](/wiki/Reykjanes). [Carbon dating](/wiki/Carbon_dating) indicates that it was abandoned sometime between 770 and 880.[[10]](#cite_note-11) Swedish Viking explorer [Garðar Svavarsson](/wiki/Garðar_Svavarsson) was the first to circumnavigate Iceland in 870 and establish that it was an island.[[11]](#cite_note-12) He stayed over winter and built a house in [Húsavík](/wiki/Húsavík). Garðar departed the following summer but one of his men, [Náttfari](/wiki/Náttfari), decided to stay behind with two slaves. Náttfari settled in what is now known as Náttfaravík and he and his slaves became the first permanent residents of Iceland.[[12]](#cite_note-13)[[13]](#cite_note-14) The Norse chieftain [Ingólfr Arnarson](/wiki/Ingólfr_Arnarson) built his homestead in present-day [Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík) in the year 874. Ingólfr was followed by many other emigrant settlers, largely Scandinavians and their [thralls](/wiki/Thrall), many of whom were Irish or Scottish.[[14]](#cite_note-15) By 930, most [arable land](/wiki/Arable_land) on the island had been claimed; the [Althing](/wiki/Althing), a legislative and judicial assembly, was initiated to regulate the Icelandic Commonwealth. Lack of arable land also served impetus to the [settlement of Greenland](/wiki/Norse_colonization_of_Greenland) starting in 986.[[15]](#cite_note-16)[[32]](#cite_note-33)

#### Economic boom and crisis[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) In the years 2003–2007, following the privatization of the banking sector under the government of [Davíð Oddsson](/wiki/Davíð_Oddsson), Iceland moved toward having an economy based on international investment banking and financial services.<ref name = Lewis/> It was quickly becoming one of the most prosperous countries in the world but was hit hard by a [major financial crisis](/wiki/2008–2011_Icelandic_financial_crisis).<ref name = Lewis>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> The crisis resulted in the greatest migration from Iceland since 1887, with a net emigration of 5,000 people in 2009.[[33]](#cite_note-34) Iceland's economy stabilised under the government of [Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir](/wiki/Jóhanna_Sigurðardóttir), and grew by 1.6% in 2012.[[34]](#cite_note-35) Many Icelanders, however, have remained unhappy with the state of the economy and government austerity policies. The centre-right [Independence Party](/wiki/Independence_Party_(Iceland)) was returned to power in coalition with the [Progressive Party](/wiki/Progressive_Party_(Iceland)) in the 2013 elections.[[35]](#cite_note-36)

## Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[thumb|right|General topographic map](/wiki/File:Map_of_Iceland.svg) [Template:Details](/wiki/Template:Details)

Iceland is located at the juncture of the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans. The main island is entirely south of the [Arctic Circle](/wiki/Arctic_Circle), which passes through the small Icelandic island of [Grímsey](/wiki/Grímsey) off the main island's northern coast. The country lies between latitudes [63°](/wiki/63rd_parallel_north) and [68° N](/wiki/68th_parallel_north), and longitudes [25°](/wiki/25th_meridian_west) and [13° W](/wiki/13th_meridian_west).

Iceland is closer to [continental Europe](/wiki/Continental_Europe) than to mainland North America; thus, the island is generally included in Europe for historical, political, cultural, and practical reasons. Geologically the island includes parts of both continental plates. The closest body of land is [Greenland](/wiki/Greenland) ([Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)). The closest bodies of land in Europe are the [Faroe Islands](/wiki/Faroe_Islands) ([Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)); [Jan Mayen](/wiki/Jan_Mayen) Island ([Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)); [Shetland](/wiki/Shetland) and the [Outer Hebrides](/wiki/Outer_Hebrides), both about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert); and the Scottish mainland and [Orkney](/wiki/Orkney), both about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). The mainland of Norway is about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) away.

[thumb|left|A sample of three typical Icelandic landscapes.](/wiki/File:Icelandic_landscapes.jpg) Iceland is the [world's 18th largest island](/wiki/List_of_islands_by_area), and Europe's second largest island after Great Britain. The main island is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), but the entire country is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in size, of which 62.7% is [tundra](/wiki/Tundra). There are thirty minor islands in Iceland, including the lightly populated Grímsey and the [Vestmannaeyjar](/wiki/Vestmannaeyjar) archipelago. Lakes and glaciers cover 14.3% of its surface; only 23% is vegetated.[[36]](#cite_note-37) The largest lakes are [Þórisvatn](/wiki/Þórisvatn) reservoir: [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) and [Þingvallavatn](/wiki/Þingvallavatn): [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert); other important lakes include [Lagarfljót](/wiki/Lagarfljót) and [Mývatn](/wiki/Mývatn). [Jökulsárlón](/wiki/Jökulsárlón) is the deepest lake, at [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[37]](#cite_note-38) Geologically, Iceland is part of the [Mid-Atlantic Ridge](/wiki/Mid-Atlantic_Ridge), a ridge along which the [oceanic crust](/wiki/Oceanic_crust) spreads and forms new oceanic crust. This part of the mid-ocean ridge is located above a mantle plume, causing Iceland to be [subaerial](/wiki/Subaerial) (above the surface of the sea). The ridge marks the boundary between the [Eurasian](/wiki/Eurasian_Plate) and [North American Plates](/wiki/North_American_Plate), and Iceland was created by [rifting](/wiki/Rift) and [accretion](/wiki/Accretion_(geology)) through volcanism along the ridge.[[38]](#cite_note-39) Many [fjords](/wiki/Fjord) punctuate Iceland's 4,970-kilometre (3,088-mile) long coastline, which is also where most settlements are situated. The island's interior, the [Highlands of Iceland](/wiki/Highlands_of_Iceland), is a cold and uninhabitable combination of sand, mountains and [lava fields](/wiki/Lava_field). The major towns are the capital city of [Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík), along with its outlying towns of [Kópavogur](/wiki/Kópavogur), [Hafnarfjörður](/wiki/Hafnarfjörður) and [Garðabær](/wiki/Garðabær), nearby [Reykjanesbær](/wiki/Reykjanesbær) where the international airport is located, and the town of [Akureyri](/wiki/Akureyri) in northern Iceland. The island of Grímsey on the Arctic Circle contains the northernmost habitation of Iceland, whereas [Kolbeinsey](/wiki/Kolbeinsey) contains the northernmost point of Iceland.[[39]](#cite_note-40) Iceland has [three national parks](/wiki/List_of_national_parks_of_Iceland): [Vatnajökull National Park](/wiki/Vatnajökull_National_Park), [Snæfellsjökull National Park](/wiki/Snæfellsjökull), and [Þingvellir National Park](/wiki/Þingvellir).[[40]](#cite_note-41) The country is considered a "strong performer" in environmental protection, having been ranked 13th in [Yale University's](/wiki/Yale_University) Environmental Performance Index of 2012.[[41]](#cite_note-42)

<gallery mode = "packed"> Iceland satellite.jpg | Iceland, as seen from space on 29 January 2004 Iceland2008-Sudureyri.JPG | [Suðureyri](/wiki/Suðureyri) Norðfjörður .JPG | [Norðfjörður](/wiki/Neskaupstaður) Eyjafjallajokull-April-17.JPG | The [eruption of Eyjafjallajökull](/wiki/2010_eruptions_of_Eyjafjallajökull) ISLANDIA.jpg | South of Iceland, off the [Ring Road](/wiki/Ring_Road_(Iceland)), looking north, late afternoon in winter 2001 </gallery>

### Geology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|The erupting](/wiki/File:Erupting_geysir.jpg) [Geysir](/wiki/Geysir) in [Haukadalur](/wiki/Haukadalur) valley, the oldest known [geyser](/wiki/Geyser) in the world

A geologically young land, Iceland is located on both the [Iceland hotspot](/wiki/Iceland_hotspot) and the [Mid-Atlantic Ridge](/wiki/Mid-Atlantic_Ridge), which runs right through it. This location means that the island is highly geologically active with many volcanoes, notably [Hekla](/wiki/Hekla), [Eldgjá](/wiki/Eldgjá), [Herðubreið](/wiki/Herðubreið) and [Eldfell](/wiki/Eldfell).[[42]](#cite_note-43) The volcanic eruption of [Laki](/wiki/Laki) in 1783–1784 caused a famine that killed nearly a quarter of the island's population.[[43]](#cite_note-44) In addition, the eruption caused dust clouds and haze to appear over most of Europe and parts of Asia and Africa for several months afterward, and affected climates in other areas.[[44]](#cite_note-45) Iceland has many [geysers](/wiki/Geyser), including [Geysir](/wiki/Geysir), from which the English word is derived, and the famous [Strokkur](/wiki/Strokkur), which erupts every 8–10 minutes. After a phase of inactivity, Geysir started erupting again after a series of earthquakes in 2000. Geysir has since grown quieter and does not erupt often.[[45]](#cite_note-46) With the widespread availability of [geothermal power](/wiki/Geothermal_power), and the harnessing of many rivers and waterfalls for [hydroelectricity](/wiki/Hydroelectricity), most residents have access to inexpensive hot water, heating and electricity. The island is composed primarily of [basalt](/wiki/Basalt), a low-[silica](/wiki/Silica) [lava](/wiki/Lava) associated with [effusive volcanism](/wiki/Effusive_eruption) as has occurred also in [Hawaii](/wiki/Hawaii). Iceland, however, has a variety of volcanic types (composite and fissure), many producing more evolved lavas such as [rhyolite](/wiki/Rhyolite) and [andesite](/wiki/Andesite). Iceland has hundreds of volcanoes with approx. 30 volcanic systems active.[[46]](#cite_note-47) [Surtsey](/wiki/Surtsey), one of the youngest islands in the world, is part of Iceland. Named after [Surtr](/wiki/Surtr), it rose above the ocean in a series of volcanic eruptions between 8 November 1963 and 5 June 1968.[[39]](#cite_note-40) Only scientists researching the growth of new life are allowed to visit the island.[[47]](#cite_note-48) On 21 March 2010, a [volcano in Eyjafjallajökull](/wiki/2010_eruptions_of_Eyjafjallajökull) in the south of Iceland erupted for the first time since 1821, forcing 600 people to flee their homes.[[48]](#cite_note-49) Additional eruptions on 14 April forced hundreds of people to abandon their homes.[[49]](#cite_note-50) The resultant cloud of [volcanic ash](/wiki/Volcanic_ash) brought [major disruption to air travel](/wiki/Air_travel_disruption_after_the_2010_Eyjafjallajökull_eruption) across Europe.[[50]](#cite_note-51) Another large eruption occurred on 21 May 2011. This time it was the [Grímsvötn](/wiki/Grímsvötn) volcano, located under the thick ice of Europe's largest glacier, [Vatnajökull](/wiki/Vatnajökull). Grímsvötn is one of Iceland's most active volcanoes, and this eruption was much more powerful than the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull activity, with ash and lava [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) hurled into the atmosphere creating a large cloud.<ref name=connor>[Template:Cite news](/wiki/Template:Cite_news)</ref>

### Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[thumb|Iceland map of Köppen climate classification.](/wiki/File:Iceland_map_of_Köppen_climate_classification.svg) [thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Eyjafjallajökull.jpeg)[Eyjafjallajökull](/wiki/Eyjafjallajökull) glacier, one of the smallest [glaciers of Iceland](/wiki/Glaciers_of_Iceland) [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

The climate of Iceland's coast is subpolar [oceanic](/wiki/Oceanic_climate). The warm [North Atlantic Current](/wiki/North_Atlantic_Current) ensures generally higher annual temperatures than in most places of similar latitude in the world. Regions in the world with similar climates include the [Aleutian Islands](/wiki/Aleutian_Islands), the [Alaska Peninsula](/wiki/Alaska_Peninsula), and [Tierra del Fuego](/wiki/Tierra_del_Fuego), although these regions are closer to the equator. Despite its proximity to the Arctic, the island's coasts remain ice-free through the winter. Ice incursions are rare, the last having occurred on the north coast in 1969.[[51]](#cite_note-52) The climate varies between different parts of the island. Generally speaking, the south coast is warmer, wetter and windier than the north. The Central Highlands are the coldest part of the country. Low-lying inland areas in the north are the most arid. Snowfall in winter is more common in the north than the south.

The highest air temperature recorded was [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) on 22 June 1939 at Teigarhorn on the southeastern coast. The lowest was [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) on 22 January 1918 at Grímsstaðir and Möðrudalur in the northeastern hinterland. The temperature records for Reykjavík are [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) on 30 July 2008, and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) on 21 January 1918. [Template:Iceland weatherbox](/wiki/Template:Iceland_weatherbox)

### Biodiversity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [right|thumb|The](/wiki/File:Alopex_lagopus_IMG_9019.JPG) [Arctic fox](/wiki/Arctic_fox) is the only indigenous land mammal in Iceland and was the only land mammal prior to the arrival of humans [right|thumb|An](/wiki/File:Icelandic_sheep_summer_06.jpg) [Icelandic sheep](/wiki/Icelandic_sheep) [thumb|Icelandic Horse](/wiki/File:Icelandic_Horse_with_blue_eyes.jpg) There are around 1,300 known species of insects in Iceland, which is low compared with other countries (over one million species have been described worldwide). The only native land mammal when humans arrived was the [Arctic fox](/wiki/Arctic_fox),[[52]](#cite_note-53) which came to the island at the end of the ice age, walking over the frozen sea. On rare occasions, bats have been carried to the island with the winds, but they are not able to breed there. [Polar bears](/wiki/Polar_bears) occasionally come over from [Greenland](/wiki/Greenland), but they are just visitors, and no Icelandic populations exist.[[53]](#cite_note-54) There are no native or free-living reptiles or amphibians on the island.[[54]](#cite_note-55) [Phytogeographically](/wiki/Phytogeography), Iceland belongs to the Arctic province of the [Circumboreal Region](/wiki/Circumboreal_Region) within the [Boreal Kingdom](/wiki/Boreal_Kingdom). Approximately three quarters of the island are barren of vegetation; plant life consists mainly of grassland, which is regularly grazed by livestock. The most common tree native to Iceland is the northern birch ([*Betula pubescens*](/wiki/Betula_pubescens)), which formerly formed forests over much of Iceland, along with aspens ([*Populus tremula*](/wiki/Populus_tremula)), rowans ([*Sorbus aucuparia*](/wiki/Sorbus_aucuparia)), common junipers ([*Juniperus communis*](/wiki/Juniperus_communis)) and other smaller trees, mainly willows.

When the island was first settled, it was extensively forested. In the late 12th century, [Ari the Wise](/wiki/Ari_the_Wise) described it in the [Íslendingabók](/wiki/Íslendingabók) as "forested from mountain to sea shore".[[55]](#cite_note-56) Permanent human settlement greatly disturbed the isolated ecosystem of thin, volcanic soils and limited [species diversity](/wiki/Species_richness). The forests were heavily exploited over the centuries for firewood and timber.[[52]](#cite_note-53) [Deforestation](/wiki/Deforestation), climatic deterioration during the [Little Ice Age](/wiki/Little_Ice_Age) and overgrazing by sheep imported by settlers caused a loss of critical topsoil due to [erosion](/wiki/Erosion). Today, many farms have been abandoned. Three quarters of Iceland's 100,000 square kilometres are affected by soil erosion, [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) so seriously as to be useless.[[55]](#cite_note-56) Only a few small [birch](/wiki/Birch) stands now exist in isolated reserves. The planting of new forests has increased the number of trees, but the result does not compare to the original forests. Some of the planted forests include [introduced species](/wiki/Introduced_species).[[52]](#cite_note-53) The tallest tree in Iceland is a [sitka spruce](/wiki/Sitka_spruce) planted in 1949 in [Kirkjubæjarklaustur](/wiki/Kirkjubæjarklaustur); it was measured at [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in 2013.[[56]](#cite_note-57) The animals of Iceland include the [Icelandic sheep](/wiki/Icelandic_sheep), [cattle](/wiki/Icelandic_cattle), [chickens](/wiki/Icelandic_chicken), [goats](/wiki/Icelandic_goat), the sturdy [Icelandic horse](/wiki/Icelandic_horse), and the [Icelandic Sheepdog](/wiki/Icelandic_Sheepdog), all descendants of animals imported by Europeans. Wild mammals include the Arctic fox, [mink](/wiki/Mink), mice, rats, rabbits and [reindeer](/wiki/Reindeer). [Polar bears](/wiki/Polar_bear) occasionally visit the island, travelling on icebergs from Greenland. In June 2008, two polar bears arrived in the same month.[[57]](#cite_note-58) [Marine mammals](/wiki/Marine_mammals) include the [grey seal](/wiki/Grey_seal) (*Halichoerus grypus*) and [harbor seal](/wiki/Harbor_seal) (*Phoca vitulina*). Many species of fish live in the ocean waters surrounding Iceland, and the [fishing industry](/wiki/Fishing_industry) is a major part of Iceland's economy, accounting for approximately half of the country's total exports. Birds, especially seabirds, are an important part of Iceland's animal life. [Puffins](/wiki/Puffin), [skuas](/wiki/Skua), and [kittiwakes](/wiki/Kittiwake) nest on its sea cliffs.[[58]](#cite_note-59) [Commercial whaling](/wiki/Commercial_whaling) is practised intermittently[[59]](#cite_note-60)[[60]](#cite_note-61) along with scientific whale hunts.[[61]](#cite_note-62) Whale watching has become an important part of Iceland's economy since 1997.[[62]](#cite_note-63)

## Politics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|450px|The political system of Iceland](/wiki/File:Politics_Of_Iceland.svg)

Iceland has a [left–right](/wiki/Left–right_politics) [multi-party system](/wiki/Multi-party_system). Following the [2013 parliamentary election](/wiki/Icelandic_parliamentary_election,_2013), the biggest parties are the centre-right [Independence Party](/wiki/Independence_Party_(Iceland)) (*Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn*) and the [Progressive Party](/wiki/Progressive_Party_(Iceland)) (*Framsóknarflokkurinn*). Other political parties with seats in the Althing are the centre-left [Social Democratic Alliance](/wiki/Social_Democratic_Alliance) (*Samfylkingin*), [Left-Green Movement](/wiki/Left-Green_Movement) (*Vinstrihreyfingin – grænt framboð*), [Bright Future](/wiki/Bright_Future_(Iceland)) (*Björt framtíð*), and the [Pirate Party of Iceland](/wiki/Pirate_Party_Iceland) (*Píratar*). Many other parties exist on the municipal level, most of which run only locally in a single municipality.

Iceland was the first country in the world to have a political party formed and led entirely by women.[[63]](#cite_note-64) Known as the Women's List or Women's Alliance (*Kvennalistinn*), it was founded in 1983 to advance the political, economic, and social needs of women. After participating in its first parliamentary elections, the Women's List helped increase the proportion of female parliamentarians by 15%.[[64]](#cite_note-65) Although it disbanded in 1999, merging with the Social Democratic Alliance, it left a lasting influence on Iceland's politics: every major party has a 40% quota for women, and in 2009 nearly a third of members of parliament were female, compared to the global average of 16%.[[65]](#cite_note-66) In 2011 Iceland was ranked 2nd in the strength of its democratic institutions[[66]](#cite_note-67) and 13th in government transparency.[[67]](#cite_note-68) The country has a high level of civic participation, with 81.4% voter turnout during the most recent elections,[[68]](#cite_note-69) compared to an OECD average of 72%. However, only 50% of Icelanders say they trust their political institutions, slightly less than the OECD average of 56% (and most probably a consequence of the political scandals in the wake of the [Icelandic financial crisis](/wiki/Icelandic_financial_crisis)).[[69]](#cite_note-70)

### Government[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|right|The](/wiki/File:Althingishusid.jpg) [Parliament of Iceland](/wiki/Althing) in [Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík) [thumb|right|The](/wiki/File:Iceland-Reykjavik-Stjornarrad-1.jpg) [Cabinet of Iceland](/wiki/Cabinet_of_Iceland) and the [Prime Minister's Office](/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Iceland) in [Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík) Iceland is a [representative democracy](/wiki/Representative_democracy) and a [parliamentary republic](/wiki/Parliamentary_republic). The modern parliament, *Alþingi* (English: [Althing](/wiki/Althing)), was founded in 1845 as an advisory body to the Danish monarch. It was widely seen as a re-establishment of the assembly founded in 930 in the [Commonwealth](/wiki/Icelandic_Commonwealth) period and suspended in 1799. Consequently, "it is arguably the world's oldest [parliamentary democracy](/wiki/Parliamentary_system)."[[70]](#cite_note-71) It currently has 63 members, elected for a maximum period of four years.[[71]](#cite_note-72) The president is elected by popular vote for a term of four years, with no term limit. The elections for president, the Althing and local municipal councils are all held separately every four years.[[72]](#cite_note-73) The [president of Iceland](/wiki/President_of_Iceland) is a largely ceremonial head of state and serves as a diplomat, but may veto laws voted by the parliament and put them to a national referendum. The current president is [Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson](/wiki/Ólafur_Ragnar_Grímsson). The head of government is the prime minister who, together with the [cabinet](/wiki/Cabinet_of_Iceland), is responsible for [executive](/wiki/Executive_(government)) government. The cabinet is appointed by the president after a general election to the Althing; however, the appointment is usually negotiated by the leaders of the political parties, who decide among themselves after discussions which parties can form the cabinet and how its seats are to be distributed, under the condition that it has a majority support in the Althing. Only when the party leaders are unable to reach a conclusion by themselves within a reasonable time span does the president exercise this power and appoint the cabinet personally. This has not happened since the republic was founded in 1944, but in 1942 regent [Sveinn Björnsson](/wiki/Sveinn_Björnsson), who had been installed in that position by the Althing in 1941, appointed a non-parliamentary government. The regent had, for all practical purposes, the position of a president, and Sveinn would later become the country's first president in 1944.

The governments of Iceland have always been coalition governments, with two or more parties involved, as no single political party has ever received a majority of seats in the Althing throughout the republican period. The extent of the political power possessed by the office of the president is disputed by legal scholars[Template:Which](/wiki/Template:Which), in Iceland; several provisions of the constitution appear to give the president some important powers, but other provisions and traditions suggest differently.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) In 1980, Icelanders elected [Vigdís Finnbogadóttir](/wiki/Vigdís_Finnbogadóttir) as president, the world's first directly elected female head of state. She retired from office in 1996. In 2009, Iceland became the first country with an openly gay head of government when [Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir](/wiki/Jóhanna_Sigurðardóttir) became prime minister.[[73]](#cite_note-74)

### Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Iceland is divided into regions, constituencies and municipalities. There are eight regions which are primarily used for statistical purposes; the district court jurisdictions also use an older version of this division.[[39]](#cite_note-40) Until 2003, the constituencies for the parliamentary elections were the same as the regions, but by an amendment to the constitution, they were changed to the current six constituencies:

* [*Reykjavík North*](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) and [*Reykjavík South*](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) (city regions);
* [*Southwest*](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) (four [non-contiguous](/wiki/Enclave_and_exclave) suburban areas around Reykjavík);
* [*Northwest*](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) and [*Northeast*](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) (northern half of Iceland, split); and,
* [*South*](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) (southern half of Iceland, excluding Reykjavík and suburbs).

The redistricting change was made in order to balance the weight of different districts of the country, since previously a vote cast in the sparsely populated areas around the country would count much more than a vote cast in the Reykjavík city area. The imbalance between districts has been reduced by the new system, but still exists.[[39]](#cite_note-40) There are 74 municipalities in Iceland which govern local matters like schools, transport and zoning.[[74]](#cite_note-75) These are the actual [second-level subdivisions](/wiki/Administrative_division) of Iceland, as the constituencies have no relevance except in elections and for statistical purposes. Reykjavík is by far the most populous municipality, about four times more populous than [Kópavogur](/wiki/Kópavogur), the second one.[[39]](#cite_note-40)

<gallery mode = "packed"> Regions of Iceland.png|[Regions of Iceland](/wiki/Regions_of_Iceland) Constituencies Iceland.png|[Constituencies of Iceland](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Iceland) Sveitarfélög-landsvæði.png|[Municipalities of Iceland](/wiki/Municipalities_of_Iceland) </gallery>

### Foreign relations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[thumb|right|Nordic prime ministers and the president of Finland visiting the White House in 2016, with Iceland's](/wiki/File:Nordic_ministers_whitehouse_2016.jpg) [Jóhannsson](/wiki/Sigurður_Ingi_Jóhannsson) second from the left. [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Iceland, which is a member of the [UN](/wiki/UN), [NATO](/wiki/NATO), [EFTA](/wiki/European_Free_Trade_Association), [Council of Europe](/wiki/Council_of_Europe) and [OECD](/wiki/OECD), maintains diplomatic and commercial relations with practically all nations, but its ties with the Nordic countries, Germany, the United States, Canada and the other NATO nations are particularly close. Historically, due to cultural, economic and linguistic similarities, Iceland is a [Nordic country](/wiki/Nordic_country), and it participates in intergovernmental cooperation through the [Nordic Council](/wiki/Nordic_Council).

Iceland is a member of the [European Economic Area](/wiki/European_Economic_Area) (EEA), which allows the country access to the single market of the European Union (EU). It was not a member of the EU, but in July 2009 the Icelandic parliament, the Althing, voted in favour of application for EU membership[[75]](#cite_note-76) and officially applied on 17 July 2009.[[76]](#cite_note-77) However, in 2013, opinion polls showed that many Icelanders were now against joining the EU; following [recent elections](/wiki/Icelandic_parliamentary_election,_2013) the two parties that formed the island's new government – the centrist Progressive Party and the right-wing Independence Party – announced they would hold a referendum on EU membership.[[77]](#cite_note-78)

### Military[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Iceland has no [standing army](/wiki/Standing_army). The [U.S. Air Force](/wiki/U.S._Air_Force) maintained four to six [interceptor aircraft](/wiki/Interceptor_aircraft) at the [Keflavík base](/wiki/Naval_Air_Station_Keflavik), until they were withdrawn on 30 September 2006. Since May 2008, NATO nations have periodically deployed fighters to patrol Icelandic airspace under the [Icelandic Air Policing](/wiki/Icelandic_Air_Policing) mission.[[78]](#cite_note-79)[[79]](#cite_note-80) Iceland supported the [2003 invasion of Iraq](/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq) despite much domestic controversy, deploying a [Coast Guard](/wiki/Icelandic_Coast_Guard) [EOD](/wiki/Explosive_Ordnance_Disposal) team to Iraq[[80]](#cite_note-81) which was replaced later by members of the [Iceland Crisis Response Unit](/wiki/Iceland_Crisis_Response_Unit). Iceland has also participated in the ongoing [conflict in Afghanistan](/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001–present)) and the [1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia](/wiki/1999_NATO_bombing_of_Yugoslavia). Despite the ongoing financial crisis the first [new patrol ship](/wiki/ICGV_Þór) in decades was launched on 29 April 2009.[[81]](#cite_note-82) Icelanders remain especially proud of their role in hosting the historic 1986 [Reagan–Gorbachev summit](/wiki/Reykjavík_Summit) in Reykjavík, which set the stage for the end of the [Cold War](/wiki/Cold_War). Iceland's principal historical international disputes involved disagreements over [fishing rights](/wiki/Fishing_rights). Conflict with the United Kingdom led to a series of so-called Cod Wars in 1952–1956 due to the extension of Iceland's fishing zone from [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), 1958–1961 following a further extension to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), 1972–1973 with another extension to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert); and in 1975–1976 another extension to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).

According to the [Global Peace Index](/wiki/Global_Peace_Index), Iceland is the most peaceful country in the world, due to its lack of armed forces, low crime rate, and high level of socio-political stability.[[82]](#cite_note-83)

## Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Akureyri.JPG)[Akureyri](/wiki/Akureyri) is the largest town in Iceland outside the [Capital Region](/wiki/Capital_Region_(Iceland)). Most rural towns are based on the fishing industry, which provides 40% of Iceland's exports [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

In 2007, Iceland was the [seventh most productive country in the world per capita](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)) (US$54,858), and the fifth most productive by [GDP](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)_per_capita) at [purchasing power parity](/wiki/Purchasing_power_parity) ($40,112). About 85 percent of total [primary energy](/wiki/Primary_energy) supply in Iceland is derived from domestically produced renewable energy sources.[[83]](#cite_note-84) Utilization of abundant [hydroelectric](/wiki/Hydroelectricity) and [geothermal power](/wiki/Geothermal_power) has made Iceland the world's largest electricity producer per capita.[[84]](#cite_note-85) As a result of its commitment to renewable energy, the 2014 Global Green Economy Index ranked Iceland among the top 10 greenest economies in the world.<ref name=ggei>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> Historically, Iceland's economy depended heavily on fishing, which still provides 40% of export earnings and employs 7% of the work force.[[39]](#cite_note-40) The economy is vulnerable to declining fish stocks and drops in world prices for its main material exports: fish and fish products, aluminium, and [ferrosilicon](/wiki/Ferrosilicon). [Whaling in Iceland](/wiki/Whaling_in_Iceland) has been historically significant. Iceland still relies heavily on fishing, but its importance is diminishing from an export share of 90% in the 1960s to 40% in 2006.[[85]](#cite_note-86) Until the 20th century, Iceland was among the poorest countries in Western Europe. Currently, it remains one of the most developed countries in the world. Strong economic growth had led Iceland to be ranked [first](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index) in the [United Nations'](/wiki/United_Nations) [Human Development Index](/wiki/Human_Development_Index) report for 2007/2008,[[4]](#cite_note-5) although in 2011 its HDI rating had fallen to 14th place as a result of the economic crisis. Nevertheless, according to the Economist Intelligence Index of 2011, Iceland has the 2nd highest quality of life in the world.[[86]](#cite_note-87) Based on the [Gini coefficient](/wiki/Gini_coefficient), Iceland also has one of the lowest rates of income inequality in the world,[[87]](#cite_note-88) and when [adjusted for inequality](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_inequality-adjusted_HDI), its HDI ranking climbs to 5th place.[[88]](#cite_note-89) Iceland's unemployment rate has declined consistently since the crisis, with 4.8% of the labour force being unemployed as of June 2012, compared to 6% in 2011 and 8.1% in 2010.[[39]](#cite_note-40)[[89]](#cite_note-90)[[90]](#cite_note-91) Many political parties remain opposed to EU membership, primarily due to Icelanders' concern about losing control over their natural resources (particularly fisheries).[[91]](#cite_note-92) The national currency of Iceland is the [Icelandic króna](/wiki/Icelandic_króna) (ISK). Nearly 70% of Icelanders have favoured the adoption of the [Canadian dollar](/wiki/Canadian_dollar) (CAD) - more than any other currency in the world.[[92]](#cite_note-93) A poll released on 5 March 2010 by Capacent Gallup showed that 31% of respondents were in favour of adopting the [euro](/wiki/Euro) and 69% opposed.[[93]](#cite_note-94) Another Capacent Gallup poll conducted in February 2012 found that 67.4% of Icelanders would reject EU membership in a referendum.[[94]](#cite_note-95) [thumb|Graphical depiction of Iceland's product exports in 28 colour-coded categories](/wiki/File:Iceland_Export_Treemap.jpg) Iceland's economy has been diversifying into manufacturing and service industries in the last decade, including software production, [biotechnology](/wiki/Biotechnology), and finance; industry accounts for around a quarter of economic activity, while services comprise close to 70%.[[95]](#cite_note-96) Despite the decision to resume commercial whale hunting in 2006, the tourism sector is expanding, especially in [ecotourism](/wiki/Ecotourism) and whale-watching. On average, Iceland receives around 1.1 million visitors annually, which is more than three times the native population.[[69]](#cite_note-70) Iceland's agriculture industry, accounting for 5.4% of GDP,[[39]](#cite_note-40) consists mainly of potatoes, green vegetables (in [greenhouses](/wiki/Greenhouse)), [mutton](/wiki/Mutton) and dairy products.[[39]](#cite_note-40) The financial centre is [Borgartún](/wiki/Borgartún) in Reykjavík, which hosts a large number of companies and three investment banks. Iceland's [stock market](/wiki/Stock_market), the [Iceland Stock Exchange](/wiki/Iceland_Stock_Exchange) (ISE), was established in 1985.[[96]](#cite_note-97) Iceland is ranked 27th in the 2012 [Index of Economic Freedom](/wiki/Index_of_Economic_Freedom), lower than in prior years but still among the freest in the world.[[97]](#cite_note-98) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), it ranks 29th in the [World Economic Forum's](/wiki/World_Economic_Forum) Global Competitive Index, one place lower than in 2015.[[98]](#cite_note-99) According to [INSEAD's](/wiki/INSEAD) [Global Innovation Index](/wiki/Global_Innovation_Index_(Cornell_University,_INSEAD_and_WIPO)), Iceland is the 11th most innovative country in the world.[[99]](#cite_note-100) Unlike most Western European countries, Iceland has a [flat tax](/wiki/Flat_tax) system: the main personal income tax rate is a flat 22.75%, and combined with municipal taxes, the total tax rate equals no more than 35.7%, not including the many deductions that are available.[[100]](#cite_note-101) The [corporate tax](/wiki/Corporate_tax) rate is a flat 18%, one of the lowest in the world.[[100]](#cite_note-101) There is also a [value added tax](/wiki/Value_added_tax), whereas a net [wealth tax](/wiki/Wealth_tax) was eliminated in 2006. Employment regulations are relatively flexible and the labour market is one of the freest in the world. Property rights are strong and Iceland is one of the few countries where they are applied to [fishery management](/wiki/Fisheries_management).[[100]](#cite_note-101) Like other [welfare states](/wiki/Welfare_state), taxpayers pay various subsidies to each other, but with spending being less than in most European countries.

Despite low tax rates, agricultural assistance is the highest among OECD countries and a potential impediment to structural change. Also, health care and education spending have relatively poor returns by OECD measures, though improvements have been made in both areas. The OECD *Economic Survey of Iceland 2008* had highlighted Iceland's challenges in currency and macroeconomic policy.[[101]](#cite_note-102) There was a [currency crisis](/wiki/Currency_crisis) that started in the spring of 2008, and on 6 October trading in Iceland's banks was suspended as the government battled to save the economy.[[102]](#cite_note-103) The latest assessment by the OECD[[103]](#cite_note-104) determined that Iceland has made progress in many areas, particularly in creating a sustainable fiscal policy and restoring the health of the financial sector; however, challenges remain in making the fishing industry more efficient and sustainable, as well as in improving monetary policy in order to address inflation.[[104]](#cite_note-105) Iceland's public debt has decreased since the economic crisis, and [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of) is the 31th highest in the world by proportion of national GDP.[[105]](#cite_note-106)

### Economic contraction[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Iceland had been hit especially hard by the [Great Recession](/wiki/Great_Recession) that began in December 2007, because of the failure of its banking system and a subsequent economic crisis. Before the crash of the country's three largest banks, [Glitnir](/wiki/Glitnir_(bank)), [Landsbanki](/wiki/Landsbanki) and [Kaupthing](/wiki/Kaupthing), their combined debt exceeded approximately six times the nation's gross domestic product of €14 billion ($19 billion).[[106]](#cite_note-107)[[107]](#cite_note-108) In October 2008, the Icelandic parliament passed emergency legislation to minimise the impact of the Financial crisis. The Financial Supervisory Authority of Iceland used permission granted by the emergency legislation to take over the domestic operations of the three largest banks.[[108]](#cite_note-109) Icelandic officials, including central bank governor [Davíð Oddsson](/wiki/Davíð_Oddsson), stated that the state did not intend to take over any of the banks' foreign debts or assets. Instead, new banks were established to take on the domestic operations of the banks, and the old banks will be run into bankruptcy.

On 28 October 2008, the Icelandic government raised interest rates to 18% (as of August 2010, it was 7%), a move which was forced in part by the terms of acquiring a loan from [International Monetary Fund](/wiki/International_Monetary_Fund) (IMF). After the rate hike, trading on the Icelandic króna finally resumed on the open market, with valuation at around 250 ISK per Euro, less than one-third the value of the 1:70 exchange rate during most of 2008, and a significant drop from the 1:150 exchange ratio of the week before. On 20 November 2008, the [Nordic countries](/wiki/Nordic_countries) agreed to lend Iceland $2.5 billion.[[109]](#cite_note-110) On 26 January 2009, the coalition government collapsed due to the public dissent over the handling of the financial crisis. A new left-wing government was formed a week later and immediately set about removing Central Bank governor Davíð Oddsson and his aides from the bank through changes in law. Davíð was removed on 26 February 2009 in the wake of protests outside the Central Bank.[[110]](#cite_note-111) Thousands of [Icelanders](/wiki/Icelanders) have moved from the country after the collapse, and many of those moved to [Norway](/wiki/Norway). In 2005, 293 people moved from Iceland to [Norway](/wiki/Norway); in 2009, the figure was 1,625.[[111]](#cite_note-112) In April 2010, the Icelandic Parliament‘s Special Investigation Commission published the findings of its investigation,[[112]](#cite_note-113) revealing the extent of control fraud in this crisis.[[113]](#cite_note-114) By June 2012, Landsbanki managed to repay about half of the [Icesave](/wiki/Icesave_dispute) debt.[[114]](#cite_note-115) According to [Bloomberg](/wiki/Bloomberg_L.P.), Iceland is on the trajectory of 2% unemployment as a result of crisis-management decisions made back in 2008, including allowing the banks to fail.[[115]](#cite_note-116)

### Transport[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Route1(iceland).png)[The Ring Road of Iceland](/wiki/Route_1_(Iceland)) and some towns it passes through: 1. [Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík), 2. [Borgarnes](/wiki/Borgarnes), 3. [Blönduós](/wiki/Blönduós), 4. [Akureyri](/wiki/Akureyri), 5. [Egilsstaðir](/wiki/Egilsstaðir), 6. [Höfn](/wiki/Höfn), 7. [Selfoss](/wiki/Selfoss_(town)) [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Iceland has a high level of car ownership per capita; with a car for every 1.5 inhabitants; it is the main form of transport.[[116]](#cite_note-117) Iceland has [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of administered roads, of which [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) are paved and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) are not. A great number of roads remain unpaved, mostly little-used rural roads. The road speed limits are [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in towns, [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) on gravel country roads and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) on hard-surfaced roads.[[117]](#cite_note-118) Iceland currently has no railways.

[Route 1](/wiki/Route_1_(Iceland)), or the Ring Road (Icelandic: *Þjóðvegur 1* or *Hringvegur*), was completed in 1974, and is a main road that runs around Iceland and connects all the inhabited parts of the island, with the interior of the island being uninhabited. This paved road is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) long with one lane in each direction, except near larger towns and cities and in the [Hvalfjörður Tunnel](/wiki/Hvalfjörður_Tunnel) (also the site of a toll) where it has more lanes. Many bridges on it, especially in the north and east, are single lane and made of timber and/or steel.

The main hub for international transport is [Keflavík International Airport](/wiki/Keflavík_International_Airport), which serves Reykjavík and the country in general. It is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) to the west of Reykjavík. Domestic flights, flights to [Greenland](/wiki/Greenland) and the [Faroe Islands](/wiki/Faroe_Islands), and business flights operate mostly out of [Reykjavík Airport](/wiki/Reykjavík_Airport), which lies in the city centre. Most general aviation traffic is also in Reykjavík. There are 103 registered airports and airfields in Iceland; most of them are unpaved and located in rural areas. The biggest airport in Iceland is Keflavík International Airport and the biggest airfield is Geitamelur, a four-runway field around [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) east of Reykjavík, dedicated exclusively to gliding. There are a number of international airlines that fly to and from Iceland regularly.[[118]](#cite_note-119)

### Energy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|The](/wiki/File:NesjavellirPowerPlant_edit2.jpg) [Nesjavellir Geothermal Power Station](/wiki/Nesjavellir_Geothermal_Power_Station) services the [Capital Region's](/wiki/Capital_Region_(Iceland)) hot water and electricity needs. Virtually all of Iceland's electricity comes from renewable resources.[[119]](#cite_note-120)

[Renewable sources](/wiki/Renewable_energy)—[geothermal](/wiki/Geothermal_power) and [hydropower](/wiki/Hydropower)—provide effectively all of Iceland's electricity[[119]](#cite_note-120) and around 85% of the nation's total primary energy consumption,[[120]](#cite_note-121) with most of the remainder consisting of imported oil products used in transportation and in the fishing fleet.[[121]](#cite_note-122)[[122]](#cite_note-123) Iceland expects to be energy-independent by 2050. Iceland's largest geothermal power plants are [Hellisheiði](/wiki/Hellisheiði_Power_Station) and [Nesjavellir](/wiki/Nesjavellir_Geothermal_Power_Station),[[123]](#cite_note-124)[[124]](#cite_note-125) while [Kárahnjúkar Hydropower Plant](/wiki/Kárahnjúkar_Hydropower_Plant) is the country's largest hydroelectric power station.[[125]](#cite_note-126) When the Kárahnjúkavirkjun started operating, Iceland became the world's largest electricity producer per capita.[[126]](#cite_note-127) Icelanders emit 6.29 tonnes of CO2 in 2009 equivalent of greenhouse gases per capita.[[127]](#cite_note-128) Iceland is one of the few countries that have filling stations dispensing hydrogen fuel for cars powered by [fuel cells](/wiki/Fuel_cell). It is also one of a few countries currently capable of producing [hydrogen](/wiki/Hydrogen) in adequate quantities at a reasonable cost, because of Iceland's plentiful renewable sources of energy.

On 22 January 2009, Iceland announced its first round of [offshore](/wiki/Oil_platform) licences for companies wanting to conduct [hydrocarbon exploration](/wiki/Hydrocarbon_exploration) and production in a region northeast of Iceland, known as the [Dreki area](/wiki/Jan_Mayen_Microcontinent#Economic_resources).[[128]](#cite_note-129) Two exploration licenses have been awarded.[[129]](#cite_note-130) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), the government of Iceland is in talks with the government of United Kingdom about the possibility of constructing a [high-voltage direct-current](/wiki/High-voltage_direct_current) connector for transmission of electricity between the two countries.[[130]](#cite_note-131) Such a cable would give Iceland access to a market where electricity prices have generally been much higher than those in Iceland.[[131]](#cite_note-132) Iceland has considerable renewable energy resources, especially geothermal energy and hydropower resources,[[132]](#cite_note-133) and most of the potential has not been developed, partly because there is not enough demand for additional electricity generation capacity from the residents and industry of Iceland, but the United Kingdom is interested in importing inexpensive electricity from renewable sources of energy, and this could lead to further development of the energy resources.

### Education and science[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|Reykjavík Junior College (](/wiki/File:Menntaskólinn_í_Reykjavík_(main_building,_2004).jpg)[*Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík*](/wiki/Menntaskólinn_í_Reykjavík)), located in downtown Reykjavík, is the oldest [gymnasium](/wiki/Gymnasium_(school)) in Iceland

The [Ministry of Education, Science and Culture](/wiki/Ministry_of_Education,_Science_and_Culture_(Iceland)) is responsible for the policies and methods that schools must use, and they issue the National Curriculum Guidelines. However, playschools, primary schools, and lower secondary schools are funded and administered by the municipalities. The government does allow citizens to [Home educate](/wiki/Homeschooling) their children, however under a very strict set of demands.[[133]](#cite_note-134) Students must adhere closely to the government mandated curriculum, and the parent teaching must acquire a government approved teaching certificate.

Nursery school, or *leikskóli*, is non-compulsory education for children younger than six years, and is the first step in the education system. The current legislation concerning playschools was passed in 1994. They are also responsible for ensuring that the curriculum is suitable so as to make the transition into compulsory education as easy as possible.

[thumb|right|The main building of the](/wiki/File:Haskoli_Islands_main_building.jpg) [University of Iceland](/wiki/University_of_Iceland)

Compulsory education, or *grunnskóli*, comprises primary and lower secondary education, which often is conducted at the same institution. Education is mandatory by law for children aged from 6 to 16 years. The school year lasts nine months, beginning between 21 August and 1 September, ending between 31 May and 10 June. The minimum number of school days was once 170, but after a new teachers' wage contract, it increased to 180. Lessons take place five days a week. All public schools have mandatory education in Christianity, although an exemption may be considered by the [Minister of Education](/wiki/Minister_of_Education,_Science_and_Culture_(Iceland)).[[134]](#cite_note-135) Upper secondary education, or *framhaldsskóli*, follows lower secondary education. These schools are also known as [gymnasia](/wiki/Gymnasium_(school)) in English. Though not compulsory, everyone who has had a compulsory education has the right to upper secondary education. This stage of education is governed by the Upper Secondary School Act of 1996. All schools in Iceland are mixed sex schools. The largest seat of higher education is the [University of Iceland](/wiki/University_of_Iceland), which has its main campus in central Reykjavík. Other schools offering university-level instruction include [Reykjavík University](/wiki/Reykjavík_University), [University of Akureyri](/wiki/University_of_Akureyri), [Agricultural University of Iceland](/wiki/Agricultural_University_of_Iceland) and [Bifröst University](/wiki/Bifröst_University).

An OECD assessment found 64% of Icelanders aged 25–64 have earned the equivalent of a high-school degree, which is lower than the OECD average of 73%. Among 25- to 34-year-olds, only 69% have earned the equivalent of a high-school degree, significantly lower than the OECD average of 80%.[[69]](#cite_note-70) Nevertheless, Iceland's education system is considered to be of excellent quality: the [Programme for International Student Assessment](/wiki/Programme_for_International_Student_Assessment) currently ranks it as the 16th best performing, above the OECD average.[[135]](#cite_note-136) Students were particularly proficient in reading and mathematics.

According to a 2013 [Eurostat](/wiki/Eurostat) report by the [European Commission](/wiki/European_Commission), Iceland spends around 3.11% of its GDP on scientific research and development (R&D), over 1 percentage point higher than the EU average of 2.03%, and has set a target of 4% to be reached by 2020.[[136]](#cite_note-137) A 2010 [UNESCO](/wiki/UNESCO) report found that out of 72 countries that spend the most on R&D (100 million US dollars or more), Iceland ranked 9th by proportion of GDP, tied with Taiwan, Switzerland, and Germany and ahead of France, the UK, and Canada.[[137]](#cite_note-138)

## Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[Template:For](/wiki/Template:For) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Reykjavík_séð_úr_Hallgrímskirkju_6.JPG)[Reykjavík](/wiki/Reykjavík), Iceland's largest metropolitan area and the centre of the [Capital Region](/wiki/Capital_Region_(Iceland)) which, with a population of 200,000, makes for 64% of Iceland's population

The original population of Iceland was of [Nordic](/wiki/Nordic_race) and [Gaelic](/wiki/Gaels) origin. This is evident from literary evidence dating from the settlement period as well as from later scientific studies such as [blood type](/wiki/Blood_type) and genetic analyses. One such genetics study has indicated that the majority of the male settlers were of Nordic origin while the majority of the women were of Gaelic origin, meaning many settlers of Iceland were indeed Norwegian Viking warriors who brought Gaelic slaves with them.[[138]](#cite_note-139) Iceland has extensive genealogical records dating back to the late 17th century and fragmentary records extending back to the [Age of Settlement](/wiki/Settlement_of_Iceland). The biopharmaceutical company [deCODE genetics](/wiki/DeCODE_genetics) has funded the creation of a [genealogy](/wiki/Genealogy) database which attempts to cover all of Iceland's known inhabitants. It views the database, called [*Íslendingabók*](/wiki/Íslendingabók_(genealogical_database)), as a valuable tool for conducting research on genetic diseases, given the relative isolation of Iceland's population.

The population of the island is believed to have varied from 40,000 to 60,000 in the period ranging from initial settlement until the mid-19th century. During that time, cold winters, ash fall from volcanic eruptions, and [bubonic plagues](/wiki/Bubonic_plague) adversely affected the population several times.<ref name = tomasson>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> There were 37 [famine](/wiki/Famine) years in Iceland between 1500 and 1804.[[139]](#cite_note-140) The first census was carried out in 1703 and revealed that the population was then 50,358. After the destructive volcanic eruptions of the [Laki volcano](/wiki/Laki) during 1783–1784, the population reached a low of about 40,000.[[140]](#cite_note-141) Improving living conditions have triggered a rapid increase in population since the mid-19th century—from about 60,000 in 1850 to 320,000 in 2008. Iceland has a relatively young population for a developed country, with one out of five people being 14 years old or younger. With a fertility rate of 2.1, Iceland is one of only a few European countries with a birth rate [sufficient for long-term population growth](/wiki/Replacement_fertility_rate) (see table on the left).[[141]](#cite_note-142)[[142]](#cite_note-143)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Population projection  (1 January)[[143]](#cite_note-144) | | | |
| **Year** | **Low** | **Medium** | **High** |
| 2014 | [Template:Ispop](/wiki/Template:Ispop) | | |
| 2015 | 326,546 | 326,895 | 327,464 |
| 2020 | 340,418 | 342,716 | 346,279 |
| 2025 | 352,280 | 357,894 | 365,893 |
| 2030 | 361,853 | 371,796 | 385,405 |
| 2035 | 369,888 | 384,397 | 404,053 |
| 2040 | 376,580 | 395,866 | 422,047 |
| 2045 | 381,846 | 406,271 | 439,756 |
| 2050 | 385,536 | 415,627 | 457,317 |
| 2055 | 387,489 | 423,790 | 474,561 |
| 2060 | 387,597 | 430,545 | 490,976 |

In December 2007, 33,678 people (13.5% of the total population) living in Iceland had been born abroad, including children of Icelandic parents living abroad. Around 19,000 people (6% of the population) held foreign citizenship. [Polish](/wiki/Polish_diaspora) people make up the largest minority group by a considerable margin, and still form the bulk of the foreign workforce. About 8,000 Poles now live in Iceland, 1,500 of them in [Fjarðabyggð](/wiki/Fjarðabyggð) where they make up 75% of the workforce who are constructing the Fjarðarál aluminium plant.[[144]](#cite_note-145) The recent increase in [immigration](/wiki/Immigration) has been credited[Template:By whom](/wiki/Template:By_whom) to a [labour shortage](/wiki/Labour_shortage) due to the booming economy at the time, as well as to the lifting of restrictions on the movement of people from the countries that were a part of the [2004 enlargement of the European Union](/wiki/2004_enlargement_of_the_European_Union).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Large-scale construction projects in the east of Iceland (see [Kárahnjúkar Hydropower Plant](/wiki/Kárahnjúkar_Hydropower_Plant)) have also brought in many people whose stay is expected to be temporary. Many Polish immigrants were also considering leaving in 2008 as a result of the [Icelandic financial crisis](/wiki/2008–2011_Icelandic_financial_crisis).[[145]](#cite_note-146) The southwest corner of Iceland is the most densely populated region. It is also the location of the capital Reykjavík, the northernmost national capital in the world. The largest towns outside the Greater Reykjavík area are [Akureyri](/wiki/Akureyri) and [Reykjanesbær](/wiki/Reykjanesbær), although the latter is relatively close to the capital.

Some 500 Icelanders under the leadership of [Erik the Red](/wiki/Erik_the_Red) colonised [Greenland](/wiki/Greenland) among the existing [paleo-Eskimo inhabitants](/wiki/Greenland#Early_Paleo-Eskimo_cultures) in the late 10th century.[[146]](#cite_note-147) The total population reached a high point of perhaps 5,000 and developed independent institutions before disappearing by 1500.[[147]](#cite_note-148) People from Greenland attempted to set up a colony at [Vinland](/wiki/Vinland) in North America, but it was abandoned in the face of hostility from the indigenous residents.[[148]](#cite_note-149) Emigration to the United States and Canada began in the 1870s. [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), Canada had over 88,000 people of [Icelandic](/wiki/Icelandic_Canadian) descent,[[149]](#cite_note-150) while there are more than 40,000 Americans of [Icelandic](/wiki/Icelandic_American) descent, according to the 2000 US census.[[150]](#cite_note-151)

### Urbanisation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

Iceland's 10 most populous urban areas: [Template:Largest cities of Iceland](/wiki/Template:Largest_cities_of_Iceland) [Template:Clear](/wiki/Template:Clear)

### Language[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Iceland's official written and spoken language is [Icelandic](/wiki/Icelandic_language), a [North Germanic language](/wiki/North_Germanic_languages) descended from [Old Norse](/wiki/Old_Norse). In grammar and vocabulary, it has changed less from Old Norse than the other Nordic languages; Icelandic has preserved more verb and noun [inflection](/wiki/Inflection), and has to a considerable extent developed new vocabulary based on native roots rather than borrowings from other languages. The puristic tendency in the development of Icelandic vocabulary is to a large degree a result of conscious language planning, in addition to centuries of isolation. Icelandic is the only living language to retain the use of the [runic](/wiki/Runic) letter [Þ](/wiki/Þ) in [Latin script](/wiki/Latin_script). The closest living relative of the Icelandic language is [Faroese](/wiki/Faroese_language).

[Icelandic Sign Language](/wiki/Icelandic_Sign_Language) was officially recognised as a minority language in 2011. In education, its use for Iceland's deaf community is [regulated](/wiki/Legal_recognition_of_sign_languages) by the *National Curriculum Guide*.

[English](/wiki/English_language) and [Danish](/wiki/Danish_language) are compulsory subjects in the school curriculum. Both languages are widely understood and spoken.[[151]](#cite_note-152) Other commonly spoken languages are [Swedish](/wiki/Swedish_language), [Norwegian](/wiki/Norwegian_language), [German](/wiki/German_language) and [French](/wiki/French_language). Danish is mostly spoken in a way largely comprehensible to Swedes and Norwegians—it is often referred to as *skandinavíska* (i. e. *Scandinavian*) in Iceland.[[152]](#cite_note-153) Rather than using family names, as is the usual custom in most western nations, Icelanders carry [patronymic](/wiki/Patronymic) or [matronymic](/wiki/Matronymic) surnames, patronyms being far more commonly practiced. Patronymic last names are based on the first name of the father, while matronymic names are based on the first name of the mother. These follow the person's given name, e.g. *Elísabet Jónsdóttir* ("Elísabet, Jón's daughter" (Jón, being the father)) or *Ólafur Katrínarson* ("Ólafur, Katrín's son" (Katrín being the mother)).[[153]](#cite_note-154) Consequently, Icelanders refer to one another by their given name, and the Icelandic telephone directory is listed alphabetically by first name rather than by surname.[[154]](#cite_note-155) All new names must be decided upon by the [Icelandic Naming Committee](/wiki/Icelandic_Naming_Committee).

### Health[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

Iceland has a [universal health care](/wiki/Universal_health_care) system that is administered by its Ministry of Welfare ([Template:Lang-is](/wiki/Template:Lang-is))[[155]](#cite_note-156) and paid for mostly by taxes (85%) and to a lesser extent by service fees (15%). Unlike most countries, there are no private hospitals, and private insurance is practically nonexistent.<ref name = j1/>

A considerable portion of the government budget is assigned to health care,<ref name = j1>[Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)</ref> and Iceland ranks 11th in health care expenditures as a percentage of GDP[[156]](#cite_note-157) and 14th in spending per capita.[[157]](#cite_note-158) Over all, the country’s health care system is one of the best performing in the world, ranked 15th by the [World Health Organization](/wiki/World_Health_Organization).[[158]](#cite_note-159) According to an OECD report, Iceland devotes far more resources to healthcare than most industrialised nations. [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), Iceland had 3.7 doctors per 1,000 people (compared with an average of 3.1 in OECD countries) and 15.3 nurses per 1,000 people (compared with an OECD average of 8.4).[[159]](#cite_note-160) Icelanders are among the world’s healthiest people, with 81% reporting to be in good health, according to an OECD survey.[[69]](#cite_note-70) Although it is a growing problem, [obesity](/wiki/Obesity) is not as prevalent as in other [developed countries](/wiki/Developed_countries),[[159]](#cite_note-160) infant mortality is one of the lowest in the world,[[160]](#cite_note-161) and the proportion of the population that smokes is lower than the OECD average.[[159]](#cite_note-160) The average [life expectancy](/wiki/Life_expectancy) is 81.8 (compared to an OECD average of 79.5), the 4th highest in the world.[[161]](#cite_note-162) Additionally, Iceland has a very low level of pollution, thanks to an overwhelming reliance on cleaner geothermal energy, a low population density, and a high level of environmental consciousness among [citizens](/wiki/Citizens).[[162]](#cite_note-163) According to an OECD assessment, the amount of toxic material in the atmosphere is far lower than any other industrialised country measured.[[163]](#cite_note-164)

### Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:Bar box](/wiki/Template:Bar_box)

Icelanders have freedom of religion under the [Constitution of Iceland](/wiki/Constitution_of_Iceland), though the [Church of Iceland](/wiki/Church_of_Iceland), a [Lutheran](/wiki/Lutheranism) body, is the [state church](/wiki/State_church). The Registers Iceland keeps account of the religious affiliation of every Icelandic citizen. In 2015, Icelanders were divided into religious groups as follows:

* 73.8% members of the [Church of Iceland](/wiki/Church_of_Iceland).
* 11.7% members of some other [Christian](/wiki/Christianity) denomination.
* 7.1% other and not specified
* 5.6% unaffiliated
* 1.5% members of non-[Christian](/wiki/Christianity) denomination.
* 0.3% members of the [Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association](/wiki/Icelandic_Ethical_Humanist_Association)

Iceland is a very [secular](/wiki/Secular) country: as with other Nordic nations, religious attendance is relatively low.[[164]](#cite_note-165)[[165]](#cite_note-166) The above statistics represent administrative membership of religious organisations, which does not necessarily reflect the belief demographics of the population of Iceland. According to a study published in 2001, 23% of the inhabitants were either [atheist](/wiki/Atheism) or [agnostic](/wiki/Agnosticism).[[166]](#cite_note-167) A Gallup poll conducted in 2012 found that 57% of Icelanders considered themselves "a religious person", 31% considered themselves "a non religious person", while 10% defined themselves as "a convinced atheist", placing Iceland among the ten countries with the highest proportions of atheists in the world.[[167]](#cite_note-168)

## Culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Icelandic culture has its roots in North Germanic traditions. [Icelandic literature](/wiki/Icelandic_literature) is popular, in particular the [sagas](/wiki/Sagas_of_Icelanders) and [eddas](/wiki/Edda) that were written during the [High](/wiki/High_Middle_Ages) and [Late Middle Ages](/wiki/Late_Middle_Ages). Centuries of isolation have helped to insulate the country's Nordic culture from external influence; a prominent example is the preservation of the [Icelandic language](/wiki/Icelandic_language), which remains the closest to Old Norse of all modern Scandinavian languages.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

In contrast to other Nordic countries, Icelanders place relatively great importance on independence and self-sufficiency; in a public opinion analysis conducted by the [European Commission](/wiki/European_Commission), over 85% of Icelanders found independence to be "very important," compared to 47% of Norwegians, 49% of Danes, and an average of 53% for the EU25.[[168]](#cite_note-169) Icelanders also have a very strong work ethic, working some of the longest hours of any industrialised nation.[[169]](#cite_note-170) According to a poll conducted by the OECD, 66% of Icelanders were satisfied with their lives, while 70% believed that their lives will be satisfying in the future. Similarly, 83% of people in Iceland reported having more positive experiences in an average day than negative ones, compared to an OECD average of 72%, which makes Iceland one of the [happiest countries](/wiki/Happiest_country) in the OECD.[[69]](#cite_note-70) A more recent 2012 survey found that around three quarters of respondents stated they were satisfied with their lives, compared to a global average of about 53%.[[170]](#cite_note-171) Iceland is liberal with regard to [LGBT](/wiki/LGBT) rights issues. In 1996, the Icelandic parliament passed legislation to create [registered partnerships](/wiki/Registered_partnership) for same-sex couples, conferring nearly all the rights and benefits of marriage. In 2006, parliament voted unanimously to grant same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples in adoption, parenting and assisted insemination treatment. On 11 June 2010, the [Icelandic parliament amended the marriage law](/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_Iceland), making it gender neutral and defining marriage as between two individuals, making Iceland one of the first countries in the world to legalise [same-sex marriage](/wiki/Same-sex_marriage). The law took effect on 27 June 2010.[[171]](#cite_note-172) The amendment to the law also means registered partnerships for same-sex couples are now no longer possible, and marriage is their only option—identical to the existing situation for opposite-sex couples.[[171]](#cite_note-172) Icelanders are known for their deep sense of community: an OECD survey found that 98% believe they know someone they could rely on in a time of need, higher than in any other industrialised country. Similarly, only 6% reported "rarely" or "never" socializing with others.[[69]](#cite_note-70) This high level of social cohesion is attributed to the small size and homogeneity of the population, as well as to a long history of harsh survival in an isolated environment, which reinforced the importance of unity and cooperation.[[172]](#cite_note-173) [Egalitarianism](/wiki/Egalitarianism) is highly valued among the people of Iceland, with income inequality being among the lowest in the world.[[87]](#cite_note-88) The constitution explicitly prohibits the enactment of noble privileges, titles, and ranks.[[173]](#cite_note-174) Everyone is addressed by their first name. As in other Nordic countries, equality between the sexes is very high; Iceland is consistently ranked among the top three countries in the world for women to live in.[[174]](#cite_note-175)[[175]](#cite_note-176)[[176]](#cite_note-177)

### Literature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|A page of](/wiki/File:Möðruvallabók_f13r.jpg) [Njáls saga](/wiki/Njáls_saga) from [Möðruvallabók](/wiki/Möðruvallabók). The sagas are a significant part of the Icelandic heritage Iceland's best-known classical works of literature are the [Icelanders' sagas](/wiki/Icelanders'_sagas), prose epics set in Iceland's age of settlement. The most famous of these include [*Njáls saga*](/wiki/Njáls_saga), about an epic blood feud, and [*Grænlendinga saga*](/wiki/Grænlendinga_saga) and [*Eiríks saga*](/wiki/Saga_of_Erik_the_Red), describing the discovery and settlement of Greenland and Vinland (modern [Newfoundland](/wiki/Newfoundland_and_Labrador)). [*Egils saga*](/wiki/Egils_saga), [*Laxdæla saga*](/wiki/Laxdæla_saga), [*Grettis saga*](/wiki/Grettis_saga), [*Gísla saga*](/wiki/Gísla_saga) and [*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*](/wiki/Gunnlaugs_saga_ormstungu) are also notable and popular Icelanders' sagas.

A translation of the Bible was published in the 16th century. Important compositions since the 15th to the 19th century include sacred verse, most famously the [Passion Hymns](/wiki/Passion_Hymns) of [Hallgrímur Pétursson](/wiki/Hallgrímur_Pétursson), and [*rímur*](/wiki/Rímur), rhyming epic poems. Originating in the 14th century, *rímur* were popular into the 19th century, when the development of new literary forms was provoked by the influential, [National-Romantic](/wiki/Romantic_nationalism) writer [Jónas Hallgrímsson](/wiki/Jónas_Hallgrímsson). In recent times, Iceland has produced many great writers, the best-known of whom is arguably [Halldór Laxness](/wiki/Halldór_Laxness), who received the [Nobel Prize in Literature](/wiki/Nobel_Prize_in_Literature) in 1955 (the only Icelander to win a Nobel Prize thus far). [Steinn Steinarr](/wiki/Steinn_Steinarr) was an influential modernist poet during the early 20th century who remains popular.

Icelanders are avid consumers of literature, with the highest number of bookstores per capita in the world. For its size, Iceland imports and translates more international literature than any other nation.[[173]](#cite_note-174) Iceland also has the highest per capita publication of books and magazines,[[177]](#cite_note-178) and around 10% of the population will publish a book in their lifetimes.[[178]](#cite_note-179)

### Art[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The distinctive rendition of the Icelandic landscape by its painters can be linked to nationalism and the movement for [home rule and independence](/wiki/History_of_Iceland#Home_rule_and_sovereignty), which was very active in the mid-19th century.

Contemporary Icelandic painting is typically traced to the work of [Þórarinn Þorláksson](/wiki/Þórarinn_Þorláksson), who, following formal training in art in the 1890s in [Copenhagen](/wiki/Copenhagen), returned to Iceland to paint and exhibit works from 1900 to his death in 1924, almost exclusively portraying the Icelandic landscape. Several other Icelandic men and women artists studied at [Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts](/wiki/Royal_Danish_Academy_of_Fine_Arts) at that time, including [Ásgrímur Jónsson](/wiki/Ásgrímur_Jónsson), who together with Þórarinn created a distinctive portrayal of Iceland's landscape in a romantic naturalistic style. Other landscape artists quickly followed in the footsteps of Þórarinn and Ásgrímur. These included [Jóhannes Kjarval](/wiki/Jóhannes_Sveinsson_Kjarval) and [Júlíana Sveinsdóttir](/wiki/Júlíana_Sveinsdóttir). Kjarval in particular is noted for the distinct techniques in the application of paint that he developed in a concerted effort to render the characteristic [volcanic rock](/wiki/Volcanic_rock) that dominates the Icelandic environment. [Einar Hákonarson](/wiki/Einar_Hákonarson) is an expressionistic and figurative painter who by some is considered to have brought the figure back into Icelandic painting. In the 1980s, many Icelandic artists worked with the subject of the new painting in their work.

In the recent years artistic practice has multiplied, and the Icelandic art scene has become a setting for many large scale projects and exhibitions. The artist run gallery space Kling og Bang, members of which later ran the studio complex and exhibition venue Klink og Bank, has been a significant part of the trend of self-organised spaces, exhibitions and projects.[[179]](#cite_note-180) [The Living Art Museum](/wiki/The_Living_Art_Museum), Reykjavík Municipal Art Museum, [Reykjavík Art Museum](/wiki/Reykjavík_Art_Museum) and the [National Gallery of Iceland](/wiki/National_Gallery_of_Iceland) are the larger, more established institutions, curating shows and festivals.

<gallery mode = "packed"> Thorarinn thingvellir.jpg|[*Þingvellir*](/wiki/Þingvellir) by [Þórarinn B. Þorláksson](/wiki/Þórarinn_B._Þorláksson) Thorfinn Karlsefni 1918.jpg|Statue of [Thorfinn Karlsefni](/wiki/Thorfinn_Karlsefni) by Icelandic sculptor [Einar Jónsson](/wiki/Einar_Jónsson) in [Philadelphia](/wiki/Philadelphia) Laxness portrett einar hakonarson 1984.jpg|The writer [Halldór Laxness](/wiki/Halldór_Laxness) by [Einar Hákonarson](/wiki/Einar_Hákonarson), 1984 Grassodenhäuser.jpg|Traditional [Icelandic turf houses](/wiki/Icelandic_turf_house). Until the 20th century, the vast majority of Icelanders lived in rural areas Akureyri Menntaskoli.jpg|The old building (Gamli Skóli) of the Menntaskóli, i.e. High School precinct in Akureyri </gallery>

### Music[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Much Icelandic music is related to [Nordic music](/wiki/Nordic_music), and includes vibrant [folk](/wiki/Folk_music) and pop traditions, medieval music group [Voces Thules](/wiki/Voces_Thules), alternative and indie rock bands [The Sugarcubes](/wiki/The_Sugarcubes) and [Of Monsters and Men](/wiki/Of_Monsters_and_Men), jazz fusion band [Mezzoforte](/wiki/Mezzoforte_(band)), musicians [Björk](/wiki/Björk) and [Emilíana Torrini](/wiki/Emilíana_Torrini), and [post-rock](/wiki/Post-rock) band [Sigur Rós](/wiki/Sigur_Rós). The [national anthem](/wiki/National_anthem) of Iceland is [*Lofsöngur*](/wiki/Lofsöngur), written by [Matthías Jochumsson](/wiki/Matthías_Jochumsson), with music by [Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson](/wiki/Sveinbjörn_Sveinbjörnsson).[[180]](#cite_note-181) [thumb|Musician](/wiki/File:Bjork_Hurricane.jpg) [Björk](/wiki/Björk), the best-known Icelandic musician Traditional Icelandic music is strongly religious. Hymns, both religious and secular, are a particularly well-developed form of music, due to the scarcity of musical instruments throughout much of Iceland's history. Hallgrímur Pétursson wrote many Protestant hymns in the 17th century. Icelandic music was modernised in the 19th century, when Magnús Stephensen brought pipe organs, which were followed by [harmoniums](/wiki/Pump_organ). Other vital traditions of Icelandic music are epic alliterative and rhyming ballads called rímur. Rímur are epic tales, usually [a cappella](/wiki/A_cappella), which can be traced back to [skaldic](/wiki/Skald) poetry, using complex metaphors and elaborate rhyme schemes.[[181]](#cite_note-182) The best known rímur poet of the 19th century was [Sigurður Breiðfjörð](/wiki/Sigurður_Breiðfjörð) (1798–1846). A modern revitalisation of the tradition began in 1929 with the formation of Iðunn.[Template:Clarify](/wiki/Template:Clarify)

Icelandic contemporary music consists of a big group of bands, ranging from [pop-rock](/wiki/Pop-rock) groups such as [Bang Gang](/wiki/Bang_Gang), [Quarashi](/wiki/Quarashi) and [Amiina](/wiki/Amiina) to solo ballad singers like [Bubbi Morthens](/wiki/Bubbi_Morthens), [Megas](/wiki/Megas) and [Björgvin Halldórsson](/wiki/Björgvin_Halldórsson). [Independent music](/wiki/Independent_music) is very strong in Iceland, with bands such as [múm](/wiki/Múm), The Sugarcubes, [HAM](/wiki/HAM_(band)), [Of Monsters and Men](/wiki/Of_Monsters_and_Men), [Sigur Rós](/wiki/Sigur_Rós), [Sóley](/wiki/Sóley) and Viking metal band [Skálmöld](/wiki/Skálmöld), as well as solo artists [Emilíana Torrini](/wiki/Emilíana_Torrini) and [Mugison](/wiki/Mugison).

Some Icelandic jazz musicians and jazz bands have earned a reputation outside Iceland. Perhaps best known is the jazz fusion band Mezzoforte and Los Angeles-based jazz vocalist [Anna Mjöll](/wiki/Anna_Mjöll). Many Icelandic artists and bands have enjoyed international success, most notably Björk and Sigur Rós but also Quarashi, [Hera](/wiki/Hera_Hjartardóttir), [Ampop](/wiki/Ampop), [Mínus](/wiki/Mínus) and múm. The main music festival is arguably [Iceland Airwaves](/wiki/Iceland_Airwaves), an annual event on the Icelandic music scene, where Icelandic bands along with foreign ones play in the clubs of Reykjavík for a week. [Electronic musicians](/wiki/Electronic_music) include ones such as Thor and [GusGus](/wiki/GusGus).

Among Iceland's best-known classical composers are [Daníel Bjarnason](/wiki/Daníel_Bjarnason) and [Anna S. Þorvaldsdóttir](/wiki/Anna_S._Þorvaldsdóttir) (Anna Thorvaldsdottir), who in 2012 received the [Nordic Council Music Prize](/wiki/Nordic_Council_Music_Prize) and in 2015 was chosen as the [New York Philharmonic's](/wiki/New_York_Philharmonic) Kravis Emerging Composer, an honor that includes a $50,000 cash prize and a commission to write a composition for the orchestra; she is the second recipient.[[182]](#cite_note-183) and [Iceland's men's national team](/wiki/Iceland_national_handball_team) is ranked among the top 12 in the world. The [Icelandic national football team](/wiki/Iceland_national_football_team) qualified for the [UEFA European football championship](/wiki/UEFA_Euro_2016) for the first time in 2016 and advanced to the quarter-final to play against France. They defeated England 2–1 in the round of 16. The Icelandic women's team also excel at football relative to the size of the country, with the [national team](/wiki/Iceland_women's_national_football_team) ranked 15th by [FIFA](/wiki/FIFA).[[197]](#cite_note-198) In 2014 the [Icelandic men's national basketball team](/wiki/Iceland_national_basketball_team) qualified into the [EuroBasket 2015](/wiki/EuroBasket_2015) for the first time in the country history.

Iceland has excellent conditions for [skiing](/wiki/Skiing), [fishing](/wiki/Fishing), [snowboarding](/wiki/Snowboarding), [ice climbing](/wiki/Ice_climbing) and [rock climbing](/wiki/Rock_climbing), although [mountain climbing](/wiki/Mountain_climbing) and [hiking](/wiki/Hiking) are preferred by the general public. Iceland is also a world-class destination for alpine ski touring and [Telemark skiing](/wiki/Telemark_skiing), with the Troll Peninsula in Northern Iceland being the main centre of activity. Although the country's environment is generally ill-suited for golf, there are nevertheless lots of golf courses throughout the island, and Iceland has a greater percentage of the population playing golf than Scotland with over 17,000 registered golfers out of a population of approximately 300,000.[[198]](#cite_note-199) Iceland hosts an annual international golf tournament known as the Arctic Open played through the night during the summer solstice at [Akureyri Golf Club](/wiki/Akureyri_Golf_Club).[[199]](#cite_note-200)<ref name = w111>[Wilcox and Latif](/wiki/#Wilcox), p. 111</ref> Iceland has also won the most competitions for [World's Strongest Man](/wiki/World's_Strongest_Man), with eight titles shared evenly between [Magnús Ver Magnússon](/wiki/Magnús_Ver_Magnússon) and [Jón Páll Sigmarsson](/wiki/Jón_Páll_Sigmarsson).

Swimming is popular in Iceland. Geothermally heated outdoor pools are widespread, and swimming courses are a mandatory part of the national curriculum.<ref name = w111/> [Horseback riding](/wiki/Horseback_riding), which was historically the most prevalent form of transportation on the island, remains a common pursuit for many Icelanders.

The oldest sport association in Iceland is the Reykjavík Shooting Association, founded in 1867. Rifle shooting became very popular in the 19th century with the encouragement of politicians and nationalists who were pushing for Icelandic independence. To this day, it remains a significant pastime.[[200]](#cite_note-201) Iceland has also produced many chess masters and hosted the historic [World Chess Championship 1972](/wiki/World_Chess_Championship_1972) in Reykjavík during the height of the [Cold War](/wiki/Cold_War). [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), there have been nine Icelandic chess grandmasters, a considerable number given the small size of the population.[[201]](#cite_note-202) [Bridge](/wiki/Bridge_(card_game)) is also popular, with Iceland participating in a number of international tournaments. Iceland won the world bridge championship (the [Bermuda Bowl](/wiki/Bermuda_Bowl)) in Yokohama, Japan, in 1991 and took second place (with Sweden) in Hamilton, Bermuda, in 1950.

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]

[Template:Portal](/wiki/Template:Portal)

* [Index of Iceland-related articles](/wiki/Index_of_Iceland-related_articles)
* [List of international rankings](/wiki/List_of_international_rankings)
* [List of island countries](/wiki/List_of_island_countries)
* [New Iceland](/wiki/New_Iceland) in Manitoba, Canada
* [Outline of Iceland](/wiki/Outline_of_Iceland)

## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=36)]

Footnote

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

Citations

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

Bibliography

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)

## Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=37)]

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* Jonsson, Ivar (2012) 'Explaining the Crisis of Iceland – A Realist Approach' in Journal of Critical Realism, 11,1.
* Heiðarsson, Jakob Oskar (2015) 'Iceland - My Small Island'.

## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=38)]

[Template:Sister project links](/wiki/Template:Sister_project_links)

* [Gateway to Iceland](http://iceland.is/)
* [Government Offices of Iceland](http://www.government.is/)
* [Guide to Iceland](https://guidetoiceland.is/)
* [Icelandic Government Information Center & Icelandic Embassies](http://www.iceland.org/)
* [Visit Iceland](http://www.visiticeland.com/) – the official [Icelandic Tourist Board](/wiki/Icelandic_Tourist_Board)
* [Template:CIA World Factbook link](/wiki/Template:CIA_World_Factbook_link)
* [Iceland](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/281235/Iceland) entry at [*Encyclopædia Britannica*](/wiki/Encyclopædia_Britannica)
* [Iceland](http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/govpubs/for/iceland.htm) from *UCB Libraries GovPubs*
* [Template:Dmoz](/wiki/Template:Dmoz)
* [Iceland](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17383525) from the [BBC News](/wiki/BBC_News)
* [Template:Wikiatlas](/wiki/Template:Wikiatlas)
* [Template:Osmrelation-inline](/wiki/Template:Osmrelation-inline)
* [Incredible Iceland: Fire and Ice](http://web.archive.org/web/20100724104957/http://www.life.com:80/image/first/in-gallery/45881/incredible-iceland-fire-and-ice) – slideshow by [*Life magazine*](/wiki/Life_magazine)
* [The Norse in the North Atlantic: Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage](http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/norse.html) [Memorial University of Newfoundland](/wiki/Memorial_University_of_Newfoundland).
* [A Photographer’s View of Iceland](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt_e1d7ZBAk) Documentary produced by [Prairie Public Television](/wiki/Prairie_Public_Television)
* [vifanord](http://www.vifanord.de/index.php?id=1&L=1&rd=243343734) – a digital library that provides scientific information on the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as the Baltic region as a whole

[Template:Geographic Location](/wiki/Template:Geographic_Location)

[Template:Coord](/wiki/Template:Coord)

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