

BEST THINGS ABOUT ICELAND – 10 HIGHLIGHTS FOR YOUR TRIP

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November 20, 2017 By Talek Nantes Europe , Iceland , Other 6
Comments

November 19,
2017

The best things about Iceland are almost too numerous to talk about. But, we have put together a list of 10 Iceland highlights and tips so you can make the most out of your trip.

Iceland is enjoying a tourism boom. Budget airlines are making it easier and less expensive to get there. Accommodation options like Airbnb make it cheaper to stay and the beauty and charm of Iceland make it easy to enjoy.

10 Best Things About Iceland, The Land of Fire and Ice



Northern lights in Iceland

1. Like waterfalls? They are our top recommendation for things to do in Iceland.

One of the best things to do in Iceland is to see the waterfalls. Iceland is a waterfall lover's

paradise and is surely one of the best things about Iceland.

Three waterfalls that should be on every visitor's list are Gullfoss on the popular Golden Circle route; the majestic Skogafoss, 25 meters high and 60 meters wide on the southern side of the island; and Seljalandsfoss where visitors can walk behind the falls and experience the water's power from a completely different perspective.



2. The Viking history of Iceland

Leif Erikson was Icelandic. He was born in Iceland around 970 AD and went on to explore the North American coast 500 years before Columbus. I always thought he was Norwegian.

One of the top things to do in Reykjavik is see the statue of the famous Viking in Hallgrímskirkja Square in the city's center. Most major streets in the city will lead you to this pretty square. On the way, you will pass quirky street art and shops selling beautifully designed warm woolen sweaters, Iceland's specialty craft.

3. The taxes on liquor are among the highest in the world (around 90%).

Okay, maybe this isn't a highlight, but it is definitely a handy tip to know about Iceland so you can plan accordingly. A glass of wine will set you back quite a bit. Even a glass of beer can go for over US\$18. One alternative is to purchase liquor at the government stores, Vinbuden, which are scattered all over the country.

Another option is to purchase liquor at the duty-free stores you find in the airports as you enter the country. You may also want to try Iceland's signature liquor, Brennivín, a type of schnapps made from fermented potato pulp and flavored with caraway seed. It is strong and tasty.

4. The quirky food is another of our favorite highlights of Iceland.

| I'll have a side of fermented shark with that, please.

Another highlight of Iceland is the abundance of unusual foods including whale steak, fermented shark, puffin, fish jerky, and others. A delicious treat is smoked sheep head, served during celebrations. More common Icelandic specialties include fresh seafood and lamb. Excellent restaurants, from ultra-chic high-end to tasty street food abound. Some that we liked are Messinn and Icelandic Street Food both in the center of Reykjavik.

What made "Icelandic Street Food" such an appealing restaurant is the owner, a friendly, funny, pleasant guy in a bowtie who explained the characteristics of Icelandic food and treated us to a sample of his grandmother's pastry. Notable mention goes to Seabaron or Sægreifannon in the harbor for a wide selection of savory seafood skewers. Sampling Icelandic food will help you make the most of your visit to Iceland.

5. In Reykjavik, you'll find the (self-proclaimed) best hot dog in the world.

One of the best things to do in Reykjavik is to try their world-famous hot dogs.

There is a little hot dog stand in Reykjavik known as Baejarins Betsu Pylsur, which loosely translates into "the best hot dog in the world." Bill Clinton sampled dogs here, and Anthony Bourdain confirmed the hot dogs were out of this world. I have to admit they were pretty good. It is said the secret is a bit of lamb in the stuffing. The stand is downtown near the harbor. Just get online.

6. Visiting the thermal waters.

Another of the best things about Iceland is the thermal waters. And when taking a dip in Iceland lagoons, there is some etiquette you must follow.

When in a pool or hot tub, the last person into the water is expected to greet the other bathers and chat amiably. When in a sauna or steam room, proper etiquette dictates that one remains silent.

The Blue Lagoon is a great place to experience the thermal waters culture in the Land of Fire and Ice. It is such an unusual experience for most visitors with its floating massages, skin-softening mud masks and swim-up bar all in a steaming cauldron of misty fog.



7. The population is very small.

The population of Iceland is approximately 340,000. The vast majority live in the capital, Reykjavik. With such a small pool of potential mates, a local company offers genealogical services to determine if the object of your affection is actually related to you.

8. Iceland's wildest animal is a sheep.

The country has no native land mammals. They have all been imported over the years. The local sheep roam free most of the year and are almost considered wild rather than farm animals, although they are owned by local farmers. Some visitors say they can almost taste the wild berries and sweetgrass the sheep feed on in the local lamb dishes.

9. Icelandic horses are another of our favorite highlights of Iceland.

Icelandic horses were first imported from western Norway about 1000 years ago. At that time they were so beloved that they were frequently buried with their owners (poor horse).

Today the horse population is so insulated that they have lost immunity to certain diseases. Consequently, the government prohibits the import of horses and certain horse gear to protect these beautiful creatures.



10. The beaches have black sand.

One of the highlights of Iceland is the black sand beaches. Due to volcanic residue deposited over the centuries, Iceland's beaches have black sand and unusual rock formations creating stunning landscapes.

One example is Reynisfjara beach where the contrast of white ice on black sand is somehow otherworldly. Massive basalt stacks encircle deep caves on the beach where the cold North Atlantic waves rush on to the black sand. Reynisfjara is so beautiful it was voted one of the 10 must-see beaches on earth in 1991 by National Geographic.



You can book local tours at the well run and efficient tourist information centers around Reykjavik. Two companies we used were Gray Line and Your Day Tours both of which were punctual, informative and pleasant.

Iceland is different. You are likely to have experiences here that you have never had before and cannot enjoy anywhere else. It is a great option for a two-week jaunt around a beautiful island or a weekend stopover on the way to or from Europe. Either way, this place will charm you. And here is the perfect itinerary for the ultimate 3 days in Iceland.

What do you think are the best things about Iceland? Did we forget anything? Let us know in the comments!

BTW, if you are getting ready for your trip, make sure to take advantage of these useful, **money-saving links** to book your trip:

- Research and **book your flight** with Skyscanner. I have found them to be the best because they list all airlines including the budget ones. You are always sure of having researched all options.
- For **car rental in Europe** that has flexible pickup and drop-off options, I



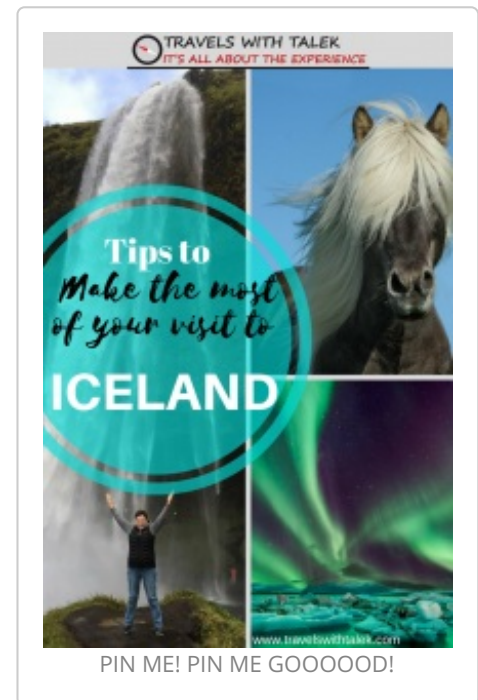
recommend Auto Europe.

- You can also **book your car rental** through Skyscanner.
- **Book your**



accommodation with Booking.com. I find they have the widest selection and a nice, user-friendly, transparent website.

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- Looking for a **small group tour** to unforgettable destinations with top professionals? Intrepid Travel is your choice.
- For more **general tours** to any destination or attraction, **book with** Viator. Check them out.
- Need a visa? **Get your visa** for all countries with iVisa.



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