

Winter in ICELAND



Gullfoss waterfall, one of the 3 sites in the Golden Circle

Geography

- If it's your first time in Iceland, you are more than likely staying in Reykjavik. It's about 45 minutes from Keflavik International Airport and I recommend taking the [Flybus](#) into Reykjavik. You can buy ahead and I believe it's roughly \$40 but the buses are pretty nice with Wifi and it's way cheaper than a taxi (and no Ubers yet, sorry). Your hotel or Airbnb host will know which stop is closest to them, so just ask.
- Almost every tour you find will pick you up in Reykjavik. If you're staying at a hotel, they will probably even pick you up at your hotel. The Airbnb I was staying at was a 1 minute walk from the [Hallgrimskirkja](#), a huge beautiful church and one of the pickup spots. *TIP: A friend of mine went up into the church tower and watched the sunrise (since it happens later) and said it was magical. It overlooks the city and the bay area, so I can only imagine.*
- I found Reykjavik to be pretty walkable, even in the freezing cold. I stayed super close to one of the bigger sites in town so I could have easily taken the bus, but I much prefer walking if I can. The city center had lots of cute shops and cafes and restaurants and was a few blocks long (lots of beautiful wool). The [Harpa](#) is a new and modern concert hall that was built recently and overlooks the water and is a good starting point to exploring the city and it is a >10 walk from the Hallgrimskirkja.

- Where to stay – my Airbnb was very conveniently located and my room was super cute and comfortable. It was a great home base for my few days in Reykjavik. And even though it was only a private room in her home, I never met the host. So those of you worried about having awkward interactions can chill out. I loved living and feeling like a local (and paying half the price of the stale hotel on the corner) > [see my Airbnb here](#). Basically I recommend staying somewhere within the city if you plan to do any exploring. If you're just there to do day trips and see all the huge sites, then any hotel will do. I always use [TripAdvisor](#) when booking hotels as the reviews are from real travelers (like you and me).
- I suggest becoming familiar with a general map of Iceland. I'd know where the airport is, the route to Reykjavik, and the locations of the sites you're going to see.

Packing

- I went over Thanksgiving, so the winter season had just begun and it was obviously cold. And in addition to the cold, it was windy as all get out, like grown men blowing over windy. Thermal bottom layers, very decent coat, gloves, hat, ears, layers layers layers. You know your cold-weather capacity more than I do, so just pack smart.
- Some people recommend traveling with a crossbody, but it never fits enough of my things and I personally don't find it useful, but #toeachhisown I have also heard that fanny packs are coming back, so I'm on the hunt for a cute and practical one. I used to have a cloth bag/purse I traveled with, because the cloth allowed it to expand (I could fit a bottle of wine in it... which was a dream come true). I also loved my over the shoulder purse that was a comfortable size, but now I have a leather backpack I bring with me that I love dearly.
- If you're going in winter, it's worth investing in a sturdy, warm pair of snow shoes. You want warm + comfortable. I have a pair of warm snow Uggs I love and a pair of sturdy boots from REI that I also love. Do your research, find what best suits you, but be prepared! Blisters on vacation ARE THE WORST!

Misc.

- Get a GOOD converter. I've bought cheap ones that were garbage and won't stay plugged in, so I'd suggest spending \$10-20 on a good one. Amazon has tons, read the reviews. [Here's](#) the tricked out one that I have and it's amazing. PS don't bring your blow dryer, it will fry and most hotels (and Airbnbs) provide them. I also suggest investing in one of those power bars for recharging when you're out and about. You can buy them anywhere here and they come in SUPER HANDY since your phone seems to drain extra quickly while abroad.
- \$\$\$: I take cash out of the ATM once I get there. The ATM fee is so low compared to the conversion rate, so you won't even notice. I usually take out a large amount (do it during the day and stuff it low in your purse). Most shops and eating places take credit/debit cards, but I recommend having both because #youneverknow.
- Make sure your CC company doesn't charge an exorbitant foreign fee and that they know you are going abroad so they don't lock up your card with your first foreign purchase.

- Be aware that since Iceland is so far north, their seasons are extreme. During the winter, the sun rises late and sets early. Daylight is anywhere from 10am to 4pm. Summertime is the opposite with the Midnight Sun. So just be mentally prepared!
- Super random, but the water smells really gross. It's perfectly fine to drink though, even from the faucet.

Food

- I found food in Iceland to be a little more on the expensive side. Expect to pay \$20-30 for a normal entrée. I will say that all the food I had was really delicious though, so just know that going in and have the right attitude so you aren't salty every time you go to pay your tab. I did a food walk tour with [Wake UP Reykjavik](#) and it was OUTSTANDING. I love to do food tours on my first day, as it helps me to get acquainted with the city and get some great local food recommendations, and this one was in my top 2.
- Skyr is a popular Icelandic food. It's cultured yogurt. I had some fresh and delicious blueberry Skyr from [Julia and Julia](#), a super cute cafe in the city center with coffee, wine, bakes & cakes run by 2 best friends.
- And as crazy as it sounds, the rye bread ice cream at [Café Loki](#) was out of this world! It is known all over Iceland as a specialty and didn't disappoint. Even in the cold, it's worth it! It was within walking distance from my Airbnb so I went again and had a delicious lamb stew for lunch.
- Definitely can't forget [the famous Icelandic hot dog](#)! It's a special hot dog recipe served with raw white onions and crispy fried onions, ketchup, sweet brown mustard called pylsusinnep, and remouloude. Most people order it "with everything" even me (who doesn't care for onions). Look for the Baejarins Beztu Pylsur hot dog stand, the oldest and most famous in all of Iceland!
- Almost directly across the street from my Airbnb was ROK. The outside looked super cool and trendy, so my new Airbnb neighbor and I popped in for dinner and ended up sharing multiple tapas and they were all AMAZING. We got out of there for less than \$50 each (including drinks) so we both left pleased and full.
- Almost everyone speaks English there, so that's a huge plus. At restaurants, I like to ask what the most popular things are or what the waiter's favorites are – forces them to explain at least a few traditional dishes and I can usually pick something yummy from those.

Transportation

- Buses are huge in Iceland. I took a public bus from
- I did take the public train from the airport into Oslo to walk around for an afternoon during my layover and I didn't have any issues.

Tourism

- Ya'll there are SO MANY different things you can do in Iceland it's kind of hard to pick. There's Northern Lights, whale watching, the Golden Circle, snorkeling, lava cave crawling, volcanic craters, glaciers, waterfalls, beaches, snowmobiling, and duh, THE BLUE LAGOON.
- What's the **Golden Circle**? It's arguably the most popular tourist attraction in Iceland (aside from the Blue Lagoon). It is 3 different sites: the amazing Gullfoss waterfall, the only active geyser, and a rift valley called Thingvellir National Park. I did a smaller, intimate day tour of the Golden Circle with [Geolceland](#) and it was GREAT. It was a smaller bus (not a big Greyhound type), the guide was amazing, the stops along the way were wonderful, and they offered lots of little touches, like little ice guards for your shoes so you could climb higher than the others. It was amazing and I definitely recommend them!
- In case you didn't know, lots of scenes from Game of Thrones tour are filmed in Iceland. [Gray Line Tours](#) offers a tour that explores all of them with a guide that was actually an EXTRA on the show! WTF! Unfortunately my tour got cancelled the morning of because of the extreme weather and road conditions, but they kindly offered me a different tour for free so I took it (and met a cool new friend). Gray Line Tours has TONS of different tours, probably every kind you can imagine. They are the biggest tour company in Iceland and also the cheapest. Think big greyhound buses, tour guides reading from a book, etc. But if all you care about are the sites and just getting there, then these are definitely for you. If you want a more intimate experience with a more professional guide, then maybe look elsewhere and be ready to open your pocket book. I've had great experiences with both types of companies and as long as you are aware that you get what you pay for, then you should be fine.
- **NORTHERN LIGHTS!** I can't adequately describe the feeling of watching the Northern Lights dance before your eyes, I can only tell you to go experience it! I enjoyed my chase with [Time Tours](#) – they were a little cheaper than other companies, but they did drive us all over looking for them until we saw some. And our guide took everyone's photo as many times as we wanted, which was nice because of course you want a souvenir photo! And just FYI, your iPhone won't capture the lights at all. You have to have a real camera and most guides can help you fix your settings if you're interested. Also note, the lights don't come out every night. Try to book your tour at the beginning of your trip because most companies will let you go on as many tours until you see them.
- **THE. BLUE. LAGOON. IS. SO. FANTASTIC.** OK, you've seen the pics and you've dreamed about it. It's exactly as you imagine. I could've spent all day there but I love the way I put it into my trip. So the Blue Lagoon is 10 minutes from the airport, so about 30 minutes from Reykjavik (where you're probably staying). If you're like me, your flight landed super early and your flight leaves super late. I'd suggest tagging the Blue Lagoon onto one of your flight days, as in on your way to or from the airport. I suggest buying your tickets online beforehand to avoid the ticket line. There are different tiers of tickets; I bought the middle one which includes a bath robe and slippers in addition to the towel that everyone is given. If you're going during the winter, I definitely recommend the bath robe as your wet towel will get freezing cold real quick. I also wish I had splurged and gotten a massage while I was there because #YOLO. When I asked the

morning of they were completely full, so if it's something you're interested in, book ahead of time. There's a little café and an actual restaurant on site and it's nice because everything gets charged to your bracelet and you pay on your way out. Even the booze and smoothies from the SWIM UP BAR in the BLUE LAGOON. Yeah ya'll, it's awesome. And your first drink is free for everyone. I got there first thing in the morning when it opened and got to watch the sun rise (since it rises at like 10am during the winter). They also have luggage storage for like \$5/bag which was nice since I was heading to the airport. You can buy transportation from the airport or Reykjavik, so I recommend booking that in advance also. There are lots of day tours from that include roundtrip transportation and the entrance fee if you want to take that route also. The locker room and showers are nice and there are attendants everywhere to help you. I had the best time ever and like I said, I could've spent all day there, but 8am-2pm was plenty of time to get all the feels and reflect on how lucky I was to be there.



Hope you
have the trip
of a life time!
Iceland is
amazing!