

Iceland

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Reykjavík runtur** Cavort with partying crowds on the city's Friday-night pub-crawl (p585)
- **Whale-watching** Come eyeball-to-eyeball with placid ocean giants (p581)
- **Blue Lagoon** Swim through steam clouds at Iceland's world-famous spa (p587)
- **Off-the-beaten track** Hike through Þórsmörk's stunning, flower-filled gorges (p588)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 103,000 sq km (89 Iceland's would fit into mainland USA)
- **ATMs** Widespread
- **Budget** Minimum 1kr4500 per day
- **Capital** Reykjavík
- **Country code** ☎ 354; international directory assistance and collect-call operator ☎ 1811
- **Famous for** Björk!
- **Head of State** President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
- **Language** Icelandic
- **Money** Icelandic króna (1kr); A\$1 = 1kr56.86; CA\$1 = 1kr66.90; €1 = 1kr95.16; ¥100 = 1kr64.86; NZ\$1 = 1kr47.25; UK£1 = 1kr138.31; US\$1 = 1kr76.06
- **Phrases** *Halló* (hello), *takk fyrir* (thanks), *skál!* (cheers!)
- **Population** 300,000
- **Time** GMT/UTC (no daylight saving)
- **Visas** Unnecessary for visitors from Scandinavia, EU countries, the USA and the Commonwealth for stays of up to 90 days.



TRAVEL HINTS

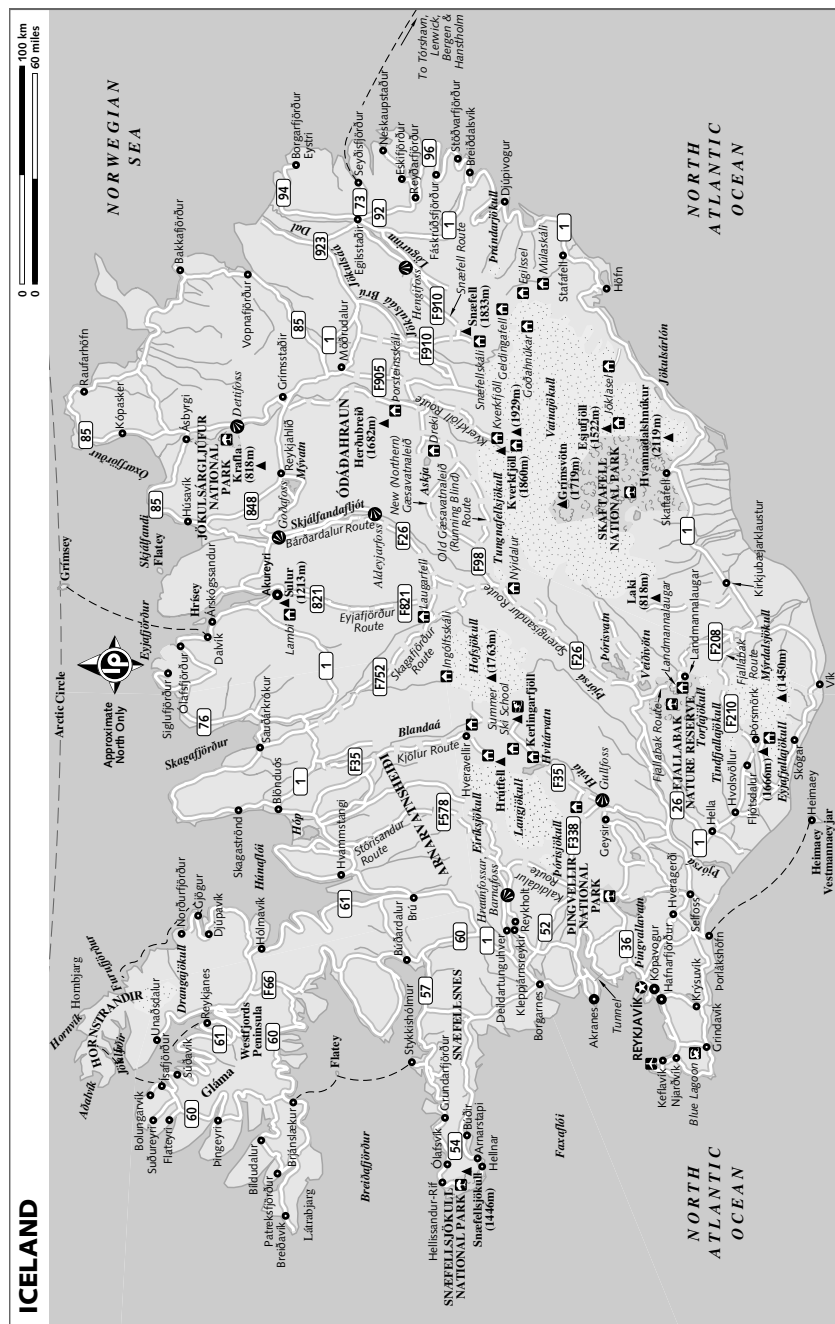
Take a sleeping bag for discounted accommodation. Buy beer from Vín Búð (state alcohol shop) and start Friday night at home.

ROAMING ICELAND

Go wild on Reykjavík's Friday-night *runtur*, then sober up with a soak in the unearthly Blue Lagoon.

Iceland is a vast volcanic laboratory, where mighty forces create glaciers, geysers, volcanoes and bubbling geothermal springs. All this earth-shaking energy seems to inspire its inhabitants too. Fuelled by coffee, sex and beer, Reykjavík's fashion-conscious crowds party like mad on the city's high-spirited weekend pub-crawl (*runtur*). Music bursts from every seam – the best time to experience all this creativity is at the Iceland Airwaves festival in October.

More chilled-out attractions include Iceland's natural wonders: you'll never forget coming eye-to-eye with whales on a boat trip, or horse-trekking under the midnight sun. Take time out to admire thundering waterfalls, spouting springs and glacial valleys; and to bathe in the world-famous Blue Lagoon, a freaky-blue spa in the middle of a lava field.



HISTORY

Iceland's solitude was shattered by the Age of Settlement (AD 871–930), when a wave of Vikings descended, driven from Norway by political clashes. The settlers rejected monarchy in favour of the world's first democratic parliament, the Alþing, established in 930 at Þingvellir (Parliament Plains; see p587).

In the early 13th century, violent blood feuds among Icelandic chieftains led to periods of first Norwegian (1262) then Danish (1397) rule. For the next six centuries, Iceland was devastated by a Dark Age of famine, disease and disastrous volcanic eruptions.

Despite never-ending catastrophes, a sense of nationalism was slowly growing. By 1874 Iceland had drafted its own constitution. The Republic of Iceland was established on 17 June 1944.

During WWII Iceland serviced British and US troops stationed at Keflavík (the base remained until September 2006). The war marked a dramatic leap forward, as subsistence farming gave way to frenzied building and prosperity. The country has never looked back.

THE CULTURE

Most Icelanders are descended from early Scandinavian settlers and their Celtic slaves. In January 2006 the population hit 300,000 – almost half of whom live in Reykjavík. Icelanders are individualists, with a live-and-let-live attitude. Despite a love of extreme partying, Icelanders have one of the world's highest life expectancies – 78.9 years for men and 82.8 for women! Eight-four percent of the population is Lutheran.

Björk and Sigur Rós are Iceland's most famous musical exports. New bands surface all the time: listen out for Leaves, Mugison, Cynic Guru, Benny Crespo's Gang and girl-band Nylon. The music documentary *Screaming Masterpiece* (2005) is a fun introduction to Icelandic music.

READING UP

Lonely Planet's *Iceland* is the guide for in-depth travel. For a flavour of Viking life, try *Egils Saga*, about a poet, murderer and grandson of a werewolf. *Independent People*, a fantastic if bleak novel about early-20th-century Iceland, won its author Halldór Laxness the Nobel Prize.

ENVIRONMENT

Iceland is a young country with an active volcanic zone running southwest to northeast, responsible for all those lava flows, geysers, hot springs and volcanoes.

The only indigenous land mammal is the Arctic fox. Iceland compensates for this shortage with huge numbers of birds and 17 species of whale.

Iceland intends to begin full-scale commercial whale-hunting in 2007: conservationists are calling for a boycott of all things Icelandic. See the International Whaling Commission (www.iwcoffice.org) and World Wide Fund for Nature (www.wwf.org) websites.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Keflavík airport (code KEF; ☎ 425 0600, flight times 425 0777; www.keflavikairport.com), 48km west of Reykjavík, is Iceland's main gateway. Flights to Greenland and the Faroe Islands use **Reykjavík domestic airport** (code REK) in the city centre.

Icelandair (code FI; ☎ 505 0700; www.icelandair.net) has direct flights to Keflavík from Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the US. **British Airways** (code BA; ☎ 421 7374; www.britishairways.com) has muscled in on Iceland routes, with a new service from Keflavík to London.

Internet-based airline **Iceland Express** (code HW; ☎ 550 0600; www.icelandexpress.com) has the cheapest flights from Keflavík to London and Copenhagen. With increased competition, Icelandair and British Airways often have equally cheap fares.

In summer, **Flugfélag Íslands** (Air Iceland; code NY; ☎ 570 3030; www.airiceland.is) flies from Reykjavík to the Faroe Islands, and to Kulusuk and Narsarsuaq (Greenland).

Boat

Between March and mid-October **Smyril Line's** (www.smyril-line.com) weekly car ferry *Norröna* sails between Hanstholm (Denmark), Bergen (Norway), Lerwick (Shetland Islands, UK), Tórshavn (Faroe Islands) and Seyðisfjörður (eastern Iceland)...not necessarily in that order! Prices and routes are complicated; check the website for the most up-to-date details.

GETTING AROUND

Air

The extensive domestic flight network is heavily dependent on the weather. Iceland's main domestic airline, **Flugfélag Íslands** (Air Iceland; ☎ 570 3030; www.airiceland.is), offers one-month four-/five-/six-sector air passes (Ikr29,700/33,700/38,700) which must be bought outside Iceland. There's also a Fly-As-You-Please ticket, giving 12 days of unlimited travel (Ikr47,000). Domestic airport tax (Ikr930) must be paid on every departure.

Bicycle

Rough roads and wild weather make cycling a challenge! Go prepared, and remember, you can always put your bike on a bus.

In several areas, including Reykjavík, bikes can be hired for around Ikr1700 per day.

Bus

BSÍ (Bifreiðastöð Íslands; Map pp582-3; ☎ 562 1011; www.bsi.is; BSÍ bus terminal, Vatnsmýrarvegur 10, Reykjavík) operates long-distance buses and sells money-saving passes. Many buses only run from June to August.

Car & Motorcycle

Transporting or renting a vehicle is expensive, although prices are improving. The Reykjavík tourist office has details of the special offers available.

You must be at least 20 years old to hire a car.

Hitching

In summer hitch-hiking is possible in Iceland, but you may have to wait a long time in rural areas.

Local Transport

Reykjavík has a good local bus service. Taxis with English- or German-speaking drivers are available in most towns.

REYKJAVÍK

pop 115,676

Cute and coffee-fuelled, Iceland's eccentric capital is a tiny city with tremendous soul. You'll find rich Viking history, state-of-the-art geothermal pools, cosy cafés, super-stylish bars and a fizzing music scene, all teetering on the brink of the Arctic Circle.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

For police, ambulance and fire services in Iceland, dial ☎ 112.

The first settler, Ingólfur Arnarson, landed here in 871, naming the place Reykjavík (Smoky Bay) after steam rising from nearby fissures. Since then, Reykjavík has become a buzzing city while retaining its small-town charm.

ORIENTATION

Reykjavík's heart lies between Tjörninn (the Pond) and the harbour, with nearly everything else within walking distance.

INFORMATION

Discount Cards

Reykjavík Tourist Card (24/48/72 hr Ikr1200/1700/2200) Available at tourist offices, the money-saving tourist card gives you free entry to galleries, museums and swimming pools, and includes a bus pass.

Internet Access

Aðalbókasafn (Reykjavík City Library; Map p586; ☎ 563 1717; www.borgarbokasafn.is; Tryggvagata 15; per hr Ikr200; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Thu, 11am-7pm Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) Libraries have the cheapest internet access.

Medical Services

Health Centre (Map p586; ☎ 585 2600; Vesturgata 7) Doctor's appointment required (Ikr700).

Landsþítali University Hospital (Map pp582-3; ☎ 543 2000; Fossvogur) Has a 24-hour emergency ward.
Lyfja Apótek (Map p586; ☎ 552 4045; Laugavegur 16; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat) Central pharmacy.
Lyfja Apótek (Map pp582-3; ☎ 533 2300; Lágmúli 5; ☎ 8am-midnight) Late-night pharmacy. Bus 52, 14 or 15.

Money

Banks, clustered round Austurstræti and Bankastræti, offer the best exchange rates.

Landsbanki Íslands (Map p586; Austurstræti) Has no commission charges.

Post

Main post office (Map p586; Pósthússtræti 5)

Telephone

There are public coin/cardphones at the main tourist office and Kringlan shopping centre (Map pp582-3).

Tourist Information

The excellent English-language newspaper *Grapevine*, widely distributed, is an irreverent introduction to Reykjavík.

Main tourist office (Upplýsingamiðstöð Ferðamanna; Map p586; ☎ 590 1500; www.vistireykjavik.is; Aðalstræti 2; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep-May) There's also a desk at the Radhús (City Hall).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The immense concrete church **Hallgrímskirkja** (Map p586; ☎ 510 1000; www.hallgrímskirkja.is; Skólavörðuholt; ☎ 9am-5pm), designed to resemble basalt columns, is Reykjavík's most famous building. For unmissable views, take an elevator trip up the 75m **tower** (adult/child Ikr350/50).

Iceland is a terrific place for whale-spotting: minke often swim right up to the boats. Between April and October, **Elding** (Map p586; ☎ 555 3565; www.elding.is; adult/7-15yr Ikr3900/1600) and **Hvalstöðin Whale-Watching Centre** (Map p586; ☎ 533 2660; www.whalewatching.is; adult/7-15yr Ikr3800/1500) run three-hour trips from the harbour.

Reykjavík's outdoor swimming pools, heated by volcanic water, are the city's social hubs. The biggest and best is **Laugardalslaug** (Map pp582-3; ☎ 553 4039; www.laugar.com; Sundlaugavegur 30; adult/child Ikr280/120, swimsuit/towel hire Ikr300/300; ☎ 6.50am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun), with indoor and outdoor pools, seven Jacuzzi-like 'hot pots' and a five-star health resort next door. Take bus 14.

Bringing a touch of the Riviera to Reykjavík, the Blue-Flag **Nauthólsvík Hot Beach** (Ylströndin; Map pp582-3; ☎ 511 6630; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm mid-May-mid-Sep) is a dinky crescent of golden sand warmed by 18°C to 20°C geothermal water. Take bus 16.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From the BSÍ bus terminal, walk left along Vatnsmýrarvegur, then turn right along Njarðargata. Cross the ring road, then take the first road on the left, Sóleyjargata, which takes you to the city centre (1km). Alternatively, take a taxi.

From Keflavik airport: the **Flybus** (☎ 562 1011; www.re.is) meets all incoming flights (Ikr1100, 50 minutes). Credit cards are accepted.

Eccentric eruption-chaser Villi Knudsen screens his footage at the awesome **Volcano Show** (Map p586; ☎ 845 9548; vknudsen2000@yahoo.com; Red Rock Cinema, Hellusund 6a; adult/student/child Ikr900/750/250). One-hour shows in English begin at 11am, 3pm and 8pm in July and August (less frequently outside high season).

The excellent **Saga Museum** (Map pp582-3; ☎ 511 1517; www.sagamuseum.is; adult/concession/child Ikr900/700/450; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, noon-5pm Oct-Mar) brings Iceland's history to life with silicon models and bloodcurdling screams. It's inside the tourist complex **Pearl** (the Pearl), which also boasts two **artificial geysers** and a 360-degree **viewing deck** with tremendous mountain and city vistas. Take bus 18.

The city's newest museum is **Reykjavík 871+/-2** (Settlement Exhibition; Map p586; ☎ 411 6370; www.reykjavik871.is; Aðalstræti 16; adult/12-18yr Ikr600/300; ☎ 10am-5pm), based around a single Viking longhouse. It's a unique combination of archaeology, technology and imagination – go and see!

The **National Museum** (Map p586; ☎ 530 2200; www.natmus.is; Suðurgata 41; adult/concession/under 18yr Ikr600/300/free, admission free Wed; ☎ 10am-5pm daily May-mid-Sep, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-Apr, to 9pm first Thu of month) gives a fine overview of Iceland's culture and history. Its most treasured artefact is a stunning carved 13th-century church door.

Þjóðmenningarhúsið (Culture House; Map p586; ☎ 545 1400; www.thjodmenning.is; Hverfisgata 15; adult/under 16yr Ikr300/free, admission free Wed; ☎ 11am-5pm) offers intelligent displays about the sagas; darkened rooms contain the vellums themselves.

The **National Gallery** (Map p586; ☎ 515 9600; www.listasafn.is; Frikkirkjuvegur 7; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) contains works by Iceland's most renowned artists, and gives an interesting glimpse into the nation's psyche: surreal mud-purple landscapes and visions of ogresses, giants and dead men walking.

Old Reykjavík evolved around **Tjörninn**, a large central lake filled with hooting waterbirds. Near the lake you'll find the **Raðhús** (city hall; Map p586; ☎ 563 2000; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun), containing a café and impressive 3D map of Iceland; the Icelandic parliament **Alþingi** (Map p586; ☎ 563 0500; www.althingi.is; Túngata); and Iceland's small but perfectly proportioned cathedral, the **Dómkirkja** (Map p586; ☎ 520 9700; Lækjargata 14a; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri).



SLEEPING

Accommodation prices are for June to September; out of season, rates drop by up to 30%. Guesthouses often offer discounts (but not breakfast) if you use your own sleeping bag.

Reykjavík Camping Ground (Map pp582-3; ☎ 568 6944; www.reykjavikcampsite.is; Sundlaugavegur 32; camp sites per person lkr800, 2-bed cabins lkr4000; ☎ mid-May-mid-Sep; 📍) Reykjavík's well-equipped camping ground gets very busy in summer. It holds 650 people, though, so you'd be unlucky not to find a camp site. It's reached by bus 14.

Reykjavík City Hostel (Map pp582-3; ☎ 553 8110; www.hostel.is; Sundlaugavegur 34; per person 6-/4-/2-bed dm lkr1700/2400/3500, bed linen lkr600, breakfast lkr800; 📍) This award-winning hostel is environmentally friendly, with helpful staff and excellent facilities (24-hour reception, large-screen TV room, internet access, bike rental etc). It's perfect for meeting other travellers: the only drawback is the trek into town. Take bus 14.

Garður Inn (Map p586; ☎ 562 4000, 551 5900; www.inns-of-iceland.com; Hringbraut; sb lkr2300-3200, s/d lkr7500/9900; ☎ Jun-Aug) The university campus, about 1km from the centre, rents out its students' rooms in summer. The cheapest sleeping-bag accommodation is in 16-person dorms.

Central Guesthouse (Map pp582-3; ☎ 552 2822; www.central-guesthouse.com; Bólstaðarhlíð 8; sb/s/d/tr lkr2300/4700/5900/7100; 📍) Welcoming Central, about 10 minutes' walk from the BSÍ bus terminal, has neat, uncomplicated rooms; the attic, with private balcony, is the best. Breakfast isn't included, but there's a kitchen.

Salvation Army Guesthouse (Map p586; ☎ 561 3203; www.guesthouse.is; Kirkjustræti 2; sb/s/d lkr3100/5500/8000) The tiny rooms are frill-free, but their location beats the city hostel hands down. There's a similar bustling backpackery atmosphere, guest kitchen and lounging area.

Guesthouse Andrea (Map p586; ☎ 552 5515; www.aurorahouse.is; Njarðargata 43; sb/s/d lkr2900/7000/9000; ☎ mid-May-Sep) Friendly Siggí runs this hidden guesthouse, tucked down a quiet side street. Its five private rooms (with sink, cooker, fridge) are ideal for self-caterers. Sleeping-bag accommodation is in a small-but-spruce bunk-bedded room.

Gistiheimilið Domus (Map p586; ☎ 561 1200; www.domusguesthouse.is; Hverfisgata 45; sb/s/d lkr2900/9500/11,300, breakfast lkr900) Once the Norwegian embassy, Domus has stately old proportions and modern touches. There's space

TASTY TITBITS

Traditional Icelandic dishes reflect a nightmarish need to eat every last scrap: but you'll rarely see *svið* (singled sheep's head), *súrsaðir hrútsþungar* (pickled ram's testicles) and *hárfar* (putrefied shark meat) for sale.

More palatable offerings include *harðfiskur* (dried strips of haddock eaten with butter) and delicious yogurt-like *skyr*. The traditional alcoholic brew *brennivín* is schnapps made from potatoes and caraway seeds. It's fondly known as *svarti dauði* (black death).

for 22 sleeping-baggers. An excellent option, close to restaurants, pubs and clubs.

Sunna Guesthouse (Map p586; ☎ 511 5570; www.sunna.is; Þórsgrata 26; summer s/d from lkr8400/10,700, winter from lkr6100/7900; 📍 📍) Rooms here are simple, sunny and honey-coloured. Those at the front have good views of Hallgrímskirkja. Brand-new studio apartments (for one to four people, lkr13,300 to lkr22,500) are a good deal for groups.

EATING

Icelandic food (from hot dogs to gourmet dishes) is all high quality, but prices are hair-raising. The thriving cafés are good for light lunches (most turn into bars at night); restaurants tend to be pricey places for dressed-up evening dining. Most eateries are on Laugavegur, Austurstræti and Ingólfstorg.

Restaurants

Sægreifinn (Map p586; ☎ 867 3660; Verbið 8, harbour; mains lkr900-2000; ☎ 8am-6pm) Eccentric Sægreifinn serves fresh seafood in what looks like a 1950s English chip shop...except for the stuffed seal. The sprightly old owner specialises in lobster soup and smoked fish.

Krua Thai (Map p586; ☎ 561 0039; www.kruathai.is; Tryggvagata 14; mains lkr990-1900; ☎ noon-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 6-9.30pm Sun) Genuine Thai recipes are served here. A glossy photo-menu shows what you'll get (spicy salads, curries and stir-fries), you order at the counter and tasty, freshly cooked dishes magically appear.

Á Næstu Grösom (First Vegetarian; Map p586; www.anaestugrosom.is; ☎ 552 8410; Laugavegur 20b; daily special lkr1350; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun) A first-rate veggie/organic restaurant, in a cheerful

orange room overlooking Laugavegur, with inventive daily specials. There's extra spice on Indian nights (Friday and Saturday).

Hornið (Map p586; ☎ 551 3340; Hafnarstræti 15; pizza lkr1200-2000, mains lkr1700-3000; ☎ 11.30am-11pm) This bright, easygoing Art Deco bistro serves large plates of grub. Choose freshly made pizzas or traditional Icelandic fish dishes.

Cafés

Café Cultura (Map p586; ☎ 530 9314; www.cultura.is; Hverfisgata 18; snacks & light meals lkr800-1400; ☎ 11.30am-1am Mon-Thu, 11.30am-4am Fri & Sat, 1pm-1am Sun) This arty intercultural café has mosaic tables, well-priced nosh (felafel, spicy meatballs and couscous), free tango lessons at 8pm on Wednesdays and funky weekend DJs.

Vegamót (Map p586; ☎ 511 3040; www.vegamot.is; Vegamótstigur 4; snacks & light meals lkr800-2190) A clubby place to eat, drink, gossip, see and be seen. The 'global' menu offers a startling choice, including Mexican salad, seafood quesadilla and blackened chicken. At night it's packed with fashion-conscious drinkers.

Té og Kaffi (Map p586; ☎ 562 2322; www.teogkaffi.is; Laugavegur 24; snacks lkr600-1100; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) Iceland has created its own version of Starbucks, complete with baristas and a huge coffee menu. It's popular with families, Saturday shoppers and LP readers.

Babalú (Map p586; ☎ 552 2278; Skólavörðustígur 22a) More inviting than your own living room, Reykjavík's newest café is way-cute. It only sells tea, coffee, hot chocolate and the odd crepe, but it's ridiculously snug.

Kofi Tómasar Frænda (Koffin; Map p586; ☎ 551 1855; Laugavegur 2; snacks around lkr600; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Thu, 10am-5.30am Fri & Sat, 11am-1am Sun) Subterranean Koffin is a favourite student hang-out. Relax with magazines and a snack (nachos,

lasagne, cakes) and watch people scurrying along Laugavegur. At night, it's a candlelit bar with DJs.

Quick Eats

Icelanders swear by hot dogs from **Bæjarins Beztu** (Map p586; Tryggvagata): use the vital sentence *Eina með öllu* ('One with everything!').

Other late-opening snack bars and kiosks include **Hlöllá Bátar** (Map p586; Ingólfstorg; ☎ 11am-2am Sun-Thu, 10am-7am Fri & Sat) and **Emmessis & Pylsar** (Map p586; Ingólfstorg), selling ice cream and hot dogs; and **Nonnabiti** (Map p586; ☎ 551 2312; Hafnarstræti 18; snacks lkr280-690) and **Kebabhúsið** (Map p586; ☎ 561 3070; Lækjargata 2; ☎ till late), offering burgers and falafel and fish and chips respectively.

The food court at Kringlan shopping centre (Map pp582-3) contains fast-food franchises.

Self-Catering

Bónus (Map p586; Laugavegur 59; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 10am-7.30pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) is the cheapest supermarket.

DRINKING

Reykjavík is renowned for its weekend *runtur*, when hard-working Icelanders get sozzled at home, then hit the town from midnight onwards. Reykjavík is dressy, but there are public places where you can get away with jeans. Usually the only difference between cafés and bars is the time of day: see also left.

Café Oliver (Map p586; ☎ 552 2300; www.cafeoliver.is; Laugavegur 20a) Oliver's is the most in-vogue place for brunch, and for partying late in super-style. DJs pump out the tunes on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; queues to get in are l-o-n-g.

Sirkus (Map p586; ☎ 511 8022; Klapparstígur 31) A kooky offbeat bar with fairy lights, bus seats in the attic and a loyal local following. DJs and bands play regularly and there's a summer garden.

Kaffibarinn (Map p586; ☎ 551 1588; Bergstaðastræti 1) Damon Albarn of Gorillaz fame owns part of this trendy bar. It's popular with celebs: at weekends you'll need a famous face or a battering ram to get in.

Grand Rokk (Map p586; ☎ 551 5522; www.grandrokk.is; Smiðustígur 6) You'll feel as though you've known this down-to-earth pub all your life. Chess enthusiasts play during the day and live bands blow the roof off at night.



Nelly's (Map p586; ☎ 551 2477; Þinghólmstræti 2) A student favourite, with Reykjavík's cheapest beer (Ikr900 for 1.5 litres) and regular DJ sets.

Hverfisbarinn (Map p586; ☎ 511 6700; www.hverfisbarinn.is; Hverfisgata 20; ☎ to 1am Thu, to 5.30am Fri & Sat) A trendy bar and club with the queues to prove it! Immaculately dressed crowds come for live music on Thursdays (from 9.30pm) and weekend DJs.

NASA (Map p586; ☎ 511 1313; nasa@nasa.is; Austurvölur; admission Ikr1000) Reykjavík's biggest nightclub plays chart music and club anthems to Prada-clad crowds. Email for upcoming bands.

Celtic Cross (Map p586; ☎ 511 3240; Hverfisgata 26) and the **Dubliner** (Map p586; ☎ 511 3233; Hafnarstræti 4; ☎ to 1am Sun-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat) are fun Irish pubs

favoured by travellers both have roughly the same opening hours. The Dubliner has live music every night from 10.30pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Reykjavík's **National Theatre** (Map p586; ☎ 585 1200; www.leikhusid.is; Lindargata 7; admission Ikr2700; ☎ closed Jul & Aug) puts on around 12 plays, musicals and operas per year. The most central cinema is **Regnboginn** (Map p586; ☎ 551 9000; Hverfisgata 54; Ikr800). Listings can be found in daily newspapers.

GETTING AROUND Bicycle

Hire bikes from **Borgarhjól SF** (Map p586; ☎ 551 5653; www.borgarhjol.net; Hverfisgata 50; ☎ 8am-6pm

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TRANSPORT	Borgarhjól SF.....51 C3	Jetty for Whale Watching Tours.....52 B1	Lækjartorg Bus Terminal.....53 B2	Taxi Rank.....54 B2	National Theatre.....49 C2
Regnboginn Cinema.....50 C3					

Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) or Reykjavík City Hostel for Ikr2000 per day.

Bus

Reykjavík's excellent city bus system is run by **Straetó** (☎ 551 2700; www.straeto.is/english), running from 7am to 11pm, with limited night buses at weekends. The two central terminals are Hlemmur (Map pp582-3) and Lækjartorg (Map p586). Bus stops are marked with the letter 'S'.

The fare is Ikr250 (no change given). The Reykjavík Tourist Card (see p580) includes a bus pass.

Taxi

There are usually taxis outside the bus stations and youth hostel, as well as bars on weekend nights. Alternatively, call **Borgarbill** (☎ 552 2440), **BSR** (☎ 561 0000) or **Hreyfill-Bæjarleiðir** (☎ 588 5522).

AROUND REYKJAVÍK

BLUE LAGOON (BLÁA LÓNÍÐ)

Iceland's most famous attraction is the **Blue Lagoon** (Bláa Lónið; ☎ 420 8800; www.bluelagoon.is; adult/12-15yr Ikr1400/700, towel/swimsuit/robe hire Ikr300/350/700, spa treatments from Ikr1300; ☎ 9am-9pm mid-May-Aug, 10am-8pm Sep-mid-May), a milky-blue spa set in a massive black lava field, 50km southwest of Reykjavík. The futuristic Svartsengi geothermal plant provides an

off-the-planet backdrop, as well as the spa's water – at a perfect 38°C and at Blue Flag standards. Daub yourself in a silica-mud facepack, and loll in the hot pots with an ice-blue cocktail – it's so relaxing, you'll never want to leave. Bring plenty of conditioner to stop your hair going solid.

Between 10am and 6pm daily, there are six **Reykjavík Excursions** (☎ 562 1011; www.bsi.is) buses from the BSI bus terminal. The Ikr3400 cost includes lagoon admission and return fare to Reykjavík (or onward journey to Keflavik airport).

THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

Marvel at Iceland's 'big three' destinations – Gullfoss, Geysir and Þingvellir National Park – on one day-long circular tour.

Gullfoss is a spectacular rainbow-tinged double waterfall, which drops 32m before thundering away down a vast rift. Ten kilometres down the road is **Geysir**, after which all spouting hot springs are named. The **Great Geysir** was plugged by rubble in the 1950s, thrown in by tourists trying to set it off. Luckily, the world's most reliable geyser **Strokkur** (Butter Churn) is right next door, spouting up to 30m every six minutes.

Þingvellir National Park is Iceland's most important historical location, and a Unesco World Heritage site. The Vikings established the world's first democratic parliament, the Alþingi, here in AD 930. They certainly had a sense of drama – Þingvellir is inside an

immense rift valley, caused by the separating North American and Eurasian tectonic plates.

The cheapest day trip (Ikr6500) is with **Iceland Excursions** (Allrahanda; Map pp582-3; ☎ 540 1313; www.icelandexcursions.is; Höfðatún 12); you're usually collected from your accommodation.

ÞÓRSMÖRK

The Woods of Thor is a stunning glacial valley, full of weird rock formations, twisting gorges, a singing cave, mountain flowers and icy streams. Its proximity to Reykjavík (130km) makes it popular in summer, when tents pile up and camping grounds become partyville.

Wild camping is prohibited, but there are three huts – **Þórsmörk** (Ferðafélag Íslands; ☎ 568 2533; www.fi.is; sb Ikr2000), **Básar** (Útivist; ☎ 562 1000; www.utivist.is; sb Ikr1800) and **Húsadalur** (Reykjavík Excursions; ☎ 580 5400; www.thorsmork.is; sb Ikr1700) – which have tent sites (per person Ikr700) around them. Reservations are strongly advised.

From June to mid-September buses run between Reykjavík and Húsadalur (over the hill from Þórsmörk) at 8.30am daily. A second service runs from mid-June to August at 5pm daily (Ikr3700, 3½ hours).

ICELAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Camping

You're free to camp anywhere, apart from on private land and in national parks and reserves.

Guesthouses

Gistiheimilið (guesthouses) range from private homes to purpose-built motels. Some offer sleeping-bag accommodation – a godsend if you're on a tight budget. Many places only open mid-May to August. Some offer a cheaper rate if you have your own sleeping bag.

Mountain Huts

Ferðafélag Íslands (Icelandic Touring Club; Map pp582-3; ☎ 568 2533; www.fi.is; Mörkin 6, IS-108 Reykjavík) maintains a system of *sæluhús* (mountain huts).

Summer Hotels

There are 15 summer-only **Edda Hotels** (☎ 444 4000; www.hoteledda.is), based in schools. Some

offer sleeping-bag accommodation in classrooms.

Youth Hostels

Iceland's 26 superb youth hostels are administered by the **Icelandic Hostel Association** (Bandalag Íslenskra Farfugla; Map pp582-3; ☎ 553 8110; www.hostel.is; Sundlaugavegur 34, IS-105 Reykjavík). All have hot showers, cooking facilities, sheet hire, luggage storage and sleeping-bag accommodation.

ACTIVITIES

July, August and September are the best months for walking. For details on hiking and mountaineering, contact Ferðafélag Íslands (see left).

BUSINESS HOURS

Usual business hours in Iceland:

Banks ☎ 9.15am–4pm Mon–Fri

Cafés & Bars ☎ 10am–6pm as cafés, then as bars to 1am Mon–Fri, to 3am or 6am at weekends

Post offices ☎ 8.30am or 9am–4.30pm or 5pm Mon–Fri

Restaurants ☎ generally close by 10pm

Shops ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, to noon or 4pm Sat, closed all day Sunday

CUSTOMS

See www.tollur.is for Icelandic customs regulations.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

A full list of Icelandic embassies and consulates is available at www.mfa.is. See opposite for information on visas.

Embassies & Consulates in Iceland

Denmark (Map p586; ☎ 575 0300; www.ambreykjavik.um.dk; Hverfisgata 29)

France (Map p586; ☎ 551 7621; www.ambafrance.is; Túngata 22)

Germany (Map p586; ☎ 530 1100; embager@Internet.is; Laufásvegur 31)

UK (Map p586; ☎ 550 5100; www.britishembassy.gov.uk; Laufásvegur 31)

USA (Map p586; ☎ 562 9100; www.usa.is; Laufásvegur 21)

Icelandic Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Australia (☎ 02-9365 7345; iceland@bigpond.net.au; 16 Birriga Rd, Bellevue Hill, Sydney NSW 2023)

Canada (☎ 613-482 1944; www.iceland.org/ca; 360 Albert St, Ste 710, Ottawa ON K1R 7X7)

Denmark (☎ 33 18 10 50; www.iceland.org/dk; Strandgade 89, DK-1401 Copenhagen K)

France (☎ 01 44 17 32 85; www.iceland.org/fr; 8 Ave Kléber, F-75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-5050 4000; www.iceland.org/de; Rauchstrasse 1, DE-10787 Berlin)

New Zealand (☎ 09-379 4720; ebarratt@sanford.co.nz; c/o Sanford Ltd, 22 Jellicoe St, Auckland)

UK (☎ 020-7259 3999; www.iceland.org/uk; 2a Hans St, London SW1X 0JE)

USA (☎ 202-265 6653; www.iceland.org/us; 1156 15th St NW, Suite 1200, Washington DC 20005-1704)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Sumardagurinn Fyrsti (First Day of Summer) Arrives optimistically early on the first Thursday after 18 April, with Reykjavík holding the biggest carnival-style bash.

Independence Day The largest nationwide festival commemorates the founding of the republic in 1944 with parades and general merriness on 17 June.

Midsummer Celebrated around 24 June, but less fervently than on the Scandinavian mainland.

Gay Pride Thousands of people parade through the streets of Reykjavík on the third weekend of August.

Iceland Airwaves (www.icelandairwaves.com) Held in Reykjavík at the end of October, this four-day event is one of the world's most cutting-edge music festivals.

HOLIDAYS

The following public holidays are observed in Iceland.

New Year's Day 1 January

Maundy Thursday Thursday before Easter

Good Friday to Easter Monday March/April

First Day of Summer First Thursday after 18 April

Labour Day 1 May

Ascension Day May

Whit Sunday & Whit Monday May

Independence Day 17 June

Shop & Office Workers' Holiday First Monday in August

Christmas Eve 24 December

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

New Year's Eve 31 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

Icelandic Tourist Board (www.icetourist.is)

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Icelandic króna (Ikr), which is divided into 100 aurar. Coins come in denominations of one, five, 10, 50 and 100 króna, and notes in 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000 króna.

Icelandic VAT (*söluskattur*) is included in marked prices: if you spend over Ikr4000 in a shop offering 'Iceland Tax-Free Shopping', you'll get a tax-refund coupon.

You can withdraw cash from banks using MasterCard, Visa or Cirrus ATM cards. MasterCard and Visa are accepted everywhere; Diners Club and Amex are less commonly used. Exchange travellers cheques and banknotes for Icelandic currency commission-free at Landsbanki Íslands banks.

Tipping isn't required.

POST

Poste restante should be addressed with your name to Poste Restante, Central Post Office, Pósthússtræti 5, IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland.

TELEPHONE

The international access code is ☎ 00, Iceland's country code is ☎ 354, and there are no area codes. Most Icelandic mobile phone numbers begin with the digit '8'.

For international directory assistance, and for assistance with reverse-charge (collect) calls, dial ☎ 1811.

VISAS

Schengen Agreement countries can enter Iceland with a valid identity card. Citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA), including Ireland and Great Britain, and the USA and Commonwealth countries can visit without a visa on a valid passport.

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