



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

## **Iceland: Renewable Energy, Technology, and Resource Economics**

Summer Track 1 – 2023



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# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Iceland was settled by Vikings in the late ninth century. After initial independence it came under Norwegian rule, and then Danish. When Germany invaded Denmark and the Allies invaded Iceland during World War II, locals took the opportunity to declare their independence.

Iceland was essentially a subsistence economy from settlement until World War II. Over the centuries since settlement, Icelanders endured many unfavorable climate changes and natural disasters (e.g. volcanic eruptions), exacerbated by deforestation and soil erosion. Starting in the mid-20th century, mechanization of the fishing fleet and increasing foreign investment brought new prosperity to the small population. In the last 60 years, Iceland has steadily built up its economy, infrastructure, educational system, and social services, and today it has one of the highest quality of life standards in the world. Fish is still the most important export, though other industries are growing; notably aluminum smelted with inexpensive and renewable electricity, and tourism. The population is still small, at about 369,000, about two-thirds of whom live in the capital region.

## CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Reykjavik is the northernmost national capital in the world, and Iceland has more land covered by glaciers than all of continental Europe, yet Iceland enjoys a much milder climate than its name and location straddling the Arctic Circle would imply. A branch of the Gulf Stream flows along the southern and western coasts, greatly moderating the climate. This brings mild Atlantic air in contact with cold Arctic air though, resulting in a climate that is marked by frequent changes in weather and storminess. There is also more rainfall in the southern and western part than in the northern part of the island. As a result of the Gulf Stream, Iceland boasts a very temperate climate. Reykjavik has comparatively mild winters, with temperatures

typically between 30–35 degrees Fahrenheit. The weather in Iceland is constantly changing, so you can easily experience wind, snow, sleet, and sunny skies in a single day, and despite so much variability, Icelanders continue with their normal routines, taking their bikes out in freezing rain or holding recess outside when it's sleeting.

The summer tourist season is from late May to early September. During the first half of this period, the sun stays above the horizon for almost 24 hours, and the interplay of light and shadows on mountains, lava fields, and glaciers provides an ever-changing landscape. But even during the middle of the summer, the sky is frequently cloudy or overcast and the sunshine does not warm the air much. Hence, during the daytime, the air is usually cool ("refreshing" is the local euphemism) and it is colder at nighttime. Temperatures on most summer days are around 60°F. A rare summer day in Iceland is 70°F with sunshine and no wind, but also possible is 40°F with howling wind and rain that appears to fall horizontally. Most days fall between those extremes.

Reykjavik, Iceland:			
AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)			
JUN	JUL	AUG	
56/46	60/49	58/48	

## LOCAL CUSTOMS

Icelandic culture is somewhat similar to that of its Scandinavian neighbors: sophisticated and modern with a dark sense of humor and rarely a cold disposition. However, Iceland is notably eccentric due to its isolation, rugged environment, and small population. Icelanders, especially outside the capital, can be very friendly towards visitors. Below is a guide to help you assimilate.

Do:

- Take off your shoes when you go into someone's home.
- Always say thank you at the end of a meal. It is a customary gesture to the host(s).
- Socialize with your hosts and others acquaintances.

Don't:

- Talk or laugh very loudly, making a scene in the street. Be modest.
- Help yourself to food or towels, etc. in your someone's home until you have been given permission.
- Wear shoes inside someone's home. It is a cultural faux pas.

Iceland is a progressive nation and men and women are equally expected to participate in household activities including cooking, cleaning, and caretaking.



## DIET

### Special Diets:

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible, but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to

the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

Remembering that for centuries Icelanders clung to life on a windswept rock in the North Atlantic, it is easy to see why traditional diets consist mostly of seafood, grazing animals, and dairy products. Opportunities to grow any grains or vegetables were extremely limited (potatoes and cabbage being the only notable exceptions). With modern technology and transportation, opportunities have changed. Some Icelanders eat "world diets" not much different from those in the States, though traditional diets of course remain. Dietary options thus may (or may not) be limited, depending on your particular situation, and may include fish, animals, or parts of animals that seem unusual. Each person must decide how to cope with the realities of food choice, and should give this some consideration beforehand.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

## SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program.

It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.



Based on evolving conditions of the pandemic including higher vaccination rates, increased protection with many individuals from previous infections, lower rates of serious illness associated with positive cases, and the removal of vaccine mandates in most SIT locations, SIT no longer requires vaccination to participate on programs except for locations where host country governments require it.

However, we strongly encourage students to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 per [CDC recommendations](#). SIT continues to closely monitor COVID-19 conditions in each program location and will advise students on any location-specific COVID-19 requirements and regulations prior to and during their program.

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the summer if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and medical insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

First and foremost, please know that your academic director has your best interests in mind and has set rules that will prevent most risky situations. While Iceland is a very safe country in many ways, some of the hazards are different than those found in other countries.

Iceland is very sparsely populated. In some parts one can travel for hours without seeing any other people or any signs of civilization. It is easy to become lost, and if one were to be injured, help might not be close at hand. Thus, it is important to travel in groups and always let your academic director know your destination and expected return time.

Because of the large area and small population in Iceland, hazards are much less likely to be marked than in the US. There are few guardrails around waterfalls and cliffs, for example, and warning signs are only found in a few areas frequented by tourists. Icelanders expect people to always exercise their own common sense. Likewise, we expect you to

use good common sense and not approach cliffs or venture into unsafe circumstances.

Varying weather conditions combined with high latitude in Iceland can lead quickly to hypothermia. The weather changes often and quickly, so appropriate clothing (warm layers and a rain jacket) should always be taken on outings, regardless of how the weather appears at departure. Freshwater rivers and lakes as well as the ocean are very cold around Iceland. Falling into water can quickly lead to hypothermia and drowning, regardless of one's swimming ability.

Hot water is also a significant hazard in Iceland. In geothermal zones the ground is quite fragile, and one can break through the thin surface crust into boiling water or mud below. Always stay on marked paths in geothermal areas—every year a number of tourists are badly scalded or killed at these sites. Tap water in many parts of the country comes directly from geothermal wells, and is much hotter than we would expect in the US. Be careful when turning on taps and especially when getting in a shower.



Though infrequent, a number of natural disasters are possible in Iceland, including volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, and hurricane-force winds. Your in-country orientation will cover procedures to be followed in these unlikely circumstances.

You will experience long summer days; the period of May through August provides long days with bright nights, and the midnight sun is especially prevalent in June. This can be disorienting and can make

sleeping difficult. Be aware that sleep deprivation can impair judgment and increase risk of accidents, as well as being unpleasant. Eyeshades for sleeping may be helpful during the summer program (most Northerners learn to sleep in the light and do not have heavy shades in their homes).

Although all healthcare services are available in Reykjavik, we suggest you to have a complete health checkup prior to leaving the US, including a dental checkup and any subsequent work.

There will be access to pharmacies, health centers, emergency services and/or hospitals at all the main program locations should you need them. You will be briefed in orientation with basic information about how to utilize these services, and your program staff can also help you make appropriate appointments.

In Akureyri and Reykjavík, there are counseling services and hospitals with 24-hour emergency receptions. In Iceland there is also a nationwide emergency hotline open 24-7 for tele-assistance. When the group is traveling in the countryside, healthcare providers may be limited to a doctor's office or small health center with limited opening hours. Your program staff will always do whatever possible to ensure you are safe and healthy and to help you get any care you need.

## OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Most accommodations will be hostels. Rooms are in dormitories, with shared common facilities such as kitchen and bathroom. The group will often do its own food shopping and cooking, so come prepared to cook.

Access to washing machines for laundering clothing varies throughout the program. There is often no laundry self-service at the guesthouses where we stay, but facilities sometimes exist in the local area. You should be prepared to get by for a week without doing your laundry in a machine and hand-washing is the most reliable way to wash your clothing throughout the program.

## TRANSPORTATION

The group will be traveling with both public and privately hired transportation, mostly by bus. At

times you will be required to carry ALL of your luggage—generally, 20kg is a manageable amount. If your luggage is unmanageable you will need to pay for a taxi, which can be expensive.



## COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

## PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. For that purpose students are required to either: (a) bring an **open, unlocked** smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location; (b) work with the academic director within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone; or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. **DO NOT purchase an international plan.** We discourage this for regular smart phones because locals will not be able

to communicate with you as they would have to call internationally.

During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their smart phone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the local contacts and program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

It is easy to get a local SIM card and you may even be able to buy one on the plane to Iceland. It will cost approximately ISK 3,400 (USD \$25-30), and will not only include the SIM card, but local credit as well. To keep your phone topped up with credit you can purchase vouchers in almost any shop or pay online with a credit card. If you choose to buy a local smart phone it will cost around ISK 20,000 (USD \$170). The cost to keep your phone full of credit will vary depending on how much you use your phone. International calls are more expensive and month to month costs will fluctuate.

Free and paid Wi-Fi is widely available in Iceland at cafés, restaurants, and other public locations.

## MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the

items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged.

For this program, **DHL services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

Mail is very expensive, unpredictable, and slow. **You are strongly discouraged from having packages or letters sent to you in Iceland. The program moves from city to city quite frequently and you could miss your letters or packages.**

## MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

The Icelandic currency is the Icelandic krona (króna), abbreviated ISK. While most things are available in Iceland, prices tend to be high: expect to pay at least twice the US price for most items. For instance, restaurant food, electronics, and English text books are particularly expensive.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you



are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages**.

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US \$1,000 to \$ 1,700**. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program.

Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Please budget approximately:

<b>Personal spending:</b> (from past student suggestions)	\$ 600 - 1,100
<b>Books, printing, supplies:</b>	\$100
<b>Up-front medical costs:</b> (you will get reimbursed for these expenses)	\$ 300
<b>COVID-19 Test(s)</b> (costs may vary)	\$100-250
<b>Cell Phone</b>	\$20 - 200
<b>Estimated total:</b>	\$1,120 - 1950

## VISITORS AND FREE TIME

**SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term**, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to

visitors. See the Attendance and Participation section of the [Student Handbook](#).



Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

Travel outside of Iceland during the program (other than for medical or family emergencies) is strictly prohibited according to the [Conditions of Participation](#), which you signed.

Please see the Packing guidelines on the next page.



# PACKING GUIDELINES

## LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

Usually only one carry-on is permitted on the plane: we recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program. A rolling suitcase or multiday backpack is a good option for your checked luggage. This program travels frequently, and you will be required to carry ALL of your luggage—generally, 45-50 pounds (20-25 kg) is a manageable amount. As a rule of thumb, think practical!



For domestic flights within Iceland on Air Iceland (which this program may involve), you are allowed to bring one piece of checked luggage at 20 kg and one piece of carry-on luggage at 6 kg. Each additional kilogram for overweight baggage costs 400 ISK (about 3 USD) and will be your responsibility.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

## CLOTHING GUIDELINES

The weather may change quickly from hot and sunny to cold wind and rain. Plan to dress in layers—as it gets warmer or colder, you can simply eliminate or add layers. A waterproof outer layer over wool sweater or heavy fleece pullover and a light base layer is commonly worn by locals. We will be walking in urban areas and hiking in the countryside, so be sure you have comfortable, waterproof footwear, and a rain jacket/rain pant option. Umbrellas are not suggested, as strong winds frequently flip them inside out. Students in the past have strongly recommended rain pants; you can use them both for added warmth while hiking and for inclement weather. You will visit some of Iceland’s geothermally heated swimming pools and “hot pots,” so bring a swim suit that you are comfortable in. Warm headgear and a scarf can come in handy, even in the summer.

## EQUIPMENT

we will be staying in guesthouses and hostels. Some places we stay offer only “sleeping-bag accommodations” which will require you to use your own personal sleeping bag and have your own towel. Please bring your own sleeping bag and towel for these accommodation options. Other places we stay will provide linens and towels.

## COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is **required** that you bring a laptop computer. Be aware that your laptop is your personal property and responsibility. SIT does not provide personal property insurance and it is recommended that you insure your computer or other valuables for full coverage. For details on SIT’s insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on our [Student Insurance](#). SIT is not responsible for any duty tax

you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

It is highly advised to back up your laptop and or smartphone to safeguard all your data if your computer is lost or stolen.

We will be traveling a great deal on this program, and many of the program elements (readings, assignments, schedules, etc.) will be accessible only on our program web page; you will also be asked to submit most assignments electronically. Thus, **having a laptop computer is extremely important**, and internet connections are good almost everywhere in Iceland. **Do not have your laptop or other electronics mailed to you while in Iceland.** You may be charged hundreds of dollars in customs duty, no matter how much you actually paid for them.

The program also includes a number of quantitative elements, so bring a calculator.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters.  
<https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets/>.

Do not bring any electrical appliances without a voltage converter and a two-prong European plug adapter; the electricity voltage is 230 in Iceland.

## WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Bring a reasonable but not excessive supply of shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, etc. These items can easily be bought in Iceland, but are likely more expensive. Prescriptions are difficult to obtain, so please bring what you will need and a copy of the written prescription from your doctor in case of loss.



## ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or [Contact a Former Student](#).

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.



# PACKING LIST

## CLOTHING

- 1 nicer outfit appropriate for a dinner out, cultural events, or semi-formal meetings
- 3-4 pairs of pants
- 6-7 shirts
- 3-4 sweaters or fleeces (wool and synthetic materials are recommended)
- Underwear (two-week supply)
- Warm socks (wool is recommended)
- **Warm** pajamas
- Cold-weather, waterproof coat/windbreaker (go for quality, it'll be worth it; down is recommended)
- Rain pants
- Warm hat, and scarf
- Appropriate clothes for outdoor activities and hiking
- Swimsuit

## SHOES

- 1 pair comfortable, everyday shoes for walking around town
- 1 pair **waterproof** hiking shoes with good grip for outdoor activities and hikes (preferably insulated)
- 1 pair nice shoes that you can wear with your nice outfit

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- 2 passport photos (in case your passport is lost)
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination encouraged

## HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of prescription medication (including birth control pills), vitamins, and motion sickness pills, if needed
- Extra pair of glasses or contacts (if needed)
- Contact cleaning/soaking liquid (if needed)
- To prevent the contraction and spread of COVID-19, students should come prepared with at least 3 reusable masks. Some individual venues may still require masks for entrance. The

CDC recommends a close-fitting and protective mask that is comfortable for daily use.

## OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Sleeping bag
- Towel (travel towel is ideal for saving space)
- School supplies (notebook, personal journal, pens, etc.)
- Calculator or calculator app
- Travel alarm clock or wrist watch
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen (especially if you have fair skin)
- Earplugs (hostels can be loud sometimes)
- Eye mask (it will be light out most of the day/night)
- Credit or debit card
- Electricity converter and European two prong adapter, chargers, batteries
- Laptop
- Unlocked smart phone
- Water bottle

## OPTIONAL

- Camera
- House slippers or flip flops for showering
- Small pair of binoculars
- Flashlight or headlamp (if you like to read in bed and don't want to disturb your roommates)
- Reusable food container, plate, and utensils

