

Scholarship Exchange in Iceland

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Intro:

Hi, I'm Emily and I'm an accounting major and German minor! My year in Iceland consisted of meeting friends from all over the world, going on road trips on the weekends, discovering the Icelandic music scene, enjoying Reykjavik's nightlife, and

of course attending class at the University of Iceland. I wanted to go to Iceland because I had seen pictures of the breathtaking scenery and was excited to go and explore it for myself. I also loved the fact that this program was a year in length, so that I could have time to fully immerse myself in the culture, and that it offered many German classes so that I could finish up my German minor. I had an amazing time over there and can't wait to go back someday! Feel free to email me any questions at all, my email is fuhrx016@umn.edu.



Hi, I'm Ben. I'm an Earth Sciences Major that studied at Háskóli Íslands in the 2018-2019 academic year. I plan on graduating in Spring of 2020. I was excited to go to Iceland because of the spectacular landscapes and interesting science that is being done there. While I was there I got the chance to climb volcanoes, hike on a glacier, walk in a lava tube and see rocks that I never would have been able to see in Minnesota. Academically, I had the opportunity to take classes relating to my major that weren't available at the University of Minnesota and had access to an unparalleled outdoor



laboratory of recent geology just a short drive outside Reykjavik.

Unlike Emily, I was a bit intimidated by the idea of committing to studying abroad for a full academic year and if you're feeling that way, I totally understand. I'm available for any questions as well, my email is popke008@umn.edu.

RESIDENCE PERMIT

The first thing you need to do once you are accepted to the University of Iceland is apply for a residence permit. This process is kind of particular and tedious, so make sure you start doing this as soon as you're accepted. You can apply for it through the Iceland Directorate of Immigration (the [UTL](#)), but you have to mail the actual papers. You fall under the "general student" category because the "exchange students" category is for secondary school students. The application is due **June 1st** but apparently the deadline is a bit flexible.

B: I mailed mine (cost \$72!) a couple weeks ahead of time to make sure it got there in time, but it's probably not necessary. When I applied, I applied for the entire year. I think that the only issue with this was that I had to show financial documents on support for the whole year, which may not be feasible for some.

E: I mailed mine through FedEx, I believe, and I think it cost somewhere close to \$80. But then I had to mail in a few missing documents separately, and I arrived in Iceland before they even did. So, it may be a better strategy to just arrive with the missing documents, rather than mail them in only 2 weeks before.

E: The most important point I want to make about the residence permit application is, even if things go wrong and you don't get the adequate documents in on time, don't stress. Things have a way of working themselves out in Iceland, and the UTL is generous about giving deadline extensions. I arrived in Iceland without my residence permit and was extremely stressed, because I thought that if my documents weren't processed fast enough, I would be sent home. You can be in Iceland for 3 months without any sort of visa or residence permit, so you have a lot of time to get your documents in order even while in Iceland. However, it is better to have it done as quickly as possible, because the sooner you have your residence permit, the sooner you can open a bank account, apply for housing benefits, access your university web page, etc.



Requirements and Documentation Necessary to be Included with Application

1. Receipt of Payment

- a. When you do a wire transfer to UTL make sure you ask for a receipt and that your name and birthdate are included.
- b. B: I went to my bank to do this and they had never transferred any amount of money to Iceland before and they didn't even have the exchange rate between USD and ISK in their database. We ended up using the unofficial google exchange rate and adding a bit more money just in case.

2. [Application Documents](#)

3. Passport-size photo

- a. The LAC will take your photo and give you two copies for ~\$10.

4. Photocopy of Passport

5. Acceptance Letter to University of Iceland

- a. You can just print off the pdf letter they will send you in the University of Iceland acceptance email.

6. [FBI Criminal Background Check](#)

- a. Get a set of fingerprints taken
 - i. B: I left this till the last minute essentially, which is a bad idea. I ended up going through an [FBI approved channeler](#) (I used Fieldprint Inc. and it cost \$50) I went to Alpha Print in Dinkytown to get fingerprinted. Within ~2 weeks they sent me my background check results via email.
 - ii. E: You can do this through the University of Minnesota police station! It only costs \$10, but they are only open one day a week, so don't leave this until the last minute.
- b. It takes a long time for the authorities to process this (12-14 weeks) so make sure that, unless you want to pay for a channeler, you do this ASAP after you find out you've been nominated by UMN. If you wait until accepted by the University of Iceland, you probably won't have time.
- c. You will have to get the document [apostilled](#) (which essentially means approved for international use.)



- i. B: I first tried to get my background check apostilled at the state level, but they told me that they can't apostille a national background check. So I mailed it in to the department of state (details in above link). I received it with an apostille about 3 weeks after I mailed it in.
- ii. E: As soon as you get the background check back, make sure you send it to be apostilled!
- iii. E: ALSO: I'm not sure this will apply to anyone, but on the residence permit application they ask you to write down what other countries you have lived in, if applicable. If you lived in a country for over three months, you also need a background check from that country. If this background check comes in a different language, you need to get it done by an "official translator", but all I essentially did was send it to an online translation website, then print it out and send it to UTL.

7. Health Insurance

- a. All students studying abroad are required by the University to get their specific CISI health insurance. This is done automatically and is part of the program fee.
- b. B: I bought the Sjova's Sickness Cost Insurance because there is a requirement for Icelandic Insurance in the application. I just printed off a receipt from the website and included it in my application.

8. Proof of Financial Support

- a. You must show that you have access to 189,875 ISK/month or ~1500 USD (subject to change and can be checked [here](#)). I believe that if you ask your LAC contact, they can provide documentation of the scholarship/stipend you will receive and that can cover part of this.
- b. B: This is where the length of time you are applying for comes into play. I applied for the whole year so that I wouldn't have to renew my permit in December. This meant that I had to show financial support for 9 months rather than just five. I had my parents transfer the required amount of money into my account and printed off statements. I went to the bank to do this because apparently UTL doesn't like statements with parent's names on the account. These were what I sent as proof of financial support to the University of Iceland.
- c. E: I only applied for the first 6 months, but I wish I had applied for a longer length of time, because I had to renew my documents in January. I recommend applying for longer than you think you may stay, because you still need a valid residence permit to travel through Europe, even if you're not in Iceland anymore. But I did the same thing as Ben, I just had my parents transfer money to my account at my

bank, printed off a bank statement (with just my name on the account), and transferred it out again.

9. Housing Certificate

- a. You don't need to submit this until after you arrive in Iceland. You will get your address and need to fill out an extra form when you visit UTL upon arrival. Make sure once you do give them your address you put your name on a post-it on your mailbox. Otherwise you will never receive your residence permit in the mail.

You need to print off all these documents and mail them to the UTL office.

PACKING

- Raincoat!! It rains a lot in Iceland, so you'll wear this all the time! I even brought 2, a longer one for the city, and a normal one for hiking. Don't bother bringing an umbrella, Icelanders don't use these, as it's often too windy.
- Warm clothes. Iceland doesn't get nearly as cold as Minnesota in the winter, but it can still be cold and windy.

- E: I just brought a lighter down jacket that could be layered beneath a raincoat if needed. On really cold days, I would wear a sweater, my down jacket, scarf, hat, and mittens, and be fine.

- Make sure you bring lots of outdoors gear, such as hiking boots (make sure these are waterproof), rain pants and jacket, wool socks, and gloves. Iceland is really expensive, so it's far cheaper if you bring all of this stuff over with you, rather than buying it there.



- Iceland is pretty fashionable, so maybe bring nicer clothes for going out. They wear lots of black, so maybe bring a pair of nicer shoes/boots or a dark jacket that you can wear.
- Camping gear - unless you plan on camping a lot, it isn't really worth it to bring this.

- E: I brought a sleeping bag and sleeping pad and only used them once. Once it's October, it gets pretty cold for camping, and my friends and I stayed in a lot of AirBnbs. I would recommend either borrowing sleeping bags/tents from others or there is a place to rent these items in Reykjavik.



- B: I planned on going camping a lot, so I brought all my camping supplies. I ended up using them twice, mostly because the trips that I was invited to go on ended up cutting into class time. I lent my materials to other students a few times though, so you might find a sucker like me to borrow from while you're there if you want to go camping.
- E: I brought a large suitcase, a carry on, and a backpack when arriving in Iceland. Bring less than you think you need, and it's a good idea to leave some space, because you'll definitely gain some belongings while in Iceland. It's also a good idea to bring a pair of slide on sandals to wear while in the common areas in student housing. Besides the sandals, I brought hiking boots, converse, tennis shoes, and a pair of nicer boots.
- B: I brought way more stuff than I needed. I brought my camping stuff and my trumpet which turned out was just extra weight. (I tried to find a non-audition group doing brass music, but I couldn't really find anything and it was difficult to practice in student housing because I didn't want to bother other people with the noise.) Bring less than you think you need. I just bought running shoes and hiking boots, but I definitely agree with Emily on the sandals. The common areas can get filthy before the cleaning crew came through once a week.

HOUSING

- Both of us lived in the student housing building called Oddagarðar, a dormitory where everyone gets their own room and bathroom and a shared kitchen.
- Information about student housing options can be found [here](#).
- Getting into student housing is really competitive, so you need to apply as soon as possible
- Applications for new students open June 1, so you should make sure that you apply as soon as they open
 - E: After emailing with student housing, I submitted my application in May.
 - B: I submitted mine on June 1st, but I was told by the LAC that on-campus housing was guaranteed for us, so I wasn't too concerned.
- Once your application is received, you will most likely be placed on waitlist, and you have to renew your application at the beginning of each month. You will get an email that gives you these instructions.
- The University of Minnesota guarantees us housing at the University of Iceland, so make sure you talk to the Learning Abroad Center if you aren't given a room

- B: Be sure to let them know you're cancelling the contract **early** before you leave (January is best, or as soon as you know your plans). I forgot to cancel until the end of April and I still had to pay rent for the month of June when I wasn't living there.
- E: Yes, you need to cancel your housing contract three months ahead of time, otherwise you run the risk of Student Housing not finding anyone to take over your room, meaning that you'll still have to pay rent. So as soon as you know your plans at the end of the year, cancel your housing contract as soon as possible.



MONEY

- Make sure you bring a debit card with a chip.
- Once you open up your Icelandic bank account, you will get a debit card that can be used to pay for basically everything with no extra fees that you might get from American banks.
 - E: I gave my parents power of attorney (you can do this through the UMN legal services, the Learning Abroad Center puts this on the checklist), so I then had them wire money from my bank account to my Icelandic bank account and used my debit card all year.
- The only place you will even need cash is the flea market. Everywhere else takes card.



LANGUAGE

- Nearly everyone in Iceland speaks English, but it can be useful to know a few Icelandic phrases.
- Goðan daginn! (go-thahn dah-yihn)– “Good morning/Hi/Hello!” goðan daginn and variations thereupon (daginn/goðan dag) are useful on the town– shopkeepers, pedestrians, your professors will all greet you this way. Repeat it back and you’re golden.
 - B: I volunteered at the Red Cross Clothing Store right on the main tourist road for a semester. It was fun to greet tourists this way and then have them tell me that I speak perfect English for an Icelandic!
- Takk fyrir! (Tahk fih-reer)– “Thanks/thank you!” Saying takk fyrir and takk instead of thank you is like wearing a cute “I tried” sticker on your lapel, and Icelanders genuinely appreciate it
- Já (jau) “yes”
- Nei (nay) “no”
- Bless- “good bye”
- Vinsamlegast (Vin-sahm-lay-gahst) - “please”
- If you are interested in learning more Icelandic, there is an intro to Icelandic class that you can take!



AFTER ARRIVAL

- B: I arrived 2 weeks early for a geology class doing excursions but you will probably come later. It was a good way to make some friends, but I missed out on some of the welcome activities during orientation week, which is probably a good idea to attend to meet other international students.
- When you fly in to the airport, the best way to get to the University of Iceland is to take the flybus. <https://www.re.is/tour/flybus/>
 - You can buy tickets online, or in the airport.



- B: I bought a ticket to the Radisson Blu Saga Hotel because it was right across the road from the University of Iceland and there was no direct drop off. It cost me around \$30 to do that, but it's cheaper if you go to BSÍ terminal.
- E: I just got tickets to BSÍ, it was then around a mile walk to the University of Iceland, so if you have a lot of heavy luggage it may be a better option to go to the hotel.
- Once at the airport, you can go to the duty free store on your way out and buy a sim card for your phone. It's also not a bad idea to buy a bottle or two of liquor from the duty free store as well, as buying alcohol is extremely expensive at the liquor stores in Iceland.
- The first thing you should do when you're in Iceland is stop at the housing office, which is located in Háskólatorg (essentially the student center). There you will sign your contract, and they will give you the address of where you can pick up your keys, which is right down the street.
- Important to note: The office of Stúdentagarðar is open weekdays 9-16. This means that you should try to plan your flight so that you will arrive at a time where you can pick up your keys, or plan to stay in a hostel when you arrive.
 - B: I arrived and planned on staying in my place that night. They said it wasn't ready yet. Luckily, I got there early enough in the year that another of the student buildings (Gamli Gardur) was acting as a summer hostel so I got a place to keep my stuff. If you think there's a chance that you might not get into your place right away I would advise you to arrange a hostel for your first night.
- As soon as you have sorted out your housing, stop by the UTL. It's important to know that they're only open 9-14. There you will give them your address and signature and take a photo for your residence permit.
 - E: Even if your residence permit isn't ready, you should still go to the UTL and get your picture taken. This is what I had to do. You have to take two buses to get to UTL, and you can figure out which ones to take by downloading the Straeto app. It maps your routes for you and it's also how you buy your tickets.
- Once you get your Icelandic ID number, or kennitala, your next stop should be to open an Icelandic bank account. I went to Landsbankinn, which is located right next to the



university. You need to open a bank account so you can get your stipend for each semester deposited. This is also how you will pay your rent each month.

- Once you have your bank account information, you should go to the exchange student office and give them your bank account information, so that they can deposit the stipend.
- Go to the student services desk in Háskólatorg and ask for your UGLA login information. If you don't get your kennitala from UTL, this should be your first stop, as they should be able to give you your kennitala number here. This allows you access to the HÍ system to see your schedule, register for classes, access your email, and so on. However, you need a kennitala (Icelandic ID number) to get your information.
 - E: I didn't have my kennitala ready upon arrival, which was the case for a few other exchange students, so I had to manually look through the class catalogue and figure out when my classes would be. I also talked to my teachers at the beginning of each class and asked them to email me the course readings/syllabus/other relevant documents that I didn't yet have access to on UGLA. I only had to do this for the first week or two, because then I got my kennitala.
 - E: One of my friends had a lot of issues getting her kennitala and didn't get it until a few months after arrival. She was able to get a temporary code to access UGLA while she waited for her kennitala. She did this by talking to one of her teachers.
- You should check that there aren't any conflicts with the classes that you picked out. You can change your courses through UGLA. It's very normal to still be finalizing your schedule throughout the first week or two. I added and dropped classes during this period.
- You should get your kennitala card mailed to you within a few weeks. **MAKE SURE YOU PUT YOUR NAME ON YOUR MAILBOX IN STUDENT HOUSING.** If you don't do this, your mail will be taken to the post office.



HOUSING BENEFITS

- Once you move in to your student housing and have a kennitala, you can apply for housing benefits.

- The housing office at the University of Iceland can help you with this, or you can apply yourself through <https://husbot.is/>
- After applying, you get money deposited into your Icelandic bank account at the beginning of every month to help offset the price of rent. So definitely apply!

UNIVERSITY LIFE

- The first few weeks will probably be confusing, so don't stress, it's completely normal. You might have scheduling conflicts or need certain permission for classes, so just be prepared. Your professors will be super relaxed about everything, so just talk to them during the first week if you have any questions/are confused about something/don't have your kennitala yet and can't access the course readings on UGLA.
- E: The classes at Haskoli Islands are pretty different than the U. They are mostly reading and discussion based, and the teachers are really flexible and understanding about students having conflict or missing class, because a lot of my classmates had jobs. There was a lot less work throughout the semester, but at the end it was pretty busy with final exams and papers. I had to write many more papers than I've ever had to write at the U.
- B: In my experience the courses often loaded work towards the second half of the semester after lulling you into a false sense of security. I had many more presentations in Iceland than at the U, which I wasn't prepared for, but I'm sure it's different for every subject.
- Final exams and papers are often worth a very large part of your final grade, usually 50% or more.



FINALS

- The final exam schedules are posted during the 3rd week of classes, so you should know your exam schedule pretty early on and make end of semester plans around them.
- Finals are usually over a span of three weeks rather than one, so you may start or finish much earlier or later than your friends.
- Exams are usually 3 hours long

- BRING A PHOTO ID. You have to put it by your table number (table numbers are posted on Ugly and outside the exam room door).
- The professor usually only appears in the exam room for 5-15 minutes, depending on the questions asked and not necessarily at the beginning.
- You are usually allowed a dictionary (English to French, Icelandic to English, etc), but you should ask your professor to make sure.
- All the instructions the proctor gives are in Icelandic, even if the class is taught in English (or another language). You'll get used to it, but essentially what is said is:
 - You cannot leave the exam room in the first hour
 - Your coat/bag has to be hung up at the side of your room, not at your chair
 - If you need to leave the exam room for a water or bathroom break, you have to sign your name and the time on a sheet of paper by the door
 - The instructions will be written in both English and Icelandic in the test booklet for referral if you need it.



PHONE

- You are required for this scholarship to get an Icelandic phone number. We recommend you bring your phone to Iceland and just get an Icelandic sim card for it. To do this, you need an UNLOCKED phone, so make sure you check with your carrier.
- There are a few different phone carriers in Iceland, but most people we knew had NOVA.
 - E: I bought a Nova sim card from the airport when I arrived. Unfortunately, my phone wasn't unlocked, so I had to email with my carrier and wait for it to be unlocked. The plan I had from NOVA cost 2,000 kronur a month. Once I had a bank account, I set it up so that it would automatically refill each month.
 - B: I also bought the Nova sim card from the dealer at the mall (Kringlan, which has a free shuttle between there and city hall every hour on the hour) and got the plan. It actually worked incredibly well over the entire country. Better service than in the US for half the price!

- E: Another thing to note is that if you plan on travelling to European countries, your phone data will work in them, as long as they are within the EEA.

GETTING AROUND

- First of all, Reykjavik isn't a very big city, so it's fairly easy to walk everywhere you need to go from student housing.
- It's also fairly easy to get a bike if you prefer that. There are quite a few online sellers if you search.
 - B: Many of my friends who lived further away from the university did this. If you do get a bike, I would recommend getting a lock as well. Even though it is Iceland with really low crime rates, one of my friends had his bike stolen because he had no lock.
- For bad weather or farther distances, we recommend that you download the Straeto app.
 - This app is how you can buy bus tickets, check bus schedules, and see what buses you need to take to get places
- E: For weekend trips, I would recommend that you rent cars with friends! I did this with my friends often, and we ran into no problems. Some rental places that we commonly used were:
 - [Sadcars](#)- this place has the cheapest car rentals by far, but you need to rent a car for at least two days, and you need a credit card. You also need to take a bus to this office.
 - [Blue Car Rental](#)- This one is also fairly cheap, and you can use a debit card to rent cars from here, as long as it has a 4 digit pin. The office is located near the harbor, so it's a walkable distance.
 - [Geysir](#)- This car rental is located in Harpa, so the closest one to walk too. It was the most expensive, but you can rent cars for one day from here, and you still need a credit card.
- BEFORE YOU GO ON A TRIP, BE SURE TO CHECK THE WEATHER!!



- Constantly be checking road conditions and the [weather](#) and [roads](#), even after you leave for your trip, because the weather and road conditions are constantly changing
- E: My friends and I got stuck in a blizzard in the West Fjords and were luckily safe, but had to come back a day early. I can't stress it enough that it's so important to be checking the weather, especially when you travel away from the coast of Iceland.
- Hitchhiking is also acceptable in Iceland. Iceland is one of the safest countries in the world, so if you want to give hitchhiking a shot, here would be your best chance.
 - E: I never got the chance to try (but I really wanted to), but many of my friends did it without any issues! A lot of them liked to do it back from the airport, in order to skip buying a bus ticket.



WHAT TO DO IN ICELAND

- Road trips!! This is the best way to see the beautiful countryside and spend time with the friends you've made.
 - E: One thing I want to note is that the Highlands are only accessible in the summer. So if you want to see them (and you should) I would recommend making trips there your first few weekends in September, before they close until May/June. Same goes for the West Fjords, it's better to visit here earlier in the year, or wait until May/June, because the roads and weather are very unpredictable in this area.



- Hiking is a great pastime. Unfortunately there's not much you can get to without renting a car, but it's still amazing to get a chance to see some of the natural beauty of Iceland.

- Hiking Esja is one of the nicest and most rewarding hikes around Reykjavik. It's pretty much the only hike you can get to using the city bus.
 - B: I did it around 5 times my first semester before the weather got really cold and rainy. When you hit a clear day the view of Reykjavik is absolutely incredible!
- Reykjadalur is a hike to a river that comes from hot springs and it's only a 45 min drive away from Reykjavik.
 - E: I did this hike multiple times with friends, it's in a beautiful area and so fun to take a dip in the hot river.
- B: If you have just one day free during a weekend you can rent a car for one day with some friends and hike Glymur waterfall which is just north of Esja. You can also do Reykjadalur to the east in just a day. Both are beautiful hikes.



- Hot Springs

- Hot Springs can be found all over Iceland. You can see a map of all the hot springs in Iceland, along with a description of them, [here](#).
- Some of our favorites include:
 - Reykjadalur, as mentioned above.
 - Selljavellir- a concrete pool was built to catch the natural hot spring water from the mountains. It's a really big pool and the mountains surrounding it are beautiful. This pool is located near the ring road on the south coast.
 - Hrunalaug- this pool is located not far from the golden circle route! There's two small pools and even a hut you can change in. It's great as a last stop after doing the golden circle.
- E: My friends and I would use the map above while on road trips to scope out potential hot springs that we might want to stop at! We found some really nice ones all across Iceland.

- Swimming Pools

- Vesturbæjarlaug is closest to the University at about a 10 minute walk west by northwest. It's right



across the street from Brauð & Co, (B: home of the best cinnamon rolls I've ever had) where you can get free bread from the dumpster after they close if you feel so inclined. Next door is Kaffihus Vesturbæjar - a pleasant cafe to do some work.

- E: My friends and I would plan to go to the pool in the evening, then stop by the dumpsters and get bread and pastries out of them on our way home. Dumpster diving is very normal in Iceland, because the low temperatures keep the food cool!
 - Nautholsvik Geothermal Beach is pretty cool because you can go for a dip in the freezing Atlantic and then go straight into a geothermal hot pool nearby.
 - Nearly every city in Iceland has a swimming pool and it can be really fun to go to the pool in a new city. The map linked above with the hot springs also includes swimming pools located throughout Iceland.
- Music Festivals/Concerts
 - E: First off, let me say that Iceland's music scene was amazing. Before coming, I barely knew any Icelandic artists, but discovered so much music/songs throughout the year.
 - Iceland Airwaves
 - This is the biggest music festival in Iceland. It's in November and has multiple venues throughout Reykjavik. Even if you don't want to buy a ticket, there are many free concerts that you can go and see.
 - E: My friends and I applied to volunteer online through the Icelandic Airwaves website. It was really easy, and all you have to do is work 2, 8 hour shifts for a ticket. Working at the festival was a lot of fun, and many of us got to work backstage and meet the artists that were performing.
 - Besides Iceland Airwaves, there are many free concerts at bars/hostels/the student cellar throughout the year. Just utilize Facebook to look at events near you.
 - Night Life
 - Despite being small, Reykjavik has a lot of fun bars and clubs to go to! You'll get to know them all very well throughout the year.



- Museums

- Reykjavik also has a lot of museums, if that's your thing. If you wait for the Winter Lights Festival in February, there's a day where many of the museums have free admission.

- Northern Lights

- Don't worry, you will see these. We recommend downloading a Northern Lights app on your phone and check it often to see when they should be visible. Since Iceland is so cloudy, it can be a bit hard to see them sometimes, so pay attention to when they are supposed to be visible!



- Student Cellar

- This is the bar on campus, with the cheapest beer in all of Reykjavik, when you show your student ID. It also has some of the cheapest food and the french fries here are amazing.
- The Student Cellar also has a lot of different events, such as bingo, trivia nights, soccer and handball game showings, bands, and they show films every other Sunday.
- E: My friends and I spent a lot of time in the Student Cellar, especially when the weather was bad, since it was so close by. It's a nice, relaxed atmosphere to catch with friends after a day of classes.

