

Scholarship Exchange In Iceland



INTRODUCTIONS



Hi, I'm Abigail and I was an Environmental Science student at the U. This was my last semester of college and I was thrilled to be able to spend it in the most beautiful country on earth. I visited Iceland before I started University and swore

to myself that I would make it back before I graduated, so deciding to do the Exchange in Iceland was a very easy decision for me. I only went abroad for the spring semester, but I got to see so many amazing things, meet brilliant people, make lifelong friends, and was able to overcome obstacles I never imagined. I can't recommend Iceland enough, so if you have any questions, feel free to email me at sveen015@umn.edu!



Hi, I'm Julien and I am a Global Studies student at the U. I was able to spend my entire junior year in Iceland and it was such a great experience. I was able to make friends, see interesting places, and experience the unique culture of Iceland and I believe I'm a better person now from doing so. If you have any questions about my experience or any questions about the exchange process feel free to contact me at nolan268@umn.edu!

RESIDENCE PERMIT

After you get accepted, you need to look into getting a residence permit. When you go to Iceland, you're allowed to stay in the country for up to 90 days without one, but because of the length of the program, you'll need to get a permit. When you go onto the Directorate of Immigration's website, you'll want to make sure you get the D-208, or the Residence Permit for Students. You'll have to fill out a form that's about eleven pages, and isn't too difficult.

Something important to consider is that you're not supposed to be in Iceland while applying -- "An applicant who falls under the visa requirement may not be in Iceland when applying for the permit and during the processing of the application," so it's pretty important that you get it sorted out before you go over. If you go over during the Spring semester only, the end of November usually gives them enough time to process it all.

Things that you'll need for the permit include:

1. Payment receipt: there is an application/processing fee
2. Passport photo: you actually will have to get photographed for a passport and get the photos printed out. *I got this done at Walgreens, but the LAC will do it as well for about \$10. - AS*
3. Photocopy of passport
4. Confirmed original of a foreign criminal record certificate. *I did this through the [Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension](#) in Saint Paul. It cost me about \$8, but went by really quickly and was sufficient for my application. I believe you'll have to be fingerprinted for it as well. - AS*
5. Confirmation of study issued by the relevant school: this just means print a copy of your acceptance to the University of Iceland.
6. Medical Insurance: *the LAC told me that I would be under the university insurance while I was over there, but I got an email after submitting my application that my insurance wasn't accepted (CISI/Arch Insurance). So, I had to order my own insurance through Sjóvá, which cost around \$90. So double check and make sure that they accept it.- AS*
7. Documents on support
8. The application itself

I sent all of this through FedEx, and had to dish out a hefty amount of money, because I did it all last minute, which I do NOT recommend. - AS

I originally sent mine via USPS but because of how long it was taking and the time crunch I was in I ended up also having to send mine via private shipping. I did mine with DHS and it got there the day before my USPS application. Though the USPS was sent a month beforehand.- JN

Once you arrive in Iceland, you'll have to get photographed at the Directorate of Immigration within a week, and then they'll either send the permit to you, or you can go pick it up when it's ready.

The Directorate of Immigration is not in Reykjavik but rather Kopavogur which is about a 30-40 min walk from the university. While it was a great way to experience the surroundings I would absolutely not recommend walking there but rather taking a scooter or getting a ride.- JN

PACKING

Something to consider about Iceland is that it never gets as cold as it does in Minnesota. The average temperature in Iceland has a low of about 30 throughout the winter and an average high of 55 in the summer. However, the wind and the rain in Iceland are unparalleled. So make sure you bring a good raincoat. Due to the strong winds, an umbrella (even a windproof umbrella) is not recommended.

I would highly recommend Reykjavík Raincoats on Laugavegur in downtown Reykjavík. The coats are heavy, very high quality, and absolutely worth the money. It saved my life many times while I was in Iceland. Otherwise, I brought essentially all winter clothing: long sleeves and pants, making sure you have the option to layer, as it does get cold. - AS

Another good outfitter is 66 North. They are certainly on the pricey side and their best jackets can go upwards of a few thousand dollars. That being said, their cold weather gear and gear specific for Icelandic weather is unmatched in my opinion. While I fortunately had good cold weather gear before coming to Iceland, I did end up buying two backpacks from the store because my laptop kept getting wet in my normal backpack. There is also a 66 North outlet store in Akureyri as well as in some other cities. These are great places to get the gear for a bit less. Not to mention Icelanders all love the brand and you will see people wearing the brand in almost every situation so it's a great option for both function and fashion, just be prepared for the cost.- JN

Whether you're a fan of hiking or not, make sure you bring a good pair of hiking boots. Some of the things to see outside of Reykjavík are on rocky or loose terrain, and hiking boots can be really helpful. Also, make sure to get waterproof ones. If you're interested in camping, I would recommend packing that with you, as buying it all in Iceland will cost quite a bit, and the variety will likely be lacking.

If you're interested in Iceland's nightlife (of which they have quite a bit), definitely bring some nicer clothes.

I went to a club one night and all the men were wearing pressed pants and button up shirts, some were wearing full suits. The women as well tend to dress up very nicely, even when just going out. So, if you plan to partake, definitely bring some dressier clothing. - AS

Black is the color of choice for young Icelanders when going out. My friends and I would often joke that the "uniform" of the girls who waited outside the clubs was black leather pants, black shirts and bleached white hair.- JN (Agreed about the uniform - AS)

I would also highly recommend packing less than you think you'll need. I brought a suitcase, a carry-on, and a backpack, with space left over so I could bring things back with me. In the suitcase, I fit all of my clothing. The carry-on held some shoes and the larger school things I might need (I brought a few books, probably shouldn't have), and my backpack had stuff for the plane and my laptop. This system worked pretty well for me. The last thing you want to do is have too much and not be able to get it all back with you. One of my roommates had to leave a ton of stuff behind, which left a lot of work for the rest of us to deal with. - AS

HOUSING

There are a few options for housing in Iceland. A lot of exchange students I knew lived in the [student housing buildings](#). It can be hard to get a spot in, so it's best to apply as soon as possible. As well, you'll have to renew your application each month to make sure that you're not taken off the waiting list.

I used HousingAnywhere instead of the student housing buildings, as I was a bit nervous about getting a spot. Housing anywhere lets you rent a room in apartments/houses for as long as you need it. I ended up living in a gorgeous house right off the main street (Laugavegur), about a kilometer from the University. The owners of the house were very well off, and we had an extremely large living space in the basement split between four people. It was definitely bigger than a lot of the other housing I had seen other people living in, so that was a huge plus, as there were fewer people sharing it. It came fully furnished as well, so I didn't have to worry about bringing anything. I ended up living with two Italian girls and a guy from Spain. We ended up getting really close, referring to each other as a second family. You might meet less people if you use HousingAnywhere, but I'm still in contact with my roommates months later, with standing invitations to visit them anytime. I have no regrets about my living situation and using Housing Anywhere rather than the on-campus housing. - AS

I decided to live in an apartment instead of student housing as I figured student housing would be similar to living in a US dorm. I was so wrong. The student halls there are all nice and most are very new. You get to live with a variety of people and can make some good friends or at the very least some nice neighbors. Not to mention there are a lot of social events that occur at the dorms of which I had to then scooter to. You automatically get a spot as a U of M student so take advantage of it.- JN

MONEY

Bring a card with a chip. Very few people in Iceland use cash, so having a card is extremely helpful. However, cash is required on the buses if you don't have a ticket!

LANGUAGE

Not to be a negative person but unless you are a savant you will not be able to learn the language in any meaningful way unless you spend a lot of time focusing on that. That being said, it's not as intimidating as it looks. Icelandic is very similar to English, it's just very old so the words they use may not always have a direct translation which makes for some interesting cultural shocks. You will pick some of it up for certain though. I definitely would not say I know the language at all but, that being said I can read and pronounce words in the language now even though I don't know what I am saying. Don't be hard on yourself, Icelandic people are not going to correct you if you try to speak to them in Icelandic but unless you actually know the language there's no reason to struggle through a conversation for the sake of cultural immersion. Learn to say yes, no, and thank you and you will get by just fine in 99% of your interactions.- JN

I took introductory Icelandic while I was abroad, making it my third language I learned in college (after German and Korean), and I found it incredibly difficult. Thankfully, most everyone speaks English, but it's good to know some basics before you go:

Good day: Góðan daginn (go-than die-in)

Yes: Já (yow)

No: Nei (nay)

Thank you: Takk fyrir (tahk fi-rir)

And you should be pretty good with that. - AS

Other resources to learn some Icelandic before you go abroad are: [Icelandic Online](#) and [Íslenksa fyrir alla](#).

AFTER ARRIVAL

You'll most likely land at Keflavík Airport, which is about 40 minutes away from Reykjavík. There are a few options to get into Reykjavík, but the cheapest would be using the Flybus. You can buy tickets ahead of time or at the airport, and I highly recommend you choose your stop to be BSÍ, the main bus terminal close to University of Reykjavík and downtown Reykjavík.

If you have time, definitely stop by the duty free (or even at the duty free at MSP if you can) if you want liquor. Alcohol in Iceland is only sold at specific stores and it's unbelievably expensive. So, the duty free at the airport is your cheapest option if you don't bring any over.

Make sure within the first week you go to the Immigration office to get photographed. Your best bet for getting there is to take the public buses. My recommendation is to map it using your phone, that will tell you which bus to get onto. The buses have numbers and names, so there might be two different buses that are listed as #1, but they'll have different names on them, so make sure you get onto the right one. You can download the app to buy tickets and scan them using your phone on the app Klappið, or use cash. Tickets are around 450kr each, and if you use cash you won't get any change back if you don't have the exact amount. If you use the app, the ticket will be good for 75 minutes after it's been opened. If you use cash, they'll print a receipt that you can use for 75 minutes as well.

Once you have your kennitala, or your Icelandic ID, you'll want to go to the bank to make sure you get the stipend.

I used Landsbankinn and it was relatively easy to open an account. I went in person to open it and that helped a lot. - AS

You'll also have to go to Háskólatorg, the main student building on the University campus (this building has the bookstore, cafe/cafeteria, and the student services office). To get access to UGLA, the Icelandic equivalent of MyU, you'll need to go to the student services office. They can also give you your kennitala if you didn't get it at the Immigration office.

HOUSING BENEFITS

There are housing benefits that you can apply for to help offset the cost of living in Iceland. Apply through www.husbot.is or through the UoI housing office!

Unfortunately, I wasn't aware that this existed until after I returned to the US, so I didn't get the benefit, but definitely check it out to help save money, as Iceland is very expensive. - AS

UNIVERSITY LIFE

Make sure before classes start that you don't have any scheduling conflicts between your classes, and you can switch your classes around if need be as well.

Classes at the UoI are a little different than at the U of M. Many of my classes were just lecture and discussion based, with little to no homework throughout the entire semester, except for a paper here or there. Something that I really struggled with is that multiple of my classes did not have clear grading instructions, or did not have a clear outline of when assignments would be due. For example, I would know that I would have three major essays in a class, one of which being my final essay, but I wouldn't know when the two other essays would be due. So, they would be announced randomly through the semester, about a week before the due date. So, make sure you're watching your email, going to class, and staying on top of assignments when they do come, and do your best to plan ahead as much as possible. One memorable time, I had plans to visit London, and after I had booked everything, I was assigned an essay that would be due while I was abroad. This was something that many people I met agreed with me on, that we often felt slightly out of sorts by not really knowing when things would be due. Moral of the story: the syllabi are not as comprehensive as the ones at the U, and make sure you're on your toes. However, in general, most of the essays and assignments are backloaded near the end of the semester, so don't get lulled into a false sense of security. Further, with the lack of assignments, expect your essays and exams to be worth much more of your final grade (around 50% for finals). - AS

On the social side of university life, the most important thing to remember is that it is a very multicultural university. You will certainly meet many Icelanders but the majority of your first few weeks will be spent with other students not from Iceland as the university hosts many mixers and parties for these students. Talk to as many people as you can and branch out. It's a small place so you will eventually know most of the people you interact with in class on a personal level. My core friend group ended up being two Brits, a Frenchman, an Icelander, a Swede and a German. All of which I am still in close contact with so don't view the friendships you make as a temporary thing. - JN

FINALS

You should learn when your finals are scheduled on UGLA at the beginning of the semester. You might find that your finals are more spread out, rather than all within the same week, so make sure you plan accordingly to start studying.

One of my classes finished at the beginning of April, with an in-person spoken final, while my other two weren't done until the 10th of May, and both of the exams were remote due to COVID. - AS

I had such a varying degree of finals experiences due to COVID that I feel like my experience is quite different from what a future student may experience. What I can say is to make sure to try and talk with teachers throughout the term because if you are able to develop a relationship with them they will be much more likely to help you out in times of need, finals included. - JN

PHONE

Your main two options are Simmin and Vodafone. I went with Simmin because they have the best coverage in all parts of the island. They also have an app which offers deals and sales for Simmin

customers so definitely a good bonus as well. I ended up only using data and phone minutes as needed by purchasing them through the app which was easy and cheap.- JN

GETTING AROUND

Reykjavík is a very walkable city, and it isn't very big, so most places you'll be able to reach on foot. The places that you can't reach on foot within the city are almost always accessible via bus.

I would recommend getting familiar with the public transportation system, as it is super helpful to be able to take the buses instead of walking for 45 minutes to get places. - AS

Reykjavik has many options for private transportation as well. The best by far are scooters which are even equipped with spikes in the winter. The top two apps are ZOLO and Hopp. Zolo only offers scooters while Hopp also offers electric cars, all for an extremely affordable price especially by Icelandic standards. For car rental there are many options but by far the cheapest, easiest and most accessible is Blue car rental which is by the old harbor. You will have many options for insurance but I recommend getting the best available, I know that around 20+ students crashed cars that I knew of and most did not have the cover all insurance. In my opinion, peace of mind is worth it. There are also domestic flights within Iceland and flying to another city and getting a rental once there can also be a bit cheaper. Whatever you do, avoid a taxi ride at all costs. They are simply not worth the price.- JN

If you want to get outside of Reykjavík, definitely rent a car, and double check to see if you're allowed to operate a motorized vehicle while you're abroad (the LAC can answer this). Cars are super helpful once you leave Reykjavík, as there is so much to see in Iceland you can't get to by foot or bus. However, if you take a trip, double check the weather, especially during the winter. Iceland is fantastic in that it has a website in which you can [check road conditions](#).

If you want to rent a car, there are multiple rental shops in Reykjavík to choose from, but Blue Car Rental seems to have the cheapest prices.

I went on two road trips during the winter. The second of which had the worst road conditions I had ever seen in my life (as a Minnesotan, that's saying something). There were multiple times you would see cars flipped over on the side of the road, and a group of friends I knew got into accidents due to bad roads and horrible visibility. During the winter, you only have about 4-5 hours of sunlight, so be very careful! I would recommend not taking any risks and if that means spending more time waiting for the weather to clear, do it. - AS

Hitchhiking is still allowed and is considered safe in Iceland, so if need be, that is an option as well.

WHAT TO DO IN ICELAND

Road trips - the southern border of Iceland is well known for having absolutely fantastic sights, and will be much busier than the rest of the country - especially in the summer. But the Ring Road is known for having absolutely fantastic sights.

If you decide to do the Ring Road, know that it'll take at least five days to complete, and you likely won't be able to see everything if you only do it for those five days. Further, the Westfjords should only be traveled during the summer.

My dad came and visited me before I left and we did two separate trips. The first was the Westfjords and the second was the entire ring road (minus the westfjords). I can't recommend the Westfjords enough. I've never been in a more desolate area. There would be times we'd be driving for upwards of twenty minutes without seeing another car. If you make it up that way, make sure you go to Ísafjörður and stop by Dynjandi waterfall. - AS

Something to keep in mind as you travel is gas stations. Along the south of Iceland, it's really easy to find gas stations. Gas stations here being a place where you can get gas + an inside rest area. However, in the Westfjords and around most of the Ring Road, it's really difficult to find gas pumps with rest areas, and you'll more likely than not only find gas pumps. So, if you have the opportunity to use the bathroom in a building and you're pee-shy, use it. Otherwise, you might have to be prepared to pee outside.

Also, make sure to look at some of the more tourist-y things to do. A lot of my friends were able to go snorkeling in Silfra. There's also options like Glacial hikes, boat tours onto Jökulsárlón, and glacial cave tours. Be aware that these will be much more expensive, but are truly experiences of a lifetime.

If you're planning on doing a road trip, here are some stops I highly recommend:

- Jökulsárlón (especially during the summer time, the colors are more vibrant and there will be a ton of seals in the lagoon!)
- Dynjandi
- Gullfoss
- Dettifoss
- Stokknes
- Fjaðrárgljúfur
- Djúpalónssandur

Iceland is also known for having a lot of swimming pools. And by swimming pools, we mean geothermally heated pools that people will sit and converse in. There are some cheap, local ones to check out, like Vesturbæjarlaug. Further, there are a lot of geothermal pools in general to check out, like the Blue Lagoon (expensive, but worth it) and Nauthólsvík Geothermal Beach in Reykjavík.

Spend time in Reykjavik and meet locals. Everyone you will meet will be raring to go on road trips and you will 100% go on your fair share. But don't overlook the city. There is so much to do especially if you make an Icelandic friend who can be a middleman for you in terms of language. There are both bars and clubs, of which the clientele can vary from extremely local to tourist only. My top spots by far were Prikid and Gaukrin. Prikid is a more local bar but there's so much going on there that it's impossible to get bored. Gaukrin is where the University hosts a lot of events including a karaoke night which was extremely popular with the international students. The hostels also host lots of events which are super fun to go to. One thing to note though if you are a young man like me, avoid overly aggressive men while out at night. For a variety of reasons it is very common for Icelandic men to get in fights while drinking. Cocaine is extremely popular with the locals and when very drunk the combination can lead to some

pretty bad situations. In my opinion the best option is to keep an open eye for conflict and stay as far away from it as possible.- JN

When I was in Iceland, I went to Harpa for three different concerts: two symphony orchestra concerts and a Wardruna concert. Otherwise, for a more chill option, check out Hús máls og menningar - a coffee shop/bar where all the walls are covered in bookshelves. I went to work there multiple times, and at night they have live music! One of my highlights for sure. While I was in Iceland, I also saw a contemporary dance performance and that was fantastic as well. There are also plenty of history and art museums in Iceland. Definitely go to Perlan if you can, it's the natural science museum, but at the top there's a slow revolving dome where you can get coffee or food and see Reykjavik and the surrounding mountains from up high. Speaking of art, if you're familiar with the band Of Monsters and Men, I lived next door to the main singer, Ragnar! - AS

Living in Europe, you also get the opportunity to watch Eurovision live! Definitely recommend for some weird music and competition.

You'll also very likely have the opportunity to see the Northern Lights. There are a lot of websites that will let you know how good your odds are at seeing them, so keep a look out and I don't doubt you'll see them eventually.



We hope this helped in your preparations to go to Iceland and we hope that you have as wonderful of a time as we did. Remember, if something goes wrong, þetta reddast!