

Scholarship Exchange in Iceland

2016-2017

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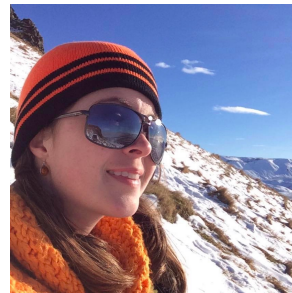
INTRO

I'm Kaija and I'm one of the two students who studied at Háskóli Íslands (the University of Iceland) in 2016-2017. I'm majoring in Global Studies (focusing on Human Rights and Justice in Europe) and minoring in French; if everything goes according to plan, I'll graduate in the spring of 2018.

So why did I decide to go to Iceland? First of all, I'd wanted to go since I found a book about pufflings – baby puffins – when I was about 5 years old and I'd become familiar with a lot of Icelandic music through the radio station KEXP and their broadcasts of the annual Iceland Airwaves music festival. Also, like almost everyone who visits Iceland, I was in awe of the landscapes and scenery (and opportunities for camping and hiking and etc.). Academically, I was excited for the chance to learn about Icelandic history and international politics/policies/social issues from a small state, non-American perspective. I can honestly say that this has been the best year of my life so far; I made tons of new friends from all over the world and did things I'd never even dreamed of (glacier walks, climbing waterfalls, skinny dipping in glacial meltwater, etc).

Hi, I'm Ellis, and I'm the other half of the duo sent to Iceland for the 2016/2017 academic year. I'm majoring in Scandinavian Studies with an emphasis on Norwegian and minoring in Medieval studies with an Old Norse focus. I may flip-flop my major and minor before graduating in the spring of 2018, because Old Norse is my true core interest, but we'll see how the paperwork goes. ;P

Why did I choose Iceland? As someone who studies Old Norse (also known as Old Icelandic) and medieval Icelandic literature and poetry– especially the Icelandic Eddas and other ancient Icelandic poetry forms–, a year in Iceland seemed necessary and perfect. In fact I all but chose to transfer to the University of Minnesota because it would afford me the opportunity to study at Háskóli Íslands and in close proximity to the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. Priorities. And the experience was everything I'd hoped it would be and more!



This report is essentially some advice and recommendations for future students on the exchange program in Iceland as well as an overview of what we did while there. If you've got questions regarding any aspect of the trip, the application process, the university, the country, the language, etc., you can send us an email at wame511@umn.edu (Kaija) or wylie055@umn.edu (Ellis).

RESIDENCE PERMIT

The first thing you've got to do after being accepted to HÍ is to apply for a student residence permit. You don't need a visa, just this permit, which you'll renew after the first 6 months. This process is different and much more complicated if you are a citizen of a country outside of the EEA. As a US citizen, you apply through the Icelandic Directorate of Immigration (UTL). All the relevant info and documents can be found [here](#). The permit is due by 1 July but the deadline is a little flexible (K: I submitted mine 4 July) and is basically to guarantee the permit is granted by the beginning of the semester. If you know your application materials will be later than 1 July, send an email to UTL letting them know who you are, why you're getting a residence permit, and why your application will be late – they were really understanding in my case.



E: I managed to get my application out by the first, barely, but the flight that was meant to carry it ended up being delayed for three days, and then once it got to Iceland it just sat at Keflavík airport for three days, inexplicably. I let UTL know it would be late, and they told me it was fine, the application simply would be processed last. But I had no problems once I arrived, everything was ready to go, and after handing over my housing agreement to UTL I got my kennitala with no issue. Iceland's national motto is "þetta reddast", which basically means "it'll work itself out" and bureaucracy in Iceland definitely proceeds at an easy, it'll-all-work-out kind of pace.

1. **Checklist of Basic Requirements & Checklist of Specific Requirements**
 - i. Specifies which documents you're including in the application
2. **Receipt for payment to UTL for the permit (~\$100)**
 - i. Include the receipt of the wire transfer and make sure your name and birthdate are included.
3. **[Residence permit application](#)**
4. **Passport-size photo**
 - i. K: I got two copies at the [Learning Abroad Center](#) (\$8)
5. **Copy of your passport**
6. **[FBI criminal background check](#) (\$18)**
 - i. You'll need to get a set of fingerprints taken for this,
 - i. K: I did mine with the [UMPD](#) (\$10).
 - ii. E: I got mine done by the [SPPD](#) for \$15 on a very fancy machine, and they were later deemed "unfit" for processing when I submitted them. So try and get those done as early as possible, and maybe shell out for two cards just in case.
 - ii. This will take a long time to process (12-14 weeks), so make sure you submit this ASAP after you've found out if you've got the scholarship

- iii. If you do need it faster, you can go through an FBI-approved channeler but this will cost you at least \$50
- iv. E: Check on where to get this [apostilled](#): my FBI channeler did not offer the service and I had to take it elsewhere, then bring it back.

7. Medical insurance

- i. K: I was initially told my US insurance was adequate, but UTL denied it, so I last-minute bought [Sjova's "Sickness Cost Insurance"](#) (\$~100)
- ii. It's worth noting that we discovered the hard way that this Sjova insurance is only for emergencies or accidents and didn't actually apply when Ellis was really sick and went to the clinic. I was lucky enough not to ever need it, but you may not want to tempt fate.
- iii. The University of Minnesota requires all faculty/staff/students to enroll in CISI international health insurance, which will be done for you and is included in the program fee.

8. Proof of financial support

- i. 163635ISK/month (about \$1400/month in summer 2016)
- ii. K: I had my parents transfer some money into my account and printed off bank official bank statements of my checking and savings account showing I had enough money to stay (for the first six months), then had them transfer the money back out
 - i. Unless you're living an incredibly extravagant lifestyle, this amount is overkill (in my opinion)
- iii. MAKE SURE you check the "News" section of UTL's website, since they changed the amount of money necessary during the application for the second semester but didn't change the amounts on the forms or instructions
- iv. E: UTL would not accept my funds from an account in my name to which my father had access– this is an uncommon thing in Europe, apparently. You may have to open a new account just to house these funds and then transfer them over from your joint account, that's what I had to do. And try and do this part early on! I waited thinking "hey, my bank can handle this, they do stuff like this all the time". Wrong: my bank had never wired anything to Iceland before and they were very confused. It was awful. So set aside a whole week for dealing with your bank just in case.

9. Confirmation of school admission

- i. Admission letter from Haskóli Íslands that was emailed to you

10. Housing Certificate

- i. You don't need to submit this until up to two weeks after you arrive in Iceland so you don't need to enclose it with your initial application.

Print off everything and mail in these documents (1-9) stacked in order to the UTL office (Skógarhlíð 6, 105 Reykjavík).

K: I used FedEx and unfortunately the cheapest option was \$50. You'll get an email when your application is approved or if there is an issue with a document.

E: Remember to write the address in an American format on your mailing forms, and others if necessary– my bank was consistently thrown by the spelling and order of UTL's address, and they called me about it no less than three times. So, in "American" the address is: 6 Skogarhlid, Reykjavik, Iceland, 105. I paid \$120 to get it sent next day via DHL, and as I said above... it took eight days anyway. So go with FedEx or UPS. It's not worth the pain.

This initial residence permit is only valid for about 6 months, so it expires in the middle of February and you need to reapply AT LEAST one month before this first permit expires (so mid-January).

K: I made sure I had all the necessary documents right when I got back from winter break and dropped them off in person at the UTL office. [The renewal of the permit requires different and, thankfully, fewer forms.](#)

PACKING

- E: Get a good raincoat with a sealed zipper, preferably. Don't bring an umbrella, they are useless against the Icelandic wind.
- E: Maybe bring a lock for your belongings if you will be spending much time in hostels. Iceland is the land of kindness and consideration, but things still happens. One of the hostels I stayed in had a communal shoe corner where we were all supposed to leave our shoes before entering the bedroom areas, so it could "feel like home". I left my Nikes there and they were stolen within 15 hours. So don't be me.
- E: Any gear such as hiking boots, rain pants, winter gear that you want to bring but are considering buying once in Iceland: don't. Iceland is the third most expensive country in the world, bring your essentials with you or have a family member mail them to you.
- K: Clothing: literally layering will save you. My "winter coat" has a removable down liner and a waterproof outer layer, but you can bring a heavier coat if you like - just make sure it's WATERPROOF (not just water-resistant). Bring wool socks and other normal winter stuff (hats/gloves/sweaters, whatever). I didn't have winter boots, just used my hiking ones with thick wool socks. Everyone in Iceland is very stylish though, lots of black, so bring like 1 "nice" coat and a pair of shoes for going out, otherwise you will feel veeeery out of place.
- K: I brought 2 suitcases and a backpack and honestly, it was too much. Bring less clothes than you think you'll need. I bought a pillow and blanket for cheap



at Ikea here, but brought a sheet. I brought a pair of (WATERPROOF) hiking boots, tennis shoes, converse, some flip flops, and a pair of "nice" shoes. You can honestly get everything you need in Iceland, but I do not recommend it, unless you're ok with spending huge amounts of money.



- If you're planning on camping a lot, make sure you bring your things from the US, don't plan on buying them once in Iceland, even to save space in your suitcases. Buying things in Iceland will usually cost double (or more) what they would in the US.
 - If you're bringing a tent, make sure it's sturdy and be ready to repair it (the wind is sometimes strong enough to shatter car windows).
 - Bring a sleeping pad and sleeping bag (make sure it can go a bit below freezing, otherwise you'll end up extremely cold, even in the late summer, fall, and spring).
 - Camping stoves are nice, but make sure you're allowed to bring them on the plane (otherwise they're not too expensive to buy in Iceland). Do NOT bring gas canisters on the plane.



MONEY

- Make sure your bank cards are equipped with a chip, otherwise you will be a bit screwed.
- You can pay for everything, everywhere, with your card, so cash at all times isn't necessary.
- It's always a good idea to get some money changed into kronur before you depart, that way you can get used to the way kronur are counted fairly early on.

LANGUAGE

- 90% of Icelanders speak perfect English, so you will rarely have to use any Icelandic during your time abroad. However, a little Icelandic goes a long way, and locals are a lot more likely to treat you kindly (i.e. not treat you like the average American tourist i.e. with contempt) if you know and utilize a couple Icelandic phrases. Here are some good ones:
 - 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
 - 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.

- Ég tala ekki Íslensku. (Yeh tahla eckee Ees-lens-koo) "I don't speak Icelandic". No explanation needed.
- Má ég tala Ensku? (Mau yeh tahla ein-skoo?) "May I speak English?" Crucial for phone conversations. You can also say talarðu Ensku? (tall-ar-thoo ein-skoo?) "do you speak English?" but Icelanders can sometimes get offended by this question, so it's safer to stick with the former
- Já (jau) "yes"
- Nei (nay) "no"
- Jæja (ya-ee-ya) "yeah/well/sure" Icelanders think it's the funniest thing in the world when you say jæja. Try it.
- Ég veit ekki (yeh veyt eckee) "I don't know".
- Afsakið (Ahf-sah-keeth) "Excuse me/my bad". Icelanders rarely, if ever, say excuse me, which takes some getting used to. People will bump into you in the grocery and say nothing. Also they will snort and hock lugies wordlessly. So afsakið is really just a formality to use at pharmacies, the bank, etc. so the employees will think kindly of you.
- Hvað segirðu gott? (kvath seh-year-thoo goat?) "How are you?" If you respond with "fine" Icelanders will know to switch to English, but some Icelandic responses, for variations of "fine", are allt gott/bará fint/allt gott bara.
- Tilboð– "sale"
- Stræto– "bus"
- Bíl– "car"
- Öl– "beer", vín– "wine". Don't pretend you don't want to know these.
- Matur– "food"



HOUSING

We both stayed in Gamli Garður, the oldest student accommodation on the university campus, found through the student housing service, Studentagarðar. Information on Gamli and other student housing can be found [here](#). If you want to be in student housing, you have to enter the housing lottery, which begins 1 June at midnight (Icelandic time). This lottery is EXTREMELY competitive, so you

have to register as soon as possible when registration goes live. If you are placed on the waiting list, let the team at the Learning Abroad Center know. University of Minnesota students are guaranteed on campus housing from the beginning of orientation through the end of the academic school year.

If you don't want to stay in student housing, there are lots of other options in Reykjavík. Many guesthouses become student accommodation during the school year and it is possible to find normal apartments. However, there is a housing shortage in Reykjavík (thanks to the tourist boom), so cheap apartments are almost impossible to find. Many people stay in hostels or the campsite for the first few weeks while they try to find permanent housing. I know a few people who found long-term apartments through airbnb, Rentmate, or a Facebook group for apartments for rent in the city.

E: Be careful out there looking for apartment or guesthouse accommodations: two classmates of mine were evicted from their housing in early Winter as their landlords knew they could get more money out of tourists visiting for the Holidays. Iceland is not used to its tremendous tourist problem yet and so their leasing laws do not cover this situation as well as ours do here in the US. So make sure you're staying in a place that is reputable and recommended by other locals, either other students or other expats. [This group](#) is good for recommendations of this nature.

Usually, kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms are shared. Roommates are more common in non-student housing to make the rent cheaper.

ONCE IN ICELAND

- K: I arrived about five days before orientation started, but it's not necessary to get there any earlier than the day before school starts; I wanted some time to meet a friend and explore the city a bit.
- You'll fly to the only international airport on the island, Keflavík (KEF). It's about 45 minutes by bus from Reykjavík. Unfortunately, the only way from the airport to the city is by car or bus. You can buy bus tickets from Reykjavík Excursions Flybus (about \$20 one way) right at the airport by the exits. You could also hitchhike, but I wouldn't recommend it with all your luggage.
- Go to the UTL office (Skögarhlíð 6,) as soon as you can to get your photo taken for your kennitala (identification) card. Bring your passport with you and say you're there to get the photo for your residence permit.
- Go to the student services desk in Háskólatorg and ask for your UGLA login information. 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. Since you are a non-EEA citizen, you had to submit all your paperwork months ago, so your



- kennitala should be ready when you arrive. You can get the number from the student services desk at Háskólatorg.
- You'll get a physical id card with your kennitala on it in a few weeks – UTL may mail it to you (like they did with Ellis) or won't (I still didn't have one after a month, and asked at the UTL office and it had been sitting there for weeks).
 - DOUBLE CHECK the courses you registered for – you may have to change your schedule since there may be conflicts with your timetable or courses may have been cancelled.
 - I was able to do this by myself, but there are student advisors available if you need help.
 - Don't stress if you don't get your schedule finalized before school starts – it's really normal for everyone, not just exchange students
- Once you have your kennitala, you need to open an Icelandic bank account. I used Landsbankinn and simply opened a student checking account with a debit card at the downtown location. You'll need your kennitala number, passport, and a passport-sized photo they can have (it goes on the back of your debit card).
 - An Icelandic bank account is necessary to receive your scholarship stipend and student housing benefits (if applicable).
 - Once you have the account number and information, visit the exchange student office and make sure they've got your account info so they can deposit the housing stipend directly into your account.
 - E: Gamli Garður wasn't available for us to move in right away, so I found a cheap airbnb to stay at and then crashed on a friend's floor. If you're in student accommodation, you've got to pick up your keys from the office at Eggertsgata 6 and sign your lease in the offices in Háskólatorg (the student center).
 - The student housing office provided us with info to apply for student housing benefits from the government (20,000 kr/month first semester and 31,000 kr/month 2nd semester). This process can be very confusing since you have to go to about three different places with different forms, so ask for help if you need it. I think this only applies if you live in student housing. I don't know if this will still apply, as even though I receive the benefits, I am still very clueless as to how it works.
- E: I arrived two days before orientation and floated around until Gamli opened its doors during the first week of school. I stayed at three separate hostels as well as in a cozy room for rent by a very friendly family. It was a bit hectic and obnoxious wandering all over creation with all of my belongings for a week and a half, but it helped me get to know the city very quickly.

- Like Kaija said, the best way to get from Keflavík to Reykjavík is on the flybus. If you know where you'll be staying when you book your ticket then provide them with your address: they will even provide you with a shuttle connection— very handy if you've got a couple bags with you. Then sit back and enjoy the pretty 50 minute ride from the airport into the city. :)
- You can walk from campus to UTL (Útlendingastofnun, the place where you mailed all those lovely forms) right along the ring road (Hringbraut). It's a two mile walk, so avoid doing it with anything heavier than a backpack. Now UTL is, frankly, a bit difficult to find: when you get to where your phone or map says you should be, take a look around. You should see Bus Hostel nearby. Walk towards it, then pass it. Go all the way to the far end of the street, where it appears to be a dead end. You should see a lot of trees in a parking lot, obscuring a sign: that hidden building is UTL. Walk on in and get your photo for your permit. If you tell them you need your kennitala for HÍ, they may write it down for you— at least they did for me. UTL is only open from 11 to 2 every day, so time your trip accordingly.
- If UTL doesn't give you your kennitala, head on back to campus and over to the student services desk in Háskólatorg (the building with the bookstore in it). They should have your kennitala if your permit application went through ok. Then they will give you your UGLA login information so that you can access the school website. If your kennitala is not ready at this time they should be able to provide you with a temporary number so that you can access UGLA in the meantime. They should also provide you with information on how to access eduroam. Conveniently, if and when you have any problems accessing either UGLA or eduroam, the it folks are just down the hall from the student services desk and they are very friendly.
 - Like Kaija said above, UTL mailed me my ID card promptly, but they never sent hers out. Remember: þetta reddast, so always ask UTL if you are missing an ID/form/etc. As chances are they simply forgot about it.
- You'll be making regular trips between campus and UTL at this point in the game, and one of your stops on the way should be a bank. Landsbankinn is the typical pick: they have a student account with a debit card that's very easy to set up, and they have an atm in Háskólatorg (the student center) and a local branch just a block from campus.



UNIVERSITY

For the first few weeks, you're going to be very confused all the time. This is normal. Seriously, don't worry. Petta reddast also applies to classes: your timetable will probably have conflicts, some of your classes may no longer be offered, some may require special permission for which you'll need to talk to the international office, and some of them may have missing professors that just don't show up to the first week of lectures. This kind of mess is normal, just stick with it, and don't be afraid if your schedule is still a hot mess after school has been in session for a week or so.

- Classes are much different at HÍ than at the U – there is little to no homework given besides reading to be discussed in class
 - Usually there are 1-2 essays or presentations/discussions throughout the semester, but the final exam is usually 50% or more of the final grade for the course.
 - Obviously, this means you won't have a lot of homework until the last few weeks of the semester, so use your free time wisely! Don't plan things during the last weeks.

Final exams

- The library isn't open overnight during finals, but you can get a special student ID that allows you special access to specific university buildings.
- Finals take place over the course of a few weeks rather than one, so you may finish very early or late compared to your friends.
- Finals are much more formal than they are at the U.
 - Exams are usually three 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.
 - You are usually allowed a dictionary (eg. Icelandic to English or English to French etc.)
 - You may have to sit for an exam along with a completely separate class from another department if both classes are small
 - 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

PHONE

- As a requirement of the scholarship, you're required to get an Icelandic phone number. Don't buy a phone in Iceland since it'll be very expensive - bring a phone, you can just insert a SIM card into.
- There are a few different phone companies in Iceland but most popular among exchange students is Nova. It's really cheap and texts and calls to other Nova numbers are always free. I bought my Nova SIM card at the tourist info center for about \$25. You've got to "top up" every three months (the cheapest option is 1000kr, or about \$9) to keep your number active.
 - K: I brought my US phone (I have Verizon), basically paused my US phone contract and kept the US SIM card with my number, and put the Nova SIM card in. When I left, I emailed Nova and asked them to cancel my number and they did it the same day.
 - E: Some phone companies lock their phones for usage outside the US, so make sure your phone can be used abroad. I use Sprint and my phone would not have functioned properly, so I had to get an unlocked phone. You can order one off of Amazon for less than \$100 if you find a good seller. Once you arrive in Iceland you can get a sim card at the airport, then you've got your data ready to go immediately once you hit the city. I used Síminn all year, and their data was always fine, and especially good when travelling outside of the city too, but the SMS seemed like it was always in need of a top up. NOVA is much more popular.

GETTING PLACES

- Reykjavík isn't a big city, so essentially everything is within walking distance. There are a few bike lanes, but it's nowhere near the "bike friendliness" of Minneapolis. There's the bus system, [Stræto](#), but it's expensive (even if you get a student pass) and the bus routes and timetables are incredibly inefficient. However, they're useful to get out of the city or if the weather is bad.
 - E: The best way to use stræto is to download the free app. Then you don't have to deal with exorbitantly priced passes or tiny tickets. I went horseback riding regularly outside the city in the suburb Hafnafjörður and I always used the app to get my stræto tickets (when I couldn't find someone to bum a ride from).

- IF YOU LEAVE THE CITY, CHECK THE [WEATHER](#), THE [ROADS](#), AND BE PREPARED.

- Weather in Iceland changes incredibly quickly and can become severe very fast. Always check road conditions and weather forecasts before going on a trip.



- If you're renting a car, split the cost of rental and fuel with friends so it ends up being pretty cheap. [Sadcars](#) is the cheapest rental company – though since you're on the exchange through the U, you can't operate a vehicle (just have someone else drive). [Blue car rental](#) is also decent, as well as the tiny car rental kiosk in the local airport across from the HÍ campus.
 - K: If you want to go even cheaper, I 10000% recommend hitchhiking. As much as my mom freaked out, I never had a bad experience. It is incredibly safe to do in Iceland and honestly, it's sometimes more reliable than the bus system. Some tips:
 - It's better to take the bus a little ways out of the city and then find someplace along the roadside where it's easy for cars to stop and pick you up.
 - Don't have a concrete schedule since you don't know when you'll get picked up.
 - Have some chocolate or another tiny gift for whoever picks you up – it's just a nice gesture.
 - Make conversation with the people who pick you up! Be friendly! Usually the people who pick you up are really cool, so ask them questions and get to know them a little bit. It's usually Icelanders who pick people up, but occasionally tourists (I never got picked up by Americans, I think because it's sort of seen as a sketchy thing).
 - E: I never hitchhiked in Iceland, but I excelled at bumming rides. Find yourself a hobby to do in Iceland– I ride horseback, Kaija rock climbs – where you can meet Icelanders and other expats outside of everyone you know on campus. They are more likely to have cars, and be friendly about letting you hitch rides. When going to the stables I would ensure that I was either a) going at the same time as a fellow rider with a car, or b) that I would be leaving the stables at the same time as someone with a car. Shaving off all those little bus expenses of 440 kr per ride really does help in the long run.



FOOD

- Food in Iceland is expensive, which makes sense, but still sucks. Cook with friends! Save money!
 - The cheapest grocery store is either Bónus or Krónan, depending on what you get (i.e. cheese is cheaper at Bónus, juice is cheaper at Krónan). The most expensive store is 10/11, a convenience store open 24hours. There are other stores, Netto and Veður, but they're usually more expensive. If you want to have a bigger selection, the Hagkaup at Kringlan (the mall) is worth a trip.
 - Bring your own bags (I usually used my backpack), since you're charged for each plastic bag
 - Produce is usually much more expensive than it is in the US, with a few exceptions (ex. avocados and beets); it's also not very good quality.
 - K: Meat is really expensive so basically all my friends and I were vegetarians.
 - K: I did go bin diving quite a bit at the grocery stores – I promise it's not disgusting and so much produce and other food is thrown away for no reason :(
 - E: I never went dumpster diving while in Iceland, but definitely ate my fair share of food collected in other people's dives. I suggest having several staple meals. For protein, get lots of skyr! It's delicious. You will miss it when you don't have it. And when the vegetarian existence gets to be too much, fish is the least expensive and freshest meat you can find in Iceland (other than lamb which, let's be real, we cannot afford).
 - K: I didn't go out to eat very often (read: a few times each semester) but did spend a lot of time studying, relaxing, and procrastinating in coffee shops, many of which sort of transition into bars at night - some favorites:
 - Stofan Kaffihús: excellent bottomless coffee, very pretty building/décor, VERY GOOD CAKES (nice to split with someone since they're huge and kind of expensive), rotating art exhibits
 - lða Zimsen: also bottomless coffee, cheaper cakes, also a bookshop
 - Kaffibrenslan: really good hot chocolate, cute upstairs, excellent cake
 - Reykjavík Roasters: the "specialty coffee" shop so no free refills, two locations (the Brautarholt one is bigger with less tourists), sometimes if you stay until close, you're sent home with a free pastry!
 - Sandholt Bakery: not so much a good place to study (it's also a restaurant), hot chocolate/mochas are the best I've had, honestly unparalleled pastries
 - Café Babalu: very cute and homey, bottomless coffee, student discount!
 - Kaffihús Vesturbæjar: really good bottomless coffee, right next to the pool, really good food, once there was a neon orange Furby
- ~If it wasn't obvious, spending a year in Iceland did nothing to curb my love of coffee~
- I'd definitely recommend going to the pizza place Hverfisgata 12 at least once (try the potato pizza), even though it's pretty pricey.

- E: I'm a big fan of food and I come from a family of middle class gluttons who love eating out, so I would set aside some cash to go out every few weeks to eat/have a coffee/graba drink with friends. Places I advise:
 - 100% agree with Kaija's coffee recommendations: Kaffibrenslan is cute, the coffee's good, and you get to feel like you're in the thick of things while you're on Laugavegur. Babalu has great kjötsupa, Icelandic meat soup, for a good price. The decorations are also hysterical. Everyone at Kaffihus Vesturbær is very nice, and it's right by campus; and if you get homesick, go down to Sandholt and treat yourself to one of their glorious, expensive pastries. So worth it. Really.
 - Studentakjallarinn has the cheapest burgers in town, and you can get a whole meal out of their fry baskets, they're huge and cost 350 kr. For some reason my entire department basically lived down there, including the professors, so I ate lots of fries at kjallarinn. Too many fries. Their happy hour beers are also the cheapest in the city, starting at 500 if you show them your student ID.
 - The cafe inside the National museum is nice for studying. They have a very tasty pesto sandwich that I'd splurge on sometimes, and it's literally in Gamli's backyard.
 - Hot dogs. Good and cheap. If you go to any N1 gas station you can get one wrapped in bacon for 360-ish. If you like that sort of thing (I doooo).
 - Sushi The Train is fun for conveyor belt sushi, and you can see the prices by checking out the color coded plates that the sushi float by on.
 - Apotek has a happy hour special where you get half off on any dessert, and they make tasty desserts (thankfully a hallmate worked there and we got lots of free stuff)
 - Dominos is infinitely better in Iceland. And they deliver to Gamli. Just saying.

PLACES TO GO/THINGS TO DO (condensed version - message us for more/info)

- Hiking/Camping!
 - There's a lot of longer, multi-day hikes throughout the highlands and along the coasts (Landmannalaugar, Mývatn-Askja...) but these are only open in the summer and early fall - the snow and the cold comes and makes them impossible, so plan accordingly. DO NOT go alone or if you're inexperienced, since these hikes have been fatal.
 - There's TONS of day hikes and smaller hikes everywhere around the country, but some good places to check out are
 - [Hveragerði](#)
 - [Heiðmörk](#)
 - [Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður \(Vatnajökull National Park\)](#)
 - Þórsmörk



- [Swimming Pools!](#)

- K: my personal fav is Vesturbæjarlaug
- E: I like all the hot tub options at Laugardalslaug

- Ice cream!

- So good, so cheap, so dangerous
 - Especially Ísbuð because it is right next to Vesturbæjarlaug

- Try and travel within the country as much as you can!

- K: fav regions: Snæfellsness Peninsula, Westfjords, Vestmannaeyjar

- [Natural hot pools!](#)

- Horseback riding!

- E: You can go for a long trail ride with a company like [Íshestar](#) if you've never ridden before or would like to go for a one-time deal, but these packages can get ridiculously pricey. If you would rather ride regularly or semi-regularly, email me and I can put you in contact with a special little riding club that I was part of.

Fifteen bucks per ride, every time, on friendly, healthy ponies. And the horses are located in Hafnafjörður from November until July, so you can ride the same trails you'd ride on a fancy Íshestar tour, for literally a tenth of the price. I practically lived at the stables, I've got the hookup, just let me know. :)



- [Iceland Airwaves Music Festival!](#)

- Even if you don't get a ticket to the festival itself, there's TONS of free off-venue concerts (just make sure you get there early because they are packed)
- Other festivals: [Sónar Reykjavík](#), [Secret Solstice](#), [Aldrei fór Ég Suður](#)

- City festivals!

- [Culture night](#)
- [Winter lights festival](#)

- [KEX Hostel!](#)
 - Good food/beer, free concerts, free jazz every Tuesday night!
- [Northern Lights!](#)
 - Trust us, you'll see them.
- Kolaportið!
 - Reykjavík flea market, open on weekends, find everything from lopapeysur to fish to used clothes; cash only.



- Lopapeysa!
 - The "Icelandic sweater" worn by everyone from old Icelandic fishing grandpas to tourists to hipsters in coffee shops. You can buy one new at [Handprjónasambandið](#) if you've got the money for it, or try and find one used at Kolaportið.
 - If you're feeling particularly Grandma-y, you can knit one yourself! (Kaija did this and is very proud)
 - Join a knitting group!
 - You can get yarn and supplies at Handprjónasambandið, sometimes there's free patters
 - Email Kaija for info/advice/patterns
 - A lopapeysa is magic, hands down. It's excellent for road and hiking trips and is literally warmer than a down jacket, plus it can get wet (and you'll still be warm).
- Climb Esja!
 - A mountain just outside of Reykjavík, easily accessible by bus and very popular for hiking!
 - K: Still can be dangerous – a friend was severely injured by an avalanche in April.
 - K: If you go in August/September, there's lots of bilberries (Icelandic blueberries) that you can pick – I went on Mondays when I didn't have class.

