

Scholarship Exchange in Iceland - Spring 2026

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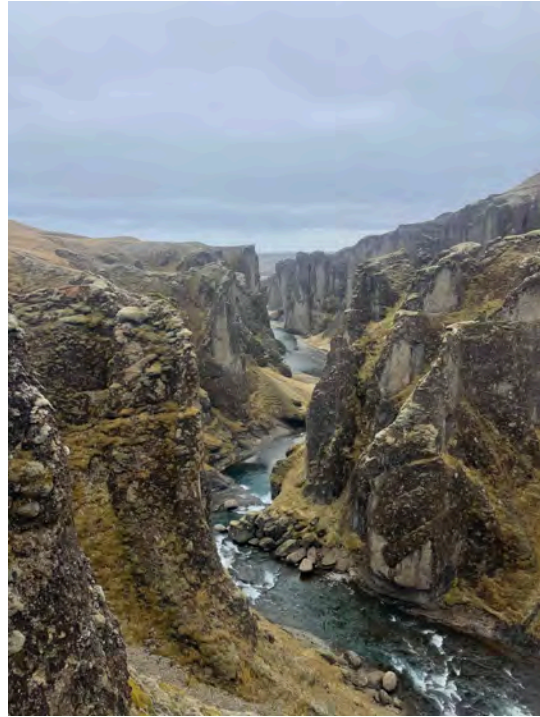


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Introduction

Hey guys! I'm Lucia, and I'm an Earth Science major and Geographic Information Science minor at the U. I studied abroad in Iceland in the spring semester of my junior year, and I genuinely couldn't recommend it more. If you have any questions at all, feel free to email me at kerke022@umn.edu

Immigration

Applying for a residence permit depends on the citizenship you hold. The other participant reports will be more helpful if you hold a US citizenship, but I hold a dual citizenship with Germany, so I used that passport to apply instead.

For EEA/EFTA citizens staying less than six months, you don't have to apply for a residence permit, but you will still need a kennitala. If you plan to stay less than 6 months, there is more information on [skra.is](https://www.skra.is), the immigration website for Iceland. A kennitala is an identification number that you'll need for several things, including opening a bank account. It is a ten digit number where the first six digits are made up of your birthdate, and the last four are random numbers.

I wasn't sure exactly how long I would stay, so I filled out the registration form for EEA/EFTA nationals staying longer than 6 months, at this website: <https://www.skra.is>. Don't submit the application more than 30 days before you will arrive in Iceland, as the application expires after 30 days, and before then, you need to go to the immigration office with your passport and the documents that you submitted so that they can actually process your application. I stayed in KEX Hostel my first night in Iceland, which was very close to the immigration office (Borgartún 21, 105 Reykjavík), so I walked there on my first day and received my kennitala via email ~4 days later.

Housing

You should have guaranteed student housing through the LAC, so personally that is the option that I chose. Keep in mind though, that asking for that arrangement kind of forfeits any of the ranked options you put down for preferred housing, which meant I paid on the higher end of rent. I knew several people who found housing off campus, mostly using Housing Anywhere. I lived in a room with shared facilities, so I had my own room and bathroom, and then shared a kitchen and living room with eight other people. None of my housemates were exchange students, so if that is something you are looking for, I believe the student housing where most exchange students stay is in Gamli Garður.

Try to fly in close to, if not the day when your housing contract starts, keeping in mind when the leasing office closes and opens in order to give you your keys. I flew in one day early and stayed at a hostel for one night, then took the bus to campus the next day.

If you stay in student housing you should be able to go onto the student housing website and put in the day that you would like to cancel your contract. As long as you do it three months in advance, you will most likely be let out of the contract. Just send them another email about 3 weeks before you move out, and they'll let you know where they are at in finding a replacement.

Housing in Minnesota

Something I had difficulty with before I went abroad was what to do with housing in Minnesota before I went to Iceland. Other students I talked to told me that they either commuted or rented an apartment, but then had to pay for the apartment while they were abroad. Commuting wasn't an option for me, so I first tried to find someone who might need a sublesser for fall, mostly posting on and checking the UMN Roommate Finder spreadsheet. I wasn't able to find anyone, so I rented an apartment with friends and posted my room on the UofM's Off-Campus Marketplace under Subleasing. I did find a sublesser after about a month posted on the marketplace, and we switched the apartment back for the summer when I got back from Iceland. Some things I think helped were having my own room in the apartment, as well as the rent being quite low.

Housing Benefits

You may be able to apply for housing benefits, though I believe it may only work if you are in student housing, as it allows for one person per address to receive benefits. Most of my friends in student housing received them, but I don't know of anyone who shared a house with several people that did receive them.

This is the link that you can use to apply for benefits: <https://island.is/en/housing-benefits>

Bank Account

You will need to have an Icelandic bank account in order to receive the scholarship for this program, as well as to pay rent if you live in student housing. I set up a bank account with Landsbankinn after I received my kennitala from immigration. They do also help you set up Auðkenni, the app that you use for two step verification anytime you sign into your bank account, or Icelandic government website. You will have to go in person in order to set up the account.

Packing

I was pretty worried that the wind and rain were going to be a lot more than I'm used to, and I wanted outerwear that would be a bit more versatile, so instead of bringing a winter jacket, I brought a puffer jacket and a rain jacket/shell layer. This worked out really well for me, but I will say that the winter I was there, every person said that this winter was one of the most gentle they

had ever had. There were only a couple yellow warnings, and I think only one week of red warnings.

My Packing List

- Hat
- Gloves
- Wind/rain proof shell
- Puffer jacket
- Rain/wind pants
- Fleece/sweaters
- Thermals
- Long sleeves
- Short sleeve t-shirts
- Toiletries
- Swimsuit
- Hiking boots
 - Ideally waterproof
- Documents
 - Passports
 - Health insurance cards
 - International insurance from LAC
- Electronics
 - Iceland uses standard European outlets
- Toiletries
 - If you have specific ones you want; also leaves you with empty space on the way back

Things I brought I didn't really need:

- Two scarves. Should've just brought a buff, I genuinely never wore either of these.

Things I wish I brought:

- A buff

I hiked Esja with some other exchange students the first weekend I was in Iceland, and the wind near the top was unlike anything I have ever experienced. I would recommend a buff.

I would also say, pack less than you think. I brought all of my clothing in a suitcase, and then packed an empty 40 liter backpack inside the suitcase, and then just my normal backpack as a carry on. Somehow, by the end of the semester I filled the suitcase and the 40 liter backpack, so I was really glad that I left that whole backpack empty.

Another note on packing, is that if you plan to travel mainland Europe at all, pack some type of clothing that corresponds to the climate where you're headed. I took a solo trip to Scotland and Italy for 11 days over Easter break, both of which had very different weather than the blizzard that was happening in Iceland at the time. I was able to get everything for that trip in just my

normal backpack though, which was great, because then I just bought the cheapest flight and didn't pay for a carry on.

After I left Iceland, I also traveled to Germany and Austria, so I made sure to pack a very limited amount of summer clothes. If you want to travel around after your exchange, I would look into lockers and shipping/holding areas, if you're not able to travel with your suitcase. I sent my suitcase to my grandparents and traveled with my 40l backpack, then visited them at the end of my trip and picked my suitcase back up to get on the flight home.

Phone

You have a couple of options for cell coverage: Síminn, Vodafone, and Nova. I went with Nova, and I got an eSIM that I paid for monthly. It was nice because the app also had a couple of deals and coupons that you can use on things like food or ice cream at Gaeto Gelato.

Transportation

Something that has saved me a lot when traveling is downloading the map of where I'm going on my phone in Apple Maps before I arrive. It's really nice to get directions to where I'm going without needing to worry about buying data immediately. It's also great when cell service is unreliable, though I never ran into that in Iceland.

Walking works for the most part for getting around, though it also depends where you live and what areas you like to frequent. I liked to go bouldering at Klifurhúsið at least once a week, and sometimes carrying my groceries home in the wind wasn't the most fun, so I was a fan of the bus. I bought a monthly bus pass on the Klappið app for most months I was there, but for a lot of people I'm sure it isn't necessary. There is a student discount for the bus, just email klappid@klappid.is and include the phone number or email that you put the account under, with your kennitala, and they will update your account to have that student discount.

If you're leaving the city, you'll probably want to take a car. There are options to fly inside the country to bigger cities like Akureyri in the north, and there are also some night buses, but it just leaves you with less options and flexibility, unless you rent a car once you arrive. For insurance purposes, you aren't allowed to actually drive the car yourself when doing a study abroad program with the LAC, but you are allowed to go in a rental car with friends.

Either way, whenever you are traveling, make sure you check the weather and check <https://safetravel.is/> to see what the road conditions are before you leave.

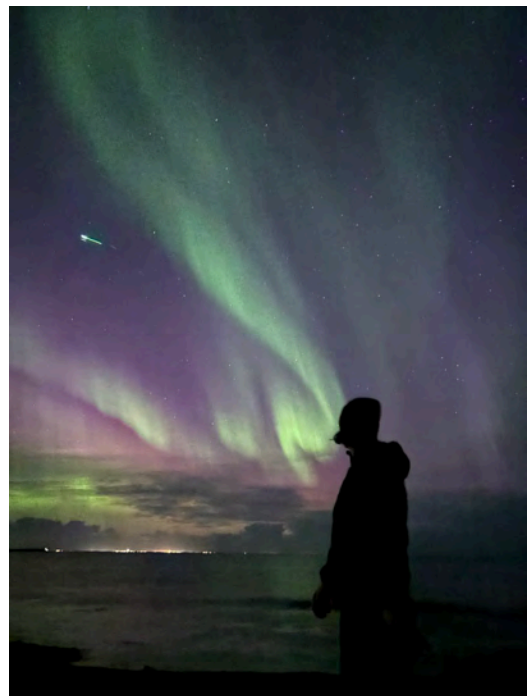
Things to Do

It's so fun to get out of the city, but don't neglect all the fun things to do in and around Reykjavík. My favorite cafe that my friends and I found was a bus ride out of Reykjavík in Hafnafjörður. We also made it our mission to try as many bakeries as we could to find the best cinnamon roll. Her opinion is Brauð & Co, but I firmly think it's Baka Baka, but you can decide for yourself.

We also tried as many of the bars as we could to see what the best was, but the answer on that varies a lot more by what kind of vibe you're going for. Karaoke ended up being a staple for us on nights out, so The Dubliner ended up being our favorite, as it has three floors, and a different vibe for each floor.

Other things to do:

- Trivia or other events at the on campus Stúdentakjallarin (student cellar)
- Relax in one of the swimming pools - closest one is Vesturbæjarlaug
- Watch the northern lights at the Gróttu lighthouse
 - Download the Aurora app
- Get ice cream at an Ísbúðin, Gaeto Gelato, or Valdís
 - (or all three)
- Take the ferry to Viðey island to see seals
- Jump in the ocean
- Go thrifting at Verzlanahöllin
- Go for a run or walk on the coast
- Hike Mt. Esja
- Visit the flea market - Kolaportið Market - on the weekends
- Buy one of those surprise bags of leftover bakery items after they close for the day, and split it with friends
 - Use the Humble app, similar to TooGoodtoGo
- Make a junk journal
 - Me and two other friends all made junk journals, and I was able to fill it with receipts and sketches throughout the semester; and at the end I asked some friends to sign and write notes in it. Absolutely could not recommend more, it's one of my most prized possessions now.



Road Trips

Everyone on exchange wants to meet people and go on trips, so it's pretty easy to find friends and people who want to go on road trips together. Make sure you go to all the welcome week events, and sign up to have a mentor group, and just talk to people in your classes. If none of that works, there is also an Erasmus group chat where sometimes people post that they need another person for a road trip that you can join.

There are so many guides on places to visit when you're on road trips, and you can prioritize what you'd like, so I just listed the road trips I took and tried to pick my favorite stop from each.

- Snæfellsness
 - 1 night
 - Sturlungalaug hot springs
- South Coast (Vik)
 - 1 night
 - The beach behind yoda cave, there's a path behind it that goes up the cliff
 - The Waterfall way hike behind Skógafoss, with 26 beautiful waterfalls
- North (Akureyri)
 - 1 night
 - Myvatn geothermal area
 - As a geology student, one of the coolest things I've ever seen in my life
- Westfjords
 - 3 nights-between finals
 - Dynjandi
- Reykjanes peninsula
 - Daytrip
 - Seeing fresh basalt
- Entire Ring Road
 - 5 nights-after finals
 - Mulagljufur (South)
 - Super beautiful canyon
 - Teigarhorn (Eastfjords)
 - National park with crazy zeolites



Classes

You're required to take 30 ECTS credits, which translates to 15 UMN credits, and for me, 75% of those credits had to be in my major. I took four classes, each of which was 7.5 ECTS credits. Three counted towards my major, and the GIS course I was also able to get credit towards my minor. I enjoyed all of my classes, and I had a field trip for each one of them, which I liked a lot. The actual homework I had to do for each class is a lot less than what I have to do at the U, but I will say the final exam for my metamorphism class was quite difficult compared to some finals I've taken at the U.

Final grades for each course are out of ten points. The grading scale does translate pretty leniently though, so you only need a 7.5/10 for your grade to translate as an "A" at the U.

JAR414M - General Oceanography 1

JAR625M - Metamorphism, hydrothermal alteration and weathering

JAR420G - Remote sensing and geographical information systems in geological observations

JAR311M - Plate Boundary Deformation: Advanced Tectonics and Structural Geology

Foods

Food to try:

- Icelandic hot dog
 - If you order it "with everything", you get four toppings that combine for the perfect meal to end your night out. Or order it without the meat, and get a vegetarian option that is also cheaper, as a bonus.
- Hartfiskur
 - Fish jerky. Has a more flaky texture than meat jerky, but really good if you don't mind fish.
- Skyr
 - A dairy product similar to yogurt with four times the amount of milk used. Great source of protein, especially for the price.
- Flatkökur
 - Icelandic flatbread
- Any candy with licorice in it
 - There are so many licorice candy options, but the one I tried and really liked was Bristur, which is in a yellow wrapping with a red three on it.
- Fermented shark
 - You can try this if you'd like? I have been told by one too many Icelanders that it tastes like an old trash can so I did pass on that.
- Cinnamon Roll
 - Or any other bakery item, just an absolute must try. Kanillbollur from the Kolaportið Market was a personal favorite of mine.

Language

If you're able to fit it into your schedule, I would definitely recommend taking an Icelandic language or culture class. A couple friends of mine took either one of those, and they had a lot of fun and were able to say a lot more phrases than the rest of us who didn't take the language class.

Either way, give learning some phrases a shot, and if you do end up getting an Icelandic hotdog from Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur, ask them for "Eina med ollu, takk". Maybe just look up the pronunciation first. :)

I hope that the information in this guide was helpful, and I hope that you have as much fun in Iceland as I did!

