

# ICELAND



When someone asks us to name a European country, we usually list Germany, Great Britain, France, Spain, and so on. But we forget, that there is one more.

**ICELAND** is an island country, on the island Iceland, in the North part of the Atlantic ocean, just below the Arctic Circle. Its area is nearly 103 000 sq. km. (Poland – 312 000 sq km). Iceland is exactly half way between Moscow and Washington, and that's why Reagan and Gorbachev met there in 1886.

## CURRENCY

The Iceland currency unit is Iceland krona, divided into 100 aurar. The official language is Icelandic. Interesting thing is that very few Icelanders have original surnames, and the telephone directory lists people by their first names. Most people have patronymic surnames, like Eriksson or Finnbogadottir.



## MAIN CITIES

The capital of Iceland is Reykjavik, the world's most northerly capital with almost 100 000 inhabitants. (By a half less than in Radom) The other main towns in Iceland are: Kopavogur, Akureyri, Keflavik, Akranes. The whole population of Iceland is almost 300 000 people, which is more or less as in Lublin. The average **density** of population is about 3 persons per sq. km, which is the lowest in Europe. 90% of the population live in towns, mostly because

there are almost no possibilities of cultivation. The inner part of the island is a large volcanic plateau.

## **AGRICULTURE**

Small lowland areas are only in the south-west part of the island. Only 0,1% of the country's area is cultivable. Small amounts of beetroots and potatoes are grown. In the south-west, vegetables are grown in hothouses (tomatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, bananas and melons).

## **ECONOMY**

The country's economy is based on the sea fishing and fish processing, which employs 12% of working population, and produces 67% of the export value.

The developing part of economy is tourism. In 2014 130 000 foreign tourist visited Iceland, spending there 108 million dollars.

## **SOME HISTORY**

The first people on the island were Irish monks, but they left with the arrival of pagan Norsemen, who systematically settled Iceland in the period 870-930 AD. Iceland was thus the last European country to be settled. In the year 930 a constitutional law code was accepted and Althing, the oldest legislative body in the world established.

In the late tenth century Greenland was discovered and colonized by Icelanders, and around the year 1000 they were the first Europeans to set foot on the American continent.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Iceland fell under Danish sovereignty, and only 6 centuries later received limited autonomy. In June 1944 the Republic of Iceland was formally proclaimed at Althing.

## **CLIMATE**

Iceland has an unusual and specific geography and climate. Considering the northerly location, it is much more milder than might be expected, especially in winter. The average temperature in January is -0,4 and in July 11. The unforgettable Northern Lights are often to be seen, especially in autumn and early winter. For two or three months there is continuous daylight in Iceland. The dark period (3 to 4 hours of daylight) lasts from November to January.

## **GEOHERMAL ACTIVITY**

Iceland is widely known for its geothermal activities. It is richer in hot springs than any other country in the world. High-temperature activity is limited to volcanic zones with stem holes, mud pools and sulphuric precipitation. Low temperature areas with hot springs are found all over Iceland. There are about 800 hot springs. The biggest hot spring in Iceland has a flow of about 250 litres of boiling water per second. Some of them are spouting springs, or geysers, the most famous of which is the Great Geysir in Heukadalur, from which the international word "geyser" is in fact derived. It has been known to eject a column of hot water to a height of about 60 metres. Geothermal activity is a rich natural source. Hot water has been used for heating purposes, and serves 82% of the population, heating hothouses as well.





## **VOLCANIC ACTIVITY**

Iceland is the country of great volcanic and seismic activity. There are 140 volcanoes, of which 26 are active. On average there is an eruption every five years. Nearly every type of volcanic activity found in the world is represented on Iceland. The most common are fissure eruptions. One of these, the 30-km long row of craters, with about 100 separate craters erupted in 1783. The lava flow from this

eruption is the largest recorded in the world, covering 565 sq. km.

The most famous Icelandic volcano is Hekla, which was renowned throughout the Catholic world in the Middle Ages as the abode of the damned. Since its first recorded eruption in 1104, Hekla has erupted 17 times. In March 1947 columns of smoke and ash rose to 30 000 metres, and the eruption lasted for 13 months. Hekla's crater is 10 km in diameter. Earthquakes are also frequent in Iceland, but rarely dangerous.

## **GLACIERS**

Over 1/10 of the Iceland's area is covered with glaciers. The biggest of them is Vatnajokull. The ice is about 1000 m thick. Underneath the ice is the active volcano Grimsvatn, which erupts every 4-10 years. During the eruption the released heat causes the rapid melting of ice. Huge amounts of water flow in inner-glacial tunnels, (the flow reaches 45 000 cubic metres) carrying pieces of ice of the size of a big house. They can cause massive floods called jokullhlaup. One of the subglacial eruption formed lake Askja, the deepest in Iceland.



## **FLORA**

There are practically no forests in Iceland. What Icelanders used to call "forests" are in fact clusters of dwarf birch. The most common kind of vegetation are various types of low-growing shrubs.



## **FAUNA**

There are mainly flying and swimming animals on Iceland. There are some reserves for birds, on Videy island for example, where eider ducks nest. Puffins are also very common.

As you see, Iceland is an extraordinary country, a perfect place for unforgettable holiday. You don't go there to admire architecture or art, as in Paris or Rome. You don't go there for

sun and sand, but for some reasons – you go there. For adventure and breathtaking views of waterfalls or lava fields.

The most convenient way to get there is by air, via Copenhagen. For details you can contact The Icelandic Tourist Board in Reykjavik. There is also Iceland's embassy in Warsaw.

### COMPREHENSION CHECK

Mark the sentences as TRUE or FALSE

1.	Iceland is bigger than Poland.	
2.	There is no capital further north than Reykjavik.	
3.	Growing vegetables is easy in Iceland.	
4.	The most important branches of economy in Iceland are fishing and tourism.	
5.	Althing is believed to be the oldest Parliament in Europe.	
6.	For a long time Iceland was a colony of Denmark.	
7.	The climate in Iceland is extremely cold.	
8.	The only usage of hot springs is leisure.	
9.	Nearly a quarter of volcanoes in Iceland are active.	
10.	Iceland often experiences disastrous earthquakes.	
11.	Subglacial eruptions cause massive floods.	
12.	Thick forests are common in Iceland.	