



Food and drink

Icelandic food is generally based on fish and lamb and owes much to Scandinavian and European influences. There is also a heavy emphasis on vegetables grown in greenhouses heated by the natural geothermal energy. Specialities include hangikjöt (smoked lamb), harðfiskur (dried fish), skyr (similar to yoghurt) and Icelandic sild (herring marinated in various flavours).



Traditional Icelandic food has its origins in the limited preserving possibilities that Icelanders had to cope with in past centuries. To make the food last throughout the winter it was processed in certain ways, which gave it a unique flavour. The meat was smoked, salted and pickled or allowed to stand in whey for 3-4 months. The fish was dried, hanged, salted and smoked. Almost everything from the animal was used. A few examples of the “delicacies” made from the Icelandic sheep include blood and liver pudding, singed sheep heads, smoked lamb and ram testicles!

Further information about [food and recipes](#)

Fish - The rich fishing grounds around Iceland are the country’s most valuable natural resource and marine products account for 80% of Iceland’s exports. Fish was traditionally the mainstay of the Icelandic diet and fresh fish is available all year round. Alongside fish from the North Atlantic, wild salmon and trout is available during the summer months. The salmon of Iceland is a great delicacy, served in many forms, one of the most popular being [gravlax](#) – a form of marinating.

More about [Iceland’s fish](#)

Meat - In addition to lamb, a wide variety of meats are available, including pork and beef, as well as limited amounts of horse meat and reindeer. Importation of foreign produce is strictly regulated. Sheep breeding in Iceland goes back to the time of the settlement.

Dairy - The extensive range of Icelandic dairy products means that every possible taste is catered for. Still popular today are the centuries-old specialities skyr and mysa (whey). Classed as a fresh cheese, skyr is made from skimmed milk and is similar to yoghurt and the German “quark”. Whey is a by-product in the making of skyr and is used in the pickling of [slátur](#).

More about [Icelandic dairy products](#)

Vegetables - A wide variety of fresh vegetables and fruit are imported, and there is a wide choice year-round. In the autumn Icelanders like to gather wild berries (mainly crowberries and blueberries) which are eaten fresh or used to make jams and juices. Geothermal energy is used to heat greenhouses for growing cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and mushrooms, as well as flowers.

Vegetarian restaurant [listing for Reykjavik](#)

Alcohol - Beer was prohibited in Iceland for 75 years and was finally legalised in March 1989. The local spirit, Brennivin, is a potent schnapps made from potatoes and is flavoured with caraway. Carry-out alcohol is sold at state-run [Vínbuð](#) stores.

You can find further general information about food on the [Iceland Portal](#) website.

Additional information: “Iceland Information Guide” (16th Edn.) [Heimur, Reykjavik](#)