



Travellers' safety

This information is included for volunteers who are planning to travel independently during their visit. Iceland offers the traveller an adventure in a spectacular landscape of stunning natural beauty. However, it can also be a harsh and inhospitable environment and it is essential to be cautious and well prepared when travelling in the countryside. The following guidelines have been produced by ICE-SAR (Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue) and the Environment Agency.

Preparation

Nature can be wild or even dangerous here in Iceland, especially for those who are unaware of the conditions or are not accustomed to travelling in uninhabited areas. You can help prevent accidents and ensure that you have a pleasant visit by being well prepared for each trip.

- Choose your clothing and footwear with care. Note that equipment suitable for trips in other countries may not be suitable for Icelandic conditions.
- Read about conditions in the area you will be visiting and talk to people with local knowledge, such as UST Rangers.
- Check the condition of the roads – information is available by phoning 1777, or by visiting www.vegagerdin.is.
- Check the weather forecast – by phoning 902-0600-44, or visiting www.vedur.is. News and weather forecasts are broadcast in English during the summer months at 07:30 National Radio -1 (RUV-1).

Weather

Iceland's weather is very changeable. Fine weather can quickly turn into quite threatening weather – something to keep in mind at all times, especially if you are travelling in the highlands.

- The temperature drops on average by 0.6°C (1°F) for each 100 metres (330 ft.) of elevation.
- The temperature can fall below the freezing point even during summer, especially at night.
- The wind can be much stronger on mountains and cliff tops.

Driving

Road conditions vary considerably in Iceland. There are many narrow, steep gravel tracks with potholes and sharp bends. Some of them are only suitable for four-wheel-drive vehicles and they are marked as such on maps. Leaving marked roads and tracks is strictly forbidden because of the sensitivity of the environment.

- Slow down when approaching other vehicles on gravel roads, as well as when the surface changes from paved to gravel.
- Blind summits are common. Slow down and keep to the right-hand edge of the road.
- Many bridges are only wide enough for one vehicle at a time. Approach bridges carefully.
- The speed limit is 90 kmh (56 mph) on paved roads and 80 kmh (50 mph) on gravel roads. It is important to adjust your speed according to the circumstances.
- Domestic animals are often on country roads and they can jump in front of vehicles with little or no warning.
- Always drive with your lights on, even in daylight.
- Use seat belts at all times – they save lives.

Telephone Communications

GSM signals are good in residential areas but intermittent outside these areas. Do not depend on a GSM telephone as a safety device when travelling in the highlands. The emergency telephone number in Iceland is 112.



Glacial Rivers and Fords

Away from the main roads there are many unbridged rivers. Forging rivers should only be undertaken by four-wheel-drive vehicles and you should make sure that the four-wheel-drive mode has been engaged before going into the water. Drive in first gear and use 'low' drive if available.

- When crossing glacial rivers bear in mind that the situation can change very quickly. On warm summer days the flow increases.
- Seek advice from experienced drivers before crossing glacial rivers and watch how and where experienced drivers cross over.

Geothermal Areas

You will find hot springs in many areas in Iceland. The temperature of the water or mud can be above the boiling point.

- Follow any instructions available and keep to designated paths when you visit geothermal areas. Don't use your fingers to check the temperature of the water!
- Watch where you tread. There is often a thin crust close to hot springs, which can break through if trodden upon, causing burns to feet or legs. Keep to footpaths.

Glacier Trips

You should not set off on a trip onto a glacier without both experience and knowledge of the special equipment required. Organised trips with experienced guides are the safest option.

Ice on glacier tongues can be very slippery. It is dangerous to walk on glacier tongues without crampons and other ice-climbing equipment.

Walking and Mountaineering

Choose your route carefully and let someone know your plans.

Marked footpaths are a safe option for walkers.

- You should be able to use a map and compass. A GPS unit is advisable on longer trips.
- Be especially careful near rock faces, cliffs and riverbanks.
- Rock faces in Iceland are often loose. Be aware of the danger of rock falls and avalanches.

The Traveller's code

The following guidelines are published by the Environment Agency.

1. Leave camping and picnic sites as you would wish to find them.
2. Never bury litter or leave it lying around.
3. Never light open fires on vegetated land.
4. Never dislodge stones or build cairns.
5. Keep water clean and safeguard springs and pools.
6. Do not damage vegetation.
7. Do not disturb wildlife.
8. Do not damage geological formations.
9. Respect the tranquillity of the countryside.
10. Never drive off roads.
11. Keep to marked footpaths when requested.
12. Respect conservation rules and ranger's instructions.

Further information:

Off-road driving in Iceland: [Environment Agency website](#)
[ISAR \(Icelandic Search and Rescue\)](#)