

# Have a safe journey





## Preface

Iceland offers the traveller an adventure in a beautiful and rugged landscape.

However, experience shows that the forces of Icelandic nature can be harsh and inhospitable, and travellers are well-advised to exercise caution and respect for the country's natural environment. Unfortunately, there have been far too many accidents in the past few years involving foreign tourists travelling around the country. These accidents range from minor to fatal. The most common type of accident is that of hikers losing their footing on uneven terrain. The most serious injuries, however, are caused by road traffic accidents where travellers drive too fast in unfamiliar conditions and do not wear seat belts.

## Preparation

Icelandic nature can be wild and dangerous, especially for those unfamiliar with it and unused to travelling in uninhabited areas and rough country. Travellers should prepare well for each trip and know its trail and route conditions. This is the best way to prevent accidents and ensure a pleasant and safe journey.

- » Choose clothing and footwear with care.
- » Read about conditions in the area you will be traversing and talk to people with local knowledge, such as rangers.
- » Let somebody know about your planned trip.
- » Check weather and road conditions – information available from the Public Roads Administration, tel. **1777** or at [www.road.is](http://www.road.is)
- » Check the weather forecast – information available from the Icelandic Meteorological Office, tel. **902-0600**, the Teletext or at [www.vedur.is](http://www.vedur.is)



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## Weather

Icelandic weather is very volatile. Fair weather can change into a raging storm at a moment's notice. Keep this in mind at all times, especially when travelling in the highlands.

- » For every 100m in altitude gained, you can expect the mean temperature to drop by 0.6°C and precipitation to increase.
- » The temperature can drop below the freezing point even during summer, especially at night.
- » At mountain tops, wind force can multiply.



## Winter

Iceland looks very different in the wintertime, and is enjoyable to explore in that season. However, the vagaries of the Icelandic weather can play a decisive role regarding your trip.

- » The frequency at which roads are cleared of snow varies, depending on their defined service level. It is important to check road and weather conditions before setting off by phoning **1777** and **902-0600**, checking the Teletext or visiting [www.road.is](http://www.road.is) and [www.vedur.is](http://www.vedur.is)
- » When travelling in a vehicle, it is important not to abandon it if something comes up or the weather conditions are difficult.
- » Winter tyres are essential for driving in the wintertime.
- » Always bring warm clothing, blankets, a shovel and a first aid kit in the vehicle.



## Signposts

There are very few warning notices posted in the Icelandic wilderness, even at popular stopovers.

- » Tourists travel at their own risk.
- » You often have to rely on your own good sense and judgment when assessing the situation and making decisions.

## Telephone connections

The mobile phone connection is fairly reliable in towns, but outside them it can be unstable. Therefore, do not only rely on a mobile phone as a safety measure.

- » Travellers intending to explore out-of-the-way areas are encouraged to use the Travellers' Reporting Service of the Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue (ICE-SAR), tel. **570-5900**.
- » The Emergency Number in Iceland is **112**.

The speed limit in urban areas is normally **50 km per hour**

On paved roads outside towns, it is **90 km per hour**

On gravel roads, it is **80 km per hour**



## Driving

Road conditions in Iceland vary substantially. Highway 1 is mostly paved, but other country roads are often very narrow, steep and washboarded gravel tracks with potholes and sharp corners. Those unfamiliar with such conditions often find it difficult to drive on Icelandic roads, especially gravel roads. Drivers are advised to choose a vehicle which they are used to driving and can handle easily. Many travellers who are not used to driving jeeps find them difficult to handle on Icelandic gravel roads.

- » Slow down when you meet other vehicles, especially when driving on a gravel road.
- » Where the road changes from a paved road to a gravel road, you need to slow down considerably. Many serious accidents occur every year at such places, especially among drivers who are unfamiliar with such road conditions, lose control of their vehicle and drive off the road.



- » Blind summits are common in Iceland. Slow down and keep to the right-hand edge of the road.



- » There are many one-lane bridges in Iceland. Slow down and use caution when driving across them.

- » Many Icelandic roads are raised on embankments against winter snows. Therefore, roll-over accidents often occur when drivers lose control of their vehicles and drive off the road. Such accidents can be very serious, especially when seat belts are not used.

- » In the summertime, there is sunlight 24 hours a day. Drivers need to be aware of this and not drive for too long, as they might otherwise fall asleep behind the wheel.



- » The speed limit in urban areas is normally 50 km per hour. Outside towns, it is 90 km, on paved roads and 80 km on gravel roads. Always adjust your speed to the driving conditions.



- » Domestic animals are often close to, or even on, country roads. Drivers who hit animals may be required to pay for the damage.

- » The use of hands-free kits is compulsory for mobile phone use whilst driving.

- » Driving while intoxicated from drug or alcohol use is prohibited.

- » Headlamps are required to be lit 24 hours a day while the vehicle is in operation.

- » The use of front and back seat belts is compulsory – they save lives.



## Highland roads

Highland roads in Iceland are usually narrow gravel roads, and most rivers are unbridged. On maps, they are indicated with an F before the road number, with most of these roads intended for jeeps only.

- » Highland roads are open only during the summertime, weather and other circumstances permitting. Information about opening dates can be obtained by phoning **1777** or at [www.road.is](http://www.road.is)
- » Driving outside marked trails is prohibited and is subject to nature conservation law.
- » Crossing rivers should be attempted only in four-wheel-drive vehicles, such as jeeps. Ensure that the four-wheel drive has been engaged before driving into the water. Drive very slowly but steadily in first gear and use the low range if available.
- » Keep in mind that fords over glacial rivers keep changing. On warm summer days, the flow increases as the day progresses. Heavy rain often causes rivers to swell, sometimes making them uncrossable even for large and well-equipped vehicles. Glacial rivers usually have less water in the mornings.
- » Deaths have been caused by underestimating the water volume in rivers. Before crossing a glacial river, it is necessary to examine its velocity, depth and bottom by wading into it. If you find that you would be unwilling to wade across the river on foot, you should not attempt to drive across it. Seek advice from experienced drivers and watch how and where they cross.
- » There is only one petrol station in the highlands (at Hveravellir) that sells petrol and diesel. Keep this in mind when driving in the highlands.

- » It is important to know the vehicle's insurance coverage before going on a trip in the highlands. For example, rented vehicles are not insured for damage that occurs while crossing rivers or lakes, and the chassis is not insured. Also, you need extra insurance for travelling in the highlands.
- » Accommodation is limited in the highlands, and you need to make reservations with sufficient notice if you don't want to sleep in the vehicle or in a tent.
- » Rangers operate at most major tourist centres in the highlands. Their job is to receive travellers and provide information. Travellers should obey rangers' instructions.



## Geothermal areas

Geysers and hot springs are found in many parts of Iceland. The water or mud discharging to the Earth's surface can be above the boiling point.

- » Always follow instructions around geysers. Do not use your fingers to check the temperature of water, steam or mud.
- » Be careful where you step. The ground around geysers is often covered with a thin crust which can break through if stepped on, sometimes causing burn injuries. Therefore, always keep to footpaths where they are to be found.

## Hiking and mountaineering

Choose your route carefully and inform someone about your planned trip. Marked trails are the safest option for hikers.

- » It is necessary to know how to use a compass, a map and a GPS unit for longer hikes.
- » Proceed with caution along cliffs, rock faces and riverbanks.
- » Icelandic rock is often loose. On hillsides, there is often risk of rockfalls and avalanches.



## Glacier trips

Nobody should set off on a trip onto a glacier without mountaineering experience and the necessary equipment. Organised tours with experienced mountain guides are the safest option.

- » Ice on glacier tongues can be extremely slippery. Walking on glacier tongues is dangerous without crampons and other glacier-climbing gear. The ice caves and vertical glacier walls of glacier tongues are unsteady, and blocks of ice can fall without warning. Therefore, it is inadvisable to enter ice caves or to stand near steep walls of ice.
- » When walking on snow-covered glaciers, it is necessary to use a rope and other safety equipment, as crevasses lurk under the cover of snow in many places. The crevasses can be very deep and wide.

- » On snowmobile tours, always follow the guide's instructions and follow his tracks. Helmets are obligatory.

## Cycling and horseback riding tours

- » Iceland does not offer much in the way of cycling facilities, and has few designated cycling paths. Therefore, use reflectors and other markings to make sure that you are clearly visible when cycling on the country's roads, always wear a helmet and beware of stones thrown up by passing traffic.
- » Horseback riders should always use bridledways where they exist and exercise special care and consideration when passing walkers or moving vehicles. A helmet is an important safety accessory, and you should always use one when on horseback. Drivers must also show consideration to horseback riders by slowing down and using extra caution where bridledways cross the road.





Dangerous bend to right



Dangerous bend to left



Dangerous bend first to right



Difficult road. Negotiable only by jeeps, i.e. vehicles which are higher than ordinary private cars and have 4-wheel drive.



Destinations ahead (b) with distances outside capital area



Dangerous bend first to left



from the right



from the left



End of tarred road



Unbridged river



Two-way traffic



Loose stones



Road narrows on both sides



Newly-laid road surface



Blind rise



Roadworks



Uneven road



Speed reduction bump



Accident risk area



Single-width surface



Risk of falling rocks or avalanche from left



Slippery road



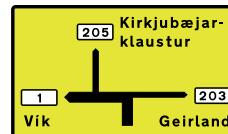
Other danger



Single-width bridge



Route direction without road number



Destinations ahead and map (b) outside capital area



Destinations ahead (b) with distances outside capital area



First-Aid post



Clinic



Police



Pharmacy



Library



Public telephone



Public lavatory



Thunderbox toilet



Waste tank discharge



Aquarium



Viewpoint



Viewpoint with information dial



Rubbish bin



Rubbish container



Domestic animal park



Cafeteria



Restaurant



Refreshments in private home



Hotel



Dog hotel



Caravan park



Cooking facilities



Shower



Hot-pot



Veterinary surgeon



Horse hire



Angling permits



Sea angling



Whale-watching



Car ferry



Snow-scooters for hire



Water-scooters for hire



Bicycles for hire



Boats for hire



Boat trips



Automatic teller machine



Post office



Tourist shop



Supermarket



Airport



Emergency shelter



Emergency telephone or radio



Fire extinguisher



Tourist information



Information office



Town centre



Industrial area



Place of interest



Starting point for walks



Lay-by



Radio



Petrol station



Car repair garage



Tyre repairs



Car hire



Sleeping-bag accommodation



Youth hostel



Holiday cottage for hire



Refuge hut



Camping site



Washing machine



Meeting facilities



Swimming pool



Sports centre



Sports field



Ski-lift



Chair ski-lift



Cross-country skiing area



Snowcat trips



Golf course



Water skiing



River rafting



Church



Graveyard



Bank



Bakery



Sales kiosk



Handicrafts



Greenhouse



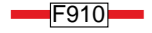
Art gallery



Iceland interior  
Hocland  
Régions montagneuses de L'intérieur  
de L'Islande



Main roads  
Landstraße  
Routes nationales



Main mountain roads  
Verbindungsstraße  
Principales routes de montagne



Mountain roads  
Verbindungsstraße  
Routes de montagne



Track  
Chemin  
Piste



River/Ford  
Furt  
Gué



Emergency shelter  
Nothütte  
Abri de secours



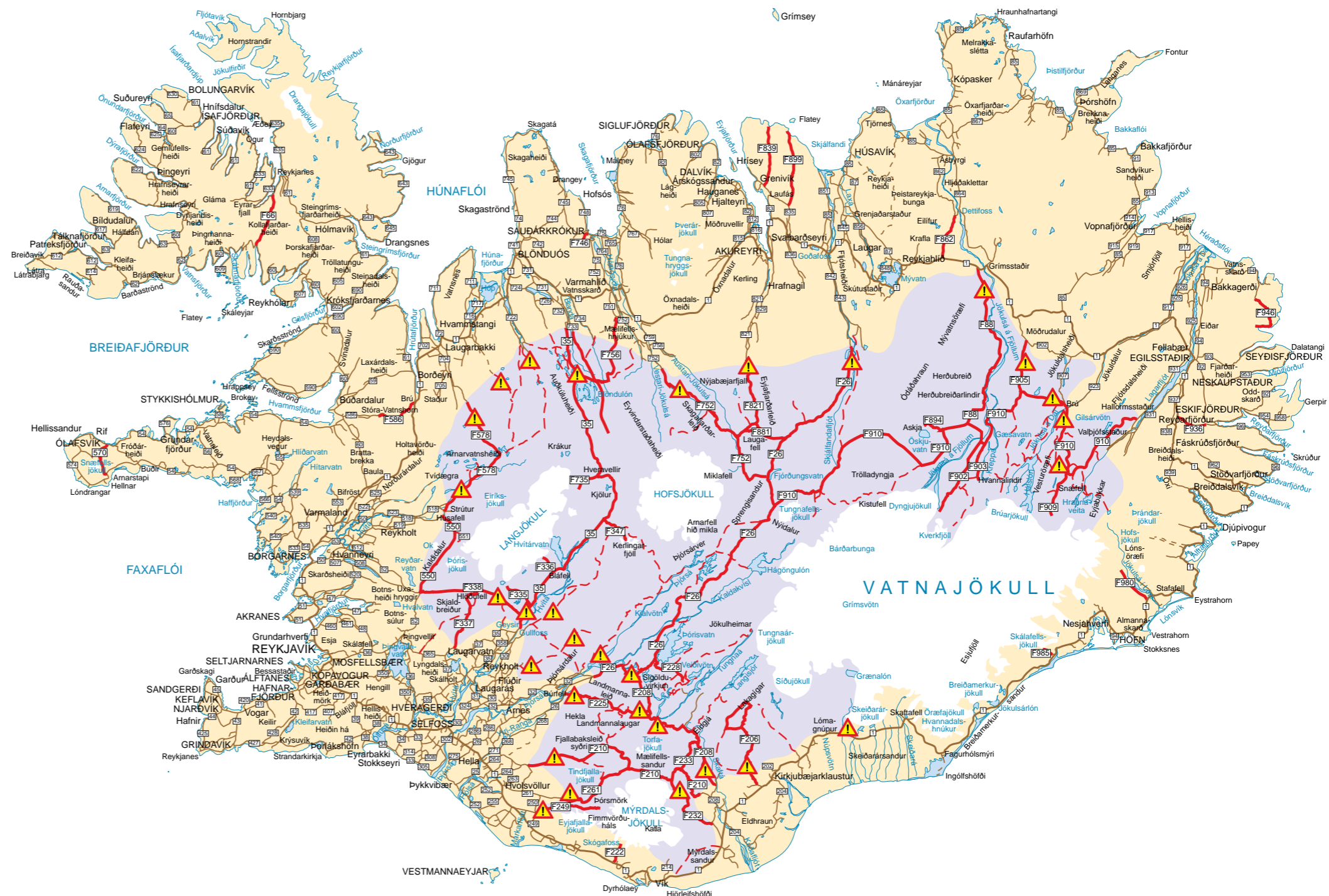
Tourist hut  
Schutzhütte  
Refuge non gardé



Ferry  
Fähre  
Bateau



Road tunnel  
Tunnel  
Tunnel



Accidents happen when you least expect them

**Be careful at all times**



**Vegagerdin**  
Borgartún 5-7  
105 Reykjavík,  
Phone: 522 1000  
[www.road.is](http://www.road.is)



**Umhverfisstofnun**  
Sudurlandsbraut 24  
108 Reykjavík  
Phone 591-2000  
[www.ust.is](http://www.ust.is)



**Umferdarstofa**  
Borgartúni 30  
105 Reykjavík  
Phone: 580 2000  
[www.us.is](http://www.us.is)



**ICE-SAR Icelandic Association  
For Search And Rescue**  
Skogarhlid 14  
105 Reykjavík  
Phone: 570 5900  
[www.landsbjorg.is](http://www.landsbjorg.is)