

## TRAVELING IN ICELAND

Iceland is a country of outstanding natural beauty. Cycling and traveling in Iceland is a great experience, but you have to be prepared for harsh weather conditions and rugged nature. We encourage you to travel around Iceland responsibly and help keep Iceland's vast but fragile environment unspoiled for future generations. The **CYCLING ICELAND and other independent travel map**, made by dedicated cyclists, provides specific advice for all who travel in Iceland by bicycle, on foot, by bus, and also by car.

*Please note that the Cycling Iceland map is from 2019 – while the road network is largely the same, services (accommodation, campsites, shops, etc.) may have changed – please check yourself what services are open before heading to a certain area.*

**We wish you a pleasant and safe journey.**



### THE WEATHER

The weather in Iceland is colder, windier and more variable than in most other countries. Strong winds often pick up within minutes, and it may be calm in one place while there is a rough storm just 5 km away. In summer, expect anything from rain at near freezing temperatures up to 20°C on rare days. In winter, storms and snowstorms are frequent.

Always inform about weather and road conditions on [en.vedur.is](http://en.vedur.is) and [www.road.is](http://www.road.is). Adjust your travel plans according to the weather.

Observe electronic signs showing wind speed and gusts (*vindhviður*) from windy places on main roads. Cycling gets dangerous at 15-20 m/s, and crosswinds >30 m/s can blow vehicles off the road.

Always take warm clothing with you, even on short day trips.



### THE ROADS

Most main roads are asphalted, but rather narrow and without a hard shoulder. Use caution when encountering oncoming traffic.



There are no bike paths. Be considerate and pass cyclists with wide distance.



One lane bridges: stop and wait when there is oncoming traffic.



Slow down on gravel roads. Use caution at loose gravel, potholes, sharp turns and blind hills.



Most main roads are cleared in winter, but snow and ice on the roads are common. Minor roads are not serviced. Use winter or studded tires. Inform on [www.road.is](http://www.road.is) and [en.vedur.is](http://en.vedur.is) and obey storm warnings and road closures.



### THE INTERIOR HIGHLANDS

The mountain roads are usually closed until late May or even July, depending on location and seasonal snow melt. Inform about road and weather conditions on [www.road.is](http://www.road.is).

Most highland roads are only suitable for mountainbikes and 4x4 cars. The surface quality (not shown on this map) ranges from packed mud to bumpy washboards, loose gravel and coarse stones, and even sand where it may be impossible to cycle when it is too dry.

Unbridged rivers must be crossed at fords and can become dangerous depending on rainfall and glacier melt on warm days. You may have to wait until late night or morning to cross certain glacial rivers. Do not cross dangerous fords alone.

The map also shows selected abandoned roads and singletrack paths where motorized traffic is prohibited. Mountainbikers may be able to use these trails, but show regard to hikers and horse riders. You may have to carry the bike in some places. Never cycle off-track.

When traveling in the highlands, always inform at local tourist informations, land rangers and other travelers about conditions on roads and tracks. Highland roads with more traffic are not necessarily better than those with few cars. Routes and fords can be impassable and there may be terrible weather conditions, including sandstorms and snow. The next shelter can be far away, and there are generally no shops or services. Huts are often fully booked. Large areas have no mobile telephone coverage, and some tracks are very lonely. Depending on the road surface, progress can be very slow and you may cover as little as 25 km per day. Obtain accurate maps, this map alone is not sufficient for traveling in the highlands.



### TREAT THE LAND WITH CARE

Iceland's nature is extremely sensitive. Plants grow slowly in Iceland's cold climate. The loose volcanic soil is easily blown away.



#### **Offroad driving/parking/cycling is strictly prohibited.**

The tire tracks damage the vegetation and cause erosion.

Follow marked roads and paths. Treat moss and other plants with care, and keep all stones in their place. Leave no trace.

#### **Take care for a livable future.**

Compensate the CO2 footprint of your trip to Iceland.

Travel by responsible means – on foot, by bike, bus, shared car or ferry.

Pick up any garbage – leave a clean country.



### STAY SAFE

**Inform about weather forecast and local conditions** on roads / paths.

Take a map, GPS / compass and phone with you. Always take warm clothing with you. Wind and rain can cool you down quickly.

**Respect Iceland's rugged nature** and show caution at steep rocks, river crossings, hot springs, glaciers and ocean beaches.

**Inform someone** or [www.safetravel.is](http://www.safetravel.is) about your travel plans before venturing out in isolated areas. **In case of emergency, call 112.**



### CAMPING – ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

Use the designated campsites.

See [www.cyclingiceland.is](http://www.cyclingiceland.is) for detailed information.

If you can not reach the next campsite, you may put up a normal hiking tent for one night anywhere along the road or path except on cultivated land, near houses, and in protected nature reserves. Note that in the lowlands most roads are fenced. Ask the owner for permission before camping on farmland or private ground. Leave the place clean and in its natural condition.



**No offroad parking.** Camper vans may stay overnight only on designated campsites.

**Further information:** [www.ust.is](http://www.ust.is) (Notes for visitors, access rights), and <https://ust.is/english/tourist-information/where-can-you-camp/>



## SERVICES, FOOD, WATER, HEALTH

**Groceries, shops and services** are sparse and may be 200 km or more away. Take enough food with you, particularly in the highlands.



**Water** from most streams and rivers is clear and absolutely safe to drink. However, do not take water downstream of farmland, houses and settlements. Water from glacial rivers should be drunk only in emergency and should be filtered. Tap water is always safe to drink.

When cycling, carrying 2 litres of water is usually enough, but in sand and lava areas without any surface water you may need to carry more.



**Basic medical assistance** is provided by medical centers (*heilsugæsla*) and pharmacies in most villages. At very small places, the local shop may have some medicine upon request. Dentists and specialist doctors are only in the largest towns in each part of the country.

In Reykjavík, contact *Læknavaktin* for general medical assistance (tel. 1770, open 24/7). **In emergency, call 112.**



## CYCLING IN ICELAND

**Bike & Tools:** All normal roads can be cycled with a robust trekking bike.

On highland roads, you are better off with a mountain bike with fat tires. Low gears are essential for steep hills and headwind. Bring tools and spare parts to fix flat tires, brake pads, split gear and brake cables, a broken chain, broken spokes, loose screws and luggage racks. The next bike shop may be 400 km away.

**Cycling Regulations:** Most main roads in south and west Iceland are hazardous for cycling due to heavy traffic and little space for cyclists. Cycle rather on minor roads or at night when there is less traffic, or use public transport.

Within the Capital Area, there is a rather good network of bike paths. In addition, cycling on sidewalks is legal in Iceland, but show regard to pedestrians.

Hvalfjörður and Vaðlaheiði tunnels are banned for cyclists. All other tunnels are quite OK to cycle through, and all tunnels are illuminated.

Lights on the bike are required when cycling at night, poor visibility and in tunnels. A bright reflective vest lets drivers see you earlier, and a helmet is recommended (required for under 15 year olds).

**Cycling & Wind:** As a cyclist, you are exposed to the elements, and shelter from trees is rare. Warm, wind- and rainproof clothing, a hat and gloves are essential, also in summer. Adjust your route to the weather. Consider also cycling at night, the summer nights are bright and the wind often calms down in the late evening.

**Cycling & Tourism:** Popular tourist spots may be crowded and with heavy car traffic; public transport is sparse. Cycling in remote areas is more rewarding.

**Cycling & Camping:** Bring a windproof tent, the next house can be far away and you may have to camp in the nature.

At many campsites, cars may drive and park directly next to your tent. Campsites with a dedicated car-free area for tents only may be more quiet. Use the campsite list on [www.cyclingiceland.is](http://www.cyclingiceland.is) to find cycling-friendly sites.

**Please note that the all information on accommodation and other services is from 2019 – please check yourself if campsites / huts are open before heading to a specific area.**

 **BUS AND BIKE**

The Public Transport map, on [www.cyclingiceland.is](http://www.cyclingiceland.is) and [www.publictransport.is](http://www.publictransport.is), shows all scheduled bus, ferry and plane routes in Iceland. Sightseeing tours which do not allow rides from A to B are not shown. For timetables etc. refer to the operator's websites. Check if the bus is on schedule, buses may be cancelled due to storms.

**Scheduled public buses** run all year. Pre-booking is not possible. On all long-distance buses, you can buy tickets from the driver with cash or credit card (on *Strætó* routes, also the *Strætó* app). *Strætó* has the largest network. Bikes are conveyed free of charge, if there is space.

**Scheduled tourist buses** are operated by private companies and run during summer only. These services have to be pre-booked; on the bus it is usually sufficient to present the booking number. Bikes cost ca. 4,000 kr extra; cyclists should contact the operator beforehand. Passengers without pre-booking may board the bus and pay at the driver if there are free seats.

**Transport of bikes:** Contact the operator and ask if/how bikes are conveyed on a particular bus. *Strætó* mainline services often have an outside bike rack. On most other buses, bikes are loaded into the luggage compartment, while some minibuses have luggage trailers, and a few buses do not convey bikes at all. Most services have capacity for about 4 ± x bikes (fewer in winter), but the bus driver decides how many bikes can be accepted. Agree on a "Plan B" beforehand, as occasionally, buses on the main routes may already be full of bikes. Be prepared to make the bike as small as possible if it is conveyed in the luggage compartment. For bike racks, remove loose parts and tie down the bikes with securing straps; some padding prevents scratches.

**Remarks on specific routes:** Most buses run once or twice per day, on some remote routes only a few times per week. Between Hvalsöllum, Reykjavík and Borgarnes, there are additional buses, which may have more available space for bikes than the long distance services. For buses near Keflavík airport, see the "Fly and bike" section below. Note that in East Iceland between Egilsstaðir and Höfn, there are only local buses which may not convey bikes, and except in summer there are no services at all between Breiðdalsvík and Djúpvogur.

**Bus stops in Reykjavík:** Long-distance buses depart from different places in Reykjavík (see the Reykjavík map): *Strætó*: Mjódd, a few services also from BSÍ terminal. *Flybus* and *Reykjavik Excursions Highland Bus*: BSÍ terminal. *Airport Direct*: Reykjavík Terminal (Skógarhlíð 10). *Airport Express*: Klettagarðar 4. *Trex Highland Bus*: City Hall (Vonarstræti) and campsite.

**Bus stops outside of Reykjavík:** Buses have scheduled stops in every village. With a bike, we strongly recommend to use scheduled stops only. If necessary, drivers may set down passengers anywhere along the route where the bus can stop safely, e.g. at parking sites or junctions with smaller roads. For getting on the bus in the countryside between scheduled stops, call the operator beforehand and agree on a suitable place for the bus to stop. Due to heavy traffic, drivers need to be prepared to stop; just waving your hands is not sufficient.

**Capital Area:** The yellow *Strætó* city buses can be payed for with the Klapp app, Klapp-10 cards for 10 rides (available in swimming pools, 10-11 and Krambúðin shops), or in cash (490 kr, no change given). Up to 2 bikes are conveyed at no extra costs, if the space is not needed for other passengers, baby carriages or wheelchairs. Unless you have a flat tyre, cycling is usually faster within Reykjavík, though.



## FLY AND BIKE

Most airlines flying to Iceland require bikes to be packed in suitable boxes or bags.

**Keflavík airport:** Bikes can be packed / unpacked in the „Bike Pit“ straight outside the arrivals exit. This is a special container equipped with assembly stands and some tools. Bike boxes can be stored at Bílahótel ([www.luggagestorage.is](http://www.luggagestorage.is), tel. 455-0000; 800 m away at Geysir car rental, see Keflavík map).

**Reykjavík** is also a good place to start cycling around Iceland. Reykjavík Campsite and City Hostel offer certified bike-friendly accommodation, assembly stands, tools, luggage and bike box storage.

**Cycling from/to Keflavík airport:** A bike path to the town of Keflavík begins at the „Bike Pit“ container. For all other destinations, you need to cycle on the roads. The main road to Reykjavík is quite wide, but there is heavy traffic and the lava fields provide no shelter from wind and rain.

**Buses Keflavík airport – Reykjavík:** *Flybus*, *Airport Direct* and *Airport Express* connect with all flights. Bikes should be boxed and booked as odd-size luggage (ca. 2,000 kr). From their bus terminals in Reykjavík (BSÍ, Klettagarðar and Reykjavík Terminal), all also provide onward transport to Reykjavík campsite/City hostel, guesthouses and hotels. *Strætó* route 55 operates to Hafnarfjörður or BSÍ, but this bus does not convey bikes. *Flybus* and *Airport Direct* also accept un-boxed bikes, but cyclists needing just any transport in the region (not to the airport) may rather take a Blue Lagoon bus where the luggage compartment is usually empty.

**Domestic flights** depart mostly from Reykjavík city airport (there are two terminals, see the Reykjavík map). Bikes can be taken on all domestic flights, but contact the airlines beforehand. Boxes are not required on domestic flights, but turn the handlebar and put some padding around sensitive parts.



## BOAT AND BIKE

**The Smyril Line ferry Norröna** provides weekly sailings between Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Denmark. Summer sailings should be booked months in advance, as cabin places sell out quickly.

**All domestic car ferries** transport bikes, and you can usually take a bike on passenger boats as well. Bikes don't need to be pre-booked, but always contact the operators to confirm sailings.

**Ferry Herjólfur to Vestmannaeyjar:** The harbour in Landeyjahöfn is sometimes closed due to bad weather or shallow water. On such days, the ferry operates from Þorlákshöfn, *Strætó* route 52 terminates in Hvolsvöllur, and a special bus connects with the ferry in Þorlákshöfn.

**Ferry Baldur across Breiðafjörður:** Cyclists who want to visit the small and car-free island Flatey can have their bike lifted on/off the ship by crane, while for through passages, bikes are conveyed on the car deck.

### About us

This information is part of the **CYCLING ICELAND and other independent travel** map. Created by Hjólafærni á Íslandi. Editor: Sesselja Traustadóttir, in cooperation with Andreas Macrander, Ómar Smári Kristinsson, Nína Ivanova, and Ingi Gunnar Jóhannsson. All information as of April 24, 2022. We can not assume responsibility for any errors.

You are welcome to contact us for any comments, ideas or corrections, and if you want to order a printed copy of the **CYCLING ICELAND 2019 and other independent travel** map. [hjólafaerni@hjolafaerni.is](mailto:hjolafaerni@hjolafaerni.is), tel. +354 864 2776. #cyclingiceland [www.cyclingiceland.is](http://www.cyclingiceland.is)