

Iceland (Icelandic: Ísland; [ˈistlant] (listen))[d] is a Nordic island country in the North Atlantic Ocean and the most sparsely populated country in Europe.[13] Iceland's capital and largest city is Reykjavík, which (along with its surrounding areas) is home to over 65% of the population. Iceland is the biggest part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge that rises above sea level, and its central volcanic plateau is erupting almost constantly.[14][15] The interior consists of a plateau characterised by sand and lava fields, mountains, and glaciers, and many glacial rivers flow to the sea through the lowlands. Iceland is warmed by the Gulf Stream and has a temperate climate, despite a high latitude just outside the Arctic Circle. Its high latitude and marine influence keep summers chilly, and most of its islands have a polar climate.



According to the ancient manuscript *Landnámabók*, the settlement of Iceland began in 874 AD when the Norwegian chieftain Ingólfr Arnarson became the first permanent settler on the island.[16] In the following centuries, Norwegians, and to a lesser extent other Scandinavians, emigrated to Iceland, bringing with them thralls (i.e., slaves or serfs) of Gaelic origin.

The island was governed as an independent commonwealth under the native parliament, the Althing, one of the world's oldest functioning legislative assemblies. Following a period of civil strife, Iceland acceded to Norwegian rule in the 13th century. The establishment of the Kalmar Union in 1397 united the kingdoms of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Iceland thus followed Norway's integration into that union, coming under Danish rule after Sweden seceded from the union in 1523. The Danish kingdom forcefully introduced Lutheranism to Iceland in 1550.[17]

In the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Iceland's struggle for independence took form and culminated in independence in 1918 with the establishment of the Kingdom of Iceland, sharing through a personal union the incumbent monarch of Denmark. During the occupation of Denmark in World War II, Iceland voted overwhelmingly to become a republic in 1944, thus ending the remaining formal ties with Denmark. Although the Althing was suspended from 1799 to 1845, the island republic has been credited with sustaining the world's oldest and longest-running parliament.

Until the 20th century, Iceland relied largely on subsistence fishing and agriculture. Industrialization of the fisheries and Marshall Plan aid following World War II brought prosperity, and Iceland became one of the wealthiest and most developed nations in the world. It became a part of the European Economic Area in 1994; this further diversified the economy into sectors such as finance, biotechnology, and manufacturing.

Iceland has a market economy with relatively low taxes, compared to other OECD countries,[18] as well as the highest trade union membership in the world.[19] It maintains a Nordic social welfare system that provides universal health care and tertiary education for its citizens.[20] Iceland ranks high in democracy and equality indexes, ranking third in the world by median wealth per adult. In

2020, it was ranked as the fourth-most developed country in the world by the United Nations' Human Development Index,[21] and it ranks first on the Global Peace Index. Iceland runs almost completely on renewable energy.

Icelandic culture is founded upon the nation's Scandinavian heritage. Most Icelanders are descendants of Norse and Gaelic settlers. Icelandic, a North Germanic language, is descended from Old West Norse and is closely related to Faroese. The country's cultural heritage includes traditional Icelandic cuisine, Icelandic literature, and medieval sagas. Iceland has the smallest population of any NATO member and is the only one with no standing army, with a lightly armed coast guard.[22]

Iceland is at the juncture of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. The main island is entirely south of the Arctic Circle, which passes through the small Icelandic island of Grímsey off the main island's northern coast. The country lies between latitudes 63 and 68°N, and longitudes 25 and 13°W.

Iceland is closer to continental Europe than to mainland North America, although it is closest to Greenland (290 km, 180 mi), an island of North America. Iceland is generally included in Europe for geographical, historical, political, cultural, linguistic and practical reasons.[63][64][65][66] Geologically, the island includes parts of both continental plates. The closest bodies of land in Europe are the Faroe Islands (420 km, 260 mi); Jan Mayen Island (570 km, 350 mi); Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, both about 740 km (460 mi); and the Scottish mainland and Orkney, both about 750 km (470 mi). The nearest part of Continental Europe is mainland Norway, about 970 km (600 mi) away, while mainland North America is 2,070 km (1,290 mi) away, at the northern tip of Labrador.

### Three typical Icelandic landscapes

Iceland is the world's 18th-largest island, and Europe's second-largest island after Great Britain. (The island of Ireland is third.) The main island covers 101,826 km<sup>2</sup> (39,315 sq mi), but the entire country is 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> (40,000 sq mi) in size, of which 62.7% is tundra. Iceland contains about 30 minor islands, including the lightly populated Grímsey and the Vestmannaeyjar archipelago. Lakes and glaciers cover 14.3% of its surface; only 23% is vegetated.[67] The largest lakes are Þórisvatn reservoir: 83–88 km<sup>2</sup> (32–34 sq mi) and Þingvallavatn: 82 km<sup>2</sup> (32 sq mi); other important lakes include Lagarfljót and Mývatn. Jökulsárlón is the deepest lake, at 248 m (814 ft).[68]

Geologically, Iceland is part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a ridge along which the oceanic crust spreads and forms a new oceanic crust. This part of the mid-ocean ridge is located above a mantle plume, causing Iceland to be subaerial (above the surface of the sea). The ridge marks the boundary between the Eurasian and North American Plates, and Iceland was created by rifting and accretion through volcanism along the ridge.[69]

Many fjords punctuate Iceland's 4,970-km-long (3,088-mi) coastline, which is also where most settlements are situated. The island's interior, the Highlands of Iceland, is a cold and uninhabitable combination of sand, mountains, and lava fields. The major towns are the capital city of Reykjavík, along with its outlying towns of Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, and Garðabær, nearby Reykjanesbær where the international airport is located, and the town of Akureyri in northern Iceland. The island of Grímsey on the Arctic Circle contains the northernmost habitation of Iceland, whereas Kolbeinsey contains the northernmost point of Iceland.[70] Iceland has three national parks: Vatnajökull National Park, Snæfellsjökull National Park, and Þingvellir National Park.[71] The country is considered a "strong performer" in environmental protection, having been ranked 13th in Yale University's Environmental Performance Index of 2012.[72]

Source: Wikipedia