

# **Untamed Iceland**

**Plus optional extensions:**

*Worlds of Fire: Iceland's Westman  
Islands  
and  
Greenland: Gateway to the Arctic*

**2012**

**Overseas Adventure Travel**  
***Untamed Iceland***  
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# 1. Travel Documents

## Passport

### Your passport should meet these requirements for this itinerary

- It should be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- It should have the recommended number of blank pages (see below for details).
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable.

### Recommended number of blank pages

Know that this recommendation is based on a “worst case” scenario. When you are on this adventure, you might use fewer pages, depending on the whims of the Immigration official on duty that day. Since the consequence of having too few pages can be severe—you could be denied entry into a country—we at OAT feel that in this case, safe is better than sorry, and we strongly recommend that you follow these guidelines.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will require 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Westman Islands:** This extension does not require any additional blank pages beyond the 2 needed for the main trip.
- **Post-trip extension to Greenland:** You will need 1 more page for a total of 3 blank pages.
- **Both pre and post-trip extensions:** You will need a total of 3 blank pages.

Please take moment to check if your passport meets all of these requirements. If not, you could be refused entry into a country. And if that happens, you might be required by that country to return to the U.S. immediately, **which would be at your own expense.**

### If you need to renew your passport or get extra pages

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit their website at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) for information on obtaining a new passport, renewing your existing passport, or for additional pages. You can renew your passport by mail if it is not damaged, you obtained it within the last fifteen years, and it’s in the name you want on your new passport. Many local post offices carry forms for renewing by mail or obtaining extra pages. Allow several weeks for processing your passport. You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

***TIP:** When updating your passport, it is worthwhile to check the prices on all the different services that might apply to you. For example, it might be less expensive to get a new passport than to have pages added, depending on the number of pages you need.*

## **No Visas Required**

For a U.S. citizen, holding a U.S. passport, the visa requirements below apply. This information is provided by PVS International, a national passport service that we highly recommend.

- **Iceland and Greenland—no visas needed:** U.S. citizens do not need visas for stays of less than 90 days in Iceland or in Greenland.

If you are staying longer in any of these countries, you should check with their embassy for the applicable regulations:

Iceland: (202) 265-6653

Denmark (Greenland is autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark): (202) 234-4300

**Non-U.S. citizens or non-U.S. passport holders:** If you are **not** a U.S. citizen or if you possess a passport from a country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about possible visa requirements. For your convenience, we recommend the services of PVS International, whose contact information follows. For embassy phone numbers, see previous.

**PVS International** Passport & Visa Services  
1700 N Moore Street Rosslyn Center, Suite 310  
Arlington, VA 22209

**Telephone: 1-800-556-9990**

**Website: [www.pvsinternational.org](http://www.pvsinternational.org)**

## **Emergency Photocopies**

The smartest and easiest security precaution you can take is to carry photocopies of the personal information pages of your passport, your air ticket, your traveler's check serial numbers (if you're carrying these checks), and your credit cards. Add phone and fax numbers for reporting lost credit cards, for your travel protection plan company if you have purchased one and for your medical emergency network. Store the copies separate from the originals. This can save you immeasurable time, money, and bother if your documents are lost or stolen during your trip.

If you don't wish to bring additional copies with you, consider scanning or entering the information you might need into your computer and emailing it to yourself. That way as long as you have access to email, you can access the information you need. (Keep in mind that you may not have immediate access to email at all times during your adventure, especially in developing countries). Another option is to give a copy of this information to a trusted friend or relative back at home as a backup that they can email or fax to you if you need it.

## **Your Flight Itineraries**

You will receive a preliminary flight itinerary approximately 100 days prior to your departure. Please examine it carefully to ensure that your first and last names appear exactly as they do on your passport. (We do not need middle names). You will receive your finalized flight itinerary in your final documents package approximately 14 days prior to your departure. If the airlines make a change in your flight times, we'll adjust your reservation accordingly. If time permits, we'll send you an updated flight itinerary. If the change is made close to your departure, you'll be advised by way of the finalized flight itinerary. You may also view your most up-to-date flight arrangements through the My Account feature of our web page, [www.oattravel.com](http://www.oattravel.com).

**All flight arrangements are subject to change at any time for reasons beyond OAT's control.**

During the course of your trip you may have regional flights within the destination. Due to international ticketing regulations, some of these flights must be ticketed within the country they originate from. If so, these flights may not be listed in your air itinerary, but your Trip Leader will advise you of these flight schedules during the trip. To see if your tour includes regional flights, please refer to your brochure.

## **Meals in flight**

Flights to Iceland are shorter than to the rest of Europe, so airlines rarely provide meals during the international flight. You might want to have something to eat before boarding the plane (we will provide breakfast on your first day after you arrive at the hotel).

## 2. Health

### Is This Adventure Right For You?

We've worked closely with our local Trip Leaders and regional associates to identify the aspects of this adventure that you should be aware of, from physical requirements to cultural factors. **Please carefully review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.**

We reserve the right for our Trip Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

#### **Physical requirements**

This adventure is not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids. You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted over the course of each day, exploring on foot and standing for up to a half hour at a time. You must also be comfortable participating in 6-8 hours of daily physical activities.

#### **Pacing**

*5 locations in 12 days.* We have 1 one-night stay in Reykjavik at the beginning of our trip, and 1 internal flight of 1 hour. Depending on air itinerary, return flights to the U.S. may require an extra night in the U.S. upon arrival.

**Climate & terrain** Iceland is sometimes subject to harsh weather, but the summer months are quite mild. The weather is warmest in July (when daytime temperatures can reach 70 degrees F), and cooler in the spring and autumn. Evenings can be chilly even in summer. We'll take one short hike up a small mountain and short trekking during the tour. We'll also travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy, gravelly, and in autumn even on icy roads, by motor coach and on foot.

#### **Transportation**

We travel by motor coach. We'll board inflatable rafts for a river-rafting excursion that requires agility for embarking and paddling. We'll also board a boat for whale watching. Agility is required for climbing in and out of the boat.

#### **Accommodations**

All accommodations are hotel standard. However, in small rural areas lodging options are limited and amenities may not be up to what you would find in a U.S. hotel. This is particularly true in Greenland, where the undiscovered and untouched nature of the country offers an authentic experience, but only simple accommodations. Our hotels do have personal service, as well as private showers, hot water, and Western-style toilet facilities.

#### **Group size**

16 maximum with 1 Trip Leader.

## Visit Your Doctor

Before you leave on your adventure, there are at least four health-related things you should do. We'll outline each one in more detail later in this handbook, but for now, here's the short list:

- **Step 1:** Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting.
- **Step 2:** Have a medical checkup with your doctor.
- **Step 3:** Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- **Step 4:** Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less important than steps 1-3.)

## Check with the CDC (Vaccinations)

To ensure you receive any needed vaccinations, or know about suggested medications, you should check the current recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the countries that you'll be visiting. You can contact them:

- **Online:** the CDC's website at [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel) has detailed recommendations for each country and comprehensive information about preventing illness while traveling.
- **By phone:** toll-free at **1-800-232-4636** 24 hours a day. Automated information may be arranged topically by disease, rather than by country or region.

## Medical Checkup

After checking the CDC's recommendations, we strongly recommend that you have a medical checkup with your doctor at least six weeks before your trip. (We suggest you check with the CDC first so that you can have an informed conversation with your doctor about vaccines and such.) Topics to discuss during your checkup are:

- **The CDC recommendations.** The CDC makes suggestions based on the destination, but that doesn't mean the suggestions are right for you. Your doctor will be able to advise you on what is best considering your unique medical history.
- **Advice on what medicines (if any) to bring.** For our suggestions of what types of medications to ask your doctor about, see the section titled "Medications" that follows. Remember to get a copy of any prescriptions—written as a generic drug name—so you can replace your medications if they are lost during the trip.
- **Your fitness for this adventure. This is a must if you have any medical conditions or physical limitations.** Use the "Is This Adventure Right For You?" section on previous pages as a guideline. Make certain to review any medical condition you have, particularly cardiac or respiratory disease or diabetes, and discuss the details of the trip itinerary as it pertains to your health. Remember, your trip will take you into remote areas, with no nearby medical facilities.

Please notify us in writing about any medical condition that may require special attention. If your report is normal, you don't need to send it to us. If you send us a medical report, we don't use it to determine if you should take this trip, or if you are likely to enjoy it. Those decisions are up to you and your doctor.

## Medications

### Prescription medication suggestions

Of course, you'll need to bring an ample supply of any prescription medications you happen to be taking. You'll also want to talk to your doctor about any medications suggested by the CDC. In addition, we suggest you ask about prescriptions for:

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- A pain medication. You might need this in the unlikely event of an injury in a location where medical attention would be delayed.

### Over-the-counter medication suggestions

Whenever you travel, there are a few basic items you should take with you as a “travel health kit”. The list is fairly standard: something for upset stomach, something for diarrhea/constipation, something for headache or general pain, bandages, and any medicines you take regularly. You'll find a helpful checklist in the “Packing” chapter of this handbook.

Just know that not every country has approved every medication—most major brands are OK, but some medications we take for granted are not allowed in other countries. Fortunately, the U.S. State Department offers advice on restricted medications on their webpage at <http://travel.state.gov/travel> (look under the “Criminal Penalties” and “Special Circumstances” sections of each country you'll be visiting. If you don't see anything mentioned, then major U.S. brands should be fine.)

*TIP: At time of writing, the State Department did not have any special warnings about American over-the-counter medications for Iceland or Greenland.*

### Traveling with medications

To avoid loss and to have them handy, pack medications in your carry-on bag. For quicker security screening at the airport—and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas—keep medicines in their original, labeled containers. To be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications, you should also bring copies of the prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name.

## Dental and/or Eye Exam

A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling in a remote area. For this reason, it is a good idea to have a dental exam before your trip. For those travelers who wear glasses, an eye exam may be a good idea as well.

*TIP: If you wear glasses, it's a good idea to bring a “backup” pair just in case. If you wear contact lenses, bring extra solution—it can be expensive or difficult to find in other countries.*

## Jet Lag Precautions

You will feel better on the first days of your trip if, shortly before you leave home, you start to adjust to the different time zone of your destination. Since you will cross several time zones to reach your destination, you may lose many hours of regular sleep. On arrival, your body then will have to suddenly adjust to new sleeping and eating patterns. The result is jet lag. Its symptoms are fatigue—often compounded by insomnia and general restlessness—irritability, and vague disorientation. You cannot totally avoid jet lag; but you can minimize it. Here's how:

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane. Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight. Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying.
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane, and make an effort to get up and walk about the cabin a few times to keep your blood circulation normal.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

## Staying Healthy on Your Trip

### Safe Water

Tap water is safe to drink in Iceland and Greenland. Bottled water is also readily available, but tap water complies with all health safety criteria.

### Safe Food

Food should not really cause any health problems—salads, fruit, and dairy products are all fine— but try to vary your diet. Be careful with food that has been cooked and left to go cold, which might happen in some self-service places.

### Electricity Supply

**During the Greenland extension a constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays.** Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) please take note.

### General Health Tips

Wash your hands frequently: before meals, before snacks, when brushing your teeth, after visiting the bathroom. Carry your own handkerchief to dry your hands thoroughly each time. For times when running water is not handy when you want it, you can bring moist towelettes or anti-bacterial "water-free" hand cleanser. Avoid touching your face, biting your nails, and putting things in your mouth out of habit. Don't share your water bottle with others.

### **Basic Illness Prevention**

It's common for people traveling in contained spaces to be more susceptible to easily transmitted viral and bacterial illnesses such as flu, stomach and respiratory bugs, and colds. The single most effective way to prevent this is frequent hand-washing. We ask all travelers to be extra diligent in their normal hand-washing hygiene, and to drink plenty of fluids for proper hydration. Simple steps like these will help ensure that everyone enjoys the comfortable, carefree vacation they looked forward to.

### **Don't Push Too Hard**

One of the most important parts of staying healthy on an active trip is to not push yourself too hard if you feel tired. Respect your own limits. Your trip schedule offers some degree of flexibility. If your energy level is low on a certain day, you can sit out a walking tour or a road excursion. Your Trip Leader can tell you about the distance, time, and terrain of our walking excursions in advance, and advise on rewarding alternative activities depending on your itinerary.

### **Drink Plenty of Liquids**

When you travel, you can easily become dehydrated without knowing it. If your fluid balance is low, you are more susceptible to fatigue and illness. Air travel will dry you out, so drink liquids and avoid alcohol on your flights. During the trip, don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink. Instead, drink by the clock: drink one to two quarts of water or juice each day, in addition to drinks at meals. If you find yourself tired or unwell, and don't know why, it may be that you simply need to drink more. Note that tea, coffee, and alcoholic beverages are diuretics, and do not help maintain hydration.

### **Sun Exposure**

Be sure to wear your hat, and use plenty of sunscreen. Let your Trip Leader know if you are not feeling well.

### **If You Have Stomach Trouble**

Despite your best efforts, you may get diarrhea at some point. It is usually limited in duration, and will often go away without medication. Immediately and consistently, drink more liquids to make up for the fluids you are losing. The best initial treatment is to use an over-the-counter remedy. This may be all you need to do. You can, and probably should, eat when you get hungry, but avoid dairy products and fried foods for a while.

If your symptoms persist for more than 12 to 24 hours, you may decide to take a course of a prescription antibiotic. Most antibiotics are taken twice a day, for about three days. Once you start the course, it's important to continue for the full duration of treatment. Don't stop if your symptoms subside sooner.

Anti-motility agents, like Imodium and Lomotil, treat the symptom rather than the cause. You may want to take Imodium before a long bus ride or a city tour. You can take it along with an antibiotic. But because these medications interfere with your body's natural attempts to rid itself of the infection, many specialists recommend that you do not take them when you are in a place with inconvenient access to a bathroom. Specifically, don't take Imodium, Lomotil, or a similar medication if you have a fever, or if you have bloody diarrhea

## 3. Money Matters

### How to Carry Your Money

Generally speaking, you'll want to bring a mixture of different payment methods—some cash for exchange, a couple of cards, and *maybe* a few traveler's checks as a last resort—so that you'll be prepared for any situation. In this section, we offer some tips on each type of payment method.

#### Cash or Traveler's Checks?

**Cash has an advantage over traveler's checks.** Cash is more readily exchanged and accepted than traveler's checks, and sometimes commands a better exchange rate. Cash is also a better choice for rural or undeveloped areas where ATMs and credit card machines are scarce.

So we know that bringing cash is a good idea—does that mean U.S. dollars or local currency?

**There is no need to obtain local currency before your trip.** You can change money when you arrive at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices. **Please note torn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills may not be accepted for exchange.** In some countries you do not even need to exchange money at all—you can use U.S. dollars. For more information on what type of currency can be used on this trip, see the "Currency" section.

**Traveler's checks are not recommended.** We urge you not to rely on traveler's checks for your personal expenses. They can be difficult to exchange and are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants. It's more practical to view any traveler's checks you might bring as a last resort for an emergency.

#### ATMs

On this adventure, PLUS, Cirrus, and other international ATM networks are typically available throughout large cities and small towns.

Always notify your bank before you leave home that you are going abroad so that they may remove any blocks on your account and also ask them about the number of withdrawals you may make abroad. For cash withdrawals, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

***TIP:** Many banks charge a fee ranging from \$1 to \$5 for every time you use an ATM in a foreign city. Others will charge you a percentage of what you withdraw. Check with your bank on what fees they charge before you leave the country. That way you can decide if it is better for you to take out one or two large sums, or make smaller but more frequent withdrawals. Your Trip Leader can advise you on ATM locations, but when to exchange money is left to your discretion.*

## Credit Cards (and Debit Cards)

Even if you do not plan on using it, having a credit or debit card as a “backup” is helpful in an emergency. Though major American credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, American Express) and debit cards with a credit card logo are accepted abroad, not every shop will take every card. So it is best to ask if your type of card is accepted before deciding on your purchase, and having a couple different cards can be useful. The Discover card is now accepted in some countries outside the U.S. However, it is not widely adopted, and other cards will work at a much larger range of stores, restaurants, etc. OAT does not accept Discover card for optional tours.

***TIP:** Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company or bank that you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure.*

*You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1-800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!*

## Optional Tour Payments

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit cards only. (We also accept debit cards with the logo of one of these credit card companies, but it must be a card that allows you to sign for purchases.)

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2-3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2-3 months following your return. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "OPT Boston" (depending on your credit card company).

## Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to our website, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

### In Greenland

The official currency of Greenland is the Danish *kroner* (plural *kroner*). The kroner is divided into 100 *øre*, although only the 50 *øre* coin is still in use. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Bills come in denominations of 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000 *kroner*
- Coins come in denominations of 50 *øre* and 1, 2, 5, 10, and 20 *kroner*

U.S. dollars are not widely accepted in Greenland; the local currency is preferred.

### In Iceland

The official currency of Iceland is the Icelandic *krona*. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Bills come in denominations of 500, 1000, 2000, and 5000 Icelandic *krona*
- Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50, and 100 Icelandic *krona*

U.S. dollars are not widely accepted in Iceland; the local currency is preferred.

## Tipping

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. For those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. All tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (this is usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars. Do not use personal or traveler's check for tips.

**OAT Trip Leader:** It is customary to express a personal "thank you" to your OAT Trip Leader at the end of your trip, especially if he or she has provided you with individual service. As a guideline, many travelers give \$7-\$10 per person per day.

**Drivers:** \$3-\$4 per person, per day

**Local guides:** \$3-\$4 per person, per day

**Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1-2 per room, per night

## Shopping in Iceland & Greenland

It is Overseas Adventure Travel's goal to identify and provide you with shopping opportunities that highlight unique, locally-produced products with good value from reliable vendors. For this reason there may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. **Overseas Adventure Travel cannot be responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.**

### Souvenirs

**Iceland:** Hand-knit Icelandic sweaters and other woolens, including hats, mittens, and jackets, are widely available. Icelanders enjoy contemporary Scandinavian-style housewares, textiles, and accessories so you'll find a good selection of these, many with Icelandic themes. The Laugavegur and Skolavordustigur shopping streets in the heart of Reykjavik have contemporary boutiques and shops offering European fashions and accessories, plus unique Icelandic designs and jewelry.

**Greenland:** *Tupilaks*—small figures carved in bone, tooth, or stone, like ones that traditionally represented the spirits of ancestors—are souvenirs typical of Greenland's Inuit culture. You'll also find soapstone carvings, *tugtupit* precious stones, and other crafts and nature-based items.

Your purchase decisions are very personal. If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price. You must use your best judgment when deciding whether an item is worth the price being asked.

## U.S. Customs Regulations and Shipping Charges

### Exemption Amounts

Articles totaling \$800, at fair retail value where they were acquired, may be imported free of charge if you bring them with you. A flat rate of duty—usually a percentage—will be applied to the next \$1,000 worth (fair retail value) of merchandise. The U.S. Customs Inspector determines the value of your items when you enter, and is not bound by your bill of sale. In almost every case, however, a genuine bill of sale will be honored.

### Fees on Items Shipped Home

**Items shipped home are *always* subject to duty when received in the U.S.** There will also be charges for shipping. Although some shops abroad may offer to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the customs facility closest to you and payment of the *export* duties (the fee to remove an item from its country of origin) **not door-to-door shipping or import duties** (the fee the U.S. government charges to bring an item into the U.S.). All additional duties or shipping charges would be the responsibility of the purchaser—you.

**Therefore unless the item is small enough to mail or to be sent by a global parcel service (like FedEx) please be prepared to pay for shipping or pick-up from the nearest customs facility and to pay for the customs duties.** This is why the U.S. Customs & Border Protection service states: “The most cost-effective thing to do is to take your purchases with you if at all possible.”

### Illegal Items

It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins. For more information on what you may or may not bring back into the United States, you can obtain the publication “Know Before You Go” from the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection at 1-877-227-5511 or from their website [www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel).

## If You Have a Problem with a Purchase

The best way to address a problem with a purchase is to not have one in the first place! So don't forget to examine merchandise before paying for it, check contracts or agreements before signing, and review your receipt before leaving the shop. For major purchases, don't hesitate to ask in advance about the return policy—local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up.

But what if you do discover an issue with an item later on? In that case, your best recourse is to contact the vendor directly. For this reason we recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. due to delays in communication, the complexities of international shipping/customs duties, and even cultural differences in how business is conducted.

## 4. Climate: A Word about the Weather

**Iceland:** Though Iceland's climate is cool, warm ocean currents keep it more temperate than you might expect for its northerly location. Highs in Reykjavik during the summer months, with their long hours of daylight, average in the 50s but can easily reach the 60s or low 70s—like fall days in the northeastern U.S. September and October in Iceland are cooler and you'll want to have a warm jacket, warm hat, and gloves available. It's often windy, so bring a good windbreaker. The weather can change rapidly, so be prepared to add or remove outer layers during the course of a day's tour. Humidity can be low at summer's outset (May), when the air has exceptional clarity on sunny days.

**Westman Islands (optional extension):** The Westman Islands enjoy a relatively temperate maritime climate similar to the rest of Iceland.

**Greenland (optional extension):** Greenland is cooler than Iceland, with an arctic climate whose high temperatures average below 50° F in the summer months; however, afternoon highs can reach the 60's F from June through August. During summer you can expect high humidity and foggy days.

### Climate Charts

The following charts reflect the average *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. As your departure approaches you may wish to monitor current weather conditions online. Here is the official data from the weather observation stations closest to our destinations:

**Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity, & Precipitation**

MONTH	REYKJAVIK, Iceland			HUSAVIK, Iceland		
	Temp. High-Low °F	% Relative Humidity (pm avg)	Monthly Precip. (inches)	Temp. High-Low °F	% Relative Humidity (pm avg)	Monthly Precip. (inches)
JAN	35-27	79	3.4	34-25	--	1.4
FEB	37-29	77	2.9	35-26	--	0.9
MAR	37-29	74	3.0	37-26	--	1.3
APR	41-33	72	2.2	41-30	--	0.9
MAY	47-39	69	1.7	50-36	--	0.7
JUN	52-44	73	1.8	54-42	--	1.7
JUL	55-47	75	2.0	58-45	--	2.1
AUG	54-46	75	2.4	57-44	--	2.6
SEP	49-41	72	2.8	52-40	--	2.4
OCT	44-36	75	3.5	41-32	--	4.1
NOV	38-31	78	3.3	38-30	--	2.2
DEC	36-28	77	3.3	37-29	--	2.0

MONTH	Westland Islands (optional extension)			Greenland (optional extension)		
	Temp. High-Low °F	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Precip. (inches)	Temp. High-Low °F	% Relative Humidity (pm avg)	Monthly Precip. (inches)
JAN	37-31	79-78	5.7	21-13	79	1.3
FEB	38-33	79-79	4.6	19-11	79	1.4
MAR	38-32	79-71	4.5	21-13	80	1.3
APR	40-35	81-77	3.9	28-21	81	1.2
MAY	45-40	86-80	3.3	36-29	81	1.7
JUN	49-44	89-84	3.3	44-35	79	1.7
JUL	52-47	91-86	3.2	49-40	80	2.6
AUG	52-47	90-85	3.7	47-39	82	3.1
SEP	47-43	85-81	5.4	42-36	79	3.2
OCT	43-39	83-81	6.0	34-28	77	2.6
NOV	39-34	81-80	5.3	28-22	78	2.0
DEC	38-32	79-78	5.8	24-17	78	1.4

### Online Forecast

Monthly temperature averages for the countries you will be visiting, plus a current 10-day forecast, are available online through the My Account feature of our website [www.oattravel.com](http://www.oattravel.com).

## 5. Packing Just What You Need

### Your Luggage & Locks

#### Luggage Suggestions

**Checked luggage:** One duffle bag or suitcase. Due to space limitations on our motor coaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy-duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.

**Carry-on bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during driving excursions and walking trips. Consider a backpack or waistpack that keeps both hands free and distributes the pack’s weight onto your back or hips.

**If you are taking an optional extension, bring a smaller bag in addition to your suitcase.** This is due to the small aircraft that are *sometimes* used to come back from the Westman Islands and the helicopter flights in Greenland. You’ll want to use this bag for your clothing during the extension so you can leave the items you don’t need in your suitcase at the hotel in Reykjavik. (We return to this hotel at the end of both extensions.)

**Inner bags:** Use plastic shopping bags, nylon stuff sacks, small zipper duffels, or special mesh bags to separate clothing and gear inside your suitcase, and for dirty laundry. Isolate liquid toiletries in heavy-duty Ziploc bags. Store camera gear and important papers in plastic bags to protect them from dirt and moisture.

***TIP:** Consider bringing a second, empty, lockable bag folded into your main suitcase, with a luggage tag and small lock. Use this to carry souvenirs home. Also, when traveling with a companion we recommend “cross-packing,” i.e., pack 2 outfits of your clothing in your companion’s luggage and vice-versa, in case one bag is delayed.*

#### Locks

**For flights that originate in the U.S.:** To reduce the risk of damage to your luggage, *either* do not lock your bags when checking in for flights that originate in the U.S. *or* use TSA-approved locks. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has the responsibility for screening every piece of checked luggage at commercial airports throughout the U.S. According to the TSA, baggage-handling agents may require access to the contents of your luggage and will break locks as required. There are some locks available from retailers that are “accepted and recognized” by TSA. TSA screeners have tools for opening and re-locking bags using those locks, thus avoiding damage to the lock or bag if a physical inspection is required.

**For flights originating outside the U.S.:** Outside of the U.S., we strongly recommend you lock your luggage as a preventative measure against theft. In some countries, you are required to lock your luggage for flights; in others, the screening process may entail opening or breaking the lock. Your Trip Leader will advise you during the trip as to what is correct for that country.

## LUGGAGE LIMITATIONS

We understand that it might seem early to discuss packing. But by knowing the luggage limits for your adventure, you can start to plan for your trip—what type of luggage to get, how much clothing to bring, etc. Therefore, we offer the following information now to help you prepare. We will remind you of your luggage limits again with an update in your final documents booklet (which you will receive about two weeks before your trip’s departure).

In addition to the international flights, you will also take domestic flights within the region on your main trip. The luggage limits on these flights might be less than the average allowance for international flights. **This means that even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions, as indicated in the following chart.**

	Number of Pieces	Type of Luggage	Weight Restrictions	Special Size Restrictions?
<b>Main trip only</b>	One checked bag and one carry-on per person	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.	Checked luggage: <b>44 lbs total</b> Carry-on: <b>13 lbs total</b>	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches
<b>Pre-trip extension to Westman Islands</b>	Same	Use a small duffel bag, backpack, or overnight bag as your checked luggage.	<b>Varies according to aircraft</b> , see “remarks” for details.	Checked luggage should be about the same as a carry-on for an international flight.
<b>Post-trip extension to Greenland</b>	Same	Use a small duffel bag, backpack, or overnight bag as your checked luggage.	Checked luggage: <b>22 lbs total</b> Carry-on: <b>13 lbs total</b>	Checked luggage should be about the same as a carry-on for an international flight.

### Remarks and Suggestions

**The “Dirty Harry” luggage rule:** The limits in the chart above are based on the airlines’ published restrictions. The enforcement of luggage limits is a matter of airline corporate policy. It may not be consistent in all situations and may include random spot checks, especially for carry-on luggage. Airline penalties and fines, however, will probably be immediate when and if enforcement occurs. Before you choose to go above the airline’s published restrictions, you should first ask: *Do I feel lucky?* (And if the answer is yes, then you should accept that you might be charged a fee by the airlines.)

**On the extension to Westman Islands:** Sometimes the aircraft for our flight back from the Westman Islands is a small plane with no room for large suitcases. Unfortunately, there is no reliable way to predict which aircraft will be used (the airlines doesn’t tell us). But no worries: our Trip Leaders have a solution. They suggest that you bring a smaller bag to use in the Westman Islands. In the meantime, you can store your suitcase and excess clothing at the hotel in Reykjavik, where you will return for the start of the main trip.

*NOTE: Of course, this means that you might bring the small bag and then have a full-size plane after all. But the point is to be prepared for the worst while hoping for the best.*

**On the extension to Greenland:** The stricter weight limits for Greenland are due to the helicopter rides. To work around this limit, our Trip Leaders suggest bringing a smaller bag to use in Greenland. In the meantime, you can store your suitcase and excess clothing at the hotel in Reykjavik, where you will return after Greenland.

***TIP:** If you are taking both extensions, then you can simply use the same smaller bag for both extensions.*

**Should I confirm luggage restrictions with my U.S./international airline(s) before departure?**

Yes, you should still confirm them directly with the U.S. domestic/international airline(s) a week or so before your departure. You should take this step no matter if your adventure has a lower limit than the average international flight or not. Why? Because there may be recent changes, such as new security regulations, or an update to the standard weight/size allowance that impacts the international flight.

**You should also check with the airlines on luggage fees—many airlines charge to check luggage, sometimes even on international flights.** Others will charge a fee if you bring a second carry-on item, like a purse or a laptop. These fees are not included in your trip price; they are payable directly to the airlines. If you are making a connecting flight, you should also confirm if your luggage can be checked through to your final destination. For more information about air travel, see the “Air Travel” section of your Important Information booklet.

We will remind you to confirm your U.S./international luggage limits (and provide an update on regional limits, if applicable) in your final documents. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our webpage under the FAQ section.

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## Packing Your Carry-On Bag

Use your daypack or small backpack as your carry-on bag for your flights. We **strongly urge** you to pack in your carry-on case at least one full change of clothes, your camera gear, all medications, changes of socks and underwear, your important travel documents, and other irreplaceable items, in case your checked bags are delayed. Store camera gear and important papers in plastic bags to protect them from dirt and moisture.

**Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage change frequently.** To avoid inadvertently packing any restricted items in your carry-on luggage, we strongly suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website, at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov), which keeps a current list of restricted items and helpful tips. From the main website click on *For Travelers* (top of page).

***TIP:** You can remember the TSA rules for liquids in carry-on luggage by using the numbers “311”:  
Liquids or gels need to be in 3 ounce (or smaller) containers, the containers need to be in a 1-quart sized bag, and each traveler is allowed 1 bag. The bag should be a transparent re-sealable plastic one, like a Ziploc bag. Exemptions might be made for medications, baby milk or food, and special dietary requirements, subject to verification.*

## Clothing Suggestions

### Functional Tips

As you will experience a range of temperatures and weather conditions, our list suggests several layers of clothing. You'll want good-quality rain gear and a warm jacket for evenings and cooler days. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, bring socks and underwear, and even shirts and pants, made of silk, synthetics, or a blend that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel. Look for clothes that offer warmth and breathability.

**Footwear:** You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction. Sturdy and comfortable walking shoes with arch support are suggested.

**Rafting gear:** All the necessary rafting outerwear such as a wetsuit, aqua socks, and a helmet will be provided during the trip. You'll need your swimsuit, and you'll probably want a warm "underlayer" as well (it goes over the swimsuit, but under the wetsuit—it helps to keep you warm and dry). We recommend an underlayer in polypropylene or another similar trademarked wicking/insulating fabric. You can find them at a sporting goods store or online. If you wear eyeglasses, some sort of string or band to keep them from falling in the water is recommended.

Everyone should bring warm clothing to put on *after* rafting because you may get a little wet when on the raft. Your Trip Leader will explain how to prepare and what to bring with you before the excursion.

### Style Hints

Dress on our trip is functional and casual. You might want to bring one slightly dressier outfit for dining on your own at nicer restaurants, or for the Welcome and Farewell Dinners, but that is totally up to you.

## Traveler's Checklists

Did you know that the top two comments travelers have about packing are "I wish I had brought less" and "I wish I had thought to double-check the weather"? In an effort to help you bring less, we offer these lists, which have been compiled from suggestions by Trip Leaders and former travelers. The lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. You might also want to refer to the climate charts in this handbook or online weather forecasts before you pack. And finally, remember the Golden Rule of Packing Light—whatever you think you need at first—take half the clothes and twice the money.

### Recommended Clothing Checklist

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts. Sleeveless tops are optional.
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose fitting is best. Avoid tight fits for comfort and ease of movement.
- ☐ Light wool or fleece sweater; vest or another layer for warmth, like a warm jacket.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Sturdy and comfortable walking shoes with arch support are suggested. Bring at least a couple pairs of medium- to heavy-weight socks for hiking.

- Underwear and sleepwear
- Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- Wide-brim sun hat
- Swimsuit for river rafting, hotel pools, or thermal pool bathing opportunities. Rafting outerwear will be provided, but a wicking “underlayer” can be useful (see “Functional Tips” on the previous page).

### **Seasonal Clothing Checklist**

You can expect summer daytime highs in Iceland to be in the 50s and 60s °F and only occasionally reach or exceed 70 °F. September and October will be significantly cooler, with some days like early winter in the northern U.S. Wind is likely and rain is possible during any of our outdoor activities.

- For summer departures:** If you wear shorts for outdoor activity even in cool weather, you might bring a pair or two for summer departures. But if you view highs in the 50s as cold, then you should bring long trousers.
- For fall departures (September and October):** Winter jacket, winter hat, and warm gloves, long underwear (tops and bottoms)

### **Other Essential Items**

- Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do not provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.
- Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses. If you wear eyeglasses, consider a string or band to keep them from falling into the water during the rafting excursion.
- Sunglasses, 100% UV block
- Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- Insect repellent
- Cold-water hand-wash laundry soap such as Woolite and plastic hang-up clothespins
- Light folding umbrella
- Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards
- Moisturizer and sun-blocking lip balm
- Packets of pocket-size tissues or small roll of toilet paper
- Moist towelettes and/or anti-bacterial "water-free" hand cleanser
- Water bottle (narrow-mouth)
- Electrical converter & plug adapter: see "A Word about Electricity" for details

### **Medicines**

(Your Trip Leader will have a small first-aid kit on hand as well.)

- Your own prescription medicines
- Cold remedies: Sudafed, Dristan, etc.
- Ibuprofen or aspirin
- Laxatives

- Pepto-Bismol or Mylanta
- Anti-diarrhea tablets, like Imodium
- Neosporin or bacitracin
- Band-Aids, several sizes
- Prescription antibiotic for diarrhea
- Optional: motion sickness medication
- Optional: Allergy medication or cough suppressant
- Optional: A strong prescription pain medication for rare emergency purposes

### Optional Gear

(These are items that other travelers have suggested *might* be useful—not requirements. The extra spaces at the end are for you to add whatever you don't want to forget.)

- Travel alarm or travel watch with alarm
- Lightweight binoculars (essential if birding and wildlife viewing)
- Folding walking staff, sold in most camping stores (preferably rubber-tipped)
- Hanging toiletry bag (with hook to hang on doorknob and pockets to organize items)
- Basic sewing kit
- Hair dryer (available in most hotels, but not all—particularly in Greenland)
- Reading materials
- Travel journal/note pad and pens
- Phrase book
- Pocket-size calculator for exchange rates
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### And Don't Forget

- Passport with visa (if applicable)
- Emergency photocopies of your passport, air itinerary, and prescriptions. Also a list of your credit card numbers and phone number to reach the credit card company or bank, so that you can report a missing card in case of loss or theft
- Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- Travel money belt or neck wallet

### What not to pack

Do not pack aerosol cans, as they tend to leak during air travel. Also avoid packing glass bottles; use plastic containers instead. Leave at home checkbooks and any credit cards not essential for your trip, valuable jewelry, and anything that you would hate to lose.

## Tips on Photo Gear

For many people capturing the highlights of their travel experiences in photographs or movies and sharing them with friends later is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the journey. You can remember and savor your memories for years to come. Digital cameras and camcorders are excellent travel companions—and many do dual duty by recording movies *and* still images. Fist sized camcorders will capture HD movies and high quality still photos; cameras smaller than a deck of cards are great for snapshots and will capture casual movie clips. With an ample supply of high-capacity memory cards you can capture your whole trip with a small, lightweight package.

Be sure to bring enough batteries. Recharging batteries is sometimes impossible, due to a lack of outlets, electrical shortages or outages—and some cameras drain batteries *very* quickly. Whether you need standard (2A or 3A) or proprietary batteries, it's handy to have spares. Be sure your charger will work with the local electrical system, and bring enough memory cards—they may be hard to find and will be often pricier than in the U.S. Whatever the storage format (often Secure Digital) memory cards are small and thin and you probably can't have too much storage.

Compact cameras are impractical for distant subjects (such as African wildlife or architectural details on Europe's taller buildings). Some models have a zoom lens of up to 120mm, which is good for middle distances. For distant subjects a *megazoom* (with a zoom lens of at least 300mm) or a single lens reflex (DSLR) camera with up to a 300mm telephoto lens are good choices. With a DSLR you can carry multiple lenses, though as your gear gets more complex you may reach luggage weight and size constraints. Large lenses that need a tripod, or double reflex cameras are impractical for casual travel photography. A single mid-range telephoto lens coupled with a small, fast prime lens (for low light/no flash situations) may be the best system for an effective but compact kit. Or, consider mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras (MILC) that combine small bodies and lenses and offer high quality for both still and HD movie images.

If you use a SLR or MILC camera, protect the lenses with a UV filter and remember to bring lens caps, covers, paper and a waterproof bag (a heavy duty Ziploc-style bag is good) to protect your camera. Remember to pack the flash if it's detachable. Be sure your camera has a flash that *can* be turned off, and learn how to turn it off. (At some sites and in many museums, flashes are *not* permitted; flashes can also frighten wary wildlife.) In some countries you may be charged for photography at specific sites; and in some cultures and individuals are less receptive to photography than others. It's always best to respect local customs.

Disposable cameras are also an option. They are inexpensive and capable of perfectly acceptable photos in light that is not too dim *or* bright. A panoramic disposable can add a particularly interesting perspective when compared to standard photo formats—and may suggest inventive ways of seeing your subjects. X-rays do not damage the data of digital cameras (in any media format), and so poses no problems for travelers using digital cameras.

***TIP:** Many travelers, excited about their trip, buy a brand new camera...only to forget that it takes a couple of attempts to get used to a new piece of equipment. Take a few photos around the neighborhood, practice turning the flash on and off, and so forth before you leave—it can save you a lot of hassle on the trip and it will make your photos look better.*

## A Word about Electricity

Electricity in Iceland and Greenland is 220 volts, 50 Hz. Type C plugs are the most common, but occasionally you will find others like Type F. (Type C plugs, which are sometimes called “Europlugs”, will fit in Type F outlets.)



This means you might need both a transformer (changes the electric current, makes it a lower voltage like in the U.S.) and adaptors (changes the shape of the plug). The downside of transformers is that they tend to burn out, so you might consider bringing only dual-voltage appliances that work on both 110 and 220 voltage. Most modern cameras and small appliances will run on both voltages – check your owner’s guide. A third option is to use battery-charged appliances—then you don’t need a transformer or plug adapter, just an ample supply of batteries.

Because electric plugs are not standardized in this region, you may wish to purchase a travel kit with more than plug adapter. Travel adapter kits can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware store. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring one, you *might* also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

**Hairdryers:** Hairdryers are provided at most hotels in Iceland, but not in the hotels in Greenland.

**Availability of electricity:** During the Greenland extension a constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) please take note.

## 6. Learn about Your Destinations

We encourage you to start learning about Iceland and Greenland before your trip. Even a small amount of background reading can help you make sense of the kaleidoscope of facts and impressions that will come your way. Having some knowledge in advance can complement and enrich what you can learn from your resident Trip Leader.

### Iceland at a Glance

#### Facts & Figures

**Area:** 39,770 square miles

**Capital:** Reykjavik

**Languages:** Icelandic is the official language; English, Scandinavian languages, and German are also spoken.

**Ethnicity:** Norse/Celtic descent 94%, foreign-born 6%

**Location:** Iceland is an island bordered by the North Atlantic Ocean.

**Geography:** Poised atop the geologically active mid-Atlantic Ridge, where tectonic plates are separating as Europe drifts away from North America, Iceland is one of only two places in the world where an undersea mid-ocean ridge rises above sea level. Iceland's 3,088 miles of coastline are punctuated by numerous rugged fjords, while some 63 percent of the mountainous interior is treeless tundra.

**Population:** 320,000 (estimate)

**Religions:** Lutheran Church of Iceland 82%, Roman Catholic 2%, other Christian 7%, other religions 1%, unaffiliated or unspecified 8%

**Time Zone:** Iceland is on UTC ("Greenwich Mean Time"), five hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 11am in Reykjavik.

### Historical Overview:

#### Early History

Iceland's first settlers were Irish monks who came in search of a remote retreat during the eighth and ninth centuries AD. They did not remain after Norse settlers (known as Vikings) began arriving in the latter ninth century. One of the oldest sagas, the *Landnamabok* or Book of Settlements, records the history of this early era of Norse settlement in considerable detail.

Around 930 AD, the Icelanders wrote a constitution creating the Althing (*Alþing* in Icelandic), which exists today as the oldest active legislative assembly in the world. The Althing met at the natural amphitheater of Thingvellir, where local chieftains gathered annually to elect leaders. Among the decision made there was the adoption of Christianity by Iceland in 1000 AD, notable for the fact that it took place peacefully.

The events of this early medieval era inspired many of the great Icelandic sagas, though they were written down later (in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries). It was late in the tenth century that Eric the Red led settlers to Greenland, giving the ice-capped island a name intended to make it more appealing to settlers. Faring even further, his son Leif Ericson (spelled *Leifr Eiríksson* in Old Norse) became the first European to set foot in North America, where he's believed to have settled for a time at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland.

In Iceland itself, the eleventh and twelfth centuries were a peaceful Golden Age when the literary tradition of the saga developed. In the early thirteenth century, the writings of Snorri Sturluson marked the culmination of this tradition. Unfortunately, in the Sturlunga Saga, they also chronicled the end of the era of peace as the "Age of the Sturlung" saw a descent into clan warfare.

### **From the Middle Ages to the Present**

Following this, Iceland fell under the rule of Norwegian King Haakon in 1262. Denmark took control following the Kalmar union between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in 1397, and Iceland did not regain full independence for more than six centuries. During this era, Icelanders faced many difficulties of both human and natural origin. Trade restrictions imposed by Denmark hamstrung the island's economy, and there were several intervals of crop failures. Three thousand pirates plagued the island in 1627, kidnapping over 200 people. Volcanic eruptions were sometimes devastating: Mount Hekla erupted in 1389, 1636, and 1693; and Mount Laki's 1783 eruption killed large numbers of livestock and led to the death of nearly 20% of the population from starvation.

The nineteenth century saw a rise of Icelandic nationalism, and the island regained freedom of trade in 1855. From 1874 through 1918, agreements with Denmark resulted in increasing degrees of Icelandic autonomy, with Iceland becoming a sovereign nation under the Danish Crown in 1918. In 1944, following a referendum in which 97% of Icelanders voted to sever ties with the Danish Crown, the establishment of the present Republic of Iceland took place in a ceremony symbolically located at Thingvellir, site of the ancient Althing.

Iceland today is a multi-party parliamentary democracy and a member of NATO. At the dawn of the 21st century, Iceland enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world, although more recently the country has been strongly affected by the global economic downturn.

## **Greenland at a Glance (optional extension)**

**Area:** 836,109 square miles

**Capital:** Nuuk (Godthab)

**Languages:** Greenlandic (West Inuit) is the official language; Danish and English are also spoken.

**Ethnicity:** Greenlander 88%, Danish and others 12%

**Location:** Greenland is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Greenland Sea, Arctic Ocean, and Baffin Bay.

**Population:** 57,600

**Religions:** Evangelical Lutheran

**Time Zone:** Greenland is two hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in New York, it is 8am in Nuuk.

Politically, Greenland is connected to the Kingdom of Denmark, but in 2008 it won a measure of independence due to a referendum on self-rule that passed with a 75% approval rating.

## Historical Overview:

### The Inuit Land of the People

Greenland, known as *Kalaallit Nunaat* (“land of the people”) in the Inuit language, has been inhabited by successive waves of Inuit cultures for almost 5000 years. The earliest people came across the narrow strait between Ellesmere Island and Thule in northern Greenland at times when the sea was frozen. Their stories have been pieced together from the artifacts they left behind, interpreted by archeologists and anthropologists.

Among the earliest Greenlanders were members of the Saqqaq Culture, reindeer hunters who first crossed the strait more than 4000 years ago and remained in Greenland until about 900 BC. Later came the Dorset culture, leaving large snow-cutting knives that indicate they built igloos. The type of women’s knife called the *ulo*, and still used today, was also characteristic of these people.

After about a 900-year gap when Greenland appears to have been uninhabited, an Inuit group called “Dorset 2” settled in the eighth and ninth centuries in the northern part of the island. Around the tenth century, they were followed by the Thule Culture, which spread along both the east and west coasts. Thule people developed the *qajaq* (kayak), harpoon, and dogsled. Today’s Inuit are descended from the Thule and are known as the Inussuk Culture.

### From Norse and Danish Influence to Autonomy

Although it is likely that Norse sailors from Iceland first sighted Greenland around 900 AD, it wasn’t until 985 AD that Eric the Red brought significant settlement. The Icelanders first established themselves in communities on the western coast not far from present-day Nuuk. There may have been about 5000 people in Greenland at the height of settlement in the thirteenth century. The reasons for the later disappearance of the Icelandic colonies, sometime after the last known report from them in the early fifteenth century, remain an intriguing mystery.

The Inuit had Greenland largely to themselves for a time, with only expeditions from Norway and England and European whalers stopping by from the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries. King Christian IV claimed the island for Denmark in 1605, after European interest had been revived by the search for a Northwest Passage, but it wasn’t until 1721 when missionary Hans Egede arrived that settlement by Europeans resumed. Egede found the Inuit receptive to Christianity and established the Evangelical Lutheranism that is still practiced today.

Greenlanders have held full Danish citizenship since 1953 and have exercised home rule in domestic affairs, with their own parliament, since 1979. In 2008, a special referendum was passed to increase Greenland’s self-rule, giving the local population more control over the court system, the police, and the coast guard. Although it was a historic step towards political independence, the economy of Greenland remains very much tied up with Denmark’s, and certain areas of government are still under Danish control.

## **Cultural Interaction**

### **Language Barrier**

You can have some great “conversations” with local people who do not speak English, even if you don’t speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Talk with your Trip Leader, and he/she can help get the ball rolling.

### **Taking Photographs**

The etiquette of photographing most people in the countries on your itinerary is about the same as it would be on the streets of your hometown. You need permission to take a close-up, but not for a crowd scene. If you want to shoot a great portrait, show interest in your subject, try to have a bit of social interaction first. Then use sign language to inquire if a picture is OK. Your Trip Leader can help.

## **Safety & Security**

### **Common Sense and Awareness**

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Don’t be overly nervous or suspicious, but keep your eyes open. If you are venturing out after dark, go with one or two other people.

Carry a one-day supply of cash in your pocket. Carry most of your money, and your passport, in a travel pouch or money belt under your shirt. Replenish your pocket supply when you are in a safe and quiet place, or in our vehicle. Don’t leave valuables unattended in your hotel room. Every hotel will offer use of a hotel safe at the front desk or an electronic in-room safe. If you’ve used it, remember to empty the safe before you leave.

Pickpockets may create a sudden distraction. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your money belt. If an encounter with a local turns out to be long and complicated and involves money or your valuables, be very careful. Con artists sometimes target travelers.

## **Communications**

Even picking up the phone or getting a paper can be a new experience in a foreign country. To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your final documents package. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

When calling overseas from the US, dial 011 for international exchange, then the country's code, and then the number. The country code, which is indicated by a plus sign (+), is +299 for Greenland and +354 for Iceland. Phone numbers abroad may not have the same number of digits as US numbers; even numbers within a country can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone. When calling from the US, you may need to drop the first digit of the area code.

When calling the US from abroad, generally you dial 00 for international exchange, then the US country code +1, and then the number with area code.

## **Cell Phones**

If you want to use a cell phone while traveling overseas, be sure to check whether your own phone will work outside the U.S. or if you're better off renting an international phone. The websites [www.travelcell.com](http://www.travelcell.com) and [www.globalcellularrental.com](http://www.globalcellularrental.com) have good information on rentals. You may also want to consider buying an inexpensive local phone for your stay.

To use your own phone, it's best to investigate the options and fees your plan offers for international use. Consult your service provider ([www.verizon.com](http://www.verizon.com), [www.t-mobile.com](http://www.t-mobile.com), etc.) for details. U.S. service is dominated by the CDMA technology standard, while most of the world uses the incompatible GSM standard. Some U.S. providers do offer GSM, but in either case you may incur high international roaming fees. With GSM, however, you can often choose to have your phone "unlocked" and then add a local SIM card for lower fees. If you can access the Internet as you travel, you can take advantage of email or a Skype Internet telephone (VOIP) account for the best value.

## **Phone Calling Cards**

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, consider using a prepaid calling card, because the only additional charge you'll normally incur (besides the prepaid long distance charges) is a local fee of a few cents and possibly a connection fee if you are using your card at your hotel. It is best to check with the hotel's reception desk prior to making phone calls to avoid unexpected charges.

Calling cards purchased locally are typically less expensive than those purchased in the U.S. and are more likely to work with the local phone system. Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

## **Responsible Travel in Iceland & Greenland**

We do our best to have a minimum negative impact on local cultures and the natural environment in every country where we operate trips. In our many years of travel, our travelers and staff have learned techniques that encourage rewarding cultural exchange. Our goal is to leave no trace on the natural environment, or to leave places better than we find them.

As you travel in this area, your OAT Trip Leader and local guides will follow strict guidelines to protect the environment. Please cooperate enthusiastically, and make it your own priority to keep this uniquely unsullied wilderness intact in all its pristine beauty. Here's what we ask of you as part of this effort:

### **Conserving the Natural Environment**

- Do not disturb wildlife; please follow your guides' instructions faithfully.
- Minimize the disposable items you bring on the trip. Leave film boxes, wrappings from new clothes, and other unneeded items at home.
- Dispose of your trash properly. Instead of disposing of trash at roadside rest areas or restaurants, keep a small trash bag in your day bag and empty it in your hotel each night.
- Ask whether plastic drinking water bottles can be recycled. Most days, it's better to keep your empty bottles with you until you reach your hotel.
- Walk only where you know it won't do damage, following your guides' advice.
- Don't pick any vegetation, or remove any item of biological or historical interest.
- If you find any litter left by others, consider picking it up.

## 7. Additional Resources

### Suggested Readings

We've listed a few of our favorite books about the region you'll be traveling. Most of these are available in large bookshops (especially those that specialize in travel or international books), by mail order, and from the Internet.

#### **Iceland & Greenland:**

***A Journey to the Center of the Earth*** by Jules Verne (Science Fiction) In this early science-fiction novel, the adventurers descend into the earth from Snaefellsjokull Volcano, now a part of a national park in Iceland.

***Frost on My Moustache, The Arctic Exploits of a Lord and a Loafer*** by Tim Moore (Travel Narrative) Inspired and full of dry British humor, a comic travels through Iceland and other northern regions—supposedly in pursuit of the famous Victorian explorer the "Marquess of Dufferin and Ava."

***Hrafinkel's Saga and Other Icelandic Stories***, translated by Herman Palsson (Literature) A good introduction to the folklore tales known as "the sagas", this collection features some of the most famous stories. Dating from as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, these tales vividly recreate the society of medieval Iceland and are considered an important part of Icelandic heritage.

***Iceland, Land of the Sagas*** by Jon Krakauer and David Roberts (Travel Narrative) Krakauer and Roberts hike and climb around Iceland in this travel narrative, reissued as a paperback and featuring color photographs by Krakauer. The book interweaves natural and cultural history of the island with the authors' own adventures.

***Independent People, An Epic*** by Halldor Laxness (Literature) This great mock-epic uses the saga style to tell the tale of an independent-minded sheep farmer. The story's rich cultural details are a hallmark of this author, who won the Nobel Prize in 1955.

***Jar City*** by Arnaldur Indriðason (Mystery) One of several novels of contemporary detective fiction by this Icelandic author, this is his most famous work to date. Made into a movie in 2006.

***Ring of Seasons, Iceland, Its Culture and History*** by Terry G. Lacy (History) A longtime resident of Reykjavik, Lacy weaves tales of family life, anecdote, lore, and history into this illuminating personal portrait of Iceland. This book may be harder to find in a store, but can still be ordered online.

***Summer at Little Lava, A Season at the Edge of the World***, by Charles Fergus (Culture) A summer in Iceland as described by folklore, history, and lyrical descriptions of nature.

***The Greenlanders***, by Jane Smiley (Literature) This marvelously researched novel recreates life in the Viking settlements in Greenland that disappeared 500 years ago. Smiley delves in the medieval colonies, their struggles to survive in the harsh environment, contacts with indigenous people and causes of their disappearance. It includes the tale of the Norse discovery of North America.

## *Additional Resources*

***The History of Iceland*** by Gunnar Karlsson (History) A scholarly and comprehensive history of Iceland from the Viking era through independence and the 20th century. The book evolved from a course that the author, a professor of history in Iceland, taught at the University of London.

***The Sagas of Icelanders***, with an introduction by Jane Smiley, illustrated by Robert Kellog (Literature) Nine sagas and six tales collected in a single volume, all newly translated. At over 500 pages, this is a big and bold volume. (Travelers who want a quicker read should consider ***Hrafinkel's Saga***, which is described on the previous page.)

***World Light***, by Halldor Laxness, translated by Magnus Magnusson (Literature) Reissued in honor of the Icelandic Nobel laureate's 100th birthday, this big novel is the sprawling, sad, funny story of a would-be (but hopelessly bad) poet in rural Iceland.

**Guidebooks:**

Your Trip Leader will be happy to provide recommendations and suggestions during the trip, so a guidebook is not a necessity. But a good one can be invaluable as a one-stop reference, so for those travelers who have asked for suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Since different guidebook series each have their own target audience and structure, it is well worth your time to browse your local library or bookstore to find the one(s) you like best. To get you started, here is some general information on the most popular series:

**Culture Smart!** – Focuses on local customs and etiquette instead of sights, dining, etc.

**DK Eyewitness** – Innovative visuals make these books easy to use and a nice souvenir once the trip is over. The focus is primarily on the sights and activities.

**Fodor's** – A classic guidebook with strong information on activities, shopping, and dining. Good mix of upscale recommendations and budget suggestions.

**Frommer's** – A comprehensive guide series that is known for its restaurant recommendations.

**Insight** – Offers more information on history and culture than usual, nice visuals, good maps.

**Lonely Planet** – Practical guides geared towards a more adventurous traveler on a budget.

**National Geographic** – From the same company that publishes the magazine. Excellent photographs, good information on history, nature, and culture.

**Rough Guides** –For the independent traveler on a budget. Particularly known for their maps.

**Maps:**

Most hotels will provide maps free of charge at the reception desk or in your room. These maps are usually sufficient for our travelers, but if you plan on any independent exploration, you may wish to consider purchasing a map before your departure. This can be especially useful in a country that doesn't use the Roman alphabet as the hotel maps may only be printed in the local language.

Some recommended map series include: Rand McNally international maps (especially the StreetWise series), Insight's FlexiMaps, and Rough Guide's destination maps. We suggest that you visit your local bookstore or library to get a better sense of which type of map is best for your needs before making a purchase.

## Suggested Movies

Here are few of our favorite movies that are about, or set in, or from the region you'll be traveling. Most are available at movie rental stores and websites—or even your public library. Sometimes films produced outside of the US may be harder to find, but they are usually available online.

***Die Another Day*** starring Pierce Brosnan and Halle Berry (2002, color). Although the plot of this James Bond film mostly centers on Korea, some scenes take place in Iceland.

***Heima*** starring Sigur Rios (2006, color). Part documentary, part concert film, part travelogue - *Heima* follows Icelandic rock band Sigur Rios during a tour of their home country during which they staged free surprise concerts in unusual locations.

***Iceland*** starring Sonja Henie and John Payne (1942, black and white) Ice skater Henie falls for a U.S. marine posted in Iceland during WWII.

***Jar City*** starring Ingvar E. Sigurdsson and Agusta Eva Erlendsdottir (2006, color). A mystery based on the novel by the same name, the film follows a detective trying to piece together the connections between a cold case from 1974 and a recent death. A good choice if you like gritty TV police procedurals like “Prime Suspect” or “Wallander”. In Icelandic with subtitles.

***Journey to the Center of the Earth*** starring Pat Boone, James Mason, and Arlene Dahl (1959, color). The classic Jules Verne story in which a volcano in Iceland is the gateway to the center of the earth. Another film by the same name was released in 2008—rather than a remake, the new version is more of a sequel with a new set of explorers discovering the same hidden world in modern times.

## Icelandic Phrase Guide

English is widely spoken in Iceland, but here are a few basic words of Icelandic. Written Icelandic uses a 32-letter alphabet with the letter þ pronounced hard “th” as in “thing” and the letter ð pronounced soft “th” as in “the.”

### **Basic words and phrases**

Icelandic (the name of the language).....	Íslenska
Yes .....	Já
No .....	Nei
Thank you .....	Takk or Þakka þér fyrir
Thank you very much.....	Takk fyrir
You're welcome .....	Gerðu svo vel
Please .....	Vinsamlegast, Takk
Excuse me .....	Fyrirgefðu
Hello .....	Halló, Góðan daginn
Goodbye .....	Bless
So long .....	Bless bless
Good morning .....	Góðan daginn
Good afternoon .....	Góðan daginn
Good evening .....	Gott kvöld
Good night .....	Góða nótt

## Useful Websites

The following Internet sites offer good travel information and resources:

### **Overseas Adventure Travel Store**

<http://www.oatshop.com>

### **International health information: CDC (Centers for Disease Control)**

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>

### **Electric current and plug types**

<http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm>

### **Foreign exchange rates**

<http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic>

### **ATM locators**

<http://www.mastercard.com/atm> for Cirrus ATMs

<http://www.visa.com/pd/atm> for PLUS ATMs

### **Tourist information**

[www.icelandtouristboard.com](http://www.icelandtouristboard.com) **Iceland**

[www.greenland.com](http://www.greenland.com) **Greenland**

### **Travel books**

<http://www.amazon.com>

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com>

### **World weather**

<http://www.intellicast.com>

<http://www.weather.com>

<http://www.wunderground.com>

[www.vedur.is](http://www.vedur.is) (Iceland weather)

### **Foreign languages for travelers: basic terms in more than 80 languages**

<http://www.travlang.com/languages>

### **Travel tips: packing light, choosing luggage, etc.**

<http://www.travelite.org>

### **Net café guide: 100s of locations around the globe**

<http://www.cybercafes.com>

### **U.S. Customs & Border Protection: traveler information**

<http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel>

### **Transportation Security Administration (TSA): agency that screens luggage in U.S.**

<http://www.tsa.gov/public>

### **National Passport Information Center (NPIC): for passport information**

<http://www.travel.state.gov>

## **8. Some Final Thoughts**

### **A Real Adventure . . .**

Exploring Iceland and Greenland brings you to some of the world's most remarkable landscapes—and the home of distinct cultures with centuries of their own history and traditions. Traveling here is refreshing for both body and soul, but like any voyage, you'll enjoy it most if you come with a flexible attitude toward any small difficulties that arise along the way.

You'll be traveling each day with people you don't know. By the end of the trip, you'll know them fairly well! Many OAT travelers form lasting friendships, and return to travel together again. But you probably won't enjoy every person every day. The evergreen qualities of patience, flexibility, humor, and mutual consideration will help everyone have a good time.

We work hard to ensure that your trip runs smoothly, but things don't always go according to plan. And we've deliberately sought out non-traditional travel settings and unusually adventurous experiences. The unplanned moments are often the most memorable, but, to be frank, they aren't always the most rewarding.

Your Trip Leaders are experienced in dealing with unexpected hitches, and will often work discreetly, behind the scenes, for the good of the group. But we've also developed a calm acceptance that some things are simply beyond our control. Weather and local road conditions might affect your trip. Your activities could be different from those described in your itinerary. There could be inexplicable delays. At such times, you'll have a better trip if you can draw on your sense of humor and your most adventurous travel spirit.