

# University of Akureyri

# Handbook for exchange and visiting students



**2017-2018**

## Welcome to the University of Akureyri

On behalf of University of Akureyri (hereafter UNAK) International office, I congratulate you on choosing UNAK as your destination for the 2016-2017 academic year. At UNAK, we understand the value of obtaining an international education and the competitive advantage it gives you when you enter the job market. We also recognize that studying abroad widens your horizons and makes you more interested in international affairs in general and in learning languages.

UNAK is an international university with faculty members from many different countries and exchange students are coming from all over the world. UNAK is also a well-networked university with alliances with well over 100 universities.

In order to make your transition to Iceland as smooth as possible, we have prepared this handbook. It contains practical information about student life in Iceland. Please read it carefully before your arrival and do not hesitate to contact us if you have any comments or questions.

Best regards,

International Office

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### Introduction to the University of Akureyri

The University of Akureyri has grown aggressively to an important and progressive milieu of higher education and research since its establishment in 1987. Students are systematically challenged with inspirational subjects of sciences and practical knowledge under the guidance of our highly-qualified faculty. The university is known for its quality on-campus and distance education. UNAK is a non-profit organization that operates as a public university and is accredited by the Icelandic Educational Authorities. Student numbers are approximately 1750 and faculty and staff around 185.

There are several research institutes and three schools: School of Business and Sciences, School of Humanities and Social Science and the School of Health Science. The University of Akureyri prepares students for a wide range of opportunities in both the private and the public sectors. Education at the University covers specific skills and scientific methods as well as other more theoretical skills that will enable graduates to improve their qualifications. Education and research are closely coordinated to achieve this, first and foremost by assigning them with equal importance in the daily work of the academic and scientific staff and whenever possible basing course work on research.

### Pre-departure Information

When going to another country to study, there is a quite a bit you need to do before departure. In this chapter you will receive some practical information on what needs to be done before coming to Iceland.

## Application Process

When an international student has been accepted to study at UNAK, an information package with necessary information about UNAK and Iceland will be sent to him/her. Please note that the application deadline is May 15<sup>th</sup> for the Fall semester and November 1<sup>st</sup> for the Spring semester.

## Passports and Visas

It is necessary all students have a valid passport when entering Iceland. Citizens of the EU and Schengen area do not need a visa to enter Iceland. If you intend to drive a car you will need an international driving license.

## Airlines

Icelandair and Wowair are the main airlines flying to and from Iceland, although various other airlines fly to Iceland. To book your flight with Icelandair, go to the website [www.icelandair.com](http://www.icelandair.com). To book your flight with Iceland Express, go to the website [www.wowair.com](http://www.wowair.com). There are several companies that do cheap charter flights to Iceland but normally they have not translated their web pages into English. You might want to look at [www.sumarferdir.is](http://www.sumarferdir.is) and [www.plusferdir.is](http://www.plusferdir.is).

## What to Pack

In addition to the many items you will bring to Iceland, the following is a list of the most important things you need to bring with you:

- Adaptor for electrical appliances (220V, frequency 50Hz)
- Warm jumpers
- Good walking shoes
- Warm, wind, and rain proof coat, scarf, gloves, and a hat
- Swimsuit
- Tickets and insurance papers
- Acceptance letter
- Camera
- Brochures and introduction material to present at UNAK International Fair

## ARRIVAL INFORMATION

When you arrive in Iceland you will land at the International airport in Keflavik, which is approximately a 45-minute drive from Reykjavik. You would think that you have landed on the moon since the Reykjanes peninsula is covered with lava. However, as you will find out, buzzing city life is only few minutes away. In this chapter you will find some practical information on your arrival to Iceland.

### How to Get to Akureyri

Flybus is operated all year daily from Keflavik Airport to Reykjavik in connection with all arriving flights (For more information on the Flybus, go to <http://www.flybus.is> or call +354 580 5400). The Flybus brings passengers to the main bus station in Reykjavik (BSÍ). From BSÍ you can either take the bus to Akureyri (6 hours) or continue to the domestic airport take the flight to Akureyri (45 minutes).

**Air Iceland** (<http://www.airiceland.is/>), mainly flies domestic flights to and from Reykjavík an up to 8 flights a day to Akureyri.

**Bus company Strætó** Bus company [straeto](http://www.straeto.is) (timetable)

## **University of Akureyri is found at the following location:**

University of Akureyri  
Solborg, v/Norðurslóð  
600 Akureyri, Iceland

## **Buddy System**

To ensure a smooth integration to the Icelandic way of student life, UNAK has a buddy system arrangement. This means that when you are accepted to the university, you will be assigned a buddy. All of our buddies are students at UNAK who have volunteered to help international students adapt the first few weeks of their stay. Your buddy will, amongst other things:

- Meet you at the bus terminal or airport and take you to your accommodation
- Show you around the school premises
- Show you around the town centre
- Show you where it is most practical to do your shopping
- Teach you how to use the bus system

Furthermore, if you have any questions do not hesitate to send your buddy an e-mail, as our buddies are quite happy to assist you in any way they can. The extent of the relationship beyond this depends on how well the students get along. We try our best to provide all students with a buddy. As your buddy is a student at UNAK, he/she will be able to give you practical hints on student life in Akureyri, so we encourage all of our international students to use this opportunity to the fullest.

## **Accommodation**

The International Office assists exchange students in finding housing for the academic year/semester (August 20th - May 15th). Exchange students do therefore not have to make other arrangements concerning housing unless they wish to. In that case, the International Office must be notified immediately. You should expect to pay approximately 50 - 56.000 ISK a month for renting a single room with access to kitchen and bathroom. When renting a flat or a room it is usual to pay a month in advance and a security deposit. You should always have a written, signed lease. For more information on leases or to print out a lease in English, Polish or Icelandic, go to [http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/eydublod\\_vel/leaseFormEN.pdf](http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/eydublod_vel/leaseFormEN.pdf)

The student is personally responsible for the room he/she rents. Students rent the rooms on their own responsibility and once you have confirmed the room to your given landlord the contract is binding so it is important to have all the information necessary before confirming the room. **Upon arrival, or during the stay in Iceland, if you reject the room you must find other accommodation on your own.** If a student has to leave earlier than planned, the owner of the rented property must be notified as early as possible, at least one month in advance and students cannot expect to get their insurance payment back.

The application for ***Student Housing*** is under the link *application forms* but you may also find it <http://staff.unak.is/not/runarg/umsoknfestae.pdf> . Please send the *Student Housing* application to the International Office along with your exchange application and notice that there is limited number of rooms available there. Sometime after the deadline you will receive a housing offer via e-mail. If you have not received a housing offer three weeks prior to your arrival, please feel free to contact the International Officer at the University of Akureyri, [international\(at\)unak.is](mailto:international@unak.is)

## **Deposit**

Most landlords ask for a deposit that will be refunded when moving out. However, if any damage is done to the accommodation, the landlord is allowed to withhold the sum required to repair the damage from the deposit.

## **Residence Permit and Domicile**

Any person intending to stay more than one semester in Iceland must be domiciled in the country. To register your domicile and completing the residence permit in Iceland, you will have to go to the Akureyri Municipality Office (Ráðhús) but they are a branch from the Statistical Bureau Iceland's National Registry (Þjóðskrá). You need to fill out a form for the residence permit (if needed to study in Iceland) along with your passport and other additional documents. Remember that you have to go in person to the Municipality office (National Registry) after arrival. The opening hours are between 8-16 hours.

Akureyrarbær, ráðhús (Akureyri Municipality)  
Geislagata 9  
600 Akureyri

## **Citizens of the Nordic Countries**

Citizens of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) do not need a residence permit. However, they need to sign their domicile at the Municipality office and receive the ID-number.

## **Citizens of EU/EEA Countries**

Citizens of EU/EEA countries who wish to study in Iceland can do so for one semester without a residence permit. However, after that time a residence permit is required. To complete the residence permit and sign your domicile, please go to Municipality office after arrival.

## **Non-EU/EEA Citizens**

Non-EU/EEA citizens need to apply for a residence permit. Residence permit must be acquired before entering the country. It can take up to 90 days for the Directorate to issue the residence permit. Upon arrival, international students from non-EU/EEA countries need to undergo a full physical examination.

If you need a residence permit, it is essential to communicate with International Office as UNAK has a special agreement with Immigration and can facilitate the process to ensure that it goes smoothly. This means that you must follow all instructions in detail. You can preview the necessary paperwork to obtain a residence permit at <http://utl.is/index.php/en/school> . Students should be aware that the Icelandic Immigration Authorities require documentation that proves your financial ability to support yourself during your stay in Iceland. Therefore, you must enclose with your application an official document from your bank certifying that you have the equivalent of 140.000 ISK per month for your intended stay. For further information, please contact UNAK International Office.

## **FIRST THINGS TO DO**

Living and studying away from home can be a challenging experience, particularly in the beginning of the stay. There are several formalities you need to take care of during your first days. The information provided in this chapter will hopefully assist you to adjust to the new circumstances in Iceland.

## **Orientation Day**

International students begin their studies at UNAK with an orientation programme which is normally in the beginning of regular teaching. During the orientation day international students will have the opportunity to meet each other as well as the staff that are involved in International matters at UNAK. At the Orientation Programme, you will:

- Receive a school ID number
- Get access to the UNAK computer facilities and an e-mail address
- Get information on the services that the school provides
- Be able to speak to the international representatives from the student union
- Become familiar with the Universities' intranet (Ugla)
- Receive assistance on selecting your courses

It is required and quite important to attend the Orientation day as it makes it easier for you to settle in at a new place.

## **Icelandic ID Number**

It is essential for all students to receive an Icelandic identification number upon arrival. The ID number is necessary if you want to register as a student, open a bank account, rent a movie, use the public library, etc. To simplify things, the International Office will assist you with receiving the ID number. At the Orientation Day please bring your passport (or a good photocopy of it). Please remember that this is just an application for an ID number not a residence permit application. The International Office will announce when the ID number has been received via e-mail.

## **Access Card**

UNAK provides all students with an access card for free. The access card gives students access to the school premises 24 hours a day. After receiving the ID number you can go to the Computer Support Service (at the Library) to have your photograph taken for the access card or send them a photo at [kort@unak.is](mailto:kort@unak.is). Student cards provide access to the school buildings; act as library cards as well as cards for the copy machines/printers and a student union card.

## **Your Exchange Programme**

All international students at UNAK are given a warm welcome by the International Office as well as by their buddies. Students are advised to attend our orientation programme, which is scheduled on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, at the same day as regular class starts. During the orientation, you will not only get to know other international students, but you will receive important information about your academic stay at UNAK.

## **Introduction to Iceland**

The Student Union at UNAK organizes one trip each semester especially for exchange students, e.g. river rafting, mountain hiking, 'Réttir', which consist of gathering sheep, trip to Mývatn. Field trips are also organized within the courses *Icelandic Nature* and *Icelandic Community, History and Culture*.

Do not forget that you are ambassadors of your university at UNAK. In order to adapt to the academic standards at UNAK, please read the following section carefully.

## **ABOUT THE ACADEMIC STUDIES AT UNAK**

In this chapter you will be able to find some useful information concerning the academic studies at UNAK.

### **Academic Calendar**

The academic year is divided into two semesters, fall and spring. The fall semester starts around August 20th and ends around December 15<sup>th</sup>. There is an exam period during the last weeks of the semester. Repeating exams for the fall semester are at the beginning of January. Therefore we urge you to count on this before buying your return ticket home over Christmas. The spring semester begins around January 3<sup>rd</sup> and ends around May 15<sup>th</sup>. Repeating exams for the spring semester are at the end of May. UNAK has a two week vacation at Christmas and a one week vacation at Easter time. The 2016 - 2017 academic calendar can be found at <http://english.unak.is/about/moya/page/calendar> .

### **Course Catalogue**

The course catalogue for all courses is available on the UNAK's website at [https://ugla.unak.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=leit&kennsluar=2017&kennslutungumal=7&adeins\\_kenndnamskeid=on&senda=senda](https://ugla.unak.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=leit&kennsluar=2017&kennslutungumal=7&adeins_kenndnamskeid=on&senda=senda)

### **ECTS Credits and Grades**

ECTS credits are applied at UNAK for academic recognition purposes. Most courses at UNAK are 6 ECTS credits. The maximum number of credits that can be taken for each semester is 36 ECTS. As a general rule, grades are given on a scale of 0 -10, where passing grades are 5 and above.

### **Workload**

At UNAK 30 ECTS credits is the regular fulltime workload for a period of 16 weeks. Please be aware that taking more than the fulltime workload will demand a lot of your time and may be difficult if you also want to travel and enjoy student life to the fullest.

### **Language of Instruction**

The principal language of instruction is Icelandic. Each semester a number of courses are taught in English. Textbooks are mainly in English and Icelandic.

### **Teaching and Learning Methods**

UNAK's instructional approach is characterized by lively interaction between teacher and student, opportunities for cooperative learning, and ultimately, teamwork. Teaching is normally based on lectures which are 45 minutes long. For each course there are 3-4 lectures per week.

Lectures are not very formal and students are encouraged to ask questions and aid class discussion through comments and observations. In most courses, students are required to hand in outside assignments in addition to taking a final exam. Due to the fact that many of these outside assignments are based on group work, UNAK students are expected to collaborate and contribute to the success of the group in an equal and scholarly manner.

While class attendance may not be compulsory in all courses, it is highly valued and is sometimes worth up to some percentage of the final grade. One should be aware that there is a strong positive correlation between class attendance and achievement.

## **Access to Instructors**

The relationship between student and instructor is generally informal and students should address their instructors by their first name. Student access to the instructor outside of the classroom is excellent. Consultation hours are generally held once a week. However, if a student needs to reach his instructor, he can do so by sending the instructor an e-mail and request a meeting.

## **Books**

Faculty members at UNAK require all students to buy the textbook for each course. You can obtain some of your books from the Pennin/Bókval Bookstore or Amazon online. Academic books are expensive in Iceland, so be prepared to pay a significant amount of money for books each semester. Students may opt to save money by purchasing used books from other students either by replying to ads posted at the University or by contacting the student union.

## **Scholarships**

UNAK does not offer scholarships to international students. However, the scholarships through the Erasmus and Nordplus programmes will cover some of the cost of studying in Iceland.

## **Icelandic Language Courses**

An Intensive Icelandic Language Course is offered in August each year. International students who are interested to participate can apply through the Office of International Education. Further information about the course and prerequisite are at the website <http://ask.hi.is/page/ilpc>. **It is also possible for international students to attend an Icelandic language course at UNAK during their studies.** This course is offered during the fall and spring semesters. International students also have the option to learn Icelandic online in a self-study course that is free of charge at the website <http://www.icelandic.hi.is>. It is valuable to learn the basics of the Icelandic language as it will become much easier to understand the culture and participate in everyday life.

## **Student Service Desk**

The Student Service Desk is located in Miðborg (main entrance). It is open from 08:00 -16:00 on weekdays. The Student Service Desk can provide information regarding students study progress, certificates of study, and all other general information.

## **Study Facilities**

Teaching is conducted in two buildings at University of Akureyri campus (Norðurslóð) called Sólborg and Borgir, in a unique university campus area in the heart of the town of Akureyri. Facilities for study intended for reading and home study are situated at Sólborg Library and in Solborg section O. University buildings are normally open from 07:30 to 22:00 hrs. However at the inception of study, students receive smart cards giving them access to the reading and work facilities at all hours.

At Sólborg there is a cafeteria where staff and students can sit down when they have the time and chat over a cup of coffee. During work days the cafeteria offers hot meals at noon and in the afternoon there is always something tasty with the coffee. The cafeteria is open workdays from 8:00 - 15:30 hrs.

## **Library and information services at UNAK**

The library is situated in spacious housing at Sólborg where there are facilities for reading and computer use. It is a research library and tailors its purchases of material mostly according to the requirements of the



university faculties and the research conducted at the University. At the library students have access to work rooms equipped with computers. The library is open from 8:00 to 18:00 hrs. all work days and Saturdays from 12:00 - 15:00 hrs.

### **Computer Facilities**

At UNAK there are two computer labs (library and classroom K203). Lap top ownership among students is growing rapidly and students can access the Internet through a wireless network. Username and password for the wireless network is provided at orientation day but the university is using Eduroam as a wireless server. On the university's intranet, students have access to information on courses in which they are enrolled, including all lecture overheads and audio lectures, where applicable, projects and discussion topics. Personnel of the computer and media centre are available for assistance and advice during office hours at the library reception, workdays from 8:00 - 16:00 hrs.

### **Printing and Photocopying**

Students can buy a printing quota for each semester at the library reception or at the service desk. The photocopy machines are also printers and are located on each floor in the building. You use your school ID card (also smart card) to log on to the printer.

### **Fitness and Exercise Room**

For those interested in improving their health and wellbeing there is a fitness and exercise centre at Sólborg. The centre is open Monday to Friday from 07:30 - 14:00 hrs. and from 16:00 - 21:30 hrs. The centre is closed during class hours.

### **Student Counsellor Service**

University studies demand independent work habits and analytical thinking. Student counsellor specializes in helping students improve their study methods and efficiency. It also helps students to increase awareness of their abilities, opinions, and interests so they can be used effectively in academia and in the workplace. Students are invited to stop by UNAK's student counsellor office to find utilize these services and for more information.

### **UNAK International Office**

International students that have the opportunity to study at the University of Akureyri for one semester (or one year) will receive assistance through UNAK's International Office. The International Coordinator and the only staff member at the office is:

Rúnar Gunnarsson  
Solborg, v/Nordurslóð, E-228  
Tel. +354 460 8035  
e-mail: [international@unak.is](mailto:international@unak.is)

UNAK's International Office carries out international cooperation matters. It is responsible for administering the exchange programmes concerning student and teaching staff mobility, as well as helping incoming and outgoing students in solving practical, administrative and educational matters during their study period.

### **International Fair**

An International fair is held once a year, final Thursday in October each year. At the International fair, international students are asked to present their country and their university to UNAK students. We would appreciate if you could bring some introduction material concerning your university and your country with you.

## **The Student Union**

The University of Akureyri has a very active student union, called FSHA "Félag Stúdenta við Háskólann á Akureyri". The Student Union secures the rights of its members and supports unity among students. The Student Union is comprised of eight student-interest societies from within each department of UNAK. These societies host all kind of activities such as parties, science trips, camping and road trips, sport events and much more. The Student Union at the University of Akureyri has an International contact/coordinator. The role of this coordinator is to act as a link between the exchange students and the Student Union so they are aware of what is going on in the students' social life. The Student Organization website is <http://www.fsha.is/is/foreign-students>

## **The Code of Ethics of the University of Akureyri**

UNAK emphasises academic integrity and ethical behavior from its staff and students. An important part of academic integrity is the respect for copyright and the full participation of all members in all work groups. In order to clarify our expectations in this area, we have created the The Code of Ethics of the University of Akureyri available in English:

[http://english.unak.is/static/files/English\\_files/Law\\_and\\_Regulations/Code\\_of\\_ethics\\_UNAK.pdf](http://english.unak.is/static/files/English_files/Law_and_Regulations/Code_of_ethics_UNAK.pdf)

## **Emergency**

In case of an emergency, dial 112 to reach police, ambulance or the fire department. 112 is the emergency number for the entire country.

## **Health Care**

Iceland has one of the highest standards of public health care in the world. Iceland's good health conditions are reflected in its high life expectancy rates: 79 years for men and 83 years for women.

## **Health Insurance**

The Icelandic social security system is a residence-based system. To be insured with the State Social Security Institute, (Tryggingarstofnun Ríkisins), a person must have been registered with a domicile in the National Registry for six months. Iceland is a part of the European Economic Area.

## **Citizens of the Nordic Countries**

Nordic students are automatically insured and therefore they do not need to take any actions.

## **Citizens of EU/EEA Countries**

Students from EU/EEA countries should bring with them their European Health Insurance card. Insured citizens of EEA countries are entitled to benefits which become necessary for medical purposes during a temporary stay in Iceland, taking into account the nature of the benefits and the expected length of the stay. Each person must be able to present their EHIC, personal identification papers, and documents proving their citizenship (i.e. passport) at the time of the medical visit. A fee, to be paid for each consultation and services rendered, is fixed by a regulation. EEA nationals presenting the EHIC will be charged the same fee as persons insured in Iceland. If these documents are not presented they will be charged the full costs of the treatment according to tariffs.

## **Non-EU/EEA Citizens**

A person who is not insured in Iceland or other EEA states can obtain medical assistance but must pay in full. That person can seek reimbursement from his own insurance in the country of origin or from his private insurance plan.

## **Doctors and Specialists**

Everyone insured is free to choose his or her own practitioner from amongst the registered health service practitioners. The general practitioner you choose will be the doctor you should go to for routine medical care. The Akureyri Primary Health Care Centre is located downtown at Hafnarstræti 99 at floor 3-6. The entrance to the Akureyri Centre is through Hafnarstræti 97 (Krónan), either from the pedestrian zone or from Gilsbakkavegur above, where there are parking places for the disabled. Entrance can also be gained through Hafnarstræti 99 (associated with Amaró). You need to make an appointment beforehand.

If you become ill outside normal opening hours you can either go to:

Emergency Room (Slysadeild)  
Akureyri Hospital (FSA)  
Eyrarlandsvegur, 600 Akureyri  
Tel: +354 4630100

## **Pharmacies and Prescriptions**

Pharmacies (apótek) are generally open Monday – Friday: 9:00 - 18:00.

Refer to the following websites if you need service outside normal opening hours: [www.lyfja.is](http://www.lyfja.is), [www.lyfogheilsa.is](http://www.lyfogheilsa.is).

## **Dentists**

Check for dentist in the telephone directory ([www.ja.is](http://www.ja.is)) yellow pages under the heading TANNLÆKNASTOFUR. The National Health Insurance Plan does not cover dentists' charges, so you will have to pay whatever amount the dentist charges. If you need a dentist outside regular hours contact.

## **Drugs**

All dealings with illegal drugs are strictly forbidden in Iceland. The use of illegal drugs is also against the law and carries heavy penalties.

## **Cost of Living**

Estimated cost of living in Iceland is about 140.000 ISK per month per person including housing. Students should expect to pay between 45.000 and 60.000 ISK per month for a single room with access to kitchen and bathroom and at least 85.000 ISK for a small studio apartment.

## **Financial Matters**

The Icelandic monetary unit is the króna (plural:krónur). The denominations of coins in use are 1, 5, 10, 50, and 100 krónur. The denominations of the notes in use are 500, 1000, 2000, and 5000 krónur. One Euro (€) is roughly equivalent to 160 ISK. For accurate information on the exchange rate go to [www.sedlabanki.is](http://www.sedlabanki.is) (The Central Bank of Iceland).

## **Banks and Account**

The leading Icelandic banks are: Landsbanki Íslands, Arion Bank and Íslandsbanki. Banking hours are generally 9:15 -16:00. Banks are closed during the weekends. Many foreign students choose to keep most of their money, at least to begin with, in a foreign currency account, which is a service provided by most banks. Apart from that, it is recommended to open a bank account with a debit card (debetkort). To open such an account, you will need your ID number and your passport. You should also bring two passport photos. You can pay directly with a debit card in most shops and services and you can withdraw money in banks or at automatic teller machines (ATMs) by using your PIN number.

## **Credit Cards**

The major credit cards in Iceland are VISA, Eurocard/Mastercard, and American Express. They are widely used and accepted throughout the country, whereas other credit cards are less known. You can also use your credit card to withdraw money on banks and at ATMs if you have a PIN number. In the event that you lose your debit or credit cards, you should contact your bank immediately to have your cards closed. The telephone service provided by the credit card companies outside normal banking hours is:

VISA Tel : 525 2000

Eurocard/Mastercard Tel: 533 1400

## **Shopping**

### **Food**

Iceland has a variety of food stores with different offerings, prices, and opening hours. Food sold in supermarkets is, on the whole, comparatively cheaper than food sold in smaller shops. The main supermarkets are Hagkaup, Bónus and Nettó. Bónus and Nettó are by far the cheapest.

General shopping hours in Akureyri are:  
Monday - Friday 9:00/10:00-18:00/20:00  
Saturday: 10:00-18:00

Some shops are open later for example the 10-11 and Strax supermarkets are open until 23:00 every night. Few shops are open 24 hours a day.

### **Shopping Centres**

There is one main shopping centre in the Akureyri called Glerártorg.

### **Buses**

The Akureyri Bus Company (SVA) run busses that have routes up to the University buildings. THE BUSESS ARE FOR FREE!!! Further information is available at Bus Central downtown or visit:  
<http://www.straeto.is/media/toflur/akureyri.pdf>

### **Bicycles**

It is possible to buy a good second hand bicycle at a low cost, which would certainly save you money in bus fares. Even so, this healthy form of travel is not as popular among students in Iceland as it is with students in most other countries. The weather (often wet and windy) might have something to do with it! Our previous international students recommend this store for a cheap bicycle:

Skíðabjónustan; Fjölhnisgata 4b; 462-1713

The Police station have sometimes auction on used bicycles that are left behind.

### **Taxi**

A taxi (leigubíll) can be obtained by phone or on the street. Taxis are clean and reliable, but expensive. Tips are not customary in Iceland as bills always include service charges. There is only one station in Akureyri:

BSO, Tel: 461 1010

### **Driving**

If you buy or rent a car, you may drive with your international driver's license for one year from the date of entry into the country. The roads in Iceland are not always in the best condition, especially in the countryside. In the winter time, they can become very slippery and sometimes they become blocked by snow. For information on road conditions go to <http://www.vegagerdin.is/English>. Icelandic cars are, however, well equipped for these conditions so you shouldn't be afraid to drive. Be sure you never drive your rented car on roads where the car is not insured.

### **Telephones and the Internet**

Mobile phones are widely used in Iceland and most students have their own phone. Students can bring their own mobile phones to Iceland and purchase a prepaid phone card. The major telephone companies are Síminn, Vodafone and Nova. All these companies have a store located in Glerártorg Shopping Mall.

There are two types of public telephones in Iceland: coin-operated and card operated. A telephone card (símakort) can be bought at all post offices and telephone stations. Phone call charges in Iceland vary greatly depending on the time of day, the day of the week, and the distance of your call.

The Internet and e-mail is used extensively in Iceland and have become one of the main communication routes in the past few years. You will be able to access the Internet for free at UNAK (**the username and password for access are provided during orientation day**) and you can make free picture-call through [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com).

### **Newspapers**

Morgunblaðið and Fréttablaðið are the daily newspapers in Iceland. Fréttablaðið is free of charge. You can read them online as well at: <http://www.mbl.is> and [www.visir.is](http://www.visir.is). Newspapers in English can be found at: <http://www.mbl.is/mm/frettir/english/>. We also recommend: <http://www.grapevine.is/Home/> and <http://icelandreview.com/>.

### **Laundry**

In all accommodations, students have access to a washing machine. Dry clean services are easily found in Akureyri. It is also possible to have your laundry washed for you (charge per kilo) in some washing and cleaning services.

### **FACTS ABOUT ICELAND**

Iceland, which is the second largest island in Europe (103.000 sq.km.), lies in the North Atlantic Ocean. The country is crossed by the Arctic Circle, which passes through the island of Grímsey, Iceland's northernmost point. Geologically, Iceland is a young country. It has about 200 volcanoes of almost every type. Volcanic activity has been frequent since the 1960s. A new island, Surtsey was formed south of the mainland in

1963, and a major eruption took place in 1973 when a volcano in the Westman Islands erupted lava over the town of Heimaey.

Iceland has a modern European economy with strong foundations in fisheries, natural renewable energy sources, and human capital that will allow Iceland to overcome its economic difficulties, like so many other countries around the world. Iceland is a republic that has a written constitution and a parliamentary form of government. The president is elected by direct popular vote for a term of four years, with no term limit. Most executive power rests with the Government, which is elected separately from the presidential election every four years.

Iceland was the last European country to be settled, mostly by Norsemen in the 9th and 10th centuries. These Norsemen came largely from Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia, as well as from the Norse settlements in the British Isles, which introduced a Celtic element. The language and culture of Iceland were predominantly Scandinavian from the outset, but there are traces of Celtic influence in some of the ancient poetry, in some personal names, and in the appearance of present-day Icelanders.

The environment in Iceland is truly unique. Iceland is a large country (103,000 km<sup>2</sup>, about the same surface area as Ireland or the State of Virginia), but is sparsely populated, with only 3 persons per km<sup>2</sup> living mostly along the coast. The interior of the country contains stunning contrasts. It is largely an arctic desert, punctuated with mountains, glaciers, volcanoes and waterfalls. Most of the vegetation and agricultural areas are in the lowlands close to the coastline. (<http://www.iceland.is/country-and-nature/>)

### **The Earliest Settlements**

The earliest settlements in Iceland, dating from the early eight century A.D., seem to be those of Irish hermits, reputed to have fled the island upon the arrival of pagan Norwegians. The first Norwegian settlement, led by Ingólfur Arnarson, dates from 874 and was located on the site of present-day Reykjavik. The number of new settlers increased toward the end of the century. The earliest settlers came from countries and districts where the Vikings had been dominant for centuries: the west coast of Norway, Ireland, Scotland, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, and Hebrides. Danes and Swedes came as well. The settlement of Iceland was followed by the discovery of Greenland and ultimately Vínland (Newfoundland or mainland North America).

### **Alþingi – The Icelandic Parliament**

Alþingi was established at Þingvellir (about 40 km east of Reykjavik) in 930 A.D., the date that marks the foundation of the Icelandic state. Ever since, Alþingi has been the primary symbol of Iceland's national identity. Alþingi was a national parliament and high court, and adopted a general system of law for the whole country. This oldest code of law was based partly on the laws which were then in force in the Gulaping district of Norway.

### **Climate and Clothing**

Although Iceland lies close to the Arctic Circle it is, despite its name, comparatively warm. Due to the Gulf Stream, the climate during the winter is milder than in many countries in northern Europe.

### **The average temperatures for January is -0.4°C and for July 11.2°C.**

It often rains, especially during the summer, but usually not for long periods of time. Iceland also tends to be rather windy, with gales being quite common during the winter. Thunderstorms, however, are extremely rare. It does snow during the winter, but the tourist guides tell you that it does not often stay white for long in Reykjavik. Overall, the weather in Iceland is very unpredictable. There are many old sayings such as "If you don't like the weather, wait a minute." Although arctic- type clothing is not needed in Iceland, one must be prepared for everything. All Icelandic homes and public buildings are very well heated, but one should think about bringing the following: good, strong walking shoes; a warm coat that is wind and rain-proof; a

scarf, gloves, and hat; and both lightweight and thick woollen jumpers (sweaters). A swimming suit is also a good idea because there are many well-heated swimming pools throughout the country. The abundance of geothermal heated water makes outdoor swimming a popular year-round activity.

## The Icelandic Language

Icelandic (íslenska) is the native language of Iceland. It belongs to the West Scandinavian group of North Germanic languages. It is the same language spoken by the original Norse settlers from western Norway in the ninth and tenth centuries with, of course, the addition of modern vocabulary. Icelandic borrowed words from Celtic, Latin, the Romance languages, and especially Danish.

## The Alphabet

The Icelandic Alphabet consists of 32 letters, 10 of which are uniquely Icelandic:

Á á like "ow" in cow  
Ð ð like "th" in brother  
É é like "ye" in yes  
Í í like "ee" in bee  
Ó ó like "o" in no  
Ú ú like "ou" in you  
Þ þ like "th" in thoughts  
Æ æ like "i" in wife  
Ý ý like "ee" in bee  
Ö ö like "i" in bird  
AU au like "eui" in the French word feuille

## Icelandic Lesson

This glossary gives you the basic vocabulary you need when a) meeting people and b) you go shopping.

a)

Good morning = góðan dag  
Good Evening = gott kvöld  
Good Night = góða nótt  
Good-Bye = bless  
Thank you = takk fyrir  
My name is = ég heiti  
What is your name? = hvað heitir þú?  
How much? = hvað kostar?  
Where is? = hvar er?  
Cheers = skál  
Sorry = fyrirgefðu

b)

Beef = nautakjöt  
Lamb = lambakjöt  
Chicken = kjúklingur  
Minced meat = nautahakk  
Whole milk = mjólk  
Low fat milk = léttmjólk  
Yoghurt = jógúrt  
Cheese = ostur  
Bread = brauð  
Beer = bjór  
Soft drinks = gos

## TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

Icelanders have many traditions and customs. Some are considered very enjoyable by foreigners while others are considered very strange. Here you can find some information on a few of them.

## Icelandic Names

Only about 10 percent of Icelanders have family or surnames. These are mostly of Danish origin or adapted from Danish. Others use a system of patronymic. That is to say, instead of a family name, the first name of the father is used with -son or -dóttir suffixed. Thus, Jónsson means the son of Jón, and Jónsdóttir means the daughter of Jón. It is even possible to be called the daughter or son of one's mother; for example, Vigdísardóttir or Vigdísarson. People always address one another by their first name, as this is their personal identification; the patronymic identifies one's father. It is even acceptable to address President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson as President Ólafur Ragnar when speaking to him. In telephone directories, people are listed by their first names. In libraries, books in the sections devoted to Icelandic authors are arranged under the author's first name.

### **Icelandic National Dishes**

There are many popular and delicious Icelandic dishes, some of which are very old. The dinner at Christmas may be hangikjöt (smoked lamb), served with pickled red cabbage and potatoes in white sauce. Rjúpur (ptarmigans) are also common on the Christmas table. Svartfugl (guillemot) and Lundi (puffin) are also traditional meals. A favorite form of hangikjöt is cold cuts on flatkökur (rye pancakes) or on seytt brauð (rye bread baked slowly). Harðfiskur (air-dried fish fillet) is also very popular. A milk product from the time of the settlers is skyr and it belongs to the same group as yogurt. Skyr is considered very healthy and is quite popular amongst young people.

### **Public Holidays**

January 1, New Year's Day  
Holy Thursday  
Good Friday  
Easter Sunday  
Easter Monday  
First day of Summer, the third Thursday in April  
May 1, Labour Day  
Ascension Day  
White Sunday  
White Monday  
June 17, Independence Day  
First Monday in August, Bank Holiday  
December 25, Christmas Day  
December 26, Boxing Day

### **Dates of Interest**

January 6 is Þrettándinn: This is the last day of Christmas. On this day, Icelanders take down the Christmas lights, throw out the Christmas tree, and many go to a bonfire where there is singing and dancing. There is an old belief that on this day the elves move to a new place of residence and during that time they can be seen by men. In Western Christianity, Lent is the period from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday (forty days). Although Icelanders don't celebrate Lent anymore, there are three days before Lent starts that are celebrated. These days are Bolludagur, Sprengidagur and Öskudagur. These three days are consecutive, starting with Bolludagur and ending with Öskudagur. Öskudagur (Ash Wednesday) can fall anywhere between February 4 and March 10.

**Bolludagur** (Shrove Monday) is two days before the old traditional lent starts. On this day all the bakeries are full with all sorts of buns filled with jam and whipped cream, which Icelanders eat a whole lot of.

**Sprengidagur** (Shrove Tuesday) is the day before the old traditional lent starts. The tradition requires that you eat salted lamb and beans until you are about to burst.



**Öskudagur** (Ash Wednesday) is the day after Sprengidagur. On this day all the children will dress up in costumes, go from one shop to another, and sing a song in hope of getting some sweets in return.

The first Sunday in June is known as **Sjómannadagurinn (Fisherman's day)**. This day is celebrated in honor of all of Iceland's fishermen. Every town that has a port celebrates with games, barbecues, and there usually is at least one ship that can take people for a short cruise.

**June 17 is Iceland's Independence Day.** Interestingly enough, Iceland became independent a little before June 17, but it was decided to celebrate independence on this day to in honor of Jón Sigurðsson's birthday, the man that fought the most for Iceland's independence. This day is celebrated all over the country and there are various outdoor entertainment programmes, including concerts, parades, speeches, games etc.

**Advent** begins four Sundays before Christmas. Upon commencement, the tradition is to take out the Advent candlesticks and light one candle each Sunday until Christmas. During Advent, Icelanders get into the Christmas cheer. They decorate their houses (some decorate more than others), buy Christmas presents, and bake Christmas cookies.

Christmas is celebrated by most Icelanders. Although **Christmas Eve** is not a holiday, this is the main day when celebrating Icelandic Christmas. On Christmas Eve, Icelanders enjoy good food with their families and later in the evening open all the Christmas presents. On **Christmas Day** and **Boxing Day** most Icelanders visit their extended families.

It is always fun to be in Iceland on **New Year's Eve**. After enjoying a nice meal, Icelanders go outside to light some firecrackers for the kids. Around ten o'clock everyone gets back inside to watch a comedy on TV, where Icelandic comedians make fun of everything that has happened in the past year. When the comedy is finished, everyone goes back outside to light some more firecrackers and for a few hours. At midnight the sky lights up as everyone lights their biggest rockets all at once.

Icelanders are usually very informal and easy going. However, there are a few unwritten rules you need to keep in mind when you come to Iceland.

### **To shake or not to shake hands...**

When you meet your peers (e.g. another student) it is not custom to shake hands, however, if you are going to meet someone over business (e.g. at a job interview) or if you find yourself in a formal situation with someone, you should shake hands with that person.

### **Don't be late**

When you are going to work or school, be on time! It is considered impolite to be late on those occasions. However, Icelanders are a little bit more relaxed in the social arena and it is not considered impolite if you are fashionably late.

### **Don't smoke**

Smoking is not allowed in public areas. There are some cafés that allow smoking in certain areas, however, the number of restaurants and cafés that ban smoking all together is increasing. If you are in someone's home, it is custom to go outside to smoke.

### **Take your shoes off**

Icelanders normally don't wear their shoes in their homes, especially during winter. A general rule is to start taking off your shoes until you are told not to do so.

## **Pay for yourself**

Due to high prices in restaurants and pubs, Icelanders pay their own way when going out for a meal or a drink.

## **Tipping**

TIPS ARE NOT CUSTOMARY IN ICELAND AS THE BILL ALWAYS INCLUDES SERVICE CHARGES.

## **LEISURE ACTIVITIES**

### **Information Centre**

A good way to start finding out about where to go and what to do is to inquire at the local Tourist Information Centre, which is now located in Hof- Cultural house, Strandgata 12, 600 Akureyri (<http://www.meningarhus.is/is/english>). Visitor guides, maps, special activities, and other pertinent information are available at the centre. You can of course also look for information on the Internet. More information can also be found at <http://www.visitakureyri.is/en>

### **Akureyri Intercultural Centre**

The Intercultural-center is located at Akureyri's town hall (Ráðhús), at Geislagata 9, 600 Akureyri, s: 460-1095, [astofan@akureyri.is](mailto:astofan@akureyri.is), <http://www.akureyri.is/english>

Open hours are:

Mondays: 08:00-12.00

Tuesday: 12:00 -16:00

Wednesdays: 08:00-16:00

Thursdays: 08:00-16:00, a polish-speaking counsellor

Fridays: 12:00 - 16:00

### **Pubs, Cafés and Restaurants**

The number of cafés and pubs in Akureyri is increasing. They are usually open on weekdays until 01:00. On weekends, many are open until at least 03:00. Restaurants in Iceland are rather expensive. However, in the last few years, many restaurants offering oriental food have opened and provide good food at low prices. There are also vegetarian restaurants that are inexpensive. More info on <http://www.visitakureyri.is/en>

### **Galleries, Museums, Theatres and Culture**

The newest addition to the cultural life in Akureyri is Hof- Cultural and Conference Centre. There are a lot of galleries and museums in Akureyri and Eyjafjörður area. To have more information on that please see list of galleries, museums, theatres and culture at: <http://www.visitakureyri.is/places-to-go/culture/>

### **Cinemas**

There are two cinemas in Akureyri downtown, Borgarbíó and Nýja-Bíó. Most of the movies shown in the cinemas are American-English movies with original sound/speech and Icelandic subtitles.

## Library

Akureyri towns library (Amtsbókasafn Akureyrar) is located in Brekkugata 17, tel. 460-1250, e-mail: [bokasafn@akureyri.is](mailto:bokasafn@akureyri.is). Opening hours 10.00-19.00 on weekdays and 12.00-17.00 on Saturday.

## Swimming

The Icelandic swimming pools have been used throughout the years as community centers. If you go for a swim, you can see Icelanders sitting in the hot tubs discussing politics, culture, or life in general. Going for a swim is a cheap and healthy exercise and is a great way to meet new people. All public swimming pools are heated as the water comes from natural hot springs. Many pools have hot tubs and saunas available as well. Closing time means that admission closes, but guests may remain in the pool for another 30 minutes.

### Sundlaug Akureyrar, 21 Þingvallarstræti

Opening hours: Winter (31.8 - 31.5): Weekdays: 6.45-21:00, Weekends: 10:00-18:30

### Glerárlaug, Höfðahlíð

Opening hours: Winter (1.9 - 31.5): Weekdays: 06.45-08.00 and 17.30-21.00, Weekends: 09.00-14.30

## Skiing

Eyjafjörður Fjord is one of the best places in Iceland for cross-country and downhill skiing. Akureyri's ski slopes, which are on mountain Hlíðarfjall, 5 km above the town, are in many ways unique. Their elevation ranges from 500 m to 1000 m above sea level, and there is therefore plenty of snow during the winter. For opening hours in Hlíðarfjall visit [opening hours](#). For further information please see also: <http://www.visitakureyri.is/places-to-go/activities/nr/10721>

## Other activity

### Bowling

The bowling "Keilan Akureyri" is located in Hafnarstræti 26 and in the same building you can find the restaurant "Kaffi Jónsson". Tel. 461-1126. Opening hours: every day from 11.00 until 23.30 hrs.

### Skate-rink

The rink is located at Naustavegur 1 and is open from the beginning of september until middle of may. Tel. 461-2440.

### Guided trips from Akureyri

The SBA-Norðurleið company is one of the largest bus companies in Iceland with about 60 busses. The company offers different tours and excursions in the north of Iceland, e.g. Mývatn, Húsavík (whale-tours), Ásbjrgi, Dettifoss etc. For more information please see <http://www.english.sba.is/>

For further activities in Akureyri and surrounding areas please see: <http://www.visitakureyri.is/en/things-to-do>

## Important Sources of Information

| Institution                         | Phone number | E-mail   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| University of Akureyri              | 460-8035     | <a href="mailto:unak@unak.is">unak@unak.is</a>           |
| The State Social Security Institute | 560 4400     | <a href="mailto:tr@tr.is">tr@tr.is</a>                   |
| Immigration Office                  | 510 5400     | <a href="mailto:utl@utl.is">utl@utl.is</a>               |
| Internal Revenue Office             | 563 1100     | <a href="mailto:rsk@skattur.is">rsk@skattur.is</a>       |
| National Health Service             | 560 4400     | <a href="mailto:upplýsingar@tr.is">upplýsingar@tr.is</a> |

Statistical Bureau  
Police - Ambulance - Fire alarm

528 1000  
112

[upplysingar@hagstofa.is](mailto:upplysingar@hagstofa.is)

## Useful websites

### Travelling

SBA-Norðurleið (bus company) - <http://www.english.sba.is/>  
Icelandic Tourist Board - <http://www.visiticeland.com>  
BSÍ bus tours - [www.bsi.is](http://www.bsi.is)  
Destination Iceland - <http://www.dice.is/>  
Hostelling in Iceland - <http://www.hostel.is/>  
Iceland - <http://www.interknowledge.com/iceland/>  
Iceland Explorer - <http://www.explorer.is/>  
Icetourist - <http://www.icetourist.is>  
NAT.is - travel guide - <http://nat.is/>  
Rent a Car in Iceland - <http://www.travelnet.is>  
Reykjavik Excursion - special interest tours - <http://www.re.is/>  
Carpooling in Iceland - <http://www.samferda.is/>  
Weather Forecast for Iceland - <http://www.vedur.is/>  
Road Conditions and Weather - <http://www.vegagerdin.is/english>

### Things to do in Akureyri and Reykjavik

Akureyri – practical information and events – <http://www.visitakureyri.is/>  
Reykjavik - practical information and events - <http://www.visitreykjavik.is/>  
Reykjavik - practical information and events - <http://www.reykjavik.com>  
What's on in Iceland - <http://www.whatson.is/>  
The Reykjavik Grapevine - <http://www.grapevine.is>  
Daily News from Iceland - Iceland Review - <http://icelandreview.com/>