



Iceland 2012 Crime and Safety Report

Stolen items; Assault; Theft; Drug Trafficking; Winter weather; Volcanoes; Transportation Security

Europe > Iceland > Reykjavik

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

Iceland suffered a severe economic downturn in 2008 that caused a relatively minor up-tick in general crime. Based on information from the Icelandic National Police for 2001-2010 (www.logreglan.is), local news sources, and previous reporting, crime in Iceland is comparatively lower than in many developed countries. This is partly due to a high standard of living, a small population, and a well-trained and educated police force. Even though Iceland has a relatively low crime rate, minor assaults, automobile break-ins, and other street crimes do occur, especially in Reykjavik. American Citizen Services (ACS) at Embassy Reykjavik reports they did not issue any replacement U.S. passports due to theft in 2010 or 2011. The majority of the assaults/crimes against persons, property damage, and street crimes are attributed to juveniles. According to police, pick-pocketing increased due to an influx of Eastern European immigrants, mainly Poles, Romanians, and Lithuanians.

Road Safety

Though Iceland has a somewhat modern highway system, roads are not constructed for speed. Many roads outside of the main highway system are unpaved and use gravel. The primary risk factors are single lane bridges, unexpected animal crossings in rural areas, lack of shoulder space, loose gravel roads, and icy road conditions during winter months (October to April).

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

The threat of political violence is minimal. In January 2009, there were several demonstrations/disturbances in front of the Parliament, the Althingi, due to the economic



downturn and the Israeli military operation in Gaza. During one demonstration, several hundred demonstrators marched to the U.S. Embassy but dispersed after the organizers passed a letter with their grievances to the political section. These demonstrators were upset about economic conditions in Iceland and the U.S. support for Israel during the Israeli incursion into Gaza. There have been no large-scale manifestations since that time.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

There is no known domestic terrorist threat against Americans in Iceland. There is also no known activity regarding regional terrorist organizations.

There are some minor organized crime groups that the police have identified as being Eastern European. The Icelandic Hell's Angels chapter was approved by the Norwegian Hell's Angels. Prior to the Icelandic Hell's Angels inaugural celebration, the National Security Unit (NSU) used their preventive measures in the Schengen agreement to close the Icelandic borders and prevented the Norwegian Hell's Angels members from coming to Iceland.

International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

According to the police and the NSU, there is no known international or transnational terrorist threat against Americans in Iceland. However, Iceland is one of 25 European countries that are party to the Schengen Agreement, which eliminates all internal border controls between them. Once you enter one Schengen country, you may travel continuously for up to 90 days within the member countries. Within the Schengen area, you do not show your passport when crossing country borders. This lack of border control can facilitate the movement of international terrorists.

Civil Unrest

The prospect for civil unrest is extremely low to non-existent. There are occasional demonstrations in front of the Althingi, mainly due to the economic crisis that Iceland suffered in 2008-2009. Though generally non-violent, they have pelted the parliament with paint, eggs, and garbage, as was seen in October 2011 during the opening of Parliament. The Embassy has also seen a number of relatively minor protests over the last year, but these demonstrations have been non-violent.

Post-Specific Concerns



Environmental Hazards

Weather conditions should be taken into consideration when traveling in Iceland. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are common. In April 2010, the Eyjafjallajokull volcano located in the Eyjafjallajokull glacier erupted. The ash plume from the crater reached up to 20,000 ft., effecting trans-Atlantic flights. Airports in Iceland and throughout Europe were closed, causing great disruptions in air traffic and effecting millions of passengers. In May 2011, the Grimsvotn volcano located in the Vatnajokull glacier erupted. The ash plume from the crater reached up to 30,000 ft., effecting trans-Atlantic flights. Again, airports throughout Europe were closed.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

As a modern developed country, Iceland has excellent HAZMAT response to industrial accidents. Iceland also has a well-established and respected search and rescue (SAR) system.

Kidnappings

There are no known threats of organized kidnapping in Iceland for either political or monetary motives.

Drug and Narco-terrorism

A disturbing trend includes an increase in the cultivation of marijuana for domestic consumption, along with drug smugglers attempting to use Iceland as a transshipment point for narcotic smuggling from EU countries to the U.S. and Canada. Iceland has a homegrown marijuana industry, which has increased its production to meet demand. The Hell's Angels have been linked with the manufacture of methamphetamine, money laundering, and extortion in Denmark, according to the Icelandic National Police, narcotics division. Icelandic criminal cases in 2011 indicate that members of Hell's Angels and other prospective motorcycle gangs, such as the Black Pistons, are involved in extortion, narcotics, and violent crime.

Police Response

Police response is outstanding. The Icelandic Police (the Logreglan), including the Metropolitan Police in Reykjavik and the National Police, are professional organizations that use modern equipment and techniques in preventing and investigating crime. As of February 2010, Iceland had 661 police officers with the vast majority, 95 percent, unarmed. A significant



issue for the police is an anticipated 5-15 percent cut in budget that may lead to cuts in personnel. Incidents of police harassment or corruption are almost non-existent.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Complaints can be filed with the National Commissioner's Office of the Icelandic National Police.

Where to Turn for Assistance if you Become a Victim of a Crime and Local Police Telephone Numbers

The police emergency number is 112; a victimized person may also visit a local police station for assistance.

Medical Emergencies

Emergency medical services can be obtained easily and timely by dialing 112. All operators speak English. To obtain non-emergency medical assistance in the Reykjavik metropolitan area, dial 544-4114 during business hours. Outside of normal business hours, dial 1770. The nurse who answers will offer advice on how to handle the problem, suggest that the patient come to an after-hours clinic, or send a physician to make a house call. For information on after-hours dental care, call 575-0505.

Air Ambulance Services

Patient transport by air is of great importance because of its many sparsely populated areas, long distances, and transportation difficulties during the winter. Until a few years ago, individual doctors contacted the most suitable aircraft company without any formal arrangements for the provision of on-call services.

The Ministry of Health and Social Security (MHSS) has contracted out air emergency services since 2001. The service for the western, northern, and eastern part of the country is centered in Akureyri in the north, where the second largest hospital is located. There is one dedicated air ambulance plane in Iceland. The plane is well-equipped and capable of transporting two patients on stretchers and is manned with an EMT-I or EMT-P from Akureyri Fire and Rescue Service and a physician, if needed, from University Hospital in Akureyri (or the local health authority).



When ordinary airplanes cannot be used, the Icelandic Coast Guard emergency helicopters are available. The Coast Guard operates two rescue helicopters (Aerospatiale Super Puma) based in Reykjavík. Their primary mission is search and rescue, both off shore and on land. Both helicopters have a rescue winch and are capable of Instrument Flight Rules (IFR). They are staffed by two pilots, a rescue technician, navigator, and a physician.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

The usual common sense security tips that apply to any large American city apply in Reykjavik and in Iceland in general:

Always try to be aware of your surroundings, especially in highly populated areas or in situations where you are time or place predictable.

When traveling, never leave personal items unattended and be suspicious of individuals who offer to assist you with your luggage.

Carry traveler's checks or plan to withdraw money from an ATM machine rather than carry large amounts of cash with you.

Do not flaunt cash or jewelry and leave unnecessary credit cards and other items at home or locked in a safe.

Carry identification at all times and secure ID and valuables in an inner pocket, preferably one with a zipper.

Carry purses and handbags with the flap or zipper side next to the body.

Always lock your vehicle and, whenever possible, park in a protected, well-lit area.

Do not leave anything visible in your vehicle's interior that would attract a thief's attention.

In hotels, utilize safe deposit boxes for your valuables and dead-bolt locks on doors.

Areas to Avoid

There are no areas of Reykjavik to avoid. The one area of concern in Reykjavik is the downtown flea market, which is usually open on weekends. Pick-pockets, either working alone



or with others, are known to work the area.

Further Information

Regional Security Officer +354-562-9100, X2289 (office), +354-693-9211 (cell), 682-2289 (IVG)

Embassy Operator +354-562-9100

Medical Unit (NONE)

Consular Affairs +354-562-9100, X2287 (office) +354-693-9203 (cell), 682-2287 (IVG)

Political/Economic Section +354-562-9100, X2294 (POL) +354-693-9212 (POL cell) 682-2294 (POL IVG) +354-562-9100 X2295 (ECON) +354-693-9213 (ECON cell) 682-2295 (ECON IVG)

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OSAC Country Council

There is no OSAC Country Council in Iceland.