



Iceland 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Rape/Sexual Violence; Other Threat / Incident; Cyber; Winter weather; Maritime; Riots/Civil Unrest; Volcanoes

Europe > Iceland; Europe > Iceland > Reykjavik

2/17/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

Crime Threats

Iceland continues its steady recovery from its 2008 economic collapse. Based on information from the Icelandic National Police, local news sources, and previous reporting, crime remains comparatively lower than in many developed countries and countries of similar size and demographics. This is partly due to a high-standard of living, a small population, and a well-trained and educated police force. General crime continues to increase slightly along with the exponential increase in tourism.

Reports of minor assaults, sexual assaults, rapes, automobile theft, vandalism, property damage, and other street crimes persist, especially in the Reykjavik metropolitan area. The majority of these crimes are attributed to juvenile delinquents, drug users, and foreign

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nationals. According to police, the rise in pickpocketing was the result of an influx of immigrants.

Police have identified evidence of minor organized crime led by groups originating in Eastern Europe. There is also a presence of outlaw biker gang organizations, including an Icelandic Hell's Angels chapter and an Outlaws chapter. Since 2013, however, authorities have increased pressure on these organizations, effectively dismantling their reach and effectiveness. Authorities have deported or excluded visiting criminal support elements from Europe with some degree of success. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) has provided additional resources in battling organized crime and has reported positive results.

Cybersecurity Issues

In June 2013, the MOI appointed a task force to address its strategy on cyber security. Its main task was to formulate government strategy in order to protect IT infrastructure elements relevant to Icelandic national security. In December 2013, Iceland suffered its first serious cyber attack when major telecommunication carrier Vodafone was hacked, and detailed personal information on hundreds of Icelanders was released on the Internet.

Early 2015 saw the servers of several small, private institutions suffering from cyber attacks, and a private missionary organization's computer network was attacked by hackers aligned with the Islamic State (ISIL).

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Later in November 2015 and again in January 2016, in a demonstration against Iceland's support of commercial whaling, the Icelandic government's public websites were attacked by the hacker collective known as "Anonymous."

Other Areas of Concern

Travel into the highlands and interior is not advisable during the winter and during inclement weather unless using well-equipped, off-road capable (4x4) vehicles under the supervision of experienced guides.

Transportation-Safety Conditions

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Though Iceland has a fairly modern highway system, roads are not constructed for speed. Many roads outside of the main highways are undeveloped and often composed of unpaved, loose gravel. The primary risk factors when driving outside of populated areas are single-lane bridges, unexpected animal crossings in rural areas, poor surface maintenance, lack of emergency lane or shoulder space, and icy/windy road conditions during the winter months (October-April). Interior roads are usually closed during the winter season. Occasionally, even main roads in more populated areas may be closed due to heavy snow. See www.vegagerdin.is/english and www.road.is for road conditions.

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Automobile use is relatively high, as Iceland possesses one of the highest ownership rates in the world, comparable to that of the U.S. This does not, however, cause much traffic congestion due to low-urban density.

Public Transportation Conditions

As a result of high vehicle ownership, demand for public transport services remains low. Public transportation is relatively underdeveloped, and many areas are poorly served compared to other capital cities. Limited but effective services are provided in major urban areas.

There are nationwide coach and bus services that link the major towns and cities, although many Icelanders use domestic flights to get from one major town to another. Strætó bs, the public bus system, operates its services in metropolitan Reykjavík, and Strætisvagnar Akureyrar is the public bus system in Akureyri.

Iceland has no rail-based public transport.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

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Iceland's aviation industry continues to expand with its two major carriers, Icelandair and Wow Air, providing service between numerous points within Europe and North America. Delta Airlines has expanded their own seasonal service to Iceland (New York to Reykjavik), corresponding to the demand for tourist travel to Iceland and Europe. In addition to charter flight options, the small carrier Air Iceland handles intraregional and interregional flights from Iceland to Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

In 2015, the Keflavik International Airport (KEF) announced a 25-year Master Plan to accommodate the rapid increases in tourism to and through Iceland. It is estimated that the passenger flow will continue to increase beyond the five million passengers that transited KEF in 2015. When fully implemented, KEF airport will be able to handle between 14 and 25 million passengers per year.

Other Travel Conditions

Despite being an island nation, Iceland has limited international sea services, featuring regular ferry service from the Faroe Islands (Denmark), as well as the local ferry services operated by Eimskip between Þorlákshöfn, Landeyarhofn, and the Westman Islands.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

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Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

According to the Icelandic National Commissioner of Police, there is no known international or transnational terrorist threat against U.S. interests in Iceland. However, Iceland is one of 25 European countries that are party to the Schengen Agreement, which eliminates all internal border controls between member states. Lack of stringent border control can facilitate the movement of international terrorists as has been the concern with recent terrorist activity throughout Europe in 2015. There is no known domestic terrorist threat against Americans in Iceland or local activity regarding regional terrorist organizations.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

The U.S. Embassy has seen a number of relatively minor protests over the last few years, mainly featuring non-violent demonstrations. In August 2014, there was a demonstration of approximately 2,000-3,000 people in front of the U.S. Embassy in support of Palestinian issues.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

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Civil Unrest

There are occasional demonstrations in front of the parliament building, Althingi. These have often focused on economic issues as a result of the 2008 economic crisis. Though generally non-violent, protestors have pelted Parliament with paint, eggs, and garbage.

Demonstrations for and against ascension to the European Union (EU) have increased. This is expected to continue to inflame the public sentiment until a definitive decision on ascension is reached.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

The January and November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris raised concerns in Iceland linked to the European migrant/refugee issues, with special emphasis on the transiting foreign fighter issue. Religious and ethnic tensions in Iceland have increased, especially toward Muslim immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Although, general sentiments have been strictly tolerant. Iceland's issues center on concerns over increased immigration in general and expansion of Islamic cultural and religious institutions, including opposition to plans for building of the first mosque at a prominent location in Reykjavik.

Post-specific Concerns

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Environmental Hazards

The weather should always be taken into consideration, especially since conditions can change rapidly. The most real threat to travelers is extreme weather, including gale force winds, snow, and ice that can cause adverse traffic conditions and death by exposure if unprepared.

Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are fairly common. Iceland's restless volcanic activity has had an impact on air travel in the Atlantic/Arctic corridor. Beginning in August 2014, a series of earthquakes and volcanic activity has centered on the Bárðarbunga volcano, one of seven active volcanoes in Iceland. There has been no impact on aviation, and, despite an ongoing eruption, only the effects of lava and gaseous discharges have occurred. The impacts of a larger possible eruption remain unclear, though in a worst case scenario, extensive flooding or aviation disruptions related to ash emissions could occur. Icelandic volcanologists consider this latter scenario as unlikely though they continue to monitor Bárðarbunga closely.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Iceland's low-cost power generation and advantageous cold weather conditions permit a growing data-storage industry, which is poised for expansion. In late 2013, Iceland joined the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence to develop its ability to augment and defend its cyber security infrastructure.

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Iceland has excellent hazardous material (HAZMAT) response to industrial accidents. Iceland also has established a well-respected search and rescue (SAR) system, staffed by volunteers nationwide.

Privacy Concerns

Iceland enjoys wide Internet freedoms; accordingly, its well-educated populace is wired-in to a high-degree. This permissive environment fostered the growth of the WikiLeaks organization under former resident Julian Assange. Public sentiment continues to support legislation and actions ensuring maintaining Internet freedom.

Drug-related Crimes

Some drug-related disturbing trends include a continuing increase in the cultivation of marijuana for domestic consumption and enterprising smuggling attempts to use Iceland as a transshipment point from the EU to North America.

Criminal outlaw organizations (Hell's Angels and Outlaws motorcycle gangs) have been linked to the manufacture of methamphetamine, money laundering, and extortion, according to the Icelandic National Police Narcotics Division. Authorities have made inroads into disrupting this

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activity through increased domestic enforcement and engagement in the exclusion and deportation of outside criminal support elements from the EU.

Kidnapping Threat

While uncommon, most of the kidnapping cases are tied to drug-related debt collection and domestic/parental disputes involving multi-national couples. There have been no reported cases of political kidnappings.

Police Response

The Icelandic Police (Logreglan), including the Metropolitan Police in Reykjavik and the National Commission of Police, are professional organizations that use modern equipment and techniques in preventing, disrupting, and investigating crime. As of February 2015, police rolls remained steady with 653 police officers, with the vast majority (over 95 percent) being unarmed. Changes in 2015 allowed for marked police vehicles to be equipped with sidearms under a strict system of control and use. Generally, law enforcement continues to suffer from funding cuts and irregular budgetary considerations.

Crime Victim Assistance

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The Icelandic Emergency Response 112 has a smart phone application that allows travelers to notify a central emergency response center of their whereabouts, which can drastically reduce response time in the event search and rescue operations become necessary.

Victims of crime may also visit a local police station for assistance.

Metropolitan Police

Hverfisgata 113 - 115

101 Reykjavik

Telephone operator (+354) 444-1000 (after hours: 112)

Police/Security Agencies

As of January 2015, there are nine police districts with pending restructuring plans to merge into eight districts. The National Commissioner's Office serves as the operational umbrella for the police districts.

The Icelandic Coast Guard represents the maritime law enforcement arm and receives assistance from the voluntary search and rescue (SAR) organization Landsbjorg with approximately 4,000 volunteers on-call.

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Medical Emergencies

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

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Landspítali

Hringbraut

101 Reykjavik

Telephone operator (+354) 543-1000 (24/7)

landspitali@landspitali.is

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Hospitals in the Reykjavik Metropolitan Area

Name/Location

Area Served

Operating Hours

Number

The General Medical Services Center
Laeknavaktin
Smaratorg 1
201 Kopavogur

Serves the Reykjavik Metropolitan Area - after hours *primary* care.

Mon – Fri: 17:00 – 23:30
Sat – Sun: 09:00 – 23:30

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Walk In Service – No appointment necessary

Tel: +354-354-1770
Fax: +354-544-4112
www.laeknavaktin.is

Emergency Ward at Landspítali University Hospital
Fossvogur
108 Reykjavik

Serves All

24-Hours

Tel: +354-543-2000 (main operator – can transfer to all other units)
www.landspitali.is

Emergency Ward at Landspítali University
Hringbraut
101 Reykjavik

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Serves All

Mon – Fri: Open 24-Hours during weekdays only
(after hours emergency care for cardiovascular illness only)

Tel: +354-543-1000 (main operator – can transfer calls to all other units)
www.landspitali.is

Area **Hospitals/Health Clinics Within ONE Hour Drive of the Reykjavik Metropolitan**

Name/Location

Serves

Operating Hours

Number

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Sjukrahus Sudurlands
Arvegi
800 Selfoss

Southern Iceland

24-Hours Emergency Room

Tel: +354-432-2000

www.hsu.is

Heilbrigdisstofnun Sudurnesja
Skolavegi 6
230 Reykjanesbaer (Keflavik)

Reykjanes Area

24-Hours Emergency Room

Tel: +354-422-0500

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www.hss.is

HVE Akranes
Merkigerdi 9
300 Akranes

Akranes Area

Clinic Hours:
Mon – Fri: 7:45 – 19:00

Tel: +354-430-6000

www.hve.is

HVE Borgarnes
Borgarbraut 65
310 Borgarnes

Borgarnes Area

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Clinic Hours:
Mon – Fri: 8:00 – 16:00

Tel: +354-437-1400

www.hve.is

Major Hospitals Outside Reykjavik

Name/Location

Serves

Operating Hours

Number

Isafjordur Hospital & Health Care Center

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Torfnes
400 Isafjordur

North West Iceland

24-Hours

Tel: +354-450-4500
Fax: +354-450-4522

www.fsi.is

Akureyri Hospital
Eyrarlandsvegur
600 Akureyri

North Iceland

24-Hours

Tel: +354-463-0100
Fax: +354-461-1621
www.fsa.is

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Available Air Ambulance Services

Patient transport by air is of great importance because of Iceland's 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 now centered in Akureyri, where the nation's second largest hospital is. There is one dedicated air ambulance, which is well equipped and capable of transporting two patients. It is staffed by an EMT-I or EMT-P from the Akureyri Fire and Rescue Service, including a physician if needed, from University Hospital in Akureyri or the local health authority.

When ordinary airplanes cannot be used, Icelandic Coast Guard emergency helicopters may be available. The Coast Guard operates three rescue helicopters (Aerospatiale Super Puma) based in Reykjavík. Their primary mission is SAR, both ashore and at sea. They are staffed by two pilots, a rescue technician, a navigator, and a physician.

Recommended Insurance Posture

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The Embassy recommends travelers consider obtaining regular travel insurance and medical evacuation insurance to cover all types of incidents.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at:
<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/iceland>.

Directorate of Health / CDC address:

Directorate of Health

Baronstigur 47

101 Reykjavik

Telephone operator (+354) 510-1900

mottaka@landlaeknir.is

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council in Iceland; however, the Embassy is seeking to establish a

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chapter. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation:

U.S. Embassy Reykjavik

Laufasvegur 21

101 Reykjavik

American Citizen Services (ACS) business hours: 0800-1700

Embassy Contact Numbers

During business hours: (+354) 595-2200

After hours: (+354) 595-2248

Email: ReykjavikConsular@state.gov

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Website: <http://iceland.usembassy.gov/>

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