

Visit Reykjavík

Strong Growth in Tourism

566,000 foreign tourists visited Iceland in 2011, of which almost all visited Reykjavík according to estimates. This represents a 15.8% increase from 2010 and makes 2011 a record year for tourist arrivals. In addition, Reykjavík's harbours welcomed 63,000 cruise ship passengers.

Most visitors came from the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and Germany. The growth in arrivals from the USA between years is phenomenal, at over 50%, making the USA topple the UK's status as Iceland's long standing top source market for tourism.

After a few years of stable arrivals numbers, these are impressive results considering the rather dire state of the world economy and the worldwide 4.4% growth in tourism between years as estimated by the UNWTO. Some of the main reasons for this sharp rise in tourist numbers to Iceland include increased flight supply and the publicity-creating volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull in 2010.

There are plenty of reasons for the Icelandic tourism industry to be optimistic about 2012 as well. A great number of airlines



will offer flights to Iceland this year, some featuring new destinations, the new Icelandair Hotel Reykjavík Marina will open in April and the marketing campaign Inspired by Iceland continues with a special focus on boosting tourism during autumn, winter and spring.

A Good Year for Northern Lights

Seeing the northern lights, also known as the Aurora Borealis, is something that many people dream of achieving in their lifetime. It seems 2012 will be a good year to realise such a dream, as NASA scientists predict the brightest northern lights display for 50 years.

The event will be caused by the Solar Maximum - a period when the sun's magnetic field on the solar equator rotates at a slightly faster pace than at the solar poles. The cycle between Solar Maximums takes an average of 11 years. The last Solar Maximum was in 2000 and NASA has predicted that 2012 will bring the greatest seen since 1958.

The northern lights are a breathtakingly beautiful natural phenomenon. They can frequently be seen in Iceland in the winter time (October - April) on cold, clear and crisp nights. According to scientists, general conditions for viewing the northern lights in 2011-2013 in Iceland are exceedingly good, although their visibility is always subject to weather conditions.



Several northern lights tours are on offer from Reykjavík, either by bus, jeep or boat. Sightings can never be guaranteed, but tour operators take visitors to places where viewing chances are best and normally offer another tour free of charge should guests fail to see the lights on the first night.

Did you know? In Norse mythology northern lights were believed to be the reflections of the shields of the Valkyries racing across the sky on their way to their resting place, Valhalla.

Reykjavík in the Eyes of the Tourist



Cold, beautiful, friendly, comfortable, clean, modern, safe, lively, fun, charming, peaceful.

These are some of the words tourists use to describe Reykjavík. Last summer we decided to ask our visitors in more detail than before how they would describe the city, what they like best about it, what influenced them to visit and what can be improved. The results

gave us some valuable insights into how tourists view and experience the city.

For example, the people of Reykjavík and the friendly atmosphere are among the things which most strongly attract tourists to the city and what they like most about it. This was something that had not popped up through other previous surveys. Another interesting finding was that 8% of respondents say that Icelandic literature and music influenced their decision to visit Reykjavík.

It is evident that Reykjavík's old harbour and the new Harpa Concert and Conference Centre are making their mark on the tourist map. This popular area has developed fast in the last few years and now features a wide variety of attractions and services. The majority of respondents in the survey had already visited or planned to visit these sites.

We also asked respondents to name anything that could be improved in the city. The most common answer was that public transportation needed improvement. A message that we will make sure gets across to the relevant parties.

We sometimes forget that visitors can view a city in a very different way from locals. That is why these insights are so valuable. We are excited to hear what our winter visitors will say about our city and whether they will answer differently from our summer visitors. We look forward to telling you all about it in our next newsletter!

Dóra Magnúsdóttir
Marketing Manager, Visit Reykjavík

Aurum is Reykjavík Shop of the Year 2011

Jewellery, design and lifestyle shop Aurum has been awarded 'Reykjavík Shop of the Year 2011'.

Reykjavík Shop of the Year (Icelandic: Njarðarskjöldurinn) is an annual encouragement award granted by the City of Reykjavík, the City Centre Alliance, The Association of Merchants, the Federation of Icelandic Trade, Global Blue - Iceland and Taxfree Worldwide - Iceland. The objective of the recognition is to encourage increased and improved shopping for tourists in Reykjavík.

Aurum is one of Iceland's most revered jewellery shops and it is very popular amongst Reykjavík tourists as well. Owner Guðbjörg Ingvarsdóttir is currently expanding her product range and has already designed a bespoke dinner service in collaboration with a Finnish design company.

When nominating the Reykjavík Shop of the Year the emphasis is on awarding the shop that has achieved the best sales results between years. Marketing and communications such as advertisements and websites are also evaluated, together with service, opening hours, tax refund signage, lighting, accessibility, staff language proficiency and product knowledge.



For the first time this year an additional award was granted for a new approach to Reykjavík shopping. Nostalgia, which specialises in second hand and vintage clothing for women, is the first shop to receive this award.

For more information about the shops visit aurum.is and find Nostalgia on Facebook – or pay a visit to downtown Reykjavík!

Two Festivals Return!

Visit Reykjavík is proud to announce the return of the Reykjavík Winter Lights Festival and Children's Culture Festival to its annual event calendar after a couple of years' absence. The Reykjavík Winter Lights Festival will be held 9-12 February. This festival celebrates both winter and the growing light after a long period of darkness and features a wide array of events including theatre, street performances, dance and visual arts. The

theme this year is Amazing Darkness. Highlights include Museum Night, International Children's Day and the brand new Pool Night, held for the first time this year. The Children's Culture Festival will be held 17-23 April and will feature children's culture, culture for children and culture with children! All events free of charge. For more information see the What's On section on visitreykjavik.is.



THE BULLETIN BOARD



New Icelandair Hotel Reykjavík Marina opens by Reykjavík harbour in April

Hotel chain Icelandair Hotels is expanding and will open its ninth establishment, Hotel Reykjavík Marina, in the heart of the capital 19 April 2012. The hotel will feature 111 rooms, a gym, bar and restaurant. Hotel Reykjavík Marina will be in a refurbished three-storey building on Mýrargata, in one of the Reykjavík’s most up-and-coming locations, just a stone’s throw away from shops, restaurants, galleries and the old harbour. The hotel will represent a cosy combination of modern design and traditional Icelandic hospitality. There will be an emphasis on the dynamic, creative environment of the rapidly developing harbour region of the capital and, through décor, food and attention to detail, guests will be given an insight into Reykjavík’s heart and soul. Icelandair Hotels consists of nine three- and four-star establishments located throughout Iceland, each with its own emphasis and character. Visit icehotels.is for more information.

Icelandic Phallogical Museum Reopens in Reykjavík

The Icelandic Phallogical Museum reopened recently in Reykjavík city centre after moving from Húsavík in northeast Iceland, where it has been located for the past years. The Icelandic Phallogical Museum is probably the only museum in the world to contain a collection of phallic specimens belonging to all the various types of mammal found in a single country. Approximately 280 samples of mammal penises and penis parts are on display at the museum and the first human specimen was added to the museum’s collection last year. The museum was relocated because its director Sigurður Hjartarson decided to retire. His son, Hjörtur Gísli Sigurðsson, now runs the museum. Visit phallus.is for more information.

Reykjavík City Museum Increases Winter Service

Reykjavík City Museum – Árbær Museum is extending its services during the winter season, starting from January 2012. There is now a guided tour every day at 13:00. The museum is also open by appointment for groups.



The Reykjavík City Museum collects and conserves objects from Reykjavík’s cultural history. Árbær was an established farm until well into the 20th century. It is now an open air museum with more than 20 buildings forming a town square, a village and a farm. Visit minjasafnreykjavikur.is for more information.

Why Reykjavík?



After a series of mild winters here in Reykjavík, we Reykjavík-ers had almost forgotten that we do actually live in the northernmost capital on the planet. Just as well though that we had not thrown out our snow boots and shovels, because this winter has certainly reminded us of where we live. Snow hasn’t left our streets since November. And I have to say that the city has seldom

been more beautiful than these past few weeks – especially at Christmas with coloured lights twinkling through the snow!

Those who find little pleasure in gliding down snow covered mountains need not fret, however, since the first months of the year are very lively festival months in Reykjavík. The contemporary music festival Dark Music Days marks the end of January, followed by the Winter Lights Festival in February, which celebrates all forms of culture. Festivalgoers are looking forward to a brand new event at the Winter Lights Festival this year, Pool Night, when three thermal pools in Reykjavík stay open until midnight with all sorts of surprises awaiting guests.

March is all about food, design and horses. The gourmet festival Food and Fun starts tickling our taste buds on 29 February. Next on the festival agenda is DesignMarch, highlighting Icelandic design in all shapes and sizes – and often in unusual places. Then, having dressed Reykjavík up to be all hip and cool, it is time to go back to Iceland’s roots ... by celebrating the Icelandic horse. The Icelandic Horse Festival will be held in Reykjavík for the very first time at the end of March, and will welcome horses into the city.

Choosing a destination for a holiday, short or long, is an important decision. Usually the purpose is to experience something new and to take home memories that will live on for months or years to come. I encourage you to try Reykjavík for your next vacation – not the biggest of capitals, but wonderfully culturally diverse.

So indeed, the question is not why Reykjavík – but when are you coming?

Welcome to Reykjavík!

**Sif Gunnarsdóttir,
Director of Visit Reykjavík**

Reykjavík festivals

WINTER – SPRING 2012

Porrablót 20 January - 18 February

A midwinter feast when Icelanders consume some interesting Viking-style foods like sheep's heads, rams' testicles and putrefied shark, washed down with generous amounts of the local schnapps, Brennivín.

Reykjavík Winter Lights Festival 9 - 12 February

Celebrating both winter and the growing light after a long period of darkness, the festival features an amazing array of events including theatre, street performances, dance, visual arts and much more. vetrarhatid.is

Food and Fun 29 February - 4 March

Celebrity chefs from around the world prepare food from the freshest Icelandic ingredients, served at selected restaurants in Reykjavík. foodandfun.is

Imagine Peace Tower 21 - 28 March

A work of art by Yoko Ono dedicated to the memory of John Lennon and the yearning for peace on earth. The Imagine Peace Tower shines during the week of spring Equinox. imaginepeacetower.com

DesignMarch 22 - 25 March

A four-day design feast which brings a splash of colour to the city of Reykjavík. A wealth of events, interesting lectures and exhibitions reflect the diversity of Icelandic design. icelanddesign.is

Icelandic Music Experiments 23 - 26 March

Young bands battle in venues throughout the city for the title of the latest Icelandic act set to erupt. musiktilraunir.is

Reykjavík Fashion Festival 29 March - 1 April

Iceland's creative energy channeled into a single event, providing an exciting mixture of fashion, design and music at venues around the city. rff.is

Icelandic Horse Festival 29 March - 1 April

Shows, parades, horse farm-visits, movies, fairs, festivities and more for Icelandic horse-enthusiasts and fun-loving travellers of all ages. icelandichorsefestival.is

Reykjavík Blues Festival 31 March - 5 April

A colourful programme of blues, performed by Icelandic and international artists. blues.is

Children's Culture Festival 17 - 23 April

Children's culture, culture for children and culture with children. The festival reaches all corners of Reykjavík city from the slopes of Mt. Esja to the bottom of the thermal pools. barnameningarnott.is

Reykjavík Music Mess 18 - 19 April

Reykjavík Music Mess is an independent music festival in downtown Reykjavík, organised by the Icelandic independent record label Kimi Records. reykjavikmusicmess.com

Art Without Boundaries 18 April - 2 May

This annual art festival aims to promote the art of people with disabilities and facilitate co-operation between people with and without disabilities. listanlandamaera.is

First Day of Summer 19 April

Icelanders celebrate the First Day of Summer (according to the old Icelandic calendar) with parades, family events and smiles all round - regardless of whether it snows or not.

Reykjavík Arts Festival 18 May - 3 June

Iceland's premier cultural festival, bringing together the best in local and international theatre, dance, music and visual art. artfest.is

A few facts and figures

The City of Reykjavík is the capital and largest city of Iceland. It is located at latitude 64°08' N in southwestern Iceland, on the southern shore of Faxaflói Bay.

Population: The Reykjavík Capital Area has a total population of about 200,000 which is about two-thirds of Iceland's population of 320,000 people.

History: Iceland was settled by Norwegian and Celtic immigrants during the late 9th and 10th centuries. According to the medieval Book of Settlements, Ingolfur Arnarson – the first settler of Iceland – built his farm on the peninsula where Reykjavík stands today. The place was named Reykjavík (meaning Smoky/Steamy Bay) after the columns of steam that rose from hot springs.

Flight time: Reykjavík is probably closer than you think. Flight time is only 2-4 hours from Europe and 5-6 hours from east coast USA and Canada. It is possible to get to Iceland by sea as well.

Weather: Despite its northerly location, Reykjavík has a relatively mild climate due to the warm Gulf stream: cool in summer (average around 12°C) and fairly mild in winter (average around 0°C). However, the weather is very changeable and visitors should be prepared for the unexpected.

Language: The national language is Icelandic, a language of a Germanic origin, related to the Scandinavian languages. English is, however, widely spoken.

Need more information? Check out our website

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