



History, Geography & the way of living



History of Iceland – Highlights

Settlement of Iceland

- Iceland was settled when people began moving to the country to live there. At the time, there were no people, no towns and almost no animals in Iceland.
- The best-known settler is Ingólfur Arnarson, who settled in Reykjavík around the year 870.
- During the Age of the Settlement (870-930), thousands of people, mostly from Norway, sailed to Iceland. They were accompanied by their wives and slaves, some of them from Ireland and the British Isles.
- The settlers brought with them livestock, tools and equipment.



History of Iceland:

Settlement of Iceland, cont.

- The settlers are often referred to as Vikings.
- The Vikings of the Nordic Countries and Britain sailed to other countries where they stole valuables – and people – from towns and villages.
- The Vikings in Iceland were first and foremost farmers, although they fought among themselves for honour and power.
- Wealthy farmers who owned large tracts of land became chieftains with a following of farmers.



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History of Iceland: Althing

- Althing, the Icelandic Parliament, is the oldest functioning parliament in the world. www.althingi.is
- It was established at Thingvellir in 930 and was convened annually there until 1799.
- Althing was reestablished in Reykjavík in 1844, in the parliament building at Austurvöllur.
- There are 63 members of parliament in the Althing. They sit in parliament on behalf of political parties that are elected by secret ballot
- once every 4 years.
- Following the election, a government is formed and cabinet ministers appointed.



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History of Iceland: Voting Rights and the President of Iceland



Mynd: <https://www.forseti.is/>

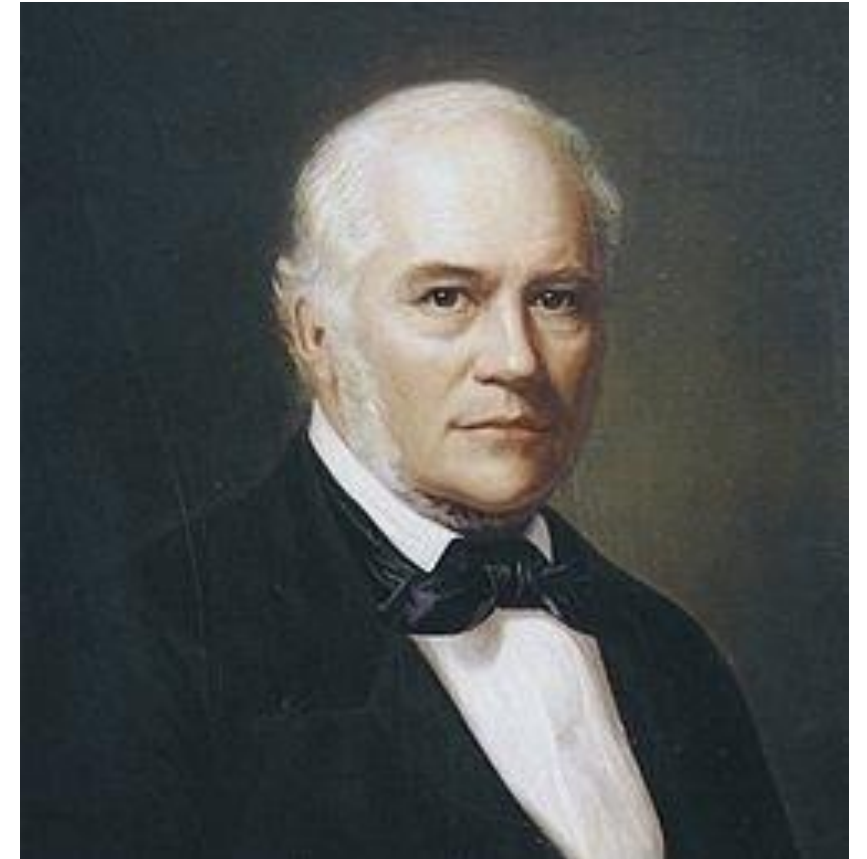
- In 1915, some women gained the right to vote in Iceland.
- In 1920, everyone over the age of 25 was given the right to vote. The voting age was gradually lowered
- and is now 18 years.
- The President of Iceland is elected every four years.
- The President of Iceland is Guðni Th. Jóhannesson.
- The first woman to be democratically elected president in the world was Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in 1980. She was president for 16 years. www.forseti.is



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History of Iceland: Icelandic Independence

- Iceland lost its independence to Norway in 1262 and later became a colony of Denmark.
- Jón Sigurðsson is the most well-known advocate for Iceland's independence. Iceland's national holiday is his birthday, 17 June.
- Iceland became a sovereign state on 1 December 1918.
- The Republic of Iceland was founded on 17 June 1944.
- Iceland gained independence without armed conflict.



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History of Iceland: Religion



- **Pagan belief:** Settlers in Iceland were pagan, like most Nordic people at the time. They believed in various gods, goddesses and deities. Sacrifices were offered to the gods and feasts were held to honour them.
- **Christianity:** Icelanders adopted Christianity in the year 1000 and the transition was peaceful.
- The Catholic Church was dominant in Europe until the Reformation in the 16th century. The Iceland Reformation took place in 1550 and the Church of Iceland is Evangelical-Lutheran.



History of Iceland: Economy

- Iceland was a farming community until the beginning of the 20th century.
- Sheep were fully utilised, both as a source for food and wool.
- Fishing was done on undecked rowboats.
- With the mechanisation of boats and the introduction of trawlers, fishing increased and fisheries became a major industry.

History of Iceland: Housing

- From the 9th to the 19th century, most Icelanders lived in turf farms,
- built of turf and stones. They were not sturdy, but they kept the warmth inside. They were dark, however, and frequently filled with smoke.
- In the evenings, the household sat together in the upstairs living quarters where they did handiwork, recited poetry and told stories.
- Following the end of the Second World War in 1945, many small apartment buildings were built in Reykjavik and in the early 1970s, larger apartment buildings began to be constructed in Breidholt.



History of Iceland: World War II

- The Second World War of 1939-1945 had a major effect on the world, including Iceland.
- Iceland declared its neutrality but was occupied by the British and later, the American Army. There were tens of thousands of soldiers in the country.
- Many people moved from the countryside to Reykjavik, where they could get work servicing the army.
- After the war, Iceland received Marshall Plan aid from the United States and used part of the amount for social housing.
- Iceland was one of the founding members of NATO in 1949.

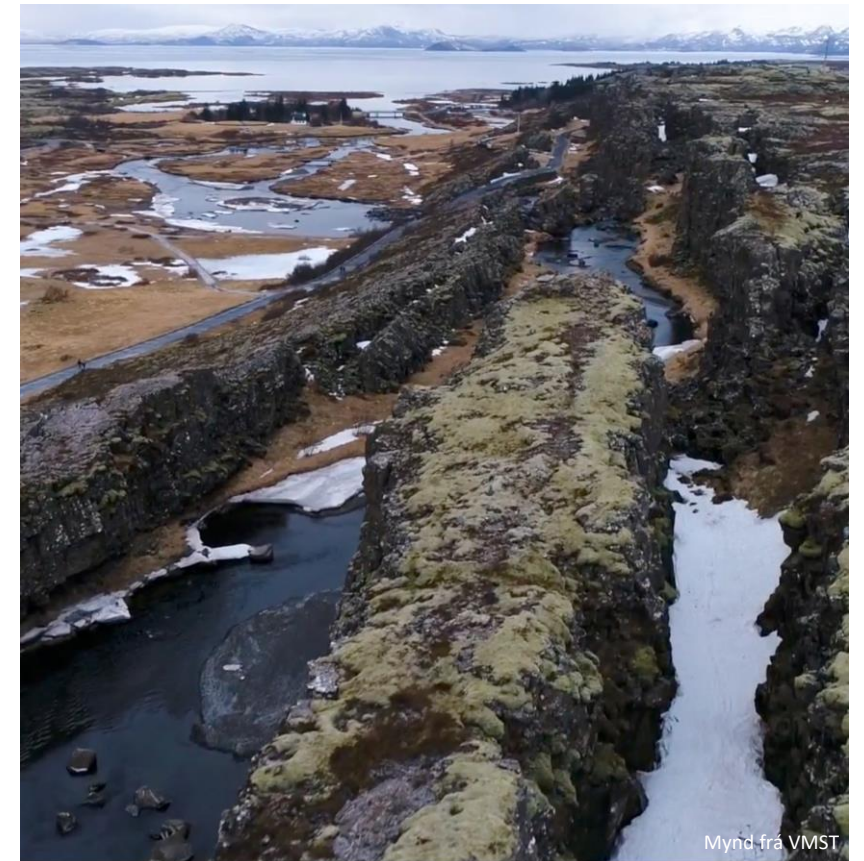


Modern Iceland

- Iceland has a diverse economy, but the fishing industry, aluminum production and the tourism industry are of great importance to the country's economy.
- Farmers produce meat and vegetables. Industry and manufacturing is diverse.
- High-tech manufacturing companies operate in the country.
- The level of education is rather high in Iceland and most people attend secondary school. More women than men receive university-level education.
- The beginning of the 20th century saw major class struggles as the populace fought for rights such as the right to sick leave, minimum rest, working time limits, parental leave and unemployment benefits.
- The women's movement is part of the equal rights struggle in Iceland. Women have fought for voting rights, equal pay and gender equality in all fields. Candidates from a women's party served as members of parliament.
- It took decades for the gay rights movement to achieve equal rights.

Geography

- Iceland is a large island in the Atlantic Ocean (103,000 km²) and is part of Europe.
- Iceland has extensive volcanic activity and many areas of geothermal heat. There are also glaciers and lava fields here.
- The country is sparsely vegetated.
- The coastline is very jagged, with many fjords, bays and inlets.
- The highlands make up 75% of the country but no one lives there.
- Towns and villages sit along the coastline.



Mynd frá VMST

Geography: Earthquakes and Volcanic Eruptions

- The earth's crust is in constant motion. This creates tension, the crust breaks and the earth trembles. This is what we call an earthquake.
- Earthquakes are frequent in Iceland. Most originate far from human settlements.
- Although Icelandic houses are sturdy, some have been damaged in large earthquakes.
- Volcanoes erupt when magma and gas come up to the surface from deep in the ground. Lava flows across the land and ash falls to the ground.
- Volcanic eruptions are rather frequent in Iceland. The most well-known eruptions of the past years are the Westman Islands eruption of 1973, the eruption in Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 and the eruptions in Geldingardalur in 2021 and 2022.



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Geography: Earthquake Response

- **Do not run out if you are inside when an earthquake begins:**
 - Remain where you are - many accidents occur when people run out when debris is falling.
 - Get under a table or a bed, protect your head and neck, hold on to solid furniture.
 - Kneel in a corner by a supporting wall or in a door opening in a supporting wall.
 - Protect your head and face with a pillow if you wake up to an earthquake.
 - Stay away from windows – they can break.
- **Do not run inside if you are outside when you feel an earthquake:**
 - Remain outside – try to find shelter to *duck, cover, hold*.
- **If you are driving when you feel an earthquake:**
 - Stop and park the car, keep your seatbelt fastened and remain where you are.
 - www.almannavarnir.is/natturuva/jardskjalftar/vidbrogd-vid-jardskjalfta

Geography: Glaciers, Rivers and Waterfalls

- Vatnajökull in South-East Iceland is Europe's largest glacier.
- People can go on guided glacier tours.
- Arctic char, trout or salmon can often be caught in Icelandic lakes and rivers.
- There are waterfalls, big and small, all over Iceland. Iceland's best-known waterfalls include Gullfoss, Dettifoss and Seljalandsfoss.
- Strokkur, in the Geyser area, erupts regularly.
- Powerful rivers have been harnessed for electricity production



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Geography: Climate

- Iceland has four seasons: Winter, spring, summer and autumn.
- In summer, the average temperature is around 10 °C and between -10 to 0 °C in winter.
- Weather in Iceland can change very quickly, with snow one day and rain the next day.
- Storms sometimes occur in the winter, including in urban areas. The Icelandic Meteorological Office uses a warning system with four colour codes: A green, yellow, orange and red alert. www.vedur.is
 - Orange and red alerts should be taken seriously. People should try to remain at home and avoid travelling, and children should not travel to and from school by themselves.

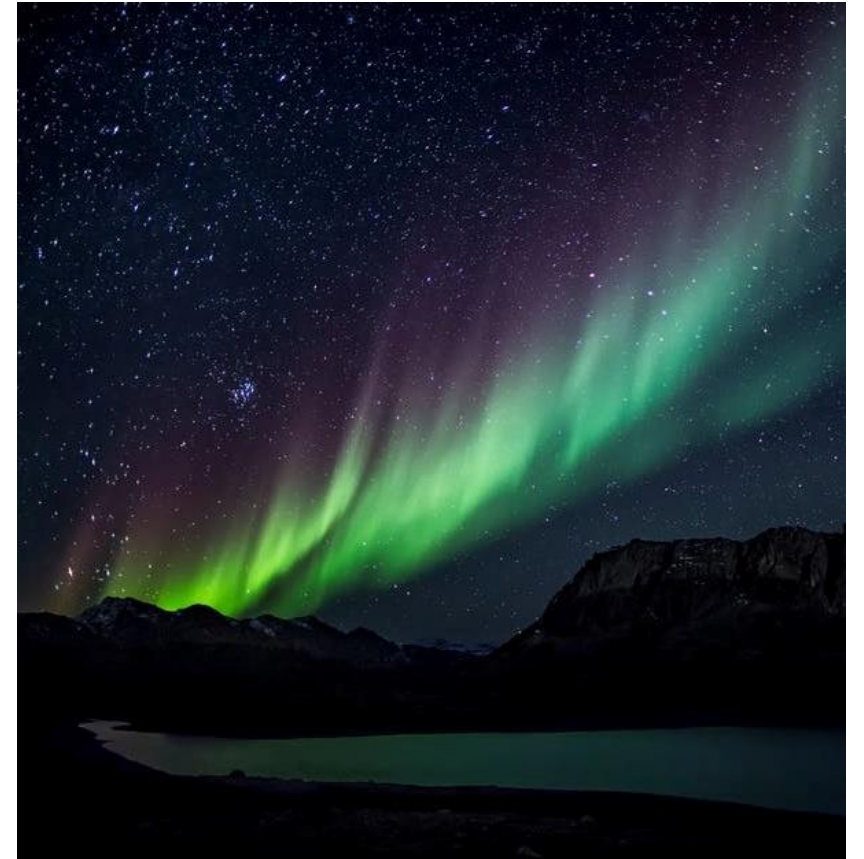


Mynd: <https://notendur.hi.is/brh12/Kennsla/dt2/>

Geography:

Weather and Daily Life

- The weather has a great impact on daily life in Iceland and Icelanders can talk endlessly about the weather.
- There can be a lot of snow in winter, so people must scrape snow off their cars. Snow must be shovelled, and salt or sand distributed on footpaths and streets so people can walk and drive.
- It is advisable to use crampons under your shoes to avoid falling on ice.
- Winters are very dark and daylight is scarce. The northern lights dance across the sky during winter.
- Summers are very bright, including the nights!



Geography: Weather and Daily Life

- Icelanders have adapted to the Icelandic climate. They go outside even if there is snow and cold weather.
- It's refreshing to go out for a walk in the winter if you wear warm clothes.
- Skiing and skating are also popular winter activities.
- Children love to go sledding and slide down slopes in their sleigh.
- In summer, most Icelanders prefer to stay outside and use the time while it's bright and warm to tend to their garden, travel or just cycle, walk and sit outdoors.

Lifestyle:

Traditions and Feasts – Christmas and New Year

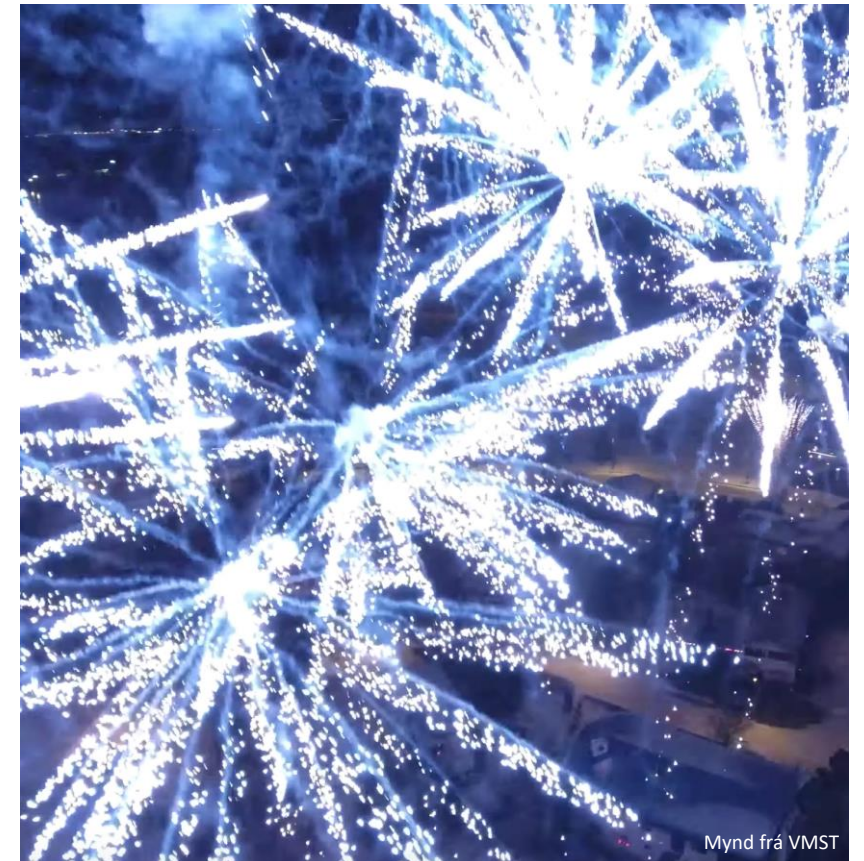
- Christmas is an important tradition for most people and a big family celebration.
- Christmas is celebrated to remember the birth of Jesus Christ, but similar feasts were held at the same time of year in pre-Christian times to celebrate the gradual re-emergence of daylight.
- Advent is the month leading up to Christmas. People have many fun activities during Advent, including baking cookies, making Christmas handicrafts, and Christmas chocolates, and going to Christmas concerts. Brotherly love is prevalent and many donate to charity.
- The 13 Icelandic Yule Lads come to town one by one, beginning 13 days before Christmas. The children believe that if they put a shoe on the windowsill, the Yule Lads will put a little present in it.



Mynd: <https://www.sykur.is/2014/2125/jolasveinarnir-koma-i-thessari-rod/>

Traditions and Feasts – Christmas and New Year

- **Thorlak's mass** is celebrated on 23 December. On that day, many people eat fermented skate, which has a very pungent smell. Shops are open until late and people strive to finish their housecleaning and shopping before Christmas.
- **Christmas Eve** is on 24 December. Christmas starts at six o'clock that evening. Families eat Christmas dinner together before opening Christmas presents. Many attend mass. Charities often offer Christmas dinners for those who are alone at Christmas.
- **Christmas Day** is 25 December and Boxing Day is on 26 December. Many people have the tradition of hosting or attending a Christmas party.
- **31 December** is the last day of the year. New year's parties in homes, where fireworks are set off, are common. Parties in homes or bars often continue until the morning hours.



Traditions and Feasts - Easter

- Easter is the Christian Church's biggest feast. Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus.
- For many, Easter is a welcome break after the long winter. Most have five continuous days off from work (from Thursday to Monday).
- It is customary to eat chocolate eggs on Easter Sunday, which is usually very exciting for the children.
- Schools are on holiday the week before Easter.
- Many people go on ski trips, stay in a summer cottage or relax at home during the Easter holidays.



Mynd:<https://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/1327462/>

Traditions and Feasts - Other Days



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- Bun Monday, Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday are a fun tradition in Icelandic culture. These days have Catholic origins and are related to the start of Lent.
- **Bun Monday** is celebrated on a Monday in February and includes heavy consumption of cream puffs.
- On the following day, **Shrove Tuesday**, people eat as much salted lamb and bean soup as they can.
- **Ash Wednesday** is the third day, when it is now the custom for children to dress up and sing for people in exchange for sweets.
- **Husband's Day** is in January. On that day, many wives give their husband a present and cook something good for him or bring him traditional Icelandic food. **Husband's Day** marks the beginning of Þorri.
- Þorri is the name of an ancient Nordic month. During Þorri, feasts called “þorrablót” are held, where traditional Icelandic winter food, soured, smoked and/or salted, is served.
- **Woman's Day** is in February, during which wives often receive flowers and gifts from their spouse.

Traditions and Feasts - Other Days

- The **First Day of Summer** is in April. This is a holiday and a festive day for the children. There are small parades and entertainment for children in Reykjavik neighbourhoods and towns around the country.
- The **Icelandic National Day** is 17 June. The day is celebrated in all Icelandic towns and villages with parades, entertainment and concerts. <https://islensktalmanak.is/dagar/>
- The **Bank Holiday Weekend** is a major holiday weekend in late July/early August. The first Monday in August is a bank holiday. Big outdoor festivals are held all over the country during the weekend, the best known of which is the festival in the Westman Islands.

Traditions and Feasts – A Little Bit More

- Many Icelandic municipalities hold a town festival in the summer. These are family festivals that are fun to visit.
- You can go on day trips to festivals in towns near Reykjavik, such as Selfoss, Hveragerdi, Akranes and Borgarnes.
- The annual Pride parade and Culture Night, celebrating Reykjavik's anniversary, are held in Reykjavik in August.



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Public Holidays in Iceland

Supplements must be paid for work carried out on public holidays

New Years Day (01.01.)

Maundy Thursday

Good Friday

Easter Sunday

Easter Monday

Ascension day (40 days after Easter)

Whitsunday (50 days after Easter)

Whit Monday

First Day of Summer (the third Thursday in April)

Labour Day (01.05)

Icelandic National Day (17.06)

Tradesmen's Day (first Monday in August)

Christmas Eve (24. 12) from noon

Christmas Day (25.12)

Boxing Day (26. 12.)

New Year's Day (31.12) from noon

Other holidays:

- With the large number of new inhabitants in Iceland – who come from all over the world – more holidays are introduced into Icelandic culture.
- Although such days are not automatically public holidays,
- it is natural to request (in advance) time off from work or school on major holidays. Note that such a leave will be unpaid or deducted from the summer holiday.

It is a good idea to set a reminder on your phone for all public holidays in Iceland – to prevent your children from accidentally going to school or you from going to work!

Other Important Days

- **Birthdays.** Not all adults celebrate their birthday, although most celebrate major birthdays. It is customary to celebrate children's birthdays by having a party for family and/or friends.
- **Baptism or Naming Ceremony.** Many people have their children baptised in a church or at home by a priest. It is also common for people to hold a naming ceremony for their child without any religious connotations. It is obligatory to name a child and report the name to Registers Iceland before the child reaches the age of 6 months. www.skra.is

Other Important Days – cont.

- **Confirmation.** Children can get confirmed in the year of their fourteenth birthday. The confirmation establishes their willingness to remain a member of the National Church of Iceland. There are also civil confirmations without any links to religion. www.sidmennt.is
- Adolescents go through confirmation education where they learn about religion and moral values and discuss various aspects of life.
- Confirmation parties are held, and the adolescents often receive money gifts from family and friends.
- Confirmation, whether in church or a civil ceremony, is not obligatory in Iceland.

Other Important Days – cont.

- **Wedding.** Many couples get married each year in Iceland. You can get married in a church, with another religious organisation or at a District Commissioner's office.
- Same-sex couples can marry in Iceland and those marriages are as valid by law as other marriages.
- **Funeral.** Around 2,000 Icelanders die each year. Church funerals are held for most of those who die. It is not obligatory to have a priest at a funeral.
- There are two types of funerals: burials and cremation. In burials, the body is placed in a casket which is then buried in a graveyard. If the body is cremated, an urn containing the cremated remains is buried in a graveyard.



Mynd frá VMST

Religion in Iceland

- Iceland has freedom of religion. This means that all people can practice their faith without fear of persecution or punishment. It also means that everyone has the right to decide their religion for themselves, or not be a member of any religious organisation.
- The National Church of Iceland is the country's biggest religious organisation. The National Church of Iceland is part of the Lutheran-Evangelical tradition. The importance of religion in people's lives varies, but the Church is important for many when it comes to ceremonies such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals, as well as the Christmas holidays.
- There are many large and small religious communities in Iceland and society is generally tolerant towards people's different religious and philosophical views.
- Part of people's taxes go to the religious organisation where they are registered. The Icelandic State pays the salaries of priests in the National Church of Iceland.
- The National Church has no influence on legislation, legal enforcement or execution of judgements in Iceland.

Websites

www.almannavarnir.is

www.althingi.is

www.borgarsogusafn.is

www.dagarnir.is

www.forseti.is

www.island.is

www.kirkjan.is

www.mcc.is

www.syslumenn.is/thjonusta/utgefin-leyfi/listi-yfir-skrad-trufelog-og-lifsskodunarfelog

www.reykjavik.is

www.sidmennt.is

www.thingvellir.is

www.thjodminjasafn.is

www.vedur.is



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