



Focus on ICELAND School Program

"Iceland is a very special place, a place where elves and trolls live in every second stone, where the forces of nature are evident in the huge volcanoes, geysers and waterfalls, and where the people are very proud of their medieval Viking past and their modern progress.

"We have all shared this year in Iceland, and there is something special we will all take away—memories, friendships, and the promise of a great trip around the world visiting all our other 'skiptinemar' friends!"

Paul, participant from Australia

"Easiest thing to get used to: Kaffitími (Coffeebreak) with all those biscuits and cakes to choose from.

"Hardest thing to get used to: Dragging myself out of bed on a dark winter morning. "The unforgettable (there are so many!!): both AFS camps (especially that huge snow fight we had at 3:30 a.m.); my host mother giving birth to another daughter. (I have two other sisters); the dances, and afterwards waiting for a pylsur (hot dog) in -7° C. in a cotton skirt; having a snow-fight while sitting in a hot pot; my first white Christmas."

Nathalie, participant from Australia

Iceland (Björk's homeland) straddles separating tectonic plates, and this causes sporadic earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, geysers and thermal hot springs that are diverted to heat most of the country's buildings. Though Iceland is warmed by the Gulf Stream, the land is so rocky and deforested that less than 2% is cultivated. Fruits and vegetables are imported (at high cost) or grown in greenhouses. In mid-winter, Iceland sees little daylight, which helps spur a national passion for chess, a high birth rate and the world's highest per capita rate of books written, printed, bought and read. Icelanders, 80% of whom live in and around the capital Reykjavik, are initially reserved with strangers but are friendly and informal after an introduction.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS a Islandi has been in existence since 1957. AFS volunteers around the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. AFS a Islandi hosts more than 40 AFS students from as many as 15 countries each year.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Iceland

Your flight will arrive in Keflavik, a town 40 km from Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. AFS a Islandi staff members will welcome you and bring you to the first orientation camp.

Arrival Orientation

The arrival orientation camp will last a three-day weekend, at the end of which you will either be picked up by your host family or travel to your host community by bus or airplane. The orientation will be held at a school about 40 minutes from the airport. There you will be introduced to Icelandic culture, history and customs.

Living in Iceland

Lifestyle and Family Living

Icelandic families tend to be close-knit. The family is important, but there is great diversity of family structures and types. In most families, both parents work outside home, and everyone shares in the housework.

Teenagers have considerable independence. Icelanders place great value on everyone gathering for dinner; sometimes this is the only time the whole family is together. It is considered impolite not to show up for dinner, and children are expected to call home if they cannot make it. In the warmer months, Icelandic families often travel together.

Icelandic host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Students may be placed anywhere in Iceland. Some will be placed in Reykjavik, many in small communities and towns in the countryside, but most placements will be along the coastline, where the majority of Icelandic people live.

People live in a very close relation with nature. This is because of the peculiarity of Iceland's environment and is reflected in both the culture—via the ancient and still-practiced Norse religion Ásatrú—and the attitude (earthquakes create little excitement).

Dress and Appearance

Icelandic teenagers follow the same styles of teenagers in Europe. They mostly dress casually, so jeans, T-shirts and sneakers are appropriate. Be sure to bring a warm overcoat, heavy jacket, heavy sweaters, warm socks, good walking shoes and raincoat since it rains a lot. On special occasions, more formal dress is expected.

Diet and Meals

The basic Icelandic diet includes a lot of fish and sea products, lamb and dairy foods like cheese. Fresh fish is plentiful and is eaten in many ways. This reflects the environment, but potatoes and bread are also served with almost every meal. Vegetarianism is extremely rare, while pasta and pizza are becoming more common.

Among drinks, coffee is very popular. Dinner is considered an important social activity, and it is impolite to prepare your own food.

School

The Icelandic school system is organized in four different levels before university. AFS exchange students attend the last year of *grunnskóli* (for students between 6 and 16) or *framhaldsskóli* (for students between 16 and 20).

There are three main types of *framhaldsskóli* (secondary school). *Menntaskóli* is a traditional school whose function is to prepare students for university. The curriculum is based on defined objectives and includes compulsory subjects, elective subjects and majors that are studied for a full year. Subjects include modern and ancient languages, physics, natural sciences, social sciences and music.

Fjölbrautaskóli is a comprehensive secondary school with different types of specialization preparing students for university or training them for diplomas in various professions.

Iðnskóli is a technical school which trains students in the chartered trades and for industrial work.

AFS requires that you to take 26 hours of classes a week in the fall; in the spring term you may take a heavier schedule. Students are expected to be self-motivated and independent. School starts at the end of August and goes through late May with a two- or three-week-long Christmas vacation and a week at Easter. There are two sessions of exams, in December and early May. The school day runs from 8 a.m. to 2 or 3 p.m., Monday through Friday. Usually there is a long lunch break in the middle of the day.

Transcripts or a certificate of attendance can be obtained if you meet the academic requirements.

Icelandic school offers a lot of extracurricular after-school activities as there is "competition" between schools. You may join a variety of clubs such as photography, cinema, radio and choir or do activities like mountaineering, modeling and cooking. Many of your Icelandic friends will probably also work.

Teen Life

Besides the many activities offered by schools, most communities offer music lessons, drama clubs, choir and sports. On weekends, Icelandic teens, like most teens around the world, enjoy getting together with friends to talk, go to parties or see a movie.

Due to the strong influence of the natural environment, Icelanders enjoy fishing, swimming in hot springs, soccer, skiing and horseback riding. Camping and hiking are popular pastimes as well. Watching TV and playing chess are common non-athletic activities.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS a Islandi will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and

educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

About six weeks after your arrival, you will attend a two-day orientation camp for all hosted students. It will be held on a weekend in a countryside location outside Reykjavik. Here, in addition to an evaluation of the first part of your stay, you will work on intercultural learning skills, group activities of family life, school adjustment and socialization.

Later, there is a camp lasting a long weekend (Thursday to Sunday), which is purely for fun and will feature several cultural events including visits to museum and countryside excursions.

Among other activities that volunteers may organize in your chapter, there is an optional one-week home stay on a farm after the school year ends in May. It is a popular activity with AFSers.

Last is the so-called End-of-Stay orientation. You will get together with other AFSers for a couple of days right before you return home. The End-of-Stay, held near Reykjavik, is about looking back and evaluating your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers.

Language

Unlike other Nordic countries, there are no dialects in Iceland. Interestingly, Icelandic has changed very little in the past 11 centuries. In fact, it retains an inflection system from the Viking age.

After you arrive, language lessons will be organized for you and the other AFSers in your chapter for a total of 10 to 40 hours.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Iceland, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS a Islandi. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Iceland can be very expensive, so plan to bring sufficient money. AFS recommends that US\$1,500-\$2,000 in traveler's checks should be sufficient to cover your spending needs for an entire year.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do things such as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility.

Many young people in Iceland hold part-time jobs in order to pay for their personal expenses and entertainment; therefore, do not expect these costs to be covered by your host family.

Safety and Support

Iceland is a very safe country, and you should do well if you simply follow the normal precautions you would at home and follow your host family's advice.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as an Icelander. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS a Islandi may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Iceland (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Iceland is the second-largest island in Europe and is surrounded by many smaller islands. As the western part of Europe, Iceland is located atop the volcanic area of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge; in fact the island was created by numerous volcanoes, many of which are still active. This makes Iceland a land of extremes and active natural attractions including glaciers and vast lava deserts, hot springs, geysers and volcanoes.

Despite its northerly location, the climate is much milder than one would expect because of the warming effects of the Gulf Stream that surrounds the island. The average annual temperature is 7°C (41°F). The summer daytime temperature ranges between 10-15°C (in the 50's°F), while the windy winters have quite mild temperatures (0-10°C/30-40°F). However, the weather can be erratic with sudden appearances of rain or drizzle. Due to the northern setting, summer has two to three months of continuous daylight, while in winter, daylight is brief. The northern lights are often seen, especially in autumn and early winter.

Population

The population numbers about 270,000. Most Icelanders (94%) are descendants of Vikings, a mixture of Norse and Celts.

Language

Icelandic is the language of Iceland; English, other Nordic languages and German are widely spoken as well.

Government

Iceland is a republic. The president is elected every four years by popular vote. Executive power resides in the prime minister and his cabinet. The Parliament (*Althing*) is composed of 63 members.

Religion

More than 87% of Icelanders belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The biggest religious minorities are Protestant 4.1% and Roman Catholic 1.7%.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Icelandic words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Iceland, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Iceland and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Iceland. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as an Icelander. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your

local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS a Islandi will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Icelanders will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Icelandic

- ◆ Polar bears occasionally drift across from Greenland on icebergs.
- ◆ One of the golden ages in Icelandic history is between 930 and 1262 A.D., when Iceland enjoyed freedom as an independent republic. Its parliament, the *Althin*, is the oldest in the world.
- ◆ Iceland is the homeland of the world-famous singer Björk.
- ◆ Much of Iceland's power and heat is generated naturally as Iceland is crisscrossed by a network of rivers and waterfalls that provide hydroelectric power. 90% of Icelandic houses are heated by hot springs, which are also used for the greenhouses where Icelandic bananas are grown.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student Age (upon arrival)	15y to 18y 5m	
Country data	Size	100,250 km ² 39,098 mi ²
	Population	279,384
	Official language	Icelandic
	Government	Constitutional republic
Currency	Krona, divided in 100 aurar.	
Useful website	www.icelandtourstboard.com	
AFS a Islandi website	http://www.afs.is	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>