



48 HOURS IN

Reykjavik

COLD LIGHT · WARM WELCOME

EUROPEAN SERIES

Welcome to Reykjavik.

Reykjavik is the world's northernmost capital, and it wears that fact lightly — a small, colorful, walkable city of roughly 140,000 people that treats its own extremity as a punchline rather than a hardship. Locals will tell you, straight-faced, that if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes. They mean it literally. What looks like a modest downtown of corrugated-iron houses and hipster coffee shops sits at the edge of a landscape so raw — glaciers, geysers, volcanic fields — that the city itself can feel almost like a base camp for something larger.

What Reykjavik has that no other European capital has: a level of ease for solo travelers, and especially solo women, that is genuinely rare — Iceland has topped the Global Peace Index for over a decade running; a downtown compact enough to see almost entirely on foot in a single day; geothermal pools and hot tubs standing in for the nightlife scene most capitals rely on; and a light — the near-endless daylight of summer, or the total dark that makes room for the Northern Lights in winter — that reshapes the whole rhythm of a visit depending on when you come.

Reykjavik rewards solo travelers who don't over-plan. Walk Skólavörðustígur under Hallgrímskirkja's basalt-inspired spire. Eat a hot dog standing up at a stand that's been there since 1937. Soak in a geothermal pool at whatever hour makes sense to you. Watch the mountains ring the bay from the harbor path. This is the itinerary.

DAY ONE

Day One — Downtown 101 Reykjavik · Rainbow Street · Old Harbor

Day One covers the compact downtown core on foot — the city's tallest landmark, its main shopping street, its oldest food institution, and the harbor.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

Hallgrímskirkja

Skólavörðustígur, 101 Reykjavík. Church: free entry, open 9am–8pm (May–Aug) / 10am–5pm (Sep–Apr). Tower: adults 1,400 ISK (~US\$10), open 9am–7:30pm (May–Aug) / 10am–4:45pm (Sep–Apr). Iceland's largest church, ~75m tall, designed by Guðjón Samúelsson with a basalt-column-inspired concrete façade. The elevator to the tower observation deck is the single best value view in the city.

INSIDER TIP

If you're visiting June–August on a Wednesday, Thursday, or Sunday around 5pm, there may be a local concert inside — check the schedule, it's a genuinely lovely way to see the interior.

10:00 AM

Skólavörðustígur (Rainbow Street)

The colorful pedestrian street running downhill from the church — originally painted for Pride, now a permanent, heavily photographed fixture. Shops, galleries, cafés lining both sides.

11:00 AM

Laugavegur

The main shopping street, named for the old path locals once walked to the hot spring laundry pools (laugar). Icelandic wool sweaters, design shops, bookstores. Good browsing whether or not you buy.

1:00 PM

Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur

Downtown, near the harbor. Reykjavik's oldest hot dog stand, open since 1937 — order “eina með öllu” (one with everything: ketchup, sweet mustard, remoulade, raw and fried onion). Under 700 ISK (~US\$5).

INSIDER TIP

Order this over any sit-down lunch on Day One; it's a genuine local institution, not a tourist gimmick.

AFTERNOON · 3:00 PM – 6:30 PM

3:00 PM

Sun Voyager & Waterfront

A steel sculpture on the harbor path, resembling a Viking ship skeleton — one of the city's most photographed spots, made better by the mountains ringing the bay directly behind it. Free, always open.

4:00 PM

Old Harbor / Reykjavik Maritime Museum

Grandagarður, Old Harbor. Housed in a former fishing factory — Iceland's seafaring history from the Settlement era to today. Small, focused, roughly 45–60 minutes.

5:30 PM

Downtown Wander / Coffee Break

Reykjavík Roasters or Kaffi Vínýl are solid downtown coffee stops — a good place to sit, warm up, and plan the evening.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner: Hlemmur Mathöll

Laugavegur 107. A converted former bus station turned food hall — multiple independent vendors, good solo-friendly counter seating, casual and fast. Meals typically 2,000–3,500 ISK (~US\$15–25).

INSIDER TIP

If you want a sit-down tasting menu instead, ROK (Frakkastígur 26a) does rustic, ambient traditional Icelandic cooking — book ahead, more of a splurge.

9:00 PM

Evening Wind-Down

Downtown Reykjavik in summer stays light until nearly midnight — a walk along the harbor or back up Skólavörðustígur under a still-bright sky is a distinctly Icelandic way to close the night. In winter, this is prime Northern Lights-checking time — step away from streetlights toward the harbor or Öskjuhlíð hill and look up.

DAY TWO

Day Two — Perlan · Geothermal Beach · Golden Circle Option

Day Two moves toward the city's geothermal and natural side, with a callout for travelers who want to extend into a Golden Circle day tour.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

Breakfast: Deig or BakaBaka

Deig (multiple locations) does excellent donuts and Nordic-style bagels; BakaBaka is a solid casual breakfast alternative. Under 1,500 ISK (~US\$11) for coffee + pastry.

10:30 AM

Perlan

Öskjuhlíð Hill. Adult admission 6,890 ISK online / 7,290 ISK on-site (~US\$53/56); children 5–12: 4,890/5,290 ISK; under 5 free. Open daily, hours vary seasonally — check perlanmuseum.org. A glass-domed hilltop landmark housing “Wonders of Iceland” — an indoor ice cave (100m tunnel, -10°C, dress warm), volcano/earthquake exhibits, and a 360° observation deck included in admission. Allow 90 minutes to 2 hours.

INSIDER TIP

A free shuttle bus runs from Harpa Concert Hall roughly every 30 minutes (10am–7:30pm) if you'd rather not walk or taxi up the hill.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM

1:00 PM

Nauthólsvík Geothermal Beach

A short walk or drive from Perlan. A man-made white-sand beach with a heated lagoon and open-air hot tubs — genuinely one-of-a-kind, uniquely Icelandic midday stop. Free to access the beach; small fee for changing facilities/showers in colder months.

3:00 PM

Sky Lagoon or Vesturbæjarlaug Pool

Sky Lagoon (splurge option, book ahead) is the scenic infinity-pool geothermal experience with ocean views. Vesturbæjarlaug, in the west-side neighborhood, is the cheaper, local, non-touristy alternative — a genuine slice of Icelandic daily life.

5:00 PM

Downtown Return

Head back toward 101 Reykjavik for the evening. If you have energy left, the Icelandic Phallological Museum (250+ specimens, genuinely well-curated) on Hverfisgata is the offbeat museum stop most visitors end up talking about afterward.

EVENING · 7:30 PM – LATE

7:30 PM

Dinner Downtown

Ban Thai — repeatedly named Reykjavik Grapevine's Best Thai Restaurant — is a well-reviewed, unpretentious option. For something more traditionally Icelandic, ROK (booked ahead) or a downtown seafood spot both work.

9:30 PM

Optional: Try Once

Hákarl (fermented shark) or harðfiskur (dried fish) — the classic “I actually tried it” Icelandic bites. Small portions available at food halls and some bars; treat it as a dare, not a meal.

WHERE TO EAT

Reykjavik's Table

RESTAURANT	NEIGHBOURHOOD	PRICE
Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur	Downtown / Harbor	500–700 ISK
Hlemmur Mathöll	Laugavegur 107	2,000–3,500 ISK
Ban Thai	Downtown	2,500–4,000 ISK
ROK	Frakkastígur 26a	6,000–9,000 ISK
Deig	Multiple locations	800–1,500 ISK
BakaBaka	Downtown	800–1,500 ISK

GETTING AROUND

Navigating Reykjavik

MODE	COST	NOTES
Walking	Free	Downtown 101 Reykjavik is entirely walkable; most sights within a 10–15 min walk.
Flybus (airport)	~4,000–5,000 ISK	Connects Keflavik (KEF) to the city center in ~45 min; book ahead.
Strætó (city bus)	~590 ISK/ride	Not essential for downtown, but useful for Nauthólsvík/Perlan in bad weather.
Reykjavik City Card	24/48/72hr options	Bundles 17 museums, 8 geothermal pools, unlimited bus travel, and the Viðey ferry.
Taxi	Metered	Licensed taxis are standard for late-night or Perlan/Nauthólsvík trips.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Before You Go

TOPIC	DETAILS
Getting There	Keflavik International Airport (KEF), ~50km / 45 min from downtown via Flybus.
Best Time	June–August: near-endless daylight, mildest temps, busiest and priciest. September–March: Northern Lights season, colder, cheaper. May & September: shoulder months.
Solo Dining	Very easy — no stigma, counter and food-hall seating is the norm rather than the exception.
Language	Icelandic; English spoken fluently and near-universally, including by older residents.
Useful Apps	SafeTravel (ICE-SAR), Icelandic Met Office weather app, Strætó (bus routes), 112 Iceland App.

Reykjavik awaits.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Final Checklist

- ☐ Book Flybus airport transfer in advance
- ☐ Check vedur.is (weather) and register any hiking/driving plans on safetravel.is
- ☐ Pack layers regardless of season — Iceland's weather changes fast
- ☐ Book Sky Lagoon or ROK ahead if planning to go — both fill up
- ☐ Download the SafeTravel and 112 Iceland apps before arrival
- ☐ Bring a swimsuit — geothermal pools are a core part of the 48 hours
- ☐ Consider the Reykjavik City Card if visiting 2+ paid museums/pools

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

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