

How to drive in Iceland

A relatively large percentage of foreign tourists in Iceland travel around the country by car. Conditions in Iceland are in many ways unusual and often quite unlike those that foreign drivers are accustomed to. It is therefore very important to know how to drive in this country.

We know that the landscape is beautiful, and naturally draws the driver's attention away from the road. However, in order to reach your destination safely, you must keep your full attention on driving.



What are the speed limits?

The speed limit in populated areas is usually 50 km/h. Speed limit signs are not posted unless other speed limits apply. The speed limit is often 60 km/h on throughways. In residential areas it is usually only 30 km/h. The rule of thumb in rural areas is that gravel roads have a speed limit of 80 km/h, and paved roads 90 km/h.

Speed enforcement cameras are widely used in addition to strict police surveillance. Speeding fines can reach up to over a hundred thousand ISK. It is also important to note that even if a driver has left the country he or she is still obligated to pay the fine.

In several places there are traffic signs (white numbers on a blue square background) which indicate the recommended maximum speed, where drivers should realize that the recommended maximum speed can be less than the permitted speed limit due to driving conditions.



Gravel roads, blind hills & blind curves

A common place for accidents to occur on rural roads is where a paved road suddenly changes to gravel. The main reason is that drivers do not reduce speed before the changeover to gravel, and consequently lose control. Loose gravel on road shoulders has also caused a great number of accidents.

When driving on gravel roads—which are often quite narrow—it is important to show caution when approaching another car coming from the opposite direction by moving as far to the right as is safely possible.

Blind hills—where lanes are not separate—can be very dangerous, and should be approached with caution. There are also many blind curves in Iceland that test a driver's skill.



Single lane bridges

There are many single lane bridges on the Ring Road. The actual rule is that the car closer to the bridge has the right-of-way. However, it is wise to stop and assess the situation, i.e. attempt to see what the other driver plans to do. This sign indicates that a single lane bridge is ahead.



Livestock on the road

In Iceland, you can expect livestock to be on or alongside the road. Usually it is sheep, but sometimes horses and even cows can be in your path. This is common all over the country, and can be very dangerous.

Sometimes a sheep is on one side of the road and her lambs on the other side. Under these conditions—which are common—it is a good rule to expect the lambs or the sheep to run to the other side. If a car hits such an animal, the driver can expect to be held liable for it.





Seatbelts required by law

In Iceland, drivers and passengers are required by law to wear seatbelts, regardless of the type of vehicle or where they are seated. Investigations of fatal accidents in recent years have shown that a large majority of those who died as drivers or passengers in cars did not have their seatbelts buckled.

Wearing seatbelts is especially important because of the nature of accidents in Iceland; many of them involve vehicles driving off the road and rolling over. In such accidents, seatbelts often mean the difference between life and death. It should be noted that children must either wear seatbelts, or be in car safety seats, depending on their age and maturity.

Video showing how to drive in Iceland

The Road Traffic Directorate has produced the video "How to Drive in Iceland" which covers most of the points that are mentioned here in this brochure. The video can be viewed at www.drive.is.

Necessary to bear in mind

- It is against the law to operate a vehicle in Iceland after having consumed alcohol or other intoxicants and penalties for violations of these laws are severe.
- Icelandic law requires that vehicle headlights be on at all times, day and night, when driving.
- During the summer, the sun is visible both day and night and the day seems long. Drivers must be aware of this fact and avoid driving for too long, since they may fall asleep while driving.
- The use of hands-free equipment is an obligation when talking on a mobile phone and driving at the same time.
- It is strictly forbidden to drive off-road. Such driving results in serious damage to sensitive vegetation, which may take nature decades to repair.
- Foreign travellers requiring information regarding road and driving conditions should visit the Public Road Administration's website at www.vegagerdin.is
- If you are the cause of a fatal accident which is a direct result of reckless behaviour, such as speeding or drunk driving, you will most likely be charged with manslaughter. Additionally insurance companies can make you liable for any damage caused by you.

Download the app
and leave your GPS trail



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Unfamiliar Conditions on Icelandic Roads