

Vatnajökull National Park

Iceland

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



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Overview

Vatnajökull National Park covers about 14% of Iceland. It protects Vatnajökull, the largest ice cap in Europe by volume, and the volcanoes, glacier tongues, canyons and waterfalls around it. The park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Most visitors see it from the Ring Road in the south, where glaciers reach down to the lowlands. The north has powerful waterfalls and the Ásbyrgi canyon. The highlands in the centre are remote and open only in summer.

When to visit

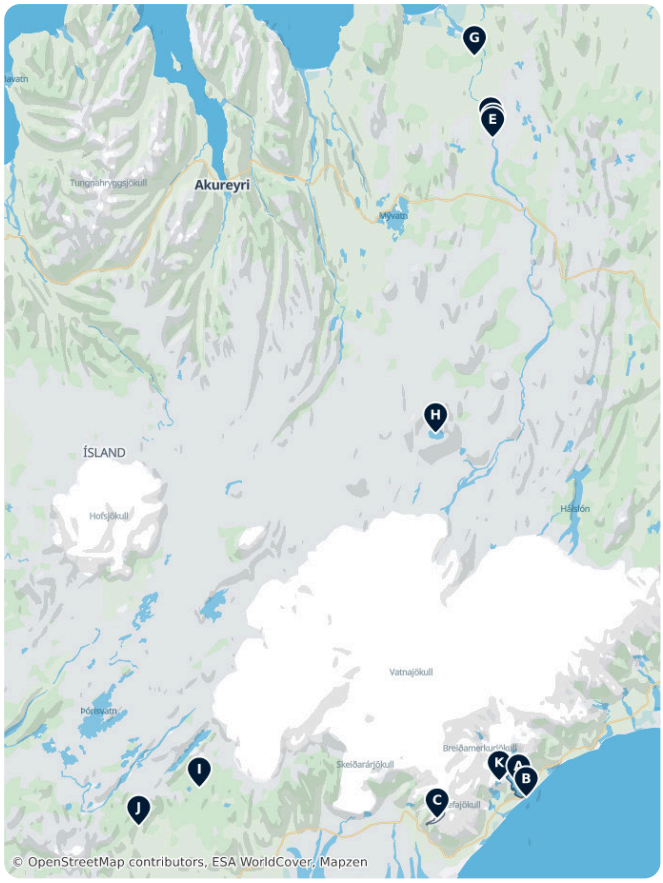
June to August is best. Highland roads open in summer, daylight is long and hiking is easiest. In winter, daylight is short and some roads close, but it is the only season for ice cave tours, and the sky is dark for the northern lights.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for hiking	0° / 4° Feels like -7°	-5° / -12°	21 rainy days · Dry air
February	Poor Poor for hiking	0° / 5° Feels like -7°	-5° / -12°	19 rainy days · Dry air
March	Poor Poor for hiking	0° / 5° Feels like -7°	-5° / -12°	20 rainy days · Dry air
April	Poor Poor for hiking	2° / 6° Feels like -4°	-2° / -9°	Dry air
May	Poor Poor for hiking	5° / 9° Feels like 0°	1° / -4°	Dry air
June	Poor Poor for hiking	8° / 12° Feels like 4°	4° / 0°	16 rainy days · Dry air
July	Poor Poor for hiking	10° / 13° Feels like 6°	6° / 4°	19 rainy days · Dry air
August	Poor Poor for hiking	10° / 12° Feels like 6°	6° / 3°	19 rainy days · Dry air
September	Poor Poor for hiking	7° / 10° Feels like 2°	4° / -1°	20 rainy days · Dry air
October	Poor Poor for hiking	3° / 8° Feels like -2°	0° / -6°	21 rainy days · Dry air
November	Poor Poor for hiking	1° / 6° Feels like -6°	-3° / -10°	20 rainy days · Dry air
December	Poor Poor for hiking	0° / 5° Feels like -7°	-5° / -12°	21 rainy days · Dry air

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2); NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights

- A Jökulsárlón is a glacial lake full of floating icebergs at the edge of Breiðamerkurjökull. Nearby, B Diamond Beach is a black sand beach scattered with ice.
- C Falljökull is a glacier tongue that flows down from the Öræfajökull volcano. It is a short hike from the road, near Skaftafell.
- D Dettifoss is one of the most powerful waterfalls in Europe, with E Selfoss and F Hafragilsfoss just upstream and downstream.
- G Ásbyrgi is a horseshoe-shaped canyon with steep cliffs and a forest floor, in the north of the park.
- H Askja is a large volcanic caldera in the highlands. It is reached by 4x4 vehicle or on a tour in summer.
- I Laki is a long line of volcanic craters. The 1783 eruption here caused famine in Iceland.
- J Ófærufoss is a waterfall in the Eldgjá canyon on the highland road.
- K Crystal Ice Cave tours run in winter only, with a licensed guide.



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Where to explore

- On the south coast, visit Glacier Lagoon and Höfn.
- In the north, see Dettifoss, Selfoss og Hafragilsfoss and Myvatn.
- Westward along the Ring Road, stop at Kirkjubæjarklaustur.

Getting there

- **By air**: International flights land at Keflavík (KEF). Reykjavík to the southern edge of the park is about 330 km, a drive of around 4.5 hours.
- **By car**: The Ring Road (Route 1) passes the southern edge. Skaftafell is the main base.
- **By bus**: Long-distance buses run along the Ring Road in summer, with fewer in winter.
- **Northern entrance**: Dettifoss and Ásbyrgi are reached from the Mývatn area or Húsavík, about 1 to 1.5 hours by car.

Getting around

- A car is the easiest way to reach the park. Guided tours run to ice caves, glacier hikes and the highlands.
- Highland routes (F-roads) are open in summer only and need a 4x4 vehicle. Many rivers have no bridges.
- Skaftafell has marked trails of different lengths.

Driving

- The Ring Road is paved. Many roads to the sights are gravel.
- Highland F-roads need a 4x4 and experience with river crossings. Check road conditions before you go.
- Winter weather can close roads without warning.

Safety & health

- Never walk on a glacier without a guide and proper equipment. Crevasses can be hidden.
- Ice caves are safe only with licensed guides in winter. Do not enter on your own.
- Rivers can rise quickly. Check SafeTravel before you go to remote areas.

Country facts

CURRENCY
ISK kr

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



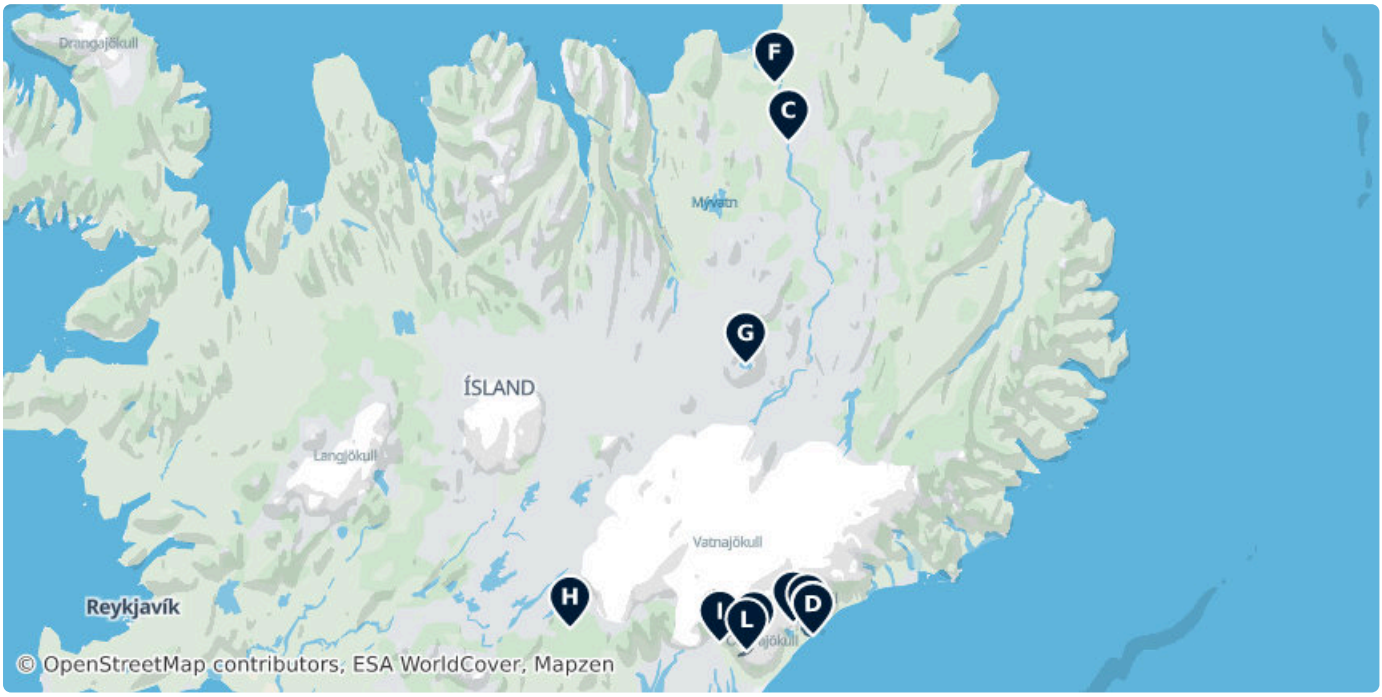
Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Icelandic

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Vatnajökull National Park: Absolute Essentials

Vatnajökull National Park encompasses over 14% of Iceland, centered around Europe's largest glacier. This collection highlights the park's diverse geological features, from the iceberg-filled Jökulsárlón lagoon and the basalt columns of Svartifoss to Dettifoss, Europe's most powerful waterfall. The region includes active volcanic systems like Askja and Laki, the horseshoe-shaped Ásbyrgi Canyon, and Hvannadalshnjúkur, Iceland's highest peak. Visitors can explore naturally formed ice caves, black sand beaches strewn with glacial ice, and the extensive hiking trail network within the Skaftafell wilderness.





A Jökulsárlón

Glacial lagoon known for large floating icebergs and deep waters near a major Icelandic glacier.

Iceland (64.07844, -16.22389)



B Black Waterfall

Waterfall featuring distinctive basalt columns that resemble organ pipes, surrounded by unique geological formations.

Iceland (64.02768, -16.97526)



C Dettifoss

A waterfall with a height of 44 meters and width of 100 meters, known for its powerful water flow and scenic natural surroundings.

Iceland (65.81435, -16.38449)



D Diamond Beach

Black sand beach known for glacial ice chunks that wash ashore from a nearby glacier lagoon, creating a striking contrast between ice and volcanic sand.

Iceland (64.04379, -16.17634)



E Crystal Ice Cave

Naturally formed cave within the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier featuring translucent blue ice. Access is typically limited to winter months via guided tours.

Iceland (64.08821, -16.34644)



F Asbyrgi Canyon

Ásbyrgi is a glacial canyon and forest in the north of Iceland, located approximately 38 kilometres east of Húsavík on the Diamond Circle...

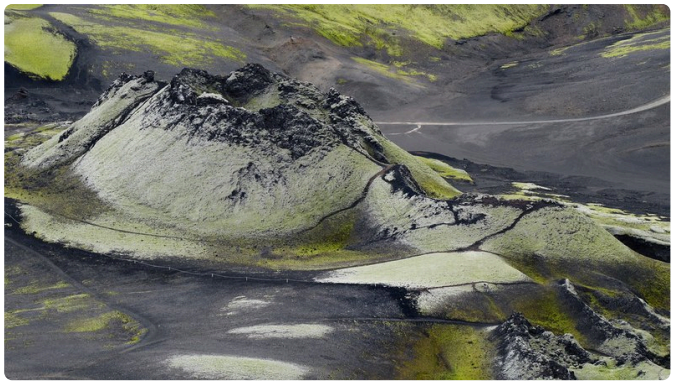
Iceland (66.01570, -16.50241)



G Askja

Askja is an active volcano situated in a remote part of the central highlands of Iceland.

Iceland (65.03044, -16.74689)



H Laki

Laki or Lakagígar is a volcanic fissure in the western part of Vatnajökull National Park, Iceland, not far from the volcanic fissure of...

Iceland (64.07019, -18.23631)



I Skaftafell Visitor Centre

Information hub for the Skaftafell area providing hiking maps, exhibition displays, and details on glacier safety. Includes a gift shop and essential facilities.

Glacier Trail, Sveitarfélagið Hornafjörður, Iceland (64.01667, -16.96632)

Jan Mo–Su	10:00–16:00
Feb-Apr Mo–Su	10:00–17:00
May-Sep Mo–Su	09:00–19:00
Oct-Nov Mo–Su	10:00–17:00
Dec Mo–Su	11:00–17:00



J Hvannadalshnjúkur

Hvannadalshnjúkur or Hvannadalshnúkur Icelandic pronunciation: is a pyramidal peak on the northwestern rim of the summit crater of the...

Iceland (64.01415, -16.67696)



K Svartifoss

Designated vantage point offering a direct view of the Svartifoss waterfall and its surrounding hexagonal basalt column formations.

Iceland (64.02740, -16.97493)



L Falljökull

A steep outlet glacier of the Vatnajökull ice cap, characterized by a dramatic icefall and rugged terrain often used for guided hiking expeditions.

Iceland (63.98476, -16.73782)

M Jökulsárlón

Main parking area located adjacent to the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon, providing direct access to boat tour departures and shoreline viewing areas.

(64.04594, -16.18283)

Glaciers and Ice Caves

Vatnajökull National Park encompasses a diverse range of glacial features, from the iceberg-filled waters of Jökulsárlón to the rugged outlet tongues of the main ice cap. This selection highlights accessible hiking locations like Skaftafellsjökull, steep icefalls at Falljökull, and seasonal ice caves formed by meltwater. The area demonstrates the dynamic nature of Iceland's geology, featuring volcanic ash layers trapped in ice, expansive outwash plains, and lagoons formed by retreating glaciers.





A Jökulsárlón

Glacial lagoon known for large floating icebergs and deep waters near a major Icelandic glacier.

Iceland (64.07844, -16.22389)



B Crystal Ice Cave

Naturally formed blue ice cave within the Vatnajökull glacier, typically accessible via guided tours during the winter months.

Iceland (64.08821, -16.34644)



C Skeiðarárjökull

A broad glacier tongue that feeds the Skeiðarársandur outwash plain, known for its significant width and history of large-scale glacial floods.

(64.14355, -17.21455)

D Veðurárrönd

Moraine and gravel area situated at the edge of the glacial ice.

Iceland (64.22453, -16.24179)

E Ice cave

Naturally occurring cave formed within glacial ice, subject to seasonal changes and meltwater patterns.

(64.11214, -16.23731)

F Skaftafellsjökull

Accessible glacier tongue in the Skaftafell area, characterized by dark sediment ridges and proximity to established hiking trails.

(64.06287, -16.85445)



G Falljökull

Steep glacier outlet featuring a dramatic icefall, frequently used for guided glacier hiking and ice climbing excursions.

Iceland (63.98476, -16.73782)

H Svínafellsjökull

Glacier tongue known for its sharp ice ridges and deep crevasses. It has served as a filming location for several major films and television series.

Iceland (64.02823, -16.74712)

I Heinabergsjökull

Glacier tongue that terminates in a quiet lagoon, often used for kayaking tours away from the larger crowds of Jökulsárlón.

(64.31936, -15.83620)



J Fláajökull

Fláajökull is a smaller, slow flowing glacier of Iceland, located on the east side of volcano Breiðabunga in the east of Iceland, in...

(64.36675, -15.67045)



K Hólárjökull

Glacier tongue located on the southern edge of the Vatnajökull ice cap.

Iceland (63.94740, -16.56961)

L Tungnafellsjökull

Tungnafellsjökull is a icecap glacier upon a volcano of the same name in Iceland. The volcano is also known as Vonarskarð.

Iceland (64.75460, -17.90795)

M Virkisjökull

Glacier outlet adjacent to Falljökull, exhibiting prominent moraines and clear evidence of rapid glacial retreat.

Iceland (63.99261, -16.74926)

N Fjallsjökull

Glacier tongue that calves directly into the Fjallsárlón lagoon, providing views of icebergs breaking off the glacier face.

Iceland (64.02632, -16.44470)

O Kirkjan

Symmetrical basalt cave formation in the Hljóðaklettar area, named 'The Church' for its distinct architectural shape.

(65.93798, -16.53450)

P Tungnaárjökull

Major outflow glacier on the western side of the Vatnajökull ice cap.

(64.31746, -18.06671)

Q Köldukvíslarjökull

Glacier tongue situated on the northwestern margin of the Vatnajökull ice cap.

(64.57271, -17.81086)

R Rjúpnabrekkujökull

Glacial outlet located on the northern slopes of the Vatnajökull ice cap.

Iceland (64.70095, -17.53126)

S Súlujökull

Southern glacier tongue extending from the Vatnajökull ice cap.

(64.03527, -17.35842)

T Skaftárjökull

Source of the Skaftá river, this glacier is notable for its subglacial volcanic activity and periodic glacial floods known as jökulhlaups.

(64.21621, -18.04532)

Icelandic Volcanoes

Vatnajökull National Park and the surrounding highlands house some of Iceland's most powerful geological features. This selection includes the massive Bárðarbunga and Grímsvötn subglacial volcanoes, as well as the Laki fissure, responsible for one of history's most significant eruptions. The list also features the iconic tuya Herðubreið and the Askja caldera, which contains the deep Öskjuvatn lake. These sites showcase a range of volcanic activity, from expansive lava fields like Holuhraun to dormant peaks and active vents hidden beneath thick ice caps.

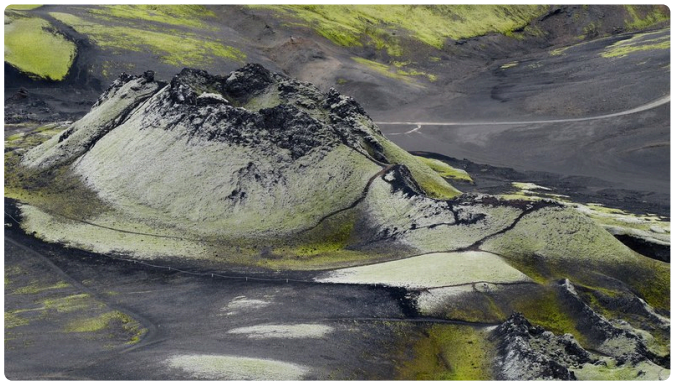




A Askja

Askja is an active volcano situated in a remote part of the central highlands of Iceland.

Iceland (65.03044, -16.74689)



B Laki

Laki or Lakagígar is a volcanic fissure in the western part of Vatnajökull National Park, Iceland, not far from the volcanic fissure of...

Iceland (64.07019, -18.23631)



C Bárðarbunga

Bárðarbunga, is an active and productive stratovolcano located under Vatnajökull in Vatnajökull National Park which is Iceland's most...

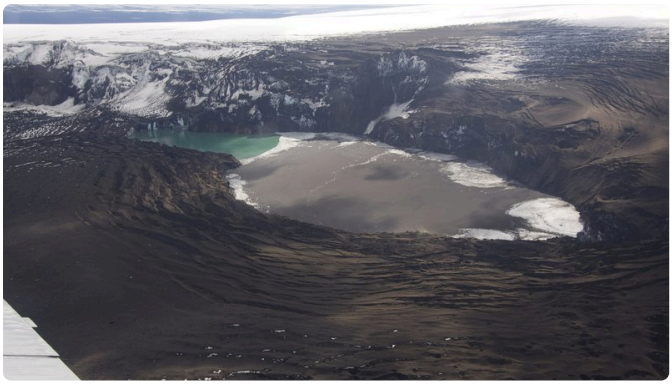
Iceland (64.64105, -17.52774)



D Herðubreið

Herðubreið is a tuya and composite volcano in the northern part of Vatnajökull National Park, Iceland.

Iceland (65.17868, -16.34502)



E Grímsvötn

Grímsvötn is an active volcano with a fissure system located in Vatnajökull National Park, Iceland.

Iceland (64.40814, -17.33779)



F Öskjuvatn

Öskjuvatn is a lake in the Highlands of Iceland. Its surface area is about 11 km².

Iceland (65.03063, -16.74390)

G Holuhraun

A vast lava field formed by a significant fissure eruption between 2014 and 2015. It originated from the Bárðarbunga volcanic system and covers over 85 square kilometers in the central highlands.

(64.85174, -16.82989)

H Esjufjöll

A subglacial volcano and mountain range located on the southeastern part of the Vatnajökull ice cap. Most of the system is covered by ice, with several peaks appearing as nunataks.

Iceland (64.26590, -16.64566)

DATA SOURCES

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