

# The Ultimate Guide to Iceland's Ring Road

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## Iceland's Magical Ring Road

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If you've ever considered travelling around Iceland, chances are you've heard of the Ring Road.

Iceland's Ring Road, or Route 1, makes for the ultimate road trip. This 1,332km long road runs along the perimeter of the island, connecting most of the inhabited areas, and boasting some of the most beautiful natural landscapes on the planet.

## The Route

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There are some areas you won't get to see if you stick to the Ring Road exclusively, like the wild Westfjords or the untamed Highlands, but the route does give you an excellent tour of the island, allowing travellers of all types to take in the unrivalled scenery that Iceland has on offer, from dramatic seascapes to sprawling magnificent glaciers, to volcanoes surrounded by isolated lava fields. But if you want to squeeze in every ounce of amazing scenery to be found in Iceland, you'll want to tack on some extra time to your visit - and some detours off the Ring Road - to see it all!

In this guide, we're giving you all the information you need to have for the road trip of a lifetime on Route 1. From tips for attractions you absolutely cannot miss to accommodation and refuelling hacks, and even some worthy detours along the way, you'll find everything to make the most amazing Icelandic memories.

## Your Custom Ring Road Map

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The key to any successful road trip is having the perfect route planned out. To help you plan your Ring Road adventure, we've pulled together the top attractions and our list of must-see detours for your trip to Iceland. Choose the attractions you know you don't want to miss and work together with your timeline to create your own custom itinerary for your road trip around the Ring Road.

# Iceland Ring Road Map

Click on a stop to  
find out more!







## STOP Reykjadalur

Heading Southeast out of Reykjavik on Route 1 for just under an hour will lead you to Reykjadalur, which appropriately translates to “steam valley.” Here, you’ll find a verdant valley surrounded by stunning mountains. The valley floor is dotted with hot springs and the famous hot river.

Reward yourself after an energising hike through the valley with a soak in the hot river. What better way to finish your day than by soaking in naturally heated thermal waters surrounded by stunning scenery?



## STOP Seljalandsfoss

Continuing Southeast along Route 1, and taking just the slightest detour off the Ring road, will bring you to one of Iceland’s many waterfalls of breathtaking capacity.

After leaving Reykjadalur, stay on Route 1 for about an hour and 20 minutes and then turn onto Route 249 for less than 5 minutes and you will reach Seljalandsfoss. This waterfall is popular amongst visitors to Iceland because of the dramatic 200ft drop and a path that leads visitors behind the waterfall into a cave where you can stand behind the mighty cascading waters.





## STOP **DC3 Plane Wreck**

Find your way back to the Ring Road and continue Southeast for another 30 minutes. This will bring you to the beginning of the path that leads you across the black sands of Sólheimasandur. Less than an hour's walk across the beach will bring you to the wreckage of the famous DC3 Plane crash. Back in the 1970s, a US Navy plane ran out of fuel and crashed on the beach but thankfully, everyone on board survived.

The presence of a decaying plane on the isolated beach is haunting and makes for brilliant photo opportunities.



## STOP **Reynisfjara Black Sand Beach**

Following Route 1 for a further 20 minutes Southeast will bring you to one of the most famous beaches in all of Iceland. The black sands of Reynisfjara have become synonymous with the mystical beauty of Iceland.

Explore the amazing rock formations and enjoy the unusual scenery, thanks to the volcanic roots of the island. You might find that spending the night in nearby Vik is a nice way to break up the trip, as the next leg of the journey is a little longer.





STOP  
**Skaftafell  
(Vatnajökull  
National Park)**

From Vik, make your way Northeast and after 2 hours you'll find yourself at one of Iceland's 3 national parks, Vatnajökull. Within the park, you'll find a natural wilderness area, Skaftafell.

Some of Iceland's most breathtaking scenery can be found in this area, and you can see Svartifoss waterfall, hiking trails and the Skaftafellsjökull glacier. If you're hoping to see some of Iceland's most raw and natural beauty, don't pass by Skaftafell on your Ring Road tour.



STOP  
**Hofskirkja  
Church**

Continuing East on the Ring Road will eventually lead you to the village of Hof, where you can see an excellent example of Icelandic architecture. The style of buildings in Iceland is truly unique and has been fascinating visitors for many, many years. The grounds are beautiful, with thick blankets of grass and low-hanging trees.

The church makes for a nice, brief stop before hitting the road again for the next big attraction. This is another great spot to spend the night after your adventures in Skaftafell and exploring Hofskirkja, as there are a few good hotels in the area.







STOP  
**Jökulsárlón  
and Diamond  
Beach**

Just 40 minutes Northeast along the Ring Road will bring you to two of Iceland's most beautiful and popular attractions. Jökulsárlón is a glacial lagoon where you can see seals lazing on icebergs drifting in from the sea. Across from the lagoon and facing the Atlantic ocean is Diamond Beach where you will find sparkling chunks of ice glistening in the sun, giving the beach its name.

During summer months, you can take a boat tour of Jökulsárlón, which is well worth doing.



STOP  
**Vestrahorn  
Mountain  
(Stokksnes)**

Continuing on the Ring Road in a Northeasterly direction will bring you to one of Iceland's most famed mountains, called Vestrahorn. This breathtaking mountain seen surrounded by glassy, reflective waters is enough to bring visitors the greatest sense of awe.

The mountain is the perfect place to visit for some fantastic photos, exploring, enjoying a picnic and relaxing.







## STOP Egilsstaðir

The next leg of your Ring Road adventure is a long one, and after 3.5 hours of heading North, taking in the scenic coastal views of the route, you'll find yourself in the lovely town of Egilsstaðir. This is the largest town in Northeastern Iceland and is the perfect place to end a long day of exploring and travelling. You may even want to spend a couple of nights here, enjoying the activities the area has to offer and taking a break from driving.

There are several swimming pools and thermal pools in the area, hiking trails to explore and plenty of other activities to enjoy in Egilsstaðir.



## STOP Lake Mývatn, Mývatn Nature Baths, Dimmuborgir, Hverfjall and Grjótagjá

Next, your journey will guide you Northwest for a little more than 2 hours, where you'll find a wealth to explore in and around Lake Mývatn. The lake itself boasts many bird species, walking trails and plenty of beautiful scenery to enjoy.

Nearby you will find the Mývatn Nature Baths, a wonderful place to visit the thermal pools and spa, and enjoy some pampering. This is one of the north's most luxurious nature baths and if you want a chance to relax it's well worth a visit.

While you're in the area, pay a visit to Grjótagjá, the secret hot spring hidden in a cave. For you Game of Thrones fans, this is where a certain very romantic scene took place for Jon Snow and Ygritte.

Also in the area you'll find the unusual lava formations of Dimmuborgir. The area is full of unusual formations, caves and walking trails that make for fantastic exploring.

Iceland is full of volcanic wonders, and one such is the location right in the Lake Myvatn area. Hverfjall is a momentous crater, or a tephra cone volcano. The area is great for hiking and taking surreal photos of the unusual landscape.



## 11 STOP Goðafoss Waterfall

Just a half hour along Route 1 from Lake Myvatn, you'll find another fantastic example of an Icelandic waterfall. This wide and cascading waterfall is stunning and the waters below are particularly blue, making it a fantastic spot for photographers.



## 12 STOP Akureyri

Another 30 minutes West will bring you to Iceland's unofficial northern capital, Akureyri. This is another wonderful place to break your journey for a few days to enjoy the second largest city in the country and all that it has to offer.

There are plenty of hotels and Airbnbs to choose from in the area, as well as restaurants and things to do and see. From museums and galleries to the amazing Akureyrarkirkja church and the northernmost Botanical Gardens in the world, there is much to enjoy in Akureyri.



## 13 STOP The Blue Lagoon

The last big stretch of your Icelandic journey will lead you South from Akureyri back towards Reykjavik. We suggest veering off the Ring Road for your final night and treating yourself to one last break at the Blue Lagoon outside of Reykjavik, and you'll want it after the 5 hour + journey from the north.

You can select your experience at the Blue Lagoon and choose to simply soak in the warm waters and enjoy the soothing properties. Or, if you want to splash out for your last celebration on the road in Iceland, you can stay in one of the hotels on sight or even enjoy some pampering sessions in the spa.



## 14 STOP Reykjavik

No trip to Iceland would be complete without spending a couple of days in the charming capital city. Reykjavik may only have a population of 122,000, but it still has enough to keep you busy like a bigger city.

Catch a show at Harpa Concert Hall, enjoy the nightlife, sample delicacies at one of the food halls, and taste the world's best hotdog at the famous hot dog stand, Baejarins Beztu Pylsur.

There are plenty of fantastic hotels and Airbnbs in Reykjavik, international and local traditional cuisine as well as culture to soak up in local museums. This little bustling city is certainly worth enjoying before finishing up your trip in Iceland.





## Not to Miss Detours

Our Ring Road map keeps you on (or just a stone's throw away from) Route 1, but as we already said, there's plenty more to see if you venture a bit off the Ring Road. Now, you could spend months exploring every corner of Iceland off the Ring Road, but we're sharing our top 15 detours that are worth checking out when on your road trip.

1

**Thórsmörk** - Located in the Highlands, this mountain ridge is named after the Norse god Thor, and boasts some of the most amazing scenery in Iceland.

3

**Skógafoss** - A dramatic waterfall - great for capturing rainbows in your photos!

5

**Fjaðrárgljúfur** - This long and winding canyon in south east Iceland is beautiful enough to take your breath away

2

**Seljavallalaug** - The iconic outdoor thermal pool in the Icelandic wilderness. Built in 1923, it's the perfect spot to bathe.

4

**Dyrhólaey** - This coastal rock formation in the shape of an arc is very popular amongst visitors and it's easy to see why - the scenery is out of this world!

6

**Hengifoss** - The third tallest waterfall in Iceland is definitely worth a visit. It requires a bit of a hike to get to it, but it's absolutely worth the effort.



Seljavallalaug



Thorsmork







Hallormsstaðaskógur

7

**Hallormsstaðaskógur** - Hallormsstaður National Forest is the largest, and one of the only, forests in Iceland. In most areas of Iceland you will not find many trees, because more than 90% of them were chopped down by early settlers.

8

**Dettifoss** - This is Europe's second most powerful waterfall. The falls make quite the impression and are a very impressive sight to behold.



9

**Ásbyrgi** - A glacial canyon located in Vatnajökull National Park, Ásbyrgi translates to "shelter of the gods". The area also makes a great camping spot.

10

**Húsavík** - This lovely town in Northern Iceland is a must-visit if whale watching is on your list! The tours that run out of Húsavík Harbour make for some of the best whale watching in the country!

11

**Tröllaskagi** - This scenic and mountainous region of Northern Iceland is nestled in a remote area between two sprawling fjords. For anyone wanting to explore the natural beauty of Iceland further away from the tourists, this is a spot you should definitely add to your route.

12

**Westfjords** - The Westfjords is a region in the far West of Iceland, with more natural beauty and a lower population than other regions of Iceland. For those who want to see wildlife, like Icelandic horses or the Arctic Fox, you'll want to allow time to explore the Westfjords!



Westfjords



## 13

**Snæfellsnes peninsula** - If you're going to add only one detour to your Ring Road trip, you might want to make sure it's Snæfellsnes peninsula. Famous for its dramatic landscapes and iconic attractions, like Kirkjufell mountain and Snæfellsjökull National Park, there is much to discover in this corner of Iceland.

## 14

**Hraunfossar & Barnafoss** - Western Iceland boasts some of the most beautiful waterfalls, and there are two you will find in the Borgarfjörður area. Hraunfossar is a wide and sprawling series of smaller falls, while a bit further along the trail you will find Barnafoss. The area is great for hiking and exploring.

## 15

**Deildartunguhver** - This natural hot spring is too hot for swimming, but it's fascinating because a great deal of this water is used for heating Icelandic homes. In fact, a large portion of homes in Iceland are heated from hot spring water!



Snæfellsnes peninsula

## Our Top Ring Road Tips and Advice

Of course you'll want to make the most of your Ring Road tour, so we suggest that you carry out plenty of research ahead of time. There are a few things you should know before you start planning, so here are our top bits of advice for your road trip of Route 1 in Iceland.

### When to travel the Ring Road

For most people, late spring and summer are going to be the best time to travel the Ring Road. The Ring Road is maintained all year, but during winter snowstorms the going can be tough and only drivers who are very experienced in the snow should tackle the task.

### How long to allow for your tour of the Ring Road

Depending on the duration of your trip to Iceland, you'll need to decide how many days you want to allow yourself to tackle all the amazing adventure along Iceland's Ring Road.

We'd suggest allowing yourself a week to take in the main 14 stops of the route listed above, but if you want to squeeze in some of the detours or allow yourself more time to explore at a slower pace, then ten days is ideal. It's all about whether you want to enjoy your time in Iceland at a leisurely pace, or pack a lot in. You can also tailor the number of attractions you visit to your timeline if you're only going to be in Iceland for a few days but still want to explore the Ring Road.

## Take the weather into consideration

No matter what time of year you're planning to embark on your Route 1 road trip, we cannot stress the importance of consulting the weather forecast. Even in the spring and summer, when the weather is typically mild, this can change quickly. Iceland is famous for the temperamental weather and locals like to say they can experience all four seasons in a single day!

Keep an eye on updates from the Icelandic Met Office to make sure you can travel safely. It's also a good idea to allow yourself some flexibility in your itinerary in case you struggle to travel due to weather conditions.

## Take advantage of tours

Though the thrill of taking yourself on a self-drive tour through Iceland is tough to beat, sometimes it's good to hook up with some organised tours to get the most out of your time in the country. Local tour guides can provide a wealth of interesting facts and helpful information about Iceland to enrich your experience.

So whether you want to explore a volcano, a glacier, an ice cave, enjoy the scenery on the back of an Icelandic horse or go whale watching, there's a tour that can make it happen for you.

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## Refuelling

Most of the areas you'll be visiting along the Ring Road will present plenty of opportunities for filling up your tank with fuel. The only area where you may struggle is the Southeast, where refueling stations are a little more scattered. In this area, make sure to refuel whenever you see a station - just to be safe.

Refuelling stations are also a great place to find some cheap food and snacks, if you're travelling in Iceland on a budget. Most stations have a variety of freshly prepared food or tasty pre-packaged food that is easy to eat while on the go.





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