

REYKJAVIK VS. KEFLAVIK

CHOOSING A LONG-TERM BASE IN THE LAND OF FIRE AND ICE

As with all other Nordic nations, Iceland is consistently regarded as one of the happiest places on Earth, marking the Land of Fire and Ice as not only a bucket list holiday destination but an incredibly appealing place to live.

While its population is made up of less than 350,000 people, Iceland has become, in more recent years, an increasingly popular option for expats. Its economy is in continuous growth, providing a surprising array of employment prospects, especially within the manufacturing industry, as well as within the services, hospitality and pharmaceuticals sectors. Moreover, Iceland sports an incredible work-life balance with plenty of room for flexibility, along with a proximity to the great outdoors that is truly unmatched. Where else could you spend weekends watching the captivating Northern Lights, glacier hiking, or bathing in geothermal lagoons?

However, while Iceland's landmass is mighty, the nation as a whole is largely uninhabitable. Thus, expats looking to relocate to the Northern European country are not left with many cities to choose from. Essentially, those seeking to set up base on the volcanic island are left with two main candidates: Reykjavik, the capital, or Keflavik, the second city. Here, we take a look at what both locations have to offer, weighing up the pros and cons of each as a long-term destination.



Reykjavik

The world's most northerly capital, Reykjavik, is strikingly cosmopolitan for its size. Despite being merely a town by international standards, and boasting a population between that of Stafford and Chester, this contemporary destination combines an impressive gastronomy scene with enduring history and an appreciation for the creative to ensure both visitors and residents are delighted by surprises at every turn.

Filled to the brim with captivating art, Reykjavik is an ideal base for those with a fondness for the expressive and imaginative. Outstanding exhibition spaces can be found all across the city, providing the perfect hideaways on weeknights and weekends spent away from the office. Major highlights include the National Gallery, which displays masterpieces from the likes of Jón Stefánsson and Einar Hákonarson – both trailblazers in the Icelandic art scene, and the Reykjavik Art Museum, which is spread across three buildings and houses work from leading national and international artists as well as those considered up-and-coming.

If history is more your thing, then The Settlement Exhibition, located within walking distance of Reykjavik's central lake, Tjörnin, and the Saga Museum situated in the Old Harbour, are the ultimate spots to while away an hour or two. The former is built around the unearthed Viking longhouse of the area's earliest inhabitants allowing visitors to journey back centuries to the Viking Age, while the latter promises a fun-filled day out for the entire family, with its recreations of key moments in Icelandic history.

Of course, residents are not limited to indoor pursuits. From the pristine runs found at nearby Bláfljöll and Skálafell – ideal for downhill and cross-country skiing as well as snowboarding – to the blossom and bird-filled Reykjavik Botanic Gardens, the otherworldly coastal stretch of Seltjarnarnes, along with the Northern Lights hotspots of Grotta Island, Lake Kleifarvatn, and Klambartun Park, there is plenty to discover amid fresh, crisp air and magical, clear skies.

With this wealth of attractions drawing in thousands of tourists every year, it is no surprise that Reykjavik's most fruitful sectors are tourism, services and hospitality. Expats can find ample opportunities amid the city's touring companies, as well as its hotels, restaurants and bars, all of which eagerly employ those with English-language skills, meaning knowledge of Icelandic is not necessary.

Alongside a thriving tourism industry, the nation's urban and economic centre is a magnet for both graduates and established professionals hoping to break through or further their careers in construction, healthcare, and IT. With the nation benefitting from plentiful hydropower and geothermal sources, the capital has also drawn in large amounts of foreign investment, aiding its commitment to power its homes and businesses with green energy. With the headquarters of industry giants such as Landsvirkjun, Carbon Recycling International, and ON Power all within Reykjavik, expats can be sure to find an array of roles to choose from. Further well-known companies with offices in Reykjavik include Deloitte, Amazon, Ernst and Young (EY), Microsoft and Google.



Lake Kleifarvatn

Note that applying for jobs through dedicated agencies (*ráðningarþjónustur*) is sure to yield better outcomes than doing so independently.

In comparison to other Nordic nations, the cost of living in Iceland is quite high, with the capital's downfall lying in its hefty price tag. For example, the average rental price for a one-bedroom apartment in downtown Reykjavik is €1,400 a month. These are somewhat more reasonable just outside this central region, with furnished two and three bedroom apartments in the outskirts of the city averaging between €1,700 and €2,500 per month. Rentals like these typically come with bills included, are far more spacious and still accessible by working professionals thanks to Iceland's efficient bus line Strætó (sadly, no train line is available). As Iceland continues to harness its natural geothermal power sources, residents can also be sure they won't have to pay exorbitant fees for utilities.

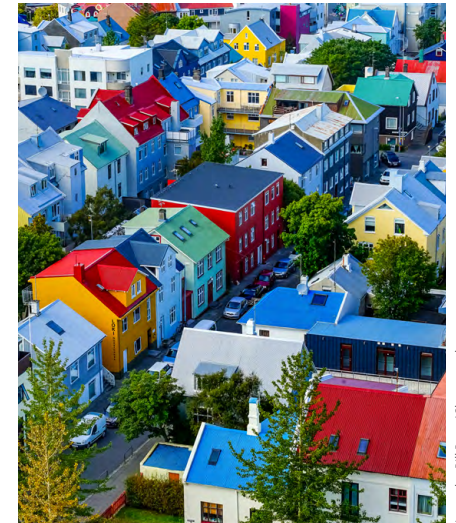


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Keflavik

Situated in the volcanic peninsula of Reykjanes within Southern Iceland, coastal Keflavik began life as a fishing port in the 16th century, developing drastically over the years to become the nation's second city. While those visiting Iceland typically associate Keflavik with its airport, deeming the city a mere stop-over on their journey to the capital or the further countryside, the once NATO military base deserves to be explored in its own right. Better yet, given its lower rental and buying prices, convenient location, and surprising number of attractions, Keflavik makes for an ideal long-term base.

Although deemed a city, just like Reykjavik, Keflavik possesses a more town-like feel and a population percentage to match, which is similar to the village of Kidlington in Oxfordshire. Yet, this is by no means a negative aspect. Rather, it allows Iceland's well-known community spirit to shine through. Deemed an egalitarian nation, Iceland as a whole is incredibly welcoming and open, with Keflavik, in particular, upholding a devotion towards social progress and widespread tolerance. Expats choosing to relocate to Keflavik can be sure their first few weeks or months will be made far easier with locals readily available to lend a helping hand – the vast majority speak excellent English too!

Despite expeditions to the famous Blue Lagoon commonly leaving from Reykjavik, Keflavik is actually far closer to the steaming pools of geothermal seawater, with just a 20-minute drive allowing residents to enjoy rejuvenating half or full-day trips. The picture-postcard scenery and mineral-rich waters feel a world away from the bustling work environments in which many spend the majority of their week, allowing for a true escape. And even regular visitors are sure to never get bored of this wonder of the world. From mud masks to saunas and steam rooms, and a range of therapeutic experiences, there is plenty to discover at the majestic Blue Lagoon.

Natural wonders abound in Keflavik and immediately beyond, with residents also able to enjoy the highly



active geothermal area of mud pools and steam vents known as Gunnuhver, the hiking trails of Mount Keilir, the sweeping shores and diverse birdlife of Gardur, and the lava mountain surrounded Kleifarvatn Lake.

The city itself offers an impressive array of museums. Perhaps most unexpectedly, Keflavik boasts the title of Iceland's Capital of Rock'n'roll, with the city's longstanding love affair with the genre best experienced at The Icelandic Museum of Rock'n'Roll. Situated within the Hljómahöll concert and conference hall, this interactive, year-round exhibition takes a closer look at the songs and stars that have defined the nation's music scene since the 19th century and right up to the modern-day, with the likes of Björk, Of Monsters and Men, and Sigur Rós featuring heavily. The Sound Lab is an absolute must-visit here. Whether you want to test your skills on the electric drum kit, guitar or bass, or simply sing your heart out in the karaoke booth, The Icelandic Museum of Rock'n'Roll will have you feeling like a real rocker.

When it comes to job searching in Keflavik, the most active employers prove to be Isavia, owners of



Keflavik International Airport. Often on the hunt for professionals eager to join their roster of more than 1,200 employees, Isavia offers roles such as store assistant, maintenance supervisor, chef, waiting staff, training coordinator, security member, and aircraft cleaner. Professionals are, of course, not limited to working within the airport. Additional industries operating within the area include tourism, hospitality, sustainable energy, fishing, and construction. With Reykjavik being a 40-minute drive from Keflavik, the city also works as an ideal base for those with careers in the financial, technology, or information sectors. Although, it must be noted that public transport links in Keflavik are far and few, making this a non-plausible option for those without a car.

Accommodation options in Keflavik range from idyllic cottages to modern apartments, beach villas and larger family homes. Rent for a city centre one-bedroom apartment is significantly lower than that of Reykjavik, averaging €1,000 per month, with larger three-bedroom apartments situated on the outskirts of the city centre available at around €1,500 per month. For those looking to buy a property, costs for a three-bedroom, centrally located house typically average €300,000, which is again considerably cheaper than Reykjavik, where properties can rise to the one million mark.

