

Country of the Week: Iceland

Iceland is an island nation just south of the Arctic Circle.

BASIC Iceland is an island in Europe, near the Arctic Circle. **What ocean is it located in?** (*The North Atlantic.*)

What is the climate like? (*It is cold in the north, but the ocean means the southern part of the country is more mild.*) Only about 372,000 people live in the whole country. Most live in or near the capital city, Reykjavík—*RAY-kyuh-vik*. Reykjavík is a beautiful, clean city on the ocean. It is famous for its colorful roofs. **From the photo, what do you notice about this city?** Iceland's Prime Minister is Katrín Jakobsdóttir. She has run the government since 2017.

GENERAL Iceland is located in the North Atlantic Ocean. It is the second-largest island in Europe, after Great Britain. Only about 372,000 people live there, and one-third of them live in the capital city, Reykjavík—*RAY-kyuh-vik*. It is famous for its colorful rooftops, and known for being safe and clean. **What can you tell about this city from the picture?** Iceland is a Nordic country, like Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir heads the government. She was chosen in 2017.

Iceland has a lot of geologic activity, such as volcanoes and geysers. Geysers are underground hot springs that shoot out water and steam. Strokkur geyser erupts about every 10 minutes, and is a popular tourist attraction. The country uses this geologic activity to create geothermal

GENERAL Iceland is the second-largest island in Europe. **What is the largest?** (*Great Britain.*) It is located in the North Atlantic Ocean and is slightly smaller than Kentucky. It is the least densely populated country in Europe, with just 372,000 people. Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir has headed the government since 2017. Nearly two-thirds of the population, live in the Capital Region, in and around the capital city, Reykjavík—*RAY-kyuh-vik*. It is the northernmost capital city in the world. Iceland sits just south of the Arctic Circle on the Mid Atlantic Ridge, between two tectonic plates. About 80 percent of Iceland is mountainous, and over 10 percent is covered in glaciers. It has 30 active volcanoes and many geysers. **What is a geyser?** (*A hot spring that boils, sending a plume of steam and water into*

the air.) Strokkur geyser, a popular tourist attraction, erupts regularly every six to ten minutes.

Iceland is located on a fault line. It has about 30 active volcanoes. It is also known for its geysers, which are underground hot springs that shoot up steam and boiling water. Strokkur geyser erupts about every 10 minutes, and it is a tourist attraction. Iceland is a very environmentally friendly country. Most people's homes are heated with geothermal energy, which comes from the heat inside the earth. **How is this better for the environment than oil or coal?** NEXT

energy, or energy that is made using the heat in the Earth. Almost all of the houses in Iceland are heated with geothermal power, and most of the energy comes from geothermal and other "green," renewable sources, such as hydropower. **What is this?** (*Energy made from the falling or fast-running water.*)

Iceland is located just south of the Arctic Circle. The sun is only out for about 5 hours a day in the winter, and in the summer, the sun sets for just 3 hours a day. It can get very cold in the winter in the north, but the ocean keeps the temperature near Reykjavík milder. **What do you think it would be like to live in Iceland?** More than 1 million people visit each year. This is more than three times the country's population. Whale watching is one popular tourist activity. NEXT

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Iceland has a diversified economy. Fishing historically was the mainstay of the economy, and today it makes up 40 percent of exports. More than 85 percent of the country's energy comes from sustainable sources, such as geothermal and hydropower. Ecotourism and whale watching are popular with visitors. Iceland sees more than 1 million visitors a year—more than three times the country's population. Despite its environmental profile, the country has allowed whale hunting in the past, selling whale meat to countries like Japan. But, citing lack of demand, Iceland says it plans to stop whale hunting in 2024. **Do you think this whale hunt is justifiable?** NEXT



Country of the Week: Iceland (cont'd)

Because Iceland was isolated, it has unique animals and a unique culture.

BASIC

This painting shows Ingólfr Arnarson, one of the first settlers of Iceland. He arrived in Iceland in 874 and built his home there. Many other settlers came after him. Eventually, Denmark took control of Iceland. It became an independent country in 1944.

Before humans arrived, the only mammal on the island was the Arctic fox. **Why?** (*Other animals could not get there.*) The Icelandic horse developed from ponies that settlers brought with them. **What can you tell about these horses?** (*They are smaller than regular horses.*) Icelandic horses adapted to their new home and they

are known for being steady on rocky ground. People from Iceland have a unique culture. Myths are important to people in Iceland. Myths are old stories about gods. Many myths are in the Prose Edda. People in Iceland once lived in “turf houses.” Turf is another word for grass and soil. **Would you like to live in a house like this?** END



GENERAL

Iceland's first permanent settler was Ingólfr Arnarson, who arrived with his wife and brother from Norway in the year 874. Iceland became part of Norway and later Denmark. It finally gained its independence in 1944. When the first people arrived, Iceland's only native land mammal was the Arctic fox. The Icelandic horse evolved over centuries. Its ancestors were brought from Europe. Icelandic horses are small, and known for their steadiness on the rocky landscape. Traditional homes in Iceland were called “turf houses.” **What is turf?** (*The top layer of Earth, with soil and grass.*) The turf provides more warmth in the cold winters than walls made only of stone or wood. **What do you notice about these houses?**

Iceland is a very peaceful society with

ADVANCED

Before the first humans arrived, the Arctic fox was the island's only endemic land mammal. Other species, like the Icelandic horse, evolved from animals brought by settlers. Icelandic horses are hardy and smaller than traditional horses. **How do you think these adaptations helped them survive?** The first Norse settler was Ingólfr Arnarson. He arrived in the year 874 and built his homestead in what is now Reykjavik. Many others followed and brought “thralls,” or slaves from Ireland and Scotland. The country came under Denmark's control and gained its independence in 1944.

About 94 percent of the people are ethnically Icelandic. The Icelandic language is more closely related to Old Norse than any of the other Nordic languages. Iceland has universal health care and tuition-free

one of the lowest crime rates in the world. Unemployment is low and people have universal health care. The average life expectancy is nearly 82 years old, one of the highest in the world. More than 90 percent of the population is ethnically Icelandic. Because of the country's small size, people value community and cooperation. Iceland ranks as one of the world's happiest countries. **What do you think contributes to their happiness?**

Iceland has a unique culture. It has many ancient myths that are still important to the country's national identity. **What are myths?** (*Stories about gods and how the world was created.*) The Prose Edda was written around the year 1220, and it is the source of many of these myths. **Do you know any myths? If so, what do you know?** END

public universities. The average life expectancy is nearly 82 years old, one of the highest in the world. It ranks as one of the happiest countries in the world. **What factors contribute to happiness?** Here you see a traditional dwelling, the turf house. **What purpose did the turf serve?** (*It provided insulation in the harsh climate.*)

Iceland's literary tradition dates back to the sagas, or epic stories from medieval times. The Prose Edda is one of the most famous sagas. It is the source of many Icelandic myths, or ancient stories about gods. People in Iceland buy more books per capita than anywhere else. Most are sold in the weeks before Christmas. This is because of the Jolabokafloð—*yo-la-BOH-kuh-flot*—or “Christmas Book Flood,” a tradition of giving books on Christmas Eve. **Would you like to live in Iceland? Why or why not?** END