

Reykjavik geographic locations

Reykjavík (Vesturbær), Bessastaðir, Skólavörðuholt (Hallgrímskirkja),

Naustlsvík, Laugardalur, Smundarsafn

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Reykjavík is believed to be the location of the first permanent settlement in Iceland, which, according to Landnámabók, was established by Ingólfr Arnarson in 874 AD. Until the 18th century, there was no urban development in the city location. The city was officially founded in 1786 as a trading town and grew steadily over the following decades, as it transformed into a regional and later national centre of commerce, population, and governmental activities.

Reykjavík is the centre of Iceland's cultural, economic, and governmental activity, and is a popular tourist destination among foreigners. It is among the cleanest, greenest, and safest cities in the world.

According to legend, the first permanent Norse settlement in Iceland was established at Reykjavík by Ingólfr Arnarson circa AD 870, as described in the Book of Settlement. Ingólfr is said to have decided the location of his settlement using a traditional Norse method: when land was in sight, he cast his high seat pillars overboard and promised to settle where the gods decided to bring them ashore. Two of his slaves then searched the coasts for three years before finding the pillars in the bay which eventually became the site of Reykjavík.

The site of the modern city centre was farmland until the 18th century. In 1752, King Frederik V of Denmark donated the estate of Reykjavík to the Innviðingarfélagið corporation. The leader of this movement was Skóli Magnússon. In the 1750s, several houses were built to house the wool industry, which was Reykjavík's most important employer for a few decades and the original reason for its existence. Other industries were undertaken by the Innviðingar, such as fisheries, sulphur mining, agriculture, and shipbuilding.

The Danish Crown abolished monopoly trading in 1786 and granted six communities around the country an exclusive trading charter. Reykjavík was one of them and the only one to hold on to the charter permanently. 1786 is thus regarded as the date of the city's founding. Trading rights were limited to subjects of the Danish Crown, and Danish traders continued to dominate trade in Iceland. Over the following decades, their business in Iceland expanded. After 1880, free trade was expanded to all nationalities, and the influence of Icelandic merchants started to grow.

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Icelandic nationalist sentiment gained influence in the 19th century, and the idea of Icelandic independence became widespread. Reykjavík, as Iceland's only city, was central to such ideas. Advocates of an independent Iceland realized that a strong Reykjavík was fundamental to that objective. All the important events in the history of the independence struggle were important to Reykjavík as well. In 1845 the Alþingi, the general assembly formed in 930 AD, was re-established in Reykjavík; it had been suspended a few decades earlier when it was located at Þingvellir. At the time it functioned only as an advisory assembly, advising the king about Icelandic affairs. The location of Alþingi in Reykjavík effectively established the city as the capital of Iceland.

In 1874, Iceland was given a constitution; with it, Alþingi gained some limited legislative powers and in essence became the institution that it is today. The next step was to move most of the executive power to Iceland: Home Rule was granted in 1904 when the office of Minister for Iceland was established in Reykjavík. On 1 December 1918, Iceland became a sovereign country, the Kingdom of Iceland, in personal union with the Crown of Denmark.

By the 1920s and 1930s, most of the growing Icelandic fishing trawler fleet sailed from Reykjavík; cod production was its main industry, but the Great Depression hit Reykjavík hard with unemployment, and labour union struggles sometimes became violent.

The economic effects of the occupation were positive for Reykjavík: the unemployment of the Depression years vanished, and construction work began. The British built Reykjavík Airport, which remains in service today, mostly for short-haul flights (to domestic destinations and Greenland). The Americans, meanwhile, built Keflavík Airport, situated 50 km (31 mi) west of Reykjavík, which became Iceland's primary international airport.[14] In 1944, the Republic of Iceland was founded and a president, elected by the people, replaced the king; the office of the president was placed in Reykjavík.

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