

Akureyri Travel Guide

Akureyri: The Gateway to North Iceland's Natural Wonders

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Things to do in Akureyri

Landmarks & Monuments

Iconic structures and architectural treasures that define Akureyri's character and heritage.



Akureyrarkirkja (Arctic Cathedral) Must See

45 minutes No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

The striking **Arctic Cathedral** is Akureyri's most recognizable landmark, featuring a unique modernist design with a distinctive tower inspired by Icelandic basalt columns. The church's interior showcases beautiful stained glass and religious artwork, while the exterior offers panoramic views of the city and surrounding fjords. Its architectural style reflects Iceland's connection to nature and spirituality.



Ás (Akureyri Town Center) Top Pick

2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

The vibrant **town center** features charming Icelandic architecture, local shops, cafés, and restaurants. Stroll through the main square to experience authentic Nordic culture and meet locals. The area is perfect for exploring boutiques, galleries, and experiencing the city's welcoming atmosphere during evening walks.

Tips for Landmarks & Monuments

- Visit the Arctic Cathedral early morning for best photography light
- Town center is most lively on weekends with local events
- Many shops have extended hours during summer season



Museums & Galleries

Cultural institutions showcasing Icelandic art, history, and local heritage with diverse collections.

Akureyri Museum (Minjasafnið á Akureyri) Top Pick

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Comprehensive museum covering **natural history, archaeology, and local heritage** of North Iceland. Exhibits include Viking artifacts, traditional Icelandic furniture, historical photographs, and displays about the region's geological formation. The museum offers insights into Icelandic daily life through the centuries and the development of Akureyri.



Nonni's House (Nonnahús) Notable

1 hour No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Historic childhood home of Jón Sveinsson, Iceland's beloved children's author, transformed into a museum dedicated to his literary works and life. The house preserves period furnishings and personal artifacts, offering visitors a glimpse into 19th-century Icelandic domestic life and the inspiration behind Nonni's famous stories.



Akureyri Art Museum (Listasafn Akureyrar) Notable

1-1.5 hours No Booking Needed



Map

Contemporary and traditional Icelandic art gallery featuring **rotating exhibitions** of local and international artists. The museum showcases paintings, sculpture, and multimedia installations reflecting modern artistic trends and cultural perspectives from the Nordic region and beyond.

Tips for Museums & Galleries

- Most museums offer discounts with combined tickets
- Audio guides available in English and other languages
- Plan visits for afternoon when lighting is best for photography



Religious Sites

Sacred spaces reflecting Iceland's spiritual heritage and architectural achievement.



Akureyrarkirkja

Must See

45 minutes No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Iceland's **most architecturally distinctive church**, designed by state architect Guðjón Samúelsson in 1940. The modernist structure's innovative design draws inspiration from Iceland's natural basalt formations. Interior features sacred artwork and exceptional acoustics, making it a venue for classical concerts and religious services.

Tips for Religious Sites

- Church is actively used for services; check schedule before visiting
- Climb the tower for panoramic city views
- Attend evening service for mystical atmosphere with candlelight



Parks & Gardens

Green spaces offering natural beauty and recreational opportunities in North Iceland's unique climate.



Akureyri Botanical Garden (Lystigarðurinn) Must See

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Northern Hemisphere's **northernmost major botanical garden**, featuring over 7,000 plant species adapted to Arctic conditions. Walking paths wind through themed sections including Icelandic flora, alpine plants, and ornamental gardens. Visitors enjoy seasonal wildflowers, mountain views, and peaceful natural surroundings.

Playland Park (Húsdýrázinn) Top Pick

2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map

Family-friendly **petting zoo and nature park** housing Icelandic farm animals, reindeer, and native wildlife in naturalistic habitats. Educational programs teach about Arctic ecosystems and traditional Icelandic farming practices. Children can interact with animals and enjoy outdoor play areas surrounded by pristine nature.

Tips for Parks & Gardens

- Botanical garden is most beautiful in summer (June-August)
- Bring waterproof clothing even in summer
- Visit animal park during feeding times for best experience



Tours & Activities

Guided experiences and outdoor adventures exploring Iceland's dramatic landscapes and Arctic wildlife.

Whale Watching Tours Must See Book Ahead

3-4 hours Book Ahead

Sea-based expeditions departing from Akureyri harbor to observe Arctic whales, dolphins, and seabirds in their natural habitat. Professional naturalists guide tours across the North Icelandic fjords. Summer months offer the highest sighting success rates, with opportunities to see minke whales, humpbacks, and harbor porpoises.

Northern Lights Tours Must See Book Ahead

4-5 hours Book Ahead

Guided nighttime expeditions hunting for Aurora Borealis displays during dark winter months. Expert guides provide comfortable viewing locations away from light pollution, with hot refreshments and education about the phenomena. Photography guidance included for capturing the magical green curtains of light.

Mývatn Lake Adventure Tours Must See Book Ahead

5-7 hours Book Ahead

Exploration of Iceland's most geologically diverse lake region featuring volcanic landscapes, geothermal hot springs, and pseudocraters. Tours include visits to natural steam vents, bathing in hot spring pools, and guided nature walks explaining the area's unique geology and ecosystem.

Photography Tours Top Pick Book Ahead

6-8 hours Book Ahead

Professional photography workshops led by experienced Icelandic photographers teaching composition, lighting, and post-processing techniques. Tours cover diverse landscapes from fjords to mountains, with instruction suitable for all skill levels from beginners to advanced.

Tips for Tours & Activities

- Book tours in advance during peak season (summer)
- Bring multiple layers and waterproof gear for all outdoor activities
- Northern lights tours require clear, dark skies (best September-March)
- Whale watching most successful May-September



Day Trips & Excursions

Nearby destinations featuring Iceland's most dramatic natural attractions within easy reach of Akureyri.

Godafoss Waterfall Must See

2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

One of Iceland's **most powerful and visually stunning waterfalls**, where the Skjálfandafljót River creates a 12-meter cascade. The name means 'Waterfall of the Gods.' Easily accessible from Akureyri with dramatic viewing platforms offering photo opportunities and the chance to experience the raw power of Arctic hydrology.



Lake Mývatn Must See

4-6 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Iceland's **most geologically complex lake system** surrounded by volcanic craters, lava formations, and geothermal features. The shallow lake offers birdwatching opportunities with over 15 duck species. Nearby attractions include Mývatn Nature Baths geothermal spa with healing mineral-rich waters.

Dimmuborgir Lava Field Top Pick

2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Otherworldly lava formations creating a labyrinth of volcanic pillars and caves near Mývatn. Named 'Dark Castles' in Icelandic, the fields showcase dark basalt columns rising dramatically from moss-covered ground. Popular hiking trails wind through the formations with views of surrounding volcanic landscapes.

Hveraflooi Geothermal Area Top Pick

1-2 hours No Booking Needed



Map

Geothermal wonderland featuring bubbling mud pools, steam vents, and colorful mineral deposits in the Mývatn region. Boardwalks allow safe exploration of this active geothermal landscape with educational signage explaining geological processes and environmental features.

Tips for Day Trips & Excursions

- All day trips accessible by rental car (AWD recommended for winter)
- Road conditions vary seasonally; check weather forecasts
- Pack plenty of water and snacks for remote areas
- Wear sturdy hiking boots for uneven lava terrain



Food & Dining

Culinary experiences featuring fresh Icelandic ingredients and traditional Nordic cuisine.

Local Seafood Restaurants Must See

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed



Map

Fresh Arctic seafood including Arctic char, halibut, and locally-caught fish prepared with traditional and modern Nordic techniques. Restaurants showcase the region's fishing heritage with daily specials highlighting the catch of the day. Cozy atmospheres with views of the harbor create authentic dining experiences.

Traditional Icelandic Cuisine Top Pick

2-2.5 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Heritage dishes including lamb, game, rye bread baked in geothermal heat, and traditional soups. Local specialties feature seasonal vegetables and unique preparations preserving centuries-old cooking methods. Farm-to-table restaurants emphasize locally-sourced ingredients and sustainable practices.

Geothermal Bakeries Notable

1 hour No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Unique rye bread baked using geothermal heat from underground steam vents, a tradition unique to Iceland. Visitors can observe the baking process and enjoy fresh-baked bread with local butter and toppings. The distinctive smoky flavor and dense texture reflect Iceland's volcanic environment.

Tips for Food & Dining

- Make reservations for popular restaurants during peak season
- Try local lamb—Icelandic sheep graze on pristine pastures
- Whale meat is traditionally served but remains controversial
- Coffee culture is strong; cafés serve excellent specialty coffees

Practical Information

Seasonal Guide

Summer (June-August): Midnight sun provides nearly 24-hour daylight, warm temperatures (12-15°C), and optimal conditions for outdoor activities, whale watching, and exploration. Peak tourist season with maximum amenity availability.

Winter (December-February): Long dark nights create ideal aurora viewing conditions. Cold temperatures (-5 to 0°C) with frequent snow. Limited daylight but magical winter atmosphere. Fewer tourists and special seasonal activities.

Spring/Autumn (April-May, September-October): Transitional seasons with mild weather, fewer crowds, and unique lighting conditions. Excellent for photography and nature exploration with fewer facilities closed.



Getting Around

Rental Cars: Most flexible option for exploring surrounding attractions. All-wheel drive recommended for winter and mountain roads. International driving permit required for non-EU/EEA nationals.

Public Buses: Regular service connecting Akureyri with major towns. Reliable for budget travelers but limited routes and schedules. Book in advance for summer travel.

Domestic Flights: Quick connections to Reykjavík and other Icelandic destinations. Useful for time-constrained travelers despite higher costs.

Taxi & Ride-Sharing: Available in town center but expensive. Useful for nightlife or short distances. Book local companies for reliable service.

➔ Airport Transfer

Akureyri Airport (AEY) to city center:

- **Taxi:** About 5 minutes to downtown Akureyri for roughly 2000 to 2500 ISK, taxis wait outside arrivals for every flight
- **Public bus:** Straeto city bus route stops within a short walk of the terminal and reaches the town center in about 10 minutes for around 700 ISK
- **Rental car:** Desks inside the terminal let you drive into town in under 10 minutes, popular since the airport is only 3 km from downtown
- **Walking:** The terminal is about 3 km from the town center, a flat 35 to 40 minute walk in mild weather

Shopping & Souvenirs

Traditional Icelandic Goods: Wool sweaters (lopapeysa), sheepskin products, and hand-knitted items found throughout town. Akureyri supports local artisans with unique, high-quality crafts.

Shopping Areas: Main town center (Ásport) features boutiques, galleries, and design shops. Larger supermarkets (Nóa, Samkaup) carry groceries and Icelandic products. Duty-free shopping available at airport.

Artisan Markets: Weekend markets showcase local jewelry, paintings, and handcrafted items. Support small businesses while acquiring authentic souvenirs with stories behind them.

Shopping Hours: Most shops open 10 AM-6 PM weekdays, shorter hours weekends. Some tourist shops have extended summer hours. Credit cards accepted nearly everywhere.

Events & Festivals

Akureyri Summer Festival (August): Week-long celebration featuring concerts, theater, art exhibitions, and traditional Icelandic entertainment. The city comes alive with cultural events and performances.

Winter Lights Festival (February): Celebrates the return of daylight with illuminations, concerts, and community celebrations. Perfect timing for aurora viewing combined with festive atmosphere.

Arctic Open Golf Tournament (June): International golf championship in midnight sun conditions. Unique experience playing under 24-hour daylight with Arctic landscapes as backdrop.

National Holidays: New Year's Day, Good Friday/Easter, First Day of Summer (April 19), Independence Day (June 17), Christmas. Many attractions have special hours or closures.

Sample Itineraries

Day 1 - Akureyri Highlights: Morning visit to Akureyrarkirkja, explore town center shops and cafés, afternoon at Botanical Garden, evening stroll along harbor. Dinner at seafood restaurant overlooking fjord.



Day 2 - Mývatn Circle: Drive to Lake Mývatn, explore Dimmuborgir lava fields and volcanic landscape, relax in Mývatn Nature Baths geothermal spa, visit Hverafloei geothermal area. Return for dinner in Akureyri.

Day 3 - Waterfall Adventure: Visit Godafoss waterfall (photograph from multiple angles), explore Diamond Circle route with waterfalls and geological features, visit Lake Mývatn for birding. Pack picnic for remote areas.

Day 4 - Wildlife & Nature: Whale watching tour (morning or afternoon), Playland animal park, Botanical Garden for birdwatching, explore local museums. Evening northern lights hunt (winter only).

Day 5 - Photography & Culture: Morning photography tour of scenic locations, Akureyri Museum and Nonni's House, local cafe stops with coffee and cakes, art galleries browse, sunset photography session at scenic overlook.

Photography Locations

Akureyrarkirkja Church: Best shots during golden hour (early morning or sunset) with soft light illuminating the distinctive architecture. Tower offers elevated perspectives of city and fjords. Nighttime illumination creates dramatic effect.

Godafoss Waterfall: Multiple viewpoints provide varied perspectives. Early morning light creates rainbow effects in mist. Wide-angle shots capture the cascade's power; telephoto for detail of water texture.

Dimmuborgir Lava Fields: Endless compositions of dark volcanic formations against sky. Best lighting during golden hour. Colorful lichens and moss create foreground interest. Dramatic cloudy skies enhance the otherworldly landscape.

Lake Mývatn: Reflective water surface creates mirror-like compositions, especially in calm early morning. Volcanic cones and geothermal features provide varied foreground elements. Sunset paints water in warm tones.

Northern Lights: Remote locations away from light pollution required. Tripod essential. 15-25 second exposures with high ISO (1600-3200) capture the aurora. Best hours 10 PM-4 AM during dark season (September-March).

Practical Information

Voltage & Frequency: Iceland uses 220-240V AC at 50 Hz, standard for Northern Europe.

Plug Types: Type F (Schuko) two round-pin plugs are standard. Universal adapters work but specific European adapters recommended.

Adapter Availability: Hotel front desks typically loan adapters. Electronics stores (Elko, Sorpa) sell adapters if needed. USB charging ports increasingly available in public spaces and accommodations.

Power Reliability: Excellent infrastructure with reliable power throughout Akureyri. No blackouts typical in urban areas. Remote locations may have limited charging availability.

Must-Try Icelandic Cuisine

Arctic Char: Delicate white fish with mild flavor, often prepared grilled or smoked. Sustainable local catch served in finest restaurants.

Lamb: Icelandic sheep graze on pristine pastures producing flavorful, lean meat. Traditional slow-cooked stews and modern preparations equally popular.

Seafood Soup: Creamy soup combining fish, shellfish, and root vegetables. Warming comfort food perfect for cold Icelandic evenings. Often served with fresh bread.

Rye Bread: Dense, slightly sweet bread baked using geothermal heat. Traditional preparation method unique to Iceland. Pairs perfectly with local butter and fish.

Icelandic Dairy: Skyr (creamy yogurt) and local cheeses reflect Norse dairy traditions. Excellent for breakfast or light meals. Superior quality dairy products throughout the country.



Tourist Passes

Akureyri Tourist Card

Multi-day discount card offering **reduced admission to major attractions** including museums, Botanical Garden, and some tours. Discounts at partnered restaurants and shops. Available in 24, 48, and 72-hour options.



www.visitakureyri.is

Ring Road Pass

Comprehensive pass covering attractions throughout the Ring Road including Akureyri area attractions, day-trip destinations, and Mývatn region facilities. Multi-day validity allows flexible exploration of North Iceland's major sites.



www.visitakureyri.is

