

Experience Report

Reykjavík University



Bachelor Business Administration
Autumn semester 16.08.2023 – 31.12.2023

Host University

General Information

Reykjavik University (RU) is Iceland's largest private university and is located by the sea. With around 3.700 students is the university bigger than the university Liechtenstein, nonetheless it feels humble and familiar. The RU is focused on Business, Computer Science, Law, Engineering, Applied Engineering, Sport Science and Psychology. Through the smooth online application process, aided by a dedicated exchange coordinator, enhanced the experience. An introduction week for exchange students fosters early friendships and familiarizes them with the campus and the city, through the first weeks a mentor is by your side if you need help.

The exchange coordinator manages a WhatsApp group for communication on essential information and facilitates student-initiated sub-groups for social activities. In this groups, the exchange students can connect, and you get the most important news or notifications. Also, they inform you, if natural hazards are coming (intense winds, storms etc.). The 24/7 accessible campus includes a library, group-work rooms, a meditation room, a café, and a small supermarket. For master students are also department lounges with free coffee to create a conducive learning atmosphere (unfortunately not for bachelor students). The university cafeteria offers a 10-day lunch pass. For leisure, there's a 24/7 gym (in the basement, is not big but sufficient), billiard tables, dart, table tennis, air hockey table and a PS4 and Television. Down to the sea you will see the student bunker, which is a bar and the geothermal beach Nauthólsvík with pools. The university's infrastructure supports both academic and social needs, making it an enhanced ideal destination for exchange students. Reykjavik's small size allows for a 20–30-minute walk to the city or quick bus rides (arriving frequently) and e-scooter options (Hopp and Zolo).

Academics

Selected courses

I chose a total of four courses. For the 12-week course, I chose digital marketing (6 ECTS), which was informative. In my opinion, it was a good mix between theory and practical tasks. You have four small quizzes about the theory and six practical assignments. The second course was Business Research Methods (6 ECTS), which was also informative and not as boring as you might think. This course also had small quizzes, a larger report and a final exam. A course I can highly recommend if you are interested in sustainability is moral profit (6 ECTS), you have a great professor and various guest lectures from around the world, from Harvard guest speakers to UN Global delegates. You get a lot of case studies to study, but it is not mandatory to read them. In addition, you will do a group presentation and an individual assignment. For the three-week intensive course, I chose Human Resource Management (6 ECTS).

Practical Information

Before going abroad

I strongly recommend checking the requirements and paying attention to the application deadline. Otherwise, the entire process is not difficult, the admission requirements are clearly stated (grade point average Minimum GPA School of Business 7.0 and English proficiency requirements, level B2).

After receiving the official confirmation, I would recommend booking a flight immediately, as the outbound flight for the winter semester is in August, which is tourist season.

VISA / Immigration Formalities (Kennitala)

Citizens of EEA countries and Switzerland who intend to stay in the country for less than six months do not need a VISA or a residence permit, only their valid travel documents. However, if you wish, you can register with the national registration office to obtain a national insurance number (Kennitala). Students who wish to apply for student accommodation, work during their stay or open an Icelandic bank account will need such a number.

Accommodation

There are two main accommodation options for students in Reykjavik: you can apply for a room in Reykjavik University's student residence, which is located close to the university, or look for a private room in a shared flat in the city center or nearby neighbourhoods.

To secure affordable accommodation, it is important to start your search early, as supply is limited and prices on the housing market are high. Check regularly on housing platforms such as Housinganywhere and the official Facebook group for private rooms in shared flats recommended by the exchange coordinator, but be careful, there are many scammers.

I opted for a private room in a shared flat in Hlíðar, Reykjavik, a nice neighbourhood about a 20-minute walk from the RU and a 10-minute bus ride from the city centre. The monthly rent for such rooms can range from 650 € to 900 €. I paid about 780 € for a 28 m² room. The location was convenient: the university was a 20-minute walk away, a shopping centre with two supermarkets was 5 minutes away and there was a bus stop right in front of the house to get to the city centre quickly.

Money & Smartphone

Living expenses in Reykjavik are comparable to those in Liechtenstein, but more expensive than in Austria, particularly concerning rent, fuel, car rentals, groceries, and alcoholic beverages. To save costs, it's advisable to purchase alcoholic beverages at the airport duty-free shop. The Studentcellar, located at the University of Iceland's campus, offers the cheapest beer and is a popular spot for students.

During my stay in Iceland, I mostly used Revolut as my main bank account. This allowed me to make free money transfers from my Austria bank account, with automatic conversion to Icelandic Krona at favourable exchange rates compared to regular banks.

As Iceland is not included in many mobile phone contracts, some students opt for an Icelandic SIM card (also offered at the university). Fortunately, my phone contract at home already included Iceland, so I didn't have to buy a new SIM card or apply for an Icelandic phone number. There was also free Wi-Fi at the university and in my flat, so I was able to use the internet without any problems.

How to save some money?

- Try to request housing benefits, which is an amount that you receive every month if you don't earn much. However, you can only get the housing benefit if the entire shared flat applies for it. If you live in the student housing, it will be easier to get the benefits.
- Do your groceries in Bonus and Kronan, which are the cheapest grocery stores.
- Check Happy Hours and special offers in local bars and cafés.
- Ask in general for student discount, in most touristic attractions they offer some student discounts for entries or the monthly bus ticket (you'll get 50% off).
- If you buy something, which costs about 12'000ISK, ask for the "tax refund" receipt and you'll be able to get some money back once you'll be leaving Iceland (Simply ask the receipt at the store you did your shopping, fill in the necessary information on the receipt, then go to the tax office at the Keflavik Airport, show the receipt and you'll get some money back)

Working

Due to the rather reduced workload at university, some exchange students look for a part time job, for the weekends or evenings at a restaurant or bar. In order to be eligible to work, you need to have a Kennitala. It is easy to get a job if you proactively ask for one and the salary makes you less worry about your total expenses throughout the semester.

Host country

Icelandic culture and lifestyle

Icelandic is the official language, but English is widely spoken, even by children. Icelanders value privacy but are friendly and helpful when spoken to. Building friendships with the locals can be a challenge as they prefer to converse in Icelandic, but their warm hospitality shines through when you show genuine interest and respect for their culture.

Despite their reserve, Icelanders remain calm, even in the face of natural threats such as erupting volcanoes. Reykjavik and Iceland are renowned for their safety, so you can move around here day and night without worry. Summers are vibrant with endless days filled with events and festivals, while winters offer a cosy atmosphere and the chance to experience Icelandic culture, especially at the local swimming pools. To make the most of this unique experience, consider a 10-person subscription for the semester.

Nature & travelling

Iceland is an ideal destination for short road trips, easily organized through the Exchange Students WhatsApp group. Utilize car rentals, with Bluecarrental or Hertz being my favourites. The country offers breathtaking scenery, adventurous highland hikes, snorkelling, whale watching, relaxing in natural hot springs, and Northern Lights viewing. To be every time safe, check weather conditions on Safetravel, road.is and Vedur.is are reliable sources. Winter may bring unpredictable weather, causing road closures or flight cancellations. Despite this, seize every opportunity for unforgettable road trips and moments.

Iceland's Keflavik Airport also often offers cheap flights to various destinations (Europe and America) so that you can visit another country after the exam period.

Concluding words

To wrap it up

Choosing Iceland for your exchange is a decision you won't regret. From exciting road trips and breathtaking nature to meeting new people in the charming city and a high-quality education at university. You will leave the island with unforgettable experiences, new friendships and lots of adventures to savour. Every day on this amazing island is special and offers a unique blend of cultural immersion and academic enrichment. Here are some more pictures from my unforgettable stay.

