K12 ACADEMICS — INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERIES

Studying in Iceland

A guide for international students & families — how Icelandic higher education works, the study residence permit, tuition-free public universities, high living costs, and work.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

TUITION-FREE PUBLIC STUDY, UNIQUE SETTING

Iceland offers a rare mix: **tuition-free public universities** (you pay only a registration fee), a modern academic system with real strengths in **renewable energy, geology, marine science, and environmental studies**, and one of the world's safest, most spectacular settings. The trade-off is **very high living costs**. Non-EU students need a **study residence permit before arrival**. This guide walks it in **ten steps**.

General guidance, not legal or immigration advice. Icelandic rules and the funds requirement change, and public universities are authorized to introduce non-EEA tuition from autumn 2027. The details here are recent examples and **must be confirmed with the Directorate of Immigration and your university**.

1

STEP 01 OF 10

Understand Why Students Choose Iceland

WHAT TO KNOW

Iceland offers **tuition-free public universities, real strengths in renewable energy/geology/marine and environmental science, a very safe and high-quality-of-life society, and a unique natural setting** — a distinctive academic experience.

BY THE NUMBERS

Free public tuition	Strengths	Safe & unique
registration fee only	energy, geology, marine	high quality of life

HOW TO HELP

Weigh Iceland's **free public tuition and unique environment** against its **very high living costs** and small English-program catalogue — for its specialisms, it's exceptional.

GOOD TO KNOW

Iceland is a **world leader in renewable energy and earth sciences** — standout fields for study and research there.

2

STEP 02 OF 10

Understand the System

WHAT TO KNOW

Iceland has **seven universities**. The largest is the **University of Iceland (Háskóli Íslands)**, a public research university; others include **Reykjavík University** (private), the University of Akureyri, and the Iceland University of the Arts. Degrees follow the Bologna structure.

BY THE NUMBERS

Univ of Iceland	Reykjavík Univ	7 universities
public, largest	private	Bologna

HOW TO HELP

Choose between the **tuition-free public universities** (University of Iceland, Akureyri) and **private ones** (Reykjavík University, which charges tuition) based on program and budget.

GOOD TO KNOW

Public universities are **tuition-free** (registration fee only); **private ones like Reykjavík University charge tuition** — choose with cost in mind.

3

STEP 03 OF 10

Get the Study Residence Permit

WHAT TO KNOW

Iceland doesn't issue a traditional "student visa." Non-EU/EEA/EFTA students need a **residence permit for study**, applied for at the **Directorate of Immigration** and **approved before you travel** — apply **at least 90 days ahead**. You'll also need a criminal-record check and, after arrival, a **kennitala (Icelandic ID number)**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Residence permit	Before travel	Kennitala
for study	apply 90+ days ahead	Icelandic ID number

HOW TO HELP

Apply for your **study residence permit at the Directorate of Immigration at least 90 days before travel** (it must be approved first), and get a **kennitala** after arrival for banking and services.

WATCH OUT

The permit must be **approved before you travel** — apply early (90+ days), with a bank statement, insurance, and criminal-record check.

4 STEP 04 OF 10

Apply to Universities

WHAT TO KNOW

There's **no central application portal** — apply **directly to each university** with your form, transcripts, and documents (some require a printed, signed copy and an application fee). **Deadlines can be earlier for international students**, so check well ahead.

BY THE NUMBERS

Apply directly	Docs	Earlier deadlines
no central portal	transcripts + application fee	for international

HOW TO HELP

Apply **directly to your chosen university** by its (often earlier international) deadline, with transcripts and any application fee — then start the residence-permit process immediately on acceptance.

GOOD TO KNOW

Deadlines are often **earlier for international students** — check each university's dates and start the permit process as soon as you're accepted.

5 STEP 05 OF 10

Understand Tuition (and the 2027 Change)

WHAT TO KNOW

Public universities are **tuition-free** — you pay only an **annual registration fee** (University of Iceland: ~ISK 100,000, roughly €600–800/year), plus a processing fee for non-EEA/EFTA students. **Private universities charge tuition** (~€4,000–8,000/year). From **autumn 2027, public universities may charge non-EEA/EFTA tuition**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Public	Private	From 2027
free (registration fee)	~€4,000–8,000/yr	non-EEA tuition possible

HOW TO HELP

Take advantage of **tuition-free public study** (registration fee only), or budget for a private university — and note that **non-EEA tuition may begin at public universities from autumn 2027**.

WATCH OUT

Public universities are **authorized to introduce non-EEA/EFTA tuition from autumn 2027** — check the latest fees before applying if you're a future entrant.

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STEP 06 OF 10

Meet the Financial Requirement

WHAT TO KNOW

The Directorate of Immigration requires proof of **sufficient monthly funds** — recently around **ISK 180,000–217,000/month (€1,200–1,500)** — via a bank statement. Iceland is **expensive**, so budget carefully; you also need **comprehensive health insurance**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Funds	Bank statement	+ insurance
~€1,200–1,500/month	required	comprehensive

HOW TO HELP

Prepare a **bank statement** showing the required monthly funds, plus **comprehensive health insurance** — and budget realistically for Iceland's very high costs.

WATCH OUT

Iceland's **living costs are among the highest in Europe** — show solid funds and don't rely on part-time work to cover them.

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STEP 07 OF 10

Meet Language Requirements

WHAT TO KNOW

The main language of instruction is **Icelandic**, but a growing number of programs (especially at **master's level**) are taught in **English** (IELTS/TOEFL). You don't need fluent Icelandic to get by, though some helps daily life.

BY THE NUMBERS

Icelandic	English	Some Icelandic
main language	growing (master's)	helps daily life

HOW TO HELP

Take the **right test for your program's language** (IELTS/TOEFL for English programs), and pick up some Icelandic — you can manage in English, but some Icelandic helps.

GOOD TO KNOW

English-taught programs are concentrated at **master's level** — bachelor's options in English are more limited.

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STEP 08 OF 10

Prepare for the Move (and Housing)

WHAT TO KNOW

After arriving, get your **kennitala, complete registration, confirm insurance, and set up banking**. **Housing is the hard part** — university dorms are limited and Reykjavík rentals are expensive, so **search early and consider shared housing**. Avoid rental scams.

BY THE NUMBERS

Kennitala	Housing	Search early
+ registration	limited & pricey	avoid scams

HOW TO HELP

Handle arrival admin — **kennitala, registration, insurance, banking** — and **start your housing search immediately**, as dorms are limited and Reykjavík rents are high.

WATCH OUT

Housing is limited and expensive, especially in Reykjavík — search early, consider shared flats, and never pay large sums sight-unseen.

9

STEP 09 OF 10

Understand Work Rules

WHAT TO KNOW

Students with a valid study residence permit may work **up to 15 hours per week** — useful for experience, though (as a non-EU/EEA student) you may need a **work permit** to take a job. Part-time work won't cover Iceland's high costs.

BY THE NUMBERS

Work	Work permit	Not a funding plan
up to 15 hrs/week	may be needed	budget fully

HOW TO HELP

You may work **up to 15 hours/week** (a work permit may be required) — useful for experience, but budget fully, as part-time work won't cover Iceland's costs.

GOOD TO KNOW

As a non-EU/EEA student you may need a **work permit** to work — confirm the current rules before relying on a job.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

Thrive & Work After Study

WHAT TO KNOW

After graduating, you can apply for a **residence permit to seek employment (valid up to 6 months)**; if you find a relevant job, you transition to a work permit. Growing fields include **renewable energy, tourism, IT, and research**.

BY THE NUMBERS

6-month permit	Then	Growing fields
to find work	work permit	energy, IT, research

HOW TO HELP

Plan for the **6-month post-study job-search permit**, target Iceland's growing sectors (renewable energy, IT, research), and transition to a work permit once you find a relevant role.

GOOD TO KNOW

Iceland's **6-month post-study job-search permit** is a route to staying — confirm current conditions, which can change.

QUICK REFERENCE

Studying in Iceland: The Essentials

A snapshot — figures change (and non-EEA tuition may begin in 2027), so confirm everything with the Directorate of Immigration and your university.

The system

Seven universities; the University of Iceland (public, largest) and University of Akureyri are tuition-free; Reykjavik University (private) charges tuition; strengths in energy, geology, marine and environmental science; Bologna.

The permit

Non-EU/EEA/EFTA students need a study residence permit from the Directorate of Immigration, approved before travel (apply 90+ days ahead); get a kennitala (ID number) after arrival.

Tuition

Public universities charge only a registration fee (University of Iceland ~ISK 100,000, ~€600–800/year) plus a non-EEA processing fee; private universities ~€4,000–8,000/year; non-EEA public tuition possible from autumn 2027.

Money & language

Prove ~€1,200–1,500/month (bank statement) plus comprehensive insurance; living costs are among Europe's highest; Icelandic is the main language, with growing English (mostly master's) programs.

Work & after

Work up to 15 hrs/week (a work permit may be needed); a 6-month post-study job-search permit leads to a work permit if you find a relevant job.

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