

CAR RENTAL and DRIVING TIPS

Faroe Islands AND Iceland

- **DISCLAIMER:** This was my first time renting cars while vacationing in Europe. I normally make use of trains, subways, buses, tuk tuks, boats/ferries, and WALKING for getting from place to place or seeing the local sights. But it is nearly impossible to see as much as we did in these particular destinations as neither of them have the public transportation infrastructure spread out from town to town etc... . If renting a car is not something for you, you could look into hiring private drivers or joining excursions that you could book in advance or through the tourist offices once there, etc... The number one perk of renting your own car is the FREEDOM!! Since the weather is so unpredictable, you can spontaneously plan out your itinerary once there. As well, you can stop to admire and take pictures and stretch your legs as often as you want. However, although a fairly easy process, it had the potential to be somewhat stressful had I not thoroughly researched and planned for this. On that note:

1) **BOOK YOUR CAR(S) WELL IN ADVANCE!!!**

I booked our cars (one for Faroe Islands; one for Iceland) about 6 months in advance. This is because you will likely want to book an AUTOMATIC and they don't have as much inventory for these. As well, we were just 2 people and wanted a small, economical ride. We booked compact cars and they really were compact (we drive small SUVs at home), but had just the right amount of room for us and our luggage (the carry ons went in the teensy tiny trunk; the medium sized checked luggage and our small backpacks (personal items) went on the back seat.



Our cute little compact car that could (Faroe Islands) We named it LEIF.

2) BOOK THROUGH A PROVIDER THAT IS LOCAL TO YOU

For ex: If from the U.S. or Canada, I highly advise, based on all the research I did, to go with a more mainstream company because if you have any issues whatsoever, you will be able to properly speak with a customer service representative either while you are there or upon your return.

TIP: If you are tempted to book with one of the local car hires, be sure to do plenty of research and read the customer reviews. Often times (not always), tourists have been hit with HUGE unexpected bills upon closing out the hire. Initially, these rental places seem to be GREAT DEALS, offering prices much lower than the mainstream sites, and in addition, if you book with them, they might offer discounts on popular tour things, like whale watching excursions etc... . However, upon closer examination, you will see there are lots of extra costs that quickly add up. As well, there are many stories of people getting dinged with “damage” charges for minor scratches and such (or for nothing at all) or double charged for tolls etc... . Sometimes, due to language barrier and the currency, these things are not caught until home and looking things over. For this reason, LOOK YOUR

CONTRACT OVER CAREFULLY before signing and booking, and certainly before taking off in your car!

I went with Budget and Avis (respectively).

<https://www.budget.ca/en/home> or <https://www.budget.com/en/home>

<https://www.avis.ca/en/home> or <https://www.avis.com/en/home>

RECOMMENDATION: If you would like to get some money back and/or points, you can book via this process:

1. Sign up for a FREE Rakuten account. <https://www.rakuten.ca/> Or <https://www.rakuten.com/> When you purchase things here, such as car rentals or flights or hotels with Booking.com, you get a cash back offering of percentages that have ranged from 1% to 12%! A cheque is mailed out several times per year.)
2. Click on BOOKING.COM (make sure you have created your booking.com account first) <https://www.booking.com/> **TIP:** I book a LOT through Booking.com for several reasons. a) I can go through Rakuten and get cash back. b) I have booked so much with them that I have advanced through their tiered Genius Levels incentive program, and am offered discounts on stays and taxis etc... AND extra perks here and there like a free breakfast included etc... . Also, I have never had an issue with cancelations or customer service.
3. Click on CAR RENTAL. And find what you find! I found cars for both places with AVIS and BUDGET. They are linked. I **compared** the prices that were offered on booking.com to what they offered on their direct websites, and booked accordingly. Sometimes, it works out that it is cheaper to go directly through them, even factoring in the cash back amount and Genius Level discounts.

INSURANCE

- It is highly likely your own car insurance will NOT cover driving outside of your own country/continent. So, BUY the insurance either offered through the car rental directly OR through Booking.com
- I paid extra to have TWO drivers (myself and my son) covered

IN GENERAL

- Take pics and vid of the exterior AND interior of the car before you get settled into it and drive off, so you don't get charged for damage you didn't cause. Do this AGAIN upon return, before closing out.
- **READ UP (in advance) ON DRIVING LAWS AND ETIQUETTES** for each country. Understand this well in advance, especially regarding speed limits and tunnels and tolls etc...
- **BE FAMILIAR with Euro car designs. A few things are quite different.**
ie: One of our cars had NO "P" option built into the stick, even though it was an AUTOMATIC car. We had to google how to get our car started and how to park it!! There is a SEPARATE HAND HELD PARKING BRAKE, which you need to release to start and which you very much need to employ when putting in PARK. **SMART CARS:** Our cars were both SMART CARS with assisted driving, and they BEEPED when we went over the speed limits. They also told us when we needed a coffee break.
- **TOLLS:** For both Iceland and Faroe Islands, there are several **tunnels** through the mountains or under waterways. With car rentals, you don't have to worry about stopping at the first petrol station after exiting to pay the toll, as your plate is scanned and charges are transferred to your car rental company, which will be paid upon your vehicle return. It is quite convenient. HOWEVER, this may not be the case if you book with a local company, so make sure you clarify at the desk before you drive off.
- **TUNNELS:** They are NOT all exactly the same. Some, for example, are SINGLE LANE, and you will need to constantly be on the lookout for oncoming traffic and yield if you have the closest pull over pad.
- **TUNNEL ALTERNATES:** In Iceland, you don't always have to take the tunnel from point A to point B. You can opt for a bit of a longer, more winding route up and down the mountains. Or you can go straight through the mountain.

- You have to stay on main roads. You have to rent special SUVs to venture on lesser traveled or unpaved ones.



A tunnel heading toward Torshavn, Faroe Islands.



A tunnel in northern Iceland.



Horseback riding is HUGE in Northern Iceland, thus the need for tunnel signage prohibiting them in the tunnels.

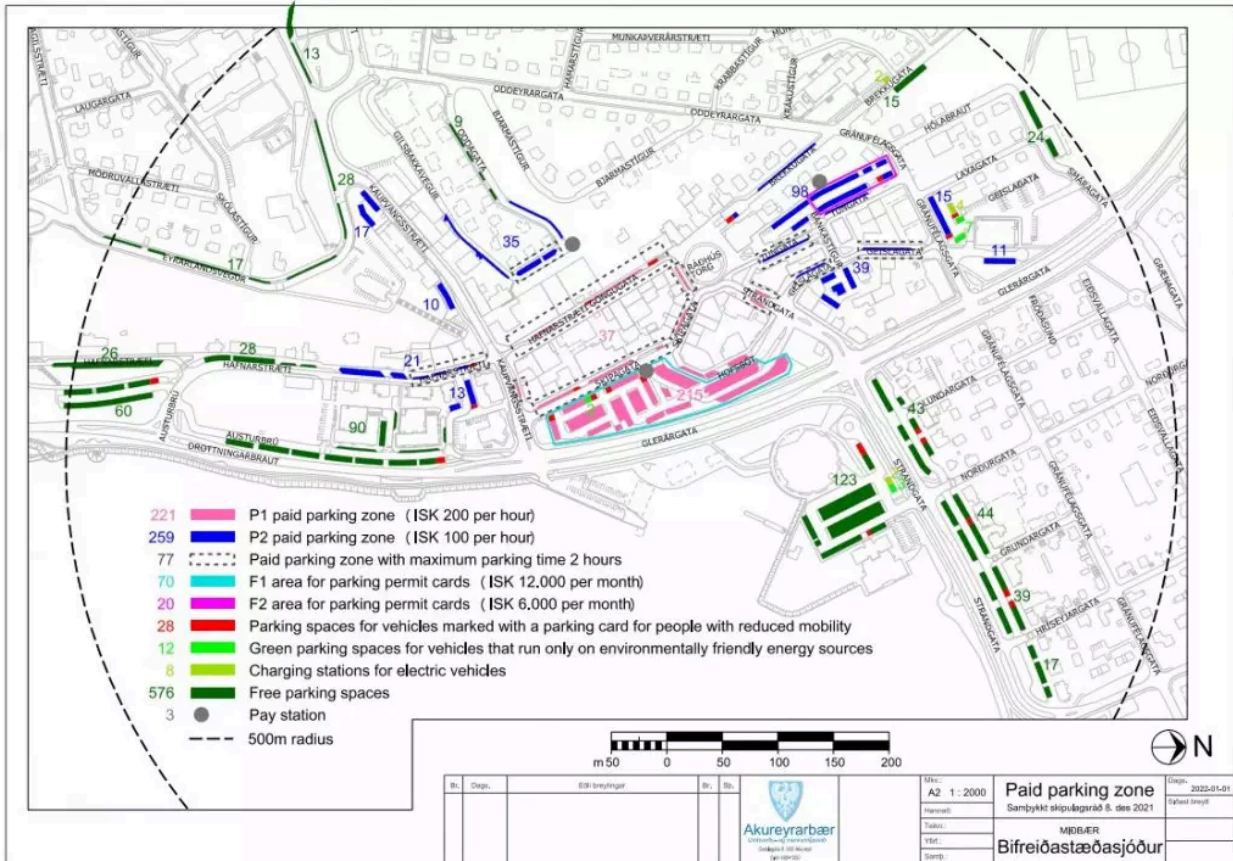
ICELAND

- Since the Keflavik Airport is a major international hub, there are many car rental kiosks. Before approaching your particular desk, you are to go to a little ***ticket stand*** and grab a ticket. You hand this to your representative at your desk. The line-ups at each desk move fairly quickly.
- This airport's car rental lot is HUGE. Allow for extra time to just find your car after you have processed everything at the check-in desk.
- When they say compact, they mean it. We barely fit our luggage. If you have 3 or more people, you need to book a larger car.

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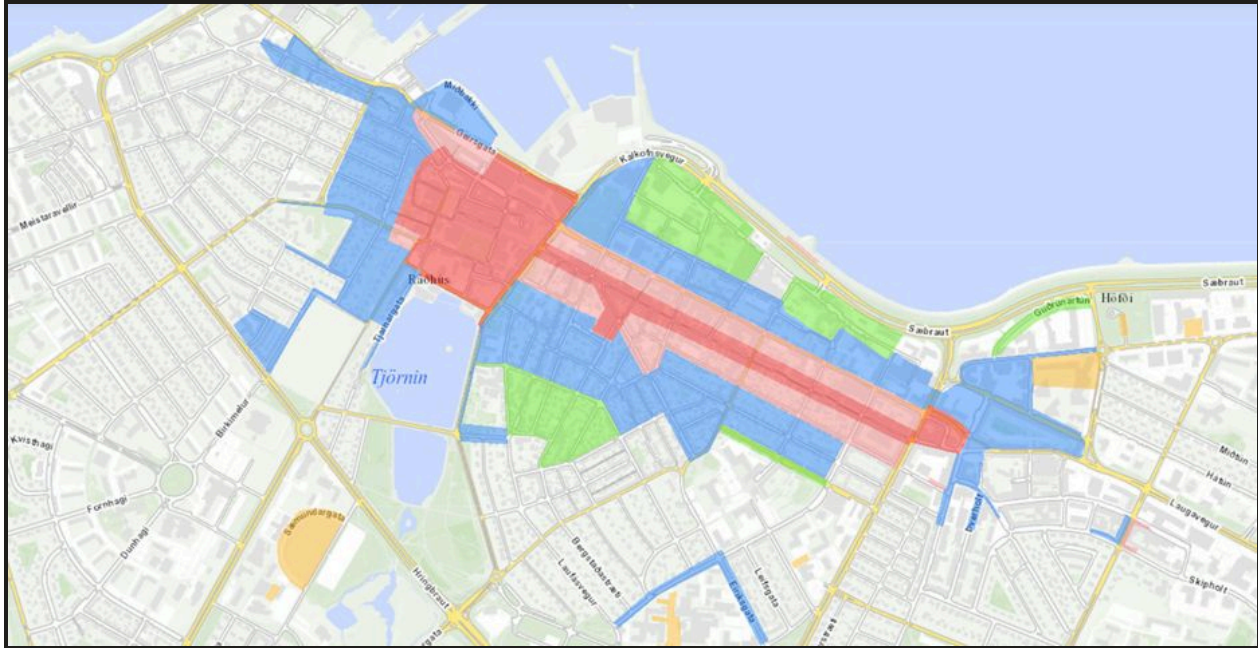
Parking ZONES

- a) Below is a map for parking zones in **AKUREYRI**. Fees vary per zone.



b) Below is a map for parking zones in **REYKJAVIK**. Fees vary per zone. Map of zones taken directly from “Reykjavik Tourist Info” <https://blog.reykjaviktouristinfo.is/2021/02/the-simple-guide-to-parking-in-reykjavik-city-center/>

*Visit this site to see the costs per zone and more detailed parking rules and etiquette. There are four zones, with each going down in price the further away you get from the city core. Factor in weekends and holidays too.



Tip: Upon arrival: park on the street near your accommodation. Pay for the shortest amount of time at the closest metre- if you can figure out how to use it! Or, try to find a parking official, they frequently walk around, to help you pay. After unloading your things, drive your car to the church parking or community pool lot, where you can park for free, then walk back. You might want to move your car back and forth between these two places at the start or end of each day. Parking fines are STEEP, so you do not want to incur one. **CONSIDER:** Everything for city exploration is walkable. You should **weigh** the cost of keeping your rental car for your time in the city. It might be cheaper to return your rental car early, at a city location (vs at the airport) and then take an uber to the airport or airport hotel when it's time to leave. For any excursions out of the city, you could look into tour groups with arranged transport. Our car was booked and prepaid well in advance, so we kept it, but found it wasn't even used until our final day when we drove to the national park on our way back to Keflavik, since we stayed IN the city enjoying it.

* **SPEEDING** is a big NO NO in Iceland, and the fines are HUGE. Truthfully, though, we only saw one police car in all of our northern highway driving, but as I said earlier, the SMART car wouldn't let us speed even if we dared to. It beeped at us.

* **Petrol stations:** We learned the hard way that with one particular station, when you are filling up, it is best to pre-set an amount and then if you still need more, do another round. This is because if you pre-authorize a *maximum* amount, that amount could take DAYS to clear (one of my pre-authorizations took until after I returned to Canada to erase!) and that amount is HUGE (since petrol is expensive there and not everyone

drives small, compact cars as we had). That amount is HELD from your spending limit. After I had several such charges, I switched to this tactic and it was worth it to me, however frustrating, to fuel up in 2 or 3 rounds of estimated amounts. The other thing to note is that one of the stations has all Icelandic instructions, while the other gives you a translation option. Of course, the one without such an option was the one that holds your pre-authorization.

FAROE ISLANDS

* As mentioned above, for FI particularly, **BOOK YOUR RENTAL WELL IN ADVANCE**, especially if you want an automatic, as they are hard to come by.

* Vagar is a very small airport with a very small car lot, so it is very easy to find your car. Rental desks are in a small building outside, right next to the airport entrance, and the rental cars are in that parking lot.

* **Parking:** It is mostly free, but there might be time limits in some areas, especially in Torshavn. There are little DISCS (dials/wheels) on the inside of the front window or on dashboards. These are to be used when parking. You turn the hands to mark the time you parked. We didn't even know what this device was until our final night, when I finally looked into it as I noticed it on all the cars in the giant public parking lot in Torshavn. This is one version of these, as stuck to a front window.



After a few hours, it is etiquette to move your car so someone else could take your spot. There are some lots that allow 8 hour parking, but you want to check the signage for each. We were there during the non-tourist season, so parking spaces were not at a premium and we didn't see any

parking officials walking around giving tickets. Not to say this isn't a thing; we just didn't notice it during our stay. Also, we had free on-site parking at our flat, so it wasn't of big concern to us since we walked in town, and when on day trips, parking was free wherever we went.

* **PETROL stations:** there is a petrol station closer to the Vagar Airport which we used at around 4:30 am on our way back to return the car. There was also a Petrol station just outside Torshavn.

MOUNTAINOUS DRIVING



The highway through northern Iceland, past Akureyri.

Mountainous driving is not for the faint of heart if you have never experienced it. It can feel at times as though you are about to drive off a cliff into an unknown abyss. Believe it or not, the descent is possibly scarier than the ascent, especially if driving in wet conditions, as your car gains downward momentum, and the roads are VERY windy, as they have to zig zag (aka: switchback) up and down the steeper parts of the mountain ranges. You can certainly understand why speed limits are set and strictly enforced. However, it is breathtaking. Truly. So, just have a good sense in advance of what to expect, don't be heavy footed on the gas pedal, use good driving sense as you always would, and enjoy the road trip of a lifetime!!

