

Guidelines for masters of cruise and passenger ships arriving in Iceland



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I. Objectives

1. To ensure that the masters of cruise and passenger ships comply with Icelandic laws and regulations.
2. To ensure that passenger ship tours and itineraries at sea and on land do not violate nature conservation and environmental laws of Iceland.
3. To draw the attention of masters of passenger ships to the safety of their vessels and their passengers when visiting Iceland.

II. Laws and regulations

Icelandic legislation on ship traffic in Icelandic waters is based on International Conventions and Icelandic laws. Iceland is a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As a party to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Iceland has ratified most of the conventions of the organisation on maritime safety (SOLAS et al.), pollution controls (MARPOL) and the responsibility of owners and operators.

Iceland is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) which, inter alia, means that the same rules on trade, services and environmental issues apply in Iceland as in the internal market of the European Union. Iceland has also participated in the work of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) in the field of maritime safety and pollution control.

An overview of Icelandic laws and regulations on the monitoring of maritime traffic in Icelandic waters and nature conservation in Iceland may be found on the websites of the Icelandic Coast Guard, the Icelandic Transport Authority and the Environment Agency of Iceland. The laws implement the provisions of international conventions to which Iceland is a party as well as containing legal provisions specific to Iceland.

Please note that the information on laws and regulations and directives that are specified in these guidelines do not replace laws and regulations that are in effect and are officially published on the websites of the Government Gazette and the Parliament Althingi.

The operators and masters of cruise and passenger ships are advised to familiarise themselves with laws and regulations on maritime safety, pollution controls and nature conservation in Iceland and note that special provisions may apply in individual areas.

III. Issues of maritime safety

Sailing in Icelandic waters may be very demanding and there are few places in the world where a change in weather can be as abrupt. Weather can be very changeable, especially in winter. Danger can also arise in the summer when low pressure areas with high wind conditions and added wave height can compromise maritime safety. It is therefore important to proceed carefully and follow rules on maritime safety in all respects.

Although the masters of passenger ships visiting Iceland are well trained and have long experience, it cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty that they are aware of the special conditions in Icelandic waters.

Rules on the traffic of passenger vessels off the South-west coast of Iceland

Regulation no. 361/2009, amending Regulation no. 524/2008 on the Delimitation of Ship-ping Routes, Areas to be Avoided and Mandatory Reporting of Ships off the Southwest Coast of Iceland states:

It shall be avoided to navigate ships subject to this Regulation into delimited areas pursuant to paragraph 1. However, this shall not apply to ships calling at ports within the Selvogsbanki Area to be Avoided (Eastern Area to be Avoided), passenger ships during the period 1 May to 1 October and ships of up to 30,000 GT which neither carry dangerous goods nor noxious materials in bulk or in cargo tanks and are permitted to transit the inner route as provided for in Article 6(2) of this Regulation. Such ships are permitted to navigate within the Selvogsbanki Area south of latitude 63°45' N. When navigating such ships within the Selvogsbanki Area, navigating officers shall take utmost precaution and take special notice of weather and weather and sea state forecasts in on-shore wind conditions.

During the period 1 May to 1 October, passenger ships, regardless of size, are permitted to navigate the inner route.

Ships calling at ports within the Selvogsbanki Area to be Avoided (Eastern Area to be Avoided) are permitted to navigate within the area. Passenger ships, during the period 1 May to 1 October and ships of up to 20,000 GT which neither carry dangerous goods nor noxious materials in bulk or in cargo tanks are permitted to transit the inner route as provided for in Article 6(2) of this Regulation are permitted to navigate within the Selvogsbanki Area south of latitude 63°45' N.

Mandatory reporting of ships

Icelandic commercially operated ships shall report their position to the Icelandic Coast Guard through the Automatic Identification System (AIS). This means that foreign vessels are visible in this tracking system.

Vessels exceeding 300 GT (other than fishing vessels and government vessels) shall report their arrival in part with a notice of 24 hours to the Icelandic Coast Guard through a SafeSeaNet (SSN) notice.

All fishing vessels and other vessels that are not covered by the rules of SSN, except government vessels coming from abroad, shall report their arrival in port with a notice of 24 hours to the Icelandic Coast Guard on the appropriate electronic form.

The master of a vessel shall report to the Icelandic Maritime Traffic Service (tel. 545 2100; sar@lhg.is) each incident or accident that can affect the safety of the crew, passengers and the vessel, threaten safety at sea and possibly cause pollution of the ocean and the coasts of Iceland. The Icelandic Coast Guard shall be contacted when a ship is in need of a place of refuge.

Passenger ships, with a gross tonnage of 300 or more, sailing between Icelandic ports, shall notify the Icelandic Maritime Traffic Service (Icelandic Coast Guard) of their estimated route to the next port 24 hours before they arrive at the first port in Iceland. Additionally, they must inform the Maritime Traffic Service where and when they intend to disembark passengers outside the ports. It is recommended that such notifications reach the Icelandic Maritime Traffic Service with a 24 hours notice before arriving at the first port. The information should accompany the ship's notifications to the Icelandic Transport Authority (SSN).

The piloting of vessels

- A master decides whether he uses pilots or not, unless otherwise provided for in laws and regulations.
- The relevant port regulations may provide for mandatory pilotage. Port operators hire pilots for harbours where pilotage is mandatory.

Vessels arriving directly from overseas

Passenger ships arriving directly from overseas are prohibited to allow passengers ashore outside of port areas using the ships' passenger boats.

Passenger ship boats and submarines

According to Article 41 of Ship Act no. 66/2021, a license is required from the Icelandic Transport Authority for commercial passenger transport within the jurisdiction of Iceland. It includes, e.g., tourist excursions, whether on RIBs, Zodiac boats, submarines or other boats.

Passenger ships are exempt from the abovementioned rules, but their tender boats are only exempt when they ferry people directly to shore and back to the ship. If the purpose of their usage is to provide for passenger tours, such as excursions, then a permit from the Icelandic Transport Agency is needed.

If the boats are under 6 meters, they need an operating permit, which states how the intended activities will be conducted, ensuring that insurance is adequate, a safety plan is in place, etc. The license applies to all the boats that the ship uses for its activities and the license is valid until the next inspection of the boats or, depending on the circumstances, the insurance of the ship is sufficient. The license is not restricted, but may be subject to further conditions, e.g., voyage just 3 miles from the ship, restrictions due to weather or wave height etc.

If the boats are over 6 meters in length, a passenger license must be applied for, and the boats must be registered, and the operation must meet the same requirements as for other passenger boats.

For further information about permits and applications, the Icelandic Transport Authority should be contacted.

Special rules may apply to boat traffic and submarines within protected areas (see [section on nature conservation](#) below). Also, sailings of submarines within port areas may be subject to the permission of the relevant port authorities.

Operators are encouraged to familiarize themselves with what assistance can be obtained if something occurs during a sailing. Limited equipment and knowledge are available in Iceland for assistance should any incidents occur during diving operations (or while underwater).

Helicopter flights

It is permissible to fly helicopters from passenger ships and land at airports. Landing on private land requires permission from the landowner. Information about flights in Icelandic airspace can be found in the Icelandic AIP.

Special rules regarding helicopter flights may apply within protected areas, and the use of unmanned and manned aircraft may be restricted or prohibited without a permit from the Environment Agency of Iceland.



IV. Pollution control

The objectives of Act on Measures for Prevention of Marine and Coastal Pollution is to protect the ocean and the coasts of the country against pollution and acts that could threaten human health, damage bio-resources of the ocean and disturb its biosphere, pollute the environment or prevent the lawful use of the ocean and coasts.

Please note that special rules/additional requirements may apply within a port area pursuant to port regulation. Regulations of ports are published on the [website of the Icelandic Transport Authority](#).

The polluter-pays principle

- In Iceland, the principle applies that the polluter is liable for pollution produced.
- Public authorities may claim a charge from a polluter due to costs incurred from pollution.

Dumping into the ocean

- **Dumping of substances or objects into the ocean is prohibited.**
- All discharge and dumping of waste into the ocean and pollution within the pollution territorial waters of Iceland shall be reported to the Icelandic Coast Guard (tel. 545 2100; sar@lhg.is), unless permit to discard waste has been granted.

Reception of waste

- The master of a ship heading to a port is responsible for notifying port authorities in advance of any ship-generated waste and cargo residues to be delivered and is responsible for the accuracy and correctness of the information provided. This rule does neither apply to fishing vessels nor recreational craft authorised to carry no more than 12 passengers.
- A ship master is responsible for ensuring that waste from the vessel is delivered to a port reception facility or to a certified service provider before leaving port.
- A fee shall be paid for the reception and handling of waste from a vessel.

Sewage and greywater

- Sewage discharge from vessels is prohibited within port areas and in areas within 300 metres from the spring tide water level. Vessels of 400 gross tonnage and above and vessels, which are certified to carry 15 persons or more but weigh less than 400 gross tonnage are

prohibited to discharge sewage within twelve nautical miles from the territorial sea baseline points. It is permitted to discharge sewage which has been treated in a sewage treatment plant, approved by the Icelandic Transport Authority or a comparable authority of another state, outside of three nautical miles from the baseline of the territorial waters.

- The same requirements apply concerning the discharge of greywater.

Discharge of substances into the ocean from vessels

Regarding the discharge of oil into the ocean, noxious liquid substances pursuant to Annex II to the MARPOL Convention and the discharge of waste and cargo residues from vessels, the provisions of Annexes I, II and V to the MARPOL Convention apply.

Ballast water

- The discharge of ballast water is prohibited within the pollution jurisdiction of Iceland unless it has been managed or treated according to standards specified in the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships Ballast Water and Sediments. These standards shall be used as stipulated in the BWM convention, meaning that the implementation schedule for the transition from the D-1 to the D-2 standard in accordance with amendments to Regulation B-3 of the BWM convention applies.
- The discharge of ballast water within Iceland's pollution jurisdiction shall be reported to the Icelandic Coast Guard in advance of any ballast water operation.
- Iceland's Regulation no. 515/2010 on ballast water applies.

Acute pollution

- Acute pollution within a port area shall be reported to the harbour master.
- Incidents at sea outside port areas shall be reported to the Icelandic Coast Guard.

Intervention due to acute pollution

- The Icelandic Coast Guard is authorised to resort to intervention and take any necessary measures in the waters within the pollution control jurisdiction of Iceland to prevent or reduce the risk posed to the ocean or coasts from acute pollution. Such intervention includes taking over the control of a vessel if the instructions of the Icelandic Coast Guard are not observed.

- When pollution occurs in the open ocean, the Environment Agency shall resort to measures. In case of risk of pollution from the grounding of a vessel or from activity on land or sea-based activities, the Environment Agency shall take measures to prevent or reduce the risk of pollution.

Pollution control

General rules on pollution control concerning discharge from commercial activity shall also apply to vessels, as applicable.

Marine fuels

- The sulphur content of marine fuels, including heavy fuel oil, used or intended for use in vessels in the territorial sea and internal waters of Iceland shall not exceed 0.1 % (m/m), except fuels for vessels using emission abatement methods.
- The sulphur content of marine fuels, including heavy fuel oil, used or intended for use in vessels within the Icelandic Pollution Prevention Zone but outside of the territorial sea shall not exceed 0.5 % (m/m), except fuels for vessels using emission abatement methods.
- The sulphur content of marine diesel oil shall not exceed 1.5% (m/m).
- The sulphur content of marine gas oil shall not exceed 0.1% (m/m).
- Vessels using emission abatement methods shall not use marine fuels with a sulphur content higher than 3,5% (m/m), except when operating in **closed mode**.
- **Vessels at berth in ports shall use shore electricity instead of marine fuels as possible. If there is no possibility of using electric power from ashore, vessels in ports in Iceland shall not use marine fuels with a sulphur content exceeding 0.1% (m/m).** Enough time should be allowed for operation to complete all necessary actions to change fuel as quickly as possible after docking, and as close to departure as possible. The fuel change-over operation should be recorded in the ship's logbook. Exemptions apply when ships, according to clear schedule, are laying at berth for less than two hour and if all engines are turned off with electricity being used from land.

Exhaust gas cleaning systems

Equivalancy with relevant requirements need to be demonstrated when operating Exhaust Gas Cleaning Systems (EGCS):

- I) Where sulphur content of marine fuels is restricted to 0.50 % (m/m), the maximum emission ratio of SO₂ (ppm)/CO₂ (%v/v) is 21.7
- II) Where sulphur content of marine fuels is restricted to 0,10 % (m/m), the maximum emission ratio of SO₂ (ppm)/CO₂ (%v/v) is 4.3.

Within Icelandic territorial waters, the maximum emission ratio of SO₂ (ppm)/CO₂ (%v/v) is 4.3.

It is imperative to have documentation that demonstrates compliance to this criteria.

Authorities may inspect documents related to marine fuels and EGCS at any given moment, and maintaining accurate records is essential for ensuring adherence to regulations.

If the sulphur content of marine fuels exceeds 3.50% m/m, the EGCS needs to operate **in closed mode**.

Continuous Monitoring:

When the EGCS is operated in ports, harbours, or estuaries, the washwater monitoring and recording should be continuous. The values monitored and recorded should include pH, PAH, turbidity and temperature.

The discharge washwater should have a pH of no less than 6.5 measured at the ship's overboard discharge with the exception that during manoeuvring and transit, the maximum difference between inlet and outlet of 2 pH units is allowed measured at the ship's inlet and overboard discharge.

Discharge criteria for PAH and nitrates, should be in accordance to appropriate limits specified in the relevant EGCS scheme that the ship operates by.

Washwater and discharge criteria where water additives and other substances are used:

When no additional discharge water quality criteria is appropriate, and the following chemicals below are being used, and the discharge water pH does not exceed 8.0, no additional assessment is needed:

- I) neutralization agent (caustic substance), such as sodium hydroxide (NaOH) or sodium carbonate (Na₂CO₃); and
- II) flocculants, which are used for marine approved oily-water separating equipment.

The EGCS must be operated in accordance with the relevant IMO Guidelines for Exhaust Gas Cleaning Systems.

Noise pollution

The use of foghorns, whistles or any other unnecessary noise near bird cliffs is prohibited. This applies both to vessels as well as boats with outboard engines that accompany the vessels.

Obligatory reporting on pollution issues

- Discharging of waste, dumping into the ocean and pollution shall be reported to the Icelandic Coast Guard.
- Acute pollution shall be reported to harbour masters/the Icelandic Coast Guard.



V. Nature conservation

The Act on Nature Conservation No. 60/2013 applies on Icelandic soil and in the territorial waters and economic jurisdiction, including the ocean floor. The act on nature conservation therefore applies equally to vessels within Iceland's pollution jurisdiction as well as to the onshore visit of their passengers.

The objective of the Act on Nature Conservation is, inter alia, to protect the diversity of Iceland's nature for the future, both its biodiversity and geology. The public right to access certain areas is subject to various obligations and limitations.

Communication with landowners and landholders

- Obtain the consent of landowner for crossing cultivated land.
- Respect prohibition on fenced land in built-up areas.
- A landowner is not responsible for any traffic across his land.

Closure of areas

The Environment Agency has the authority to close areas where there is a risk of damage due to heavy traffic.

- It is important for the masters of passenger ships to familiarise themselves with any rules on closure of areas and that they respect the decisions and signs on limitation of traffic in closed areas. Information on closures of areas can be found on the website of the Environment Agency (www.ust.is).

General rules of conduct

- Treat nature with respect.
- Show landowners and land beneficiaries consideration and follow their instructions.
- Show respect to the landowners and land beneficiaries' interests, i.e. farming, land cultivation and forestry.
- Stay on marked footpaths.
- Avoid noise pollution.
- Be clean and tidy.
- Do not litter.
- Show consideration for farm animals, seal colonies and bird nesting

areas, fishing, angling and hunting locations.

- Avoid disturbing vegetation, including moss, heath or brushwood.
- The use and handling of fire should be done with utmost care. Lighting a fire in the open is strictly prohibited where this is dangerous or where this creates danger to the vegetation, wildlife or structures.

Organised tours

When tours are organised on private land in built-up areas or where such activities may cause interruption to the land utility, the landowner or landholder shall be consulted regarding the traffic of people and their stay on their land.

The removal of minerals and fossils

It is strictly forbidden to remove fossils. There may also be special provisions in the regulations for protected areas that prohibit the removal of certain minerals.

The use of unmanned aircraft or drones

Please note that in many places there are special restrictions regarding the use of drones, including distances and other limits.

Protected areas

In Iceland, special rules apply regarding traffic and stays in protected areas.

Special rules on traffic in such areas are published in the regulations for the protected areas or in management plans.

Limitations on going ashore within protected areas

Akurey

- It is prohibited to go on shore in the island except with a permit from the Environment Agency and the City of Reykjavik.

Látrabjarg

- All vessel traffic and disembarking within the protected area is prohibited, except by traditional sailing routes west of Bjargtangar and along the current Latrarost.

Surtsey, Eldey and Melrakkaey

- It is prohibited to go on shore in the islands of Surtsey, Eldey and Melrakkaey.

Skrúður Island

- Access prohibited except with consent of landowner.

Hrísey, Gróttta, Dyrhólaey, islands and skerries at Grunnafjörður

- Access is prohibited in designated areas during the period 15 April to 15 July for bird protection.

Drangar

- Disembarking from cruise and passenger ships that have not called at an Icelandic port is prohibited.
- Disembarking from cruise and passenger ships carrying 51 passengers or more (passengers and crew) and associated craft is prohibited, except with a permit from the Environment Agency.
- All disembarking for research purposes is prohibited except with a permit from the Environment Agency.
- All vessel traffic in the vicinity of seal and bird colonies is prohibited within the protected area.
- All traffic of personal watercraft, such as jet skis and sea-doo's, is prohibited within the protected area.

Flatey

- All disembarking is prohibited within the protected area.
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- Access to the nature reserve is prohibited during the nesting season from 15 April to 15 July each year.

Lundey

- All disembarking is prohibited within the protected area during the nesting season from 20 May to 20 August each year, except with a permit from the Environment Agency.
- The maximum speed limit for vessels and craft within the protected area is 4 nautical miles.
- All operation of personal watercraft and other water sport activity, such as jet skiing and windsurfing, is prohibited within the protected area during the nesting season from 20 May to 20 August.

Breidamerkursandur

- All disembarking from motorized boats and ships is prohibited within the protected area.

Special rules for traffic within Hornstrandir Nature Reserve

- All vessel traffic closer to seabird habitations than 115 metres is prohibited.
- The Environment Agency of Iceland recommends vessels not to go closer than 1 km to seabird cliffs.
- Passengers from vessels with 51 passengers or more (passengers and crew) are prohibited to go ashore within the nature reserve. The prohibition also includes any vehicles associated therewith, except in consultation with the Environment Agency.

Special rules for diving to the marine hydrothermal vents in the Eyjafjordur fjord

Marine hydrothermal vents in Eyjafjordur fjord

- It is permissible to dive down to the hydrothermal vents to observe them, but it is prohibited to disturb or damage them. All diving shall be reported to the port authority of Akureyri on the day of diving.
- Anchoring is prohibited within the protected area. Divers should dive down at the light buoy near the hydrothermal vents. From the buoy lies a line/connecting line that is attached in the immediate vicinity of the extinct hydrothermal vent.

Marine hydrothermal vents in Eyjafjordur fjord, north of Arnarnesnafir

- It is permissible to dive at the buoy/marked diving site near the hydrothermal vent at coordinates 65°52'15 60"N - 18°13'13 02"V (ISN93 535582 597331).
- Anchoring within the protected area is prohibited and it also not permitted to place any kind of fastener or signs on the hydrothermal vents.

Access to bird nesting areas

- All unauthorised traffic and disturbance is prohibited within protected eider-duck nesting sites during the period from 15 April to 14 July each year, as well as all unnecessary noise from humans and machinery, unless permitted by the eider duck farmer. District commissioners maintain registers of eider-duck nesting sites. A map showing the location of protected eider-duck nesting sites is available at www.map.is/aedur. Information on the website is updated annually.
- All traffic within 500 meters from the nesting sites of eagles is prohibited during the period from 15 March to 15 August.

- It is prohibited to stay close to the nests of falcons, white-tailed eagles, snowy owls and dovebies for filming, recording noises and other observations that might cause disturbances except by pre-issued permission from the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources.
- Photography and filming of white-tailed eagles, falcons, snowy owl and little auk at their nesting sites is prohibited except by permission of the Ministry for the Environment and Natural resources.

Hunting of wild birds and wild mammals

- Wild animals, including those that arrive regularly or may migrate to Iceland, are protected, unless the protection is cancelled in accordance with Act No. 64/1994 on the Protection, Preserving and Hunting of Wild Birds and Wild Mammals.
- Authorisation must be obtained by applying for a hunting card upon fulfilling the requirements for hunters in Iceland.
- The hunting periods for birds and wild mammals are bound by law.
- Polar bears are protected on land, drift ice and in the ocean.

