

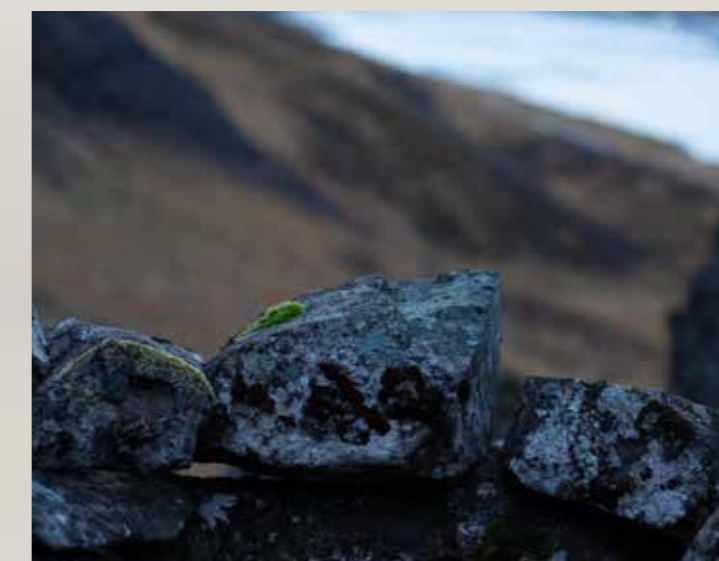
# SAFETY WHEN TRAVELLING IN BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR BAY

## DANGEROUS AREAS

**Steep rocks and cliffs** often attract visitors, not least since they are often the home of seabird colonies. In the geographically young lava fields, rocks are often loose, including on the edges of bird cliffs. Therefore, keep a safe distance from the edge (at least 1.5 m). If you want to use binoculars or a camera, kneel or sit down before looking through the lens, to reduce the danger of losing your balance.

Young **lava fields** are full of holes and loose rocks, not to mention delicate moss. Hiking in such conditions is not advised unless there are marked footpaths.

On the shores, **rocks covered with algae** can be extremely slippery and dangerous to walk on. You can also get stuck in soft mudflats. Avoid walking alone on mudflat areas. Because many shores are flat and wide in the Breiðafjörður Bay, it is very hard to see the tide advancing. However, please be aware that as the sea level can rise quickly on the mudflat and beach areas, there is the potential for stranding.



## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Foresight and responsible behaviour are important when travelling in Iceland. Before starting a journey, one should think of:

- **Travel plan and security:** Especially when travelling in sparsely populated areas, like the highlands, mountains or the islands of Breiðafjörður Bay, it is important to leave a travel schedule with relatives, friends or at [www.safetravel.is](http://www.safetravel.is). At Safetravel, you can also choose Trip Monitoring, which means that your safe and timely return is checked. You can use the 112 Iceland app to increase your security.
- **Equipment:** Vehicle equipment and vehicle maintenance must be adequate for the mode of transport you are using. If driving, the vehicle must fulfil the needs required by the roads and seasons. Tyres must match safety standards and suit the driving conditions.



- **Clothing:** The weather in Iceland is extremely dynamic, so you always need to be prepared for very different conditions. That means wearing a few layers of clothes, preferably with the outermost layer wind and water resistant.
- **Weather:** Before starting a trip, always check the weather forecast for the area. You can download the app for the Icelandic Met Office (Veður).
- **Road condition:** Follow the conditions of the roads at [www.road.is](http://www.road.is) or use the app (Vegagerðin), especially when travelling in winter or in the highlands.
- **Respect:** A responsible tourist respects the nature and cultural heritage of the area they are travelling through, so future generations can also enjoy the same experience.

## IN AN EMERGENCY

**In Iceland, the emergency telephone number is 112.** Call this number to report an accident or if you need the assistance of police, a rescue team or the fire department.

## USEFUL INFORMATION ON CONDITIONS AND SAFETY



[en.vedur.is/about-imo/news/nr/2812](http://en.vedur.is/about-imo/news/nr/2812)



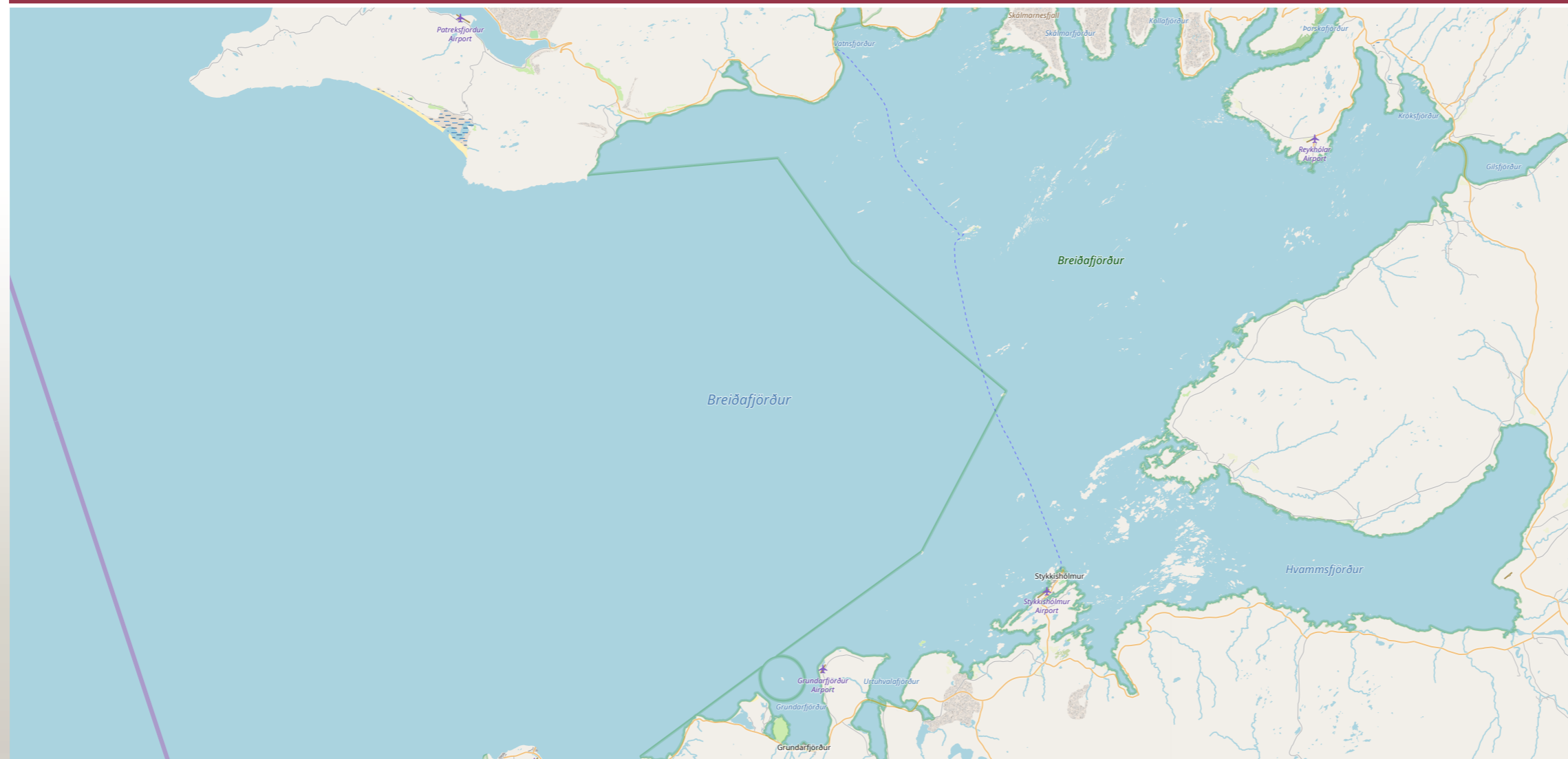
[safetravel.is/is/112-iceland-app/](http://safetravel.is/is/112-iceland-app/)



[road.is/about-us/app-from-irca/](http://road.is/about-us/app-from-irca/)



[safetravel.is](http://safetravel.is)



## DIVERSE CONDITIONS

Iceland's nature can be harsh and the weather may change extremely rapidly. By respecting the local conditions this can ensure safe travel both for yourself and others.



## DRIVING

Highway surfaces and their conditions vary greatly and are often very unlike roads that foreign drivers might be accustomed to. Before driving, obtain information on the weather at [en.vedur.is](http://en.vedur.is). Information on current road conditions can be found at [www.road.is](http://www.road.is) and instructions for driving in Iceland at [www.safetravel.is](http://www.safetravel.is).

Here are a few important safety points:

- **Gravel roads** can still be found in some areas around the Breiðafjörður Bay. There, the maximum speed limit is 80 km/hour (under optimum conditions).
- **Single-lane bridges** are common. When approaching the bridge, decrease the speed. The car closest to the bridge has the right-of-way.
- **Sheep or other livestock** are common on or alongside the roads. If they are close, make sure to reduce speed, as they may suddenly run across the road.
- Avoid creating danger by stopping the vehicle on the side of the road. Find a secure site with good visibility, preferably a parking site. Stopping on the side of the road to look at the Northern Lights in the dark, can be dangerous for you and other road users.

## SAILING

Because of the landscape and extensive variation between the tides, the Breiðafjörður Bay has strong streams/currents and extensive shallows. Therefore, sailing can be dangerous and should **only be done by competent and experienced seafaring locals** with official credentials. Always use life vests when sailing on open boats.

Kayakers should study the tides and tidal streams, and always leave a travel plan at [www.safetravel.is](http://www.safetravel.is) or with a friend. They should never travel alone and always have some kind of telecommunications equipment at hand, for example a mobile phone or an emergency transmitter. Swimming and diving in the ocean should never be undertaken alone, and the strong sea currents should be respected.



Code of conduct  
and safety around  
Breiðafjörður Bay



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# CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR BAY



## BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR BAY

Breiðafjörður Bay is an extensive and shallow bay in West Iceland, located between the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and the West Fjords. The bay has many distinguishing features and is characterised by an archipelago consisting of more than 4000 glacially eroded islands, islets and skerries. The bay's large tidal fluctuation (up to 6 metres on spring tide) causes strong tidal streams, especially in the straits between islands. The interplay of the landscape, a long coastline and tidal fluctuations make the Breiðafjörður Bay the most extensive intertidal zone and shallow water habitat in Iceland, with 31% of all shallow water areas less than 20 metres deep around Iceland, 56% of all intertidal areas, 65% of all rocky shores and 40% of all mudflats. In a large portion of the area, sunlight reaches the sea bed, enabling the growth of the most extensive seaweed forests around Iceland, which in turn create rich habitat for a variety of animals and plants, including fish and birds. Thus, Breiðafjörður Bay is the most important bird habitat in Iceland. The area has also often been referred to as the bread basket of Iceland due to the utilisation of its abundant natural resources. The area holds a rich cultural heritage regarding the utilisation, including the harvest of fish, eiderdown, eggs, birds, seals and seaweed. Its islands and shoreline are protected by law and the area is on the tentative list as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, due to both its natural and cultural heritage.

## FRAGILE NATURE

Iceland's nature is beautiful, raw and spectacular, yet also very fragile. Contributing factors to its fragility are:

- Wind and rain can in a relatively short time cause small areas of sparse vegetation to become large vegetation-free wastelands, washing and blowing away the valuable but easily erodible volcanic soil.
- Weather can be hard for any vegetation, and Iceland's native plants have short growing seasons and slow growth. Damage to delicate vegetation such as moss, can take decades or even centuries to heal – if it ever does.
- Many geological formations are fragile. This includes tuff (móberg), which is formed by sub-glacial volcanic activity. Whilst these unique rock forms are relatively common in Iceland they are rare in most other countries.
- Animals use the short summer to breed. They only have a short period to raise young and are therefore highly sensitive to disturbance. This includes seabird species that only venture onto land during the nesting season.

## CODE OF CONDUCT



When travelling in Breiðafjörður Bay, one needs to be careful and considerate. According to the Icelandic Nature Conservation Act, everyone has the right to travel around the country, provided the traveller does not litter and is careful not to damage or otherwise spoil natural resources. Crossing uncultivated private property is allowed without seeking any special permission. The traveller should always be considerate towards landowners, respect landowners' interests, e.g. in their livestock and cultivation, and follow any recommendations or limitations. When sailing in Breiðafjörður, it is an unspoken rule to get a licence from the landowner before visiting any of the islands. Nevertheless, travelling in Breiðafjörður is at your own risk. According to nature conservation laws, one should be particularly careful around livestock, seal haul-out (breeding) sites, bird breeding grounds and fishing sites, and refrain from damaging vegetation. Overnight stays in camper-vans, recreational vehicles and other mobile homes are prohibited outside organized camping areas, except with the landowner's permission. Camping of up to three standard sized tents is allowed on uncultivated land if an organized camping site is not nearby and the landowner has not placed restrictions on access to the area.

Waste should never be left in the environment, only in disposal bins or at official disposal sites.



## NATURE CONSERVATION

**Nature Conservation Areas:** Damaging vegetation, interrupting wildlife, distributing non-native species and disrupting and damaging geological formations is strictly prohibited. Exploitation of natural resources is generally not allowed, except for the traditional harvest by landowners and berry-picking for on-site consumption. The Breiðafjörður Bay area contains one national park, one protected area with sustainable use of natural resources, four nature reserves and one natural monument:

- Snæfellsjokull National Park is at the western-most tip of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula – The area is open for visitors, but they should follow marked walking tracks if possible.
- The islands and shoreline of the inner part of Breiðafjörður Bay are protected under the terms of Breiðafjörður Conservation Act no. 54/1995. This Act is in place to protect the landscape, geological formations, biota and cultural heritage.
- The east part of Flatey island is a nature reserve. Public access is prohibited in the nature reserve from April 15th to August 15th.
- Hrísey island is a nature reserve. Public access to the island is prohibited from April 15th to July 15th.
- Melrakkaey island is a nature reserve. Public access to the island is entirely prohibited except with permission from the Environmental Agency of Iceland. All shooting is prohibited within a 2 km radius of the island.
- The Vatnsfjörður fjord and its surroundings are a nature reserve. Access to islands of the nature reserve is prohibited, except with permission from the Environmental Agency of Iceland.
- The Surtarbrandsgil ravine by Vatnsfjörður is a natural monument for the protection of lignite fossils of vegetation. At Brjánslækur you can enjoy an exhibit about the ravine. Walking within the natural monument is only allowed with a ranger and collection of fossils is prohibited.

**Wildlife viewing:** It is both rewarding and exciting to observe wildlife such as puffins, Arctic foxes and whales in their natural habitat. When viewing wildlife you must ensure your own safety and also the welfare and safety of the wildlife you are experiencing. It is important not to interfere with the animals' natural behaviour. A good pair of binoculars can give you a safe and enjoyable viewing perspective, without affecting the wildlife you are interested in. If you see the wildlife changing its behaviour this might be an indicator of stress and that you are too close; if so, you should immediately retreat. A wildlife encounter or a photograph should never be at the expense of the wildlife.

Even small interruptions can, if often repeated, cause long term consequences to breeding and may actually reduce life expectancy for wildlife. The operation of drones can be very disruptive and damaging to wildlife and should not be conducted in areas such as bird cliffs or other dense bird colonies during the breeding season. Also, be aware that the operation of drones can reduce the quality of other people's experiences. The regulation on the use of drones in Iceland can be found at the Icelandic Transport Authority's web site. More stringent rules may apply locally, e.g. in national parks or at popular tourist destinations.

**Eider colonies:** Around Breiðafjörður Bay, there is an old tradition of collecting the down feathers lining the nests of wild common eiders. This practise of sustainable down harvesting does not affect the bird population. After cleaning, the down is a valuable commodity and mostly sold to Japan. Most of the islands of Breiðafjörður Bay contain eider nests that are harvested. Many landowners have applied for special protection of their eider colonies, which means that visiting the colonies is banned from April 15th to July 14th. All shooting is prohibited within 2 km of the colony and fishermen may not lay their nets within 250 m of the colony.

**White-tailed eagle:** Around 70% of all white-tailed eagles in Iceland live in the Breiðafjörður Bay. The eagles are shy and sensitive to disturbance. The birds and their nests are heavily protected. During the breeding season, from March 15th to August 15th, all traffic is prohibited within 500 m of nests, except for traditional use of the land that cannot be done at other times of the year. The area within 100 m of nests is strictly protected and cannot be disturbed or modified in any way.

**Mosses** are extremely fragile and grow exceptionally slowly. When walking outside of designated paths, please try not to step on moss. If a rift is created in the cover of mosses, please try to close it immediately.

**In towns, dogs are only allowed on a leash**, apart from designated areas in a few municipalities. In sparsely habited areas, away from livestock, dogs can be allowed to run free. Nevertheless, dogs are not encouraged on the islands of Breiðafjörður Bay. The dog's handler should always prevent the dog from causing disturbance or damage to domestic or wild animals. This applies especially in the breeding period of birds and mammals, in May, June and July. During this period, dogs should always be under control and ideally on a leash.

**Domestic cats** can cause havoc for birdlife and have no natural niche in the islands of Breiðafjörður Bay. In other areas, outdoor cats should always carry a brightly coloured bird collar or cat bib and a warning bell to limit predation.

**Off-road driving** is illegal apart from on completely frozen and snow-covered ground. Violators should expect to pay high penalty fines.

**Noise from vehicles**, e.g. jet skis, can severely impact birdlife and the experience sought by people seeking tranquillity and natural beauty. Therefore, such motor-engine transport should not enter important bird areas, including bird colonies and the vicinity of eagles' nests.

## HUNTING AND OTHER EXPLOITATION

The nature of Breiðafjörður Bay is utilised in various ways; harvesting fish, invertebrates and algae from the ocean are most important throughout the whole region, and agriculture is also important locally. Traditionally, landowners also collect eider-down and use the islands for sheep grazing and hunting birds and seals. Sea angling is permitted by tour operators with a special license.

Salmon and trout fishing in rivers and lakes is locally very important. A license can be bought online or from the owners of the fishing rights. The Fishing Card gives access to many lakes, including a few in the Breiðafjörður Bay. Hunting of wildlife is regulated through the Wildlife Act. If you want to hunt, please contact a hunting tour operator for information.

In some areas, there is a tradition for collecting eggs of wild birds, especially of gulls, geese and auks (guillemots and murre). Only landowners have permission to collect eggs. The collection of berries, mushrooms, herbs and marine algae is only allowed if consumed on-site. Otherwise, one needs permission from the landowner. The collection of stones is generally not allowed except with permission from the landowner. The removal of fossils is illegal.

## PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE



The cultural heritage of Iceland provides remnants of the Icelandic nation's history. This includes archaeological sites over 100 years old, which are protected within a 15 m radius. If the remains are protected by law, they are indicated by a sign and the protected area has a radius of 100 m.

It is of utmost importance not to walk upon or otherwise tamper with archaeological remains, as they can be fragile and easily destroyed.

Breiðafjörður Bay has a lot of cultural remains in connection with fisheries and agriculture. Although tourists are free to inspect the remains, these remains must be treated with respect and care.

**Take nothing but pictures – keep nothing but memories.**