

# Make most of daylong Iceland layover



**Rick Steves**

Iceland is a pioneer of “stopover tourism.” Floating alone where the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans meet, this island nation was long considered too out-of-the-way for travelers ... until airlines like Icelandair started luring Americans with cheap flights to Europe that included a stopover in Iceland.

The caveat: Your stopover was a full day.

This offer is still popular today, with multiple airlines allowing a 24-hour (or longer) stopover for no additional airfare. All you need is a passport, a rental car and an extra day or two. But with its striking glaciers, craggy peaks and steamy geysers, Iceland can fill up an entire vacation — so the challenge for the casual visitor is figuring out what to cram into a short stay.

If you thrill to the idea of an Iceland stopover, consider this whirlwind itinerary.

**Planning:** Try to do this in the summer, when roads are clear and daylight is virtually endless. From early June to mid-July, it never really gets dark, letting you extend your daylight sight-seeing day as far as your energy level will take you.

It's also best to rent a car. Even though it's only a day, having your own wheels will help you get the most out of your Iceland time. And while you should prepare to bundle up — cool temperatures and bone-chilling wind can happen at any time of year — also bring a swimsuit for visiting a thermal bath and sunglasses for driving with the sun low in the sky.

**Morning:** Most U.S. flights to Iceland land in the wee



Iceland's Golden Circle hosts many natural wonders, including the must-visit Þingvellir National Park, set in a stunning gorge. **CAMERON HEWITT**

hours of morning at Keflavik International Airport. Conveniently, the famous Blue Lagoon thermal-bath spa is just 15 minutes away — and in the summer it opens nice and early. By the time you deplane, clear customs and pick up a rental car, you can head straight there for a relaxing outdoor soak in milky blue geothermal waters. But you can't just show up and hope to slip in — reservations are required. To have your choice of time slots, book ahead.

**Midday:** Refreshed from your soak, drive 45 minutes into Reykjavik and browse the town. I'd walk down to the harborfront for a photo op at the popular Sun Voyager sculpture (shaped like an old Viking boat),

then follow the shoreline past the cutting-edge Harpa concert hall and moored boats to the Old Harbor, where you can browse lunch options at the seafood restaurants on the piers.

**Afternoon:** Set out from Reykjavik to the Golden Circle route for some serious sightseeing. This excursion offers a rewarding ratio of natural wonders per miles driven. Without stops, the entire circuit requires about four hours of driving — but a long Icelandic day will let you wring the maximum out of your visit.

Three essential stops along the way include Þingvellir National Park, situated in an extraordinary gorge caused by the slow separation of the Eurasian and North Ameri-

cant tectonic plates; Geysir, a bubbling, steaming geothermal field with Iceland's most active geyser, called Strokkur; and one of the country's most impressive waterfalls, Gullfoss. Since these major Golden Circle sights technically never close, you can go at your own pace without eyeing the clock.

**Dinner:** Grab a bite to eat in Golden Circle country (limited options); hold out for your return to Reykjavik (where restaurants keep long hours and you'll find plenty of spots still serving food as late as 10 p.m.); or plan ahead and picnic at one of the Golden Circle sights. Food and drink are expensive in Iceland, but you can make the most of your money — and your sightsee-

ing time — by grabbing grub at a grocery store and dining geyserside.

**Late:** Collapse at your hotel and sleep for a few hours — or pull an Icelandic all-nighter (which is relatively easy, as it never really gets dark). Then drop your car at the airport and fly out the next morning.

**For a longer layover:** With 48 hours, do the one-day plan at a more relaxed pace or keep up the tempo and add a visit to the dramatic South Coast, which sits in the shadow of two glacier-topped volcanoes. With remarkable waterfalls (Seljalandsfoss), black-sand beaches (Reynisfjara) and hikable glaciers (Sólheimajökull), the South Coast is a close runner-up to the

Golden Circle as a top day trip. Plan on a 2.5-hour drive each way (without stops), or consider joining a bus excursion from Reykjavik.

With its stunning natural wonders, kind and gregarious people and unique attractions, this little island stubbornly exceeds the lofty expectations of its many visitors. Whether or not you can pronounce the names on its map, Iceland is a rewarding place to travel — even if you're just stopping over.

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## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Qisha eyes headlining concert at Red Rocks

By Jae-Ha Kim  
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

Born in Malaysia, Chloe Qisha moved to the United Kingdom at age 16, thinking that she would pursue a career as a therapist or psychologist.

But instead, the London-based artist became one of Gen Z's most exciting alternative pop stars, with songs that are fresh while conveying a retro vibe that pays homage to '80s pop. Her latest single “YDH” is her answer to a stressful 2025.

“I wanted a song that captured the feeling of letting your hair down and having the best time,” Qisha said. “YDH” is a good summation of that. I wanted to capture the raw, instinctual feeling of having a crush (when there's no rhyme or reason to it. That first initial pang of a crush can be all-consuming, and I like capturing that kind of raw emotion in a song.”

This interview with Qisha has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: Are there things you'd like to achieve on your 2026 tour that you didn't get to do during your earlier shows?**

**A:** There's a lot I want to improve on. It's been nice having a big gap between the last tour in October and this next one. Even though I'm touring a similar set, I feel like I've grown a lot in the last six months. I've been through a lot of ups and downs with music and I've also written a bunch of new songs that resonate really deeply with what I'm currently feeling. It's going to be nice to add in some new bits for an audience I've never actually performed for before.



Singer-songwriter Chloe Qisha says she would be lost traveling without her headphones. **LILLIE EIGER**

**Q: Do you have any free time built into your tours to go sightseeing or just enjoy the city you're in?**

**A:** At this stage, touring has to be quite snappy and efficient to make everything work. I think we have maybe one day in New York and then a day in Los Angeles for press at the end of the trip. I've been to LA more because I go there to write, so I don't really feel like I need to sightsee as much. As long as I hit up Erewhon for a smoothie, I'm good. New York, though — I've only visited once for about two days and I've always wanted to spend more time there.

**Q: What is your future bucket-list venue?**

**A:** I've always said my ultimate dream would be a headline show at Red Rocks in Colorado. There's something about that amphitheater that's really legendary. At night, especially with how it's lit, it looks beautiful.

**Q: What are your five favorite cities?**

**A:** London, Tokyo, Singapore, Penang (Malaysia) and New York.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** I really love Japan. Being from Malaysia, traveling there used to be quite easy, so we visited a lot and I spent quite a few Christmas holidays there growing up. Japan in the winter is one of my favorite places in

the world. Every time I go, it feels like there's more to discover. I'm also a big food person and Japan has some of my favorite food.

**Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?**

**A:** Brazil! Mainly because a lot of my listeners are there. I've heard amazing things. Either that or just anywhere sunny and beachy.

**Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?**

**A:** My journal and my headphones. Traveling without my headphones is torture to me. (Laughs)

**Q: What is your guilty pleasure when you're on the road?**

**A:** Honestly it's just having some time to myself. I can be quite introspective, and I do my best music listening when I'm able to sit with good headphones and listen to something on repeat without distractions. Usually it's when I'm traveling from one place to another or looking out of a window. I like being able to listen to music and daydream.

**Q: Do you have a knack for picking up new languages?**

**A:** No, I'm actually terrible. I only really speak English, which I'm a bit ashamed about.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Avis charges fee for lingering marijuana smell inside rental

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I recently rented a car from Avis at Sacramento International Airport.

A few hours into my drive, I noticed that it strongly smelled of marijuana. I kept the windows open, but the odor lingered.

When I returned the vehicle six days later, I told the staff about it. They said that it would be fine.

A week later, I received a \$250 bill from Avis for cleaning, including the repair of a burn mark that I never noticed.

I don't smoke cigarettes or marijuana and was the sole driver. I protested, but Avis insists that the charges are valid.

What are my rights?

— Gary Mullen-Schultz, Minneapolis

**A:** You should never have been given a car in this condition, and you shouldn't have been billed for cleaning it up. Car rental companies regularly impose steep cleaning fees for smoking, pets and spills. I don't have a problem with this when the damage actually happens during your rental. After all, renters agree to accept responsibility for the vehicle while they are renting it.

But there's a problem — these charges are often subjective. Unless an employee documents the condition of the car before you leave the lot, it's your word against the company's when you dispute them. This is exactly what happened here.

Avis sent you a series of canned replies insisting that it had ample documentation. But when I reviewed your correspondence, I didn't see any convincing proof that you caused the odor or damage. You, on the other hand, have a credible explanation and a

strong record as a longtime customer.

Still, I wanted to be sure that this damage didn't happen on your watch. It turns out that you had a sinus condition that prevented you from smelling the marijuana odor when you picked up the car. Otherwise, you never would have accepted it. You also don't smoke and didn't have any other passengers, so it was highly unlikely that this happened during your rental.

Avis didn't send you any photos of the alleged cigarette burns, but I think that you could have disproven its claim by taking interior shots of the vehicle — the seats, the floors, the dashboard with the odometer. These should be a standard part of your check-in anyway.

Also, don't assume that casually telling a rental agent about a problem is enough. Ask the agent to document it in writing. This way, if a charge like this appears later on, you'll have

proof. I really wish car rental companies would follow the lead of Turo, which strongly encourages its renters to take before and after images of its vehicles and even has a function in its app to help renters take usable, credible photos of their rentals.

I contacted Avis on your behalf. A few days later, it dropped the \$250 cleaning fee. Remember, cleaning fees can be a profit center for car rental companies, and they are often unfairly applied. If you're charged for a preexisting odor or stain, challenge it immediately and escalate the situation if necessary. With persistence — and sometimes a little advocacy — you can win!

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