

# The history of Iceland

## The settlement

It is told that Nordics sailors had been the first to arrive to Iceland around the years from 800-874. Some stories appoint to that Irish sailors and even Romans had come here much sooner. But that has not been proved.



In the first chapters of *Íslendingabók* (Icelandic book) and *Landnámabók* (History of the settlement) it's told that Iceland was first build by people from West-Norway.

But why did people from West-Norway go out on the open sea, to look for Island that just few people had even heard about?

One of the main reasons was that, young people were beginning to live on their own needed land to stay on. So they decided they would like to go somewhere else, where was more land to live on. Other reasons was that Haraldur Lúfa Hálfðánarsson a.k.a. Haraldur hair-beauty was on this time concuring Norway and the word spret out by people that was escaping from him, that he would and his forces had burned many town and

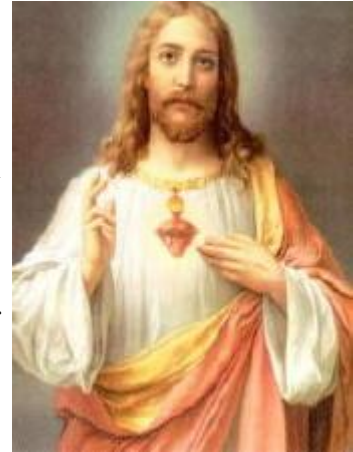
executed some farmers. And people were afraid to be forced to attend in battles for him. Or maybe it was only the adventures desire for some people to come over the sea to our beautiful country.

It's told that nordics sailers had used the stars to support them to find the right way, on dark, clears skyed nights. And of course they could always take the point of Pole-star which is always located in high-north.

## Conversion of Iceland to Christianity

King Olaf I of Norway sends the missionary priest Þangbrandur to Iceland to convert the inhabitants to Christianity. He has some success in baptizing chieftains but also meets opposition and ends up killing two or three men who had composed libelous poetry on him. He returns to Norway after one or two years with a litany of complaints and tells the king that he has little hope that the country can be converted. The king is furious at hearing the news and threatens to hurt or kill Icelanders in Norway. Two of the Icelandic chieftains previously converted by Þangbrandur meet with the king and pledge their aid in converting the country.

In the summer of 999 or 1000 the issue of religion reaches a crisis point at the Alþingi. The Christian faction and the heathen faction do not want to share the same laws and the Christians choose a new lawspeaker for themselves, Hallur á Síðu. He reaches an agreement with Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði, the heathen lawspeaker, that Þorgeir will find a compromise acceptable to everyone.



Þorgeir goes to his camp and stays under a skin for the remainder of the day and the following night. The day after he gave a speech at Lögberg. He says that the only way to maintain peace in the country is for everyone to keep to the same laws and the same religion.

Þat mon verða satt, es vér slítum í sundr lögin, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn. - "It will prove true that if we tear apart the laws we will also tear apart the peace."

## Independence



During the 19th century the country's climate changed for the worse, resulting in mass emigration to the New World, particularly Manitoba, Canada. However, a new national consciousness was revived in Iceland, inspired by 18th century romanticism and nationalism from mainland Europe. An independence movement developed under Jón Sigurðsson. The Alþingi had remained for centuries as a judicial body but was finally abolished in 1800. In 1843 a new body by the same name was founded as a consultative assembly and claimed continuity with the Alþingi of the Icelandic Commonwealth.

In 1874, a thousand years after the first acknowledged settlement, Denmark granted Iceland home rule, which again was expanded in 1904. The constitution, written in 1874, was revised in 1903, and a minister for Icelandic affairs, residing in Reykjavík, was made responsible to the Alþingi. The Act of Union, a December 1, 1918, agreement with Denmark, recognized Iceland as a fully sovereign state united with Denmark under a common king. Iceland established its own flag and asked that Denmark represent its foreign affairs and defense interests. The Act would be up for revision in 1940 and could be revoked three years later, if an agreement wasn't reached.

## Iceland and the World War II

German occupation of Denmark on April 9, 1940, severed communications between Iceland and Denmark. As a result, on April 10, the Parliament of Iceland, Alþingi, elected to take control of foreign affairs into its own hands, electing a provisional governor, Sveinn Björnsson, who later became the republic's first president. During the first year of World War II Iceland strictly enforced a position of neutrality, taking



action against both British and German forces violating the laws of neutrality. On May 10, 1940, British military forces sailed into Reykjavík harbor, beginning the invasion and occupation of Iceland by Allied forces which would last throughout the war. The government issued a protest, but if the authorities ever had any thoughts of mounting a defence, they were made impossible by the fact that most of the country's police force was in a training camp some distance from the capital. On the day of invasion, Prime Minister Hermann Jónasson read a radio announcement telling Icelanders to treat the foreigners as they would treat their guests. The government quickly adopted a policy, similar to the Danish one, of cooperation with the occupying forces.



At the peak of their occupation of Iceland, the British had around 25,000 troops stationed in Iceland, all but eliminating unemployment in the Reykjavík area and other strategically important places. In July 1941, responsibility for Iceland's defence passed to the United States (U.S.) under a U.S.-

Icelandic defence agreement. The British needed all the forces they could muster closer to home and thus coerced Alþingi into agreeing to an American occupation force. This time around, there were up to 40,000 soldiers in the island, thus outnumbering all grown Icelandic men. (At the time, Iceland had a population of around 120,000.)

Following a plebiscite, Iceland formally became an independent republic on June 17, 1944. Since Denmark was still occupied by Nazi Germany, many Danes felt offended that the step should have been taken at this time. Despite this, the Danish king, Christian X, sent a message of congratulations to the Icelandic people.

In 1944, 97 percent of Iceland's people voted to cut all political ties with Denmark. Iceland officially gained independence on June 17, 1944.

## **The national parks in Iceland**

Thingvellir is the first national park in Iceland and it was established in 1928. Thingvellir (The Parliamentary Plains) are the most important historic site of the country.

The second national park is Skaftafell, established in 1967, contains some of the most precious natural pearls of the country.

The National Park Jokulsárgljufur was established in 1973. The park is ideal for short or long hikes and that is the best way to enjoy its charm fully.

The Snaefellsjokll National (Glacier) Park was officially established on the 28th of June 2001 and became the fourth national park of the country.

In March 2007 a foundation of "Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður" - the National Park Vatnajökull was accepted by the Parliament Alþingi. It will be the largest National Park in Europe proximately 13.400 square kilometres or 13% of the total area of Iceland.

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