

# Easter in Iceland

While some Icelandic holidays (such as [Bondadagur](#)) are related to ancient Norse traditions, others are related to Christianity. Icelanders have their very own unique ways of celebrating these holidays – even when it comes to Easter:

Easter – or in Icelandic *Páskar* – is an important national holiday for many Icelanders with about 70% of the population belonging to the Lutheran church. However, as the majority of Icelanders is not really religious, the Easter holidays are more about chocolate eggs than Jesus' death and resurrection.

With the Easter holidays coming up soon, we want to share the most important information on how Icelanders enjoy a traditional Easter weekend

**In Iceland Easter is celebrated over a five-day weekend.**

**Maundy Thursday** (*Skírdagur*), also known as Holy Thursday, is the Thursday before Easter and an official holiday in Iceland. It commemorates the Last Supper and many 14-year-olds' confirmation take place on this date. The confirmations are religious ceremonies but over time secular confirmations are becoming increasingly more popular. The events are usually very well attended and provide their guests with lots of yummy food. The absolute highlight of these confirmation parties must be the *Kransakaka* though. It is a marzipan-flavoured wreath/tower cake with beautiful white glaze and chocolate decorations.

**Good Friday** (*Föstudagurinn langi*): in Iceland Good Friday is the day of solemn and contemplation. There is a law that forbids partying or any other festivities or social gatherings in the public. Bars, clubs, some restaurants and grocery stores, liquor stores and even local police offices are closed until midnight. This law has been around since 1926 and is not as strictly enforced as in the past. And even there is no drinking or gambling on this day you can still have fun 😊

For example, numerous atheistic Icelanders protest this outdated law by gathering and playing bingo in front of the parliament. Everyone is welcome to join – for free! Even though you can win a prize. This fun activity has been around for a while and as far as we know there has not been any arrests yet.

**Holy Saturday** (*Dagur Thagnarinnar*): this is the day of vigil and prayer.

**Easter Sunday** (*Páskadagur*) must be one of the absolute favourite days of every Icelandic child (and perhaps also adult). The traditional hunt for the Easter Egg (*Páskaegg*) takes place on Easter Sunday. The *Páskaegg* is a chocolate egg and sometimes comes with a liquorice taste – we Icelanders love liquorice! That's something you will surely notice as soon as you step into any grocery or tourist store in Iceland 😊 This egg is stuffed with more Icelandic candy and the manufacturers take their jobs very seriously. You can find pralines, more liquorice, lollipops, gummy bears, caramels, liquorice chocolate caramels and more sugary things in there. It's a dream come true for every person with a sweet tooth and Iceland has many of them. In addition to the sweet fillings, there is an Icelandic proverb in the egg – similar to a fortune cookie. Some proverbs make more sense than others. For example, there is: *Ber er hver að baki nema sér bróður eigi* – *Bare is the back of a brotherless man.* Or: *Hver er sinnar gæfu smiður* – *Every man is the smith of his own fortune.*

These Easter eggs come in various sizes, although the most popular size is probably that of an ostrich egg – like I said – Icelanders have a sweet tooth.

As mentioned already, for many Icelanders this Easter Egg hunt is the most important tradition during this time. Sometimes, this activity can be really elaborate with trail of clues and a prize at the end but other times the egg is simply just hidden somewhere. This Easter Egg tradition has not had a long history though. It only started around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the first egg being produced by Björnsbakarí bakery. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly popular since then and more than one million chocolate Easter eggs are sold every year. Nowadays, they are available in every supermarket around Iceland during the Easter time.

Another significant tradition on Easter Sunday is the Easter Leg. It is a dinner consisting of roasted lamb leg and is normally served with side dishes like sugar-glazed potatoes and gravy.

**Easter Monday** (Annar í páskum): The last day of this long weekend is usually just seen as an extra day reserved for finishing all the yummy food from the previous days or for recovering from all that feasting.

**Popular activities Icelanders like to do during these times is usually related to travelling:**

Hit the slopes – ski resorts are very well visited during this time, even if it is April already.

Visit the family

Spend time in the countryside, some people even rent cottages

Attend mass

Go to an Easter concert e.g. Aldrei fór ég sudur is a popular free music festival in Ísafjörður

**What you can do:**

Join the Easter egg hunt (almost a must do!), visit the countryside, go to an Easter concert, visit a local chocolate factory, go on day tours such as the Golden Circle and end it with a visit to one of our amazingly relaxing geothermal baths (e.g. the famous Blue Lagoon)

**Weather:**

Even if it is already April, the weather in Iceland will still remain rather fickle with rain, snow, sunshine or wind. Therefore, we would recommend you dress warm in water- and wind-proof apparel.

**Fun fact:**

Unlike in other cultures where bunny decorations can be found in every grocery store during Easter, the most important motif during Icelandic Easter is the Easter chick. This is also why you often can find them on top of every Easter Egg produced and sold in Iceland.

Many houses are adorned with those chickens and additionally decorated in the colours of yellow and green. In Iceland these colours relate to the coming of spring. It is also popular to place a bouquet of tree branches into a water-filled vase and leave it somewhere in the house. Due to the warmth, these branches will usually spout leaves much earlier than the trees outside.