

HOW TO DRIVE IN SNOW IN ICELAND

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Tips, tricks and useful information about driving in the snow in Iceland in winter



Photo by Hunter Lawrence

Snow can be wonderful, it creates a winter wonderland feeling that is beautiful and otherworldly. Driving in snow however is not as wonderful, as you can see in the videos below. For this reason, we get lots of questions from people planning to visit our country about driving in the snow in Iceland.

For people that are not used to driving in snow, the thought of it can be a source of enormous anxiety which might even stop them from going out on the road. And that is not what we want. Seeing Iceland by car is the best way to enjoy the country's landscapes, and with the right tools and information, driving in the snow in Iceland is perfectly fine. We have therefore gathered a bunch of tips about driving in snow in Iceland, preparing for it and what to do if you get stuck in it.

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Iceland Ring Road Winter Driving:



The winter weather in Iceland:



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Before we begin, it is helpful to realize that Iceland is quite dark during the winter! This means you will be driving in the dark a lot of the time as you want to spend the few hours of daylight you have sightseeing and checking out cool spots, not driving to them. Furthermore, Northern Lights hunting happens only in the very dark arctic night. When it is dark, it is harder to see the road, and therefore more important to practice caution.

For any of you who are planning to pick up a car from us at SADcars and have questions about the right type of car to hire, we have answers. You should be able to drive in winter in any type of our cars except if the weather forecast is predicting bad weather, such as a snowstorm.

Our cars all have good, studded tires and are equipped for normal winter circumstances on the Icelandic roads. However, we do recommend you rent a 4x4 car, especially if you plan on going the ring road in the dead of winter when driving in Iceland in the snow. Just send us a line to info@sadcars.com if you have any questions or concerns about which type of car you should choose.

Preparing to drive in snow in Iceland

When you are getting ready to drive on Iceland's snowy and icy roads, it is good to have a few things in mind. This first rule applies for all seasons; check the weather and road conditions in the area you plan to drive through before departing. In Iceland, the weather can really change after 5 minutes and you really can't look out the window and say the weather is a certain way and expect it to stay that way. There are a few useful sites to check before heading off.

The [Icelandic Met Office](#) has an excellent site where you can see the weather forecast in different parts of the country with a time slider.

The [Icelandic Road Administration](#) has a road map with detailed information about the road conditions on specific roads, not only if there is snow, but also the types of snow or ice like "Spots of ice", "Wet snow", "Blowing snow" and "Snow showers" to name a few.

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And of course the dreaded "Closed". This information is updated in real time every 15 minutes or so which makes this an excellent source of information. Furthermore, you can click straight through to webcams and road numbers to actually see the condition on the road you plan to drive on. Checking this website is a must when preparing to drive in the snow in Iceland.

Finally, [Safetravel.is](https://www.safetravel.is) is your one stop source of information to successfully travel safe in Iceland.

The mountain passes can be especially dangerous because the weather up there can be a lot worse than where you are down at sea-level. You might even look at the road you are going to drive and think "that doesn't look bad at all". Don't make that mistake! At around 600 meters above sea level the weather system is just different and you can expect anything, and you do not see it from where you are standing. If you know you are going to be going over a mountain (that is basically what you are doing) then make sure you check the weather forecast ahead.

Driving downhill in the snow

Another important thing to bear in mind when driving in the mountains in Iceland is how to drive downhill in snow. When driving down a hill in the snow, it's important to remember that you should be driving in a low gear. Use the engine to slow the car rather than engaging the brakes where possible, and make sure to steer smoothly.

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Photos by Maciek Krynica and [The Busbyhive.com](http://TheBusbyhive.com).

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Another tip is to check the condition of the tires before heading off. If the tires have less grip on the road you might want to clean them as there might be tar on them. Of course, if the tires are studded or winter tires, make sure they have a good grip (are not too worn).

Bring a shovel if there is a lot of snow in the forecast. A window scraper is a must. Warm clothes, gloves and hats are a plus if you need to go outside for some reason.

Driving in snow in Iceland

The top advise we have to offer for driving in the snow in Iceland is to drive slowly in all conditions and circumstances, all the time, always.

- If you are driving in just snow, drive slowly.
- If you see a turn of the road ahead, slow down even more.
- If you see a one way bridge, blind hill or any kind of circumstance where you are uncertain, slow down even more.
- If there is a lot of wind, drive even slower.
- If the road is also icy underneath the snow, slow down even more. Do not worry about cars passing you or being impatient behind you, you are in control of your car.
- And so on, just drive slowly and you will be fine.

Braking in the snow in Iceland

If you get into a situation where you need to brake, try go brake as gently as possible. Do not brake forcefully on icy roads as that might cause the wheels to lock, leaving you with no control of the car at all. It is better to brake gently to have control of the situation. If you start losing control of the car, try to steer it in the other direction. If the tires get locked and you lose control of the car keep trying to brake gently and steer in the other direction in case the car finds a grip on the road.

It might be helpful to head on over to YouTube and look up how to drive in snow to get some good tips from experts.

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If there is a lot of snow or blowing snow so you do not see the road the situation can become stressful. Don't panic, Icelanders have come up with a solution for that; reflective sticks on the side of the roads. As you can see in the below picture and video there are reflective sticks on both sides of the roads. They will lead you in circumstances where there is very little visibility. Blowing snow can happen very suddenly and without warning so it is very reassuring to know those little shiny friends are there. In case of no visibility we suggest you send a (very warmly dressed) person out to walk by the side of the car and find the reflective sticks. It is important to remember not to panic and just take all the time you need, you will get out of the blowing snow at some point ahead.

Be careful when passing a car when there is snow on the roads as the blowing snow from your car can blind the driver of the car you are passing. This does of course not always apply but is good to have in mind.



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Photos by Maciek Krynica and *Retour du Monde*, respectively. Both models are older SADcars.

What to do when you are stuck in the snow

Sometimes, in areas where the snow is deep or the wind has caused snowdrifts, you may get your tires stuck in the snow. First of all, never step forcefully on the gas pedal hoping that the car will be able to get loose, you are only digging yourself a bigger hole.

The best way to free the car is to gather some people to push the car at the same time you lightly step on the accelerator. Try to wiggle the car out with help from the people that are pushing the car. In certain types of snow, it can be useful to put the mats from inside the car behind the wheels that are stuck, that is sometimes enough to give the tires the grip they need to get out of the snow.

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If nothing works and you are stuck in the middle of nowhere, call 112.

Hopefully you have found some useful tips about how to drive in snow in Iceland and are prepared to brave the roads even if the white stuff is flying around.

Just remember, assess the situation, use common sense and most importantly, drive slowly! :)