Iceland is an island that lies in the middle of the northern Atlantic Ocean. It has a size of about 102,000 square kilometers and lies just south of the Arctic Circle.

Iceland is about 1000 km away from the European mainland and about 300 km from the coast of Greenland. Iceland has a long coastline with many fjords and bays.

**Physical Geography**

Iceland is a volcanic island. It emerged from an underwater mountain range, the Middle Atlantic Ridge, about 20 million years ago. Volcanoes are still active on Iceland today. The island is full of lava fields, geysers and hot pools. A small island, Surtsey, was formed by volcanic eruptions 40 years ago.

Iceland is also a land of glaciers. Vatnajökull, covering an area of 8,000 square kilometres, is the largest glacier on Iceland and the biggest ice sheet in Europe.

The climate of Iceland is warmer and milder than anywhere else near the Arctic Circle. The Gulf Stream that comes from North America flows around the southern coast of Iceland. Winters are therefore mild and summers can be cool and rainy.
PLANTS AND VEGETATION

Only about 25% of Iceland is covered with plants. Grassy fields and bogs are widespread. Originally birch trees were common on the island, but they have been cut down and towns and villages have replaced them.

PEOPLE

Most of Iceland’s 300,000 inhabitants descend from Viking settlers who came to the island from Norway in the 9th century. Almost all of them live in towns and villages near the coast in the south and south-western part of the country. Reykjavik is the capital and largest city of Iceland.

ECONOMY

Because of the cool summers farmers cannot grow crops on Iceland. They make a living by raising sheep and cattle. Fishing is the most important economic sector in Iceland. 70% of the country’s income comes from fishing.

Between 2008 and 2010 Iceland was experienced a major economic crisis. The country’s large banks collapsed. Many investors from Great Britain and the Netherlands lost money because they invested in these banks.

Iceland’s economy profits from thousands of tourists who come to the island every year to see its natural beauties. They can engage in many outdoor activities, including horse riding, cycling and hiking.

HISTORY

Iceland became one of the world’s first democracies. After settlers from Norway came to the island at about 900 A.D. the first government was established.

In the 13th and 14th centuries Iceland was first ruled by Norway, then by Denmark. The island became independent again in 1944.

Today Iceland is a member of NATO and serves as an important military ally between Europe and North America.