

# Five Themes of Iceland

Seeing the Five Themes through Observation

## Five Themes of Geography

- 1. Location** - The Absolute and relative location of different things around the earth's surface
- 2. Place** - The human and physical characteristics of a place
- 3. Movement** - The forces of human migration, the spread of ideas, and the spread of physical resources and products and how they impact the planet.
- 4. Regions** - The formal, functional, and perceptual regions humans use to sub divide the earth.
- 5. Human-Environment Interaction** – The impacts that humans have on the environment, the ways they adapt to their environments, and the ways humans use the earth's resources

# 1. Location: Relative Location

The relationship of a place's location as connected to another place's location.



Iceland is located in the North Atlantic Ocean, between Scotland and Greenland. Although only a small tip of the island of Grimsey is actually located above the Arctic Circle, most of the island's biological characteristics classify it as being located in the Arctic.

# 1. Location: Absolute Location

The exact location of something on the earth's surface. Displayed as latitude or longitude coordinates or as an address.



Example is a fjord in the northeast corner of Iceland, with a screenshot of an iPhone GPS app showing the absolute coordinates of where the photo was taken in the East Fjord region.

## 2. Place: Human Characteristics

The cultural and visible impacts that humans have had on an area.



With only about 330,000 people in a country roughly the size of Kentucky the human impact is still surprisingly vast. Across the countryside farms use as much of the arable land as possible to grow hay to feed the flocks of sheep and the famous Icelandic horse. There is an undeniably close link between human elements and natural elements in Iceland, and sometimes the two literally collide. This is especially true in the example of the city of Heimaey in the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar) where the government literally had to fight back the forces of nature, in this case lava from a volcanic eruption, to preserve their environment. The picture on the right shows the city of Heimaey, with a visible wall behind the blue fish processing building. The wall was created at the point where lava flows were literally doused by pumped supplied by the US Army. The building of the port itself is also a visible reminder of the impacts humans have had on the environment. The picture on the left shows the Hallgrímskirkja protestant Lutheran church in Reykjavik. The church's architecture is inspired by the European style Lutheran churches, and the basalt columns that can be found around Iceland.

## 2. Place: Physical Characteristics

The natural landscape and environmental characteristics of a place.



Iceland is called the land of Ice and Fire. Pictured are the Eldfell Volcano on the island of Heimaey, and the Solheimjokull Glacier along the southern Coast. The Eldfell volcano erupted in 1973 and covered much of the island in lava. Geologists estimate there are around 130 volcanoes on Iceland, of which, about 30 volcano systems are active. On the other side, ice covers about 10% of the island at all times. Much of that is in the many glaciers and ice caps around the country.

### 3. Movement: Communication

The spread of ideas (through spoken, written language, or even sign language.)



Icelandic is one of the oldest languages in the world, similar to the old Norse spoken by medieval Vikings. It does have a lot of similarities with Danish, and other Germanic languages, but is still difficult for outsiders to understand (The sign in the picture is for the Blue Mountains outside Reykjavik). After Icelandic, English is the most spoken language. Most Icelanders had to learn English in schools to be able to read the textbooks, since very few have been translated into Icelandic. Especially with the growth of tourism, Icelanders are having more interaction with people from around the world, and English is commonly used as the main language of communication in Iceland.

### 3. Movement: Transportation

- The spread of different products and services around the earth.



Transportation, and lack thereof, has had a large impact on Iceland over the course of its history. The middle picture is of a sculpture of the Sun Voyager in Reykjavik. The sculpture represents the origins of the Icelandic people. The island was originally settled by Irish monks and Vikings from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, who traveled via ship. The island has mostly Scandinavian influence, and because of their later separation from the rest of Europe, they have one of the oldest languages in the world, similar to that of their early Viking ancestors. Now Iceland is highly connected to the rest of the world, and the idea of Movement is evident in that goods from all around the world are transported in (like the shipping containers from the city of Akureyri - Pictured on the right). Tourism has also had a large impact on Iceland, especially thanks to Icelandair, who offers up to a 7 day layover on popular Europe to North America routes, without any additional charge. Tourism is now the number one industry in Iceland, leading to the building of many new hotels to accommodate visitors, like the hotel in Vik pictured on the left.

## 4. Regions: Formal

Areas with shared religion, language, economic activities, etc.



Iceland is part of Scandinavia. The countries are connected by a common linguistic origin (Germanic language family), religion (Protestant – Lutheran), and historical origin (Viking settlement).

## 4. Regions: Functional

Areas that are linked together by shared interactions.



Iceland is part of the functional area of the Schengen Agreement with the European Union. Although, Iceland is not a full member of the EU, they have agreed to be part of the Schengen area which allows citizens of member states to travel freely within the area without having to go through passport control.

## 4. Regions: Perceptual

Regions based on how people think about an area.



Iceland is in the North Atlantic Perceptual region. It is a perceptual region because the understanding and country composition of the area changes from person to person.



## 5. Human-Environment Interactions: Impacts

How humans change their environment or the earth's environment as a whole.



The picture on the right shows ships from a company's whaling fleet in Reykjavik. Iceland has decided to not sign the International Whaling Convention, and has set quotas for how many whales can be harvested each year. Whales that can be harvested include the endangered fin whale, which are hunted to be sold in meat markets in Japan. The second picture shows the Vatnajökull ice cap, that covers roughly 8% of the island, is rapidly declining due to the effects of global warming.

## 5. Human-Environment Interactions: Adaptations

Ways that humans change themselves in order to better survive in an area.



Iceland is a historically difficult place to live in. The story of Iceland is that of the people adapting to the conditions and trying to irk out a living, often failing despite their hard work due to cold winters making agriculture difficult, or an occasional volcanic eruption. One of the most prominent and visible ways that Icelanders have learned to adapt to their environment is the use of geothermal energy (like the building of the GO geothermal plant pictured to the left outside Reykjavik). Iceland gets 85% of its energy and water through renewable sources on their own island, and is working to become 100% energy independent.

## 5. Human-Environment Interactions: Resources

Things that occur naturally on the earth's surface that humans use for their own benefit.



Fishing is still the second largest industry in Iceland, second only to the booming tourism industry. The cold waters that surround it attract scores of fish who come to feed in the plankton rich waters. Despite its relatively small population of 330,000 people, Iceland is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest fishing nation in the world. Pictures – (Left) A fish farm near Súðavík in Northwest Iceland. (Right) – Fresh caught fish being brought in for processing in the town of Siglufjörður in northern Iceland.