

Breathing Easy

Iceland doesn't just keep up with the latest in haircuts, fashion, and wireless technology – the nation's public health policy is just as trendy. Along with England, Wales and Finland, Iceland will be introducing a smoking ban for bars, cafés, and restaurants this summer. From June 1 (July 1 in England and Wales), a breath of fresh air will be blowing through northern Europe as the bans take effect.

The first-ever smoking ban can be traced back to 1590 during Pope Urban VII's 13-day papal reign. The provident pontiff saw fit to ban the use of any tobacco in and around churches against the threat of excommunication. The torch was later passed to the Nazis, who, under direct orders from Adolf Hitler himself, imposed the first nationwide smoking ban.

While the current proliferation of smoking bans (including much of Europe and a fair number of US states) has not incited any world wars nor gotten anyone

excommunicated, it has been a source of controversy in some of Europe's more nicotine-friendly nations like Germany, Italy, France, and Ireland. Overall the new bans stem from a policy of protecting workers from exposure to second-hand smoke in their workplaces, an idea which has most recently been extended to workers in bars, restaurants, and hotels. A 2004 study revealed that bars and restaurants in New Jersey had more than nine times as much indoor air pollution as those of neighboring New York City, where a smoking ban is in place.

Most of Icelandair's 23 destination cities have or will soon have a smoking ban for bars and restaurants (in addition to those mentioned above, Parisians have plans to kick the habit in January 2008). Only six have no firm plans to ban smoking: Orlando, Baltimore, all three German destinations, and Amsterdam (though Holland's reasons for holding out on the ban have little to do with tobacco...). JM ◻

