



WARMING UP TO **GREENLAND**

FROM DOG SLEDDING TO GLACIER GAZING, THIS RUGGED ARCTIC NATION IS RICH
IN ADVENTURES FOR EVERY AGE AND TASTE

BY ANDREW MYERS



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Those who've ever caught a glimpse of the Northern Lights, even for the briefest moment, will never forget their fiery charm.

In Greenland, the Northern Lights are visible on every clear night three seasons a year—autumn, winter and spring. In summer, they would be there, too, but for the round-the-clock midnight sun outshining them. On most nights, they appear a ghostly emerald green, but they can also venture into fiery reds or even purples on the very best nights.

“The Northern Lights are, without question, spectacular in Greenland,” says Sarah Woodall, an American who works as a tourism consultant for Visit Greenland, the national tourist board (www.greenland.com).

Though Greenland likely doesn't leap to mind as a tourist mecca, this rugged land three times the size of Texas that stretches almost to the top of the world is emerging as a surprisingly popular destination, and not just for the Northern Lights. Greenland is rich in adventures for every age and every taste. Some 60,000 visitors each year travel to this stunning Arctic land. While that number may not at first impress, consider that Greenland has only 56,000 permanent residents and the figure takes on added significance.



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Northern Lights, Destination Arctic Circle

The Northern Lights are, of course, one of Greenland's star attractions, but they are just one of what are known as “The Big Arctic Five,” which include adventurous dog sledding tours, spectacular displays of ice and snow, incomparable whale watching and, of course, an engaging culture with roots stretching back thousands of years. Today Greenland offers a unique blend of Inuit and global influences—and is like no other place on Earth.

Greenland's centuries-old dog sledding tradition remains vibrant and

offers a distinctive vantage on the country's rugged beauty. Tour leaders, known as mushers, provide entrée into the history of dog sledding and the unique collaboration between man and animal that is sled dog life.

“Dog sledding experiences range from light day trips to more extreme adventures,” Woodall says. “You can take a few hours' tour around the backcountry just outside town, or you can take a longer excursion that includes overnight stays in small lodges.”



The “The Big Arctic Five” icons located on the opposite page are directly associated with Greenland's national brand, “Pioneering Nation,” a campaign based on Greenland's five core attractions. They are specifically meant to promote Greenland. Visit greenland.com.



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Coffee break on the dog sled trail

Lodges are simple but cozy, and all provisions are carried aboard the dog sleds, as the Inuit hunters have done for ages. The prime season for dog sledding is March and April, when the winter snows linger but the sun has emerged from its months-long slumber beneath the horizon. For the quintessential Greenlandic experience, try wearing traditional Inuit gear made of animal fur. Whether you choose modern or traditional gear, however, trail outfitters will have it all.

Third of The Big Arctic Five is Greenland's magnificent ice and snow. Contrary to its verdant name, 80 percent of Greenland is covered in a perpetual sheet of ice that towers two miles thick in places.

Chief among the ice highlights is the Greenland ice sheet, easily accessed from the town of Kangerlussuaq in the Arctic Circle region, where a lone unpaved back road leads almost directly to the ice sheet's edge (a two-hour drive by all-terrain vehicle).

The Greenland ice sheet is in constant motion, albeit at a glacial pace. The lucky visitor will bear witness to massive chunks of ice breaking free with a thunder as they crash to the land or water below, a process known affectionately as calving. Once the icebergs hit the water, it is possible to hear them "breathe" as they pop and release oxygen while floating alongside one another.

The best-known spot for iceberg gazing is the Ilulissat Icefjord on Greenland's western coast, which is

HOW'S THE WEATHER?

Greenland has an arctic climate with average temperatures that do not exceed 10° C (50° F) in the warmest summer months. However, in the southern part of the country and the innermost parts of the long fjords, temperatures can rise to more than 20° C (68° F) in June, July or August. The cold season in Greenland lasts from December to April, with average daily temperatures falling below -3° C (26° F).



"Greenland Map" ©iStockphoto.com/wowchikyury

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Norbert Eisele-Hein imageBROKER/Newscom



Top, cooking musk oxen; bottom, rich bits of mattak, humpback whale meat, an Inuit specialty

A TRUE TASTE OF THE ARCTIC

Greenland boasts a distinctive cuisine that is focused on sustenance from the land and the sea, but increasingly includes fresh elements raised during the short-but-sweet growing season in South Greenland, affectionately known as the “Garden of Greenland.” The traditional foods of Greenland are largely dependent on the game that roams the rocky coasts, namely reindeer and musk ox.

“Most of our Greenlandic specialties here are wild-caught. They are absolutely sustainable and organic in the truest sense of the word. Nothing is mass-produced,” says tourism consultant Sarah Woodall. Reindeer meat with crowberry sauce is a local favorite. On the domesticated side, the South Greenland lamb is absolutely delicious, she says.

From the sea, whose cold waters produce fish of exceptional quality, the salmon is a highlight and, surprisingly, not available anywhere else in the world. “We don’t export our salmon, so to taste such a unique flavor one must come to Greenland,” Woodall says. The halibut, shrimp, trout and mussels are exceptional, as well. In the spring, the Greenlandic tradition calls for lumpfish roe. “With some crème fraîche and chopped red onion on a blini, it’s delicious,” says Woodall.

For those who want to experience exotic Greenland dining, traditional whale and seal meats are still eaten and are available in fish markets and restaurants. Mattak is a small but rich bite of whale skin with blubber. Suaasat is the national soup, a flavorful broth with boiled seal meat.

“Whale and seal meats are delicacies here. They are very lean and maybe one of the most nutrient rich foods available,” Woodall says, “For the gastronomically adventurous, they represent a true taste of the Arctic.”

Musk oxen with crowberries

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GETTING TO— AND AROUND— GREENLAND

Remote as Greenland seems, it is accessible year-round. Using Iceland as a stepping-stone, North Americans can easily reach Greenland's hot spots via flights with Air Greenland and Air Iceland. Should you find yourself in Europe, it is also possible to reach Greenland from Copenhagen, Denmark. The spring travel season starts in March, with the popular summer season beginning in June and lasting through fall.

Cruises along the scenic coast are available from the late spring to early fall. Nearly half of Greenland's 60,000 tourists each year come by cruise ship, tracing the coast and disembarking for a few hours here and there in select towns along the way.

As for accommodations, Greenland boasts two four-star hotels, but there are plenty of options, including small hotels, bed-and-breakfasts and even home stays with a local host family.

Getting from city to city is not so easy as hopping in the car and heading out. There are no roads between towns, so tourists and residents alike must take either a flight or the coastal ferry to get from place to place.



ICE & SNOW

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The Iluliattoq lake at the ice edge near Kangerlussuaq

filled with freshly minted icebergs. "Photos simply cannot do justice to its beauty, scale and significance," Woodall says.

A few hours north by boat from Ilulissat is a glacier known as Eqip Sermia. Visitors can stay in the Glacier Lodge Eqi, an eco-lodge with an on-site chef, which is located just across from the glacier. Boat tours to other Greenlandic glaciers are also available from the towns of Nuuk, Narsarsuaq and Tasiilaq. For a truly spectacular introduction to the ice, however, Woodall recommends a "flightseeing" tour by small plane or helicopter.

In summer months, Greenland is renowned for whale watching. Many are drawn to the fish-rich waters near Nuuk, the capital city, to see the pod

of humpback whales that returns year after year to feed there.

The whales are fascinating creatures to observe, Woodall says, whether seen at a distance or within meters. When the mighty animals surface to breathe, they release a show-stopping mist, as their blowholes pop open with a powerful whoosh.

Last but not least of The Big Arctic Five, of course, are the people of Greenland. Greenland, where Danish and Kalaallisut are the primary languages, prides itself on being a nation of pioneers. From the Inuit who ventured here across North America some 5,000 years ago and shaped a life in this challenging environment; to Erik the Red and his Viking cohort who landed in South Greenland in the

Summer in Tasiilaq. Right: a whale diving off the Greenland coast



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WHALES

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PIONEERING PEOPLE

An icefjord cruise near Ilulissat. Right: A group of people in traditional clothes, Holsteinborg

10th century; to the Danes who claim it as a self-governing territory today, Greenland has always embraced a pioneering spirit of self-reliance and adventure.

As ever, the operative word for Greenlanders is adaptation. It is in

the people's remarkable ability to adapt to the land, to the sea, to the changing climate and, most of all, to the global culture that makes this place such a compelling destination. That spirit is alive and well and extends to all who visit.

"With all this open space, physical beauty and engaging people, Greenland is meant for adventure," Woodall says. "Some people just book a flight and walk out into the nature. Greenland is freedom." ◀

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