

Greenland Snapshots

After much wrangling, the USA's lease on the Thule Air Base (see the boxed text 'Plutonium Peril in Pituffik', p200) was renewed in summer 2004. It was a unique historic moment for Greenland, not because of the agreement itself but because then US Secretary of State Colin Powell came all the way to tiny Igaliku to sign it. In the 25 years since Home Rule, this was the first time that Greenland's foreign policy had not been entirely conducted from Copenhagen.

FAST FACTS

Area: 2,415,100sq km,
85% covered in ice

Beer consumption per
capita: 0.45L per day
(2000), 0.35L per day
(2002)

Cars per 1000
inhabitants: 45

Inflation: 1.6%

Number of operational
traffic lights: 4

Population: 56,676

Population of sled dogs:
30,000

Highest point: GUNNBJØRNS-
FJELD (3733m – compare to
Mont Blanc, 4807m)

Unemployment: 7.4%

Internationally sanctioned
whaling quota: 19 fin
whales, 194 minke whales

This was great news for Greenland's Home Rule government, which is desperately keen to move towards independence. But it's in a deep quandary, as Greenland is totally economically dependent on a massive budget subsidy from Denmark. At some Dkr3,000,000,000 that's almost US\$10,000 per year for every man, woman and child, or around one third of GDP. Infuriatingly for the nationalists, it's hard to see the Danish largesse as anything other than well intentioned. That doesn't prevent quite unsubstantiated rumours circulating that somehow Denmark is siphoning off secret profits from something...but what?

National priorities are firmly aimed at balancing the books to allow an eventual political disengagement. Nobody's arguing for a return to traditional Inuit subsistence hunting; the idea is to squeeze money out of the ice, and the biggest hope is oil and mineral extraction. Production costs are prohibitively high, but rocketing petroleum and gold prices since the Bush and Blair 'War on Terror' began have made some developments look more viable. A new gold mine near Nanortalik was officially inaugurated in 2004 and it sent its first production to be made into wedding rings for the Danish Crown Prince and his Australian bride. (Perhaps paradoxically, most Greenlanders are intensely fond of the Danish royals.)

Greenland is also pushing for increased energy self-sufficiency. The country's greatest waterfall, Qorlortorsuaq (p125), is to be sacrificed for hydro power. The routing of Greenland's power lines across previously pristine fjords to Narsaq remains controversial, as the most economically logical pylons routes traverse the greatest Greenland Norse ruins (at Hvalsey, see p120).

For now, nearly 90% of exports are based on shrimps, crabs and fish, while local village economies depend on seal hunting. Foreign criticism of Greenland's laissez-faire hunting and fishing policy is seen as culturally insensitive interference.

Greenland's domestic economy works to a rather Soviet-style model, with central planning, state-owned shops, no private land ownership and heavily subsidised jobs. Arguably it has to be that way. Many villages have effectively lost their *raison d'être* since cod stocks collapsed in the 1980s, and even with huge subsidies the ships and planes needed to keep them supplied are painfully expensive. Air and ferry timetables are major political issues. The money spent on building the new Qaanaaq airport could have given everyone in that village free helicopter tickets for life to the existing Pituffik airport.

In big towns housing remains a dominant issue. While municipalities such as Paamiut have ample spare housing, others (especially Nuuk) are overflowing as people come to seek opportunities in the 'big city'. Demand has pushed Nuuk house prices to double those in Copenhagen – way above most people's wildest possibilities. Meanwhile many residents are stuck in a poverty trap. A rental apartment often comes with a job. This creates great

inflexibility of labour. Changing jobs could mean losing your home, and bosses are loath to fire even the most incompetent worker if that would make them homeless when it's -20°C.

Like many postcolonial nations, Greenland has a language dilemma. Moving towards all-Greenlandic schools might sound sensible. However, without Danish (or another foreign language) few students are likely to get further education. And that, some locals fear, threatens to sentence Greenlanders to a future as second-class citizens in a globalising world.

Always the conundrum returns: how and whether to escape from Denmark. Most Greenlanders admit that they could have done much worse than to have the Danes in charge. Denmark's relatively enlightened attitude toward traditional native cultures has spared them much of the outright exploitation and plunder that many other colonies suffered. Instead, Denmark provided schools, hospitals and even the odd kilometre of road. But having been half-killed with Danish kindness, how will Greenland do on its own? It may take some years to find out.

HISTORY

Inuit History

Greenland's predominant population group is known simply as the Inuit ('people'). Though out of favour and faintly pejorative, the term Eskimo ('eaters of raw meat') is still used in some historical references (see the boxed text, p40). Originating in Siberia, different proto-Inuit peoples reached Greenland in various waves via Alaska and Canada.

Archaeologists have divided these peoples into several historical 'cultures' based on their tool technologies. The cultures are named after the places where evidence was first discovered: Independence (Independence Sound in Peary Land), Saqqaq (on Disko Bay), Dorset (Cape Dorset in Nunavut, Canada) and Thule (now Pituffik). Our conception of each, possibly interconnected, culture is very hazy but develops with every new archaeological find and improvement in carbon dating.

The first known group, Independence I, probably arrived from Canada's Ellesmere Island in around 2400 BC. Perhaps no more than 500 souls in total, these nomadic hunters somehow eked out a meagre existence at the frontier of human endurance for several centuries before apparently dying out between 1800 and 1600 BC.

Discoveries at Qeqertasussuk (near Qasigiannuit, p181) suggest the west-coast Saqqaq culture may have been concurrent. It was certainly much more widely spread and lasted around 1000 years. The Dorset culture probably derived from the Saqqaq or a second Independence culture. It was more technologically advanced and more communally based than its predecessors. Dorset people carved weapons and artistic pieces from bone and ivory, and used sleds to transport belongings. Learning to extract oil from whale and seal blubber meant that they could heat their way through colder climatic cycles. However, their apparent insistence on inflexible design rules suggests a strong resistance to innovation. Thus when the Thule culture arrived from Canada around the 11th century with harpoons, dogsleds and *qajaq* (kayak) technology, the Dorset ways were rapidly swept aside. Within 150 years the Thule, ancestors of most present Greenlandic Inuit, had spread all over north Greenland's coasts, absorbing or supplanting other cultures.

A cooling climatic shift in the 12th century pushed the Thule ever further south, increasingly fragmenting into a number of subcultures. By the time east- and west-coast subgroups met at Greenland's southern tip in the 19th century their languages had become almost mutually unintelligible.

The Greenland Research Centre website (www.sila.dk/History/) makes the fascinating if arcane subject of Inuit history readily accessible through a hyperlinked timeline.

The Norse Arrive

Curiously, just as the Thule Inuit started arriving in Northwest Greenland, Viking Norsemen were beginning to colonise the south. They weren't nearly as well prepared for Greenland's climatic hardships and within 500 years they had all mysteriously disappeared. Nonetheless, their haunting history gives a strange appeal to the extremely minimal ruins that you'll find dotted all over southern Greenland. Some of the most worth seeing are at Hvalsey (p120), Herjolfsnæs (p132) and Anavik (p155).

According to the sometimes contradictory Norse sagas, the first European to discover Greenland was Gunnbjörn Ulfsson, an Iceland-bound Norwegian who got blown off course in AD 930. Unimpressed with Gunnbjörn's Skerries (now named for him, near present-day Tasiilaq), he did a quick about-turn and retreated to Iceland.

Vikings regularly wallowed in vicious family blood feuds involving generations of revenge killings. However, such killings were not sanctioned, and killers would typically be exiled. In 978, the land reported by Gunnbjörn seemed to offer a desperate last hope to one such exile, the unsavoury Snæbjörn Galti. However, icy Bláserk Fjord near Tasiilaq proved a bad place to lodge. Holed up by the snow all winter, his party swiftly degenerated into murderous quarrels and virtually exterminated itself.

This didn't put off later exile Eiríkur Rauðe Þorvaldsson, who's generally remembered in English as Erik the Red for his russet hair and florid face. He and his father had already been forced to flee Norway after a rather bloody revenge killing. They settled in northwest Iceland. But in 982 Erik was again convicted of outlawry when he avenged the killing of two of his slaves, who had vandalised a neighbour's property.

Like his predecessors, Erik and his retinue fled to Greenland. They made landfall at Bláserk, but considering the place unlucky after Snæbjörn's fiasco, they continued down the coast. After rounding Cape Farewell (Nunaap Isua/Kap Farvel), they settled in for the winter on an island that Erik modestly named Eiríksey (Erik's Isle). The following summer they continued farther up Erik's Fjord (now Tunulliarfik), where they found tolerable country with animal-rearing potential. On the best plot Erik set up a farm that he called Brattahlíð. This name (meaning 'Steep Hillside'), along with local archaeological discoveries, has led some to identify Narsaq (p109) as the site of this original Brattahlíð. Undoubtedly Narsaq has the requisite steep, sloping pasture, but the majority of historians still place Brattahlíð at the head of the fjord on the site of modern Qassiarsuk (p104).

In 985 Erik returned to Iceland. There he pulled off one of the greatest masterstrokes in the history of marketing, calling the new country Grænaland (Green Land) to make it sound attractive. His reports of a land rich, fruitful and ripe for settlement encouraged 25 shiploads of prospective colonists to join him on the return journey. Ice and storms en route destroyed many ships, and others turned back when they saw the less-than-green reality of their new home. But 14 boatloads settled, and with their pick of virtually virgin land the colonists found conditions better than expected. Soon farmsteads dotted the fjord systems as far south as Herjolfsnæs (near modern Narsarmiit). Southern Greenland became known as the Eastern Settlement (Østerbygd) as more recent colonists settled new lands in the fjords behind modern Nuuk (the Vesterbygd or Western Settlement).

Christianity & Cooling

Fired with pioneer zeal and equipped with Viking ships, the first wave of Greenland Norse travelled widely, hunting ever further north and exploring the seas to the west. Erik the Red's son, Leif Eriksson, is famously credited

as being the first 'European' to visit North America, in 1000. Meanwhile, Leif and his mother, Þjóðhildur, converted to Christianity. Þjóðhildur demanded that Erik build her a church at their farm and refused to sleep with her pagan husband until he agreed. Spreading to create some 300 farms, the Norse community successfully bred sheep, cattle and pigs and soon became piously Catholic. They petitioned Norwegian king Sigurd Jorsalafare to establish a Greenland bishopric. The lavish gifts of walrus tusks, whalebone and two polar-bear cubs accompanying this request apparently did the trick. A Swedish monk called Arnald was nominated as bishop in 1124, and by the time he arrived in 1126 a red-sandstone church awaited him at Gardar (now Igaliku). Perhaps the colonists were later to rue their pro-church enthusiasm. While bishops proved useful at settling local disputes, they also exacted considerable tithes and taxes and could fine troublemakers by requisitioning their stock or land. By the time Greenland was annexed by Norway in 1261, most of the land had been thus appropriated by the church. Also, a lack of wood (as there were no trees, Siberian driftwood was the only source of timber) meant that building or repairing boats was tough. This reduced mobility to head north to hunt or trade with the Inuit, who were themselves spreading steadily southward.

By the terms of a 13th-century trade monopoly, two Norwegian ships were supposed to visit annually with supplies. In turn they would carry skins, narwhal tusks, locally made wool and other Greenlandic trade goods to Europe. Unfortunately, a notable cooling climate trend late in the 13th century made conditions increasingly tough for shipping and colonists alike. The colder Western Settlement was eventually abandoned around 1350; even in the warmer Eastern Settlement animals died and sheep needed their wool much longer, ruining the cloth industry. As ice choked the seas, navigation became increasingly hazardous. In 1380 the Norwegian supply ship sank. Worse, in 1392 the Hanseatic League (a powerful commercial confederation of North German port city-states) destroyed the port of Bergen, through which all Greenland trade was conducted.

Left with no link to the outside world, Greenland was effectively forgotten. And, as the value of walrus tusks had dwindled, Europe had little commercial incentive to restore contact. At some point in the 15th century the Greenland Norse simply vanished.

What Happened to the Norse?

There is no archaeological proof to suggest a massive epidemic or murderous raids by Inuit or *skraeling* (Native American) tribes. Various theories include a scourge of caterpillars that destroyed the grazing lands, emigration to North America or absorption into the Inuit community. Wildest of all is the idea that the Norse people were kidnapped by pirates in the 1470s and sold as slaves at Tenerife. One particularly far-fetched version claims that the kidnappers had been sent to extract long-overdue tithes owed to Pope Sixtus IV, who was at that time on a spending spree sponsoring the Sistine Palace in Rome.

The last confirmed report of the Norse communities was given by an Icelander who attended a wedding at Hvalsey in 1408. Fascinating new research by Gavin Menzies suggests that China's brief era of exploration may have included voyages to Greenland during a sudden warm spell in 1422 or 1423. Perhaps the Chinese were the mysterious barbarians obliquely referred to by Pope Nicholas in a belated 1448 epistle telling Irish bishops of Greenland's reported ravaging 25 years earlier. However, it's unlikely that the fact-finding, trade-minded Chinese would have been aggressive towards

Berkeley Online Medieval Library (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/>) has hundreds of searchable pages of Norse sagas.

DID YOU KNOW?

In North America the Norse would visit Labrador (Markland), Baffin Island (Helluland) and Newfoundland (Vinland), but they rarely stayed for long. Their settlement at L'Anse Aux Meadows lasted just three years before being abandoned following tensions with *skraelings* (Native Americans).

DID YOU KNOW?

Imported walrus ivory had been used extensively in Europe's early-medieval ecclesiastical art. However, the 15th century's improving Mediterranean trade made elephant ivory available more cheaply.

Although fictional, Jane Smiley's *The Greenlanders* is a magnificent epic offering better insights than any history book into the brutally harsh day-to-day life of the 14th-century Norse colonists.

locals. Sadly, all official Chinese records of that period were destroyed by later isolationist dynasties.

The disappearance of the Greenland Norse colonies remains one of history's great mysteries.

New European Interest

The lure of cheaper spices awoke late-16th-century Europe from Dark Age isolation as a race developed to find trade routes to the Orient. This included the hunt for a possible Northwest Passage past Greenland and around the unmapped, icebound north coasts of America (see p18). Famous attempts included those of Frobisher (1575), Hudson (1607) and Baffin (1615), but the trips of John Davis (from 1585) were most significant in mapping Greenland's west coast. Davis established a rapport with local Inuit and wrote the first ethnographic, geographical and biological studies of the island.

The latter part of the 17th century saw another mini ice age, but this didn't dissuade a new breed of European visitor. From the 1670s whalers – mostly Scottish, Dutch and Basque – arrived in ever-increasing numbers. Though they mainly lived on board, they inevitably indulged in some romantic dalliances and limited trade with the local Inuit, who were anxious to acquire knives; previously the only source of iron had been meteorite scrapings. In return, the Europeans valued narwhal ivory – spiral tusks which had long been considered to be the horns of unicorns and were considered a potent aid to virility. The whalers came to know the coasts much more intimately than the adventurers ever would, but their centuries of hunting would eventually spell disaster for marine mammal stocks.

Christianity & Trade Monopoly

With a 1605 expedition King Christian IV claimed Greenland for Denmark – a claim unsuccessfully disputed by Norway as recently as 1924. The first attempt at renewed European colonisation was over a century later, in 1721, when pastor Hans Egede received permission to establish a trading post and Lutheran mission. Egede's original plan was to find the lost Norse colonies. Convinced that Norse descendants had survived but reverted to paganism, he was determined to reclaim their souls for Christ. Finding no sign of any Norsemen, however, he decided that saving Inuit souls might be worth a go instead. In 1728 he founded Godthåb ('Good Hope') which, with the arrival of a competing Moravian mission in 1733, immediately became the centre for converting native Greenlanders to Christianity. The former missions now form the most attractive core of old Nuuk.

Before Christianity, Inuit hell was freezing cold, various easily angered spirits needed to be appeased by *angakok* (shamans), and everything from seals to rocks to icebergs had an immortal soul. Using trade as an encouragement, Christian missionaries set out to undermine these 'superstitions'. The church outlawed the shaman's drum and urged couples to form nuclear families. People had formerly lived communally, sharing food, tasks and even wives. Long term the attack on this lifestyle is considered to have dangerously fractured social cohesion, undermining organisations like the *umiaq* women's boat teams and the very practical sharing of food.

In 1774 Denmark imposed a trade monopoly administered by the Royal Greenland Trade Department (KGH), whose locally run successor still manages the ubiquitous Pilersuisoq stores. Over time the locals discovered a taste for KGH's addictive luxuries such as coffee and tobacco. This in turn encouraged a move away from nomadic subsistence hunting and a greater tendency to settle semipermanently near trade posts. Meanwhile,

Greenland remained closed to non-Danish shipping and trade right up until WWII. The only exception was for Faroese fishermen, who were permitted to develop their own village (Faeringehavn/Kangerluarsorseq, now abandoned) in the early 20th century. They also established isolated, normally uninhabited boat stations from which they caught cod in Viking-style *imaati* skiffs that would be walled into shelters in winter. One derelict *imaati* boat remains sadly forgotten amid rubbish in Paamiut.

Further Exploration

The 1815 Battle of Waterloo ended Europe's exhausting Napoleonic wars, but victorious Britain suddenly found itself with thousands of under-employed military officers. To keep their oversized Navy busy the British Admiralty encouraged a new age of exploration, and the race resumed to find the fabled Northwest Passage (see p20). Once this was achieved (by Robert McClure in 1854) the race mutated into a competition to achieve 'furthest north'.

One of the best-known if not best-loved Arctic explorers was the American Robert Peary. Ruthlessly single-minded in his passion to reach the North Pole, he infamously part-funded his expeditions by 'stealing' the 37-tonne Savissvik meteorite (north Greenland's main historical source of iron) and by bringing back living 'human specimens' to the US, hoping to impress his sponsor, Morris Jesup. Peary claimed to have reached the Pole in 1909, at the cost of eight expeditions and eight toes (to frostbite), but it's generally accepted that he didn't actually make it (see p22). The northernmost lobe of Greenland is nonetheless named after him, and his descendants still live around Qaanaaq.

A quite different breed of explorer was the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen. He is remembered as the first European to cross Greenland's inland ice (in 1888) but he also developed theories of Arctic ice drift (see p21).

Greenland's greatest home-grown explorer was Knud Rasmussen (see the boxed text, p174), born in 1879 at Ilulissat. Unique amongst ethnographers of the era, he lived among the most remote Inuit tribes, many of whom had previously had little or no contact from outside. Speaking their languages fluently, he recorded their stories, beliefs and shamanic rituals and lived as a native. His extensive reports remain a unique record of societies that have now disappeared forever. Rasmussen remains something of a national hero, and his 1936 film *Paolo's Wedding*, using an original cast of Inuit playing themselves, is a unique document; it's available on video from Nuuk's museum.

World War II & the 1950s Social Revolution

In 1940 Hitler occupied Denmark. In early 1941, even before it officially joined the war, the USA set up air bases at Søndre Strømfjord (Kangerlussuaq), Thule (Pituffik) and Narsarsuaq. At Green Valley (Grønneal) they built a naval base to protect the intensely strategic Ivittuut cryolite mine (see the boxed text, p138) and bartered the cryolite they needed for aluminium production for Greenland's basic imports. Meanwhile, on Greenland's east coast a thrilling if tiny-scale battle raged for control of the weather stations (see the boxed text, p212).

Apart from its trading stations and Christianising missions, Denmark had largely left the traditional Inuit lifestyle alone before the war. However, a mixture of wartime American openness and post-war idealism resulted in a massive social shake-up. In what later backfired as perceived cultural imperialism, Denmark set out to offer Greenlanders full Danish citizenship. In 1953 Greenland became a county of Denmark, and soon locals were being

1421: The Year China Discovered the World, by Gavin Menzies, is a superb read that gives a controversial new angle on the medieval history of Greenland and indeed the whole world. Check the associated website: www.1421.tv.

Give Me My Father's Body, by Kenn Harper, eloquently retells the extraordinary tale of Minik, one of six Inuit taken to New York by Robert Peary in 1897. The trip proved far from a holiday and Minik was horrified to discover his dead father as an exhibit in the Museum of Natural History.

DO YOU KNOW?

Greenland's northernmost cape was named by Peary for his sponsor, Morris Jesup, a railway magnate turned philanthropist who was a major benefactor of the American Museum of Natural History and a co-founder of the YMCA movement.

The Sledge Patrol, by David Howarth, grippingly retells the tale of the WWII East Greenland skirmish. Behind some gratuitous anti-Nazi moralising lies a deeply human story of hunters' lives and the bewitching spiritual power of the Arctic.

Siulleq Photo-gallery (www.arktiskebilledeer.dk/siulleq) has thousands of fascinating historical and recent photos listed alphabetically (in Danish) by place (sted), person and theme (emne).

moved out of their insalubrious turf huts and rehoused in comfortable but alien apartment blocks built in the ugly modernist styles of the day. In the now infamous G60 policy, many smaller villages were considered impossible to supply or to 'properly modernise', so their populations were shipped off to regional centres where a bright new future appeared to beckon with new jobs in the booming cod factories.

In retrospect the project seems to have been doomed to failure. Subsistence hunters were totally unaccustomed to town life. Many felt disconnected from their land and rapidly turned to drink. Things became even worse in the 1980s, when the changing climate caused the cod to simply swim off elsewhere. Overnight the factory jobs disappeared and unemployment was added to the growing social discontent.

Recent History

In a 1972 referendum Denmark decided to join the European Economic Community (the forerunner of the EU). But in Greenland the referendum vote was heavily against joining. Greenlanders feared opening their territorial waters to European trawlers. Sure enough, before long there was almost uncontrolled fishing, particularly by German and British fleets. To most locals this looked like daylight robbery, especially as they themselves officially now had to ask Brussels for 'permission' to fish their own seas. Angry Greenlanders noticed that another Danish dependency, the Faroe Islands, had managed to avoid a similar fate. The Faroes, which had had its own home-rule government since 1946, had quietly remained outside the EU. Pressure thus built for Greenland to start running its own domestic affairs, too. In 1979 the 'county council' of Greenland was replaced by a Home Rule government. The KGH, which had run trade activities for centuries, was replaced by Kalaallit Niuerfiat (the ubiquitous KNI) to handle supplies and infrastructure. Greenland retained two representatives in the Danish parliament and (initially) one in Strasbourg's European Parliament. The latter, Finn Lyngø, was later given the task of easing Greenland out of Europe after a second referendum in 1983 that was much more closely fought. To general relief, new fisheries agreements were introduced, and Greenland left the EEC in 1985 while remaining part of Denmark.

In the 1980s there was a backlash of anti-Danish feeling. Schools moved increasingly towards using Greenlandic rather than Danish, and there was very occasional violence against 'colonisers'. Tensions have calmed since, but there remain murmured hopes of eventual independence. However, so long as Greenland's rather Soviet-style economy remains dependent on Danish subsidies the prospect seems unrealistic.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

Inuit people tend to be emotional and live very much in the moment. Such spontaneity is a wonderful spiritual gift but is rarely an advantage in a materialistic world. 'If there's cash let's spend it' is a common Inuit mindset. On payday tools lie where they're dropped once the cash arrives. The Danish-minded Greenlanders who actually budget and count their money can end up rich...and resented. In reality most modern Greenlanders by blood and by culture are a mix of Inuit and Danish. Locals may hunt reindeer or seal by day and return home to surf the web, or they may carve traditional-style *tupilak* (p86) yet go to church on Sunday. A curious blending of values has occurred, but since the two thought systems are often almost diametrically opposed there's bound to be a certain tension

DID YOU KNOW?

Kalaallit Niuerfiat (www.kni.gl) runs the ubiquitous Pilersuisoq chain of supermarkets, duty-free airport shops and general stores that are the lifeline of small rural villages.

Nanoq (<http://dk.nanoq.gl>) is the official website of Greenland's Home Rule government.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

'In Greenland you're as unlikely to meet an unfriendly man as to meet a friendly bear' goes the local maxim. You're equally unlikely to find someone who's talkative (unless they're drunk). The lack of emphasis on talk means that even at parties and on festive occasions there might be a marked lack of conversation. Europeans often find this uncomfortable, mistaking it for shyness, rudeness or standoffishness. In return, Inuit people often consider Europeans annoyingly loud, brash, boisterous and chatty. Yet Inuit emotions are generally near the surface, expressed through body language that you should learn to read. People love to laugh, and chuckles are common at occasions which can seem very inappropriate to Westerners. Be aware that smiles don't always mean pleasure and need to be interpreted. The Inuit often raise their eyebrows to say yes and squint to say no without making any verbal communication at all.

Only children are openly inquisitive. Even in small villages that rarely see foreigners, local adults might appear to ignore you (though doubtless the rumour mill will be running overtime). To get into village life it's thus really important to have at least one advance contact. Once you have made a local friend and gained some respect you'll usually find you get 'passed on', and the cultural experience becomes ever richer and easier. Homestays are a great first step for meeting people.

in the psyche. As they've effectively been dragged from subsistence hunting to citizenship of a developed modern country in just 50 years, it's hardly surprising that many Greenlanders suffer a certain philosophical confusion and a vague, often indefinable feeling of loss. This is worst in the bigger towns, where the distancing from nature is most marked. The void is frequently filled with alcohol, sex, extraordinarily expensive hashish or – rather less frequently – religious piety. Today there's a growing societal divide. On one side are those who are content to blame historical mistakes for their present despondent inactivity; on the other is a new forward-thinking generation of Greenlanders who accept that the past is gone and it's up to them to improve the future.

TRADITIONAL INUIT PHILOSOPHY

Harmony and balance between the environment and its inhabitants is a traditional goal. Rocks, fish, vegetation, animals and even abstracts such as moods and misfortunes were all attributed to independent souls in shamanistic Inuit belief systems (for more, see p39). The traditional Inuit attitude is to love, fear and respect nature on its own terms – to simply accept both its kindness and its wrath without wanting to conquer or change it. There is no sentimentality about the death of animals, who are considered to give up their lives to sustain human life, just as sometimes humans sacrifice themselves in the hunt. Common to any people living at high latitudes, there's a high incidence of depression during the long, dark winters. Greenlanders call this *perlerorneq* (the burden). Violent or other abnormal behaviour is often blamed on it, but people don't try to explain it away or make excuses. Rather, they accept it as part of life.

Lifestyle

Greenlandic society offers a curious mixture of images. A smartly dressed woman holds a Burberry handbag and dried fish in the same manicured hand. A motor is left running in a parked car in a village that's so small you could walk anywhere. Homes are left unlocked so guests can let themselves in. The eternal coffee pot or thermos is filled yet again. Friends greet each other then sit comfortably in silence. Beside the flapping bedsheets, seal ribs hang to dry from washing lines in city apartment blocks.

Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow, by Peter Hoeg, is a fine examination of ambivalent loyalties in the part-Danish, part-Greenlandic heroine, who's far from loveable. A movie version has some great photography but loses the book's gripping psychological depth.

DID YOU KNOW?

Perlerorneq, the Greenlandic term for Seasonal Affective Disorder, is also the local word for rabies.

TOP GREENLANDIC INUIT EXPERIENCES

- Riding a dogsled
- Falling in love with the land
- Learning to pronounce the 'll' sound without embarrassment
- Knowing when to leave a *kaffemik* at the appropriate moment
- Seeing the traditional costumes worn on the first day of school
- Appreciating silence in company without discomfort
- Seeing the other side of the whaling debate
- Eating *kivioq* without gagging

Children

One thing you'll soon notice is that Greenlandic children seem to have a remarkable degree of independence. This is partly because an Inuit child is considered to be born with a complete personality that is preordained as a direct gift from the ancestors. Punishing a child might show dissatisfaction or ingratitude for those gifts. Sadly, in modern Greenland, children's independence is often less philosophically driven. Especially at weekends you'll often find children who stay on the streets all night, not to celebrate inherited magic but out of general neglect, or perhaps to avoid a beating from drunken parents who have drowned their traditions in alcohol.

Education

In principle Greenland has the same educational standards as the rest of Denmark. However, a shortage of qualified Greenlandic teachers means that many educators are still Danish expatriates, sometimes helped out by untrained Danish assistants.

There are primary schools even in small villages, but for secondary education most rural kids have to move away from home. There's a choice between high school or various vocational schools such as the marine training college in Paamiut and the catering school in Narsaq. Nuuk has colleges for business, teacher-training and nursing. Nuuk's University of Greenland has around 100 full-time students, though many more study in Denmark.

Population

The vast majority of the tiny population lives on or near the west coast. In the south, villages are sometimes interspersed with sheep farms, so occasionally you can walk between population centres without camping en route. Further north, villages are even sparser. Almost every village has at least one English-speaking teacher. The ethnic Danish tend to be concentrated in the bigger towns.

Sport

In 2002 Nuuk co-hosted the **Arctic Games** (www.awg.gl), a sort of Olympics for polar competitors. Included are several Inuit sports that originated as training exercises for hunting and *qajaq* (kayak) competence. Examples include various balance games, snow-stake throwing, target high-kicking (*aratsiaq* with one leg, *akratcheak* with two), and *aksaraq* (finger pulling). The latter is somewhat reminiscent of arm-wrestling and is popular in local pubs.

Skiing, especially Nordic (cross country) is popular. Sisimiut's 160km **Arctic Circle Race** (www.acr.gl), held every April, is considered the world's toughest such competition; see p160.

Other popular international sports are handball, table tennis, badminton, kayaking and, less predictably, tae kwon do. Nuuk organises its own **marathon** (www.arctic-marathon.gl). Most Greenlandic villages have a rough football pitch with enough gravel to dissuade diving for free kicks. Geographical distances make a regular football league far too expensive, so instead teams meet up for an annual tournament in late August. Details vary each year, but the 2005 tournament will be held in Uummannaq from 17 to 24 August. No tickets are required – the pitches aren't fenced.

The **Sports Confederation of Greenland** (www.gif.gl) has applied to FIFA moot-ing Greenland's future eligibility for World Cup soccer qualifiers.

At around -8°C in mid-April, a world championship of **Ice Golf** (www.icegolf.com) is played at Uummannaq (p191). Compared to normal golf, the balls are softer (and red, to show up in the snow), the fairways are shorter and the holes are bigger. Nonetheless, the basic rules are the same, with 'whites' instead of greens around the pin.

Multiculturalism

Traditionally, Greenland's harsh environment has encouraged a reflex of communal self-help: survival means overcoming petty human differences. Social acceptance is based on one's actions and attitudes rather than one's origins, as discovered by Togolese writer Tété-Michel Kpomassie (in *An African in Greenland*).

However, in the last 60 years large numbers of foreigners, mostly Danes, settled rather less sensitively, as part of Denmark's well-intentioned but socially destructive colonial paternalism. Society became not so much multicultural as bicultural. Following Home Rule, a few Inuit Greenlanders vented belated, subdued anger with attacks on Danes, some of whom returned to Denmark. Attacks have almost entirely petered out now, though sections of both cultures remain somewhat unreconciled. Notably, many Danes are contemptuous of the perceived Inuit lack of work ethic and predilection for alcohol bingeing. Meanwhile, some Inuit eye Danish commercialism with suspicion and grumble that Danes still seem to get most of the best jobs.

Still, Greenlanders of Danish, Inuit and mixed origin share a bond of objective, philosophical realism, and they mock incoming Danes and foreigners alike for their unrealistic belief in clocks, appointments and deadlines.

RELIGION

Greenland is at least nominally Christian. The Norse settlers were Catholics but, burdened by sometimes crippling tithes to bishops and popes, they died out without trace. Today's form of Christianity is a rather morose Lutheranism. As in Denmark, pastors still wear the vaguely Jacobean-style ruff collars. Perhaps these were still fashionable in the early-18th century when the religion arrived with Hans Egede. Conversion was as much by trade incentives as faith. Pre-Christian Inuit beliefs had attributed souls to everything, living or inanimate. Spirits of weather and sea were especially powerful and needed to be constantly placated by *angakok* (shamans). The souls of hunted animals needed to be thanked and not taken for granted. To avoid disasters there were numerous talismans, protective amulets and complex taboos. Accepting the Christian God proved reasonably convenient as a cure-all. However, the Bible didn't catch on so well. Inuit society has always been experiential, and talk is relatively minimal. In such a context John's Gospel's assertion that 'In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God' sounds entirely farcical. While Inuit society was always superstitious, sex was not a hang-up. Until a generation or two ago isolated

Qajaqsite (<http://home.att.net/~jimcoburn/>) has a step-by-step guide to building your own Greenland-style *qajaq*.

DID YOU KNOW?

Greenlander Hans Pavia Lind was Denmark's 2004 Olympic hope in archery. Sorry, no medals.

This Cold Heaven, by Gretel Ehrlich, poetically evokes the unique mix of action, stasis, ecstasy and terror of travelling in rural-most Greenland. A superb travel companion.

Grønlands Statistik (www.statgreen.gl/english/) has all the figures you might need on demographics, geography and economy.

DID YOU KNOW?

Greenland has the world's lowest population density (0.026 humans per sq km). Even sparsely inhabited Australia is 100 times more crowded, Macau 700,000 times more so.

DID YOU KNOW?

Church interiors are painted metaphorical colours: blue (sky), white (snow) and yellow-gold (sun). Altars popularly display the seven-stemmed candelabra (*menorah*) honouring Jesus' origins.

communities welcomed (rare) male visitors by inviting them to widen the gene pool. Don't expect that nowadays. While travellers still tell apocryphal tales of such 'welcomes', taking up such an offer now could land you in serious trouble: it's more likely to be an alcoholic aberration than a cultural celebration.

Most churches are beautifully maintained, but on Sunday morning the traditional 10am service often has more lighted candles than worshippers. Almost all churches hang a model ship from the rafters to remember those lost at sea. At Qoornoq (p154) it's an *umiaq* (women's boat).

ARTS

Greenland's artists are abuzz with the counterpoint of ancient and modern and patchily galvanised by the political dilemma of neocolonialism. The land is living art, suffused by dazzling light or mysterious fog and spiritually haunted by an unfathomable vastness. It's hard not to be inspired. Perhaps that's why a land with a population smaller than many European country towns has such a remarkable wealth of artistic expression, both traditional and international-minded. See www.arcticartsales.com for photos of the traditional-style artworks and carvings.

Art & Craft**TRADITIONAL ART**

Carving is the most archetypal Greenlandic art form. Artists use soapstone, antlers, bones, narwhal tusks or walrus ivory to make jewellery, animal models and grotesque little figurines known as *tupilak*. Originally *tupilak* were spiritual creations used like voodoo dolls or jujus to cast misfortune and even death on enemies. One had to use extreme caution, for if the victim's powers were greater than the assailant's then the spell could backfire and harm its maker. *Tupilak* gradually took physical form, and these days the figures are purely artistic creations. Celebrated contemporary *tupilak* carvers include Aron and Cecilie Kleist, whose work you'll see in occasional museum exhibitions.

Carving has taken a wonderful modern twist in Qaqortoq (p114), where the town's ubiquitous boulders are gradually being transformed into sculptures by a team of artists. Julius Jakobsen of Arsuk (p139) has carved official gifts for Danish royalty.

Fur is traditionally seen as a functional item, but there is great artistry in the various processes of shaping and working the material, whether for drums, bags, clothes or increasingly for souvenir knick-knacks.

Be aware when buying animal products, including carvings, that some may not be exported and others require permits (see p218).

QAJAQ & UMIAQ

The *qajaq*, forerunner of the kayak, originally developed as an Inuit hunting boat. Longer and narrower than modern recreational kayaks, the traditional *qajaq* was constructed with a driftwood or whalebone frame, covered with tightly stretched seal skin and waterproofed with animal fat. It was ideal for hunting walruses, seals, polar bears and whales, as it could be rolled over and then righted by the occupant without taking on water.

Accompanying groups of women would follow the *qajaqs* in a larger, open boat called an *umiaq* (women's boat), which could transport cargo and bring home the hunters' kills. Traditional skin boats haven't been in common day-to-day use since the 1950s. However, several towns now have *qajaq* clubs to preserve construction and handling skills. They'll often perform shows when a cruise ship is in port (and has paid for it!).

Aana (<http://aana.net>) is an as-yet underused but developing interdisciplinary organisation for local artists.

Beadwork is the pastime of many retired women. While the tiny *saparn-gaq* beads they use are often garishly coloured, there's no doubting the care and intricacy of the best work. Such beadwork is used in great quantity for the surprisingly heavy *nuilarmiut* shoulder-and-neck piece of traditional Greenlandic women's clothing.

FINE ART

The queen of 20th-century Greenlandic art is Aka Høegh. Her work is varied, vivid and expressive and turns up everywhere from book illustrations to panels on coastal ferries. A former director of the Greenland National Museum, Jens Rosing is an author and artist whose illustrations add a distinctive poignant depth to his storytelling. Up-and-coming artists include Anne-Birthe Hove, who makes imaginative text-image lithographs. Buuti Pedersen (www.buuti.com) produces many rather scrappy watercolour landscapes, but her oils of polar-bear couples wrestling (or cuddling?) are iconic and appealing. For the 25th anniversary of Home Rule in 2004, Asmund Havsteen-Mikkelsen and film-maker Inuk Silis Høegh produced a provocative if amusingly tongue-in-cheek installation piece for Copenhagen's Nordatlantens Brygge gallery (www.bryggen.dk). Amid prison-camp décor and martial music it announced Greenland's invasion of the world, ice weapons set to stun global warming and new Inuit names to replace Denmark's 'unpronounceable' European ones. Very thought-provoking.

The best places in Greenland to see contemporary art are the Qaqortoq Museum (p115), the Home Rule building in Nuuk (p148), Katuaq Cultural Centre (p148) and (for sale) at the small Nitz Gallery in Nuuk (p152).

Literature**ORAL TRADITION**

Traditionally the words and songs of shamans had special powers, so stories were carefully passed down through generations with little alteration right up until the early 20th century. Although most of these have been lost from the contemporary Inuit memory, many songs, poems and stories were collected by Danish Governor HJ Rink in the 1860s and explorer Knud Rasmussen between 1914 and 1924. Much like Aesop's fables, many conveyed lessons or suggested appropriate codes of behaviour but were also poetically full of anthropomorphism and wild, easily angered spirits.

WRITTEN TRADITION

Although literature is a relatively recent addition to Greenlandic culture, writing is a popular pastime and the Greenlandic Society of Authors has around 100 members.

Desperately little Greenlandic writing has been translated into English. One selection of 11 snippets (written or recorded between 1922 and 1982) is included in Michael Fortescue's sampler *From the Writings of the Greenlanders* (1990). The sampler also includes the original Greenlandic text and an extensive glossary, but it's less interesting as literature than as a set of anthropological snapshots or as a Greenlandic language learning tool.

Some works written and illustrated by Jens Rosing are locally available in English; others are published in Canada by Penumbra Press (www.penumbraappress.com).

Music & Dance

Despite its tiny population, Greenland has a very active music industry. Though most home-grown bands are part time, many release their own CDs, which normally sell for Dkr145 in department stores and at a few

Last Places – A Journey in the North (1981), by Lawrence Millman, is alternately snide and amusing; the author's Brysonesque reports of being sexually harassed by geriatric Greenlandic women seem improbable...until you visit the same pubs.

Sacred Text Archive (www.sacred-texts.com/nam/inu) posts whole books by Rink and Rasmussen, including texts about *tupilak*, *angakok* and feared *kivigtok* (*qivittoq*; outcasts).

tourist offices. Greenlandic music is neither traditionally Inuit nor 'world music'. Indeed it developed its distinctive 'Vaigat-style' Hawaiian twang from American recordings popularised during WWII. Today's styles mix country-and-western riffs, folksy reels and fairly mainstream pop sounds. For archetypal chuntering polkas and accordions, listen to Rosa Willie and Tuukkakkormiut. For pub-style singalongs, get Lallaati's *Asanninnileraarut* or Martin Løvstrøm's *Soormi Taava*. Mainstream Julie Berthelsen is a Greenlander who's made it big in Denmark singing could-be-anywhere ballads in English. More interesting Pamyua are funky, multit talented artists now based in Alaska; they mix jazz, reggae and even a hint of throat singing. Rasmus Lyberth is the beloved 'old man' of Greenlandic pop. His early songs counterpoint a longing for traditional values with the desire to hang on to the benefits of 1960s Danish liberalism. Malik Høegh is considered Greenland's John Lennon. He started with the classic 1970s protest group Sumé, though his recent work sounds more influenced by Radiohead than Dylan or the Beatles. Greenlandic rap is currently ascendant. Reversing traditional rapper roles, teenage sensation Prussic rage against their parents' alcoholism and drug use. You'll see their name popularly graffitied around the less salubrious apartment blocks.

On weekend evenings most bigger towns have live music in at least one of the pubs for dancing and raucous singalongs. One weekend in early September Aasiaat gathers several bands at once and calls the event a **rock festival** (www.nipiaa.gl).

There are some anachronistic attempts to revive shaman drumsongs, but if you're invited to listen to 'traditional' local singers the chances are they'll sing hymns. These may be beautifully harmonised a cappella or accompanied by harmonium, but they're almost always old-church dirges. Despite a few distinctive foot-scrape movements, Greenlandic dance is mostly an adaptation of reels learnt from Scottish and Dutch whalers in the 18th century.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Over 50 times bigger than mainland Denmark, Greenland is the world's biggest noncontinental island. Measured from north to south, the mainland is over 2500km long. Oodaaq Island, a tiny scrap of rock off the north coast of mainland Greenland, is the world's most northerly land at 83°40'N. Yet Cape Farewell (Nunaap Isua/Kap Farvel), the southernmost tip, is on the same latitude as the Shetland Islands. While the northern limits have midnight sun for nearly three months each summer and long weeks of polar night in winter, the far south experiences several hours of real daylight even in December.

At their nearest points, Greenland and Canada's Ellesmere Island are only 26km apart. Iceland is only 300km southeast across the Denmark Strait, but geologically it couldn't be more different. Iceland's dynamic volcanoes produce the world's youngest minerals, while Greenland has the oldest rocks yet discovered. Gneiss samples from Akilia Island and Isukasia (both around Nuuk) are reckoned to be over 3.8 billion years old. The earth itself is only approaching its 4.6 billionth birthday.

The Ice

Ice in all its multifarious forms gives Greenland's glorious scenery a very special photogenic extra. Some 79% of Greenland's massive 2,175,600-sq-km surface area is beneath an icecap that's up to 3km thick. This ice-age

remnant is so heavy that Greenland's interior has sunk into an immense concave basin depressed just below sea level. Were the ice to melt, the water produced would raise world sea levels by around 7m, submerging coastal cities from London to LA. Scarily, global warming makes this doomsday scenario less than impossible over future centuries. The ice's creation took millennia of compacted snowfall. Most of its dripping noses are 'dead glaciers', meaning they melt into rivers. Much more impressive for visitors, however, are tidewater glaciers where the inland ice comes right to the sea or fjord and calves chunks of ice directly into the water. When such chunks are really massive they're called icebergs (though, technically, for the chunk to qualify as an iceberg over 5m of it should show above the waterline). Smaller chunks are known as bergy bits or, when less than a metre shows, as growlers.

Greenland's most productive tidewater glaciers produce fabulous icefjords packed with icebergs, most impressively near Ilulissat (a UNESCO-recognised site).

Icebergs contain considerable quantities of pressurised air bubbles so, especially on hot summer afternoons, they can quite literally explode. The result is myriad shards and fragments of brash ice, which float around the bizarre spiky remnant of the central iceberg. Partial melting can also make big icebergs suddenly roll over. While impressive to watch, this can cause a tidal wave that's very dangerous to small boats and kayaks, and to anyone on a nearby shore: don't camp on bergy beaches.

SEA ICE

A completely different source of ice is frozen sea water. First frazil ice forms; it's made up of small plate-shaped crystals suspended in viscous water. These later coagulate to make a soup known as grease ice because of the matte finish it gives to the sea's surface. This can become slush or spongy lumps called shuga, solidify into a thin crust called nilas, or form vaguely circular platelets called pancake ice. Finally the floating sea ice may thicken to as much as 3m. This pack ice is always in motion and often breaks up into flat-topped plates called floes. The channels of open water between floes are known as leads.

In spring the ice floes start drifting south down Greenland's east coast, rounding the southern tip, then swinging north up the west coast where in early summer they can block harbours and fjords entirely. Some ice floes can be several kilometres across. Curiously, icebergs can move in completely different directions to the main ice floes, as their bulks are in much deeper water.

NAVIGATING IN ICE

Every few days the Danish Meteorological Service (DMI) produces estimates of ice-floe densities with scores out of 10 according to the proportion of ice to open water when viewed from the air. Scores of 10/10 mean consolidated pack ice, which is effectively solid. Close ice (DMI code A) scores 7/10 or 8/10 and is dangerous to navigate without an icebreaker, though it's possible with a small motorboat and a gung-ho disregard for personal security. Tides, currents and wind can cause it to close up and trap you. Open pack ice (code B, scores 4/10 to 6/10) can be pushed aside by boats and is thus navigable if conditions are calm. For little motorboats the very low-density ice can be dangerous due to the smallest growlers, which can be virtually colourless but still big enough to cause serious damage if struck at high speed. Things can change very rapidly, so look at previous maps as well to see the trends.

Greenland Iceberg Paradise (www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Rapids/4233) has enthusiastic explanations of all things icy, including how Greenland ice cores are used to research climate-change history.

DO YOU KNOW?

Even in the middle of pack ice there are patches of open water called polynyas where upwellings of warm water prevent the formation of ice at all.

DMI (www.dmi.dk/dmi/index/gronland/iskort.htm) has online ice maps: click Ugekort for all Greenland, Kort1 for the southern tip and Kort2 for the inhabited area of East Greenland.

ULO (<http://iserit.greennet.gl/ulomusic/>) is the site of Greenland's main Sisimiut-based record label. It features disc reviews in a variety of languages, sometimes English.

The Age of the Earth, by G Brent Dalrymple, is ideal if you're wondering how rocks' ages can be calculated or simply want to brush up on your Rubidium-Strontium isotope methodologies.

Wildlife ANIMALS

Due to the harsh conditions, Greenland's Arctic wildlife is necessarily sparse. Very distinctive are shaggy, handlebar-horned muskoxen (*umimmaq/muskus okse*). They look like woolly bison, though bizarrely they're actually related to goats. Vegetarian and fairly passive unless closely approached, they were traditionally seen as walking steaks by hungry Inuit hunters. In western Greenland they were hunted to extinction. However, a few individuals specially shipped over from the east were reintroduced and now form considerable populations that are very easy to spot around Kangerlussuaq (see p162) and Grønødal (p136). In September virtually every Greenlander takes time off work to hunt for elk-like caribou (*tuttu/rensdyr*) and reindeer. These are now considered to be too common for the environment's carrying capacity.

Arctic foxes (*terianniaq*) are white in winter for snow camouflage, but their coats turn blue-grey in summer. They're liable to nibble your camp provisions if you don't stash your food securely. Beware of foxes that look too tame – they may have rabies.

Polar bears (*nanoq/isbørn*) are brilliantly adapted creatures with natural sunglasses: a second, inner eyelid to protect their vision from snow blindness as well as from water when swimming. Most live far from human habitation in Greenland's northeast. Even in Nanortalik, whose name means 'the place of bears', you're not really likely to see any. You'd probably have more success spotting polar bears in either Svalbard, Grise Fjord (Canada) or Point Barrow (Alaska). Just a handful every year float south on drift ice, where they're welcomed to the human realm with both barrels, their skins being made into traditional trousers. Magnificent as they look, polar bears are far from amicable. However, they're so used to scaring the daylighters out of anything they encounter, they'll probably be taken aback if you stand your ground. So don't run away if cornered – your best hope is to act aggressively annoyed. One famous field archaeologist defended himself for decades armed only with a lot of bravado and a trumpet.

Mouse-like lemmings make burrows in the soil, which can trip unwary hikers in the Northeast Greenland National Park. Their famous Monty Pythonesque mass suicides are actually caused when overpopulation sends thousands in search of food; some get pushed over cliffs by the force of those coming behind them.

White Arctic Hares (*ukaleq*) are sometimes seen by hikers; the hares freeze instantaneously in confusion before bounding off to rejoin Alice in Wonderland.

Whales & Walrus

Limited quota-based whale hunting continues (p93) and whales (*arfeq/hval*) are probably more common in Pacific waters). Still, from Greenland's coastal ferries visitors regularly see smaller minke whales (*tikaagullik*) and dramatic humpback whales (*qipoqqaq*), especially in September. The latter typically blow out about eight spurts of their very bad breath before breaching spectacularly and diving, tail up. There are special whale-watching trips from Nuuk (p149) and notably Aasiaat (p183). Killer whales (*aarluk/orka*) are among the most common in Arctic waters and sometimes tease boats with nerve-racking swim-pasts.

A narwhal (*qilalugaq qernertaq*) is an extraordinary marine mammal known for the incredible spiral tusk on its snout. Technically, this is a distended tooth, but when first brought to medieval Europe it was considered proof that unicorns existed. In those days tusks were worth 20 times their

weight in gold, and narwhals were thus heavily hunted. Today the best time to spot one is during the summer in Inglefield Fjord near Qaanaaq and in the Davis Strait.

Greenland's beluga are white whales, not caviar-producing sturgeon. They are considered to have the tastiest *mattak* (skin), but their numbers have reduced by two thirds in the last 20 years and they have virtually disappeared from waters south of Maniitsoq.

Walrus were once fairly common and they posed a real threat to *qajaqs*. However, they were hunted close to extinction for meat and their distinctively goofy, carveable fangs. Although they have been globally protected since 1972, limited hunting by Greenlanders is still permitted, and sightings are consequently rare except when they're basking on a few remote beaches of the very hard-to-reach Northeast Greenland National Park.

Seals

From boats you'll often spot seals (*puisit*) bobbing up inquisitively. Commonest are ringed seals (*natseq*) and harp seals (*aataaq*), which lounge on ice floes, giving them their Latin name *Pagophilus groenlandicus* (Greenland's ice-lover). Rarer are bearded seals (*ussuk*), whose skin was once prized for use as rope, and hooded seals (*natsersuaq*), whose males inflate a curious red facial bladder when excited. Seals are at the heart of the rural Greenlandic economy. Global anti-fur sentiment caused by the perceived inhumanity of cub-clubbing in Newfoundland resulted in plummeting demand for sealskins in the 1990s. The resultant rock-bottom prices caused unintended financial devastation in Greenlandic communities. This was particularly galling as, traditionally, all parts of the animal were eaten or used, including the blubber, which made lamp oil. Nonetheless, a recent price rebound means hunters currently receive Dkr285 per pelt, so long as it's the right quality and pattern. So, increasingly, the meat is becoming just a partly used by-product. Present hunting levels are reckoned to be within the carrying capacity of the species, though whether these statistics include 'lost' kills is unclear. Most of the 'sustainably harvested' skins are salted and sent to the Great Greenland tannery in Qaqortoq (see p117).

Fish

Fish are abundant in both fresh water and salt water, though commercially valuable cod (*saarullik*), Atlantic halibut (*nataarnaq*) and scallops have been drastically overfished. The lakes and streams abound with Arctic char (*egaluk*), a colourful type of trout (see p215). There are also fine Atlantic salmon (*kapisilik*) and tasty red fish (*suluppaagaq*). Deepwater shrimps and snow crabs are commercially important but rarely served fresh. Relatively plentiful Greenland halibut (*qaleralik*) is smoked and exported.

Birds

Greenland is not an exceptional bird-watching destination, but 52 bird species traditionally breed on or near the shores and around 150 species migrate through. The small Grønne Ejlund isles in Disko Bay have Greenland's highest level of bird diversity – visit from Aasiaat or Ilulissat. The commonest urban sightings are northern wheatears (*kussak/stenpikker*), redpoll (*orpimmiutaq/grāsiken*), black-and-white sparrow-like snow buntings (*qupannaq/snespurv*), and noisy jet-black ravens (*tulugaq/ravn*), which watch hikers quizzically.

Common sea birds include Iceland gulls (*naajaannaq/hvidvinget måge*), glaucous gulls (*naajarujussuaq/grāmåge*), terns (*imeqqutaalaq/havterne*), skuas (*isunngaq/kjove*) and kittiwakes (*taateraak/ride*). From Disko Bay

A Nature and Wildlife Guide to Greenland (2004), by Benny Génsbøl, is a very practical illustrated identification guide covering Greenland's most common birds, animals, fish and flowers. It's sold in tourist offices.

DID YOU KNOW?

Caribou skins are reckoned to have the best insulation per weight ratio of any material, artificial or natural.

DID YOU KNOW?

Its pallid, cadaverous appearance gave the narwhal its name, meaning 'corpse whale' in old Norse.

Zoom Whales (www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/whales/) is a delightful introduction to whales that's designed for schoolkids but great for any age group.

DID YOU KNOW?

Confusingly for anglers, in Greenlandic Danish both Arctic char and Atlantic salmon are known by the same term, *laks*.

Birds of Greenland (Atuakkiorfik) is a locally sold ornithological guide that has slightly more recognisable pictures than the *Nature and Wildlife Guide*, so it's a better choice if you're exclusively interested in bird-watching.

IBGL (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ibgl>) is an English-language open forum for Greenland bird observations.

north, fulmars (*qaqulluk/mallemuk*) are common and fairly tame, and localised populations of puffin (*qilanngaq/lunde*) breed around Upernavik. In the hills, highly edible ptarmigans (*aqisseq/fjeldrype*) look like stretch-necked chickens and turn white in winter. In higher wetland areas red-necked phalarope (*naluumasortaq/odinshane*) nest from early June. Arriving snow geese (*kangoq/snegås*) herald spring in the north.

You might mistake dovekies (little auks; *appaaraq/søkonge*) for small penguins until they take falteringly to the air (real penguins are only found in the southern hemisphere). Millions of Brünnich's guillemots (common murre; *appa/polarlomvie*) once brought the cliffs north of Disko Bay raucously to life, but the species has been decimated by hunting, egg collecting and fishing nets, which act as traps. Confusingly, in Greenlandic Danish they're usually called *alk*, which more correctly applies to razorbills (*apparluk*). Black guillemots (*serfaq/tejst*) are more often seen but have smaller breeding colonies. The common eider duck (*aavooq/ederfugl*) is not common any more; indeed it's locally endangered.

Small populations of impressive white-tailed eagles (*nattoralik*) are fairly regularly spotted along the west coast south of Nuuk, notably around Paamiut and Arsuk. Rarer birds of prey include peregrine falcons (*kiinaaleeraq/vandrefalk*) and gyrfalcons (*kissaviarsuk/jagtfalk*), which shriek distinctively. Snowy owls (*uppiq/sneugle*) are limited to remote northeastern Greenland.

PLANTS

Arctic vegetation is fairly limited and typically stunted. Dwarf willow and birch that are mere centimetres high might be decades or even centuries old. In just a few very sheltered areas they grow into bushes or small trees, which Greenlanders consider an attraction. Common in villages are limpид, yellow-petalled Arctic poppies (*sungaartorsuaq/fjeld-valmue*), and wide varieties of buttercups, cinquefoils, dandelions and hawkweeds all add a golden dazzle to grassy areas. These contrast photographically with the ubiquitous clumps of edible, violet-blue Arctic harebell (*tikiusaaq/blåkklokke*). Perhaps the most dramatic blooms belong to Greenland's national flower, the broad-leaved fireweed (*niviarsiaq/storblomstret gederams*), which emerges purple and proud from gravelly scree.

Mountainsides are made eminently more climbable thanks to tightly woven carpets of crowberries (*paarnaqutit/sortebær*) and Arctic bilberries (*kigutaarnat nagguui/mosebølle*), commonly translated into local English as blackberries and blueberries respectively. Their fruits are edible and their tiny leaves redden the hillsides to a glorious autumnal russet in late September. Boggy areas are easy to spot from their vivid deep-green mosses and from tufted-headed cotton grass (*ukaliusaaq/polar-kæruld*). Of five orchid types supposedly present, all are rare, with *leucorchis albida* the easiest to find – look beneath eagle nesting sites.

Environmental Issues

At first glance, Greenland may seem a pristine realm of nature. However, the country is dealing with many problems caused by citizens of other nations. These include centuries of overhunting and overfishing, which notably decimated whale stocks. As elsewhere in the Arctic, the build-up of toxins from global marine pollution (see p34) has been concentrated higher up the food chain and thus has most affected bear and seal meat, the traditional mainstays of the Inuit diet. Most horrifyingly, in August 2000 the US finally admitted that a plane that crashed 30 years earlier into a bay near Thule (Pituffik) 'lost' a US hydrogen bomb. Whoops, cancer worries.

Locally, whales and sea mammals are legally caught subject to very strict quotas. Other nominally 'sustainable' hunting is less controlled and some 'traditional' pursuits have overstretched resources – notably egg-collecting, which has had a devastating effect on bird populations in certain areas. Nonetheless, with hunting such a key part of Inuit culture, any implied criticism is taken very much to heart. Greenpeace and other activist groups remain widely despised for their anti-seal fur campaigns. A pair of must-read books encapsulate the culture-versus-protection arguments. Finn Lyng's *Arctic Wars, Animal Rights, Endangered Peoples* (1992) sturdily upholds the Greenlanders' rights to respectful, traditional hunting and lambasts the incongruities of interfering, urban-minded animal-rights groups. However, in *A Farewell to Greenland*, Kjeld Hansen counters with a scathing attack on Greenland's laissez-faire attitudes to animal protection. Read both.

Meanwhile, relatively plentiful Arctic wildlife survives largely unpestered within the remote Northeast Greenland National Park, the world's biggest. This covers around a quarter of the nation, but it's very remote and access is tough (see p213).

FOOD & DRINK Restaurants & Cafés

Greenland has relatively few restaurants. Most are in hotels and offer international-style cuisine with some local ingredients. Restaurant meals aren't cheap (they average Dkr200 to Dkr300), but many are worth the money. Indeed Nipisa in Nuuk (p151) offers world-class cuisine that would impress critics in Paris or New York. Cheaper cafeterias offer acceptable and hearty but unmemorable meals-of-the-day with meat, boiled potatoes and frozen vegetables. Side salads are sometimes available, but vegetarian options are few and far between. Fast food generally means a grill-bar specialising in hot dogs (*pølse*). A few places offer pseudo-Oriental cuisine or pizza. There's a good Thai restaurant in Nuuk. The term *café* can mean anything from pub to fast-food stand, but there are a couple of real *café*s in Nuuk with decent espresso coffee.

Self-Catering

As most hostels have equipped kitchens, economy-conscious travellers can survive relatively cheaply on supermarket food and fresh fish or seal meat bought from markets (*kalaaliaraq/brædtet*). Considering that almost everything else is imported, the variety of groceries sold is amazing, especially in the big Sisiffik and Brugsen supermarkets (in bigger towns only). Supplies of fresh vegetables can be sporadic, especially in smaller shops; they might have pineapples and mangoes yet have no more onions till the next supply boat arrives. Prices seem high to many Europeans but are comparable to those in Scandinavia and low compared with Iceland. Supermarkets usually have an associated bakery supplying fresh bread, pastries and biscuits.

KNI's Pilersuisoq shops have village branches where prices are usually no different from those in the towns, but stocks can be limited. 'Kiosks' open late to sell candy and a small selection of groceries at up to 50% above Pilersuisoq prices.

Fishers and seal hunters nibble eternally on tasteless, jaw-crackingly hard *Ngguteeqqat* ship's biscuits.

Traditional Foods

Traditional Greenlandic fare is dominated by meat, especially whale and seal. Before rejecting these foods for sentimental or ideological reasons, remember that Inuit subsistence culture has lived harmoniously hunting

Proact Greenland (www.proact-campaigns.net/greenland/) has a partial online text of *A Farewell to Greenland* and plenty of discussion on Greenland's environmental issues.

these animals for millennia. It was European commercial whaling that caused the collapse in cetacean numbers. Today, all whale catches are regulated by strict quotas. Fresh whale steaks cost around Dkr50 per kilogram. The best raw whaleskin (*matlak*) comes from beluga or narwhal, taking on a slightly nutty, mushroom-like flavour when cooked.

There's no quota on hunting harp seals, whose populations are counted in millions. Originally people killed no more than they could use, but rising skin prices have inspired liberal interpretations of the tradition, and in hunting villages seal meat is so plentiful that it's given away. In towns seal meat costs around Dkr30 per kilogram from the harbour markets. Cook it by boiling chunks in water for an hour or more. The cooked meat has a deep, chocolate-brown colour. Back-joint meat is soft and tender. Cuts edged with a centimetre of blubber taste rather like lamb chops: excellent when straight from the pot but slightly sickening if kept.

In September virtually everyone takes time off work to hunt caribou (*tuttu*), which yield superb steaks and very tasty leg-meat (rarely sold). Muskox (*umimmak*) meat is generally tender and gristle-free. Greenlandic lamb is perhaps the most fragrant anywhere due to the sheep's diet of flowers and berries. However, sheep are expensive to feed through the harsh winters and thus local lamb ironically costs more than frozen imports from New Zealand. Delicious Greenlandic smoked lamb tastes rather like *jamón* or prosciutto but is hard to find.

Arctic char and trout (*eqaluk*), salmon (*kapisillit*), capelin (*ammassat*) and cod all appear at fish markets, sometimes dried, smoked or pressed with herbs for a similar culinary effect. Although shrimps and snow crabs are a mainstay of many village economies, most are frozen for export and are remarkably difficult to find fresh.

North Greenlanders once survived by eating dovekies (penguin-like small birds). Stuffed in hollowed-out seal carcasses and left to rot, they form *kivioq*, Greenland's most unappetising speciality. It was food poisoning from bad *kivioq* that killed explorer Knud Rasmussen. Traditional egg-collecting has decimated bird cliffs and is now much less common.

Many of the wild foods described below are served with local meals.

Wild Foods

In summer you can supplement your diet with some of Greenland's abundant wild foods. From August to early September the bush is carpeted with black crowberries (*paarnaqutit/sortebaer*), which are a popular addition to ice cream. Tarter, tastier Arctic bilberries (*kigutaarnat naggui/møsebølle*) are commonly known as blueberries.

All over South Greenland, but especially around ruins and deserted villages, you'll find ball-headed Garden Angelica (*kuanneq/fjeld-kvan*), which makes great pickles and jams. Tiny leaves of low-lying wild thyme (*tupaarnat/skotsk timian*) make excellent tea as well as seasoning, but although abundant in grassland slopes the plant is only easy to spot in July or August, when it produces little clusters of pink-red flowerlets. In late summer you'll see abundant growths of Arctic harebells, known locally as *tiiusaaq/Grønlandsk blåkløkke*. Though it seems odd, you can pick off and eat the violet-blue, bell-shaped flower heads. An excellent alternative to salad, these taste like fragrant mangetouts. Check inside for flies before eating, and consume immediately.

Common all over southern Greenland in summer, the delicious birch bolate (slippery jack) mushroom has a smooth golden-brown dome and distinctive spongy underside. No Greenlandic mushroom of that type is poisonous, though check older specimens for little worms.

Fishing also provides nourishment, and you don't even need a rod – just a hook and line will do in some places, where pan-sized Arctic char will snap at anything. Fishing legally requires a licence (Dkr75/200/500 per day/week/month; see p215).

At low tide, blue mussels are common in sheltered bays. They're excellent steamed or fried with butter and garlic, though chew carefully as they often contain miniature pearls. Avoid collecting shellfish near towns, where they may be tainted by sewage.

Drinks

NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Tap water is almost always drinkable. Giardia does not occur, so one can generally drink stream water while hiking, except around animal farms.

Coffee is a social institution and is almost constantly on offer wherever one goes. The *kaffemik*, a coffee morning with cakes and possibly other food, is the archetypal Greenlandic get-together. In villages the whole population might be invited to celebrate a birthday, christening or school-entrance day. Sitting in silence isn't considered bad form – indeed it shows comfortable sociability. However, it's polite to leave after one's second cuppa, especially if other guests have arrived.

Tea is also popular. Urban Greenlanders are increasingly discerning in their blend selection when supply allows.

ALCOHOL

Most beer sold is 4.6% Carlsberg or Tuborg. Either usually retails at Dkr14 for a 330ml bottle in shops (plus Dkr2 deposit), or Dkr25 to Dkr40 in pubs. Stronger beers can cost as much as double.

Wine is popular, and a surprising international range is available. Supermarket prices start at around Dkr70 for a 750ml bottle of drinkable plonk; since much of that price is transportation cost, though, an extra Dkr20 can net you a much better bottle. Vintage port can cost as little as Dkr200 – when it turns up.

Stronger alcohol is fiercely expensive. You'd be wise to buy some duty free on arrival even if you don't drink: it's a prized gift and a delight to share. If you're going to splash out on a bar cocktail, try the symbolic and potently warming Kalaallit Kaffiat (Greenland Coffee). This takes Kahlua, whiskey and fresh coffee and adds whipped cream as metaphorical ice. Then Grand Marnier is heated over a flame, set alight and poured from a height onto the cream. The blue flames represent the aurora borealis (northern lights).

Alcoholism is a serious and very obvious problem. This becomes all too apparent in bigger towns on weekends, especially payday Friday nights. To limit the problem, alcoholic drinks may only be sold in shops from noon to 6pm on weekdays and from 11am to 1pm on Saturday.

'North Greenlanders once survived by eating dovekies. Stuffed in hollowed-out seal carcasses and left to rot, they form *kivioq*, Greenland's most unappetising speciality'

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