

Greenland | Nunavut | Churchill

As we begin navigating Greenland's age-old inter-coastal routes, we indulge in the multitude of natural wonders. From the "the iceberg capital" of Ilulissat and nearby UNESCO-protected Icefjord to Disko Bay's Balsalt Mountains and glacier of Eqip Sermia. Eventually we say goodbye to Greenland's shores, and set sail across the Davis Straight.

We continue our polar experience and discover the beauty of Canadian wildlife and culture of the arctic. Hiking ancient archeological sites, visiting communities and learning first-hand how polar bears, beluga whales and more navigate the land and sea of the exceptional North.

Day 1: Kangerlussuaq. Embarkation.

Located at the tip of its namesake fjord, Kangerlussuaq is the home of Greenland's largest international airport. Although the airport hums with civilian travel, it is a quiet town with only 500 permanent residents.

Upon arrival, we will be transported to the small port located to west of the airport, where our ship, *Ocean Atlantic*, will be anchored and waiting. The Zodiacs will ferry us in small groups to the ship, anchored about one kilometer out into the fjord. Each of us will wear a lightweight life jacket and there will be assistance with boarding and disembarking the dinghy. Once on board, we will each be shown to a suite and the crew will review the safety procedures prior to dinner. As we sit down to our first chef-prepared dinner at sea, *Ocean Atlantic* will set sail, passing through the 160-kilometer fjord and cruise out into the ocean.

Day 2: Sisimiut

Early in the morning, we arrive at Sisimiut, Greenland's second-largest city at the foot of Nasaasaaq Mountain. The harbour is bustling, as this is the most northerly port of Greenland that remains free of ice in the winter. It is also the southernmost town with sufficient snow for dog sledding.

After breakfast, we will venture in to the busy city-centre to behold the 18th-century wooden buildings, including the culturally significant Blue Church. We will also visit the local museum to learn about the Inuit culture, and the colonial history of Greenland.

Having arrived here in several migrations from North America, the Inuit have lived around Sisimiut for an estimated 4,500 years. In 1600, the first European whalers arrived in the Sisimiut region, but they maintained very little contact with the Inuit population. It was only after Norwegian missionary, Hans Egede, colonised Greenland in 1721 that regular contact developed between the Inuit and Europeans. Nowadays, Sisimiut is an important place for education and industry, and the fish processing plant is one of the largest of its kind in Greenland, and one of the world's most modern.

Possible Excursions, sights and lectures:

- Guided town walks with ship guides
- Old Quarter
- Tele Island.
- Lecture "From muskox to wool". Thirty persons at a time during the day in 'Yellow House', Old Quarter. "Greenland Tasting" at Hotel Sisimiut

In the afternoon, our voyage will continue northward. As evening falls, we will pass the Sisimiut Isortuat Fjord, the Nordre Strømfjord settlements of Attu and Ikerasaarsuk and the small town of Kangaatsiaq. During the course of the bright night, we will pass Aasiaat and proceed into the southern waters of Disko

Bay. Next, the ship's heading will be set for Disko Island, known for its distinctive 1,000-meter volcanic mountains. At this point, we will be north of the Arctic Circle! Here, the nights are bright and early risers can enjoy the sight of the icebergs on Disko Bay as they squeeze out of the Ilulissat Ice Fjord and dance into the frigid ocean waters.

Day 3: Qeqertarsuaq on Disko Island. Calving glacier of Eqip Sermia

Our next sojourn lies on Disko Island, where *Ocean Atlantic* will dock in a protected natural harbour, which is reassuringly named Godhavn ('Good Harbour') in Danish, while its Greenlandic name, Qeqertarsuaq, simply means 'The Big Island'.

Although insulated from mainland Greenland by the shadow of Disko Island's 1,000-meter tall mountains, Qeqertarsuaq maintains a long, rich history and once served as one of the country's important economic center. From the 16th century, the community was relatively prosperous and was considered the most important town north of Nuuk until the mid-1900s. This due in part to the area's sizeable whale population. As dominant industries evolve with the passing of time, so too has Qeqertarsuaq's affluence of yesteryear.

During our visit, we will wander through town, paying a visit to the characteristic, octagonal church nicknamed "God's Inkpot".

Possible Excursions, sights and lectures:

- Nature walk to spectacular basalt formations, showing columnar jointing as well as strange sculptured rock forms.
- Local community center can host a traditional Greenlandic "kaffemik", which can be best described as a friendly gathering with coffee, cake and storytelling.

In the early evening, our ship will reach a magnificent natural highlight – the enormous Eqip Sermia Glacier. Situated approximately 50 nautical miles north of Ilulissat, the Eqip Sermia Glacier is renowned for her awe-inspiring beauty. Some legendary arctic explorers selected this location as a base for their studies. One such explorer, the acclaimed Swiss glaciologist, Alfred de Quervain, used the location as a base for his expeditions onto Greenland's inland ice cap over a century ago. We will sail as close as possible to the ice's edge – but at a safe distance to dodge the plunging blocks of ice and violent waves that result from the calving glacier.

Day 4: Ilulissat; the capital of icebergs, walking tour to the Sermermiut Plain

Ilulissat is possibly the most well-placed town in Greenland. The name simply means 'icebergs' in Greenlandic and the town's nickname is rightly 'the iceberg capital'. In Disko Bay, which is located just off the coast of Ilulissat, gigantic icebergs linger in the freezing waters. These icebergs come from the Icefjord, which is located a half hour's hike south of Ilulissat. These impressive frozen structures are first born some 70km deeper into the fjord by the enormous Sermeq Kujalleq glacier. This 10km-wide and 1,000m-thick glacier is the most productive glacier outside of Antarctica. Whereas most glaciers only calve at a rate of approximately a meter a day, the Ilulissat glacier calves at a rate of 25m per day. The icebergs produced by the glacier represent more than 10% of all icebergs in Greenland, corresponding to 20 million tons of ice per day! These facts, together with the fjord's extreme beauty, have secured the Icefjord a place on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

During the more than 250 years that have passed since the establishment of Ilulissat, the town has steadily flourished. Today, Ilulissat is Greenland's third largest with more than 4,500 inhabitants. The

town is very vibrant, welcoming and lively with a wide range of cultural attractions, according to Greenlandic standards. The legendary polar explorer, Knud Rasmussen – first to take his dog sledge from Greenland all the way to Alaska - was born in Ilulissat.

Possible Excursions, sights and lectures:

- Trip to the Ice Fjord by local boat
- Helicopter flight along Kangia Ice Fjord (few seats available, subject to weather).

Day 5: Pretty Uummannaq town with hiking.

During the evening, we have cruised past Disko Island and Nuussuaq Peninsular. In the crisp morning air, the heart shaped mountain of Uummannaq is our direction marker. Uummannaq was originally established as a colony on the Nuussuaq mainland in 1758, but shortly thereafter in 1763, it was moved to the nearby island, which offered more abundant seal hunting. Our walk along the town's steep streets will lead us to a historic building constructed in 1860, which once housed boilers to extract oil from the blubber of whales. The resulting production was shipped throughout Europe to light the streets and served as an important contribution to the oil trading economy in both Greenland and Europe.

Possible Excursions, sights and lectures:

- Nature hike (difficult 5 km hike) to Santa Claus Hut in s.k. 'Spragle Bay'
- Historic lecture in the town church

Day 6 & 7: At sea:

This time at sea allows us to relax and reflect upon your journey, as well as prepare for the ventures ahead!

Unwind in the beautiful accommodations of the Ocean Atlantic, dine in the bright and spacious restaurant and lounge, read from the many topical subjects available in our well stocked library, enjoy playing the piano, sit back in the sauna, top up your tan by the pool, or keep active in the gym.

Take in the stunning scenery of the Arctic on the observation deck and search for wildlife.

Attend the many educational lectures on a variety of topics from the fauna, flora and wildlife to the historical importance of the geography and environment.

Day 8: Iqaluit, Nunavut:

We will get our inward customs and immigration clearance from the Canadian authorities in Iqaluit. It is the capital city of Nunavut where legislators debate and pass legislations that govern the future of Nunavut, which translates as residents of Nunavut. Our guided tour will take you for a truly iconic cultural and historical tour of this beautiful city including a tour of the St-Jude Anglican Church, Art & visitor centre and the legislative building, if it is not in session. You will get an opportunity to taste local cuisine that will include arctic char, seal and whale meat, subject to availability and all deliciously prepared by well known local chefs. Witness world-class drum dancing performance and learn about the rich culture and history of the native Inuit people. Take part in an arctic games demonstration and artisan stations that will be set up for you or take a tour of the town to visit its many attractions that includes the Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum, which features an impressive Inuit and Arctic art collections.

Optional shore excursions:

- Aerial sightseeing to view the amazing Grinnell Glacier at the mouth of Frobisher Bay
- Allen Island Ice Fields located just south of Cumberland Sound &/or, Penny Ice Cap/Coronation located in Auyuittuq National Park
- Take a hike in the picturesque Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park where you will also find the remains of Thule archeological sites, a variety of rare plants, several species of wildlife, and some 40 species of birds. The river provides a perfect background for a picnic where you can also try fishing to catch the Arctic Char, a member of the Salmon family

In the evening we depart Iqaluit towards Cape Dorset which is known as the centre for Inuit Art paintings, print making and other works for arts. Keep an eye out for the Lower Savage island as we sail out of Frobisher Bay. This island is known to have large colonies of arctic wildlife Such as the mighty Polar bear wandering looking for food.

Day 9: At Sea:

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Day 10: Cape Dorset:

This idyllic community in the territory of Nunavut is known as the centre for Inuit arts, crafts, prints and soapstone carvings unique to the Canadian arctic. Upon arrival, our guide will take you on a walking tour of the hamlet of Cape Dorset that includes a guided tour of the Kenojuak Arts Centre with print demonstration. Carvings, prints and handicrafts are available for sale.

We will also visit the Mallikjuaq Island to get a interpretive tour of the historical Thule House archeological site that was about 1000 years ago, home to the Thule people who lived in low stone houses framed with whalebone ribs, the roofs of which were lined with hides and sod. You will be able to see the remnants of nine winter houses whose stone foundations are still in place with the bones of whales, seals and walrus scattered all around.

Archeological evidence unearthed suggests that people from the Dorset culture (era 500 BC – 1500 AD) predated the Thule people who lived in the area from about 1000 AD – 1600 AD. Since then, the Inuit people have been living in this area. The ingenuity of these people can be seen in the many stone structures, kayak stands, fox traps, burial sites and 'Inuksuit' that have been built for their survival and guidance.

Local laws require these structures to be left untouched and not disturbed as they are protected under Nunavut Laws.

Day 11: Coral harbor (Coats Island):

Coats island, named after Captain William Coats, who made many voyages for the Hudson Bay Company from 1727 -1751 is located about 90 miles south of Southampton Island on whose south shore is situated the small hamlet of Coral Harbor. Coats Island is itself uninhabited, with cliffs on this island rising to about 215 m above sea level. Most of the island is low-lying and flat. The bedrock is primarily limestone, but with large areas of Sedge tundra, tundra ponds and raised beaches. This topography of the island provides a perfect nesting place to large number of thick-billed murres, estimated to be about 30,000 that come here each year for breeding, nesting and raising their off-springs. Black Guillemots, peregrine Falcons (listed on the endangered list of species), and Glaucous Gulls also nest in the immediate vicinity. The island is a mix of federal crown land and parcels of private land owned by the Inuit of Nunavut, who frequently come from nearby Coral Harbor for hunting.

Local outfitters from Coral Harbor will be present in their own boats to help you observe the thick-billed Murres and many bird species that may be resting on this island. You may also get to view colonies of walrus that haul out on its beaches during the summer months.

Day 12: Marble Island and Rankin Inlet:

We go past marble island that has been made famous by ill fated James Knight expedition in 1719 to the overwintering of the whalers in the 19th century. The island is a place of intriguing history and haunting stories. Stark graves of the early whalers on Deadman's island and piles of old iron barrel hoops indicate where whale blubber was rendered into oil. Belugas, ringed seals and polar bears are sometimes seen on this island and its bays.

We land ashore in Rankin Inlet which is the transportation centre, business and health centre of the Kivalliq region. It was known for its rich nickel mining history and for having the only ceramic factory in Nunavut. Artisans at the ceramic factory create works of art that are copy righted and displayed in museum all over the world. Conditions of this copyright include that these works of art must be displayed for public viewing. A visit to the newly inaugurated visitor centre is a must to view its large collection of arts, crafts, fauna, flora and some of the land animals of the wild that call the arctic their home.

Take in a visit to the Northern Development Centre where you will see a very variety of Traditional Inuit arts, crafts and clothing for sale. For the strong hearted, a visit to the community meat processing plant and freezer next door helps understand how the community comes together to process and store its meat.

Day 13: Churchill, Manitoba

In the morning, we arrive at the Polar Bear Capital of the World, Churchill, Manitoba. Beginning as a remote outpost, this northern community quickly grew to a bustling seaport for the Hudson Bay Company in the 1920s. Now with a population of under 800, Churchill welcomes thousands of visitors annually as truly unique destination. Polar bears frequent the town in the early winters, and beluga whales travel up the river during the summer months. When the sun sets, and the conditions are right, the Northern Lights showcase their spectacular dance.

Upon disembarking the vessel, you will check-in to a hotel of your choice, and get ready to be mesmerized by the warm welcome and hospitality accorded by the residents. On this final day, we get the opportunity to get up close and personal with polar bears as we aboard a specially designed vehicles that will carry you to the heart of the Wildlife Management Areas frequented by Polar Bears, Caribou, Arctic foxes, Muskox, many species of birds and other wildlife that call the Arctic its home.

Possible shore excursions and activities:

- Take a tour of the historical Fort Prince of Wales that was established by the Hudson Bay company in 1717 to control the flourishing fur trade between UK & Canada
- Visit the Itsanitaq museum which houses a collection of internationally recognized Inuit art
- Stop by the visitor centre at the historic railway station
- Take a ride on the Dog Sleds
- Go for a tour in the river to view the magnificent Beluga whales
- Taste the delicious northern cuisine at one of the local restaurants.

Day 14: Winnipeg

When you are ready to leave, you will board a flight to Winnipeg, Manitoba from where you can make your connections to go back to your home. If you wish to stay for a few more days in Winnipeg, our friendly staff at Hampton Inn by Hilton Winnipeg Airport Polo Park will shuttle you from the airport to your beautiful accommodations where you can reflect on your journey through the arctic in your well-appointed guest room, or in the warm saltwater pool and whirlpool. Enjoy your stay, indulge in the On the House™ deluxe hot buffet breakfast before taking the complimentary shuttle back to the airport for your connecting flight.