



Expedition

GREENLAND: THE ICEBERG TRAIL



This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.



Sermilik Fjord from Paarnakajit. Photo Vincent Lowe

- ***A memorable backpacking journey in remarkable surroundings***
- ***Food drops every 2-3 days***
- ***A balance of coastal walking and peaks***
- ***Wild flowers***
- ***Some tough walking off trail***

East Greenland

Greenland, the world's largest island, is formed from some of the oldest rock in the world, much of it covered by an icecap several kilometres thick. The east coast is steep and rugged, with mountains divided by deep fjords and glaciers calving straight into the sea. East Greenland is less accessible than the west coast due to pack ice drifting down from the polar region. Supply ships can only approach the main town of Tasiilaq, formerly known as Ammassalik, during the brief months of the summer.

There is a sense of excitement and anticipation as the first boat of the season arrives, usually in late June or early July, bringing fresh fruit, vegetables and a whole bounty of goods from Denmark. Colourful villages provide an insight into a way of life far removed from city life, with

the Inuit maintaining the old traditions of hunting and fishing. The catch is strung up on racks to dry, alongside the occasional polar bear skin.

Trip Summary

This is a spectacular backpacking journey through the mountain and coastal wilderness of Greenland's fjorded east coast. The trip combines valley and shoreline walking with climbing to high points and the option of climbing a peak where ice axe & crampons may be needed, though ski sticks and crampons would also work. (Previous experience is not necessary). We camp by iceberg-strewn fjords or high mountain lakes with the inland ice, a vast ice sheet, never far away. Icebergs and glaciers turn pink as the sun sets and rises near to midnight.

Some food caches have been laid beforehand and so, combined with a couple of boat rendezvous with additional supplies, our load carrying is not excessive. There are few paths on the east coast. The terrain varies from soft moss and lichen beds to gently sloping rock slabs to boulder fields. The arctic flowers are in full bloom in July and August, with arctic river beauty ('niviarsiaq'), the national flower of Greenland, giving a beautiful rich pink hue on hillsides and shorelines. Sometimes we stay in the same spot for two nights, giving time to explore and climb peaks without having to carry much.

Accommodation

On trek we camp in lightweight, two person tents. In Tasiilaq we camp or stay in a hostel. In Reykjavik we stay in a guesthouse close to the town centre. (B&B).

Food

In Greenland all meals are included apart from lunch in Tasiilaq. In Reykjavik we provide B&B. In good weather on trek, we cook communally outside, and help will be required with meal preparation and washing up.

Food caches will include tinned meats, fish, cheese, rice, pasta, potatoes, wholemeal Danish bread, sandwich fillings etc. In between caches we carry dehydrated meals. If you are vegetarian, you will be asked to bring a few favourite items to ensure you have a balanced diet.

Greenlanders are a nation of hunters so fresh vegetarian supplies are extremely limited. The cost of any food used on the trip will be refunded.



By Sermilik Fjord

Climate

Temperatures in July and August normally range from 7° C to 20° C and the weather is often clear and sunny, though wet and/or windy weather is possible and snow can fall in the mountains at any time of year. You should come prepared for any weather, with good waterproofs and warm clothes, but bring shorts and sun hat too, and hope for the best.

Insects

Black fly and mosquitoes can be troublesome on a windless day. A head net and good repellent are on the kit list. Most years the problem is restricted to the low level camps as the breeze normally keeps flies away at the high camps.

How much do I have to carry?

This depends on how lightweight your gear is and whether you can do without your bedtime paperback! Our two person tents weigh approx 3.7 kg and each person's share of the stoves and food will weigh approx. 1.5 to 2 kg. (*note; food is not a big item – we have a cache or rendezvous every two days.*) Loads normally range from 14kg to 19kg, with the more experienced backpackers carrying the lightest loads. If you bring lots of extras you could be carrying 20 kg or more. For the first half of the trip we will not be carrying ice axe or crampons.

Transport

Boats will transport us from Kulusuk to our drop off point at the start of the trip, from Tiniteqilaaq to Ammassalik Island, across Kong Oskars Havn at the end of the trip to reach the town of Tasiilaq, and finally from there to Kulusuk for our return flight.

Money

Danish Kronor (DKK) is the currency used in Greenland. Personal expenses might include postcards, maps, coffees, drink, gifts and lunch in Tasiilaq. There are some interesting Inuit carvings and books available, so a credit card is useful as a backup.

The Icelandic Krona (ISK) is the local currency in Iceland. You will need money for meals in Reykjavik. A credit card is a useful backup for the unexpected, such as a coffee table book or Icelandic sweater.

Equipment

Strong walking boots with good soles and a comfortable large rucksack with hip belt are essential. Tents and cooking gear are provided, though we encourage you to bring your own tent as it is good if you are familiar with your gear. Please check first with us that it is suitable.

Crampons backed up with either ice axe or ski sticks are required in case of hard snow conditions and to cross a glacier. Previous experience is not necessary. Both can be hired from an outdoor supplier in Scotland – details are in the kit list, which will be sent when you book. These need only be carried on the second half of the trip.



High on Sofia's Fjeld photo Jos Mahon

Maps

There are some excellent maps available:

Saga Ammassalik 1:250,000: English version.

This map covers the whole trip and has excellent information on the back, in English, Danish or German – be sure to specify English. This should be available at Kulusuk Airport, but may also be available from Inger Hauge, Atuagkat Book Shop, Box 1009, 3900 Nuuk, Greenland, Fax 00 299 23378, atuagkat@greenet.gl

Tasiilaq Hiking Map 1: 100,000 + Kuummiit Hiking Map 1: 100,000, both produced in 1995 by the Danish Committee for Hiking Tourism in Greenland. This pair of maps covers our day to day route, and can be hard to source. Try Inger Hauge or the following:

'Stanfords' www.stanfords.co.uk, customer.services@stanfords.co.uk, fax: +44 (0) 20 7836 0189

'The Map Shop' www.themapshop.co.uk, themapshop@btinternet.com 0800 085 40 80 (UK)

'Harvey Map Services' www.harveymaps.co.uk, winni@harveymaps.co.uk Tel 01786 841202

There is a compact paperback 'Flowers of East Greenland', which is also useful.

Digital photography

You will need to be self sufficient re batteries as there is nowhere to charge en route.

Reykjavik Extension

It is possible to extend your trip by a night or two to see more of Reykjavik - subject to flight availability. The capital is an attractive and stylish city with impressive art galleries, museums and geothermal bathing pools. Day trips are possible to e.g. Geysir, Þingvellir (the old parliament site - pronounced Thingvecleer), Gullfoss or the Blue Lagoon.



Dines, our boat man, with his dogs photo Roope Roine

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

Most people will fly to Iceland from the UK, however some of you may prefer to meet up with the group in Reykjavik.

DAY 1 Flight to Keflavik. Transfer to our guesthouse in Reykjavik.

DAY 2 A 2 hour flight from Reykjavik to the island of Kulusuk, with exciting views of the inland ice and Greenland's mountainous east coast. If your gear feels heavy, now is the time to decide what is not needed! Travel clothes and any surplus gear are taken to Tasiilaq to be collected at the end of the trip. Ice axe and crampons will be sent to Tiniteqilaq for use on the second half of the trip. Put on all your warm clothes for the boat trip – the journey is cold but exciting as our Inuit boatman weaves between the icebergs to reach the start of the trek at the end of the narrow fjord of Ikerasaalaq. After being dropped off near to an old summer settlement, we walk for approx. 2½ hours to camp by a mountain lake. (B,L,D)

DAY 3 The valley, Ikaasaalap Ilinnera, is a traditional dogsled route to Sermilik Fjord in winter. We follow the river along grassy mountain slopes and fields of tussock grass over a pass to camp by the shores of the fjord. At night we can listen for the sound of icebergs turning over and watch the changing colours as the sun sets behind the icecap. 7-8 hours. All our walking will be at a relaxed pace, with time to enjoy the birds and flowers. (B,L,D)

DAY 4 The 939m peak behind the hut offers tremendous views, and it's great to walk with just a daysac! Look out for arctic poppies which grow at this altitude. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 5 An easy day along the rocky, grassy coast with time to watch the icebergs and to scramble on the rocks. We finish around lunchtime at a lovely site poised above Sermilik. Possible sightings of great northern divers on the fjord, or perhaps a visiting arctic fox at dusk. (7 km).

In the afternoon there is time to relax or explore. Nearby is an abandoned settlement where people formerly lived the year round. Remnants of walls indicate previous houses and white crosses mark the final resting place of ancestors. Generations of food scraps have made the soil rich for flowers. (B,L,D)



*Nivarsaq, Greenland's national flower
photo Roope Roine*

DAY 6 We head south along the shore to the outlet of a river. Inuit may be camped here during the summer when they often string a net across the river for arctic char. After finding our way across a wide river delta, we follow a large lake to camp near to the head of Amitsivartiva Fjord ('the narrow place'), where we pick up a food cache. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 7 A steady climb over slabs and ledges leads to Innertivik (543m) and spectacular views to the west over Sermilik Fjord and beyond to the inland icecap. We walk along 'the roof of the world', a broad and undulating rocky ridge with panoramic views, to camp by some high lakes and watch the alpenglow on the peaks and glaciers to the east, and a final sunset over the inland ice. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 Dropping down rock slabs and heather ledges, we reach the fishing village of Tiniteqilaaq ('the sound that is dry at low tide'). This is likely to be our first encounter with other people apart from our food drops. We collect our crampons for using on the glacier on Ammassalik Island. 4 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 9 We cross by fishing boat to Ammassalik Island. The land changes here and we enter an area that seems as if the ice age has just left. There is less soil and the rock has been scraped clean, leaving beautiful patterned gneiss slabs. We slowly climb up from sea level, and reach the remnants of the ice sheet which once covered the entire island. Camp near the icecap. (4-5 hours). (B,L,D)

DAY 10 Crossing the icecap, we head for a watercourse which we follow over boulder scree to camp by a lake. 7 hours (B,L,D)

DAY 11 You have earned a rest today! Time to relax and take a break. (B,L,D)



Crossing the icecap

DAY 12 Over the next two days we follow a series of inland lakes and waterfalls leading to Tasiilaq and the sea. Along our route, the variety of plant life increases: dwarf birch, dwarf willow, crowberry, blueberry, arctic river beauty (french willowherb), alpine ladies mantel, harebells, sorrel, angelica, rose root and many more. There will be a couple of river crossings today. We camp by Lake 1, listening to the lonesome call of the great northern diver if we are lucky. 6-7 hours (B,L,D)

DAY 13 The final push leads round the eastern shores of Lake 1, then up and over a grassy/rocky knoll. We drop down a broad gully to our campsite and hope fresh bread has been delivered from the Tasiilaq bakery. (5-6 hours, longer if the blueberries are ripe) (B,L,D)

DAY 14 A chance to finish on a high note by climbing to a great view point on the ridge between Imertivap Qaqqartivaa (Sofia's Fjeld) and Qimmeertaajaliip Qaqqartivaa (Polhelm's Fjeld). The route is interesting and not difficult, and offers a final panorama encompassing the inland ice, the polar stream, and the unending peaks to the north. Camp. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 15 In the morning our boat arrives, and we cross Kong Oskar's Fjord to the town of Tasiilaq, (formerly Ammassalik), meaning 'that which looks like a lake', with a population of approximately 1700 people. There will be a chance to visit the museum which helps us to understand the harsh stone-age style of life which locals faced until less than 100 years ago. The museum displays clothing of seal and bird skin, artefacts of bone and ivory, an 'Umiak' – the larger communal womens kayak, as well as the men's skin clad smaller kayaks from which they would hunt polar bears, whale and seal, armed only with a harpoon. Hostel. (B,D)

DAY 16 We return to Kulusuk by boat, on the lookout for whales. If the weather is good on the return flight to Reykjavik, the pilot may fly along the coast only a few hundred metres from the vast Karaali and Knud Rasmussen Glaciers, giving a breathtaking aerial view of the dramatic ice sheets spewing into the sea. (B)

DAY 17 Flight from Keflavik OR extend your stay in Reykjavik. (B)



A friendly Arctic fox photo: Jos Mahon

What our clients say.....

“ ... an expedition that exceeded all my expectations...This has been a life changing experience. Thank you. I look forward to travelling with High Places again”. A.C.

“Sermilik Fjord has to be one of the most stunning places on earth, and some of the tops we climbed had views I will dream about for the rest of life! And we were even fortunate enough to see the Aurora on one night. The food was far better than anticipated - the real bread, cheese and meats made a welcome addition.” A.F.

ML10/07