

# Serene Land

Amid the stillness and silence of **Greenland's** icy passages, *Sara D'Souza* uncovers a burgeoning creative spirit

Neither I, nor anyone I speak to, it turns out, knows anyone who has actually been to Greenland. Often billed as the “final frontier of travel”, Greenland, despite being the world's largest island, has for many years been just that little bit too far off the beaten track for most travellers. However, with Air Greenland having recently launched an increased flight capacity from Copenhagen to Nuuk and Kangerlussuaq – Greenland's international transport hub – this magical island is beginning to emerge as an alternative to Iceland's glacial charms.

I touch down in a flurry of snow and a temperature reading of -32°C, and in classic Cool Runnings style immediately put on my entire suitcase – jumpers and all. Packing something warmer than just skiwear, including some serious thermals, is advised. As I discover, -32°C is next-level cold.

I'm here to experience the breadth of what the country has to offer, encompassing not only its beautiful panoramas and opportunities for adventure, but also its burgeoning creative culture and – cemented by the fact that Noma's René Redzepi has recently been Instagramming here – its rising star in the world of gastronomy.

Suitably kitted out in several layers of knitwear, my journey starts with The Aurora Zone, a specialist northern lights company. I dive into a waiting (and thankfully warm) van in search of the

elusive musk ox, and barely make it out of town before I spot one roaming peacefully across the icy tundra. Majestic in stature and enormous in size, its Ice Age swagger is quite spectacular.

However, it's Greenland's colours that take my breath away first. Landscapes, almost lunar in their vastness and blanketed in fresh snow, are tinged a dusty pink. The skies are awash with pale blues flecked with lavender and later a fiery orange glow as the sun makes its slow descent. The temperature is too cold for dog sledding, so we explore the area by van instead, zipping past serene reindeer, a frozen fjord and the northern lights research station along the way. Bright-yellow oil drums line the roads as we climb high enough to get out, pad across creaking snow and gaze over the colourful squares of houses that dot the town. The quiet envelops us.

That night marks our first attempt to track the fickle northern lights. Kangerlussuaq sits just north of the Arctic Circle, and with fewer than 500 residents, light pollution here is almost non-existent, meaning that your chances of catching them are strong between August and April. Unfortunately, tonight's weather isn't good enough, so my fellow travellers and I reluctantly retreat to a hut to learn about the solar winds that spark this stratospheric dance, relieving our disappointment with steaming glasses of Greenlandic coffee laced with a knockout combination of whiskey, Kahlua and Grand Marnier. >>





PHOTO BY REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND

THE RUSSELL GLACIER  
PHOTO BY MADS PIHL - VISIT GREENLAND

PHOTO BY REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND

Having failed in this first endeavour I decide to swap light-spotting for plane-spotting at Hotel Kangerlussuaq's restaurant, run by one of Greenland's most revered chefs, Jeppe Nielsen, and quirkily located in the airport terminal. My front seat to the runway is complemented by dishes including fresh halibut from Ilulissat (a Unesco World Heritage glacier) paired with salsify, thyme and brown butter emulsion and reindeer in game sauce with parmentier potatoes. Relying on foraged local produce, fresh fish and meat and limited food deliveries, which are often hampered by poor weather conditions, Nielsen has to creatively calculate exactly what he needs to produce each standout meal.

An ice cap covers 80 per cent of Greenland and the next morning we head off to explore it, travelling under the pink glow of a sun that doesn't fully rise until midday. We embark on a walk to the Russell Glacier, an awe-inspiring wall of ice that stands 60m high and has many shades of blue running across its surface.

Given the clear skies of the day, I'm more optimistic about experiencing the northern lights as evening rolls around. Clad in polar suits, our small group heads out to wait for one of the wonders of the natural world. After about half an hour we glimpse vibrant, almost fluorescent greens shimmering across the sky. The sheer beauty and power of it all leaves us open-mouthed under a sky punctuated with stars.

From Kangerlussuaq I decide to extend my trip to Greenland's capital, Nuuk, on the southwest coast. The island is so immense in size that flying is the only way to get around, so I board one of Air Greenland's fleet of smart red planes, grateful for the spellbinding 50-minute journey that sees us soar over glaciers, mountains, fjords and fearsome-looking crevices.

In Nuuk I bed down at Inuk Hostels, which sits on the water's edge of the Nuuk Fjord. Its four Scandi-chic cabins overlook Nuuk's imposing Sermitsiaq Mountain, and I join the brilliant owner, Liisi, in the cosy wood-clad common room adorned with traditional objects ranging from polar bear-skin drums to beautiful ulu (knives used by Greenlandic women). Coffee in hand, I listen captivated to Liisi's stories of her childhood and of Inuit culture.

Despite being better known for its dreamlike landscapes, I'm repeatedly struck by how rich the history, music and art scenes are in Nuuk. It seems fitting to begin at the city's cultural hub, the larchwood Katuaq Cultural Centre, which is shaped like a wave and houses a cinema screening the latest releases, a regular roster of local musicians such as rock bands Kimmernaq and Siissisoq, and musk-ox hotdogs in the café. Later on I become so entranced with the National Museum of Greenland that I visit several times, taking in Inuit history, colourful national costumes and hand-carved wooden kayaks. ▶▶

For such a small population, Greenland has a big music scene, and Atlantic Records is an Aladdin's cave of vinyl, instruments and records from Greenlandic stars such as Simon Lyngé. I emerge with a handful of new bands to listen to as well as a gift of a musk-ox plectrum. It's not just music either – the Nuuk Art Museum is packed full of black-and-white portrait photography, wood carvings, watercolour and oil landscapes, and a collection of ceramics so beautiful that I could have happily bought the lot.

On the dining front Nuuk scores highly, and Björn Johansson's menu at Sarfalik (in the Hotel Hans Egede) is garnering major acclaim by using only the freshest Greenlandic ingredients, including halibut, snow crab and foraged black crowberries. Caffé Pascucci becomes my go-to lunch spot for substantial pasta dishes, but it's Liisi's cooking at Inuk that steals my heart, with soul-restoring Greenlandic fish soup and a hearty reindeer stew served in an atmosphere that could be bottled as hygge.

While in Nuuk I take my inaugural snow-shoeing experience with the wonderfully patient Marc Carreras from Nuuk Adventures. Kitted out with snow shoes that to me look more like miniature skis, we shoot out across the steep terrain feeling superhuman. The air is so clear that I can see for miles, and that night I actually spot the northern lights out of my cabin window.

Before I leave I'm keen to get out on the icy blue-grey water, so I bundle up warm for a sailing trip on the fjord. It's a bit too snowy to see the icebergs of the glacier Narsap Sermia, so instead we do a spot of fishing near some of the oldest rocks on Earth, next to a few playful bobbing seals.

Reflecting on my travels, I can only describe Greenland's ethereal beauty as almost other-worldly, while the warmth and energy of its people is infectious. I ask everyone who I meet what their favourite season is, but they can't say. It seems as though every month heralds something new and spectacular to punctuate the everyday, from spotting whales floating out on the fjord on the morning commute to watching the northern lights while doing the washing up.

As yet largely untouched by tourism, Greenland has a raw charm that I've never experienced and a stillness like no other – some days are so calm here that you can hear the powerful flap of an eagle's wings above your head. By the time I depart, this final frontier feels strangely like home.

#### THE LOWDOWN

The Aurora Zone offers four nights' B&B accommodation, return flights from Copenhagen to Kangerlussuaq, return airport transfers, two dinners, a Kangerlussuaq guided tour, three evening Aurora hunts, an icecap and arctic nature tour, cold-weather clothing and the services of expert local guides for £2,080 per person (based on two people sharing a double room).

*For more information visit [theaurorazone.com](http://theaurorazone.com)*

