

# Getting Started

Nothing quite prepares you for your first trip north and that tingle of expectation as you plot a route, pore over those glossy photos and scare yourself silly with tales of frozen flesh and cavernous ice fissures. Going 'up north' requires a little more planning than most trips, though you'll probably be surprised by the modernity of the facilities available. The time of year you go will impact immensely on the size of your rucksack, of periods of perpetual day or night will determine your activities and the uncertainty of the weather may hamper even the best-laid plans.

## WHEN TO GO

Paris in the spring? Don't even think about it – the Arctic is where you really want to be. For that dreamy fantasy of dogsleds, ice fishing and vast blue skies, the Arctic spring brings long days, bearable temperatures, good snow cover and the buzz of a land shaking off a long, dark winter. Depending on latitude, spring is anytime between March and May. The best time for dogsledding and skiing tours is between late March and early May, and most trips to the North Pole take place in April. For the best times to catch a glimpse of the region's animals and birds, see p56.

By June there's perpetual day, winter snow is beginning to melt and the tundra teems with mosquitoes. The mosquito season generally runs from late June to early August, and anyone attached to their sanity should wear long clothing, invest in a head-net (*komarnik* in Russian) and load up on repellent. Summer – July and August – is the peak time for tourists. Maximum daytime temperatures average between 10°C and 18°C in the south and between 5°C and 10°C in the north. It can be wet and windy, though, and coastal fog is common. By late August, nights are getting colder and by mid-September, there's new snow and genuinely cold weather.

The most spectacular displays of the aurora borealis (p31) can be seen from August to mid-November, and mid-February to early April. Areas just south of or around the Arctic Circle are ideal for watching the lights (the northernmost Arctic regions are actually too far north to experience

See the climate charts (p54) for more information.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

#### Anytime

- Lots of film or a digital camera. If you're travelling in winter/spring a UV lens filter will reduce the glare off snowy surfaces.
- A good dose of patience
- Copies of all documents
- Good hiking boots and gaiters
- Plenty of reading material
- High-protection sunglasses
- Multipurpose pocketknife

#### In winter/spring

- Thermal underwear
- Warm clothes in multiple layers
- Windproof hat with ear protection
- A good-quality subzero-rated sleeping bag

#### In summer

- A fleece, hat and gloves
- A giant bottle of insect repellent
- Compass and magnetic deviation tables if you're hiking
- First-aid kit

the best displays). Arctic winters – any time from mid-October to March – are long, harsh and very, very dark. In the far north the sun disappears for months on end, and a perpetual night descends. In the far south, temperatures of -20°C can be expected, but further north it can be -40°C or lower for weeks. However, welcoming the return of the sun after experiencing a winter up north is a truly momentous occasion, with festivals held in every town and village for the light that heralds the coming of spring.

## COSTS & MONEY

There's no point denying it: travel up north isn't cheap. The vast distances and severe lack of roads mean that travel costs can easily spiral. Depending on your budget, your best bet is to limit the number of locations you visit and save some money for boat, dogsled or snowmobile trips to 'get out on the land' and experience what it is that makes the area so special.

### Greenland

Because of Danish food-import subsidies, eating is not enormously more expensive than in Copenhagen. Better restaurant mains average Dkr160, which seems high if you're arriving from the US or Europe, but cheap if you're coming from Iceland. Accommodation is expensive for the quality you get, with hostel beds averaging Dkr250 and mid-range hotels costing about Dkr600 to Dkr1000 for a double. Transportation is painfully expensive thanks to the vast distances, small passenger numbers and almost total lack of roads. Assuming you're in a fixed location, not taking organised tours and self-catering in hostels, you'll spend between Dkr300 and Dkr400 per day. Visitors staying at hotels and eating in restaurants should plan on spending about Dkr1500 per day.

### Arctic North America

Prices in Alaska generally increase the further north you go. Organised camp sites cost between US\$8 and US\$25 per night, while motels generally cost between US\$70 and US\$90, though they can be much more in out-of-the-way locations. Apart from fast food, eating out will cost you at least US\$25, and internal flights to remote destinations cost US\$200 to US\$500. Backpackers could survive on US\$30 a day, but if you're planning to eat out and stay at motels you're looking at about US\$130 a day.

Arctic Canada sees few independent visitors and has few road connections. Camping is your only budget accommodation option, and hotels can cost anywhere between C\$110 and C\$190. Options for eating out are also fairly limited, and in remote locations plan on spending about C\$30 on a meal. If you rough it and limit yourself to road travel you could survive on C\$50 a day; for more comfort, hotel beds and air transport plan on C\$250 a day.

### Arctic Russia

In principle, Russia offers the cheapest Arctic options: if you sleep in small-town dosshouses and travel by riverboat or *platskart*-class (third-class) train you could survive on R500 to R800 per day, or R1500 per day staying in nicer city hotels and visiting decent restaurants. However, this style of budget travel will generally show you only the depressing Soviet hub towns. More interesting Arctic regions often lack infrastructure and you may need complex permits and chartered helicopters, which can become much more costly. These factors often make joining an organised tour (from R3000 per day) the only sensible option. Don't underestimate

the cost of getting the appropriate visas and permits, which can quickly add up to hundreds of US dollars.

### Arctic Scandinavia

Thanks to a good network of camp sites and hostels, travel in Arctic Scandinavia need not be prohibitively expensive. Budget accommodation options will set you back about €30 a night, while guesthouses and hotels cost between €50 and €140 a night. Eating out isn't cheap and will cost about €10 to €25. If you use public transport and self-cater you could squeak by on about €60 a day, but this doesn't allow for much amusement. If you want a little more luxury, plan to take some flights or hire a car, budget on at least €100 a day.

Note that Norway and Sweden have the krone and the krona, respectively, while Finland uses the euro.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

The Arctic has inspired a surprising amount of literature, all of it laced with a peculiar passion for the seemingly desolate landscape.

*Arctic Dreams*, by Barry Lopez, is a magical evocation of all things Arctic. At once essay, history, nature writing and anthropology, it covers everything from animals, land and people to natural phenomena and explorers.

A classic tale of exploration and discovery, *The Noose of Laurels* by Wally Herbert traces the bitter rivalry between Robert Peary and Frederick Cook in their quest to be first to the North Pole. *The Arctic Grail* by Pierre Berton is an absorbing account of the quest for the Northwest Passage and the North Pole, detailing the drama and the hardships of polar exploration and the contribution of the Inuit.

In *Ice!* Tristan Jones travels across the Arctic by boat with only a one-eyed, three-legged dog for company. He struggles with loneliness, polar bears and possible death with sharp wit and a keen eye.

The classic travelogue *Across Arctic America* by Knud Rasmussen follows Rasmussen's epic voyage across the Arctic on the fifth Thule expedition. It's a mammoth tale with a wealth of ethnographic, cultural and religious observations.

*A Year in Lapland: Guest of the Reindeer Herders* by Hugh Beach recounts the author's experiences while living with the Sami of Sweden and describes their herding lifestyle and struggles with modern culture and government policy.

*Arctic Crossing* by Jonathan Waterman is a vivid portrait of extreme conditions, disillusioned communities and incredible landscapes as seen from a kayak on an epic crossing of the Northwest Passage.

Part travelogue, part historical epic, *The Horizontal Everest: Extreme Journeys on Ellesmere Island* by Jerry Kobalenko traces the footsteps of past explorers and their reasons for seeking out this breathtaking but life-threatening island.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

You'll need to do a lot of your predeparture planning on the Internet, and there are loads of sites out there just bursting with information.

**Alaskan Adventure** ([www.alaskanadventureguide.com](http://www.alaskanadventureguide.com)) Community profiles, accommodation options and tour planning for visitors to Alaska.

**Arctic News** ([www.arctic.noaa.gov/news.html](http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/news.html)) Get up to date on Arctic news, research, issues and events before you leave home.

**Greenland Guide** ([www.greenlandguide.gl](http://www.greenlandguide.gl)) Numerous tourism-related links on transport, tours and events.

### LONELY PLANET INDEX (GREENLAND)

Litre of bottled water  
Dkr14

Bottle of Carlsberg  
Dkr14 from supermarkets,  
Dkr35 to Dkr40 from bars

Souvenir T-shirt  
Dkr149 to Dkr395

Hot dog Dkr16 to Dkr25

### HOW MUCH? (GREENLAND)

Mars Bar Dkr9

Cheapest summertime  
AUL ferry ride Dkr185

Mid-comfort hotel,  
double room Dkr800

Dogsledding for a day  
Dkr1400

100g of dried caribou  
Dkr40

## TOP TENS

### NATIONAL PARKS

The Arctic's national parks protect some of the most pristine and spectacular scenery in the world. Plan a trip to one of these parks for an unforgettable experience.

- Auyuittuq National Park, Canada (p249)
- Gates of the Arctic National Park, Alaska (p256)
- Quttinirpaaq National Park, Canada (p247)
- Northeast Greenland National Park, Greenland (p213)
- Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska (p254)
- Pallas-Ounastunturi, Finland (p327)
- Sirmilik National Park, Canada (p248)
- Lapland Biosphere Reserve, Russia (p276)
- Abisko National Park, Sweden (p310)
- Wrangel Island, Russia (p293)

### ARCTIC VIEWS

The landscape of the Arctic can range from the seriously spectacular to stretches of immense boggy plains. The following views will simply leave you speechless.

- Ilulissat icefjord and its gargantuan bergs, Greenland (p170)
- Thousands of migrating caribou herding in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, Alaska (p254)
- Quassik's panorama of spiky mountains, ice islands and fjords, Greenland (p129)
- Kobuk's bizarre desert-like dunes, Alaska (p262)
- Grise Fjord's spectacular peaks and icebergs, Canada (p248)
- The ice fields and jagged peaks of spectacular Svalbard, Norway (p324)
- Narsarmiit village with its jagged rocky backdrop, Greenland (p132)
- The aurora borealis seen from the ice hotel in Jukkasjärvi, Sweden (p309)
- Sivinganeruo Imaa fjord and the whole Aappilattoq fjord system, Greenland (p133)
- Qoornoq ice face and fjord viewed from Mellemlandet, Blue Ice Camp or best of all from an excursion helicopter, Greenland (p102)

### ARCTIC ADVENTURES

To really get in touch with the Arctic wilderness, take one of these trips into the great unknown.

- Crack through metre-thick floes on an icebreaker cruise through the Northeast Passage to the North Pole (p270)
- Cycle the Kaiser Route on beautiful Lofoten, Norway (p306)
- Hike the Ikuvik Trail for superb views of Pangnirtung Fjord, Canada (p248)
- Join Inuit hunters through the fjords and floes around Cape Farewell, Greenland (p134)
- Follow in the footsteps of explorer Fridtjof Nansen and ski across Greenland's icecap (p216)
- Hike along the Kevo River with its spectacular waterfalls and dramatic gorges, Finland (p319)
- Unwind on lazy riverboat rides up Siberia's vast Ob, Irtysh or Yenisey rivers (p269 and p281)
- Hike through the wilds of Gates of the Arctic National Park, Alaska (p256)
- Go sea kayaking up spectacular fjords from Narsaq (p113) or Nanortalik (p127)
- Walk to the end of the world at Point Barrow, Alaska (p261)

**Greenland Tourism** ([www.greenland.com](http://www.greenland.com)) Greenland's official tourism site with regional information, tour suggestions and travel tips.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Comprehensive travel information and advice.

**Nunavut Tourism** ([www.nunavuttourism.com](http://www.nunavuttourism.com)) Online travel planner for Canada's far north.

**Siberia Nomad** ([www.siberianomad.com](http://www.siberianomad.com)) Information on Siberian towns, travel arrangements and tours.

**Visit Finland** ([www.visitfinland.com](http://www.visitfinland.com)) Info on route planning, attractions and events in Lapland.

**Visit Norway** ([www.visitnorway.com](http://www.visitnorway.com)) Heaps of information on planning a trip to Norway's north.

**Visit Sweden** ([www.visit-sweden.com](http://www.visit-sweden.com)) Comprehensive information on where to go and what to see in northern Sweden.

# The Authors



## ETAIN O'CARROLL

### Coordinating Author

Stepping off a plane in pitch darkness on a January afternoon, wind chill hitting -60°C and a herd of muskoxen just visible on the far side of the runway, Etain was simultaneously choked by her first breath and smitten by the Arctic. What was supposed to have been a short trip became almost three years 'up north' and an enduring fascination with the extremes of weather, the terrible beauty of the tundra and the wonderful Arctic people. This book allowed her to return north to research the southeast and northwest coasts of Greenland and fantasise over the ultimate travel routes through Arctic North America and Scandinavia.

Etain wrote the introductory Arctic chapters, Disko Bay, Northwest Greenland, East Greenland, Arctic North America Travel Routes, Arctic Scandinavia Travel Routes and part of Southwest Greenland.

## My Favourite Trip

A trip up north is always an adventure, but sometimes a combination of landscape, light and timing just makes it extra special. For me, standing fishing by a lake near Kangerlussuaq (p162) at 4am with the sun glowing deep red in the sky, the perfect silence broken by the soft tinkling of candle ice melting and falling into the glassy water was as close to paradise as I imagine I'll ever get – and I don't even like fishing. The other indelible memory of this trip is the first sight of the truly massive, majestically carved icebergs of the Ilulissat icefjord (p170). It left me mesmerised for hours and with enough photographs of icebergs to bore the pants off the most avid of friends.



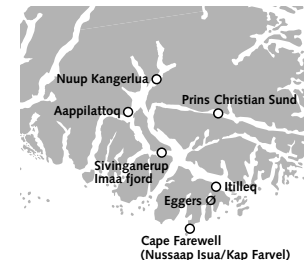
## MARK ELLIOTT

Mark Elliott first visited the Arctic in 1982. He has written numerous travel guidebooks and has contributed to a volume of adventure-travel tales. While researching this book he 'enjoyed' some rather overexciting escapades travelling with Greenlandic hunters. In one hair-raising mishap, compacting ice floes closed around his minuscule open boat off Prins Christian Sund. Being stranded for months like Parry or Shackleton was not an option in the uncovered craft. With two Inuit crew friends he finally managed to drag and squeeze the boat across the gathering patchwork of ice and leads, reaching open water late at night. The freezing return trip was lit only by a surreally beautiful, dancing aurora borealis and the fjord's glowing photoplankton.

Mark wrote the remainder of the Greenland chapters and compiled Arctic Russia Travel Routes.

## My Favourite Trip

I can't imagine scenery more stunningly impressive than the fjordlands around Aappilattoq (p133). Wrap up very, very warmly for the boat ride, even on sunny summer days. Start off towards the great tidewater glaciers of Nuup Kangerlua. Whizz back for a quick peek down Prins Christian Sund – the best views are from near its western mouth. Then, ice permitting, loop around Eggers Ø, exploring the spire-tickled southern fjords. I find Cape Farewell (Nunaap Isua/Kap Farvel) exciting more for the *frisson* of passing Greenland's treacherous southernmost point than for the scenery. Afterwards wind up to truly gorgeous Itilleq (Itivdleq), my favourite ex-village site. The most fabulous views are saved for last as you return to Aappilattoq through the jaw-dropping scenery of Sivinganerup Imaa fjord.



# Arctic Snapshot

Although dogsleds and *iglos* still exist, life in the Arctic is a far cry from the romanticised notions of most southerners. Today Stone Age traditions collide with modern technology to create a complex society where children chew on whale blubber as they watch satellite TV and hunters learn first-aid skills to qualify as guides.

## FAST FACTS

Population: 1.6 million

Region size: 11.3 million sq km

Average unemployment rate: 25%

Temperature differential between winter and summer: 50°C

Depth of Greenland icecap: 3085m

Average deaths by polar bear: 1 in 25 years

The fast and furious changes of the past 40 years have brought problems, and in some ways many Arctic villages resemble tough inner-city neighbourhoods. Low standards of education, high unemployment, rampant alcohol abuse and all the associated social problems dog many communities, and across the Arctic suicide rates are high and life expectancy is low. Children witness various kinds of abuse and grow up fast, while many adults find themselves back at school in their forties hoping to make up for lost time.

Despite the social problems, harsh climate, isolation and, in some areas, basic standards of living, the indigenous people of the far north are fiercely committed to their communities and even the young are reluctant to leave. A deep appreciation of the land and the traditional lifestyle, and the huge importance of family connections, far outweigh the lure of the bright city lights to the south.

Unfortunately, this traditional lifestyle is under threat from all sides. Climate change (see p27) is already apparent in the north and threatens the very heart of most communities: warmer weather and bad ice conditions prevent traditional hunting and threaten the habitats of the animals the local people rely on. Arctic scientific research is in an era of unprecedented cooperation, however, and international projects are working feverishly to collect data to accurately predict changes in local climates and the effects on indigenous people.

Meanwhile, oil and gas exploration and the dumping of nuclear waste have left some Arctic areas with severe environmental problems (see p59) and, as pollution from industrialised nations travels north, bioaccumulation of toxic chemicals threatens the health of northern peoples (see p34). An increasing sense of powerlessness in the face of these problems has led to a backlash against badly adapted social systems and government policies set by southern bureaucrats with little understanding of the true concerns of Arctic residents. A real push for self-determination has begun, and the creation of the Inuit homeland, Nunavut, in Canada (see p25) has encouraged other indigenous groups across the north to campaign for similar agreements.

However, with low levels of education and a culture of welfare dependence, it will take years before most communities can look forward to any true financial or political independence. Diversifying the economy and providing meaningful employment for isolated communities without causing irreparable damage to the land remains a real challenge. The people of the far north are renowned for their ingenuity and resilience in the face of difficulty, however. Although no-one may know quite where life is going, the unflinching desire to protect indigenous culture, maintain a meaningful link to the land and make the most of modern innovations is an excellent start.

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