

# Toward culturally sensitive tourism

## Report from Greenland

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Northern Periphery and  
Arctic Programme  
2014–2020



EUROPEAN UNION

Investing in your future  
European Regional Development Fund

Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI)  
Rovaniemi  
[www.luc.fi/matkailu](http://www.luc.fi/matkailu)

Design: Lappi Design / Tytti Mäenpää

ISBN 978-952-6620-45-9

Publications of the Multidimensional Tourism Institute  
Matkailualan tutkimus- ja koulutusinstituutin julkaisuja

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Rovaniemi 2020

# ARCTISEN

Promoting culturally sensitive tourism across the Arctic

**Main result:** Improved entrepreneurial business environment for culturally sensitive tourism that will be achieved by improving and increasing transnational contacts, networks and cooperation among different businesses and organizations. Improvement of business environment will also result in concrete products and services, locally and transnationally designed, that support the capacities of start-ups and SMEs to develop sustainable, competitive and attractive tourism businesses drawing on place-based opportunities.

**Funder:** Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme

**Partners:** University of Lapland (Lead Partner), Finland  
 UiT The Arctic University of Norway  
 Northern Norway Tourist Board  
 Umeå University, Sweden  
 Ájtte - Mountain and Sámi museum, Sweden  
 Aalborg University, Denmark  
 University of Waterloo, Canada  
 WINTA - World Indigenous Tourism Alliance

**Budget:** 1,455.547,88€





LAPPI DESIGN



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# Introduction



# Introduction

While visitor numbers to Greenland are still relatively low compared with other parts of the Arctic, tourism currently is experiencing unprecedented attention in Greenland<sup>1</sup>. Successful marketing, combined with a growing global interest in the Arctic, has led to a volume of tourists and a corresponding rise in political and societal interest in tourism. Today, tourism is viewed as one of Greenland's three economic pillars, next to fishing and mining, as well as a promising lever for the Arctic nation's future economic development. Furthermore, its successful development potentially could help pave the way for the Arctic nation's independence from the Danish Commonwealth.

The growing attention from political and other public actors in Greenland has elicited several reports, policy documents and strategies conducted during the 2010s to explore Greenland's tourism potential<sup>2</sup>. While they all recognised development of a

strong tourism industry as one path toward growth (with fishing, mining, farming and hunting being the others)<sup>3</sup>, they also noted such a path's impediments, some of which already are known to Arctic destinations.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Rambøll Group<sup>5</sup> identified the most important impediments as being a short tourism season, lack of infrastructure, current limited capacity, low customer service standards, low tourism growth rate, lack of package tours, low overnight-stay average (only four nights per trip), low expenditures per tourist (~1,100 Danish Kroner or ~\$160 US dollars per day), a lack of concrete initiatives by Greenland's government (and a low priority given to them), lack of online information about the nation's tourism destinations, and difficulties with internal and external coordination in the Greenlandic tourism sector.

While challenges still abound, many tourism strategies, research and development projects, funding opportunities and networks have recently been launched to uncover and alleviate barriers, raise the level of service and entrepreneurship, develop products, improve digital and physical infrastructure etc. In this context, the *Towards More Tourism (TMT)* conference in 2018, hosted by Visit Greenland and Air Greenland, illustrates current and ongoing efforts to develop to develop the Greenlandic tourism field by showcasing best practice cases, inspiring and creating discussions about current and future tourism development in Greenland, secure better local and regional coordination and ownership<sup>6</sup>. Attended by 137 tourism actors, predominantly micro- and small enterprises from all over Greenland, it shows how tourism – unlike mining and infrastructure ventures – is not just a waiting game for large



foreign investors<sup>7</sup>. It is also a place where national and local strategies, investments and people can make things happen and make a difference despite lingering difficulties, which also were mentioned during the conference, in coordinating and developing tourism and associated products at a regional and national level.

Tourism offerings in Greenland currently centre around adventure tourism and the 'big Arctic five' sights and experiences marketed by Visit Greenland<sup>8</sup>: dog sledding; whale watching; Northern Lights; ice/snow; and the nation's pioneering people. In combination with sailing, hiking, fishing and hunting, as well as cultural offerings, such as *kaffemik* coffee parties in private homes and visits to handicraft workshops, these comprise the products offered to the nearly 100,000 people who visit Greenland annually.

In this report, we will introduce and discuss how this recent interest and rising numbers of tourists intersect with the interpretation and evaluation of actual and expected growth by Greenlandic tourism actors, with a specific emphasis on culturally sensitive development. This overview is based on desk research, as well as 11 solo interviews and two double interviews with 15 tourism actors. The interviews were

conducted in February and March 2019 in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, and in Sisimiut, the second largest town in Greenland. The respondents represented a handful of small and medium-size tourism companies, and a range of other central tourism-related organisations such as associations, public authorities and research institutes. The interview questions revolved around the use of local culture in tourism, operating tourism businesses, development ideas, and tourism possibilities and challenges. Interviewing different kinds of tourism actors allowed for approaching cultural sensitivity from multiple perspectives.

## Structure of the report

The report first offers a cursory introduction to the history of tourism in Greenland in Section 2, setting the stage for a discussion of the frameworks for culturally sensitive tourism in Greenland in Section 3. Particular interest is shown in how culture and cultural practices in Greenland are connected to tourism and how communities experience it, either in beneficial or conflicting ways. Section 4 offers a perspective on the character and challenges tied to cultural sensitivity specific to Greenland compared with other Arctic tourism regions. A major identified difference is

how indigenous culture plays a different and much less prominent role in promoting, developing and articulating tourism in Greenland. This is explained partially as a consequence of, among other aspects, Greenland's status as a self-rule nation, the quest for economic and national independence,<sup>9</sup> and the modest (for now) presence of tourism in Greenlandic society.

In addition to economic development, culturally sensitive tourism enhances:

- stakeholders' self-determination
- intra- and intercultural understanding and respect
- inclusion and empowerment.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1. Characteristics of culturally sensitive tourism.

# Framework for culturally sensitive tourism in Greenland



# Framework for culturally sensitive tourism Greenland

This section approaches culturally sensitive tourism from four different perspectives that are important in Greenland: history of tourism development; guidelines and quality certificates in tourism; legal, territorial and cultural minority-majority challenges in tourism development; and demand for culturally sensitive tourism.

## History of tourism development

From 1721 until 1953, Greenland was a colony under Danish rule, and people wishing to visit Greenland had to seek permission from the Danish Ministry of Greenland to enter the country. Visitors typically would travel there as part of the colonial government (trade and commerce, teaching) or through missions or expeditions. The basis for tourism in a more traditional sense was laid shortly after 1953, when chartered flights were initiated to Kulusuk (East Greenland) and Narsarsuaq (South

Greenland) on airstrips built by the U.S. army under World War II.

This slowly paved the way for opportunities to make tourism a viable industry and an alternative to traditional hunting and fishing merely for economic gain. Tourism consolidated over time in the 1960s,<sup>11</sup> and in 1973, the first commission-based white paper was written, 'Tourism in Greenland'. Data indicated that 500 tourists visited the nation in 1960, a number that rose to 6,500 in 1972 (comprising tourists and visiting friends and relatives [VFRs]).

The commission expected the number of international tourists to reach approximately 35,000 by 1980 and, based on this assumption, concluded that tourism would become the second-largest sector. Although the sector did grow in the '70s and '80s, it contributed only modestly to employment and income. In 1981, two years after instalment of Greenland's Home Rule government, only 10,000 tourists visited Green-

land annually.<sup>12</sup> This demonstrates how the influx of tourism has been difficult to predict in the past and mirrors the current situation, in which predictions of a tourism boom so far have failed to materialise.

In 1990, the Home Rule government once more decided to intensify its focus on tourism, viewing it not just as one of many opportunities, but as a staple sector. A tourism development plan, 'Turismeplan for Grønland 1991-2005', was developed, and in 1992, Greenland Tourism was established to further tourism in accordance 'with Greenlandic nature and culture'.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the 2000s, Greenland Tourism, later renamed Visit Greenland, worked to make tourism the second most important sector in Greenland. As a development philosophy, Greenland Tourism stressed, according to a 2001 report, that tourism 'develops in full harmony with the Greenlandic nature and culture' and that 'local anchoring should characterise tourism, as should

broad support from the Greenlandic population'.<sup>14</sup> This philosophy can be traced further back to a tourism conference in South Greenland in 1975. Here, it was decided that tourism was to benefit and be owned and controlled by Greenlanders, thereby boosting Greenland's economy, but also functioning as a vehicle to improve understanding of Greenlandic culture, strengthen understanding and cohesion of the Greenlandic people through national tourism and expand Greenlanders' horizons.<sup>15</sup>

Later, in 1984, the Landsting decided that by recognising tourism as an industry, emphasis would be placed on employment and income in local communities.<sup>16</sup> This view was maintained and strengthened in the 1990s, and in 2000, Simon Olsen, Greenland's deputy for tourism, in a speech to tourism actors, mentioned the importance of developing and making available Greenlandic products, including handicraft and product development of Greenlandic food. Again, it was emphasised that the nation should 'develop tourism on our own terms and hereby become integrated in the culture of our country'.<sup>17</sup> From a political perspective, this emphasis on developing tourism on the nation's own terms (*på landets egne vilkår*)<sup>18</sup> is linked closely with national, local and indigenous culture.

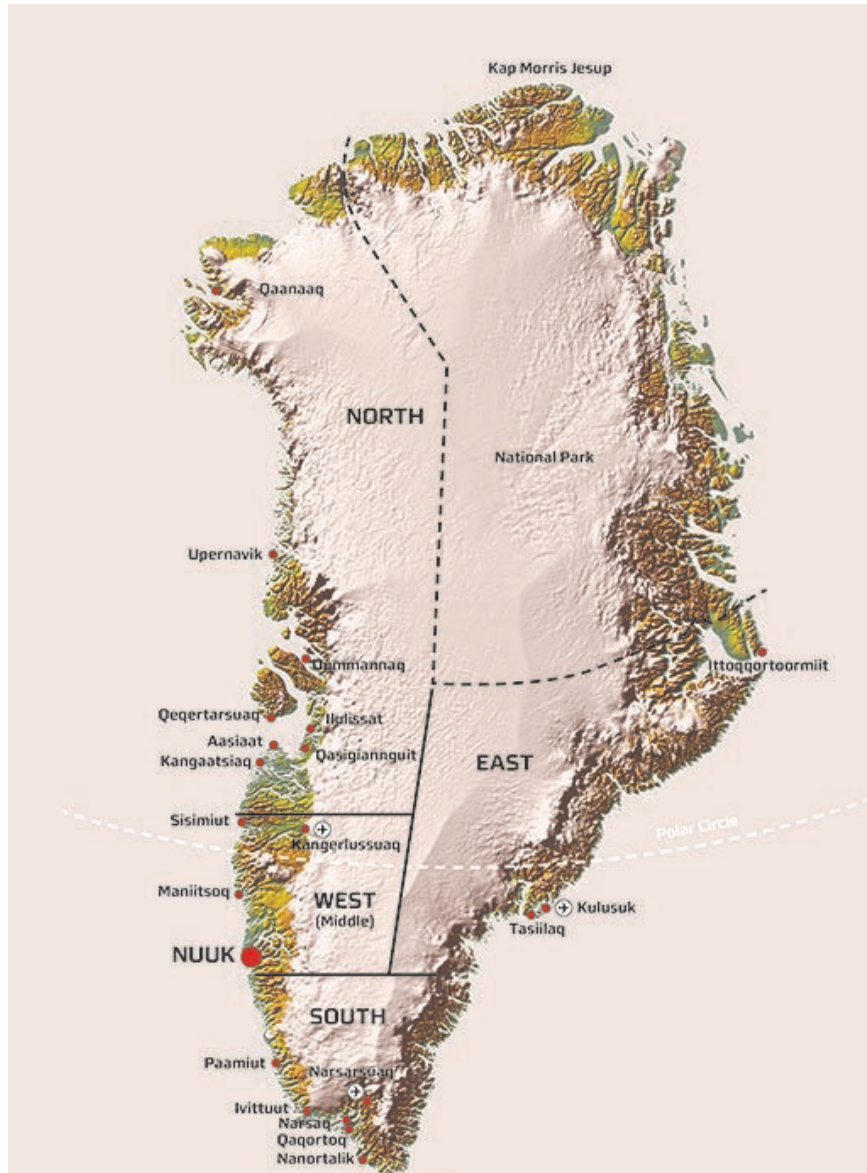


Figure 2. Map of Greenland. (Credit Greenland Travel.)



In the book *Tikeraaq*<sup>19</sup> by Liisi Egede Hegelund, based on her decade-long involvement in Greenlandic tourism, she describes the slow, but sure, creation of Greenlandic tourism initiatives, operators and ownership, from the first visits to East Greenland from Iceland in the early '50s through the Home Rule government established in 1979, to the initiation of Greenlandic Self Rule in 2009. For many, the transition to Self Rule was viewed as a final step before total independence from Denmark, and in this expected transition, tourism and its economic role '(are) embedded (in discourse) in the ongoing nation building process in Greenland'.<sup>20</sup> In this light, tourism development is not only about business activity, but also about political activity.

### Existing guidelines and quality certificates

While debates and initiatives, such as the ones cited above, are still taking place, so far, no overarching certification in Greenland exists for tourism operators, local guides, experiences or for specifying the origin of cultural tourism products and souvenirs, which usually include handcrafted figures (in soapstone, antlers or tusk), needlework (pearls), silver and ruby jewellery, sealskin and musk ox wool products.

Plans to undertake certification are in the government's pipeline for Greenlandic stone products, including gems (rubies, typically) and soapstone, to strengthen the unique brand of hand-carved Greenlandic stones towards locals and tourists, and to ensure transparency, consumer safety and more sales/higher prices.<sup>21</sup>

The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) currently is working to develop site-specific guidelines in Greenland. These are in line with similar community guidelines in Svalbard, where AECO is based. A local guide for Sisimiut already has been developed in collaboration with Arctic Circle Business, with a second guide for Nuuk in the making.

With the tourism sector continually witnessing steady growth in Greenland, the largest tourism actors, such as Visit Greenland, are taking a more explicit role to shift tourism in a sustainable direction. In 2018, Visit Greenland became a member of CSR Greenland. Also, Visit Greenland has created a 'how to kaffemik' guide on the popular activity for tourists, which entails visiting people's homes during special occasions (birthdays, first day of school etc.). In the guidelines, a light-hearted infographic advises tourists on proper dress codes and Greenlandic etiquette, such as removing

one's shoes and leaving the kaffemik once no more free chairs are available.

Besides these scattered initiatives, no labels or guidelines exist in Greenlandic tourism. This might indicate that guidelines most often are instigated due to a problem and that because of its still relatively small size, tourism is not yet perceived as a highly competitive field (outside of cruise tourism, where we also are seeing the first guidelines being created). This is in line with a comment by the manager of a local tour operator in Nuuk, in answering a question on whether guidelines might ease tensions between locals and tourists:

*'No, not really. I know that there have been issues in Ilulissat with tourists, for example, taking pictures of the kindergarten and people. I have not heard of issues here in Nuuk, though. It might come when more tourists are coming.'*

Interestingly, and in line with Visit Greenland head Julia Pars' call to 'clean up at home' when receiving guests, an interviewee discussed Greenlanders' own responsibility to 'be green':

*'A lot of people come to Greenland and imagine a country where we are respecting our nature. We do that, maybe not in the same way as they (we) used to. It does not say organic all over the place, but we are doing it in other ways. So, we need to be better in telling*

*that, but also being more conscious when it comes to the use of plastic, for example. Being more aware’.*

In some conversations, Iceland is mentioned as a ‘significant Other’ and as someone to learn from, both in attracting more tourism and regulating it. In the context of raising more awareness among travellers to Greenland, the Icelandic Pledge was mentioned as an inspiration in inviting tourists to pledge for responsible tourism: ‘It could be interesting to prepare tourists more (about) what they are coming to and that they are more aware. I think in Iceland, they have a pledge and they have made some kind of guidelines’.

### **Legal, territorial and cultural minority-majority challenges in tourism development**

One of the tools for stimulating investments in Greenlandic tourism has been through concessions, in which investors gain the exclusive right to develop an area by, as one of the respondents explained, ‘*applying for concessions, so they [...] are the only ones who can take tourists to this area and build facilities*’. So far, fishing grounds, field areas for skiing and grounds for development of huts have been mentioned. However, this has been somewhat controversial, as land

in Greenland cannot be bought or owned by anyone. Thus, everyone still has the right to access the land to fish, hunt, gather plants etc. According to an interviewee,

*‘the idea of the concessions is that locals can go to the river any time, but there is only one tourist operator who can take tourists to that specific area. So, we as locals can still go and use the areas. Concessions do not change that, but there is only one who can sell a tourist product linked to that area’.*

However, people have voiced concerns over how concessions would, *de facto*, interfere with the *allemandsret* (all people’s right) to the land. Also, and on a larger scale, competing interests from mining have their own vision for certain landscapes and land use.<sup>22</sup>

As the Inuit in Greenland form the majority of the population, no indigenous-minority issues exist as known, for instance, from the Sámi areas. However, while still a minority, Danes and Danish migrant labour in Greenland, until recently, have received privileges in Greenlandic society (higher salaries, first right to accommodations etc.). As a consequence of this and the continued, troubling presence and influence of colonial history, distrust and latent racism are not unusual between the two groups. Colonial infrastructure is also a potentially problematic, though integral, ele-

ment of Greenlandic tourism, as reflected in this interview with the Sisimiut Museum:

*‘We try to find a balance between the colonial history and life today. Colonial history obviously plays an important role in the Greenlandic development and the Greenlandic society. You do not want it to overpower the story of the traditional culture. However, the museum is right here in the colonial centre of Sisimiut, and the Greenlandic culture is out in nature’.*

Some of this tension also can be traced to discussions on tourism development and labour that have revolved around young Danish guides coming to Greenland for the summer and preventing locally trained Greenlandic guides from entering the industry. Furthermore, it has been discussed how to ensure that local companies can benefit from cruise tourism and become better at developing – and making a living from – locally anchored cultural tourism products.

### **Demand for culturally sensitive tourism**

Generally, demand for cultural tourism in Greenland is not high. In conversations with a travel agent from Greenland Tours, an agency operating from Berlin and Reykjavik, the agent describes how people

travelling to Greenland are predominantly after ice in its many forms – icebergs, the icefjord in Ilulissat and the ice cap – and show very little interest in cultural community activities that the agency promotes on its website (often free of commission).

In the interviews, operators also mainly talked about nature-related activities, such as dog sled rides, sailing and fishing trips, and hikes. However, all these activities naturally also contain a cultural component:

*'All the culture is linked to nature. That is our DNA. You cannot separate it. All the elements of culture are somehow related to nature, so what we find here is what we call culture symbols. If you would ask anyone about a cultural symbol, they will say the kayak, the ulu, the sled dog. Everything is connected to nature'.*

Nevertheless, many believe that this aspect could be strengthened and made more visible, e.g., by becoming better at 'telling the story'.

Recent successful attempts from Visit Greenland to 'repopulate' Greenland through branding campaigns and a new visual identity might help spark interest in – and awareness of – local Greenlandic culture and communities.

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# Possibilities and challenges of culturally sensitive tourism



# Possibilities and challenges of culturally sensitive tourism

This section examines the ideas, challenges and opportunities in business and product development that were brought up during the interviews.

## Possibilities in business innovation and product, service and capacity development

Tourism in Greenland is distributed unevenly. In Ilulissat, signs of what we might term *overtourism* during the summer season are starting to appear, but elsewhere – like in Nuuk, Sisimiut – numbers of tourists are generally low. In these places, the principal concern is to increase the numbers and spread activity beyond July and August. As stated by a Sisimiut tourism entrepreneur: *'I know that they [other entrepreneurs] say that [referring to overtourism], but in our case, we have tourism; we have the incoming system. We do have the capacities needed,*

*but we do not even meet 50%'. This articulated imbalance between existing capacities of well-functioning tourism businesses and visitation numbers seems to hinder development of products and services. Ongoing discussions on increasing capacities disable innovation potential for development, as unused capacities exist in other destinations in Greenland. This is prevalent in a statement by the largest tourism operator in Sisimiut: *'The funny thing is that, on a national scale, we say we need to have a better incoming system. So, what we do here is that we keep on improving our incoming system. That means we now have a huge incoming system here, and we only use around 50%. That [referring to the lack of capacities] is what we say in general in Greenland, but the only place that has challenges is actually Ilulissat'. It is apparent that a need exists to work more closely together to nourish innovation, as well as spread out existing capacities.**

While there is general interest in building critical mass – both in terms of visitor numbers, offers and experiences, and tourism staff – the perceived large-scale and top-down focus on tourism development, mainly centring around infrastructure, is viewed as a threat to sustainable and locally anchored tourism. One respondent stated: *'Well, if we talk sustainability, then we are on the wrong path right now. We are focussing on building up what we call enormous destinations, and the rest of the area just stays or slowly develops'. However, another respondent conversely stressed the positive and beneficial aspects of tourism and the development of local infrastructure through this activity:*

*'Tourism is also a good way of improving infrastructure. Infrastructure in Greenland today is only improving through tourism. We would not even talk about new airports without tourism. I believe that tourism will, in a way, always initiate improvements in*

*infrastructure. That is all, from bins in the street to benches at viewpoints’.*

While having said this, our interviewees all work on the ground to engage with or develop tourism in their own ways, and one general characteristic is concern over how to integrate tourism into building and strengthening the community, in terms of both culture and economy:

*‘We would like locals to engage more in tourism on a small-scale level. For example, meeting the locals, inviting (them) for coffee or dinner, present(ing) Greenlandic food and lifestyle. And again, I am not talking traditional old Inuit. I am talking Greenlandic modern life’.*

This indicates – as also examined by Wennecke, Jacobsen and Ren<sup>23</sup> – that tourism entrepreneurship in Greenland often is motivated – at least partially – by a wish to support family and community. Interviewees pointed to the need to build local partnerships ‘so people get involved and are not marginalised that way’. Regarding culturally sensitive tourism, tourism entrepreneurs have stressed the need for inclusion and involvement by locals when talking about developing tourism products and services based on cultural heritage. ‘You need to get people involved; you need to involve the locals. You need to inspire them, to have them onboard,

so that they make it their own’. Doing it this way aims to ensure culturally appropriate development of tourism products and services.

## **On challenges**

No certificates currently exist in Greenlandic tourism, and no plans are in the pipeline to develop any, neither in relation to sustainability, nor locally manufactured products. However, guidelines have been prepared in Sisimiut and are in the planning stages elsewhere. The guidelines predominantly are targeted at cruise tourism and are unlike other guidelines in the Arctic cruise industry (e.g., those of AECO), as they are oriented towards habitation and culture, rather than wildlife and nature. The local museum in Sisimiut has collaborated with AECO to develop community-specific guidelines and print fliers:

*‘The National Museum made fliers mainly for locals on guidelines, like only drive your ATV on the tracks because you might go over a site. Basically, you should follow the law and only drive where it is legal to drive. We also do not want to exclude locals from using the landscape. That is where the culture is still alive. It is a work in progress developing guidelines, and it only now becomes relevant because it is now that tourism is being a bigger element here’.*

***‘We would like locals to engage more in tourism on a small-scale level. For example, meeting the locals, inviting them for coffee or dinner, presenting Greenlandic food and lifestyle. And again, I am not talking traditional old Inuit. I am talking Greenlandic modern life.’***

The Sermersooq Business Council in Nuuk also noted potential benefits and the need for guidelines for tourists, something that was experienced firsthand during a recent Svalbard visit. It is addressed primarily as a way to frame the tourism encounter and reduce conflict more explicitly:

*'What we learned through the recent trip to Svalbard was that there is a necessity to have guidelines because we are the only ones that can develop tourism as we want it. No one else can do that for us. We need to be sharp and clear on what kind of tourism we want to have in the future. We want to have guidelines; we want to have rules, maybe some certifications, e.g., for tour operators and so on. So, we do not have these negative examples like other destinations have.'*

Reflecting on their impression of the Norwegian guidelines in Svalbard, the Sermersooq Business Council concluded that further work on providing guidelines for tourists in Greenland was needed to avoid future clashes. *'We need to do more in order to inform [tourists] on what being a good tourist in Greenland entails [...].'*

Interestingly, one interviewee in Nuuk pointed to the fact that even though tourism entrepreneurs, locals and tourists might perceive guidelines as limiting and negative, *'out there, it shows us more and more that it is OK to set guidelines and rules on*

*how we want tourism: "We want this, but we do not want this". It is fully accepted. It seems that nowadays, it is also expected in a way'.* In conclusion, the need for guidelines – and on a more basic level, signage around towns and on trails – will grow together with tourism numbers. Gaining inspiration from other destinations and learning from others how to carry such things out without 'scaring tourists away' are viewed as valuable.

## Examples

Generally, no consensus exists on what constitutes a sensitivity issue in Greenland tourism, but awareness of cultural sensitivity exists, as underlined by a Sermersooq Business Council representative, who stated:

*'A main resource that you need in this context is the knowledge, sensitivity and understanding of what the cultural landscape[...] is. It is important to understand the stakeholders. It is not only the tour operators and the providers; it is also the hunting association or the Art Museum and drum dancing club. These kinds of stakeholders are important'.*

The quote reflects how multiple stakeholders should have a say and be involved in developing tourism, considering that it affects them. This understanding is sup-

ported by many interviewees, as is an increased awareness of keeping things local, although foreign workforce issues have been raised. The perception that a low level of conflict related to development tourism exists in Greenland also was supported by one of our interviewees in Sisimiut:

*'Here in Sisimiut and Qeqqata municipality, there is a lot of talking, and people are trying to make the tourism industry local. So, it is coming from within the culture, so I don't see very many things like that (insensitive ways of developing tourism) because people that are selling and creating the products are from within the culture'.*

Perhaps it is because the still relatively small size of tourism keeps the level of controversy low. However, as also mentioned by a travel agent, conditions will change in the near future as improved international tourism infrastructure is built:

*'With the longer airstrips coming, we have 4-5 years to prepare the local businesses so we are not run over by companies coming from the outside. It would be very easy for large foreign companies to come in and buy up local companies. We have some years to become strong, so we can withstand the pressure that will come. It is exciting to see what is going to come. Nobody knows for sure what is going to happen. Nobody knows what will happen when the airport*

*is finished. What airlines are interested to come in and what cruise lines are interested in doing their turnarounds here and bringing in new guests? Nobody knows. So, these are exciting times'.*

When asked, interviewed tourism actors found it difficult to pinpoint tourism products that they view as improper in a culturally sensitive way, suggesting a low level of controversy – also in relation to the other areas covered in the ARCTISEN project.<sup>24</sup> For example, very few expressed the view that selling *tupilak* as souvenirs might be considered inappropriate: *'The only thing I can think of is tupilak because it is originally a voodoo thing. I don't know if it is right to sell that to tourists. Personally, for me, it is just a piece of stone, but it depends on what you believe'.*

The most crucial aspect that is prevalent throughout the empirical data, and articulated strongly by one interviewee in Sisimiut, is the aspect that for tourism entrepreneurs in Greenland, it is not important to put a 'cultural sensitivity' label on their actions:

*'I just hope that it is always the Greenlanders that define the roles, what is right and what is wrong and what to do. Right now, we also have large operators from outside. If Greenland wants tourism, it should be under their rules. I am not a fan of copying a system from outside. We say that we want to*

*be independent, but we keep on copying from Denmark. Denmark is different. So, many things are different. So, we should do it from the inside'.*

Many actors in or around tourism focus on locally based tourism and tourism that allows for respectful and responsible encounters. Some examples of what we might interpret as culturally sensitive tourism products in Greenland that exist on a small scale include *kaffemik*, as well as open dance and storytelling sessions at museums and cultural houses. Characteristic of these encounters are that they are small-scale events in which the public and private are not easily discernible or separable.

Generally, almost all interviewees identified storytelling as a particularly Greenlandic activity, and many viewed it as either already integrated into tourism offerings or in need of becoming so. However, because of its close connection to Greenlandic culture, 'doing it right' was mentioned more or less explicitly by one interviewee:

*'It is going to be an exciting experiment trying to translate Greenlandic storytelling, like things that go on when we sit at a kaffemik or meet someone in the supermarket or talk with our grandparents or children, to translate that into marketing campaigns for tourists... It can be anything. That*

*is something that is growing in the Greenlandic culture scene. It has its roots in the Greenlandic storytelling, and you have a lot of Greenlandic stories and myths and events being adapted or translated into dance and musical arts... It is so interesting that storytelling is so important in the Greenlandic culture. It is the attraction itself. That is what I think about a lot these days. How do you do that in a good manner?'*

Also, local jewellery, handicraft and handicraft workshops were mentioned, as were more traditional activities, such as fishing and dog sled activities. Some mentioned how 'everyday life' could become a tourism product, with some cited examples including small language courses and local or self-caught-food tastings, either in people's homes or after a foraging/fishing/hunting trip.





# Final reflections



## Final reflections

Generally speaking, the interviewed stakeholders displayed a great deal of pragmatism and a willingness to 'move things forward'. Issues were raised around balancing tradition and modernity in selling and constructing Greenland as a tourist destination, while manoeuvring the often-difficult conditions of making a living in a tourism industry that remains, in most areas of the country, modest in size and highly seasonal.

However, optimism has prevailed, and many feels that the national marketing foundation is moving in the right direction in developing the image of Greenland and Greenlanders:

*'We were bad in our marketing for quite some years. Before, there were these pictures of Greenlanders in traditional costumes on a dog sled with a harpoon. We are now more aware that Greenland is so much more than that'.*

Visit Greenland was lauded by many as having played a substantial role in this work:

*'A lot has happened when it comes to how Greenland is presented to tourists now. In the earlier days, Greenland and Greenlandic people have been presented in a very traditional way. ...It is more modern (now). Before, there was a focus on icebergs and dog sleds and then when you had people, they wore the traditional costume. When people came, they thought everyone wears it. The last few years, I think they really worked on the brand of pioneering nation. They really worked on showing how we really live. Greenland is more than this idealistic picture. It is more realistic now.'*

The lack of cultural controversies or clearly identified problems in how tourism products are developed and marketed in a culturally sensitive way seems to connect with still-moderate tourism numbers in Greenland and has been voiced by many as a principal concern recently. For the ARCTI-

SEN project, this offers a fantastic opportunity to work critically and reflectively with tourism development as a proactive, rather than reactive, activity, building capacity to develop the destination, marketing and content in culturally sensitive ways.

While the political discussion on tourism development until recently has revolved around raising the numbers (primarily through cruise tourism), an ongoing discussion in the Greenlandic tourism industry is now taking place regarding a more reflexive and smart approach to 'whom to invite in'. As Julia Pars, head of Visit Greenland, asked during a recent conference (TMT, October 2018): 'Whom do we want to invite to our home? How should we host them?'<sup>25</sup>

In regards to this discussion and supported by desk research, Greenland's ARCTISEN subproject interprets and articulates culturally sensitive tourism as mutual respect, rather than implying cultural 'frailty',

as intuitively understood by some informants. As strongly suggested in the desk research, the role and configurations of indigenous and national culture in the ongoing struggle to become an independent nation-state are crucial to include as an important aspect of how culture is marketed and activated in tourism.

Mutual respect could be a strong tag line in the ongoing work, whether it's between locals and tourists, or locals and tourism entrepreneurs, as reflected in discussions about 'cleaning up our act' and responding to complaints about garbage and waste in many Greenlandic ports, towns and settlements.

*'We were bad in our marketing for quite some years. Before, there were these pictures of Greenlanders in traditional costumes on a dog sled with a harpoon. We are now more aware that Greenland is so much more than that'.*



## Notes and references



## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our partners in Sisi-miut and Nuuk. They shared their time, experiences and knowledge with us throughout this project and provided us with valuable insights.

## Notes

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## Toward culturally sensitive tourism

### Report from Greenland

This report examines ongoing tourism development in Greenland through the lens of cultural sensitivity. What does cultural sensitivity mean to actors directly involved in or connected to tourism? In what ways can local communities and businesses utilise their cultural heritage and contemporary way of life in creating successful tourism products and services? Based on interviews among tourism actors, this report offers an overview of the tourism landscape in Greenland, with a particular emphasis on Nuuk and Sisimiut.

