

Five Tips for Travelling Sustainably in Greenland

Are you captivated by the beauty of the Arctic but feel concerned about your footprint? Here are five best practices for travelling in a responsible way in Greenland—based on insights from locals themselves.

By **Liz Cooper** | February 15, 2022

Related expeditions: [Iceland to Greenland: In the Wake of the Vikings](#), [Greenland & Wild Labrador: A Torngat Mountains Adventure](#), [Heart of the Arctic, Greenland and Arctic Canada: High Arctic Explorer](#), and [The Northwest Passage](#)



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As adventurous souls we are often faced with a paradox: we feel drawn to visit remote and interesting destinations, yet we are also aware that they can be some of the most fragile places on the planet.

Greenland is a perfect example of such a destination—it offers so many unique and once-in-a-lifetime experiences, but they're all located at the other end of a ship's cruise or plane journey, activities which are not (yet) carbon neutral.

However, Greenland's economy is diversifying, and the tourism industry helps not only with economic growth and job creation, but also to strengthen and promote Greenlandic culture.



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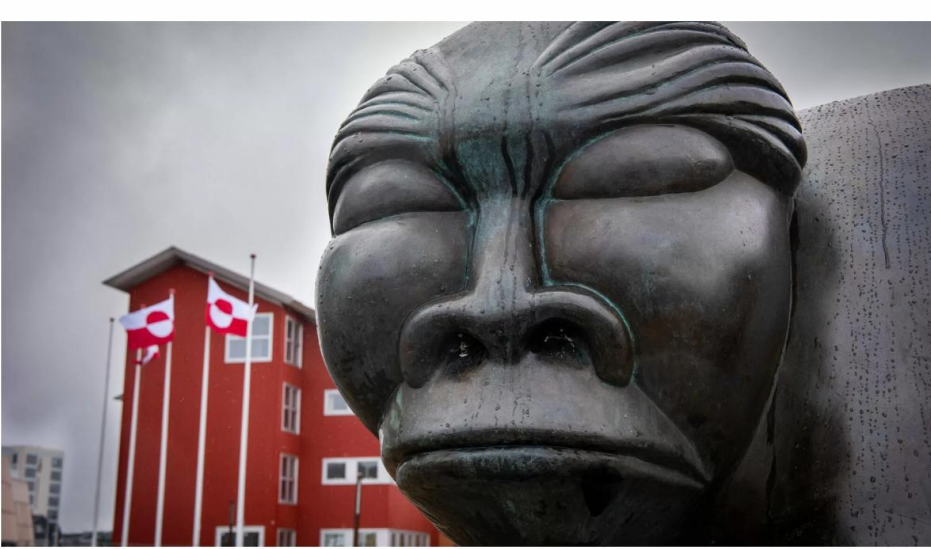
Kayaking in Kangerluluk, Greenland

It is of utmost importance that tourism in Greenland and other places like it happens in the most sustainable way possible, and, where possible, also in a regenerative way. The term *regenerative tourism* is gaining popularity and is sometimes used instead of *sustainable tourism*.

Sustainable tourism, [according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council](#), aims to minimise the negative impacts of tourism while maximising positive impacts. These positive impacts are specifically what [regenerative tourism](#) refers to—practices which, for example, help to restore cultural heritage, protect endangered species, and create local jobs.

Opportunities to behave in a sustainable or regenerative way as a tourist are not always obvious, and they can even differ across different destinations. For this reason, I have put together a list of five top tips for travelling sustainably in Greenland.

These tips are based on interviews with stakeholders in Greenland's tourism industry, which I conducted as part of my PhD research for Copenhagen Business School and Visit Greenland.



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The Greenlandic flag and part of the Kaassassuk sculpture in Nuuk, Greenland

1. Keep an open mind about what counts as sustainable

Context matters when discussing sustainability, perhaps more so in the Arctic than anywhere else. As an example, people from North America or Europe may think of eating a vegetarian diet as more sustainable than eating meat, because it avoids the emissions involved in animal agriculture.

However, in Greenland, it's pretty much the opposite; since most vegetables do not grow naturally in the Greenlandic climate, shipping produce to Greenland is in fact more damaging to the environment than eating local meats, which are almost always wild-caught.

When you're visiting, [look for opportunities to eat](#) reindeer, muskox, and seal—all of which live free in the country's vast landscapes, and none of which are endangered in Greenland.

Similarly, you might see locals walking around with [hats made of muskox wool](#), or gloves made of sealskin. Animals in Greenland are never killed for their skin or wool—they are only ever killed for food (and in very rare cases self-defence).

Afterwards, every part of the animal is put to good use, be that the skin or fur for clothing or furniture; the bones to make carvings, jewellery, or tools; or the innards as food for our sled dogs.

So, it is actually quite sustainable to buy clothes and souvenirs made from animal products in Greenland. Just be sure to check any restrictions on which animal products you can bring back to your home country.



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A herd of muskoxen seen near Etah, Greenland

2. Do your research

Sustainable behaviour differs among destinations, but it can also differ across towns and settlements within one country. For this reason, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) has created [community-specific guidelines](#) in collaboration with many of Greenland's local communities.

These give clear guidance on what the locals expect from you when you visit their town. Check if there are community-specific guidelines for the community you are going to visit—if there aren't, ask your onboard guide for some tips, or follow these [general guidelines](#) provided by AECO.



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Sisimiut, Greenland

3. Take the time to listen to our stories

Most Greenlanders are happy about cruise ships visiting their towns. Many of them also love talking to tourists, but others might be shy or lack confidence in their English language skills. It can also be intimidating for local people to see tourists moving in large groups.

Try breaking off from the group, learn a few words of Greenlandic, smile, and strike up a conversation with a local resident. They have so many good stories to tell.



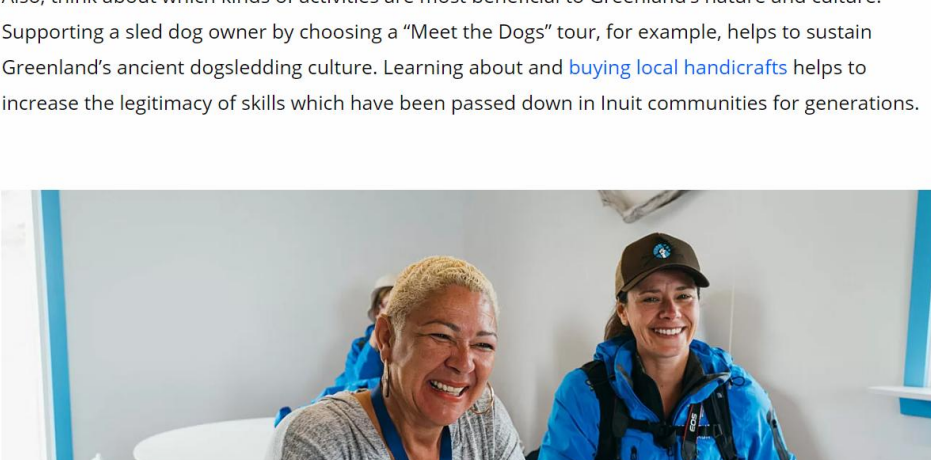
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Nive Nielsen and Tupaarnaq Egede provide engaging on-board learning about the topic of Greenland's sovereignty and governance.

4. Spend your money in the right places

Consider the importance of spending some money in each town you visit; local communities do not always directly financially benefit from cruise ship calls. Have lunch in a local café, buy a souvenir, or take a spontaneous tour with a local tourism operator.

Also, think about which kinds of activities are most beneficial to Greenland's nature and culture. Supporting a sled dog owner by choosing a "Meet the Dogs" tour, for example, helps to sustain Greenland's ancient dogsledging culture. Learning about and [buying local handicrafts](#) helps to increase the legitimacy of skills which have been passed down in Inuit communities for generations.



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Marcia Alderson and Leanne Matthews enjoy a treat at a local coffee shop on Adventure Canada's 2019 Iceland to Greenland: In the Wake of the Vikings small-ship expedition cruise.

5. Look for opportunities to regenerate!

With a bit of effort, opportunities to engage in sustainable and regenerative behaviours are everywhere. If you really want to go above and beyond, you can be part of initiatives that make a significant positive impact on Greenland's nature and culture.

Take part in one of Adventure Canada's on-board fundraising auctions—which support projects and partners in Greenland and other wonderful places—follow [AECO's Clean Seas Guidelines](#) for visitors to the Arctic, calculate and offset the carbon emissions of your trip, or find a way to make a donation to a local community or charitable organisation.

About the Author



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Liz Cooper is an Industrial PhD Candidate at Copenhagen Business School, sponsored by Visit Greenland and Innovation Fund Denmark. Through her research on sustainable tourism and tourist behaviour, she aims to contribute to making tourism an all-round force for good. [Read more](#) about Liz's PhD research or [contact her](#) to learn more.