PHOTO STORY

# Ten Fantastic Sights from Iceland to Greenland

By **Adventure Canada** | October 22, 2020

**Related expedition:** Iceland to Greenland: In the Wake of the Vikings

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*Each Adventure Canada expedition holds its own unique highlights. Fascinating Viking archaeology, breathtaking geology, and fantastic wildlife sightings set our hearts aflutter in this special region. These are our ten picks for the top experiences of this trip of a lifetime, Iceland to Greenland: In the Wake of the Vikings.*

A millennium ago, a few plucky Vikings set out from Iceland, the farthest outpost of Europe at the time, and sailed west into the unknown. Now we sail on their trail, encountering Greenland as they experienced it—a lush yet forbidding wonderland of crags and glaciers, whales and birds, fjordside pastures and lonesome estates.

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## 1. Sail on the trail of Erik the Red, the first-ever Norseman in Greenland

According to the Sagas, Thorvald Asvaldsson was expelled from Norway for "some killings." He settled in Iceland with his red-headed son Erik. Carrying on the family tradition, Erik also killed some people, so he too was banished. In the year 982 CE he went west, into the history books. Sail across the rich Denmark Strait to follow after him, in the company of countless fulmars, shearwaters, cormorants, and other seabirds.

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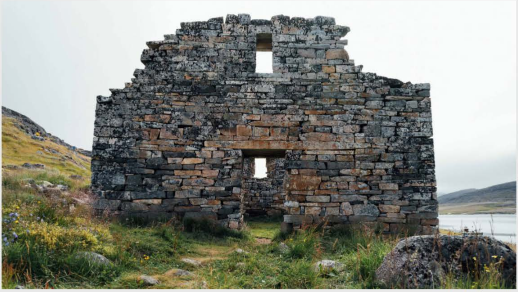
## 2. Ogle the wild east Greenland coast, teeming with whales and ice

The storm-tossed coast of southeast Greenland is too inhospitable for human settlement, but it's a heck of a place to tour by ship and Zodiac. Here, endless acres of ice grind down from the polar pack, churning amongst stark islands, stunning fjords, and fantastic peaks. The floes provide haul-outs for a variety of seal species and a stunning backdrop for photos of breaching humpback whales.



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## 3. Visit haunting Hvalsey, the last place Norse Greenlanders were ever seen

With its stone walls intact but its roof open to the heavens, Hvalsey Church, near the modern-day community of Qaqortoq, is the best-preserved Norse structure in Greenland. It's also the most eerie. In 1408 it hosted a wedding—the last recorded event before the Greenlandic Norse vanished. Visit this fjord-side ruin and join in the speculation: Did they starve en masse during the Little Ice Age? Decamp back to Iceland? Or were they out-competed by the determined Inuit, who at the time were moving down from the north?

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## 4. Feel small (in a good way) in the wondrous, humbling Fjord of Eternity

Greenland's southwest coast is transcendent, thronging with peaks, glaciers, and plunging fjords. Explore the Sermersooq area by Zodiac, on foot, and maybe in kayaks, keeping a lookout for *nattoralik* (white-tailed eagles), seabirds, marine mammals, and bright, tiny blooms on the tundra. Further north, in Kangerlussuatsiaq—the Fjord of Eternity—visit cacophonous bird cliffs, stroll beside cascading ice water streams, and visit the face of a tidewater glacier, waiting with bated breath to see if an iceberg will calve.

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## 5. Savour the crags and glaciers of Ikerassuaq, a.k.a. Prince Christian Sound

At Greenland's south tip is brooding Cape Farewell, a headland jutting aggressively into the North Atlantic. But a sneak-route lies behind it—an intimate, sublime passage called Ikerassuaq, or Prince Christian Sound. Transit in the shadow of kilometre-high crags and marvel at glittering glaciers that spit icebergs into the sea.

© Jen Derbach

## 6. Shop (and sup) 'til you drop in Greenland's cosmopolitan capital, Nuuk

Greenland's capital, Nuuk, bridges old and new. The charming harbour pays homage to colonial Denmark (note the 170-year-old Our Saviour's Church and the towering statue of missionary Hans Egede) as well as to modern Greenland (catch the seaside Inuit sculptures and the amazing national museum). Downtown are chic boutiques and coffeeshops, but also the distinctively Indigenous parliament house and a market where hunters sell sea mammal meat. Shop, eat, stroll the streets, and enjoy big-city living on the world's coolest island.

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## 7. Experience the bucolic farmlands in the fjords of southwest Greenland

Erik the Red called his colony "Greenland" as a sales ploy, enticing potential settlers with notions of a lush oasis. But he wasn't entirely lying. Here, deep in the fjords of southwest Greenland, warmed by tongues of the Gulf Stream, are pastures where crops and livestock thrive. As you'll discover, the farmers and shepherds are no longer Vikings, but rather Inuit, making for a fascinating cultural mashup. Meet the locals, trek their landscape, and marvel at this agricultural haven blooming just kilometres from the Greenlandic icecap.

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## 8. Cross the Arctic Circle in west Greenland's greatest fjord

Sailing up Kangerlussuaq Fjord (Søndre Strømfjord) is a true polar pleasure. A whopping 190 kilometres long but just two klicks wide, this remarkable seaway is flanked all along by frosted peaks and glaciers. En route you'll cross the Arctic Circle—an achievement few travellers can claim. And at the end of it all is humble-but-historic Kangerlussuaq. Once a United States air force base key in fighting the Nazis, it's now Greenland's main international airport. Look for muskoxen, scruffy trees, and several fine souvenir shops around the airport terminal.

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## 9. Bask in the beauty of Brattahlíd, Erik the Red's thousand-year-old estate

The estate of Brattahlíd was the fabled home of Erik the Red and his descendants. In its day it was the seat of power of the Eastern Settlement, which for half a millennium hosted thousands of settlers on as many as five hundred farms. It was also from here that Erik's son, Leif the Lucky, set sail west, becoming the first European to reach Canada. Visit this UNESCO World Heritage Site, explore the reconstructed Norse church and longhouse, and feel history come alive.

© Dennis Minty

## 10. Have a hot time in Reykjavík, a city that's ancient, quaint, and chic

According to lore, Iceland's hip little capital was founded by Ingólfr Arnarson, who liked the steamy local hot springs (Reykjavík means "smoky bay"). Today, more than eleven centuries later, the city boasts dozens of geothermally heated outdoor pools. Spend an extra few days here to take a dip, check out the towering expressionist-style Hallgrímskirkja Church, the placid Tjörnin pond in the city center, or the National Culture House (which preserves the Norse Sagas in their original manuscripts).