

Northwest Greenland



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Dogsled through the dramatic fjords of **Uummannaq** (p193)
- Visit the site of the discovery of the **Qilakitsoq** mummies (p195)
- Traipse around the historic buildings of **Upernavik** (p196)
- Take a trip with a traditional hunter in **Qaanaaq** district (p200)
- Visit the traditional communities of **Siorapaluk** (p201) or **Inglefield Fjord** (p201)



Extreme distance and costs have long kept Northwest Greenland one of the least visited areas of the country, and the ensuing isolation has meant that it remains one of the least developed and least westernised areas of Greenland. It was less than 150 years ago that the last group of Baffin Islanders migrated to this area, and 40 years ago hunting was still the full-time occupation of most locals.

In the far north and in smaller communities many families still depend on hunting as their main source of income, and a ban on hunting and fishing by snowmobile or motorboat means that the dogsled and the kayak are still the primary means of transport for traditional hunters. The authenticity of it all hits you with the smell of dogs, drying fish and stretched skins wafting through the air. However, junk food, alcohol, snowmobiles, mobile phones, speedboats and prefab housing are increasingly encroaching on that traditional way of life.

Gloriously scenic Uummannaq, to the south of the region, is the only area with any kind of tourist industry, and even this means just a trickle of travellers and a few organised tours. Further north, life proceeds at a slower pace, and a successful trip will depend on your ability to make contacts with local people and get access to the vast beauty that lies beyond the towns.

UUMMANNAQ DISTRICT

UUMMANNAQ ISLAND

pop 1350

Fly or sail into Uummannaq (Heart-shaped) on a clear day and you'll be smitten. The towering red gneiss peak that dominates the tiny island lords over the colourful village below, where houses cling precariously to the steep rocky shore and a network of wooden steps plays snakes and ladders with the winding roads.

Uummannaq Island sits at 70°N latitude, 600km north of the Arctic Circle, and it's famed as Greenland's sunniest spot. It is also one of the driest places in the country: mineral-rich desert landscapes dominate the nearby islands, creating a surreal image when set against the surrounding iceberg-littered fjord. Elsewhere in the region are soaring cliffs sweeping down to the sea, home to thousands of nesting sea birds.

In winter, darkness descends for two months, but spring ushers in excellent conditions for dogsledding, and in April the

town hosts the ice golf world championships (www.golfonice.com), where there are icebergs instead of bunkers.

History

Uummannaq has been a seasonally inhabited hunting ground for several millennia and found fame as a whaling district in the 17th century. The first permanent settlement, however, was founded on the Nussuaq Peninsula in 1758 and shifted to the present site in 1763. Over the years it developed into a sealing district and service centre for the mines around outlying Maarmorilik and Qaarsut. Today shrimp-processing and halibut fishing sustain the local economy.

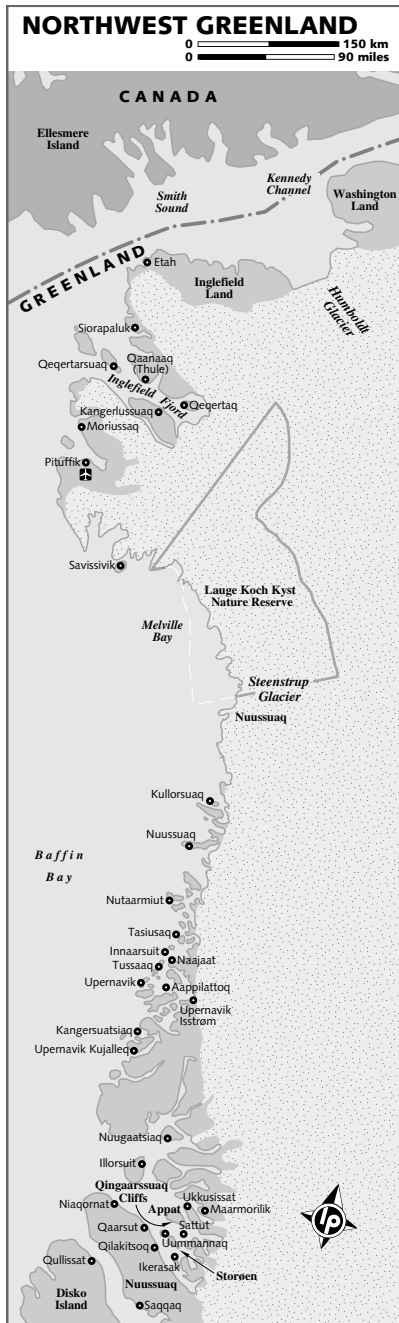
Information

The Tele-Post Center has two ATMs in the lobby.

Arctic Umiq Line (AUL) office (☎ 951246; bktumd@aul.gl; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Police (☎ 951222)

Uummannaq Tourist Service (☎ 951518; uummanaq@icecaphotels.gl) At Hotel Uummannaq; hotel guests and tour groups are their definite priority.



Sights

UUMMANNAQ MUSEUM

The excellent **Uummannaq Museum** (☎ 954461; Alfred Berthelsen-ip Aqq B9B; admission Dkr20; 🕒 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, noon-3pm Sat) is one of Greenland's better town museums and houses a diverse collection featuring displays on the Qilakitsooq mummies (p195), the whaling era, the former marble quarry at Maarmorilik, and Greenlandic history and archaeology. There's also a display on the ill-fated 1930-31 inland ice expedition of German scientist Alfred Wegener, famous for his theory of continental drift.

The northern end of the building was constructed in 1880 as a home for the Royal Greenland Trade Department clerk. It was enlarged nine years later and converted into a hospital, with further additions made in 1921. The nearby yellow houses were built in 1907, one as the vicarage and the other as the doctor's residence.

Before leaving the museum ask for the keys to the church and turf huts down the road. You'll most likely get a guided tour.

CHURCH, TURF HUTS & BLUBBER HOUSE

The town's striking granite **church** (Kussanga-jaaunguaq), consecrated in 1935, seems a fitting creation for the rocky community: the granite was quarried from the wall just north of the church. Look out for the faces carved into the boulder above the church clock and on the font. To get a good view over the harbour and bay, climb up the bell tower.

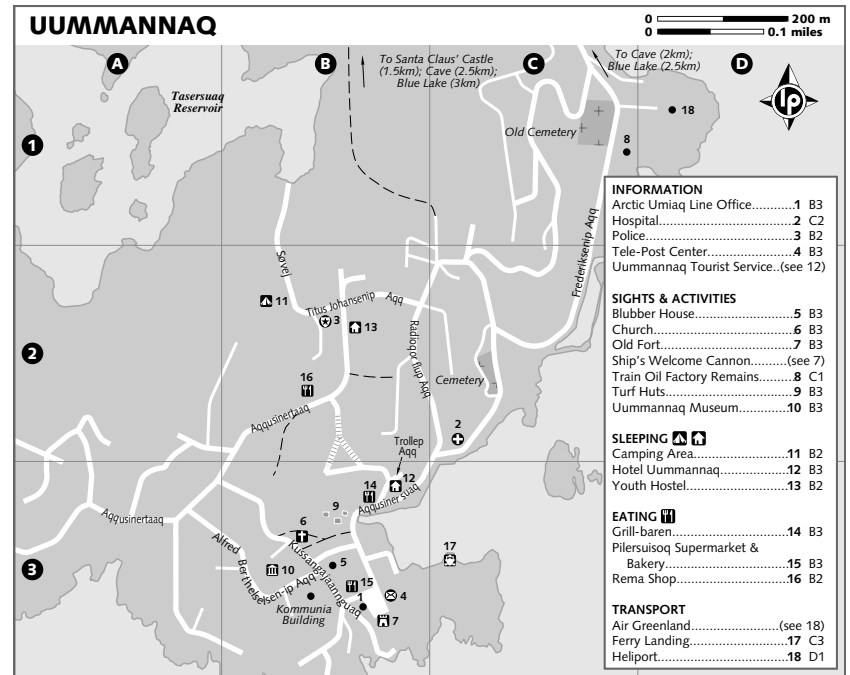
Near the church, three traditional **turf huts** are preserved as national historical buildings. They're surprisingly bright and spacious inside. The largest, constructed in 1925, once housed two families, while another of the same year was inhabited until 1982. The third dates from 1949, when it served as a potato-storage shed.

Opposite the turf huts is the yellow washed stone **Blubber House**, built in 1860 as a whale-oil warehouse. Because of the strong smell, the blubber wasn't actually boiled down there, but at a train oil factory; its scattered **remains** can still be seen about 1km north of the harbour, near the heliport.

Activities

HIKING

Uummannaq sits on a small, precipitous island with limited walking opportunities, but



the 1170m mountain that acts as a backdrop to the town is one of the most unusual and colourful sights in the Arctic. It changes dramatically from moment to moment as the light plays across the stripy granite, swapping dull cloud-wrapped grey for pastel rose and carrot orange. The mountain and the entire island are composed of a geological formation known as basement gneiss – granite that has been metamorphosed by intense pressure and heat into wild black, white and rose swirls and stripes. Several expeditions have made it to the top via the north ridge, but it's a serious rock climb. Most visitors are content to tramp around the base.

The easiest hike is to **Santa Claus' Castle** (see the boxed text p194), a traditional turf hut less than an hour's walk from town. The trail begins from the centre of town near the reservoir and is marked with yellow boulders. From the castle a steep walk takes you to a **cave** known locally as 'the troll's grotto' and on to the small **Blue Lake**. The trail is marked with cairns and red-painted stones but can be difficult to follow. At Blue Lake you are almost at the far end of the island, where

you'll get fantastic views out into the fjord. The return walk should take no more than a leisurely three to four hours.

DOGSLEDDING

Uummannaq is an excellent spot for dogsledding trips with local seal hunters, who guide tourists during the slack hunting period from mid-March to May. The frozen sea provides a level sledding surface between the far-flung villages of the district, and accommodation can be arranged at community halls (Dkr200 per person) or with local families (Dkr275 to Dkr375). Typical costs start at Dkr2000 per person per day for a dogsledding trip, including accommodation (food is extra). However, it's only Dkr800 to Qaarsut and back (five hours). In the sledding season, dogsled races are held around the district and provide a festive atmosphere and a chance to see the professionals at work.

Tours

Friendly local guide **Lucia Ludvigsen** (☎ 951421; luusi_uummannamiu@hotmail.com) organises recommended boat trips to the hunting and fishing

NORTHWEST GREENLAND

NORTHWEST GREENLAND

SANTA CLAUS' CASTLE

Santa's a busy man but he manages to maintain homes all around the Arctic. The Finns have him living in Rovaniemi, Icelanders say he's resident in Vopnafjörður, the Swedes put him somewhere around Kiruna and Alaskans claim he hails from the village of North Pole near Fairbanks. Even the Turks have a claim on him, maintaining that St Nicholas was a native of their fair country.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Danes and Greenlanders cite his official address as Spraglebugten, DK-3961 Uummannaq. His 'royal castle' is in fact a traditional turf hut, built for a Danish children's TV programme, *The Christmas Calendar*. Beware, however, that Santa may not be home, though he kindly leaves his key with the tourist office when he goes on tour. There are several stone graves near the hut and some 19th-century inscriptions on the rocks near the shore.

village of Ikerasak (Dkr500, six hours); the Qilakitsoq Inuit ruins and mummy cave (Dkr400, four hours); and through grand fjords to Maarmorilik (Dkr600, nine hours). Prices are per person based on three people joining the tour. In winter, long-line fishing trips (Dkr250 per hour) and dogsledding tours to local settlements (price by agreement) are possible. She can also arrange an evening visit to a local family to see traditional crafts and try on typical winter fur clothing (Dkr100), and can organise accommodation in local settlements (Dkr275). Another local outfitter, **Karl Markussen** (☎ 23292; kmouffitter@greenet.gl), can arrange similar trips.

Trips by the **Uummannaq Tourist Service** (☎ 951518; uummannaq@icecahotels.gl) all require a minimum number of participants and so can be hard to arrange. You'll get the hard sell about their full-day boat tour (Dkr1100), though. The trip goes through iceberg-filled waters to Qilakitsoq, and then along the Nuussuaq Peninsula, on to the desert landscape of Storøen and the 1000m cliffs at Qingaarsuaq – a breeding ground for thousands of fulmars – before heading home via the small settlement of Sattut. It's pricey but very informative and well worth the cost.

Other tours include a half-day trip to one of the smaller settlements (Dkr550); a full-day boat trip to Great Qarajaq, one of the fastest moving glaciers in the world (Dkr1200); a half-day boat trip to Qilakitsoq (Dkr450); a half-day whale-watching trip (Dkr635); a hike to Santa Claus' Castle (Dkr190); a two-hour midnight boat trip (Dkr350); and an evening glacier tour and barbecue (Dkr700). In winter the tourist service offers half-day dogsled tours (Dkr700) and tours to local settlements (three/four days Dkr9400/10,500). They can also arrange accommodation in local settlements (Dkr375) throughout the year.

If you want to see narwhal (4m-long mottled whales with tusks up to 2m long), you're advised to visit in late October or November.

Sleeping

Youth Hostel (☎ 951518; Aqqusinerataq; dm Dkr325; ☒ mid-Jun–Jul) Basic but expensive dorm accommodation can be had at the makeshift youth hostel near the police station. The place has little character, but there is a kitchen. Bookings should be made through the tourist service.

Hotel Uummannaq (☎ 951518; uummannaq@icecahotels.gl; Trollep Aqq B1342; s/d Dkr850/1150; ☒) Excellent-quality but fairly basic modern rooms are available at the hotel, but you've no guarantee you'll get one with a view or anything other than mediocre service. The hotel restaurant (mains Dkr148 to Dkr168) is about the only place to eat in town, but outside the peak season it only offers the two-course menu of the day (Dkr168). If you're staying at the hotel the full-board option (Dkr250 extra) is a good deal.

The island is made of solid rock, but 50m west of the reservoir, near the police station, there are a few level, grassy spots suitable for camping. There are also acceptable sites around Santa Claus' Castle.

The tourist office can arrange B&B accommodation (Dkr375) and fully equipped house or apartment rental (single/double Dkr550/775). You can stay in the town's traditional turf huts (Dkr250) by contacting the museum in advance.

Eating

Lucia Ludvigsen (☎ 951421; meals Dkr100) To sample some typical Greenlandic food, contact

this local guide the day before and you can savour seal, whale, caribou, halibut or other local fish cooked in the traditional way at a typical family home.

You'll find groceries and a good bakery at the Pilersuisoq supermarket and a more limited selection at Rema. **Grill-baren** (Aqqusinerataq B799A; meals Dkr40-55) has burgers, fries and hot dogs.

Getting There & Away

To get to any of the district's seven villages or Kuusuup Nuua (for the trek to Saqqaq, see p180), you'll need to fly (Dkr445), charter a boat (Dkr1800 per hour) or organise a tour. The most affordable charters are offered by Lucia Ludvigsen (see Tours, p193).

AIR

Air Greenland (☎ 951289; Frederiksenip Aqq B1515), which is based at the heliport, flies to Ilulissat (Dkr1572, 1½ hours) and on to Kangerlussuaq (Dkr2847, 2½ hours) twice weekly via Qaarsut (Dkr526, 10 minutes). Helicopter flights run on weekdays to the district villages from Uummannaq (Dkr445) and daily except Wednesday and Sunday to Qaarsut (Dkr445).

BOAT

AUL ferries serve Uummannaq once weekly on their run from Nuuk (Dkr2145, 60 hours) via Ilulissat (Dkr740, 16 hours). The trip to Upernavik costs Dkr800 (15 hours), but the ferry arrives in the middle of the night. For information on midnight culture tours of Upernavik see p198.

AROUND UUMMANNAQ

Qaarsut

pop 240

Tiny, untouched and rarely visited, Qaarsut sits in a broad, level valley on the Nuussuaq Peninsula, 21km west of Uummannaq. All flights to Uummannaq include a transfer to helicopter in Qaarsut, but few visitors make it outside the airport terminal. This is a shame, as the traditional village gives a good insight into life in small northern Greenland settlements without requiring visitors to cough up for an expensive side trip.

A coal mine operated in Qaarsut until 1924, but today the village subsists on seal hunting and fishing. Local women have formed a small **cooperative** (☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) where they sew sealskin into traditional boots, gloves and coats.

QILAKITSOQ

Sometime in the late 15th century a group of eight Inuit were buried with some care in the now abandoned village of Qilakitsoq (Where the Sky is Low) near Uummannaq. As was customary, they were dressed in their winter clothes for the long, cold journey to the land of the dead and were provided with the tools needed to survive in the afterlife. There was nothing unusual about their burial except that the grave was placed high above the village away from the others and, thanks to their location, the bodies were unintentionally preserved – dry air, low ground temperature and an overhanging rock protected the graves from wind, water, sunlight and snow.

Although the older villagers at Uummannaq claimed they knew of the existence of the grave for years, it was two ptarmigan hunters, Hans and Jokum Grønvald, who rediscovered the site in 1972, photographed it and reported their find to government authorities. It was 1977, when Claus Andreasen took over the director's post at Greenland's National Museum, before any attention was paid to the site, but then Qilakitsoq was catapulted to international fame. The eight bodies and their clothing were almost perfectly preserved and were by far the most significant archaeological find in the Arctic. There were six adults in the group, all women; one of them had a brain tumour. With them were a six-month-old baby, and a four-year-old boy who apparently had Down's syndrome. In February 1985 *National Geographic* did a cover story on the mummies and the subsequent research, and suddenly people everywhere were captivated by the haunting face of the six-month-old boy who had lived and died in 15th-century Greenland.

You can see several of the mummies on display at the National Museum in Nuuk (see p147) and the tourist office in Uummannaq sells the booklet *Qilakitsoq – 15th Century Greenlandic Mummies*. You can visit the abandoned village and the site of the find from Uummannaq. Ruins of houses from several different periods are visible, and there are 33 other graves, some with visible skulls and bones inside.

SHIP'S WELCOME

It's an Uummannaq tradition to heartily welcome the first ship to sail into the harbour each spring. Lookouts are posted on Nasiffik hill, west of town, and when they call out 'Umiarssuaq!' (Ship!) the entire village gathers on the hill to await the arrival. From the fort hill, south of the harbour, three old cannons are fired in welcome not only to the ship but also to springtime. The cannons are fired again for the departure of the season's last ship, but with considerably less fanfare.

B&B (Dkr275-375) can be arranged in Uummannaq and there's a Pilersuisoq shop, for supplies.

Air Greenland (☎ 957699) flies helicopters daily except Wednesday and Sunday to and from Uummannaq (Dkr545). Lucia Ludvigsen and the Uummannaq Tourist Service organise charter trips for visits to Qarsut's sandy beach and for climbing or hiking around the distinct cone-shaped peak, Qilertinnuit (1977m).

UPERNAVIK DISTRICT

UPERNAVIK TOWN

pop 1200

Historic Upernavik sits on one of a series of tiny islands facing the open sea. It's a scruffy little place, but it's also home to a host of historic buildings and one of the country's most fascinating museums. Boat trips to the surrounding areas offer views of the inland ice reaching down to the sea, fantastic bird cliffs and a variety of archaeological sites.

The town is the most northerly ferry terminal in Greenland and nearly 800km north of the Arctic Circle. Even though the sun does not set from mid-May to early August, average summer temperatures still hover at a chilly 5°C.

History

All known Greenlandic cultures must have migrated though the Upernavik area to reach southern Greenland, and the district is littered with archaeological sites. In 1772 Upernavik town was founded, but the colony was abandoned several times by the Danes.

In 1826 trade was firmly established and by 1833 a mission had also been founded. In the early 1980s fishing took off, and despite its northerly location the town is now much more a fishing than a hunting society. To experience a more traditional lifestyle you need to travel to the smaller settlements, which give a real glimpse of life in times past.

Information

Hospital (☎ 961211)

Police (☎ 961222)

Tele-Post Center (Napparsamiuup Aqq B656) There's an ATM inside this post office, but it does not accept American Express cards.

Tourist office (☎ 961700; turist@greenet.gl; Niuertup Ottup Aqq B-12; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) In the museum building.

Sights

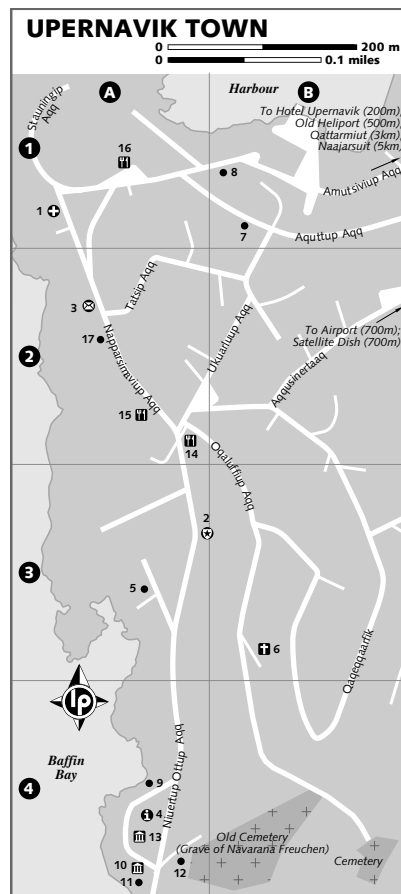
UPERNAVIK HISTORICAL DISTRICT

The entire historical district of the village has been designated a conservation area. Upernavik's **museum** (☎ 961085; www.iserit.greenet.gl/inussuk; Niuertup Ottup Aqq B-12; admission Dkr25; ☎ 2-4pm Tue-Fri, 2-5pm Sun) is Greenland's oldest, and the collection is housed in a series of beautifully restored buildings.

The **colony manager's former home**, brought to the site in 1831 from near Aasiaat, is host to a late-13th-century rune stone found in 1824, bearing evidence of a visit to the district by three Norse hunters. There's also a collection of images from Greenland mythology by Danish artist Gitz Johansen (1897-1977), carved *tupilaks* (figures traditionally used by Greenlandic shamans), and finds from local archaeological sites.

The **old shop**, built in 1864, holds a fascinating original *qajaq* ensemble (see p86) complete with a harpoon, a throwing stick, a bird skewer, a knife and a seal-stomach float (to prevent seals diving after being hit or sinking after being killed). You'll also see an ethnographic collection including tools for hunting, household implements, traditional costumes and exhibits on traditional hunting and fishing methods.

In the **old church**, built in 1839, you can see the former meeting rooms of the district council. Greenlandic furniture is on display, as well as chandeliers, ashtrays and match holders made from brass salvaged from a 1921 shipwreck. The council guest book contains the signatures and drawings



of numerous Arctic explorers and scientists. It was used as the guest book at the museum after the council disbanded in 1950.

Other historic buildings in the area (but closed to the public) include the **old rectory** (1863), the **old school** (1911) and the **old bakery and cooperage** (1848), which is now used as a studio for visiting artists-in-residence. South of the centre, you can see the **Blubber House**, which dates from 1912. Down by the harbour are the **historic KNI office**, built in 1936, and the **Jorgensen Warehouse**, which was in use from 1929.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The new **church**, which dates from 1926, was renovated in 1990. Take a look at the crucifix,

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which was taken from the old church (now the museum), and the pulpit and kneeling altar, which are decorated with pearl and embroidered sealskin. The *Madonna and Child* altarpiece was made by Danish artist Mathias Ferslov Dalager (1770-1842).

Due to the permanently frozen ground, the graves in Upernavik's **cemetery** are raised and covered with rock and concrete. Incredible floral memorials adorn the graves, and downhill from the main cemetery you'll find the grave of Navaranak Freuchen, the wife of Peter Freuchen; she died in 1921 on the fifth Thule expedition with polar explorer Knud Rasmussen (see p174).

Hiking

Tiny Upernavik Island doesn't offer the most challenging terrain for hiking. However, even a short hike to the satellite dish or the airport terminal will give you views of surrounding islands, the 130m-high Umiasuussuk (Women's Boat Mountain) to the east, and the icefjord and inland ice to the northeast.

For a longer hike, start at the old heliport and follow the coast north for about 2km until you hit a gashlike valley that slices across the island. Rather than taking the steep descent into the valley, follow it across to the far side of the island, where you'll get an overview of the extensive ruins of **Qattarmiut village** and a couple of nice lakes. The slope to the valley floor is much more gentle on this side. The steep northern slopes of the valley reveal some brilliantly coloured mineral deposits.

From here you can either follow the watterpipes from the lake back to the airport or head to **Naajarsuit**, the northern tip of the island, where you'll find an ancient landscape of twisting bands of folded granite, feldspar and gneiss inlaid with tiny garnets. There are some very steep slopes of loose rock down to the sea at this end of the island, so be wary about your footing.

A leisurely walk to Qattarmiut and back will take about two hours; add another hour or so if you plan to go to Naajarsuit.

Tours

Organised tourism in Upernavik is still in its infancy, and your best bet is to contact the tourist office in advance. It can help put you in contact with local hunters who may be able to take you on boat trips during the summer months. The average cost is Dkr300 per hour for the whole boat.

On a half-day or full-day trip you can visit the Upernavik Isstrøm (Upernavik Icefjord), where the inland ice meets the sea and breaks off into some of the largest icebergs in the northern hemisphere. Unlike at the icefjord at Ilulissat, you can travel to the face of the glacier and see it calve. Longer trips can also take in the bird cliffs at Apparsuit, one of the world's largest bird colonies. There you can see thousands of fulmars and, at other locations nearby, guillemots, great northern divers, puffins and cormorants.

Three-hour archaeological trips are also possible, guided by Eskimologist Bo Albrechtsen, leader of Upernavik museum. A typical trip will visit two sites where evidence of different eras of the Thule culture can be found (Dkr1200 per boat).

Keen fishers may be interested in a trip to sheltered Eqallugaasuit (Sea Trout Bay), for fishing (in July and August) and to see trees of up to 1.5m, a rarity at this northern latitude.

The Upernavik district is also good for kayaking, and although you cannot rent kayaks the tourist office is happy to give advice on routes, safety and logistics.

In winter the tourist office organises dog-sledding tours in the district. For a three-hour trip you'll pay about Dkr500; a full-day tour will cost Dkr1200. Ice conditions have been bad in recent years, so you'd be well advised to contact the tourist office in advance if you'd like to plan a longer trip.

Hotel Upernavik (see Sleeping & Eating, following) owns a three-berth boat that can be chartered for trips or tours (prices by arrangement).

Sleeping & Eating

The hills and valleys north of town offer lots of free scenic camp sites, but flat areas can be quite soggy. Ask at the tourist office for information on the best locations.

The tourist office can arrange B&B accommodation (Dkr300) in private homes, but you must book in advance. It's a good way of meeting a local family and getting an insight into life in the town. Payment should be made at the tourist office.

Hotel Upernavik (☎ 962279; www.hotel-upernavik.gl; Mittarfup Aqq B748; s/d Dkr895/1295; ☒) You'll find modern but fairly basic, comfortable rooms at this small hotel by the harbour. The price includes breakfast and pick-up at the airport. There's a kitchen for guests' use, and the restaurant serves decent meals for Dkr75, though it has all the character of a hospital canteen and only opens when there are guests around. There's live local music in the bar downstairs every weekend (Dkr20 to Dkr40). Note that you can't pay by credit card here.

Grill-baren (Ukuarlup Aqq; meals Dkr25-45; ☎ 10am-10pm) The only other option for food in town, the grill-bar serves a good variety of fast food from burgers and kebabs to pizzas and hot dogs. The building is unmarked, but you'll recognise the smell and the gaggle of teenagers hanging around outside.

Other eating options are the **Pilersuisoq supermarket and bakery** (Umiarsualivup Aqq B143) and LT's kiosk, which stays open after hours and on weekends and sells hot dogs and chips for Dkr35.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Greenland (☎ 961148) has three weekly flights between Ilulissat (Dkr3286) and Upernavik and on to Qaanaaq (Dkr1226, 1¾ hours). Helicopters fly to each of the district settlements twice a week (Dkr525).

BOAT

AUL (☎ 961044; bktjuv@aul.gl; Napparsimaviup Aqq B676) runs ferries once weekly from Nuuk (Dkr275, 75 hours) to Upernavik from mid-June to mid-August, calling at Ummannaq

(Dkr800, 15 hours), Ilulissat (Dkr1150, 20 hours) and Sisimiut (Dkr1970, 54 hours). Although the ferry arrives in the middle of the night and only has a short stop, the tourist office runs a 'Culture Night' (Dkr100) for passengers. A guide will meet you at the harbour and show you the town and the museum before you return to the ship in time to sail south. Contact the tourist office in advance to let them know you'd like to take part.

With lots of time and money, you can charter a boat up through icy Melville Bay to Savissivik and Qaanaaq. Ask the tourist office for information.

AROUND UPERNAVIK TOWN

Although Upernavik district is only slightly smaller than Great Britain, it has just 2965 inhabitants. Of the 10 outlying settlements, those without fish-processing plants (Kangersuatsiaq, Nuussuaq and Upernavik Kujalleq) remain the most traditional and can make fascinating destinations for travellers. In these villages life still revolves around the seal and polar-bear hunt. In spring and autumn respectively, narwhal and belugas are frequent visitors, and both are still hunted from kayaks at the northern end of the district in Melville Bay.

The northern part of Upernavik district has very different vegetation from the southern part; it has only sparse ground cover and some very scenic but barren mountains. The most northerly and largest settlement of the district, **Kullorsuaq** (The Devil's Thumb), at the southern end of Melville Bay and 300km from Upernavik, has a striking rock pinnacle rising from the town, just like a thumb.

In the south the fishing village of **Aappilattoq** is located at the mouth of Upernavik Isstrøm, and boat trips in the area visit the calving glacier.

For a unique perspective on village life you can visit the smaller settlements and stay overnight. The tourist office in Upernavik can help arrange accommodation at local service houses (community washing facilities) and make contact with hunters in the settlements who could take you on local tours. Although it is possible to charter boats to most settlements, the heavily subsidised Air Greenland helicopter fares (Dkr525) are good value for once. A flat-fare system

operates, and so you pay the same cost to travel to Aappilattoq, just 23km away, as you do to Kullorsuaq, 300km away.

QAANAQ (THULE) DISTRICT

Ultima Thule. Even the name sounds exotic. Fourth-century geographer Pytheas coined the term 'the furthest north', and for centuries afterwards Europeans had no idea what this enigmatic area looked like. But long before they postulated on its appearance the first waves of Inuit migration were occurring from the west, and this gateway to Greenland remained open for centuries: the last migration took place only 130 years ago. Today the modern Thule Inuit refer to themselves not just as Inuit, but Inughuit (pronounced inu'hhui'), the 'great people'.

The vast Qaanaaq district is among the northernmost inhabited places on earth. It's also one of the least populated, with only about 1000 people living in its 297,000 sq km. Life here is the closest you'll find to the traditional Inuit lifestyle: hunting is still the main source of income, and restrictions on the use of snowmobiles and motor boats for hunting mean that dogsleds, kayaks and harpoons remain in daily use. However, the area has not stood still, and prefab housing, junk food, alcohol and mobile phones are also part of everyday life.

The area is also the last bastion of the US military in Greenland, and the US base at Pituffik remains a thorny issue for all politicians and an open sore for the local people (see p200).

Visits to Qaanaaq are far from cheap but afford a glimpse of a lifestyle that has changed very little in modern times. Here, many of the traditions of the past are held as firmly as they were thousands of years ago. If you're merely interested in attaining a new 'furthest north', parts of Norway's Svalbard (p324) are farther north and cheaper to visit.

QAANAQ TOWN (THULE)

pop 650

On 17 February each year the first sunrise turns the skies of Qaanaaq pink, orange and red after a prolonged stint of polar night.

PLUTONIUM PERIL IN PITUFFIK

The Thule Air Base is a serious bone of contention in international relations between Greenland, Denmark and the USA. The greatest controversy involves the US B-52 bomber that crashed near Thule in January 1968 and was later revealed to have been carrying four hydrogen bombs with nuclear detonation devices.

A two-month clean-up operation followed; of the 1000 people who worked on it, over 100 have since died, half of them from cancer. In 1988, health problems prompted 166 workers to file a joint complaint, but it took until 1995 before it was even confirmed that the plane did indeed carry 6kg of plutonium. The Danish government paid US\$9000 tax-free compensation to each of the 1500 Danish and Greenlandic workers and residents of the base area. However, in August 2000 it was revealed that only three hydrogen bombs were recovered – meaning that the fourth is still in Greenland. Both the Americans and Danes have admitted that between 500g and 1.8kg of plutonium was never recovered. The results of environmental-impact studies in the area remain secret.

Meanwhile, local hunters complain of finding muskoxen with deformed hooves and seals with no hair. This, coupled with continued ill-feeling over the forced relocation of their community, means that many Greenlanders feel strongly that the base should be closed down. However, the lease was renewed in 2004, and the USA is planning to upgrade the base as part of its controversial Star Wars national missile defence system, saying it is of strategic importance.

For the local Inuit the campaign to allow them to return to their traditional territory continues. In 2003 the Danish Supreme Court ruled that the people of Qaanaaq did not have the right to return to their original home. They have now taken their case to the European Court of Human Rights, where they hope to see the issue resolved by 2006.

This far north, life runs on a different beat, and the small community of Qaanaaq has attracted explorers and adventurers for hundreds of years. Knud Rasmussen established his expedition base here, and Robert Peary came back repeatedly until he claimed to have reached the North Pole in 1909, with the assistance of many local hunters. Although the town has few specific attractions, the surrounding landscape, traditional lifestyle and the possibility for visits to outlying settlements make it a worthwhile trip for the modern adventurer.

Qaanaaq was moved 200km north to its present location in 1953 after being displaced by the expanding US airbase at Pituffik.

Information

There's nowhere to change money in town, but the general store accepts Visa, MasterCard, Eurocard and Dankort.

Police (☎ 971022)

Post Greenland (☎ 971044)

Tourist office (☎ 971473; www.turistqaanaaq.gl;

☎ 11am-1pm Mon-Fri)

Sights

A good starting point for any tour of the area is Qaanaaq's **museum** (☎ 971126; admission

free; ☎ 1-3pm Sun), housed in the former home of famed polar explorer Knud Rasmussen (see p174). Displays include items relating to his work, archaeological finds from around the district, and tools and clothing used by the Inuit.

You can see busts of the famous Minik (see p80) and his family in the assembly hall in the Kommunia.

Activities

In April and May dogsledding is the most popular local activity, but cross-country skiing trips are also possible. During summer, boat trips, fishing and hiking are popular, and the inland ice is only a two- to three-hour hike away.

Tours

Tours can be arranged through the tourist office, Hotel Qaanaaq (see opposite) or outfitter **Finn Hansen** (☎ 971148; finnhansen@greenet.gl). Prices have been standardised and range between Dkr1000 and Dkr1400 per day. On multiday trips, overnight stays may be in local houses at a settlement, in a hunters' hut, or in a tent.

A two- to three-hour dogsledding trip will take you close to huge icebergs frozen into

the sea and is a great way to decide whether to participate in a longer trip and to try out skin clothing. A full-day trip goes to the large abandoned island of Qeqertarsuaq (Herbert Island). Seals are hunted here during winter and spring, and you may see narwhal in late spring. Nearby islands are home to millions of little auks (small round diving birds), who also arrive in late spring.

Longer trips can be made to settlements around Qaanaaq or to hunting grounds. It is a full-day trip to Siorapaluk (see below), and one-week trips are available to Moriusaq and Savissivik, tiny settlements south of Qaanaaq that are totally dependent on hunting from the sea. Guides will hunt on these trips if the opportunity arises, and if they need to feed their dogs. Depending on ice conditions, a route partially over the ice-cap may be taken.

Trips to Etah to see muskoxen, reindeer, and archaeological remains are also possible.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office rents a small two-bed **cabin** (per person Dkr200) with kitchen, shower and toilet. Accommodation in private homes (Dkr200 to Dkr300) and rentals of other rooms can also be arranged, both in Qaanaaq and in smaller settlements.

The basic **Hotel Qaanaaq** (☎ 971234; hansje@greenet.gl; s/d Dkr575) has a handful of simple rooms with shared bathroom but can arrange accommodation elsewhere if it happens to be fully booked. The restaurant serves lunch for Dkr45 and dinner for Dkr85.

The Pilersuisoq supermarket has a bakery and hot-dog counter and sells pretty much anything you might need. Stocks can get low in late spring and early summer before new supplies arrive by ship.

Shopping

Artistic talent runs especially high in Qaanaaq and it's an excellent place to look for traditional Inuit art. **Ultima Thule** (☎ 971473) markets genuine and original artwork and crafts typical of the district.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Greenland has flights every Tuesday and Thursday between Qaanaaq and Ilulisat (Dkr4296, 3¼ hours) via Upernavik (Dkr1226, 1¼ hours).

Siorapaluk, Moriusaq and Savissivik are accessible by helicopter (Dkr525 one way).

BOAT

From Qaanaaq, you can charter private boats in the summer or dogsleds in the spring to the other Qaanaaq district villages of Savissivik, Siorapaluk, Qeqertaq and Moriusaq. Expect to pay about Dkr1000 to Dkr1400 per day.

You can also charter boats to Upernavik from Qaanaaq, but it's very expensive. Quark Expeditions (see p65) runs cruises that call at Qaanaaq.

AROUND QAANAAQ TOWN Inglefield Fjord

The vast Inglefield Fjord east of Qaanaaq has several active glaciers, which calve huge icebergs during the summer, and there are many sites of Thule-culture dugout houses. At the head of the fjord is Qeqertaq, a small village home to about 10 families. Motorboats are not permitted in the area, and restrictions on all travel are enforced in summer months, when the waters become a sanctuary for breeding narwhal. The narwhal are the main prey for local hunters, who use traditional kayaks and harpoons. The area around Qaanaaq is the only place in the world where the traditional skill of hunting narwhal by kayak and harpoon is still alive.

Contact the tourist office well in advance if you would like to visit either Inglefield or Qeqertarsuaq to see narwhal. You will need a lot of luck to catch sight of these beautiful creatures if you're travelling in any kind of motorboat, as the sound frightens them into a deep dive.

SIORAPALUK

pop 90

Siorapaluk is the northernmost natural settlement in the world (Longyearbyen and Ny Ålesund in Norway's Svalbard began as coal-mining centres, and Alert on Canada's Ellesmere Island is a military post), and it remains a bastion of tradition. Most of Siorapaluk's residents still survive by fishing for halibut and hunting seals, narwhal, walrus, birds and polar bears, and in summer many people return to traditional hunting camps in the fjords with their families.

Two glaciers pour down into the head of the fjord, and the cliffs around the town are home to millions of little auks (diving birds) that migrate here to breed. The hills above the settlement abound in Arctic hare and Arctic fox, and north of Siorapaluk there are caribou and muskox hunting grounds as well as many archaeological sites.

The town has a church, school, general store and skin workshop, and has electricity

but no running water. A guesthouse may be rented, or accommodation in private homes can be arranged through the tourist office in Qaanaaq (Dkr200 to Dkr300 per person).

You can reach Siorapaluk from Qaanaaq by dogsled, private boat or helicopter (Dkr525). The dogsled trip between Qaanaaq and Siorapaluk is about 60km and takes six to eight hours. Depending on the ice conditions, it's sometimes possible to dogsled well into June.