

Gateway to Greenland & the Faeroes

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For many visitors Iceland provides a stepping stone to the wild, mysterious lands of Greenland and the Faeroes. Both are easily accessible and, although the journey may poke a hole in your wallet, it's more cost effective than planning a separate trip, especially since you've already come this far. Air Iceland's regular summer flights to Kulusuk, Constable Point, Nuuk, Ilulissat and Narsarsuaq make it easy to tag on a trip to Greenland, while regular flights (or extended ferry layovers) to the Faeroes allow you to easily discover these little-visited islands once used as a stopping point for Viking explorers.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

GREENLAND

Iceland's main domestic carrier, **Air Iceland** (Flugfélag Íslands; ☎ in Iceland 570 3030; www.airiceland.is), flies from the domestic airport in downtown Reykjavík (REK) to a variety of destinations in Greenland, including Kulusuk (two hours, Monday to Saturday May to mid-September), Constable Point (two hours, once or twice weekly), Narsarsuaq (three hours, twice weekly late May to mid-September), Nuuk (three hours, four times weekly June to August, twice weekly May and early September) and Ilulissat (three hours 15 minutes, twice weekly mid-June to August). Due to the immense popularity of these Greenland tours, the roster of flights and destinations continues to grow with each passing season.

Air Greenland (☎ 299 34 34 34; www.airgreenland.com) code-shares with Air Iceland, offering continuing helicopter service on the east coast from Kulusuk and Constable Point

to the secluded settlements of Ammassalik and Ittoqqortoormiit respectively. A network of intra-Greenland flights links an assortment of additional west-coast destinations like tangled shoestrings. There are also direct flights from Nuuk and Sisimiut to Kulusuk and Narsarsuaq. See website for more details.

FAEROES

In summer, Air Iceland code-shares with the Faeroese airline **Atlantic Airways** (☎ 298 34 10 00; www.atlantic.fo), offering direct service from the domestic airport in downtown Reykjavík (REK) to Vágur (FAE) in the Faeroes.

In the warmer months (between 30 June and 18 September) there are two or three flights a week – there's always a Friday flight and the other flight(s) run on weekdays. During the off-season (from 29 March to 29 June, and 19 September to 24 October) there is a flight on Monday and Friday. With a bit of planning, you can nab a one-way ticket for Dkr495 (Ikr12,000), which is comparable to Iceland's domestic airfares.

Atlantic Airways also offers air service to London (Stansted), Stavanger, Copenhagen, Aalborg and Billund, making the Faeroes an intriguing layover option if you are flying between Iceland and any of these destinations.

Due to the jagged topography and thick tufts of fog, it is sometimes difficult to land at Vágur. If the plane cannot land, it will be rerouted to Norway or back to Iceland where you'll spend the night (paid for by the airline, of course) and try again the following day. Inclement weather can also delay take-offs, so plan accordingly if you have travel connections. This is usually only an inconvenience in July.

Sea

Smyril Line (☎ 298 34 59 00; www.smyril-line.com) car ferries link Iceland to Denmark, stopping at Tórshavn in the Faeroes along the way. See p336 for details.

TOURS

To get the most out of a short trip to Greenland you may wish to join an organised tour. If you're visiting Greenland from Iceland, then consider joining one of the well-liked Air Iceland tours. A popular option is the day trip to Kulusuk (see the boxed text, below); however, Greenland's ultimate beauty unfurls during lengthier stays. Air Iceland's longer-stay trips include an eight-day fishing trip to Kuussuaq, a five-day stay in Nuuk, the capital, and a three-day culture-focused visit to Ammassalik, where first contact with the local Inuit was made a mere 95 years ago.

Greenland's tourism board has a hands-on website featuring a detailed list of the preferred tour operators and travel agencies offering trips through the island. Check out www.greenland.com/content/english/press_agents/greenland_travel_planner/travel_agencies for regularly updated details — operators are sorted by country. The website also features a handy travel planner for those who prefer to design their own journey. This is starting to become a viable option as the local tourism infrastructure continues to develop.

Like Greenland, the Faeroes tourism website (www.visitfaeroeislands.com) has a drop-down list of accredited tour operators and cruises sorted by nation. The leading travel agency in the Faeroes is **GreenGate Incoming** (☎ 298 35 05 20; www.greengate.fo; Jónas Broncksgøta 35, FO-100 Tórshavn). All-inclusive package trips are

widely available, however the Faeroes' small size makes it quite easy to base yourself in Tórshavn and arrange a variety of day trips (see opposite for ideas).

GREENLAND

As remote, wild and exotic as Iceland may seem to first-time visitors, it's positively pedestrian when compared to the splendours of Greenland. Nothing quite prepares you for the raw power of nature and the majestic scenery of this incredible place. Four times the size of France but with a population of just 57,600, it's a truly wild and humbling country. The sheer vastness of the ice cap, the size of the icebergs, the tenacity of the wildlife and the stoic attitude of the wonderful people will stay with you for life.

Travel here requires a combination of plane and helicopter flights and ferries through iceberg-strewn bays. Once at your destination you can choose to hike, ski, dog sled or kayak around the local area to see the towering peaks on the east coast, the gargantuan icebergs in Disko Bay or the surprisingly green fields of the south. Independent travel is easy to arrange, but there are plenty of all-inclusive packages if you'd rather let someone else do the planning.

For more information on Greenland, contact **Greenland Tourism** (www.greenland.com); Nuuk (☎ 299 34 28 20; PO Box 1615 DK-3900 Nuuk); Copenhagen (☎ 45 3283 3880; PO Box 1139, Strandgade 91, DK-1010 Copenhagen).

A DAY IN GREENLAND

A convenient halfway-point between Europe and North America, Reykjavík has developed quite the reputation as a trendy layover destination. Tourists who are tight on time tend to use the capital as a base for scenic day trips. Glacial lagoons, geysers, lava fields and windswept islands can be tackled before nightfall, but few people realise that a trip to Greenland can easily fit into the itinerary. In summer, Air Iceland offers regular tours to the faraway community of Kulusuk in east Greenland. Hidden in an endless tapestry of icy whites and cool blues, Kulusuk represents the ultimate frontier.

With only 360 inhabitants (and no flushing toilets), the little village slowly reveals itself to day-trippers during the stunning walk over from the airport. The distant mirage of brightly coloured wood-box houses suddenly becomes a reality as cameras click furiously. Although the traditional Greenlandic drum-dance demo is a tad kitsch, the rest of the experience is like one giant dream sequence. At the end of the tour you have the option of returning to the airport by sea or by land. The boat ride (an extra €25) puts you face-to-face with the popcorn-like ice chunks floating in the bay, while the hike gives visitors one last chance to take in the dramatic scenery of snow-strewn crags.

Prices start at €428 – OK, so it's pricey, but how many people can say that they have a 'Kalaallit Nunaat' stamp in their passport?

See p319 for more details.

FAEROE FORAY

Biweekly flights and ferries give Arctic adventurers three or four days to explore these truly magical islands. A half-week is just enough time to check the following highlights off your to-do list:

- **Tórshavn** The first thing you'll notice are the striking turf roofs adorning almost every bright-coloured building in the marina. The quaintness is palpable, yet you still know that you're in a capital. Although light on sights, Tórshavn makes a great base if you're planning a series of day trips. While mild summer evenings illicit thoughts of Mediterranean fishing villages or Caribbean outposts, the faint howl of distant winds confirms that the Faeroes are indeed children of the Arctic.
- **Gjógv** Perhaps the most adorable village in the entire world, Gjógv (jaykf) may be hard to pronounce, but it's oh-so easy to love. Tiny turf-roofed cottages sit clustered around a naturally formed harbour tucked within a gorge, which looks as though a lightning bolt has ripped straight through the terrain creating a sheltered cove. There's good hiking here, and an adorable inn should you want to spend the night.
- **Mykines** Marking the western limits of the island chain, Mykines (*mee-chi-ness*) is where the local landscapes come to a dramatic climax – innumerable bird colonies (puffins!), haunting basalt sea-stacks and silent solitary cliffs. Although considered quite remote by Faeroese standards (there are only 11 inhabitants!), the island is connected to Vágur by helicopter and ferry services. It's well worth visiting. Just make sure you plan your visit at the beginning of your trip – harsh winds and dense fog can delay your return.
- **Vestmanna Cliffs** You'll find plenty of bird cliffs in Iceland and the Faeroes, but these special crags are so visually striking that visitors often fail to notice the legions of swooping avians. In summer, there are three boat trips per day (DKr225, 2½ hours) departing from the village of Vestmanna, in northern Streymoy.
- **Hestir** Like a resting horse pausing for a quenching sip of seawater, little Hestir rears just south of Streymoy. The island is best known for its hollow grottoes carved into the cliffs by the pounding waves. On Thursday evenings you can take a boat into the caves and listen to soothing saxophone jazz as it bounces off the stone walls. See www.tutl.com for more info.

FAEROES

At the end of 2007, National Geographic proclaimed the Faeroes as the most 'authentic and unspoilt' island destination in the entire world – we were not surprised. Flung out into the North Atlantic, halfway between Norway and Iceland, these enchanting islets seem almost to lie on the edge of the earth, and their remote location and low profile lend them a genuine air of mystery.

In many ways the fiercely independent residents of these 18 wind-scoured islands remain closer to their Viking roots than any of their neighbours. Their ancestors can be traced back to the first seafaring explorers who set out from southern Norway in the 9th century and claimed Orkney, the Shetland Islands, Iceland and Greenland – and maybe even America. Today most people earn a living from farm-

ing or fishing, and the laid-back atmosphere of the cosy villages is more reminiscent of the Scottish islands than Iceland. The landscape, too, resembles the Scottish highlands, with Munro-like peaks and towering grass-topped sea cliffs, mobbed by nesting sea birds.

These marvellous islands can easily be tackled on a three-day layover between flights or ferries (see the boxed text, above). Boats dock in central Tórshavn, the capital, while planes land on Vágur, an island further west. A brilliant network of paved roads, tunnels and car ferries link the various islands, providing access to remote fjord-side villages and humbling ocean landscapes.

For more information on the Faeroes, contact the **Faero Islands Tourist Board** (☎ 298 30 61 00; www.visitfaeroislands.com; Bryggjubakka 12, FO-110 Tórshavn, Faeroe Islands), or see www.faroeislands.com.

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