

TRAVEL

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Would I like the fried whale or the home-smoked whale? Hmmm, so many difficult choices in life. Maybe just a salad? But there doesn't seem to be a salad option. And when in Greenland ... etc.

I've decided to throw myself into this trip, culturally speaking. Get involved. Since stepping off the plane I've been rubbing noses with everyone I meet. With mixed reactions, it has to be said – generally a slap around the face, although one guy threatened me with his harpoon. That's the famous Greenlandic sense of humour, Inuit? I think they appreciate me making the effort, really.

I go for both – smoked is very thinly sliced, and leathery, with something distinctly ocean about it – carpaccio of old sea-boof? Fried is more like liver, also chewy and very meaty, again unmistakably from the sea. Both are absolutely delicious. With a bellyful of whale, I retire to my igloo.

I've always wanted to visit Greenland. On the atlas it's a huge icicle hanging down from the Arctic. It turns out it's not all ice; there's a thin, inhabitable crust round the outside, with unpronounceable names like such as Illoqqortoormiut and Kangerluarsorused, and the people – all 56,000 of them.

About halfway up the west coast, at 69 degrees north, comfortably inside the Arctic circle, Ilulissat is an honest-looking (scruffy) little town, with a busy prawn processing factory. It's also one of the main centres of Greenland's fledgling tourist industry.

I'm staying at the Hotel Arctic, which has 66 comfortable rooms and – more excitingly – five igloos. OK, so they're not proper snow igloos; they're made out of aluminium and come with toilets



Go with the floe

Greenland's charms get under your skin, writes **Sam Wollaston**

And showers. On a rocky point, overlooking Disko Bay with Disko Island, which has its own personal icecap, in the distance, the positioning of the igloos is perfect. Guess where Bjork stayed when she was in town? These funny little silver domes look as if they were designed for Bjork to emerge from, stretching into the sunshine.

Ah yes, the sun. It doesn't go away at this time of year, and I'm finding that difficult. It's lam and I'm ready to go to sleep. Well, I feel I should be. I'm wearing my eye mask (one of three essentials for any summer trip to Greenland), but it's not fooling anyone. My brain knows perfectly well that it's broad daylight out there.

And that seems to trouble it, the lack of punctuation that darkness gives a day, so much so it just won't let go of consciousness. This could get desperate after a while, like it was for Al Pacino in *Insomnia*.

The next day (I say the next day, but as far as I'm concerned I was in Greenland for one very long day, during which I had breakfast several times) Erik, who runs the hotel, tells me the way they deal with the light is not to fight it, but to embrace it. No one goes to bed until two, and still they get up at six. The winter is for sleep, and they get plenty of winter.

In my igloo a helpful leaflet lists activities and the months of the year

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they're available. In July I can do the midnight sun (done that) and mosquitoes. I never really thought of mosquitoes as being an activity, but it seems I've done that too, judging by the red spots on my legs.

(Insect repellent, that's the second essential to bring to Greenland in July – they're vicious little buggers.) You can go on a boat trip to another settlement, or take an expensive helicopter ride to the glacier. (The third essential thing to bring to Greenland is money – plenty of it, it's seriously pricey.) I'll bet Bjork didn't go on any helicopter trips, though. And there's plenty to do without making a lot of noise and spending the earth.

I do two long walks, one along the rocky coast just outside town, in search of seals (no luck). And then the next day inland to the hills, across springy grass and past sparkling blue lakes full of mountain

trout, which the locals hang out on washing lines to dry, like socks.

Ilulissat actually means "icebergs" in Greenlandic. East of town, the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier flows down from the inland ice sheet. It's retreating, depressingly, as most of the world's glaciers are, but it's still the most prolific one in the northern hemisphere, pushing 20 billion tonnes of icebergs into the fjord every year. The big ones, up to 1km high, run around and stay stuck there for years sometimes, until they're nudged along by others from behind. They all eventually float out into Disko Bay, before heading north up the coast.

Some time, maybe even years

Icebergs on the move in Disko Bay. Local lore in Ilulissat has it that the frozen giant that sank the Titanic came from near the town. Photo: Alamy/ArgusPhoto

before April 14, 1912, an iceberg calved off a western Greenland glacier – possibly the Sermeq Kujalleq – then headed north, as they all do. But this one then turned west and drifted into the Canadian side of the Davis Strait, where the current flows south. It ended up down near the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, where it met a transatlantic liner on its maiden voyage: 1,517 passengers lost their lives. Well, the locals say it was an Ilulissat iceberg. You would, though, wouldn't you? If your town was called "icebergs" and they were your thing, you'd claim the Titanic iceberg.

A visit to the town's small museum, which has every type of seal skin you can imagine, is amusing. No wonder I didn't find any live ones. And – my top tip – drop in to the hut at the centre of town where the fishermen bring in their catch. There are big buckets of whale meat. The lads got a fin whale the day before I came, and apparently you get a lot of meat on a fin whale. But, for moral reasons, I've decided this is going to be a one-whale holiday. So through a mixture of pointing, sign language and laughing (I've given up the nose rubbing – maybe I got that wrong), I score half a halibut. It doesn't get much better than the freshest halibut in the world, grilled over a disposable barbecue outside your very own silver igloo in the midnight sun, washed down with a bottle of "cheap" (HK\$160) white wine, while the icebergs go by.

Getting there: **Scandinavian Airlines (flysas.com) flies from Hong Kong to Copenhagen via Beijing. From Copenhagen, Air Greenland (airgreenland.com) flies to Ilulissat via Nuuk.**

Guardian News & Media

Detours: Athens

Kevin Rushby

Walking through the bright sunshine and crowds of tourists in an Athenian street, two landmarks rise into sight – the hill of the Acropolis, and the New Acropolis Museum, scheduled to open this month.

A publicity blurb in my hand says the museum's mission is "to house all the surviving antiquities from the Acropolis within a single museum of international stature".

It might have added that it has been a 207-year mission to return the so-called Elgin Marbles, a collection of classical marble sculptures originally from the monument and removed in 1801. The question on everyone's lips is will the new museum live up to the expectations, since many of the city's antiquities are in London museums?



The New Acropolis Museum, which opens this month, rises above Athens

At its entrance, the ground to the left falls away to reveal archaeological excavations of ancient Athens streets dating back to the 5th century BC, an area contemporary with the construction of the Parthenon itself.

It was this discovery that delayed the museum project, but architect Bernard Tschumi solved the problem by setting the building on more than 100 concrete pillars directly over the old city. Now visitors on the lower and middle levels can see through glass floors to those ancient streets.

The marbles, kept on the upper level, are the raison d'être for this US\$200 million project. Displays tell their story: in 480BC the Persians invaded Greece and sacked the Acropolis. A generation later the Athenians, led by Pericles, celebrated their city's revival in fortunes by rebuilding the Parthenon in 437BC. The sculptor Phideas produced an astonishing stone frieze running for 166 metres around the frame of the building.

The marble frieze subsequently survived until 1801, when the seventh earl of Elgin arrived. He had about half of the frieze cut off and shipped home – along with other artefacts – to Scotland. After much haggling, he sold the marbles to the British Museum for £35,000. Despite the British refusing to

return the marbles, the hill's far smaller museum has now been replaced with the new museum, which has space enough for all the Acropolis' treasures, including a number of well-preserved statues from the pre-480BC Acropolis – some showing clear traces of the paint that once adorned them.

The New Acropolis Museum can be seen rising above the surrounding city. The main gallery runs around the central core of the building which rises from the ground floor and has the same dimensions as the Parthenon.

It's in this core that the remaining marbles are placed. At present about half are original and half are plaster copies; this is far from ideal but nevertheless does give visitors – for the first time in two centuries – a chance to see the whole of Phideas' impressive artistic achievement.

Finally, visitors can stroll around the frieze's visual narrative at eye-level, examining the extraordinary detail, including its patina.

The new museum will no doubt be a major tourist attraction. Its breathtaking design, with natural light flooding every corner, is a huge achievement in itself.

Guardian News & Media

Entrée: Boston

Despite being in New York's shadow, the dining scene in New England's largest city, Boston, is coming into its own. Here's a sampling of its best restaurants.

O Ya, 9 East St, oyarestaurantboston.com
Situating in an industrial part of the town near the city's South Station, O Ya's sushi is impeccably fresh, and inspired dishes such as Nantucket Bay scallop with coconut dressing are seasoned to perfection. Make your reservation well in advance.

B&G Oysters, 550 Tremont St, bandgoysters.com
You'll find the best of New England seafood here, from Maine lobster rolls to North Shore clams, served in Boston's stylish South End. More than 12 varieties of oysters are paired with a superb wine list.

Icarus, 3 Appleton St, icarusrestaurant.com
Icarus specialises in American-style cuisine with regional ingredients.

Look for the grilled pork chop glazed with maple-mustard sauce, porcini-crusted halibut with a cabernet-vinegar sauce, or polenta topped with braised wild mushrooms. On Friday nights there's live jazz.

Craigie Street Bistrot, 5 Craigie Circle, Cambridge, craigiestreetbistrot.com
Chef Tony Maws applies a continental flair to local ingredients such as Vermont pork, woodland mushrooms and a variety of meats such as kidney and cocks' combs that other city restaurants won't touch. His wine list includes excellent organic varietals. Next month the restaurant relocates to Cambridge's Central Square and will be renamed Craigie on Main.

Gran Gusto, 90 Sherman St, Cambridge, grangustocambridge.com
Tucked away in Cambridge's Huron Village, this Italian restaurant has a cult following for its pizza marguerite, a thin Neapolitan-style



Gran Gusto's chef Giuseppe Castellano. Photo: Gran Gusto

crust pie topped with buffalo milk mozzarella and a wicked homeade tomato sauce.

Durgin-Park, 340 Faneuil Hall Market Place, durgin-park.com
Durgin-Park's the place if you're looking for Yankee home cooking, from beef pot roast and yellow cornbread to Indian pudding, and yes, Boston's famous baked beans.

Diana Burrell

CERTAIN THINGS DO HAVE TO BE SEEN. BUT NOT FROM THE SAME ANGLE.

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