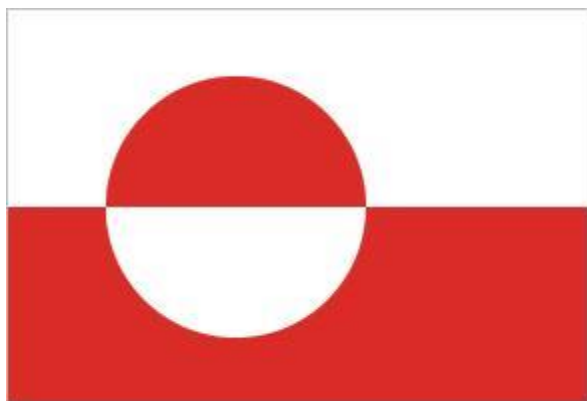


# Greenland

## Introduction

**Greenland**, the world's largest island lying in the North Atlantic Ocean noted for its vast tundra and immense glaciers. Although Greenland remains a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, the island's home-rule government is responsible for most domestic affairs. The Greenlandic people are primarily Inuit). The capital of Greenland is Nuuk (Godthåb).

<i><b>Official name</b></i>	Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenlandic) <sup>1</sup> ; (Greenland)
<i><b>Political status</b></i>	self-governing overseas administrative division of Denmark with one legislative house (Parliament [31]) <sup>2</sup>
<i><b>Head of state</b></i>	Danish Monarch: Queen Margrethe II
<i><b>Heads of government</b></i>	High Commissioner (for Denmark): Mikaela Engell; Prime Minister (for Greenland): Aleqa Hammond
<i><b>Capital</b></i>	Nuuk
<i><b>Official language</b></i>	Greenlandic
<i><b>Official religion</b></i>	Evangelical Lutheran (Lutheran Church of Greenland)
<i><b>Monetary unit</b></i>	Danish krone (DKK)
<i><b>Alternate titles:</b></i>	Grønland; Kalaallit Nunaat
<i><b>Population</b></i> (2013 est.)	56,200



Greenland is called Grønland in Danish. Danish was the official language of Greenland prior to

June 21, 2009.

A referendum approved in November 2008 endorsed the gradual expansion of Greenland's autonomy from Denmark; the Greenland government assumed greater responsibility for local matters on June 21, 2009.

## **Land**

More than three times the size of the U.S. state of Texas, Greenland extends about 1,660 miles (2,670 km) from north to south and more than 650 miles (1,050 km) from east to west at its widest point. Two-thirds of the Island lies within the Arctic Circle, and the Island's northern extremity extends to within less than 500 miles (800 km) of the North Pole. Greenland is separated from Canada's Ellesmere Island to the north by only 16 miles (26 km). The nearest European country is Iceland, lying about 200 miles (320 km) across the Denmark Strait to the southeast. Greenland's deeply indented coastline is 24,430 miles (39,330 km) long, a distance roughly equivalent to the Earth's circumference at the Equator.

A submarine ridge no deeper than 600 feet (180 meters) connects the Island physically with North America. Structurally, Greenland is an extension of the Canadian Shield, the rough plateau of the Canadian north that is made up of hard Precambrian rocks.

Greenland's major physical feature is its massive ice sheet, which is second only to Antarctica's in size. The Greenland Ice Sheet has an average thickness of 5,000 feet (1,500 metres), reaches a maximum thickness of about 10,000 feet (3,000 metres), and covers more than 700,000 square miles (1,800,000 square km)—over four-fifths of Greenland's total land area. Layers of snow falling on its barren, windswept surface become compressed into ice layers, which constantly move outward to the peripheral glaciers; the Jakobshavn Glacier, often moving 100 feet (30 meters) a day, is among the world's fastest glaciers. The remaining ice-free land area occupies the country's coastal areas and consists largely of highlands; mountain chains parallel the Island's east and west coasts, rising to 12,139 feet (3,700 meters) at Gunnbjørn Mountain in the southeast. These highlands notwithstanding, most parts of the rock floor underlying the Greenland Ice Sheet are in fact at, or slightly beneath, current sea levels.

Long, deep fjords reach far into both the east and west coasts of Greenland in complex systems, offering magnificent scenery. Along many parts of the coast, the ice sheet fronts directly on the sea, with large chunks breaking off the glaciers and sliding into the water as icebergs.

The climate of Greenland is Arctic, modified only by the slight influence of the Gulf Stream in the southwest. Rapid weather changes, from sunshine to impenetrable blizzards, are common and result from the eastward progression of low-pressure air masses over a permanent layer of cold air above the Island's icy interior. Average winter (January) temperatures range from the low 20s F (about  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) in the south to approximately  $-30^{\circ}\text{F}$  (about  $-34^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) in the north. Summer temperatures along the southwestern coast average in the mid-40s F (about  $7^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) during July, while the average in the far north is closer to  $40^{\circ}\text{F}$  (about  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Greenland experiences about two months of midnight sun during the summer. Average annual precipitation decreases from more than 75 inches (1,900 mm) in the south to about 2 inches (50 mm) in the north. Large areas of the Island can be classified as Arctic deserts because of their limited precipitation. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, scientists posited that global warming was profoundly affecting not only Greenland's climate but also its physical geography. A number of scientists noted that Greenland's vast ice sheet was shrinking at a highly increased rate. In 2012, for example, satellites revealed that at midyear 97 percent of the ice sheet showed some signs of melting, whereas in most years the melt affected only about half of the ice sheet. Researchers were uncertain, however, if the abrupt ice loss represented a long-term trend.

The country's plant life is characterized mainly as tundra vegetation and consists of such plants as sedge and cotton grass. Plantlike lichens also are common. The limited ice-free areas are almost totally devoid of trees, although some dwarfed birch, willow, and alder scrub do manage to survive in sheltered valleys in the south. Several species of land mammals—including polar bears, musk oxen, reindeer, arctic foxes, snow hares, ermines, and lemmings—can be found on the island. Seals and whales are found in the surrounding waters and were formerly the chief source of nourishment for the Greenlanders. Cod, salmon, flounder, and halibut are important saltwater fish, and the island's rivers contain salmon and Arctic char.

## People

About four-fifths of Greenlanders are principally of Inuit extraction. They are very strongly admixed with early European immigrant strains. More than one-tenth of the people are Danish, most of them born in Denmark.

The official languages of the Island are Greenlandic (also known as Kalaallisut, an Inuit language belonging to the Eskimo-Aleut language family) and Danish (a Scandinavian, or North Germanic, language); English is also spoken. Evangelical Lutheranism, the official religion, is

followed by nearly two-thirds of the population; about one-third of Greenlanders follow other forms of Christianity. Traditional beliefs, including shamanism, are still practiced by a small minority.

The population of Greenland is widely dispersed. The large majority of people live in one of the Island's 18 municipalities, while the remainder lives in villages. Because of emigration levels, Greenland's population growth rate was about zero at the start of the 21st century. Life expectancy is comparable to the world average, with males typically living into their mid-60s and females generally living into their early 70s

## **Economy**

Greenland's economy has long been based on fishing. Seal hunting, once the mainstay of the economy, declined drastically in the early 20th century and was supplanted by the fishing, canning, and freezing of cod, shrimp, and other marine life. The Island's dependence on the fish industry, which is susceptible to problems of overfishing and fluctuating prices, became a growing concern in the late 20th century. Greenland therefore attempted to diversify its economy, and much emphasis was placed on the tourist industry. Since the 1990s, revenue from tourism has grown significantly. The government, which receives substantial financial aid from Denmark, continues to play a leading role in the economy. Nearly half the labour force works in the public sector.

Agriculture is possible on about 1 percent of Greenland's total area, in the southern ice-free regions. Hay and garden vegetables are the main crops grown. Commercial sheep farming began in the early 20th century. Reindeer also are raised for meat, and polar bears are sometimes caught for their meat and pelts. However, sea mammals—seals, walruses, and whales—are still the most important source of meat.

Deposits of cryolite, lead, zinc, silver, and coal were mined at various times in the 20th century, and the Island's first gold mine opened in 2004. Exploration has uncovered deposits of iron, uranium, copper, molybdenum, diamonds, and other minerals. Climatic and ecological considerations had long limited the exploitation of these resources; however, global warming has not only melted sea ice and made oil and natural gas exploration more accessible but also opened tracts of land for mineral exploitation. The manner in which increasingly interested foreign firms were allowed to undertake exploration and mining became a pivotal political issue in Greenland in the early 21st century.

Oil drilling in the Arctic waters around Greenland began in mid-2010. Licensing agreements were delayed; however, as environmental concerns grew in response to BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that year. Scotland-based Cairn Energy began drilling in 2010 but has yet to discover commercially viable sources of oil or natural gas off Greenland. In the late 20th century the Island opened its first hydroelectric power plant.

Besides supplying domestic needs, fish (mainly halibut) and crustaceans (mainly shrimp) constitute Greenland's principal exports. Seal pelts are tanned and used domestically as well as exported, but, due to import bans on seal fur, the international price level is at a minimum.

Greenland's chief trading partner is Denmark, although it does conduct trade with other countries as well.

Roadways in Greenland are limited to short stretches within town limits. Although dogsleds and snowmobiles are used on ice-covered coastal areas and inland, shipping and air service are the principal means of transport. Greenland has a sophisticated digital telecommunications network, as well as a military communications network associated with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American radar defense system. The rates of cellular telephone and Internet use rose during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, though usage rates remained lower than those in nearby Canada and in the Nordic countries.

## **Government and society**

In 1979 the Danish government granted home-rule to Greenland. Under this agreement, Greenland remained part of the Danish realm, and each Greenlander was a Danish citizen, enjoying equal rights with all other Danes. Denmark retained control of the Island's constitutional affairs, foreign relations, and defense, while Greenland maintained jurisdiction over economic development, municipal regulations, taxes, education, the social welfare system, cultural affairs, and the state church. Mineral resources were managed jointly by Denmark and Greenland. It was perhaps this last point that inspired Greenlanders to vote overwhelmingly in 2008 to increase their autonomy from Denmark, and Greenland is now officially designated a self-governing overseas administrative division of Denmark. Under the expanded home rule agreement, which took effect on June 21, 2009, Greenland retained a greater percentage of oil and mineral revenue. It also managed virtually all domestic affairs, including criminal justice, and Greenlandic supplanted Danish as the official language of government. Denmark, in collaboration with Greenlandic political leaders, continued to manage the Island's foreign relations and defense.

The centre of power in Greenland is the Landsting, a parliament elected to four-year terms by all adults age 18 and older. A number of parties have been represented in the Landsting. Among them are Siumut, a social democratic party that favours self-determination while maintaining close relations with Denmark; the Demokratiit party, created by a breakaway faction of Siumut; Atassut, a more conservative party that has supported Greenland's historical relations with Denmark; and Inuit Ataqatigiit, which calls for full independence from Denmark. The Landsting elects the prime minister as well as the other members of the Landsstyre, a council that assumes the Island's executive responsibilities. The prime minister is typically the leader of the majority party in the parliament. Greenland's voters also elect two representatives to the Danish parliament (Folketing). An official known as the high commissioner represents the Danish government in Greenland.

Using financial grants from Denmark, Greenland's government provides its citizens with a wide range of welfare services. Free health care is available to the Island's people as well. These social services have greatly improved Greenlanders' health and living conditions.

Nine years of education are free and compulsory for Greenlandic children. The Island's school system historically had an insufficient number of teachers who were native Greenlandic speakers, and consequently it hired many Danish-speaking and Danish-educated teachers. By the end of the 20th century, however, the number of native Greenlandic-speaking teachers was increasing. Greenlandic is the principal language of instruction in the schools, but Danish also continues to be taught. Greenland offers a large selection of vocational and teacher-training programs, and there is a small university, Ilisimatusarfik (founded as the Inuit Institute in 1983). Nevertheless, many students attend university outside Greenland, especially in Denmark.

## Cultural life

Despite the Western influence exerted by the Danish presence in Greenland and, more recently, by increased access to international mass media, the practice of traditional Inuit cultural activities is still of importance. Folk arts such as soapstone carving and drum dancing remain popular, as do kayak building and sailing. The Island features a number of museums, including the Greenland National Museum and Archives in Nuuk. Katuaq Cultural Centre, also in Nuuk, hosts concerts, art exhibits, and other cultural events. Numerous sports are played in Greenland: football (soccer) is very popular, as are skiing, badminton, handball, table tennis, tae kwon do, and volleyball. Kalaallit Nunaata Radio (KNR), the Island's broadcasting company, offers radio and television programs in Greenlandic and Danish.

## History

The Inuit are believed to have crossed to northwest Greenland from North America using the islands of the Canadian Arctic as stepping stones, in a series of migrations that stretched from at least 2500 BC to the early 2nd millennium AD. Each wave of migration represented different Inuit cultures. Several distinct cultures are known, including those classified as Independence I (c. 2500–1800 BC), Saqqaq (c. 2300–900 BC), Independence II (c. 1200–700 BC), Dorset I (c. 600 BC–100 AD), and Dorset II (c. 700–1200). The most recent arrival was the Thule culture (c. 1100), from which the Inugsuk culture developed during the 12th and 13th centuries.

In 982 the Norwegian Erik the Red, who had been banished from Iceland for manslaughter, settled on the island today known as Greenland. Returning to Iceland about 985, he described the merits of the newly discovered land, which he called Greenland, and in 986 he organized an expedition to the island that resulted in the development of two main settlements: the East Settlement, near present-day Qaqortoq (Julianehåb), and the West Settlement, near present-day Nuuk (Godthåb). These settlements may have reached a population of 3,000–6,000 on about 280 farms, suggesting that temperatures at that time may have been as warm or warmer than they are today. Christianity arrived in the 11th century by way of Erik's son Lief Eriksson, who had just returned from the recently Christianized Norway. A bishop's seat was established in Greenland in 1126.

Beginning sometime in the 13th century, the Norse (Scandinavian) settlers began to interact with the expanding Inuit Thule culture that had appeared in northern Greenland about 1100. But in the

14th century the Norse settlements declined, perhaps as a result of a cooling in Greenland's climate. In the 15th century these settlements ceased to be inhabited.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Dutch and English whalers frequently traveled in the seas around Greenland, and occasionally they interacted with the local population. However, no further attempt at colonization was made until 1721, when Hans Egede, with the permission of the united kingdom of Denmark- Norway founded a trading company and a Lutheran mission near present-day Nuuk, thus marking the real beginning of Greenland's colonial era. In 1776 the Danish government assumed a full monopoly of trade with Greenland, and the Greenland coast was closed to foreign access; it was not reopened until 1950. During this period Denmark tried gradually to acclimatize the Greenlanders to the outside world without exposing them to the danger of economic exploitation.

Greenland fell under the protection of the United States during the German occupation of Denmark in World War II and was returned to Denmark in 1945.

Following the war, Denmark responded to Greenlanders' complaints over its administration of the Island. The monopoly of the Royal Greenland Trading Company was abolished in 1951, and, after Greenland became an integral part of the Kingdom of Denmark in 1953, reforms were undertaken to improve the local economy, transportation systems, and the educational system. Denmark granted home rule to the Island on May 1, 1979.

At the start of the 21st century, there was growing support in Greenland for greater control of its foreign affairs. This arose partly in response to a 2004 agreement allowing the United States to upgrade its missile defense system at Thule Air Base. Inuit who had been forcibly removed from the area surrounding the base in the 1950s sued for the right to return, airing their grievances at the European Court of Human Rights. Some Greenlanders were wary of continued U.S. involvement because the United States had stored nuclear bombs on the Island during the Cold War without Greenland's knowledge, despite a Danish ban on such weapons; additionally, in 1968 a U.S. military aircraft carrying four hydrogen bombs had crashed near Thule.

There were calls for an independent Greenland, and parties campaigning for greater autonomy scored electoral victories in the first decade of the 21st century. In November 2008 more than 75 percent of Greenlanders who voted approved a nonbinding referendum calling for greater autonomy. The proposal, which was formulated by legislators in both Greenland and Denmark, had the tacit approval of the Danish government even before the referendum was held. It would increase responsibilities of Greenland's government in foreign affairs, immigration, and justice, among other areas, while also granting it the rights to the potentially lucrative hydrocarbon and mineral resources that have become increasingly accessible as a result of the Island's melting ice cap. It was widely believed that this potential revenue would free Greenland from its economic dependence on Denmark, which many saw as the final stumbling block to complete independence. Snap elections held in June 2009 saw Siumut removed from power for the first time since home rule was granted in 1979. The opposition Inuit Ataqatigiit captured more than 40 percent of the vote, and party leader Kuupik Kleist worked quickly to form a coalition government prior to the expansion of home rule later that month.

In elections in 2013 Siumut returned to power at the head of a coalition presided over by Greenland's first female prime minister, Aleqa Hammond, whose government placed a

moratorium on granting licences for oil exploration and began requiring royalty payments from foreign concerns before they began mining. (Kleist's government had planned to allow foreign firms to defer payments until some startup costs could be recouped.) Hammond's government also announced its willingness to allow the mining of some radioactive minerals, notably uranium, which had previously been prohibited.

**Axel D Have**