

Experience Greenland's Treasures With A Brand New Sustainable (And Fun) Luxe Tour Operator



Jeanine Barone Contributor 

With the vast majority of Greenland covered by an ice sheet, this island nation is often defined by its rugged beauty of dramatic fjords, remote settlements, massive icebergs, soaring mountains, and desolate expanses. Few roads course through this vast, almost lunar, landscape, making travel via chopper, boat or kayak a necessity. Yet, its capital city, Nuuk, successfully blends a scenic location at the mouth of a stunning fjord and vistas saturated with the ever-changing colors of land, sky and sea, with a sophisticated cosmopolitan sensibility, whether its contemporary art galleries, minimalist architecture, stylish fashion, or an enviable, modern, locavore-focused gastronomy scene.



Pink sky, colourful Nuuk ELIA LOCARDI - VISIT GREENLAND

Yet, many savvy travelers have not placed Greenland on their list, either because they deem it too difficult to venture to, not worth the time and effort, or believe the signature sights and activities only revolve around the northern lights or dog sledding. Now, a new, Nuuk-based company, [Greenland Escape](#), is offering myriad tours and services for the discriminating traveler that open a window into Greenland's plethora of treasures that will touch the senses in unforgettable ways. For example, photography enthusiasts can opt for an all-day excursion that includes an art walk -- Nuuk is sprinkled with outdoor sculptures and murals -- along with a hike around a lake to explore shooting images of local flora, plus a boat tour of the Godthab Fjord to hopefully spy seals or whales. The luxury or elite traveler tour includes three nights of glamping (luxe camping) deep in a fjord along with a heli-picnic at the top of Nuuk's landmark, Sermitsiaq Mountain; hiking with a private guide who will also act as their chef; kayaking between icebergs; and, at night, relaxing with a shot of whiskey chilled by iceberg-derived ice. I recently interviewed Jesper Oraker, the owner and managing partner of Greenland Escape, who's a Nuuk resident, and who provides a unique perspective, given that he's lived and traveled extensively far beyond Greenland, including Australia, U.S., Sweden, and Denmark (where he was born).



Nuuk Winter JESPER ØRAKER



Two kayakers paddle around icebergs in Nuuk Fjord as a daytime adventure while staying at the Arctic Nomad Adventure Camp RAVEN EYE PHOTOGRAPHY - VISIT GREENLAND

1- What inspired you to start Greenland Escape?

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I have been working in the logistics and freight forwarding industry for more than a decade, and I felt like something new had to happen. However, I had no idea what I should do – I just knew I was not going back to logistics and a 9-5 desk job. A lot of the inspiration for Greenland Escape came from spending time with fun and interesting people in the tourist industry around Nuuk, and listening to them discussing what was needed for further developing Nuuk as an awesome destination for sustainable luxury tourism.



Colourful Nuuk JESPER ØRAKER

2- How does Greenland Escape distinguish itself from other tour operators currently in Greenland?

A number of ways. Guests will never hear the phrase from our guides and employees: “I need to ask about that.” We don’t handle groups larger than 12-18 people because we think the charm and romantic feel of Greenland would disappear if we did. The tourism we provide is sustainable and personal because those are qualities that are so much part of the Greenland experience. From my experience living and working away from Greenland, I understand the importance of service and the needs of international customers. Guests will not find mass tourism or halfhearted service. The providers we use for sailing, hotels for sleeping, and camps for adventure have been thoroughly vetted, and we only use pre-approved vendors to provide service. Aside from all the serious stuff, we are just nice people that like doing what we are doing. We believe in having fun in our job. It is such a joy to show off Greenland on a beautiful sunny day with its icebergs, whales, seals, and the absolutely raw nature, and seeing people who had been dreaming about experiencing the northern lights their whole life and then seeing them for the first time. This is what really makes Greenland so special.



Northern lights over the mountain Sermitsiaq in Nuuk REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND



Power Boat Tour JESPER ØRAKER

3- What are your most popular tours?

That is a difficult question. It depends so much on the individual traveler and the day. Some guests are in awe of our icebergs that are the size of small villages; for others, it's the possibility of sleeping in camps in the middle of a no-man's-land. For the busy professionals, it is actually the experience of being cut-off from the internet, emails and cell phones. Being isolated from the rest of the world often brings people closer together – often referred to as transformational travel. We have a place where people suddenly have time to dive into their emotions, and have deep conversations with their partners. Sailing among icebergs or seeing the grand and endless nature while standing on top of a mountain is transformational. Keep in mind that this is all possible within a few hours of sailing from Nuuk, which is a buzzing little metropolis with art, design and a great culinary scene. I think the combination of wild nature with a modern city is truly unique.



Icefjord NUUK WATER TAXI

4- Regarding your Ultimate Arctic Diving Experience, what are some features divers might expect to see?

The greatest attraction is definitely the experience of diving under and along icebergs, or seeing the glittering sun under the ice sheet. The waters are crystal clear, and the visibility is extremely good. In the summer, we can dive closer to shore, and there are chances of seeing arctic char, salmon and cod. One of the other great attractions is the whale bone yard. Not far from Nuuk, there are a group of islands where, back in the day, local hunters used to hunt whales for food. This has left a truly spectacular and impressive boneyard with the massive skeletons of whales. We also have a fun dive not far from Nuuk where there are a lot of shipwrecks. (It has turned into an arctic reef with plants, fish and wildlife.)



Shuttle VH PHOTO, VAGN HANSEN

5- On the Hike and Fish Escape, what is unique about Restaurant Qooqut Nuan?

Qooqut Nuan is one of the most isolated restaurants in the world. The restaurant is a true jewel with great food, and one of the best views a restaurant can have. The restaurant tries to grow as many vegetables as they can, and all the fish comes from the fjord. The greatest experience is catching your own fish, which the restaurant will prepare for the guests several different ways. It is probably some of the freshest fish in the world – perfectly natural and sustainable. If there's time for a hike in the valley behind Qooqut, guests can experience the old Viking ruins, pick blueberries, and drink the pristine water from the running streams. There is also a chance of seeing reindeer, fox, hares, and a lot of birdlife.



Qooqut Nuan ELIA LOCARDI - VISIT GREENLAND

6- What do you love about living in Nuuk?

Life. A simple, easy life. I have two small boys, three and five years old. It's a safe place where there is nothing to fear. My oldest takes the bus from his school and home already. We can let them play outside without having to worry about them. I love the city of Nuuk, which is big enough to have everything you need, but not so big that it's unsafe or impersonal. I love the travel community here; there is really a feeling that we just want to show Nuuk and Greenland from its best side. The food is awesome too – we have many good restaurants serving contemporary versions of the old Greenlandic kitchen. Living in the capital, we also have a lot of culture: shows, concerts, festivals, and such. It's a great little big city.



Boys flying kites JESPER ØRAKER



Kalaalliarq ANINGAAQ ROSING CARLSEN - VISIT GREENLAND



Culinary Experience JESPER ØRAKER

7- What are some of your favorite activities in Nuuk?

I love sailing, and feeling the wind and the smell of the water. Feeling the freedom of Greenland, where we are not so limited by rules. Hunting or catching your own food is also a favorite activity – the connection with nature and the feeling of fulfillment you have when bringing food to the table that's not coming from a grocery store. We really enjoy experiencing Nuuk's culinary scene. Trying the

newest pop-up restaurant or a local tasting event is always fun, hanging out at the cafes, meeting friends and business partners for a laid-back conversation, and getting new ideas of what's next. Otherwise, I really enjoy spending time with my children, sharing their activities, or having them join in fishing and preparing dinner from the food we caught.

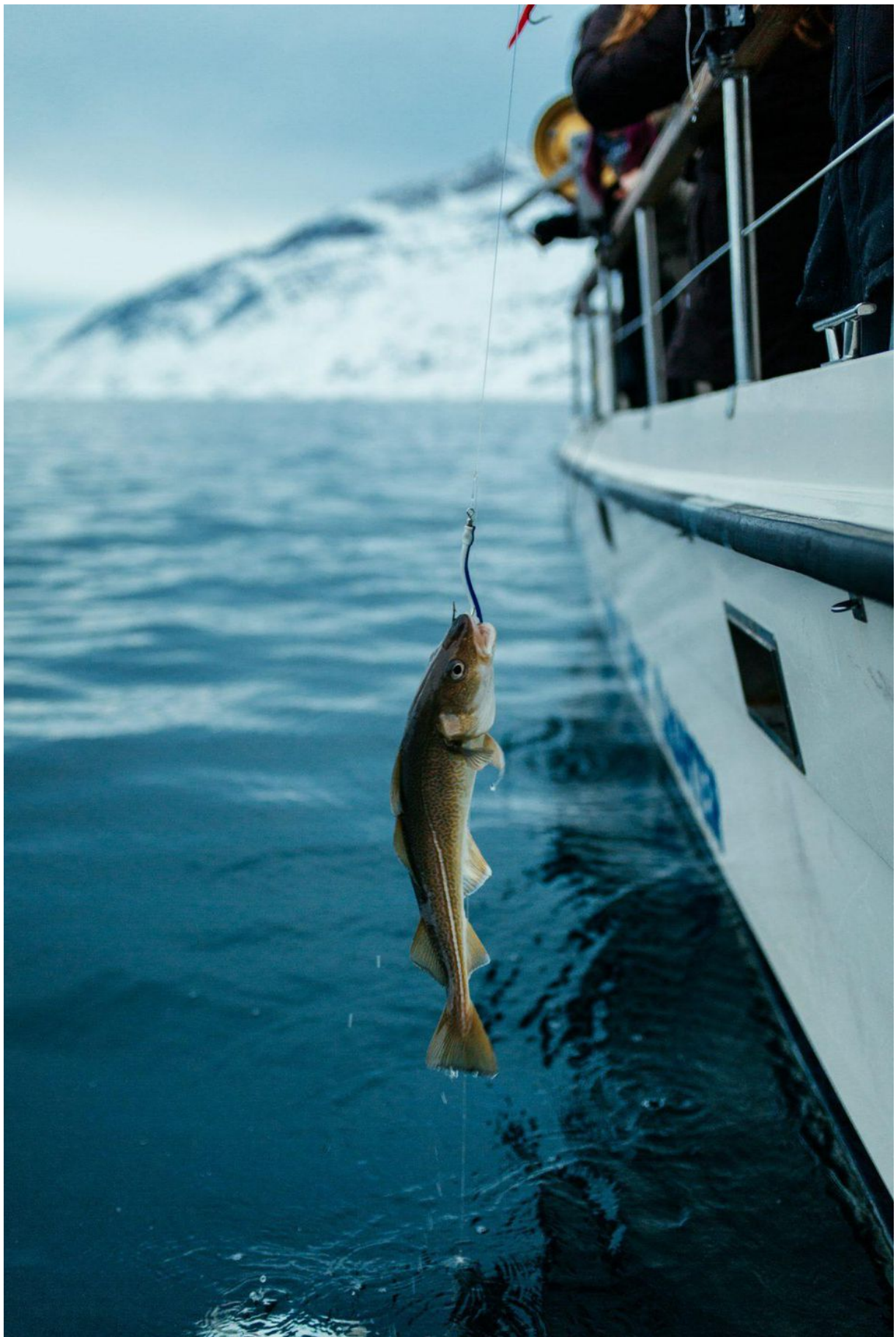


Nuuk Kangia JESPER ØRAKER

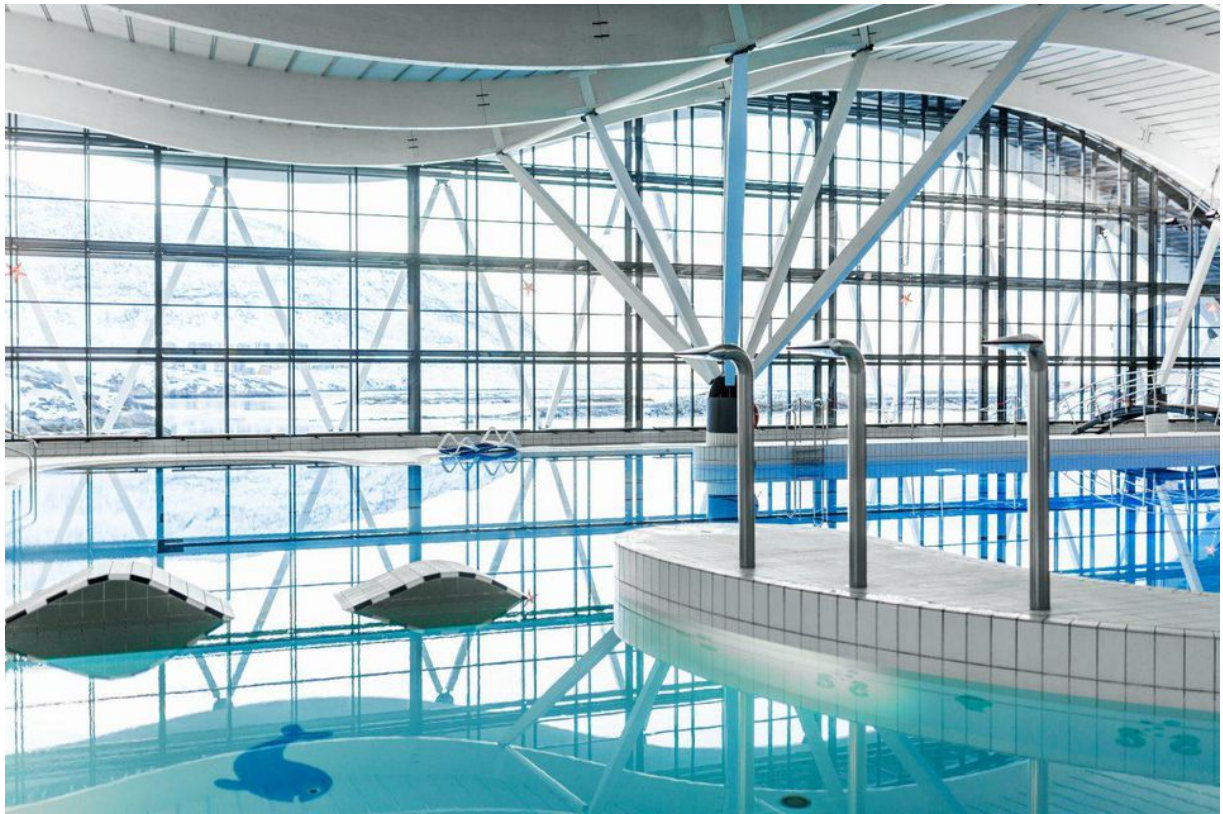


8- Can you discuss some family-friendly activities in Nuuk?

Camping is a great way to spend time with family and friends, and not worry about the kids while they play around nature and the campsite. Fishing as a family is also great fun. It's an especially good activity for kids because they can see where their food comes from. Picking berries is also fun for kids, who often gobble up the berries as soon as they pick 'em. Going for a boat trip is also safe and fun for the family – experiencing the dramatic icebergs and the mighty whales is something most families will never forget. Otherwise, as cities go, Nuuk is very family friendly. We will also be launching a small bicycle rental shop, which is a great way to get around town and experience different activities, such as the local swimming pool, or a weekend brunch at the cultural center.



Fish being caught by tourists on a tour with Arctic Boat Charter in the Nuuk fjord REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND



Interior of the indoor swimming pool Malik in Nuuk REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND

9- What are three must-do activities in Nuuk?

- A boat tour is definitely one, to see the giant and majestic fjord, which is one of the largest fjords in the world. It stretches almost endlessly towards the icecap of Greenland. In the summer, there's a very good chance of seeing whales, seals and local birds.
- Take a helicopter ride to the summit of the Sermitsiaq mountain. From there, guests can see all the way to the icecap, with Nuuk sitting as a tiny little speck on a peninsula. (Nuuk means peninsula in Greenlandic). It is quite an experience to stand on top of the mountain with a glass of champagne and hors d'oeuvres while looking over the rugged and endless landscape of Greenland.
- As a third activity, I would spend two days in Nuuk, visiting the National Museum, enjoying the extraordinary food, shopping at the local arts and craft emporia, and maybe catching a show at the National Theater or the Cultural Center Katuaq.



Visitors in the Nuuk Art Museum REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND

10- What are some must-do activities in other parts of Greenland?

- The Eqi Glacier north of Ilulissat is a must-do. This glacier calves as much ice every day, as New Yorkers consume water in a year. The grand size of the icebergs from this glacier is just mind boggling. Rumor has it that one of the icebergs from this glacier is what devastated the Titanic.
- Try a farm stay in southern Greenland's farming area. Horseback riding among the farms, fjords and icebergs in one of the most beautiful areas of Greenland, and a truly unique experience.



Eqa Glacier Ilulissat MADS PIHL - VISIT GREENLAND



South Greenland Horse ANINGAAQ ROSING CARLSEN - VISIT GREENLAND

11- What are some misconceptions people may have about Nuuk and Greenland?

- The biggest misconception is that we all live in igloos in winter and turf huts in summer. Nuuk is a city with about 18,000 inhabitants, and modern businesses, hotels, restaurants, and trendy cafes. Many guests we have are quite surprised with the level of service we can provide in Nuuk.

- Another general misconception about Greenland is that it is super hard to get to. I agree that it is not the easiest, but it is far from impossible. In summer, we have almost daily flights from Iceland to Nuuk and Ilulissat, and two daily departures from Denmark to Greenland. Greenland is opening up; it is getting increasingly easier to get here. By 2023, we should also have new airports in Ilulissat and Nuuk, making it even easier and cheaper to get here.



The main shopping street of Nuuk REBECCA GUSTAFSSON - VISIT GREENLAND



12- Is there anything new you are planning for Greenland Escape in 2019?

- We are opening a new office in downtown Nuuk, across from the cultural center. From here, we will run our shuttle busses, organize our tours and operate our bike rental business. We are very excited about getting better visibility and having a central contact office.
- We are starting construction of a small boutique hotel in May 2019, which should open near the end of 2020. It will be a cozy hotel, very close to downtown with approximately 40 rooms, each with a private bath. To make it appealing to individual travelers, we will be installing a large common kitchen that people can freely use to cook their own meals.

I'm a New York City-based journalist, and photographer who specializes in hidden treasure travel, in other words under-the-radar experiences that provide insights into the heart of the land and its people. My articles appear in dozens of publications, including the Wall Stre... MORE

Jeanine Barone is a well-published travel and food writer, specializing in hidden treasure travel, hunting down the little-known cafe, under-the-radar museum, or just opened underground art gallery.

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