



# Qeqertarsuaq – Disco Island

## The volcanic island in the heart of Disco Bay



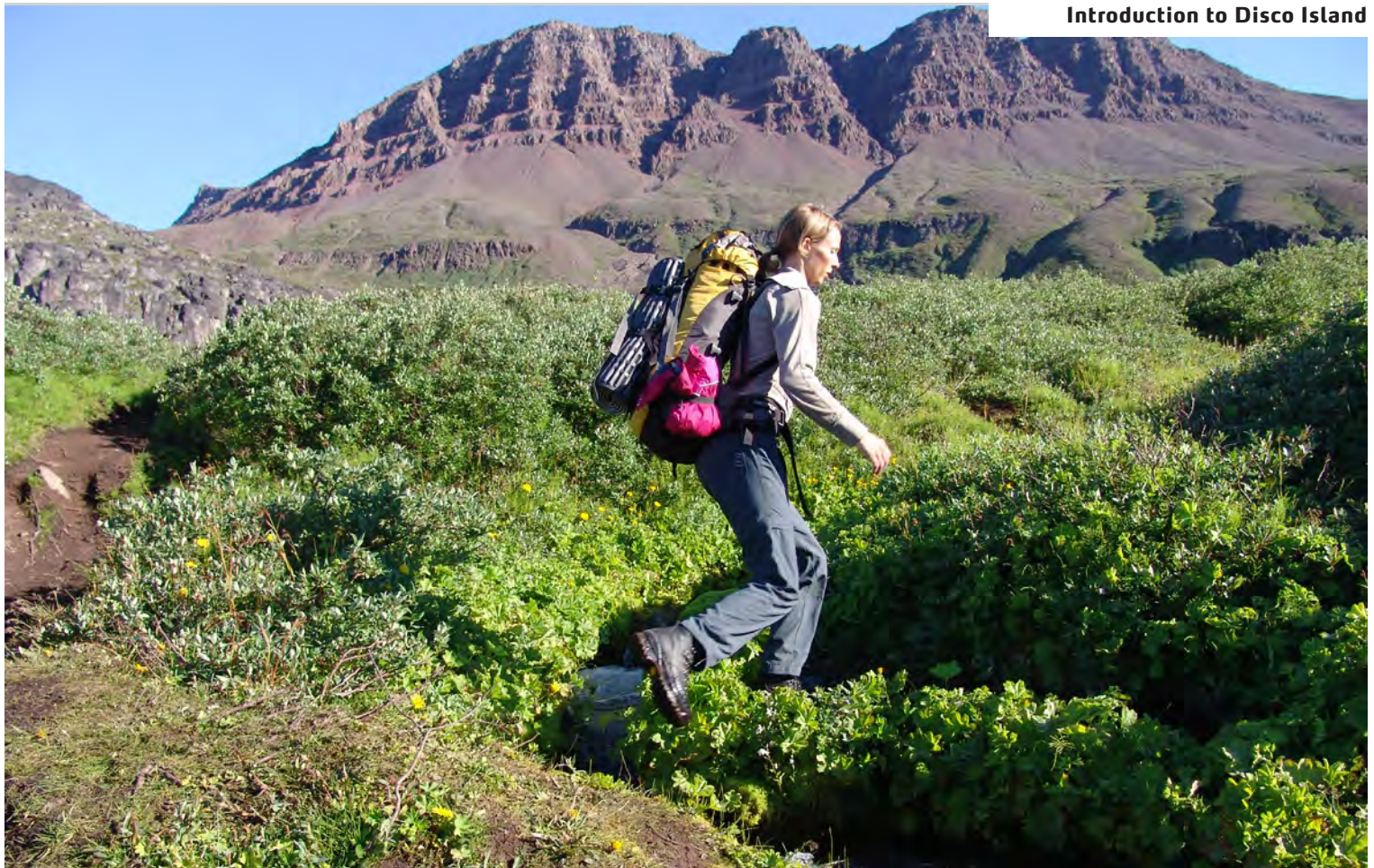
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# Welcome to Qeqertarsuaq – Disco Island

Legend says, that two hunters went hunting for seals in South Greenland, saw Disco Island and pulled it northwards. It was simply in the way when hunters were heading for the sea, so they moved the island with their kayaks and a strain of hair from an infant. In Ilulissat, a witch saw the island, recited an incantation and ran the island aground. That is how Disco Island received its current location.

The “documented” history of Disco Island (Qeqertarsuaq in Greenlandic) begins in the 16th – 17th Century, even if traces of habitation have been found 5 – 6000 years before. The history of the volcanic island has pivoted around whaling and for many years, Qeqertarsuaq, the main town of Disco Island, functioned as the capital of North Greenland.

Disco Island is of volcanic origin with hot springs and mountains that look different, compared to the rest of Disco Bay. So if you are a nature lover, interested in Greenlandic history and want to see whales – then Disco Island is the ideal travel destination for you.

Welcome to Disco Island!

Best regards,  
Greenland Travel

The Greenlandic word “Immaqa” means “maybe” and when travelling in Greenland, you should always keep a slight “immaqa” in the back of your head. Things change in Greenland and the arctic weather is forever changeable so you can never plan everything from home and expect to stick to schedule. We will try to keep this guide updated but as things change fast in Greenland – use our guideline with a slight “immaqa” in the back of your mind.



### **Qeqertarsuaq – The volcanic Disco Island**

Qeqertarsuaq means "the large island" and it is indeed Greenland's largest island. If you are interested in geology, you will enjoy a stay here. The island lies in the middle of Disco Bay, about 70 km from the mainland and can be reached in a day's sailing.

The island is different from the rest of Greenland as it is of volcanic origin. The landscape is characterized by basalt mountains and a type of vegetation, not found elsewhere in the area, that is predominantly flat. The area around the town is very fertile with *Angelica Gigas* and other plants - the rest of the island is untouched nature with hot springs that never freeze (you cannot bathe in them). This provides heat and good conditions for vegetation, so judging from arctic standards, Disco Island has a very varied flora and fauna.

Generally, Disco Island is known for its beautiful nature, abundant flora and a certain geology that made geological surveys possible from 1848. In 1906, the "Arctic Station" was founded and it is now the oldest manned field station in the arctic region. The Arctic Station conducts arctic research on bio and geo-related problems.

With an area of 8,578 km<sup>2</sup>, it is one of the largest islands in the world. It is located about 100 km from the mainland, is about 160 km long and has an average elevation of 975 m. above sea level. The highest point is 1,919 m above sea level.

### **The main town of Qeqertarsuaq**

The main town of Qeqertarsuaq is also called Qeqertarsuaq, and has about 850 residents today. Qeqertarsuaq was founded in 1773 under the name of Godhavn by the whaler and merchant, Svend Sandgreen.

Qeqertarsuaq is beautifully located by Disco Bay and in the posterior the basalt mountains appear in their majestic appearance. The town is located on a peninsula and has a natural harbor. The main occupation is crab and halibut; crab fishing being essential.

The church is popularly referred to as "God's Little Inkwell" because of its unique shape (see photo) and is located in the middle of town, just as the school. The old Doctor's residence and former headquarters for the Governor of North Greenland, is today a museum and we highly recommend a visit as it gives a good insight into the city that was once the capital of North Greenland.

### **Only one settlement on Disco Island**

Today, Kangerluk/Disco Fjord is the only settlement (smaller than a town) left on the island and is located in the largest fjord complex, about 35 km north of Qeqertarsuaq, completely surrounded by the characteristic mountains.

Kangerluk has 34 residents (per February 2013) who live in the 15-20 houses available. The number of residents has varied a lot over the past 200 years and the settlement has even been uninhabited several times. In the settlement, you will find a post office, a factory and a shop that sells the uvak fjord cod.





Introduction to Disco Island

Kangerluk also has a small school with 5 pupils who are taught here until the 10th grade, after which they can continue their schooling in Qeqertarsuaq. In the school, a room has been made into a functioning church. Kangerluk has its own power station to which most of the settlement's houses are connected.

The main occupation in Kangerluk is still hunting and fishing as it has been since the settlement was established. This settlement has always been one of the most isolated in Greenland and that has left its mark on the residents.

Until 1972, there was a coal mine by Qullissat on the north eastern side of the island. After the mine was closed, residents were moved to different towns, including Qeqertarsuaq. However, most were moved to Ilulissat, where a part of town was named "Little Qullissat".

► For more information on Qeqertarsuaq and Disco Island's history, check the web page of [Qeqertarsuaq Museum](#).

### **Where the whales meet**

From spring to autumn, the area around Disco Island is where large whales meet and frockle. Most often, you will see the bowhead whale (from April to May) and the humpback whale (May to September). In the 17th Century, the first whaling stations were established on Disco Island and the optimal fishing areas drew many European whaling expeditions. Whaling Station "Godhavn " (today Qeqertarsuaq) was founded in 1773 by the whaler Svend Sandgreen. For many years, Godhavn was an important base for whaling in the Davis Strait. Today, the town harbour is still a lively place, however today due to the common fisheries.

### **Beaches with black sand**

The beach in Qeqertarsuaq is covered in fine black sand. It is also called basalt sand and was formed many, many years ago. The town's football field is located by the beach so if the ball rolls into the water, you may need to buy another. Fortunately the ball may also be thrust onto shore again!

### **Midnight Sun on Disco Island**

In Qeqertarsuaq, you will see the Midnight Sun from the end of May to the end of July and while the Midnight Sun reigns, there is no big temperature difference between day and night. Midnight Sun can be seen near the Arctic Circle and cannot be seen south of Sisimiut.

### **Stunning views of Disco Bay from the Lyngmark Glacier**

On the mountain, across from the town is the Lyngmark Glacier located 900 meters above sea level. It is the only place in Greenland where you can go dogsledding in summer if the snow is stable. There is snow all year round, so summer dogsledding is in principle possible, but in recent years the snow has unfortunately not been quite stable, which is why this excursion is no longer available with Greenland Travel, nor do we recommend it.

If you're still interested in the excursion, you can check with "Siku Aput ", the local tourist operator, for conditions on the glacier and book the trip, while you're still on the island. Stable snow conditions or not, the view from the 900 m. altitude is always well worth the hike. You will have an astonishing view of Disco Bay,



one that really puts meaning into "seeing as far as the eye can see". You can hike to the top and back in a day or you can choose to spend a night at the Lyngmark cabins on the glacier. An overnight stay, will give you plenty of time to really enjoy the stunning views.

### **Disco Island is made for hiking**

The landscape on Disco Island is characterized by volcanic activity and steep basalt mountains. The three mountains: Apostelfjeldet, Lyngmarksfjeldet and the Skarvefjeldet form the island's profile and end wall to the north. The area is ideal for hiking - e.g. through Red River on the coast of Kuanit. Kuanit is a fertile area, where locals enjoy the wild Angelica Gigas. The area is known for its unique columnar basalt formations and along the coast, you will find natural lava formations resembling a camel and elephants. Your hike may continue towards the Skarvefjeldet mountain, over the lateral Petursons moraine with a view of the Blæsedalen valley.

When hiking in Greenland, expect tracks to be uneven and not well marked. That also goes for Qeqertarsuaq. You can choose to go on organised tours or if you are an experienced hiker, you can hike without a guide. If you travel with Greenland Travel on the "Step into nature in Disco Bay", the travel guide will take you on these hikes.

- ▶ For more information on the hikes.
- ▶ For information on a trip with hiking on Disco Island.
- ▶ Trekking maps can be purchased at Scanmaps.

### **Sailing to Kangerluk**

If you have a day available on Disco Island, you can go on a full-day trip to the settlement Kangerluk, which is the largest fjord on Disco Island. From the harbour, we sail past Kilit and the steep blue mountains that have a great birdlife, into the Kangerluk fjord. Here, you can experience life in a settlement and the difficult conditions that form the basis of a small hunting community. The village is located approximately 35 km north of Qeqertarsuaq and has app. 35 residents. Please note, that the boat used is an open boat and that it can be cold. So if you're traveling with small children, and the weather is cold, we do not recommend this trip.

- ▶ For more information on this and other excursions, check the local tourist operator, Siku Aput's webpage.

### **Dining in Qeqertarsuaq**

There is only one restaurant in town called Nilak. It is located by the Hotel Disko and Siku Aput. You will also find a grill bar, kiosks and a supermarket with a bakery that sells sandwiches.

### **Spend the night on Disco Island**

There is only one hotel in town, the Hotel Disko. There are two hostels in Qeqertarsuaq; the Panorama Hostel and the Siorarsuit Hostel. You can also spend the night in the Lyngmark Cabins on the Lyngmark glacier. You are also welcome to camp in the hills.



### **How do I get to Qeqertarsuaq**

In principle, you can get to Qeqertarsuaq several ways as there are helicopters flying to Disco Island. However, these mainly fly with supplies. Tourists usually go with the sailing services from Ilulissat or Aasiaat. The ship also gives you the option of taking a daytrip to Disco Island from Ilulissat, 4 times a week with a 6-7 hour stay. Food is available on the ship but as it is heated "cup noodles", we recommend that you bring your own lunch.

During winter, the residents are more isolated as it is only helicopters and ships (providing there is no ice) that bring supplies to town. That is why you can risk sold out supplies and you have to wait for a new shipment of supplies.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Now you know the basic information on Disco Island. If you want to know more, we have more exciting news for you in the following:

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If you prefer to speak to one of our specialist Travel Consultants to hear about your options, you are more than welcome to contact us for information. Call +45 33 13 10 11 or stop by our offices at Wilders Plads 13A, 1., 1403 Copenhagen K (to give you the best advice possible, we recommend that you book ahead).

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