Whales in Greenland
Get close to the giants of the sea

We know a place... And we would like to show it to you. It is the most beautiful country in the world - Greenland. From the gentle breeze of the midnight sun and the bright colours of late summer to the dark nights of autumn with dancing northern lights and winter with dogsledding and creaking snow. Sheer, breath-taking beauty, always.
WHALES IN GREENLAND
Their size alone has made whales mythical creatures, and Greenland is home to numerous whales – especially in the months of summer. Silver Bay, Moby Dick and Disney's Willie the Whale; we have been fascinated by the giants of the sea for centuries, and we can guarantee you that you will never forget witnessing the stunning animals dive tail-up, or – if you are fortunate enough – seeing them gambol in the surface.

Approximately 15 species of whale frequently appear in Greenlandic waters. Only three of them remain there all year: The beluga, the narwhal and the bowhead whale, while certain species like the blue whale and the killer whale only rarely are seen. However, the other species are represented in large numbers!

If you visit Greenland during summer, you have really good chances of spotting whales. The more time you spend at sea, the better are your chances.

In this inspirational guide, you can read more about
- Where do you find whales?
- The best seasons
- Whale categories
- Whale species in Greenland
- How to get there?

THE SMELL AND THE SOUND
Experiencing whales up close often surprises travellers – not only due to the sheer size of the animals, but also their sound and sometimes even their smell.

The sound of whales is beautiful, while the same cannot necessarily be said about their smell. But imagine getting so close that you can actually smell them! The skippers and captains have great experience navigating safely near the whales, taking you as close as possible.

Commuters of the sea
Many of the whales in Greenland swim back and forth between the Caribbean Sea and Greenland. They spend summer in Greenland where there is plenty of food. In order not to disturb the whales, Greenlandic authorities have imposed strict guidelines on how to behave around whales.
CAPTURE THE WHALES WITH YOUR CAMERA
Some of the whale species found in Greenland are preserved, while the other species are hunted according to internationally defined quotas. Greenland is a whaling nation and it is a natural part of life up here that the large animals are hunted – as they provide plenty of food and reserves.

Obviously, you have not come to Greenland to hunt whales – except with your camera. Therefore, this guide will tell you where you have the best chances of meeting these imposing giants.

The best places to spot whales in Greenland
Both the sea and the fjords are swarming with whales. Whales live where their food is. They feed on krill, plankton and shoals of small fish, so they follow their food. Fortunately, some whales are also fond of certain places, making specific regions in Greenland particularly suited for whale safaris because the chance of whale sightings there is high. These places include Southern Greenland, the Disco Bay, near Maniitsoq and in the large system of fjords near the capital, Nuuk.

The large majority of tourists plan a visit to the Disco Bay and the town of Ilulissat where you stand really good chances of getting close to the whales. The Ilulissat Icefjord is highly popular among whales as the large quantity of ice masses and movements in the water offer great conditions for finding food.

On board the coastal ship
The coastal ship Sarfaq Ittuk sails up and down along the western coast of Greenland and has a panoramic salon, which is ideal for scouting for whales and enjoying the view. In the summer, passengers sit on the upper deck taking in the view and the sun with a clear sight if whales are to appear.

It is more than likely that you will see whales when sailing with the coastal ship, and many of our travellers choose a tour that includes sailing with the Sarfaq Ittuk – often also spending a night or two on board.

You can see pictures, read about the coastal ship and download a guide about sailing with the coastal ship at www.greenland-travel.com/about_greenland/coastal_ship

The Greenland Institute of Natural Resources
The Greenland Institute of Natural Resources conducts research into Arctic ecosystems and how they are affected by climatic and human impacts. The research primarily focuses on living marine resources such as fish, shellfish, marine mammals and birds as well as land-based resources, including land mammals and vegetation. The institute's website holds lots of information about Greenland's animals – and by following this link, you can read more about whales and seals: http://www.natur.gl/en/birds-and-mammals/marine-mammals/
PEAK SEASON
From midsummer to late autumn you are almost guaranteed to meet whales near Paamiut in Southern Greenland, near Nuuk in Central Greenland as well as north of the Arctic Circle near Aasiaat, in the Disco Bay and near Uummannaq. We say ‘almost guaranteed’ because whales are independent animals, and they obviously do not appear just to please us.

Already in April and May, your chances of seeing bowhead whales near Qeqertarsuaq are good. A great tip is to remain close to the skipper or other on-board staff as they are trained whale spotters.

Regardless of whether this is your first, second or tenth whale safari, you cannot help but be excited every time the large animals come close. Just like with the rest of Greenland’s nature, you quickly feel very small in this world.

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OUTSTANDING WHALE EXPERIENCES
Greenland is incredibly versatile. You can experience everything from fluttering northern lights, golden midnight sun, impressive glaciers to lush meadows, deep fjords and fantastic wildlife.

The Big Arctic Five is a collective term for five of the most popular experiences in Greenland. The whales in Greenland make for one of these experiences – and with good reason. First of all, Greenland is home to a great number of whale species including some of the really big ones. Moreover, Greenland is still a relatively small-scale tourist destination, allowing both nature and culture to keep up.

Therefore, the whales have not had to relocate to more peaceful waters. They still return to the same place where they have always gambolled, to the great delight of all who enjoy watching them at close range.
THREE MAIN KINDS OF WHALES

Whales are divided into three suborders: baleen whales, toothed whales and ancient whales. By the way, did you know that hippopotamuses are the closest living relatives of whales?

Baleen whales
Among the baleen whales, we find blue whales, humpback whales, fin whales, bowhead whales and grey whales. Instead of upper teeth, the baleen whales have several long, narrow baleen plates, which the whale uses to eat. The baleen whales fill their mouth with water, which they then press out through the baleens using their tongue. Afterwards, a lot of small animals are stuck in the baleens providing food for the whales. Moreover, baleen whales always have two blowholes on top of their head.

Toothed whales
Toothed whales are characterised by its many small, pointy teeth. They hunt fish, squid or seals and use their teeth to hold on to the food. Contrary to the baleen whales, toothed whales only have one blowhole on top of their head. Among the toothed whales, we find sperm whales, dolphins, killer whales, porpoises, narwhals and belugas.

Ancient whales
You will not come across any ancient whales in Greenland. As the name suggests, these whales have been extinct for a very long time.

WHALE SPECIES IN GREENLAND

Greenland is home to 15 species of whale. In southern Greenland, you will typically see fin whales and minke whales, but we have also come across sperm whales down there. The whales often appear at random when you are sailing between the towns. You are likely to spot humpback whales near Paamiut, Maniitsoq and Aasiaat, and they are also found in large numbers in the fjords around Nuuk. Humpback whales, minke whales, fin whales and bowhead whales are a common sight in the Disco Bay. Whales also flock to Eastern Greenland where they enjoy the desolate surroundings.

You might be fortunate enough to meet belugas and narwhals at the northernmost coasts where in rarer circumstances you can also see blue whales and killer whales. Generally, approximately 15 different species of whale swim by Greenland in order to feast on the many other animal species the sea has to offer. Most whales commute back and forth between Greenland and the Caribbean, while three species – belugas, narwhals and bowhead whales – have quit commuting to remain in Greenland all year.

Whale spotting

The fjords around Nuuk swarm with whales. Follow this link to find a photo album with pictures of whales spotted near Nuuk. That way, you can keep your own record of which whales you spot and thus perhaps held the Greenland Institute of Natural Ressources.
THE BOWHEAD WHALE – THE LONGEST, HEAVIEST AND OLDEST

Weighing up to 100 tons, the bowhead whale is counted among the heaviest of whales and is one of the heaviest animals to have ever existed. Some bowhead whales have been known to live for more than 250 years, and it is one of the longest-living mammals in the world! But not only the age is impressive: The bowhead whale can become up to 18 metres long, it weighs up to 100 tons and it lives in the most beautiful regions on earth: the waters surrounding Canada and Greenland.

The bowhead whale is an Arctic whale species, and in Greenland, it typically spends the months of spring near Qeqertarsuaq on the Disco Island before heading towards Canada in mid-May. You have particularly good chances of spotting the world's longest-living mammal around April. The bowhead whale can become up to 200 years old, and in the 1600-1700s, it was the preferred catch of whalers.

Compared to other whale species, the bowhead whale has the thickest layer of blubber (25-45 cm) and the longest baleen (3.5 m).

THE HUMPBACK WHALE – THE ACROBAT OF THE SEA

The humpback whale is almost as long as the bowhead whale – up to 18 metres long, but it weighs "only" 30 tons, making it one of the acrobats of sea among large whales. Its highly characteristic tail flip is a breath-taking experience to many. It is easily recognisable due to its characteristic black and white markings underneath the tail as well as the fact that it often flips its tail straight up when it dives. You will typically see the humpback whale at the western coast of Greenland, near Nuuk, Aasiaat and Qeqertarsuaq, but also near Sisimiut, Maniitsoq and Paamiut your chances of seeing the humpback whale are particularly good in the period from April to November. In recent years, the humpback whale has often also been spotted near Ilulissat.

On our website, you can see a wonderful film with the whales in Greenland. Click on the film below, or visit www.greenland-travel.com/about_greenland/whales.
THE FIN WHALE
The fin whale is quite a sight. It can grow as long as 27 metres and is thus the second longest species living in the world today – the longest being the blue whale. It is no lightweight either, weighing up to nearly 100 tons.

Especially near Uummannaq but also in the water around Qaqortoq and in the Disco Bay, we often spot fine whales on boat rides.

The fin whale only rarely lifts its tail when it dives, but on a good day you can experience how it thrashes around above the surface.

THE MINKE WHALE
The minke whale is a relatively small whale, which only becomes up to 10 metres long and weighs up to 10 tons. The whale is often seen in fjords and along the coasts in Southern and Western Greenland no further north than the Disco Bay – typically from May to October. However, the whale is spotted at many other locations in Greenland and at different times as well.

THE NARWHAL – WITH THE SPIRALLED TUSK
The narwhal is a medium-sized toothed whale, typically weighing 800-1,600 kilos. It is easily recognisable due to its characteristic tusk growing in a counter-clockwise spiral, which in some males can grow up to three metres long. In Greenland, the narwhal is often seen in the Melville Bay, in the water around Qaanaaq as well as in the north-eastern part of Greenland.

THE BELUGA – A MEDIUM-SIZED TOOTHED WHALE
Just like the narwhal, the beluga is a medium-sized toothed whale. The beluga often travels in smaller groups of 5-10 whales, but is also seen in herds counting several thousands. In Greenland, the beluga is seen between Maniitsoq and the Disco Bay as well as near Qaanaaq and Upernavik.
HOW TO GET THERE?
If you are convinced that Greenland is a must-visit place, your next step is to plan your trip. You can find much more inspiration on our website and we are not more than a phone call or an email away, and we are happy to answer any and every question you may have.

Use our trip finder to find tours with whales
We are the biggest travel agency in the world specialising in Greenland, and therefore we offer a large selection of package tours all year round. You can use our trip finder to see, which tours are best suited for you and match your preferences for experiences, mode of travel and level of activity.

Our trip finder contains an entire category of tours on which you can experience whales. Find them at www.greenland-travel.com/tripfinder/whales.

More inspiration from Greenland
Where to go in Greenland, when to travel, and what are the most popular places, towns and experiences in Greenland? You will find much more inspiration, photos and films from Greenland on our website. Visit our inspirational section and let yourself go www.greenland-travel.com/inspiration.

What are our travelers saying about us
On Trustpilot.com, our customers are free to speak their mind. You can read all their comments on www.trustpilot.com – type 'greenland-travel.com' in the search field. Or click on the link.
GREENLAND TRAVEL
Whether you want a complete package tour or a customized tour, we can find the right solution for you. We also arrange tours for special groups, conferences and associations. The common denominator for all our tours is that we create a travel experience that suits you and takes you on a journey of a lifetime.

We are more than 30 employees in Denmark and Greenland, and – in all modesty – we are the world’s biggest and most dedicated specialist in Greenland. Therefore, we know what we are talking about.

A part of Air Greenland Group
Greenland Travel is part of Air Greenland Group, which also comprises Air Greenland, Hotel Arctic and Arctic Umiaq Line. Moreover, we are co-owners of the excursion operator World of Greenland in Ilulissat. We help develop the excursion possibilities in Greenland and work closely together with those offering excursions and accommodation all over Greenland.

Find us in Greenland and Copenhagen in Denmark
Greenland Travel is the only travel agency, which is present locally in several towns in Greenland. Our headquarters are located in Copenhagen, but we have three offices in Nuuk, Sisimiut and Ilulissat. That way, we are able to service you across the different time zones between Denmark and Greenland.

Are you curious?
If you want to know who we are, our smiling faces will greet you on our website where you can also read more about our different backgrounds www.greenland-travel.com/team.

THIS IS WHY OUR CUSTOMERS CHOOSE US

The world’s biggest specialist in Greenland
We are the world’s biggest specialist in Greenland, Iceland and the Arctic regions, and our senior travel consultants have many years of experience with our destinations. Use it to your advantage.

Reliable guidance
We have been there. We would never dream of selling a tour to a destination we do not know ourselves. Things change quickly in Greenland, so we always stay up to date.

Excellent service
At Greenland Travel, excellent service is still at the heart of everything we do. 98% of our customers recommend us due to our service. We are always available – by phone, email or chat.

Peace of mind
We are a member of the Association of Danish Travel Agents and Tour Operators, the Travel Guarantee Fund and an IATA agent, which is your guarantee for a serious travel agency.