SIGHTINGS

PASSENGERS ON U.S. AIRLINES SOON TO GET LESS SNEAKY WITH THEIR E-BOOK READING

The war of wills between Kindle-toting passengers and flight attendants preparing for takeoff is about to de-escalate — at least on U.S. airlines. The Federal Aviation Administration announced this week that passengers will be allowed to use their electronic devices any time during a flight, so long as the airline can prove the plane can tolerate the interference, reports *The New York Times*. The new rules are expected to come into effect before the end of 2013, but while Angry Birds addicts can rejoice, would-be cellphone yakkers are out of luck, as the regulation stops short of allowing phone calls. "We believe today's decision honours both our commitment to safety and consumers' increasing desire to use their electronic devices during all phases of their flights," Anthony R. Foxx, the United States Secretary of Transportation said in a press release. *Weekend Post*

Continued from Page WP14

Homes in Pang are belted down with hurricane straps, windsocks forever turgid and airlines don't guarantee arrival, instead leapfrogging if wind proves too troublesome, to the nearest runway in Qikiqtarjuak. Despite the perks of northern air travel — open seating, hot towels and sacrosanct box-meals even on the shortest flights — travellers temper their expectations knowing they'll get to Pang, just maybe not today. Even the most able-bodied adventurists should not simply blow into the park. They are expected to be seasoned (or be accompanied by an outfitter), register, undergo pre-trip orientation and provide a post-trip report.

"Interestingly enough," says Peter Kilabuk, a local outfitter of three years and lifelong Pang resident, "a plane went through the ice here in '59." Kilabuk tows visitors by *qamutik* (an Inuit sled) for excursions on sea ice in winter and by boat in summer. He brakes at points of interest along the way to recount tidbits such as how, on a clear day, the aluminum shell of the downed plane — from which everyone safely escaped — can be seen resting on the seafloor.

Prior to outfitting, Kilabuk was an MLA and Parks Canada warden. He tells a lot of tales, many of which involve wind: the machinegun rattle of gravel spitting against his outpost walls; the windstorm in 1978 that carried entire shacks down-fjord. (It bears repeating: Pang is not for the anemophobic.)

Wind isn't the only constant in the fjord where all ice-roads lead to the glaciers and ice fields of Auyuittuq National Park — Auyuittuq meaning "land that never melts." Past the park entrance trekkers are met with a sign marking the Arctic Circle. Pang, 40 kilometres south of this marker, receives 24-hour summer sunlight. In July and August people throng the shores near town at low tide well past midnight to fish under a twilight-y orange and pink half-sunset, ashen mountains reflecting off a still, green mirror of water.

"It's spectacular. It's like a dream," said Silas Nauyuq, a longtime local hunter and fisher on Cumberland Sound. He spends much of his time at the mouth of the fjord, describing it as an underwater highway of bowheads, beluga, narwhal, turbot and char, and rarely comes home empty-handed, often carrying his catch flapping. "I like my fresh fish."

Not far inland at Auyuittuq Park is the most recognizable and photographed Baffin Island mountain: the cylindrical, twin-peaked, flat-topped Mount Asgard. Nearby is Thor Peak with a vertigo inducing 1,250-metre hangover — the planet's greatest vertical drop.

"The tourists I prefer are those who can face the pass," said Louis Robillard, manager of Pang's Auyuittuq Lodge. "It's not for everybody. It's a dangerous trek."

Robillard, a gruff, eccentric, pipe-smoking Québécois hotelier and chef is actually one of the Swiss-est things about Arctic Switzerland. Tonight he has prepared a char gravlax (a Scandinavian dry-cured marinated red fish) as an amuse-bouche for his guests. Online reviews of Auyuittuq Lodge bear a certain pattern: The hotel is nothing to postcard home about but chef Louis is a gem. In Pang, the 25-room lodge is the only game in town, so many travellers venture directly from plane-to-park then time their departure for a quick (if not malodorous) trip out. Robillard hopes to change this. With Inuit art — crocheted "Pang" hats, famous prints, tapestries — and "all the fresh fish you can find," he insists more investment is needed in transportation and infrastructure to transform Pang into a world-class tourism affair.

These winds of change are gathering but the major caveat in Pang's tourism remains cost. One can travel to actual Switzerland for less. Local outfitters hope to strike airline deals and offer special comborates to encourage more winter and spring travel instead of the summer-only crowd. A new annual snow-kiting festival also plans to take advantage of all that wind and help ice the idea of Pang as a mecca for adventure tourists.

Whether or not tourism takes off is up in the air, so to speak, as are daily departures from the airport. Robillard double-checks the weather for guests, studying sudden drops in barometric pressure, visibility and wind direction with meteorological acumen. "You have good luck," he says with a thick accent, adding the Pang equivalent of counting chicks before they hatch, "but we won't sell the hide before we shoot the bear."

Weekend Post

PETER WORDEN

Visitors to Pang can't get attached to a specific arrival date.

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE
First Air and Canadian North airlines offer daily flights from Ottawa to Iqaluit and from Iqaluit to Pangnirtung. Expect the fare to be about $2,500 round trip. You will need to overnight in Iqaluit. Leaving the butter-yellow Iqaluit airport, ticket-takers remind passengers on the tarmac that weather conditions in Pang vary. If they cannot land in Pang, pilots hop to nearby Qikiqtarjuak — a treat in some cases as the overshoot means a flight over scenic Auyuittuq National Park. Visitors can enter the park from either Pang or "Qik."

ACCOMMODATION
Auyuittuq Lodge is the only hotel in Pang and is undergoing renovations. Currently, all but six rooms have shared facilities. Some visitors opt instead for a handful of homestays, which can be arranged by calling the Angmarlik Visitor Centre at 867-473-8737.

SIGHTS
The breathtaking Auyuittuq National Park peaks of Mt. Asgar and Mt. Thor; straddle the Arctic Circle; spot a downed plane at its icy resting place below Pang Fjord; meet Chef Louis; fish the fjord at midnight; see renowned Inuit printmakers and weavers at work at the Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts.

MARGO PFEIFF

Greenland, a home-ruled Inuit nation within the Kingdom of Denmark, delivers a host of unexpected experiences.

ON ISLAND TIME

Greenland may be the world's least populated place, but it's still home to surprisingly sophisticated cuisine and culture

By Margo Pfeiff

I step off the boat for afternoon high tea and into the plot of an international love story, that of Agathe Devisme and Kalista Poulsen — not exactly what I expected at a sheep farm on a remote South Greenland fjord. But then again, that's not what the French architect expected either when she came to visit her sister studying agriculture at an experimental farm and school nearby at Upernaviarsuk where Kalista was a teacher. The two fell in love and she moved to Greenland, working there as a chef and housekeeper for a few years.

In 2005, when they could afford their own farm, they bought Ipiutaq and turned it into a working guest eco-farm — for which they have won an entrepreneurial award — including a rustic/chic cottage and featuring gourmet local cuisine. "I mix Greenlandic food and French tradition," says Agathe in a charming accent, serving cookies and finger cakes like rhubarb with the sub-arctic herb angelica, using blue harebells and crowberries and pouring tea into her grandmother's china. "Dinners might include dried and smoked reindeer with wild Greenlandic sorrel, or traditional "mattak" — whale skin — with my angelica-garlic-rosemary pickles."

Even after a week of touring the remote southwestern tip of Greenland, the world's biggest island hasn't eased up on delivering unexpected cultural, culinary and wilderness experiences. I may be on an isolated fjord trafficked by polar bears where the nearest sign of neighbours are 10th century Norse ruins, but there is nothing backwards about this intriguing part of the world — it is at once rural and fiercely local yet also sophisticated and world-savvy, traditional yet stylish.

Greenland is a unique, home-ruled Inuit nation within the Kingdom of Denmark and the world's least populated country: more than three times the size of Texas, it has just 57,000 people, about 90% of them Inuit. As it hurtles toward complete independence from Denmark, it faces a roll call of 20th century issues from the world's fastest rate of global warming to Chinese mining conglomerates eyeing the rare earth and other minerals emerging from beneath the vast ice cap that covers three-quarters of the island.

Most of the population lives on the ice cap-free west coast fringe and South Greenland is the lushest region. Even the Vikings thought so, since Eric the Red and company set up farming colonies in AD 950 before mysteriously vanishing 500 years later. It's a remote cluster of a few towns and villages with no connecting roads so all travel is by small boat-shuttle (or hiking) up long, iceberg-dotted fjords. South Greenland is still the country's agricultural hub — its tender lamb is a sought-after commodity in Europe —making it an off-the-beaten-track foodie destination for those who also like to hike, kayak, get to know unpretentious locals or just cruise spectacular waterways beneath glacier-topped fjords.

I land at Narsarsuaq (population 158), South Greenland's gateway, on one of this mountainous country's few runways. Most were built during the Second World War by U.S. military as part of an aircraft supply route to Europe. I head to the Blue Ice café/shop/outfitter to meet Frenchman Jacky Simoud who operates the scheduled small boat shuttles and charters up and down the fjords. My plan is to base myself in the four-star hotel in the post-card-cute community of Qaqortoq and take trips to ruins, sheep farms, glaciers and trailheads from there. But, first, en route I'll stop at the village of Igaliku, (population 30), and considered one of Greenland's most scenic villages. I hop onto the little wooden Puttut, chugging through waters dotted with ice alongside hillsides dotted with sheep. Once ashore, it's an hour's easy hike up and over a slope toward the small community, an idyllic smattering of red, turquoise and yellow houses on the shore of a fjord. After spending the night in the tiny hotel, I poke around the 12th century ruins of Norse Greenland's religious heart, the seat of the bishop, then hike through wild lavender and lupin flowers for eight kilometres to a lunchtime lookout over Qooroq Glacier.

By late afternoon I have been shuttled to Qaqortoq ("Ha-hor-talk"), South Greenland's largest town (population 3,200), a cluster of colourful houses perched up a hillside overlooking the harbour. Up the steep streets I poke into shops selling Danish pastries and whale blubber and in the morning I head for the daily "country food" market where fresh reindeer, caribou, musk ox, Arctic char and halibut are sold on the waterfront. The hotel restaurant specializes in Greenlandic cuisine using these ingredients, so lunch is an open-faced Danish sandwich buried in fresh Greenlandic shrimp and sipped down with Eric the Red Ale from Nuuk's Godthaab Bryghus microbrewery.

For my last night I travel to the head of a fjord among bobbing blue "bergy bits," remnants of once-grand icebergs where I'm dropped at one of the sheep farms that host guests in the region, that of Lars and Makkak Nielsen. "Our sheep eat the wild thyme in the meadows and it flavours the meat," says Makkak, setting a platter laden with one of their crispy-skinned, slow-roasted lambs on the dining room table alongside a pot of reindeer stew. There are potatoes, turnips and carrots from the garden and angelica harvested from the wild. Dessert is tundra blueberry cheesecake. It's a meal similar to the one Makkak recently created for the television series *A Taste of Greenland* that is broadcast internationally and a hit in Europe.

Heading back to the airstrip at Narsarsuaq, the boat makes a final stop in tiny Qassiarsuk where a replica has been reconstructed from the ruins of the tiny Christian church Eric the Red built for his wife. Then we pass the foot of Qooroq glacier and drift awhile with the current, the absolute silence broken only by the sound of ice cracking, rolling and splashing into the fjord. A few chunks are hauled on board and chipped into glasses. Cocktails are poured and mini-explosions erupt in our glasses as 10,000 year-old air bubbles escape from ancient ice like Mother Nature's champagne.

Weekend Post

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE
The main travel season is mid-June through September. English is widely spoken. As well as the usual routes through Copenhagen and Iceland, during summer Air Greenland offers flights to the capital of Nuuk via Iqaluit. airgreenland.com

GETTING AROUND
No roads connect South Greenland towns and farms so transfers throughout the fjords are by small boats operated by Narsarsuaq-based Blue Ice Explorer. They also offer custom tours and cruises to Viking ruins, glaciers and other points of interest. Licensed outdoor adventure operators, they can arrange kayaking and hiking trips. Tel: +299 497371; blueice.gl.

Air Greenland also offers scheduled helicopter services between South Greenland towns. airgreenland.com

WHERE TO SLEEP AND EAT

- Hotel Hans Egede is a modern hotel in the capital of Nuuk. engelsk.hhe.gl; Double rooms from $340. There is a rooftop bar with a view as well as two restaurants including a steakhouse and one of the best Greenlandic cuisine restaurants in the country, Sarfalik. Dinner for two $160.
- The Godthaab Bryghus, a microbrewery in Nuuk has a range of beers on tap and serves burgers, steaks, muskox, reindeer and lamb. bryggeriet.gl. Dinner for two $45.
- Hotel Qaqortoq is a contemporary hotel in Qaqortoq. hotel-qaqortoq.gl. Double rooms $295. Their Nanoq Steakhouse serves excellent local Greenlandic cuisine. Dinner for two $140.
- The Igaliku Country Hotel is a simple, comfortable village inn with a dining room. Book through Blue Ice: blueice.gl/Igaliku_accommodation.html. $190 double including full breakfast.

MORE INFORMATION

- Greenland Tourism greenland.com/en
- For more foodie information, check out A Taste of South Greenland greenland.com/en/about-greenland/kultursjael/mad-og-drikke.aspx

For more recommendations, visit nationalpost.com/travel