

2012

The Greenland Crossing – a Real Polar Expedition



The Greenland Crossing – East to West

From Hahn Glacier, Ammassalik to Hill 660, Kangerlussuaq

The Ultimate Cross Country Ski Expedition!

Overview:

For April / May of 2012 Icelandic Mountain Guides (IMG) have organized their 6th expedition across the Greenland Glacier, the world's second biggest sheet of ice. The aim is to cross the interior of Greenland from Ammassalik on the East Coast to Kangerlussuaq (Sondre Stromfjord) on the West Coast. The entire expedition will take up to 34 days in total.

Start of journey: Reykjavik, Iceland April 18th

End of journey: Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, May 18th +/- 3 to 7 days

Cross country skiing: 4 to 5 weeks polar expedition.

Walking per day: 6 to 8 active hours.

Total distance: 540 kilometers (335 miles).

Altitude: 0/900 – 2.500 meters above sea level (0/2.950 - 8.200 feet).

Max elevation one day: 250 m (820 feet).

Duration: 4-5 weeks.

Price: 4 – 6 participants: 1.350.000 ISK

7 participants: 1.250.000 ISK

8 participants: 1.150.000 ISK

including all the necessary permits, and a SAR and an Evacuation insurance

Expedition leader: Róbert Thor Haraldsson





Róbert Thor Haraldsson Robert Thor is one of Icelandic Mountain Guides' most experienced guides and has been with the company for over a decade. On foot with his backpack he has twice successfully led the Iceland Traverse, a 31 day 500 km long expedition across Iceland from the north to the south - one of the most strenuous expeditions available in Iceland. Over the years Robert has led many of IMG's most demanding hiking and backpacking tours, and has been a lead guide at the Icelandic Mountain Guides base in Skaftafell. He has guided numerous mountain and glacier tours in Iceland and has crossed a lot of Iceland's interior on foot and skis. Robert has a firm knowledge of Greenland having been there several times for cross-country skiing, sailing and kayaking. He is a very active backcountry skier and spends his winters in the Canadian wilderness where he is partially based over the winter.

For those who are interested in gathering more experience and meeting Robert, you can join him on the Sprengisandur cross-country ski traverse of Iceland on the 21- 31 of March 2012. This tour is highly recommended as preparation experience for the Greenland traverse.

Practical information:

Expedition members will have to confirm their participation by paying a confirmation fee of 250.000 ISK by Dec 1st. This fee is not refundable unless Icelandic Mountain Guides need to abort the expedition. Full payment needs to be paid by Jan 25th 2012 the deadline for signing up for the 2012 Crossing. After paying the confirmation fee, expedition members are required to send in a résumé of their mountaineering experience for prior assessment by the EL not least to ensure a successful crossing for all the expedition members.

The expedition starts on Wednesday April 18th but expedition members need to be in Reykjavík Iceland no later than Tuesday April 17th for a prep meeting with Róbert Thor Haraldsson in the morning. NOTE this meeting is obligatory so that Róbert can assess the equipment each member has brought and advise if there will be a need to replace anything in which case members can use the afternoon and Wednesday morning before the flight, leaving at 13.00 for Kulusuk.

Luggage allowance for the flight from Reykjavík to Tasiilaq is 20 kg. Care should be taken while packing for the flight so that expedition members avoid excess baggage. This can easily be done by wearing your ski boots and outdoor clothing for the 2 hours flight from Reykjavík to Greenland. It is possible to leave a small bag in Tasiilaq with fresh clothes and basic toiletries to be retrieved on the west coast of Greenland at the end of the expedition. These items need to be packed in a small bag that can be placed in a bigger bag, containing bags from all expedition members, to be sent by air over to the west coast of Greenland.

Kangerlussuaq, is where the Greenland Crossing Expedition comes to an end. It is a small village, formerly a US Airbase at the head of the 180 km long Kangerlussuaq fjord, with a small population of Inuits servicing the international airport and catering to tourists that come to enjoy the wildlife or over the Ice sheet. In the village all the basic services are to be found, such as a cooperative store, selling the basic necessities, a souvenir shop, a post office and even a swimming pool. Getting away from Kangerlussuaq should be fairly easy as Greenlandair operates 4/5 flights per week to Copenhagen from where it is easy to fly onwards to most places in the world.

How to book:

Please contact [Anna](#) for further information and bookings.



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The expedition begins at Reykjavik city airport, on April 18th 2012, with a flight to Kulusuk, Greenland and then a boat or helicopter transfer to Tasiilaq, the capital of East Greenland. The group will stay in Tasiilaq for one or two nights, sorting out equipment and food and dealing with the final preparations before setting out. From Tasiilaq the group will be flown by helicopter either to the small village of Isertoq or directly onto the Hahn-glacier at about 900 meters (2700 feet) altitude, where the skis will take over for the next 540 km (335 miles) or so. If the village of Isertoq is our starting point, the first part of the trip will be a dogsled supported hike to the bottom of the Hahn glacier for 3 – 4 hours.

It takes about 10 - 15 days to climb from the Hahn glacier up to the highest part of the Greenland ice sheet, at 2500m. From there it takes about a week to get to the phantom radar station DEY-2, one of the strangest buildings to be found on the planet, and then it takes approximately five days to reach land at Hill 660 at the western edge of the ice sheet. All in all we estimate spending from 22 to 27 days on the ice sheet.

Hill 660 is in fact a nameless hill close to the glacier that measures 660 m above sea level in height. A jeep track lies from the hill which is beneficial for expeditions coming off of the ice sheet as both people and luggage can ride the last 35 kilometers to Kangerlussuaq. However, a hike back to civilization may be a welcoming thought for expedition members as the landscape is quite dramatic providing brilliant contrasts to the endless snows of the ice sheet. The fauna of the area is also truly remarkable. Reindeer, muskoxen, snow hares and arctic foxes can be seen in big numbers and during this period the lakes are still, mostly ice covered keeping the mosquitoes away.

If the expedition has made good time over the ice sheet, nobody is pressed for a return flight from Kangerlussuaq, and all expedition members are still in good health, without any blisters or foot aches, there is a possibility of doing the hike, either in part or as a whole, down to Kangerlussuaq carrying only a light pack. This will be decided by the guide and all expedition members once the expedition has reached Hill 660.

Permits and Insurance:

There are quite a few permits needed for an expedition across the Greenland ice sheet. All necessary permits for the Greenland Crossing as well as a Search and Rescue (SAR) and Evacuation insurance is included in the expedition price, however we recommend that all participants also have their own travel insurance.



The Expedition timeframe:

When choosing the correct time for a Greenland Crossing there are always certain advantages as well as disadvantages to consider. IMG has, after careful consideration, decided that the time period, April/May is in fact the most opportune time for the Greenland Crossing. In the early spring the temperature is not favorable, as it is still much too cold up on the ice sheet at this time. However an expedition of this sort cannot be done too late when the temperature has risen and the melt off on the west side of the glacier can be problematic. The western edge of the glacier can however be difficult at all times, since it is necessary to navigate through a much crevassed area on a rather steep outlet glacier. Expedition members should expect to take off their skis and wear crampons for some time in order to get off of the ice sheet and onto Hill 660.

Level of experience of Expedition members:

A Greenland Crossing is a real Polar expedition and participants should expect long and hard days throughout the journey. As such, the expedition is only suitable for people that are both physically and psychologically prepared for a highly engaging experience. Be aware that the mental aspect is often more challenging on expeditions like this than the physical one. Therefore, it is of great importance that each participant prepares for teamwork, where the circumstances may often be stressful. Expedition members must be prepared to be confronted with cold weather, strong winds, fresh snow and even blizzards. Also expedition members should be ready for every challenge camping and camp life in the worst of scenarios present, not to mention dealing with the unexpected and unwanted, such as blisters and other bodily aches.

A high level of fitness is indeed an asset for everyone considering an expedition of this caliber, but endurance and self motivation works wonders as well. All prior snow/glacier and cold climate experience is highly appreciated, but previous cross country skiing experience is obligatory. For those interested in doing a preparatory tour, we recommend our cross country ski tour over the [Vatnajökull](#) Glacier, or the [Sprengisandur](#) Traverse of Iceland. Those tours offer a good feel for skiing, camp life, glaciers and even the weather and snow conditions that can be expected on the Greenland Crossing.

General preparation:

The best preparation for an expedition like this is to engage in long hikes in the mountains or long days of cross country skiing, even with a backpack or a pulka. It is very important that participants are familiar with all their personal gear and equipment (skis, boots, and clothes from the bottom up as well as through all the layers). The more comfortable you are with your gear the easier everything becomes when adjusting to the communal gear and the expedition as a whole. Hauling a pulka for hours for many days can be very straining for the lower back and it is recommended that participants engage in exercise that will strengthen both the abdominals and the back muscles. Strong back muscles make hauling easier, as well as shoveling when the necessity for building protective walls for the tents arises. Tent life can also be hard on the back and the better we prepare ourselves the better the outcome will be. The value of all general exercise in preparation for an expedition of this kind should not be underestimated!

Expedition life:

The Greenland Crossing is a real Polar expedition and needs to be approached as such. IMG put great effort into making the expedition as comfortable as possible for all members and by following a certain routine, expedition life acquires its desired rhythm. Each day is divided into different walking periods. At the beginning the periods may only be 3 per day but as the expedition proceeds the number of periods will increase, prolonging the active walking hours from 6 to 7 or 8 hours per day. Each period may vary from 1 – 2 hours, the expedition leader deciding on the length of periods in accordance with the overall condition of the expedition members.

During each period there is brisk walking and IMG recommends wearing wind stopper clothing that allows for good breathing, such as a soft-shell. Between each period there is a short break, where the expedition members can grab a snack and a drink and at midday there is a longer stop for lunch. It is not advisable to carry a backpack as all the gear should be stored inside the pulka however a small one may be OK if one chooses. The best thing is to keep all necessary gear for the day, such as the day's food, a down parka and other essentials, extra hats, gloves etc. on top of the pulka where this is easily accessible.

Each evening camp is set up, snow is melted for plenty of tea/hot drinks and a communal dinner is prepared. After a hard day it can be pleasant to get into the sleeping bag early and get a good rest since the next morning has another day in store for all expedition members. After a communal breakfast, camp is broken and the first walking period starts.

Luggage:

All baggage is transported in pulka sledges made of plastic. At the beginning of the expedition each member should expect to be hauling a sledge weighing about 75 kg (165 pounds). This is the total weight of both the personal and the communal gear (i.e. clothes, sleeping bag, food, fuel, stoves, tents etc.). Towards the end of the expedition the weight will be closer to 50 kg (110 pounds) as team members will eat and burn away at least 30 to 35 kg of the total weight during the crossing.



Weather:

Most of the time, the weather conditions on the Greenland Ice sheet are stable, but some variations have to be expected and taken into account. While climbing the east side of the Greenland glacier, one may expect steady winds from the north-west with variable wind speeds. If the wind speed exceeds more than 15– 17 m/sec staying outside is not advisable and in our itinerary we have planned for some weather days. Once the expedition begins to descend on the west side of the ice sheet, catabatic winds from the south-east are to be expected. Over all, the temperature varies from 0 to -15 °C during the day, getting warmer as the expeditions moves to the west side of the Ice sheet. At night the temperature can drop down to - 30°C so a good sleeping bag is essential. The radiation of the sun during the evening makes the tents reasonably warm and it is not uncommon to see -20°C on the outdoor thermometer and between +10 to +20°C inside the tents.

Snow conditions:

The surface of the Ice sheet consists more or less of well packed snow that the constant wind sculpts into sastrugis. Some precipitation should be expected causing blizzards, bad visibility and difficult skiing and hauling condition. One or two days after snowfall the conditions should be good again, the snow well packed and skiing easy. In the event that the sastrugis are difficult, too high to easily haul pulkas over them, it is very important that expedition members arrange their gear into the pulka in a way that prevents them from rolling over. The expedition leader will be more than happy to advise you on how best to pack things into a pulka.

The snow conditions make the use of skins necessary, when climbing up on the east side of the ice sheet. Once the steepest part is completed, it may be a good idea to cut the skins in half, and once the highest point is reached, there is no need for the skins any more. For the crossing we recommend rifled skis for all participants except experienced cross country skiers. In the warmer temperatures on the lower parts of the ice sheet on the west side, there may be some complications with ski-wax, whereas rifled skis are perfect. In May there is less chance of precipitation, but some snow and even blizzards can be expected

Daylight hours:

In April/May continuous daylight is something to look forward to, especially for those who come from regions where there is little or no fluctuation in the daylight hours.

Included in the Expedition Price:

IMG will provide: Guiding services, necessary paperwork, permits and the compulsory insurance for the Greenland Crossing, transfers from guesthouse in Reykjavik to the domestic airport in Reykjavik, flight from Reykjavik to Kulusuk, helicopter transport from Kulusuk to Tasiilaq, all the airport taxes and handling fees required, sleeping bag accommodation for two nights in Tasiilaq, helicopter transport from Tasiilaq to Isertoq/Hahn glacier, transport of luggage from Hill 660 to Kangerlussuaq, transport of participants from Hill 660 to Kangerlussuaq*, two nights' accommodation in Kangerlussuaq, all food during the expedition (from departure in Reykjavik to arrival in Kangerlussuaq), pulkas and harness for the pulka, waterproof bag for the pulka, tents, cooking equipment, fuel, toilet paper, maps, first aid kit, satellite phone, solar panel for charging the satellite phone.

* Hiking from Hill 660 to Kangerlussuaq is an option; this is done only if expedition members are blister free and eager to enjoy the wildlife and vegetation of the area. This hike takes 2 days.

Not Included in the Expedition Price:

All necessary personal gear. Any excess baggage (anything more than 20 kg) on the flight to Kulusuk/Tasiilaq in East Greenland. Accommodation and food that irregularities in flight to/from Greenland may cause at the beginning or at the end of the trip*. The flight to Iceland, where the expedition begins. Flight from Greenland, where the expedition ends.

* Because of irregularities in flights to and from Greenland an extra day or two might be needed before departure. IMG cannot be held responsible for any extra cost regarding flight delays or other unforeseen/unexpected situations in connection with such irregularities.

Expedition members will have to provide the following items themselves:

Each team member should bring a rucksack or a travel bag to store personal gear within the pulka, as well as a good sleeping bag*, sleeping mattresses such as Thermarest and a foam mattress for better insulation in the tent, lightweight harness, karabiners, crampons, shovel (aluminum), 2 water bottles 1 L, thermos flask 1 L (steel), personal first aid kit**, appropriate clothing for a Polar expedition, face mask, snow goggles and sun glasses, as well as sun protection, 100% UV highly effective for lips, nose and cheeks

*It is important when considering sleeping bags to choose only the best bag available (comfort limit minus 20°C). IMG have had great experience with down sleeping bags on the Greenland Crossing and can highly recommend **Mountain Equipment Everest** or the **North Face Inferno**.

** The personal first aid kit should contain analgesics and anti inflammatory drugs, we recommend you consult your doctor, as these may be prescription drugs. Also, a sufficient amount of blister pads, band-aids and sports tape needs to be in every kit. Of course all necessary medicine as well as epipens for people with known anaphylactic reactions. For greater comfort and well being it might be wise to bring foot lotion, such as Gewohl that seems to work towards blister prevention and definitely makes the socks smell fresher!