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Sustainable Arctic Cruise Communities

Nuuk Case Report

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Heidi Aardrup Eskildsen**



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Executive summary

Cruise tourism is an important part of tourism in Greenland and in the years to come, it is expected to grow. In Nuuk the future of cruise tourism is subject to a great deal of debate. Many local stakeholders want to build the cruise industry and develop it in a more sustainable direction but face a range of challenges in this work. This case report has been developed as a part of the research project Sustainable Arctic Cruise Communities, which has researched sustainable cruise tourism development initiatives across five Nordic Arctic cruise ports. The study is based on desk research, document analysis, interviews and field research. The report discusses and synthesises the key issues in Nuuk. The hope is to draw insights from this destination to inform the development of more sustainable Arctic cruise communities in the future.

The report shows that Nuuk is in many ways an atypical Arctic cruise destination, and its size and position as Greenland's capital means that it does not suffer from many of the severe problems faced by small communities that are overwhelmed by large numbers of cruise tourists. Nonetheless, as our analysis makes clear, there are still challenges related to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of cruise tourism, and an ongoing lively debate about its future development.

The report identifies three key issues related to cruise tourism. First, the **common use of resources and shares spaces** that create negative impacts, such as pollution, but also positive impacts; for example, developing tourist infrastructure that can be used outside the main season. Second, the **timing and pace** of cruise tourism are important for economic and social sustainability. This includes issues related to seasonality, long-term planning combined with unpredictability due to weather conditions, and the dynamics of short, intense cruise calls that last only a few hours. Third, different stakeholders attach different **values and meanings** to various types of cruise tourism, which means that there is currently no consensus regarding the future development path of cruise tourism.

Overall, most stakeholders in Nuuk agree that they do not want mass cruise tourism and very large ships, but there is no clear consensus regarding exactly which cruise segment is preferred – beyond a desire to target tourists that are higher-spending. Most stakeholders believed that cruise tourism should be better regulated but few had very concrete ideas about how this should take place, or who has a responsibility and a mandate to lead on this issue.

As argued during a cruise seminar in 2021, no one knows who has 'the red button' to push stop and our study also shows that no single institution has the authority, mandate or incentive to stop cruise. **No single actor in Nuuk is currently able to 'push the red button'**. While stopping cruise tourism may not be an option, more transparency and closer collaboration and dialogue among industry stakeholders and representatives of the community will be needed to ensure that cruise tourism takes better part in the economic, environmental and socially sustainable development of Nuuk.

Introduction

1. Cruise tourism in Greenland

Cruise tourism is an important part of tourism in Greenland, representing perhaps a third of all foreign visitors. In 2016, Visit Greenland set a growth target for cruise passenger numbers at 3.5% per year (Visit Greenland, 2016: 28). The development of cruise tourism in Greenland began in the 1990s (Cartwright and Baird, 1999) and passenger numbers grew from just under 10,000 in 2003 to 46,633 in 2019 (Statistics Greenland, 2022).

Greenland is ideally suited to cruise tourism as all towns and settlements and many attractions are adjacent to water, either on the coast or on the shores of fjords. The most popular destinations are Ilulissat, Sisimiut, Kangerlussuaq (turnover port), Nuuk and Qaqortoq.

According to Hall (2021), pre-COVID cruise tourism to Greenland was developing mass tourism characteristics in terms of larger ships, a greater proportion of passengers arriving in the largest ships and a spatial concentration whereby just five ports (among them Nuuk) hosted ships with more than two-thirds of all cruise passengers. Also, the characteristic of temporal concentration, whereby in 2019, 78% of vessels (including 11 of the largest 13 ships) visited in August and September, was actively confounding the objective set by Visit Greenland of extending the tourism season.

The very optimistic feeling around tourism in 2019 was severely challenged by COVID-19. Although Greenland avoided almost all contagion until late 2021, international tourism numbers were heavily impacted by hard lock-down (all airplanes and ships) enforced from 20th of March 2020 and later, quarantine regulations for people entering the country. However, a swift turn to domestic marketing (through the campaign Nunarput Nuan) and product and package development oriented directly towards a home market – in combination with domestic travel subsidies – saved the summer for many hotels and operators, especially in destinations such as Ilulissat and South Greenland. To help tourism operators target this new market, Sermersooq Municipality organised a range of seminars and webinars about staycation marketing and product development, e.g. [link](#).

Seeing tourism numbers in 2022 already exceeding the levels of 2019, much hope and high expectations are connected to the development of tourism, including cruise tourism, in and around Nuuk, primarily connected to the new international airport planned to open in 2024. The opening of the airport is significant to Nuuk as it allows for bigger planes to land. Currently, there are only direct flights to Iceland, with other passengers required to change in Kangerlussuaq. Therefore, the airport will allow not only for more direct international flights to arrive and depart from Nuuk but also enable turn-around in Nuuk, which will make cruise tourism in the capital more profitable, but also put new pressures on the town beyond harbour facilities with the expected increase in passenger numbers.

Nuuk is a special case compared to other cruise destinations and harbours of Greenland, because it has more of everything: more space, more attractions, more buses, more berth meters etc. Maybe this is also why heated discussions and conflict, that have been voiced both in Ilulissat and Qaqortoq, are so far relatively absent in Nuuk. The presence of space and



resources and (relative) absence of conflict means that Nuuk is not necessarily representative for the state of operations of cruise tourism in Greenland, or more broadly in Arctic communities that are included in this larger study.

Regardless of this, the Nuuk case still highlights some of the issues that are of concern also in other places in Greenland including questions of *who holds the power or the responsibility for limiting the number of cruise ships* or calls and of the related uncertainty of *who (should) governs cruise*. Although cruise is generally perceived as less problematic by destination residents and businesses, deliberations still take place about the *meaning* and *value(s)* of cruise for the community and how cruise tourism should be developed and regulated in the years to come. It is this context, which forms the base for our exploration in this case study report on current cruise-related practices, conflicts and improvements towards the development of more sustainable cruise tourism.

To explore these issues and related practices at destination level in further depth, we made use of a range of methods. In early 2021, we conducted a thorough desk study, gathering all available information (strategies, policies, statistics) on cruise tourism in Nuuk. This was supplemented with an interview with the Head of Sustainability at Visit Greenland. As a next step we held a cruise seminar in Nuuk in conjunction with the Greenland Science Week in November 2021. Attending (cruise) tourism stakeholders and citizens were also invited to join the following future scenario workshop on desirable cruise futures.

The aim was to get a preliminary understanding of how various stakeholders perceive the current cruise tourism situation in Nuuk as well as its future. In the summer of 2022, fieldwork and observations were conducted in Nuuk together with stakeholder interviews. In total, 21 interviews were conducted as part of the research. Five of these were carried out as part of master thesis research on cruise tourism in Greenland (Eskildsen, 2022), and others to follow up on various topics after returning from fieldwork. Pictures and informal conversations with stakeholders have also been included as part of the material, which forms the basis of this report.

2. Case study area: Nuuk

This case report has been developed as a part of the research project Sustainable Arctic Cruise Communities, which has researched sustainable cruise tourism development initiatives across five Nordic Arctic cruise ports. The Greenlandic port case selected for the project is Nuuk, Greenland's capital and its largest town. Nuuk is situated on the southwest coast of Greenland, at the mouth of the Nuup Kangerlua (Nuuk fjord), about 240 km south of the Arctic Circle. It is also the administrative seat of Sermersooq Municipality, also comprising the inhabited areas of East Greenland. The town reached a population of 19,000 in September 2021, which is a third of the entire population of Greenland.

The town is currently witnessing expansion and the capital development strategy [*Nuuk – Arctic capital*](#) is projecting 30.000 inhabitants by 2030. This entails a physical expansion beyond the current physical boundaries of the town, with the new international airport set to open in 2024 as one of the main drivers. In other words, Nuuk is booming.



Nuuk is the home of the Greenlandic Self-rule Government and main centre of the Greenlandic administration. It is also the home of Ilisimatusarfik/University of Greenland and other educational institutions, and many companies within engineering, mining, fisheries and shipping have their Greenlandic headquarters in Nuuk.



Figure 1: Map showing location of Nuuk and the four other case study ports

Nuuk has two harbours, Sikuki/Port of Nuuk and the Colonial/Sissiugaq harbour. It is predominantly Sikuki, the largest harbour in Greenland, that is used for cruise ships. The Nuuk harbour opened in 2017 and plays a central role in the freight shipping to and from Greenland. It is one of two harbours in Greenland that offers services such as waste disposal and refueling. 22 cruise calls were planned for 2022, with a total of 8,132 passengers.

There is currently no turn-around of cruise passengers in Nuuk. At present, turn-around only takes place in Kangerlussuaq and Narsarsuaq, which are also the places where tourists can fly directly in and out of Greenland. When the international airport opens in Nuuk in 2024, Nuuk may also become a turn-around destination as well. Several stakeholders foresee that many new cruise lines will also enter when Nuuk becomes a turn-around destination, as Kangerlussuaq was by many not seen as attractive, particularly for high-end clients. There is an expectation among some stakeholders that cruise tourism and income from cruise tourism to Nuuk will thereby increase, although others disagree.

Turn-around may most likely not be effectuate already from 2024, as pointed to by this operator: *‘Cruise ships are not the kind to take chances. It is not like we are getting bookings now for 2025 on a turn-around. We won’t get bookings until the airport is finished, so it may well be that we will be in 2025-26-27 before they really start coming. But when they start coming, when the airport is there, then things will start to go fast’*. When it happens, most cruise tourists will be taking one or several overnight stays in Nuuk. This will put pressure on hotels but also challenge the capacity of urban structures and facilities roads, waste and sewage and hospitals as well as natural resources in the Nuuk fjord.

Cruise arrivals

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cruise ship arrivals	29	30	36	0	0	43
Passengers	14958	16466	22584	0	0	25435

Table 1. Nuuk cruise ship arrivals and passenger numbers 2017-2022. Source:

<https://traveltrade.visitgreenland.com/cruise-call-list/>

Tourist arrivals

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Overnight stays (Sermersooq Vest)	61276	59326	60529	53630	35209
Number of guests in paid accommodation (Sermersooq Vest)	22829	19971	19527	14957	8645

Table 2: Number of overnight stays and number of guests in Sermersooq Vest 2017-2021.

Source: Visit Greenland, 2022 <http://www.tourismstat.gl/?lang=en>

Port	Ship	Position	Arrival	ETA	Departure	ETD	From	PAX	Contact
Nuuk	Seaventure	Berth	30/06/2022	07:00	30/06/2022	11:30	Ilulissat	149	
Nuuk	Fridtjof Nansen	Berth	05/07/2022	10:00	05/07/2022	17:00	Ilulissat	530	
Nuuk	Ambience	Berth	05/07/2022	07:00	05/07/2022	17:00	Ilulissat	1400	
Nuuk	Ultramarine	Berth	09/07/2022	05:00	09/07/2022	15:00	Aappilattoq	140	
Nuuk	MSC Poesia	Berth	18/07/2022	06:00	18/07/2022	20:00	Isafjordur, Iceland	2550	
Nuuk	Fridtjof Nansen	Berth	20/07/2022	10:00	20/07/2022	17:00	Ilulissat	530	
Nuuk	Spirit of Discovery	Berth	20/07/2022	08:00	20/07/2022	17:00	Reykjavik, Iceland	999	
Nuuk	Hanseatic Nature	Berth	21/07/2022	13:00	21/07/2022	18:00	Reykjavik, Iceland	230	
Nuuk	L'Austral	Berth	22/07/2022	09:00	22/07/2022	13:00	Narsaq	264	
Nuuk	Seven Seas Voyager	Berth	24/07/2022	07:00	24/07/2022	17:00	Paamiut	1127	
Nuuk	Silver Wind	Berth	28/07/2022	06:30	28/07/2022	16:00	Qaqortoq	513	
Nuuk	Norwegian Star	Berth	29/07/2022	06:00	29/07/2022	17:00	Paamiut	2348	
Nuuk	Ocean Majesty	Berth	31/07/2022	10:30	31/07/2022	16:30	Qeqertars...	621	
Nuuk	Ocean Endeavour	Berth	31/07/2022	09:00	31/07/2022	17:30	Killiniq, Canada	199	

Table 3: Itineraries and passenger numbers for cruise ships docking in Nuuk, July 2022 (retrieved from Visit Greenland's [Cruise Call list](#))

Sikuki/Port of Nuuk operates 11 docks, piers and pontoons, several of which are used for cruise vessels. Ny Atlantkaj is primarily used for trawler operations but is also used by cruise vessels between June and September. Feederkaj, a wooden construction, is used for smaller cruise vessels and expedition vessels in the summer. Skonnertkaj is primarily used by Arctic Umiaq Lines coastal ship, Sarfaq Ittuk. Kutterkaj is primarily used by small vessels, including visitors staying for short periods, mainly in the summer. The Tidal Stairs and pontoon are used by boat tour operators. Sissiugaq, the old port of Nuuk, close to the city centre, also has a pontoon used by local tour operators.



Figure 2: Nuuk Inner and Outer Port. Source: <https://www.sikuki.dk/the-port/port-of-nuuk/>

In relation to cruise tourism, an information and visitor centre has been set up in adapted shipping containers by the municipality to help greet and inform tourists about experiences and tours. The Culture and Events Department initiated a project in 2019 on pop-up events in the colonial harbour when the very large cruise ships call at Nuuk harbour. The events were set 'to create an opportunity for tourists and locals to come down to Nuutoqaq (Nuuk local museum) in the colonial harbor, and see and experience the Greenlandic culture first hand' ([Link](#)).

A more permanent visitor centre for Kommuniqarfik Sermersooq (West) is planned as part of the national tourism strategy, stating that each tourism region should have a [visitor centre](#) (6 in total). The visitor centre will be a *Nature and Geo centre* and will be placed in the former headquarters of Royal Arctic Line on the harbour, specifically catering for cruise tourists. So far, 120 million have been allocated for the purpose ([link](#), 2018). In 2019, two million Danish kroner were invested by the municipality with the explicit goal to improve the visitor experiences for cruise and land-based tourists. Initiatives include the improvement of signage, better marking and development of hiking routes, etc.



Figure 3: Cruise visitor centre at Sikuki harbour

In Greenland, the local and regional development of tourism experiences is overseen and managed by mainly two organisations, the national tourist organisation Visit Greenland and the regional destination management organisation, in this case Visit Nuuk (previously Colourful Nuuk). Other national authorities and organisations, such as Innovation South Greenland and Nalik Ventures partake in specific initiatives.

Ideally, development plans and strategies are coordinated with municipal development plans and strategies, in the case of Nuuk, with the Sermersooq Municipality and Sermersooq Business. This ensures strategic alignment and the efficient use of resources, for instance in offering support, fundings schemes, and seminars and courses for entrepreneurs. Much effort is put in developing skills and competencies within service, experiences, accounting and other tourism related issues.

As tourism is increasingly perceived as a viable avenue for year-round, sustainable business, tourism operators and products continually emerge in Nuuk. Private initiative thrives in the area, ranging from offers to sail, hike, fish and hunt. Also kayak and stand-up paddle tours are on offer as are food, music and cultural events. A well-known classic is the 'kaffemik', a home visit that includes coffee, cakes and a meet and greet with a local host.

Cruise Practices

1. Ship handling

Practical arrangements for cruise ships are made by Sikuki and port agents – Blue Water, Royal Arctic Line. The port agents are in contact with cruise lines and organise provisioning and other services, while tour operators such as Greenland Escape, Greenland Cruise, Tupilak Travel and Guide to Greenland run shuttle buses into the town centre, arrange tours, activities and cruises on smaller vessels in Nuuk fjord. Due to limited capacity, cruise ships are advised not to offload waste in Nuuk, but they can rent waste containers through their shipping agent. It is expensive to provision in Greenland as most goods and foodstuffs are imported.



Figure 4: View over quay before arrival of cruise ship

Nuuk is one of only two harbours in Greenland where bigger cruises can berth, which means that passengers can more easily come ashore and, if they wish, can return to the ship more than once during the day. Prior to the arrival of a cruise ship, fencing is set up around the quay and the area is secured with a guard.



Figure 5: Quay during cruise call

Cruise season stretches from June, July, August to the first half of September. In 2022, approximately 50 ships called at Nuuk and during this period there is competition for space at the quays. This makes the coordination of different vessels in and around the harbour one of the most important – and challenging - practices. All stakeholders agree that cruise tourism is close to or has reached the limit in relation to the number of cruise ships that can be accommodated. However, more than 70 ships are already expected for 2023.

There is no central coordination or selection of cruise ships and they are booked via a ‘first come, first served’ principle. Trawlers are, however, prioritised because they represent year-round business that is economically critical. So even though the number of cruise calls has grown substantially, they are less important economically to the harbour than container ships and trawlers.

Sikuki is ultimately responsible for how many cruise ships that dock, and it also operates a booking system. Quay places are blocked out in the booking system so that there is always space for them to dock and offload fish and seafood, etc. Cruise ships tend to book places well in advance (often 2 years), while fishing and cargo vessels operate with much shorter notice and this system ensures that there is always space for them. However, even though cruise ship calls are planned

years in advance, they are still subject to change or cancellation at short notice due to weather conditions or changes to the itinerary during the voyage, with knock-on effects to the planning and activities of other stakeholders, notably the tour operators, as described in Section 3.

2. Planning for and hosting tourists

In contrast to most other ports of call in Greenland, berthing along the quay allows more tourists to come ashore. In many other destinations, Zodiac or fender boats are used to sail the cruise guests to shore, often resulting in queues and bottlenecks. With berthing, guests to Nuuk can much quicker get off and onboard.

A number of different organisations are involved in planning and preparing for cruise visits. As described above, Sikuki has responsibility for the harbour facilities and infrastructure required for cruise ships to dock, refuel, take on provisions, etc. In addition, they are responsible for the tourist facilities at the harbour, including the information centre. Sikuki also maintains the pontoon in the colonial harbour from which smaller tourist boats sail. They collaborate closely with the port agents (usually Blue Water or Royal Greenland) who negotiate and book quay places, ensure paperwork and fees are paid, and organise the various services required by the cruise vessels. Finally, the tour operators plan and schedule tours and activities for cruise tourists and organise the shuttle buses that transport them from the ship to the town centre. The main operators in Nuuk are Greenland Cruise, Tupilak Travel, Guide to Greenland, and Greenland Escape (which also acts as a port agent). Tour operators hire individual providers and, in some cases, provide the experiences themselves. The most popular products for cruise tourists visiting for the day are experiences that can easily be scaled-up. They include town walks including visits to Katuaq, Greenland's cultural centre and to art and history museums, kaffemiks and boat tours, kayaking or SUP trips in the Nuup Kangerlua fjord, the second largest fjord system in the world. To access the experiences in town (guided tours, kaffemiks, museum visits), tourists are transported from the harbour into the city centre in tour buses, a brief drive (5-10 minutes) from the harbour.

Cruise tourism stakeholders coordinate and collaborate in different ways, both through formal and informal networks with each other, but also with stakeholders that are mainly responsible for other practices (port practices, local business development practices, cultural practices, etc.). All the cruise tourism stakeholders in Nuuk hold a meeting before the cruise season begins to discuss any potential problems and improvements that could be made. One example is that guides were suffering from overheating in the visitor centre and requested that the harbour installed sun film on the windows.

There is also collaboration taking place within the [Nuuk Maritime Network](#). However, an issue with this type of collaboration is the small size of many operators, which make representation in the network difficult in comparison with other much larger companies. For this reason, the [Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators](#) (AECO) serves to represent many smaller companies and their interests, as explained here: *"it's obvious to use AECO if you want to work further on what is it that we can actually sell and deliver to the cruise industry. It is really important that they participate, because AECO also has the capacity to participate in such network meetings. The small tourism companies are so tied up in their own operations that they find it difficult to prioritize something like this. So their voice is quickly stifled by the fact that they*



- they can't just take a whole day off, like you can in a large multibillion-dollar group like Royal Greenland, to go to a conference. Because then no one is sailing the boat.'

Cruise tourism is an important activity for tour operators, one of whom noted that one ship can bring as many bookings as a whole month of land-based tourists. Tour operators sometimes run their own walking or car tours, but largely collaborate with others – especially charter boat firms – to arrange tours. There are many different types of tourism experiences ranging from hiking, cultural events, kaffemik, bus tours, food experiences such as cooking over an open fire, beer brewing and local gastronomy.

In addition to land-based experiences, many tourists also book short boat tours around Nuuk fjord or longer trips to local islands. When large cruise ships are in port, this can be a very busy and industrial-like operation, where all available local boats are chartered by the tourism operators. This is a very important business for local operators, but some stakeholders feel that it has the character of mass-tourism and can be very chaotic; for example, if a whale is spotted in the fjord and eight and ten tourism boats try to get close to it. While most tourists book a tour via the cruise line, it is also possible to book more expensive tailor-made tours directly with providers.

Some shops in the town centre have made special arrangements with the cruise ships or the guides to promote their business, offering discounts and opening earlier or later to accommodate cruise calls. Katuaq, the Greenlandic cultural centre, has also developed a specific event tailored for cruise passengers.

3. Developing infrastructure

As a cross-cutting theme ranging from large infrastructure projects such as expansion of harbour to 'micro-infrastructure' such as garbage bins, signage and walking paths in the town centre, infrastructure is a major issue and of great importance to secure a smooth execution of cruise tourism activities, especially in smaller places. Nuuk is the largest harbour and town and as described already, major crowding due to cruise tourism is not perceived as a great problem (yet), probably due to the physical lay-out of the town away from the harbour and the relative size of Nuuk, that allow of a certain 'soaking up' cruise tourists. The harbour collaborates with the municipality which has responsibility for infrastructure outside the harbour area. There have for example been discussions about how to improve access to and from the harbour for pedestrians.

Signage all over Nuuk is perceived by many of the interviewees as not user-friendly. This is not a cruise-only issue, as signage has been mentioned for many years as an issue for tourists in Nuuk. Increasing cruise tourism (and generally more tourism) may however become an occasion to improve the situation, also benefiting residents and especially newcomers, that may not all know their way around the town as it continues to expand. Better signage on trails, that are also continually being developed may also contribute to better access to the outdoors, as paths are currently inaccessible if not on a tour or having prior knowledge of the destination.

There are currently plans to expand the harbour further in order to accommodate larger trawler, increase the warehousing space and offload containers more efficiently. As cruise tourism is expected to increase as a consequence of the new direct

airport to Nuuk and the general rising interest in Arctic (cruise) tourism, question is how cruise tourism will be able to co-exist with current harbour activities, being cargo shipping and most importantly, fisheries, that is currently given priority. Currently, industrial needs take prior over cruise ships as cruise tourism only takes place a few months of the year, whereas fishing is a year-round activity.

Cruise tourism in Nuuk is growing and set to change because of the new airport, but still many perceive a lack of preparedness, as mentioned by this municipality representative: *'We lack hotels for them to spend the night in. (...) We are probably missing most things. What we have before long is the airport and the port. Then we lack everything in between'*. So while the capacity right now is beyond or at level, a future increase in numbers and length of stay will create new pressure on all types of local infrastructure: from hotel rooms, to waste, to trails, etc. This is an extremely important issue in relation to the prospects for Nuuk as a turn-around port (where cruise passengers begin or end a cruise). At present, cruise ships arrive and as an interviewee noted 'it doesn't require big investment in hotels and all kinds of things. They use the facilities that are already here...they bring income without the requirement of investment in advance'.

4. Recruiting and developing human resources and competences

In our conversation with operators, there appeared to be few problems employing guides in Nuuk. Because it is the capital and largest town in Greenland, it also has a larger pool of workers. In the summertime, staff is recruited among students from the university or other educational institutions, from other parts of the coast or from abroad. Some interviewees emphasised that it was easier to find Greenlandic employees in Nuuk and this is seen as an important aspect of the social sustainability of cruise tourism. The use of local work force is often addressed in public and social media as a major concern as tourism is expected to grow. However, those who had worked as guides also noted that wages were not very high and that there are sometimes challenges with retaining staff. Guides are not necessarily professionally trained. They are often local students who are trained on the job.

Although cruise tourism takes place only during the summer, there are boat trips and other tours also during the winter months. This year-round tourism in Nuuk caters for instance to land-based tourists and conference attendees. Despite this, we do see mention of a loss of staff during off-season, also because not all positions are full-time, and employees seek elsewhere in a job market with very high employment. As one tour operator describes: *'the problem is that although we now get many cruise ships, it is still difficult to give the guides tasks. It is only once or twice a week that there is something for them. So, they need to have another income'*. This problem has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic when there were no cruise calls at all for two years and guides have found other jobs.

Successful cruise calls do not only rely on the skills and competences of local stakeholders but also the crew of the cruise ships. This was sometimes a cause of frustration among tour operators who felt that their local knowledge of the best and most efficient way to organise tours and move passengers from the ship to tour busses was ignored. Again, COVID-19 has had an impact because as cruise tourism starts up again, there are many new crews onboard the ships who have not visited Nuuk before.

Cruise tourism is by some stakeholders seen as an opportunity to develop cultural products and experiences, but this requires knowledge of tourists' motivations and interests, as well as how to package experiences to fit with the short cruise visits. One provider of cultural experiences describes it thus : *'Visit Greenland say that people who travel to Greenland (...) want something with nature and some culture. So, what I ask is: 'well, what kind of culture? What do they have in mind?'. It can be hard for us to know exactly (...). How long have they been gone? Are they like... hard to impress because now they've been away for so long and seen so much else, or have they just arrived? And where are they from? So, there is such a... well... it's a special kind of tourism. Also, because they come in in the morning and then they leave again during the day, so they only have a few hours for something like that, and do they want to sail into the fjord, or what do they want?'*

Issues such as these make it difficult for some stakeholders to develop good and relevant products, while at the same time making sure that the product is also meaningful and fitting at their end in terms of available resources and hands, time of the week or of the year, etc. At destination level, we see individual stakeholders experiment with new products, such as at Katuaq/Greenland's Cultural Centre which has developed a cultural offer where cruise tourists see a presentation about Greenlandic culture, experience music and dance, and taste some Greenlandic food specialities. Some stakeholders also argued that entry barriers to cruise tourism were relatively low, and anyone could become a guide and build up a business.

5. Regulating cruise tourism

Cruise ships operating in Greenlandic waters are covered by the Polar Code, which regulates ship design and construction, safety, operations and environmental protection. There are also laws regarding the protection of the marine environment - Landsting Act no. 29 of 2003 on the Protection of Nature and Executive order no. 8 of March 2, 2009 on protection of birds, a.o. In addition, the Greenlandic Act of Preservation of Cultural History severely forbids any kind of violation of man-made monuments such as graves, ruins, hunting structures as well as structures from recent times protected by preservation regulations. In relation to navigation, '[Order no. 1698 on Pilotage Around Greenland](#)', issued by the [Danish Maritime Authority](#), requires passenger ships with more than 250 passengers to use a pilot when sailing within the National waters of Greenland.

Port taxation is an important part of the governance of cruise tourism in Greenland and taxes are often mentioned in conversations about cruise tourism. Port taxation was first introduced in 1992 and was based at the time on the gross registered tonnage (GRT) of the ship. In 2002, this tax was changed to a passenger tax of 300 DKK (40 Euro) per passenger, increased to 450DKK (60 Euro) in 2006 and 525DKK (70 Euro) in 2008.

In 2015, the tonnage tax was reinstated at a higher rate. This favoured larger ships because their weight per passenger is usually lower than smaller ships. Nuuk has recently adopted a passenger tax (in addition to tonnage tax), set at 10 DKK (1,35 euro) per passenger. At present, taxes are slightly lower than most Baltic ports and lower than Iceland. The taxation model is currently (April 2023) under review, a process which also includes discussions with a range of stakeholders,

including Visit Greenland to ensure a balanced pricing, that make cruise tourism in Greenland competitive, while ensuring that it also remains 'worth it' for the receiving community.

Expedition cruise ships and passengers to Nuuk are requested to follow community guidelines developed by the Association of Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO). These guidelines cover operational matters such as passenger behaviour onshore, limits on the number of cruise passengers per guide, protecting biodiversity and wildlife. Community-specific guidelines are developed in collaboration with local residents, councils and tourism operators typically through workshops facilitated by AECO and the local destination organisation (you can read more about the community guidelines and the development process [here](#)). AECO members are required to follow these guidelines, but they are voluntary for others. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), which represents conventional cruise lines has its own set of policies covering environmental stewardship, safety and security, health and accessibility for persons with disabilities, but these are not specific to the Arctic region.

The Nuuk case highlights issues about power and responsibility: who holds the power or has the responsibility for limiting numbers of cruise ships or calls, who is responsible for developing and regulating cruise in the years to come. A workshop with cruise stakeholders held in Nuuk in November 2021 made it clear that many are unaware and concerned about who decides and regulates cruise tourism, or as asked by a participant: *'who holds that red button?'*. Currently, the level of cruise tourism to Greenland is controlled by the market in the sense that port agents book slots at the harbour on behalf of cruise lines and decisions about whether, how often and for how long cruise ships call in Nuuk is not regulated. If there is room, ports have no authority to reject ships.

Key issues and controversies

1. Shared resources and spaces

Cruise practices draw on a range of different human and physical resources. These include materials and infrastructure (for instance port facilities, fences, busses) and competences (such as human skills, knowledge and hands). Many of these resources are shared with or have significance for other practices; for instance, fisheries and shipping (through the shared port spaces and facilities) or locals shopping in Nuuk (through crowding in the town centre). In that sense, cruise tourism is intertwined with, affects, and is affected by many other local practices and the physical environment.

There is potential for mutual support and for synergies; for example, when locals use tourism infrastructure. But there may also be clashes; for example, due to pollution from cruise affecting the local environment or for interference with other practices which take place in the same geographical spaces as cruise tourism such as hunting or fishing. Analysing the ways in which cruise practices relate to other local practices and the resources on which they depend is crucial to understanding the sustainability of this type of tourism. In this section we explore the extent to which cruise practices in Nuuk are complementary or clashing, and whether there is competition between cruise and other practices (for example, over space, resources and labour).

The most obvious geographical space in which cruise intersects with many other practices is at the harbour itself and there are clearly challenges related to the coordination of tourists and getting them off the cruise ships and on to tours. Tourists who have booked land-based experiences are usually transported by shuttle bus directly to the town centre or to attractions upon their arrival, but some passengers walk on their own, which can be problematic as there is no pathway for pedestrians or signage to the city centre. This means that they share the road with cars, machinery and heavy goods vehicles carrying containers. Also, the walk from the harbour to the centre is steep, which means that the approximately 25-minute walk is difficult for older or less mobile passengers.



Figure 6: Road from harbour towards Nuuk town centre

Passengers taking boat trips which leave from the harbour must cross the main road into the facility in order to access the small pontoon from which boat tours leave. When larger cruise ships call (or there are two in port at the same time), the quay areas can become chaotic. For example, one tour operator describes how a ship with nearly 4,000 guests is only in port for six hours, and they can barely manage to get all the guests off the ship and back again in that time: *'there is a long list of tours they want to go on and they all need to leave from that little harbour. We know that it will be complete chaos, but...it simply can't be avoided. There is nothing we can do'*.



Figure 7: Pontoon at Water Tide Steps at the main harbour

Competition for quay space is more common in the summer as the harbour becomes more crowded due to the cruise season. As described in Section 1, coordination by the harbour authorities is necessary to avoid clashes between trawlers and cruise ships, and most stakeholder felt that the harbour was close to the limit in terms of the number of ships that can be accommodated each season.

By contrast, crowding in the town centre was not mentioned as a serious issue by any of our interviewees. The distance from harbour creates a natural divide between the two parts of the town. In the context of cruise tourism, this physical lay-out may unintentionally help to counter massive, condensed 'waves' of cruise tourists and crowding in the city centre, something which is often reported in other ports of call in Greenland, such as Ilulissat and Qaqortoq. Also, Nuuk is a relatively large and sprawled town with a substantial town centre that includes shops, offices, museums, etc. Although interviewees all said that cruise tourists were visible when they visit the town centre, they did not seem to overwhelm the locals.



Figure 8: A charter bus transporting cruise tourists

In short, there currently seems to be enough space to share between residents and tourists so that residents' everyday practices are not unduly disturbed by cruise calls. As one interviewee put it: *'I would say that the town is so big that it [cruise tourism]... gives a good vibe. And it brings a little life to the town because the town has the size it has, and it isn't as vulnerable as other small towns.'* The fact that most tourists are transported by bus directly to e.g., the national museum or on guided walks outside the town, means that there are not often large groups of tourists exploring by themselves, and there seem to be no issues with tourists invading locals' privacy, trespassing on private land, etc.

Cruise tourism also impacts on the local environment in several ways. Pollution is a major issue, which becomes worse as the number of cruise calls increases. During their stay in the port, a cruise ship will keep its motors running to provide electricity and heating for the ship. In the Greenlandic media, this issue has received attention over the year, as exemplified by this article from 2018: *'Greenland has some of the world's cleanest air, but cruise ships calling at the country's ports noticeably damage the clean air, with the use of heavy bunker oil, which is banned in several places in the world'* ([Link](#)).



Figure 9: Cruise tourists visiting Nuuk town centre

While heavy fuel oil (HFO) has now been banned in the Arctic, there are plans to connect the cruise ships to shore power. As all electric power in Nuuk comes from hydro power (from the Buksefjorden power plant), this would be a major improvement and currently (2023), calculations are being made by Nukissiorfiit (the Greenlandic power company) about this possibility. Whether and when this will materialize remains uncertain and before the planned expansion of the Buksefjord plant, there is currently not enough capacity. It should also be mentioned that this is not an issue that was discussed by the stakeholders interviewed for this project.

Other environmental impacts occur because cruise ships and tourists on boat tours share the fjord with other various types of wildlife. The role of whales in cruise (and other forms of tourism) is particularly sensitive. Whale watching is an extremely popular tourism activity, and a number of humpback whales return to Nuuk fjord each year. Given the potential for tourist boats to disturb whales, the Nature Institute in Nuuk helped to develop a code of conduct which has been adopted by the boat operators which provides guidelines regarding the speed and direction from which boats approach whales, how far away from the animals they should stay.

Cruise ships themselves are a major source of acoustic disturbance (as are all large vessels) but little is known about the impact on whales and other wildlife. However, due to hunting practices, many animals are very wary of humans and Nuuk is not well-known as a wildlife tourism destination. Birdwatching is also a popular activity and is regulated so that humans do not come within a few hundred metres of bird colonies.

There is also an on-going debate about whether whales should be protected in the fjord for the sake of tourists (and animal welfare) or whether the cultural (and economic) interests of hunters should be given priority. Hunting of humpback whales in the fjord was forbidden in 2021, though hunting of other whales is not forbidden. Examples exist in the Nuuk fjord of four orcas being shot only a week after entering the fjord to the great disappointment of tourism operators ([link](#)) and how a whale spotting Facebook page was used by hunters to help them locate their prey. However, some stakeholders also describe somewhat chaotic scenes in the fjord if a whale is spotted while a large cruise ship is in port, with several tour boats all trying to get the best position for tourists to observe them.

Participants at a scenario workshop held in Nuuk in August 2022 on the future of tourism expressed concern about increasing human activity and crowding in the Nuuk fjord in the coming years because of the new airport. Also, concerns are voiced over more disturbance of hunting areas during hunting season. New camps and huts are being built for land-based tourists, where hunters previously would go, and in a case in 2023, musk ox hunting concessions were rolled back due to protests of hunters indicate that moving forward, spatial crowd and spatial management will be of increasing importance to avoid conflicts over land and resources.

Cruise tourism can, however, also generate or attract resources that may serve to improve the quality of life of local residents. This applies on a general level in regard to infrastructure from airport development to signage, garbage cans, roads, paths and boardwalks. For instance, a resident working in tourism noted how developing better trail systems in town away from the main traffic areas for tourists would also be great for walking with the pram (private communication). Also, on the level of individual businesses looking into the development of culture, arts, adventure, wellness and food products do we see an interest in making these available for locals as well as cruise tourists.

At the same time, there can be a tension between providing experiences for cruise tourists and locals. Those involved in cultural experiences, for example, noted that cruise tourists were interested in authentic experiences that locals would also enjoy, but that these needed to be presented in a way that was accessible (e.g., due to language). As one stakeholder put it: *'it's about balance for us – how much should be here for these tourists. We are here first and foremost for the local population and to create cultural arrangements for them.'*

2. Pace and temporality

Cruise tourism is characterised as a combination of different paces and temporalities, ranging from the long-term planning of cruise itineraries years in advance of a cruise ship visiting a destination, to the micro-dynamics of a particular cruise call that unfolds over a few hours.

At the destination, there is much waiting and anticipation before the season starts and before a ship is expected. Then, once the ship is in, there is little time to get everything sorted out as describe in this quote: *“Then they want a waste container. They want a footbridge. They'd like to have foam bags. They would like some water delivered. They want vacuum cleaners, all sorts of weird things. Then you line it up in the – what to say – the times when they are inside. And it's quite intense, because then they're in for eight hours, and we have to deliver provisions to them from our logistics department, and we drive a lot of buses for them on guided tours and transfers up to the city, and when the day is over, you throw the last rope, and you see them sailing again. What a day!”*

Usually, cruise trips are developed, planned, advertised and sold years in advance. On the list of cruise calls on the homepage of Visit Greenland, authorities and operators are able to get an overview over the calls in Greenlandic ports for the coming season months in advance ([link](#)). However, even with years and months of preparation, calls may be cancelled with only a few hours' notice if the weather is bad, or the ship has lagged behind its schedule. A major issue for local stakeholders is how to manage this tension between long-term planning and the costs of arranging tours, with the realities of weather and sea conditions, which mean that cruise calls can be cancelled at extremely short notice. One big debate is whether cruise ships should pay cancellation fees to cover some of the unrecoverable costs incurred by tour operators when arranging activities. It appears that there is now a dialogue between tour operators and cruise lines regarding this issue but, as one operator put it: *‘previously you couldn't talk about it. They turn up if it suits them and if they didn't come then tough luck’*.

If more agents and operators set up businesses in Nuuk, this could lead to conflicts in years to come, especially if it means that the cruise companies gain more power in negotiating terms because they can more easily find alternatives should a particular operator ask for cancellation/no show fees.

Cruise tourism in Nuuk only takes place during the summer months, and one consequence of the short season is the idling of resources outside this period as described by one tourism operator: *‘eight months of the year, we have far too many buses, but four months of the year, we have far too few (...)’*. However, this also means that all resources are booked up when cruise ships call and that the operators have ‘all their eggs in one basket’. Nonetheless, the relatively few days when cruise ships call are a very important source of income for tour operators and their suppliers: *‘a lot of money comes in on one of these days. Maybe we have 20 days a year when it is in full swing with the boats sailing for cruise ships. And those 20 days are something that means that we can afford to invest in more material, more boats and maintain the boats we have. So, it has big significance’*.

Overall, June-August is generally characterized as a (hectic) high season for those directly involved in tourism. Charter boat firms may have a few employees in winter and many more in summer. However, some local institutions struggle to make space and find the time for cruise-related activities in summer, that is usually quiet: *‘It's just the balancing act and the fact that it's also something that has to make sense for the house and to prioritize it in a time that's also holiday time’*.

It is important to emphasise that Nuuk has all-year tourism due to its position as the capital of Greenland. It is accessible by air, including a direct flight connection to Iceland. There are many business visitors and tour operators have activities all year round, as well as organising travel for local residents. Some would like to spread the summer peak into the shoulder

seasons, but this is challenging for cruise tourism, which is dependent on ice conditions. As one interviewee describes: *Kangerlussuaq [where some cruises start] is a huge bottleneck in terms of getting the season extended, because it thaws late and freezes early. So if Nuuk becomes a turn-around port [cruise line] has indicated that they would like to do a cruise – something like March to October, and then turn around in Nuuk’.*

The temporal rhythm of cruise visits themselves are also important to the overall impacts on residents’ quality of life and the social sustainability of cruise tourism. Cruise tourists are only present in the town during the daytime. They arrive at approximately 8am and leave again between 4 and 6pm after which the residents ‘have the town to themselves again’, as one interviewee put it. However, the fact that their visits are so short means that there are few connections made between locals and tourists. Cruise calls also change the rhythm of local travel. If a big cruise ship calls, then all boats will be used for tourism, and local people delay other trips until later in the day.

3. The meaning and value(s) of cruise tourism

Cruise tourism is contested in many places around the world. While there are currently no vocal protests or open conflicts around cruise tourism development in Nuuk, it is still the subject of discussion and there are many different opinions about the benefits and problems of cruise. There is no consensus about what kind of cruise tourism – and indeed tourism in general – is best for Nuuk, but there is a clear sense that development up to (and now after) the COVID-19 pandemic had been very rapid. Some stakeholders expressed concerns about further growth in tourism, with fears about mass tourism that is not controlled by local stakeholders. As one interviewee put it: *‘I usually say that things in the Arctic grow slowly. They have to so that they become strong enough to live here. And tourism in Greenland should also grow slowly...It should be us who develops it’.*

In contrast to other cruise destinations, Nuuk is not dependent on cruise tourism, and has year-round land-based tourism. Nonetheless, cruise tourism has grown substantially and is a significant source of revenue. While the harbour prioritises fishing and container ships, some tourism stakeholders would like to grow cruise tourism even more. Their focus is on developing products and services that can generate more economic benefits from cruise:

‘how do we actually discover what it is that we can sell to cruise tourism instead of just saying they are in the way? We have some really bad estimates, but the turnover is probably 1-1.5 million DKK in the city when a trawler arrives and probably an average of DKK 0.5 million when a cruise ship arrives. And that number could well be raised much higher. Instead of just sitting down and saying: ‘trawlers, they are the ones who give the most, so they are the ones we want space for’. It’s only a year and a half ago that that I’m beginning to experience that some of the companies that actually primarily service fishing are beginning to say: ‘whoa, what can we actually sell to cruise tourism?’, instead of just complaining about them. Because they are not going away.’

It should be stressed that there is a lot of uncertainty around how much income cruise tourism generates, but some argued that although individual cruise tourists do not spend as much per person as land-based tourists, the large numbers that arrive make them economically important:

'Statistics are both good and bad in the sense that if you look at the individual tourist on a cruise, it is clear that one tourist does not perform nearly as well as the land-based tourist. They don't stay here and they don't eat as much and things like that. But if you look at the cruise then it's really, really a big amount of money they're handing over.'

This is echoed by other stakeholders, but they often emphasised that this was only an economic perspective, as one stakeholder explained:

'Only economic. That is what I see. In terms of income, if you think about cruise tourism as a possible future income source, then it's the big ships that spend money. And it is them that can develop not only cruise tourism but also local tourism because they, as I said, use all the capacity there is already.'

Overall, the debate in Nuuk centres not on whether cruise is or is not a good thing per se, but what type of cruise tourism should be developed. Almost all the interviewees believed that cruise could be economically and socially valuable for the town and local community, but there were a variety of views about what type of cruise ships and what type of cruise tourists are most desirable.

The most important issue for the stakeholders interviewed in this study, and one that they returned to again and again, is how to maximise the economic benefits of cruise tourism for the local community. The most frequently mentioned objection to cruise tourism is the fact that most value is captured by the cruise lines because tourists sleep, eat and book tours onboard the ships. Addressing this issue is seen as a priority and most stakeholders saw this in terms of encouraging particular types of cruise ships and/or cruise tourists, although it must be stressed that there were a range of views regarding which groups should be prioritised.

In general, most stakeholders preferred smaller ships because of their perception that tourists on these cruises spend more money in the destination. As one interviewee put it: *'Anyone who has worked in tourism knows that the smaller, the more expensive, the more money they spend'*. Some argued that adventure tourists, typically travelling on so-called expedition cruise ships (max 500 pax), were most attractive because they often stayed overnight, the tourists are younger, and more likely to take longer tours, eat in the town's restaurants and generally spend more money. Focusing on adventure tourists is argued to fit well with Greenland's overall destination image and a higher-spending market segment would support economic sustainability while minimising environmental impacts. As one stakeholder involved in destination development argued: *the fewer tourists, the less damage to nature and all that. But we do also need to earn some money from it'*. This segment is also perceived to be more interested in experiences that support the local community and are attracted by sustainable initiatives.

However, not all stakeholders thought that expedition cruise ships should be prioritised. Some argued, for instance, that expedition cruises often came with all their own guides and Zodiac gear on board and therefore spent very little money locally. As one operator describes:

'There are some that have their own guides on-board. They have zodiacs. They do everything themselves...there was a lot of talk that it was all about adventure tourists and small ships and so on. But not if you want to have income. They can go all kinds of places and enjoy themselves, have a great time and an amazing experiences...but it is just not something that gives a lot of income to the country'

In fact, many interviewees pointed to mid-size conventional ships as the best possible size for the local industry and also for the sake of the visiting tourists: *'up to a maximum of 1000 passengers, I would say. That fits best with the town and attractions and gives all tourism operators full employment. And that is the most important, and it means no one has a bad experience. When 4000 passengers run around, they don't get the experience they should'*

Many interviewees also talked less about the size of the ships and more about the type of cruise and cruise tourists. The overwhelming preference is for wealthier cruise tourists on expensive cruises. As one interviewee described it: *'There is a wide range of cruise ship quality. There are some very expensive cruises, very luxury, that are expensive... and then all the way down to discount cruises, which a load of old crap to be blunt, some old ships that are just about held in life, with a clientele that don't have any money and have in general bought an all-inclusive tour. In other words, lunch and everything. They come ashore in Greenland, and then go back onboard and eat their lunch...So if one could choose, if we shall have cruise ships, then let us take the top half and let the bottom half stay away'*. Many stakeholders also had preferences regarding the nationality of cruise tourists. Americans and Canadians were often perceived to be higher spending, for example.

Others are concerned about the safety of cruise ships, especially conventional cruise ships that do not have ice-reinforced hulls and carry thousands of passengers in areas where sea charts are often poor. As one interviewee put it: *'if an accident happens with one of the big ships out at sea, we are fucked. I mean, there is no capacity anywhere to help them'*. Some feared that it is only a matter of time before there is an accident and that the limited search and rescue capabilities, long distances and challenges with weather would result in high casualties. They argued that expedition cruise ships are better equipped for sailing in the Arctic and with smaller numbers of passengers they are also more sustainable. In particular, as described in **Section 2.5**, expedition cruise ships follow the AECO guidelines. These were praised by many local stakeholders and there were many calls for them to be extended to all cruise ships.

4. The future of cruise tourism in Nuuk

Nuuk is in many ways an atypical Arctic cruise destination and its size and position as Greenland's capital means that it does not suffer from many of the severe problems faced by small communities that are overwhelmed by large numbers of cruise tourists. Nonetheless, as our analysis makes clear, there are still challenges related to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of cruise tourism, and a lively debate about its future development.

Overall, it is noticeable that issues related to economic and social sustainability are much more emphasised than environmental sustainability among the stakeholders interviewed in this study, and three key issues related to cruise tourism have been identified. First, it **uses resources and shares spaces** that are also used by other stakeholders



(including non-humans) in ways that create both negative impacts, such as pollution, but also positive impacts; for example, supporting tourist infrastructure that can be used outside the main season. Second, the **timing and pace** of cruise tourism are important for economic and social sustainability. This includes issues related to seasonality, long-term planning combined with unpredictability due to weather conditions, and the dynamics of short, intense cruise calls that last only a few hours. Third, different stakeholders attach different **values and meanings** to various types of cruise tourism, which means that there is no consensus regarding the future development path of cruise tourism.

In Nuuk the construction of a new airport, which will enable more direct international flights, has raised expectations that it could become a turn-around cruise destination. Several interviewees talked about the economic benefits that this could bring, as it would mean cruise tourists staying longer in the town before or after their cruise. They argued that Nuuk is well-placed to take advantage of this since ships can dock at the quay which makes loading, refuelling, and provisioning easier than in Kangerlussuaq. Others were more sceptical, pointing to the lack of hotel rooms in Nuuk (which is already at full capacity when a large event takes place in the town) and the unpredictable weather which often means that flights are often cancelled or delayed. If the idea of Nuuk as a turn-around port becomes a reality, then it will have important consequences. There will be more tourists in the town, more pressure on infrastructure, and a longer cruise season.

In any case, cruise tourism is again growing in Nuuk and at the time of writing 77 ships were expected to call in Nuuk in summer 2023. Nearly all the stakeholders interviewed in this study reflected on the number of cruise tourists and how many the town could welcome without being overwhelmed. Some pointed to the experience of Iceland and the problems caused by the explosive growth of tourism. As one interviewee said, *‘tourism became number one for Iceland [and] it was suddenly something that they couldn’t control and I think that is my biggest worry. We have an even smaller population... and if we don’t know what we want and try to control it as we wish, maybe we will stand here in a few years and think ‘oh, those tourists...’* Overall, most stakeholders in Nuuk agree that they do not want mass cruise tourism and very large ships, but there is no clear consensus regarding exactly which cruise segment is preferred – beyond a desire to target tourists that are higher-spending.

Most stakeholders believe that cruise tourism should be better regulated but few had very concrete ideas about how this should take place, or who has a responsibility and a mandate to lead on this issue. Some stakeholders expect the national government to act, for instance regarding the expansion of the harbour; others see Visit Greenland as leading on the development of a broader tourism strategy, while the municipality is seen as important in terms of local business development and infrastructure. Visit Greenland has taken a lead by stopping all marketing of Greenland as a destination for conventional cruise tourism ([link](#)), and is focusing on expedition cruises (although as we have noted, not all stakeholders agree with this position).

AECO’s guidelines were popular, and several stakeholders thought that they should be expanded to include all cruise ships. AECO clearly has a strong position as opinion leader and influencer with the national tourism organisation and regional DMOs. In recent years the organisation has developed a series of community guidelines in Greenland together with representatives of the local destinations. Since the first guidelines for Sisimiut came out in 2019, a total of 10 guidelines (2023) have been published, including a set for [Nuuk](#). These documents offer advice for cruise tourists visiting communities on how to behave, places to visit and other advice that help minimize negative impact for locals and on the environment.



They are, however, voluntary guidelines, that are only followed by expedition cruises that are members of AECO. Some interviewees say that politicians seem to be uninterested in the area, but this might be changing after the current and coming record-breaking season.

There is certainly interest in cruise and research being carried out by Visit Greenland, which has launched a process of consultation regarding the development and regulation of cruise tourism. Our findings suggest that this is very much needed, because most stakeholders felt that there should be a clearer direction for cruise development. As one put it: *'All the time there is that question. What do we need? What is the plan, I mean the real plan for what we should prioritise, and what should be done, what should happen. That I don't know'*. It is also clear that there is a lack of dialogue with cruise lines themselves, who are in many ways the most important stakeholders influencing the future direction of development. As one local stakeholder noted: *'I don't get the impression that anyone is even talking to the cruise lines. Why don't you pick up the phone and call them. They might not be against you. I think that the cruise lines also want to make a positive contribution, and they also want to provide a good experience for their guests. So, everyone has a common interest, but it's not like it's set up. Greenland is being pitted against the cruise lines'*.

Those local stakeholders with strong views on regulation were, unsurprisingly, those who were most concerned about the negative impacts of cruise. They suggested regulations including an increased passenger tax with the proceeds being partly spent on safety and infrastructure. There were also suggestions to force ships to re-fuel and provision in Greenland, so that local companies could earn more from each call. At the same time, stakeholders in Nuuk are aware that regulation in one destination has knock-on effects elsewhere on an international scale. One example is the decision to limit the size of cruise ships that can visit Svalbard, which has the effect of making other destinations more attractive for larger cruise ships. Several stakeholders mentioned Nuuk's positioning in relation to the level of passenger tax/tonnage tax compared to other destinations, suggesting that it should not be too high or low.

Concluding remarks and take-aways

The report displays how Nuuk is an unusual cruise tourism destination and case since cruise tourism is by the vast majority of the respondents and in the public opinion perceived as relatively uncontroversial at this point. Also, our study showed that the development trajectory is highly uncertain and that stakeholders have very different visions of what cruise tourism activities in Nuuk should look like in the future. Summarizing the study, we see that:

- There is **no 'red button'** that one single authority or stakeholder can push to stop cruise. Responsibility is highly delegated and regulation cruise is much more complicated and necessitates dialogue and cooperation.
- Cruise tourism stakeholders attach different **values and meanings** to various types of cruise tourism, which means that there is currently no consensus regarding the future development path of cruise tourism.
- Most of the respondents **do not want mass cruise tourism** and very large ships, but there is no clear consensus regarding a **preferred cruise segment** beyond a wish to target high-spending tourists.
- Cruise tourism entails a common use of **resources and shares spaces** that create negative as well as positive impacts for the environment and local community. Generally, the dispersed lay-out of the town ensures less clashes than in other Greenlandic towns
- Issues of **timing and pace** are key to ensure economic and social sustainability. This includes issues related to seasonality, long-term planning combined with unpredictability due to weather conditions, and the dynamics of short, intense cruise calls that last only a few hours.

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