

# Kayaking in the World's largest national park

For many people, it is the ultimate dream to participate in an expedition in one of the most rugged and impassable regions of the world, hundreds of miles from civilization. Serving as expedition leader on Arctic voyages, **Soren Telling** takes travellers on a three-week adventure of a lifetime to a world far away from everyday life. Thus, the Dane is familiar with some of the most inaccessible areas on earth. Here, only calving glaciers and roaring icebergs break the silence and one must constantly watch out for polar bears – everything is at the mercy of Mother Nature in the world's largest national park in northeast Greenland. We spoke to Soren about his latest expeditions and about the future.



*"For me it is important to do my utmost to make sure that everyone has an adventure of a lifetime! Participating is expensive and something most people only get to experience once in a lifetime. We only use highly professional guides, the best equipment and routes we have tested beforehand,"* says Soren Telling, founder of the company Outdoorsports and the ArcticExpedition.com concept.



**Fact**  
The national park in **northeast Greenland** covers almost 45% of Greenland and is the world's largest national park with an area of 972,000<sup>2</sup>kms.



**Fact**  
The **average temperature** of the warmest summer month is 3-6 degrees and minus 40-50 degrees during the coldest winter months.



**Fact**  
The fjords are only navigable about two months of the year, all other months, they are covered by metre thick sea ice.

Expeditions in northeast Greenland start from Iceland, where the expedition leader and participants meet up before flying over the Greenland Sea to the last civilized stop before the expedition truly commences. Kayaks, food and all equipment are shipped in advance before the last flight to the National Park and must be loaded onto a special airplane which can land in the terrain and serves as the only access way to one of the most remote areas in the world.

Although the expedition starts in the Arctic high summer, the ice is still several feet thick at the coast, which makes transport by ship impossible. Therefore, folding kayaks are used on the expedition. Preparation is a big task and takes several months, where checklists are carefully reviewed again and again to ensure everything is packed. In addition to the special folding kayaks,

the equipment also includes drysuits, satellite phone, PLB emergency transmitter with GPS location, radio, AIS emergency bearing transmitter, Navtex weather forecaster, rifle, flare gun and rockets, advanced first aid kits, and medicines.

About one and a half days after the participants have met for the first time, the aircraft takes off from the makeshift runway in a ravine between the cliffs, leaving group and leader alone in the great outback, all alone. *"From now on it will be really exciting,"* Soren says, referring to the reflection that occurs for most when the last drone of the aircraft's propeller has faded into the distance and the first task for the group is to find drinking water and ensure that the area is free of polar bears!

# Safety procedures

The next few days are spent assembling the kayaks, finding the group's rhythm and going through safety procedures and equipment to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. "When we land at the edge of the ice cap, we take time to enjoy the magnificent scenery of the endless masses of ice before the paddling journey through the fiord systems begins. Every day a distance of 20-40km is paddled. The total route is typically between 450 and 500km, and the daily distances depend on weather conditions and the possibility to go ashore," Soren explains.



**Fact**

The Danish army has 12 people based in Greenland. Sirius's main task is to maintain Danish sovereignty and act as police and patrol the fjords by dogsled in the winter.



**Safety first!**

The water temperature is just above the freezing point and gorges between the high mountains of the fiord system create very strong winds, so one must always be extremely careful when in the area. Help is several days away and capsizing can in a very short time become fatal. The weather is very changeable and therefore it is important to seek safety shelter as soon as changes in weather occur, as wind speeds of up to 100km per hour are not uncommon!

Soren has experienced this on his own body. "During our recent expedition in 2013 we enjoyed almost three weeks of high sun and mild weather but this is not always the case. In 2011 we were seriously under pressure, as a weather change in just 10 minutes created a massive storm in an area where we could not reach the shore. The waves rose several metres high and the icebergs were smashed against the vertical rock faces. We fortunately found a small ledge in the cliff side where we could take shelter and tie the kayaks to the rocks while the storm rode of," he recalls.

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**Fact**

Swedish explorers tried to map the area for the first time in 1899. In the early 1960s the area was finally mapped using aircraft.



In such a situation it is important that the whole group is properly prepared and everyone knows what to do. "The most important task as leader of the expedition is to ensure good group dynamics so that all stand together when challenges arise. Another challenge may be lack of suitable drinking water in the area around the camp or to meet a group of muskoxen or a polar bear," Soren says.

**An experience of a lifetime**

Covering an area of 972,000 square kilometres, the national park of Northeast Greenland is the world's largest, larger than Spain and France combined. The area offers clear traces of the hunting culture that emerged in the beginning of the 1900s when hunters from the populated area of North Greenland settled there. From the 1920s to the early 1960s, the area was home to Scandinavian fur hunters who lived in the huts



along the coast in small groups of up to three persons. From here they hunted polar bears, arctic foxes and snow-hares in winter and sold the furs in the summer when the only ship of the year docked on the shore.

# The fjord system around the Kong Oscar Fjord consists of a number of small inlets, each of which has its unique attractions.



**Fact**

The area has been protected since 1967 with access requiring special permission from the Greenland authorities and extended insurance with Search and Rescue (SAR) coverage, is mandatory.

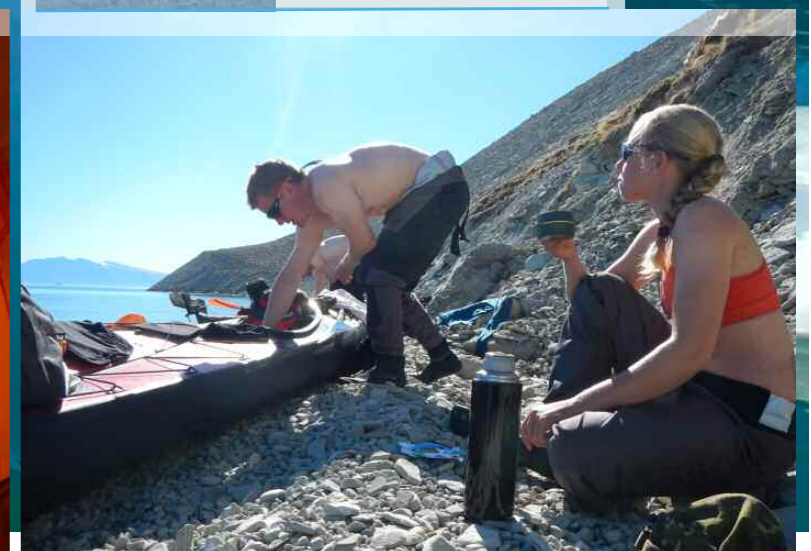
The huts of those hunters are preserved in precisely the same condition as when the area was abandoned, and are now used by the Danish Sirius Patrol and the rare expeditions visiting the area. The area also houses the research station Eagle's Nest from 1931, built by Danish explorer Lauge Koch to serve as a base for mapping the area. The station is located at the foot of the Mount Bastion, which is a favourite place to visit as a hike to the vertical cliff that rises 1,300 meters above sea level brings spectacular views of the whole area.

The fjord system around the Kong Oscar Fjord consists of a number of small inlets, each of which has its unique attractions. Closest to the sea is the Alpine Fjord, which is, immediately before the bottom, blocked by a calving glacier tongue that extends far into the fjord. Besides various seal species, stray whales and walrus can be seen in the fjords. On land, it is not rare to get close to arctic foxes, snow-hares and muskoxen. And as they are not used to human contact, they do not feel threatened and run away.



**Fact**

The national park is one of three breeding areas for polar bears in Greenland.





## Teamwork and daily tasks

Taking part in an expedition lasting for several weeks, places great demands on all participants. The participants live under simple conditions and close to each other, and each day brings a number of tasks in which everyone has to take part to ensure that everything works. One of the main tasks is to take part in the 24-7 guard shift routine, to ensure that the camp is always watched and that no polar bears enter.

In addition, all participants need being committed to taking responsibility and participating in the daily tasks around setting up the camp, collecting fresh water, washing clothes, maintaining the equipment, cooking, and other common tasks. *“Even such a thing like putting the kayaks in the water is a common task, as it requires several persons to carry a heavily loaded kayak and prevent it from being damaged by the sharp rocks,”* says Soren.

*“It’s absolutely not a beach holiday. I experience that participants gain significant self-insight and reflect on their life situation. The conversations around the fire gradually*



*become deeper during the expedition, and friendships for life are fostered with no regard to age and gender,”* Soren concludes.

To participate in expeditions, it is a prerequisite that one possesses basic kayaking skills and feels at home in the outdoors. The participants certainly do not need to be top athletes – it is far more important being mentally balanced and open.

The price for a three-week expedition in the national park with [www.ArcticExpedition.com](http://www.ArcticExpedition.com) is \$15,995/€11,695 and includes equipment rental, lodging, guide, insurance and transport to and from Iceland.



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