

## **Outposting: Arctic Archipelago**

Shelby Rachel Hilson

Published in Outpost Magazine 2007

**Area:** Over 1.4 million sq. km over 94 major islands and more than 36,000 minor islands. The majority of the archipelago belongs to Nunavut.

**Population:** About 85 percent of the small population on the archipelago is Inuit and the majority of them reside in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, with a population of little more than 5,000 people.

**Languages:** English, French and different dialects of the Inuit-Aleut language family; mainly Inuktitut. English and French

**Religion:** While large numbers of Inuits have converted to Christianity, traditional beliefs in the form of animism, in which all objects have spirits, still exist.

**Currency:** The Arctic Archipelago stretches over eight different currencies.

**Climate:** Night can last for three to four months in the winter and daylight for the same length of time during the summer. With no sun for months, temperatures can drop as low as -50 degrees C on the northern islands, and rise above freezing for a mere month or two during daylight season. The islands don't get much rain with such cool temperatures, but this is expected to change over the next few years as global temperatures rise.

## WHEN TO GO

This is something to seriously consider when travelling to the Arctic. It's not like taking a trip to the Dominican, where you'll have a similar experience no matter what time of year you travel. What do you want to accomplish on your adventure to the Great North? This is one of the first questions you should ask yourself before booking a flight. If you're prepared to bundle up to witness the wondrous Northern Lights, or to take a dog sledding trip through home territory, you'll want to plan your trip for late winter to early spring so you can enjoy winter activities, but also soak up a little sunlight. If water activities like kayaking or rafting down some of the mightiest rivers in the world, are more up your alley than you'll want to hold off until late June through September when the sun never sets. Keep in mind that some bodies of water still have ice chunks in the middle of July. The further north you travel, the tighter the time restrictions.

## GETTING THERE

Because the Arctic Archipelago expands over such a vast area, there are different means of travel depending on the remoteness of the location. Canadian North Airlines have charter flights from a number of Canadian cities fly into three Nunavut locations. First Air serves 26 different Nunavut locations from Ottawa, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Montreal. Air Nunavut operates out of the capital to a number of local destinations, as well as Labrador and Greenland. Areas that cannot be reached by these or a few other charter airlines may require helicopter, boat or skidoo transportation.

## GETTING AROUND

Exploring the many islands of the Arctic can be done in a number of ways. Not by taxi, bus or subway, but by snow shoe, skidoo, cross-country ski and dog sled. There are plenty of places to rent this equipment from or to take tours with. To travel between the islands you can take a boat or charter flight depending on the season, but you'll want to check out the schedule ahead of time as not all islands have daily service. Boat tours are becoming a popular way to explore the Arctic during the sunny season. These are a good choice if you're inexperienced with harsh climate and rough terrain, and are trying to see as much as possible in a short amount of time.

## WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The Arctic Archipelago is home to seven of the world's largest islands, including Baffin Island, which ranks fifth. Here you may be able to catch a glimpse of the polar bear along the sea ice, but it's not a creature you want to get close enough to pet. The Arctic possesses many of the world's natural wonders and should really be experienced in all its beauty, day and night, winter and summer.