

Squiz the World goes to... Greenland

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting a country where the ice cracks, groans and booms all by itself, where the Sun can disappear for weeks at a time, and then later in the year refuse to set at all, and that world leaders are suddenly talking about...

Can you guess? ... Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Greenland.

JUST THE FACTS

Let's start with the basics, and a few myth-busters along the way.

Greenland is called Kalaallit Nunaat (ka-LAH-lit noo-NAAT) by the people who live there. That name means "Land of the Kalaallit people" (ka-LAH-lit), the Indigenous Inuit people of Greenland. The capital city is Nuuk, one of the northernmost capital cities on Earth. Around 57,000 people live across the entire country. That's fewer people than you'd find in a packed sports stadium, spread out across a place that is absolutely enormous.

In fact, Greenland is the largest island in the world. And no, Australia doesn't count. Australia is a continent, not an island. Greenland is bigger than Mexico, similar in area to Western Europe or if you're thinking in terms of Australia, it's bigger than Queensland but smaller than Western Australia and unlike those places about 80 percent of Greenland is covered by a massive ice sheet, a thick, slow-moving blanket of ice that can be kilometres deep.

You'll find Greenland in the Arctic Ocean off the East Coast of Canada... It's so far north that two thirds of Greenland is above the Arctic Circle. Now, if you've ever looked at a world map and thought Greenland looked almost as big as Africa, you're not imagining it, but the map is a bit misleading. Many world maps use something called the Mercator projection, which stretches places near the top and bottom of the Earth. That makes countries close to the poles look much bigger than they really are. It's what happens when you try to flatten a round planet onto a flat page. Something always gets squashed or stretched.

"Politically, Greenland is a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. It runs many of its own affairs, including education and decisions about natural resources, and that's one reason Greenland sometimes pops up in global news.

But to really understand this place, we need to rewind the clock and do some..."

TIME TRAVEL

Long before any Europeans arrived, Inuit peoples made their way to Greenland from what's now Canada. They arrived in several waves, beginning around 2500 BCE and continuing right up until about the 12th century CE. They were expert hunters and travellers, with deep knowledge of the sea, the ice, the animals and the seasons, skills that made life possible in one of the harshest environments on Earth.

Then, about a thousand years ago, a very different kind of traveller arrived. A Norse viking named Erik the Red. Erik wasn't exploring for fun. He had been banished from Iceland after getting into serious trouble, including a few murders ahhh vikings..... During his exile, he sailed west and found new land. When his banishment ended, Erik returned to Iceland and tried to convince other people to come back with him. There is a medieval story written about him called a saga. Sagas were long storytelling histories, written centuries later, that mixed real events with legend.

One saga says Erik named the land "Greenland" to make it sound welcoming rather than icy and frightening, and that the name helped persuade people to move there. It seems to have worked. Between three thousand and six thousand Norse settlers followed him.

Those Norse settlements eventually disappeared, but Inuit cultures continued. Centuries later, Greenland became part of the Danish realm. In 1979, Greenland was granted home rule, and in 2009 it gained even greater self-government, while still remaining part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

So what's it like growing up in Greenland today? We're going to find out because it's...

TIME FOR SCHOOL

School in Greenland is free, and education is compulsory in principle, but how schooling works can look very different from what Australian kids are used to. Greenland is huge, the weather can be extreme, and communities are often far apart. Because of that, some children learn from home, have tutoring, or use remote learning, especially when weather conditions make travel difficult.

Primary school lasts for ten years, from ages six to sixteen. After that, students can attend one of the four high schools in Greenland, or they can go to a vocational college to learn a trade. Greenland has only one university, and it mainly focuses on humanities and social sciences. If you want to become a doctor or an engineer, you usually have to leave Greenland to study, often in Denmark or another country.

"From their very first day of school, kids learn three languages. They learn Greenlandic, also called Kalaallisut (ka-LAH-li-soot), Danish, and English.

There's no school uniform, but there is a special tradition. On their very first day of school, many children wear the colourful traditional national costume."

And getting to school depends on where you live and the season. Some kids walk. Some travel by boat. Some take snowmobiles. And in a few places, yes, it might even be by dog sled. Now, if that all sounds extreme, just wait. Because Greenland is full of things that sound almost unbelievable....

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

"Believe it or not, Greenland's glaciers are always on the move. They creep slowly toward the sea, cracking and groaning as they go. Huge chunks of ice regularly calve off the glaciers, crashing into the ocean and becoming icebergs.

Scientists estimate that if all of Greenland's ice melted, global sea levels could rise by between six to eight metres."

If it did these would come in handy... one of the world's most famous boats was invented here. The kayak was designed by Inuit hunters for silent travel across icy waters, and as you're probably aware, versions of it are still used all over the world today.

Greenland is also home to some truly extraordinary animals. There are whales and walruses, narwhals... the unicorns of the sea, polar bears, and Arctic foxes that change colour from brown to match the rocky tundra in summer to snowy white in winter.

Under Greenland's land and sea are valuable resources too. Greenland contains 25 of the world's 34 critical rare-earth minerals, which are used to make things like mobile phones, computer chips, and clean energy technology. There are also large reserves of oil and natural gas, and Greenland sits in a key Arctic position between North America and Europe.

That combination of location and resources is why world leaders, including US President Donald Trump, have talked about Greenland's importance. Greenland and Denmark are very clear about one thing, though. Greenland is not for sale.

"After all that ice, history and wildlife, I don't know about you, but I'm hungry.

It must be

"

DINNER TIME

Food in Greenland is shaped by the environment. Traditional diets include fish, whale meat, seal, birds, musk ox and reindeer. Because of the long, cold winters, many foods are dried, smoked or fermented to preserve them.

Some traditional dishes include Suaasat (SOO-ah-sat), a thick soup made with meat, rice and onions, raw reindeer liver, and whale meat. It can be a tricky place to be a vegetarian, but today modern foods are also common, especially in towns like Nuuk.

I've stuck a link to a recipe for Suaasat in the episode notes... If you want to give it a try and your local store doesn't stock them...you can substitute the seal, whale or reindeer meat for beef...

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

"Greenland looks huge on many world maps, sometimes almost as big as Africa. Why is that?

Is it because

- A. Greenland is actually the biggest place on Earth, because
- B. maps often stretch areas near the poles making them look bigger, or because
- C. Greenland keeps growing every year?

B. maps often stretch areas near the poles making them look bigger,"

"True or false. About half of Greenland is covered by a massive ice sheet.

False. It's actually around 80%"

"And finally, why did Erik the Red call the land "Greenland," according to Viking sagas written later? Was it because

- A. it was completely green all year round, because
- B. he was naming it after his favourite colour?
- C. he wanted the name to sound inviting and attract settlers, "

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Greenland.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.