

‘We have reached a critical point’ an appeal from tourism businesses in Ammassalik

This statement has been prepared on behalf of tourism businesses in the Ammassalik region of East Greenland. It presents the thoughts, concerns, and fears of local residents, employers, and business owners. The document is based on the experiences of people who live every day with the consequences of deteriorating infrastructure and increasing isolation, and who foresee serious threats to the region's future as both a community and a tourism destination due to Icelandair's reduction of flight services. The statements from tourism operators are complemented by findings from more than 45 interviews conducted by Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq's regional destination management organization, Visit East Greenland, during spring 2026. The interviews involved international travel agents, local businesses, and other stakeholders as part of a comprehensive strategic planning process.

The elimination of flight routes is catastrophic

In Week 22, Icelandair announced a further reduction of flights between Iceland and Kulusuk. As a result, within only 2 years, Kulusuk has gone from year-round international access down to direct international flights operating for only 3.5 months per year from 2027. The connection to Iceland is absolutely vital for the Ammassalik region for residents, businesses, and especially tourism, which is one of the region's very few export industries. For everyone, this connection represents the fastest, most affordable, most reliable, and most attractive gateway to the outside world. It is therefore a lifeline. Reducing this route will have a number of serious consequences:

1. Restricted freedom of movement and unequal access to opportunities
2. Transportation becomes a privilege
3. One of the region's most important export industries is threatened
4. Weakened supply security in an already vulnerable region
5. Increased risk of outmigration and loss of skilled workers
6. Loss of investments and partnerships
7. Greater centralization and weakened regional equality
8. Fewer jobs in the region
9. A threat to the dog sledding culture and living cultural heritage
10. Reduced international accessibility weakens East Greenland's competitiveness

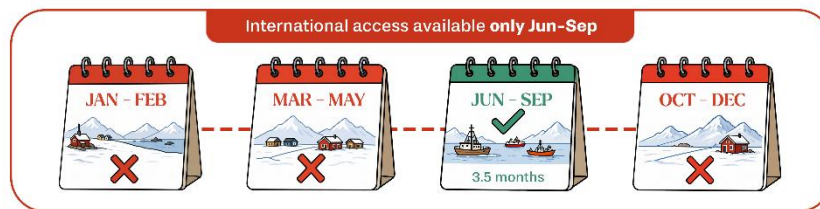
If this development continues, we risk seeing businesses close, jobs disappear, and valuable expertise leave the region long before new solutions become reality. Once businesses have shut down, families have moved away, and investments have been withdrawn, rebuilding the region will neither be quick nor easy. Political action and concrete solutions are needed now to ensure sufficient flight capacity and regular connections to both Iceland and Nuuk. Could a triangular route between Nuuk, Kulusuk, and Keflavík be established? Could Icelandair be granted permission to carry freight, making the route commercially viable? What short-term and long-term infrastructure solutions can be developed for the region?

Without such solutions, East Greenland risks becoming disconnected from the growth opportunities that are central to Greenland's national tourism and business strategies. This would have severe consequences for both the economy and the quality of life of the region's residents.

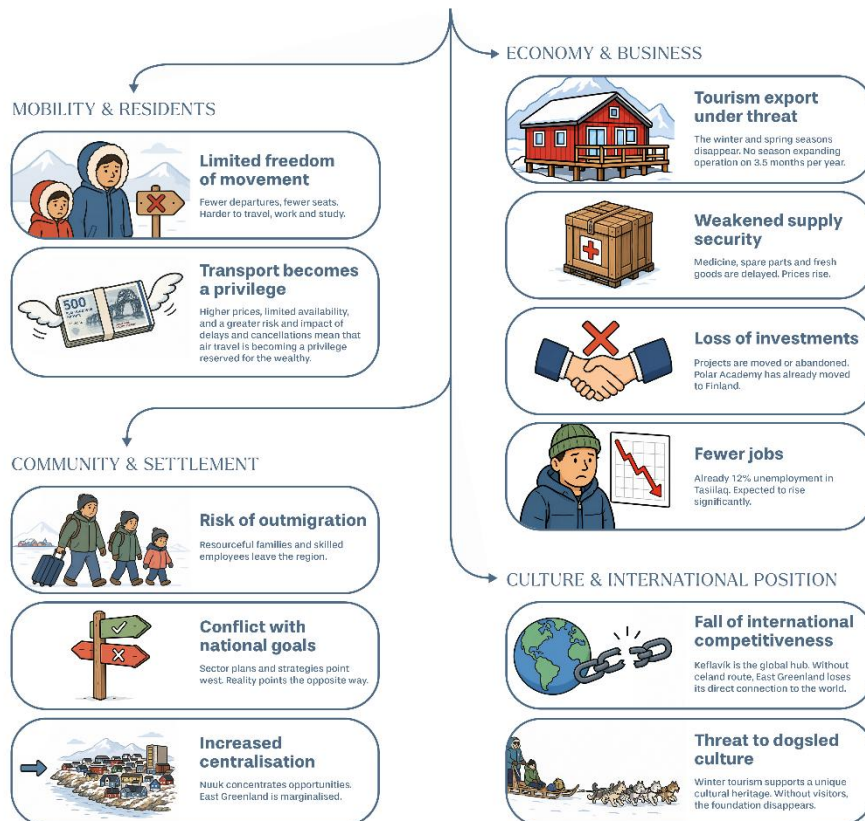


The Consequences for the Ammassalik Region

Icelandair cuts connections: From year-round international access to just 3.5 months per year.



REDUCED FLIGHT CONNECTION



East Greenland is not asking for special treatment.
We are asking for equal opportunities.

What are the consequences for the Ammassalik Region?

1. Restricted freedom of movement and unequal access to opportunities

Residents of East Greenland should enjoy the same opportunities as citizens in the rest of Greenland to travel, work, pursue education, access public services, and visit family and friends. When the number of flights is reduced, access to and from the region becomes significantly more limited. Fewer departures mean fewer available seats, increased pressure on the remaining flights, and greater difficulty planning essential travel. This is not merely a transportation issue; it is fundamentally an issue of equality and equal access to the opportunities that society provides.

The domestic connection to Nuuk cannot compensate for the loss of international access. The route operates only twice a week, has limited capacity, and is frequently delayed. At the same time, it must serve local demand for hospital treatment, education, employment, and family visits. If more tourists are forced to use this route in the future, pressure on capacity will increase even further. Ticket prices are likely to rise, while journeys will become longer, more expensive, and less reliable. For many residents, this will become a genuine barrier to participating in education, employment, and family life on equal terms with the rest of Greenland.

2. Transportation becomes a privilege

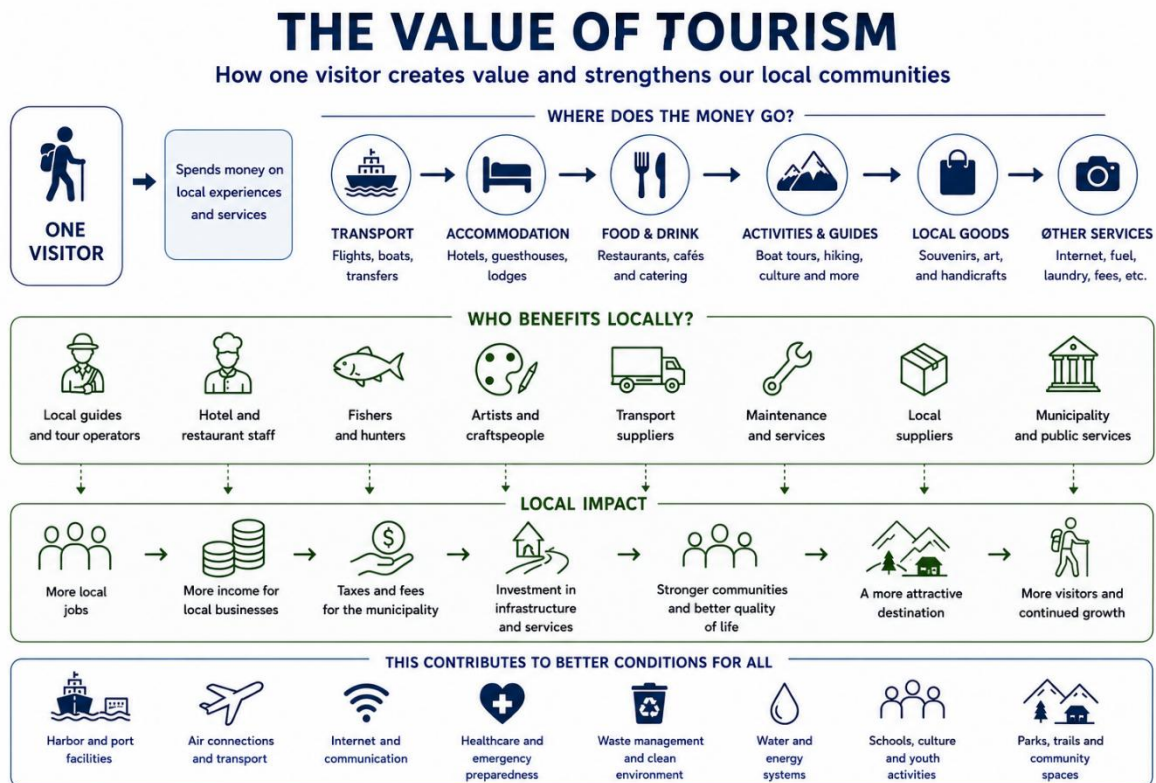
Reduced capacity increases demand for the remaining flights and raises the risk of higher prices for both passenger travel and freight. For residents and visitors alike, travelling to and from East Greenland will become increasingly complicated. The route via Iceland provides fast and efficient access to international markets because it requires fewer flights and fewer overnight stays. The alternative route via Nuuk and Copenhagen involves additional travel days, more overnight accommodation, higher costs, and a greater risk of delays and cancellations. The result is that East Greenland becomes even more expensive, more isolated, and considerably more difficult to reach.

3. One of the region's most important export industries is under threat

Tourism is one of the few industries that brings new revenue into East Greenland. When international visitors come to the region, they generate income for guides, hotels, restaurants, transport providers, artisans, retailers, and many other local businesses. The reduction in flight services effectively eliminates the winter and spring tourism seasons and places greater pressure on local infrastructure and visitor facilities during the short summer season. No tourism business can maintain a sustainable year-round operation if it has access to international markets for only three and a half months each year. The inevitable consequences will be: fewer investments, fewer businesses, fewer employment opportunities.

The value chain illustrated in the following model demonstrates how tourism revenue flows throughout the local economy. Tourist spending benefits a wide range of businesses and professions across the community. Consequently, the reduction of flights from Iceland will

directly affect household incomes, employment opportunities, and the financial stability of many local residents.



4. Weakened supply security in an already vulnerable region

East Greenland already depends on complex transportation and supply chains. When transport capacity is reduced, the consequences extend far beyond passenger travel. The delivery of goods, spare parts, medicines, technical equipment, and commercial supplies is also affected. Any further reduction in transport connections will make the region even more vulnerable, increasing the risk of longer delivery times and higher costs. The effects are already becoming evident. Since the opening of Nuuk's new airport, the distribution of parcels, letters, and freight has been reorganized through Nuuk, resulting in noticeably longer delivery times for ordinary mail and cargo.

From mid-November until the end of May, Royal Arctic Line does not operate cargo ships to East Greenland. During this period, fresh food can only be supplied by air. The Iceland route has traditionally prioritized fresh produce, ensuring that goods arrive in good condition. Although prices are higher during the winter months, these deliveries are essential for local residents. Supplying fresh produce via Nuuk is not a viable alternative. The longer transport chain increases costs even further and significantly raise the risk that food quality will deteriorate before it reaches local shops.

5. Risk of accelerated outmigration and loss of skills

Thriving communities depend on reliable access to the outside world. When mobility is restricted and future prospects become uncertain, the likelihood increases that highly skilled professionals, qualified workers, and resourceful families will choose to leave the region. At the same time, it becomes increasingly difficult to attract new residents, investment, expertise, and qualified employees. Over time, East Greenland risks losing precisely those people who are needed to create future economic growth and community development.

6. Loss of investments and partnerships

East Greenland risks losing development opportunities that have taken many years to establish. The economic consequences extend beyond tourism and include the loss of investments, partnerships, educational opportunities, and international recognition. Projects may be relocated, downsized, or cancelled altogether, not because they lack value, but because the necessary conditions for operating successfully in East Greenland no longer exist. Conversely, forcing all projects into the short summer season would place unsustainable pressure on local infrastructure and communities.

A current example is Polar Academy, which for many years has chosen Tasiilaq as the base for its internationally recognized youth development program supporting young people facing social and personal challenges. The program has generated economic activity while also contributing to capacity building, international visibility, and valuable local partnerships. These partnerships are particularly important because they address challenges that local communities themselves are working hard to overcome. As a direct consequence of the loss of winter air connections between Iceland and East Greenland, Polar Academy has now temporarily relocated its activities to Finland. At the same time, local initiatives that have grown out of this collaboration are also being weakened, including the Mountain Leader Program, which aims to develop practical local skills and professional qualifications in tourism and guiding within East Greenland.

7. Increased centralization and weakened regional equality

We recognize that major investments in Nuuk and elsewhere are important for Greenland's national development and international accessibility. However, our concern is that developments in East Greenland are moving in the opposite direction. If Greenland is to realize its ambition of creating growth throughout the country, improvements in one region must not come at the expense of opportunities in another. East Greenland does not wish to stand outside this development. We want to participate actively and contribute to Greenland's future. Achieving this requires the basic infrastructure and conditions necessary to create jobs, attract investment, and sustain vibrant local communities.

8. Fewer jobs in the region

When businesses lose revenue, jobs disappear. Higher unemployment leads to lower tax revenues and increases dependence on public financial support. In a region where unemployment is already high, these consequences could become severe. Tasiilaq already faces an unemployment rate of approximately 12%, and this figure is expected to rise significantly as tourism declines following the reduction in flight connections.

9. A threat to the dog sledding culture and living cultural heritage

The winter season provides the economic foundation for a large part of East Greenland's dog sled tourism, generating income for local mushers and sled dog owners. Tourism revenue directly supports the maintenance of sled dogs and helps preserve a unique cultural tradition that has been passed down through generations. If winter and spring tourism disappear, the consequences extend far beyond the loss of jobs. We also risk undermining one of Greenland's most distinctive forms of living cultural heritage.

10. Reduced international accessibility weakens East Greenland's competitiveness

For East Greenland, the connection through Iceland is far more than simply an airline route, it is the region's primary gateway to international markets. Keflavík International Airport serves as a global hub with direct connections to much of Europe and North America. For many visitors, travelling via Iceland is faster, simpler, and more reliable because it involves fewer flights and fewer overnight stays. If visitors instead have to travel via Nuuk and Copenhagen, their journeys typically become longer, more expensive, and more complicated, with increased risks of delays and cancellations. Reduced international accessibility therefore makes East Greenland significantly less competitive as a destination in the global tourism market.

What Do Local Tourism Businesses Say?

As part of this work, members of East Greenland's local tourism network met to discuss the consequences of the reduced flight services. Regardless of company size, business type, or geographic location, a clear consensus emerged: The continuing reduction in air services is no longer viewed as an ordinary operational challenge, it is seen as a direct threat to the survival and future development of local businesses. Several operators expressed their concerns as follows:

'This is not simply about receiving fewer visitors. It is about our ability to continue existing as a business.'

'If we lose the winter connection to Iceland, we are not just losing a season—we are losing yet another part of the foundation required to operate a year-round business.'

'The latest reduction in flight services represents an existential threat to our company. Without access to the market, we cannot plan, invest, or grow our business.'

'We must find a solution. If this development continues, we may no longer have a sustainable basis for operating tourism businesses in East Greenland.'

Why is this a national issue?

The consequences described above directly contradict the objectives that Greenland has set for its own development. The Government of Greenland's Tourism Sector Plan 2025–2035,

Visit Greenland's strategic priorities, and Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq's development plans all pursue the same goals:

- Creating more jobs.
- Building stronger local communities.
- Extending the tourism season.
- Promoting regional development.
- Supporting sustainable economic growth.
- Maintaining vibrant communities throughout Greenland.

We fully share these ambitions. However, the continuing reduction in air services to East Greenland produces the opposite outcome:

- Instead of extending the tourism season, we lose winter tourism.
- Instead of encouraging regional development, we lose investments.
- Instead of creating employment, unemployment is likely to increase.
- Instead of strengthening settlement across Greenland, the risk of outmigration grows.
- Instead of making East Greenland an attractive place to live and work, it becomes increasingly difficult to build a future here.

Ultimately, the issue is whether Greenland's national development goals are intended to apply equally to East Greenland.

What is needed

We recognize that long-term infrastructure investments are essential for East Greenland's future. However, the region cannot build its future on solutions that may not materialize for many years. Action is required now.

We therefore call upon all relevant authorities to work towards:

- Improved accessibility and more reliable transport infrastructure for residents, businesses, and visitors.
- A year-round international air connection between Iceland and Kulusuk.
- A stable, modern transport link between Kulusuk and Tasiilaq that supports local communities, businesses, and tourism.
- Long-term, predictable framework conditions for East Greenland's tourism industry, enabling businesses to plan, invest, and expand strategically.
- Equal development opportunities for all regions of Greenland.

Possible solutions

We recognize that there may be several ways to address these challenges and therefore encourage the following options to be explored before decisions are made:

- Engage in political dialogue with Icelandair to determine what would be required to restore year-round service and identify any political measures needed to make this commercially viable.
- Conduct a rapid assessment of how existing public service contracts could be adapted to support year-round international access to East Greenland.
- Clarify the legal and commercial possibilities of allowing Icelandair to transport freight, thereby broadening the route's financial basis beyond passenger traffic alone.
- Establish a year-round triangular route connecting Keflavík – Kulusuk – Nuuk, or alternatively Keflavík – Kulusuk – Nerlerit Inaat.

There is often discussion about future infrastructure investments in East Greenland, including the possibility of constructing an airport in Tasiilaq. We recognize the importance of such long-term investments and improved conditions for the region. However, businesses, families, and local communities cannot base their future on projects with uncertain timelines.

This issue is therefore not only about future opportunities, it is about the decisions being made today. If access to East Greenland continues to deteriorate, we risk losing far more than an air route. We risk undermining the very foundations for settlement, business development, and sustainable economic growth across an entire region. East Greenland is not asking for special treatment. We are asking for the necessary conditions to contribute to Greenland's development on equal terms with the rest of the country.

Signed by the tourism businesses in the Ammassalik region of East Greenland

