

Interests of the municipality of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq

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The nearest settlement to the national park/Biosphere reserve is Illoqqortoormiut (or locally Ittoqqortoormiit) with its ~500 inhabitants, situated on the coast some hundred km south of the park, at the arm of the worlds largest fjord system Scoresbysund.

The area was first mapped in 1822 by the English Arctic Explorer, Scientist and whaler William Scoresby, hence its Danish name Scoresbysund. Ruins, tent rings and traps bear evidence of a former relatively dense Eskimo population.

The area was repopulated in 1924, initially by 70 young hunters from the East coast settlement at Ammassalik, now Tasiilaq, and from Greenlands west coast. The move provided better living conditions, enabling the settlers to take advantage of the excellent hunting area, but was also intended by the Danish authorities to give Denmark better cards in a strife with Norway over the sovereignty of East Greenland.

Ittoqqortoormiit was the capital of an independent municipality the size of Sweden, until January 1st 2009 when it merged with the remaining permanently populated areas of the Greenlandic East Coast as well as the capital Nuuk, the township Paamiut and a number of villages on the South West coast into the new municipality Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq covering an area the size of France.



Being the northernmost settlement in the new enlarged municipality Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, Ittoqqortoormiit is situated 1.500 km from Nuuk and some 2.000 km from the southern end of the commune.

For generations, the local hunters have made a living by hunting marine and land mammals, which are still today of great cultural and socio-economic significance. Products and byproducts of these are an integral part of the household economy, but the revenues are mostly seasonal and unstable.

Other natural resources are large quantities of shrimp and Greenland halibut. However, the ocean freezes over during winter, preventing the exploitation of these resources throughout the year. Hence, fishing is not a developed industry in the area.

As a pronounced hunting community, Ittoqqortoormiit is utterly vulnerable to changes in living conditions for the hunt. In recent years, and in the foreseeable future, climate change has and may threaten the livelihood of the hunters and their families. Fortunately, they have been able to combine their traditional occupation with tourism, thus allowing for tolerable economic conditions.

The mountain landscape in the hinterland of the airport Constable Point, along the coast at the town and former villages Uunarteq (Kap Tobin) and Itterajivit (Cape Hope) and mountains of the peninsula north of the city are reknown as excellent hiking areas, provided that a hunting rifle is brought along in case of an odd encounter with a polar bear.

And tourism is indeed expanding and of growing importance, offering opportunities for hunting trips, boating and mountain hikes with overnight stay in tents or in the former villages Uunarteq (Kap Tobin) and Itterajivit (Cape Hope) or hunting cabins.

If not by cruise ship, visitors arrive by plane from the South East Coast village of Kulusuk or from Reykjavik in Iceland to Mittarfik Nerlerit Inaat (Constable Point airport), and from there by helicopter or boat.

This part of Greenland contains fossils from both dinosaurs and trees, including palms, dating back 250 million years, and hence has the interest of geologists and paleontologists. "Harris Mountain" next to the landing strip in Constable Point is made up from the same stone layers, as where oil is retrieved from the Norwegian sector in the North Sea. Increasing numbers of scientists visit each summer to explore the riches offered by the nature here and more and more tourists use the area as a base for trips into the wild, hiking, fishing and skiing. The fauna is rich with both the white and the blue polar fox, polar hares, musk ox, seals, whales, dolphins and the above mentioned polar bears. The Greenland falcon, the raven, the polar grouse and snow sparrow and numerous sea birds are all well represented in the area.

The climate is visitor friendly, sunny and calm with an average of nine hours of sunshine a day including midnight sun in July, mean temperatures of + 6 °C and at night around freezing point and rainfall of merely 24 mm in July.

In conclusion, the area has much to offer. However, it is pivotal to involve and enable the local population to become an integral part of the area, to fully comprehend its natural, cultural and geological values and the importance of caretaking and to take full advantage of the area and the activities, within which the area offers income opportunities.

Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq is in favour of expanding the Man & Biosphere *MAB* area to include Ittoqqortoormiit and the surrounding fjord complex in order to fulfil the MAB requirements. Thereby, the settlement would more likely be used as centre and base for the logistics of travel to and from the park. Thoughts and wishes have been put forward of a small landing strip near by Ittoqqortoormiit in order to serve and increase the tourist industry.

Today there is some mining activity within the national park - just north of the municipal border line.

Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq recommends that:

- 1) the area maintain both MaB and national park status
- 2) that the choice of status, borders and graduated zonation should allow continuation of such activities, which may benefit the local population,
- 3) the border of the national park is moved close to Ittoqqortoormiit allowing tourists to be within the park just beyond the community.
- 4) Vocational training should be put in place, taking its base in the traditional abilities of the population and expanding this with focus on offering the population certified knowledge and skills within the main activities, which can be expected in the area, eco-tourism and guiding, trophy hunting, technical assistance of researchers, various types of expeditions, etc.

Although the national park undoubtedly holds many – still unrevealed - riches in store, it is essential to Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, that possible exploitation is provided strict evaluation and monitoring ensuring that such activities do not infringe upon and endanger the core cultural, natural and environmental values of the national park/MaB and the prospects of both cultural preservation, research, expeditions and a growing tourist industry.

To ensure that both personal tax of potential workers and company tax is paid within the municipality, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq suggests that the borders of the municipal be revised and if relevant, moved to the north to include the planned mining area at the southern border of the park and Biosphere reserve into the municipality.