

Day 30 August 23, Qaqortoq Greenland – Church – David Smith – Icebergs

The day started with calm sea, overcast sky and temperature about 50°F. At 6am we started the approach to the harbor at Qaqortoq, Greenland. It was interesting to see icebergs in the distance between us and the shoreline.





Another cruise ship, the Tahitian Princess was entering the harbor along with the Maasdam, as can be seen in the picture below, which also shows a large iceberg that was near Qaqortoq. We suspected the iceberg was grounded on the harbor bottom

because it didn't move all the time we were in the port.

Another interesting thing about the iceberg was that when we entered the harbor it had a flock of white sea birds resting on one corner of it, as shown below.



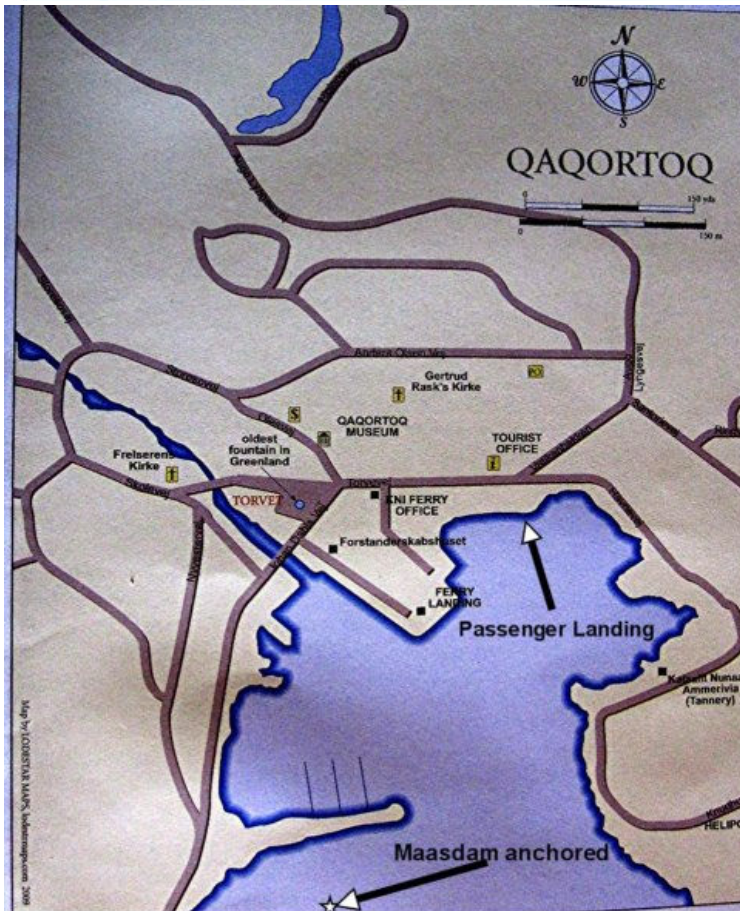
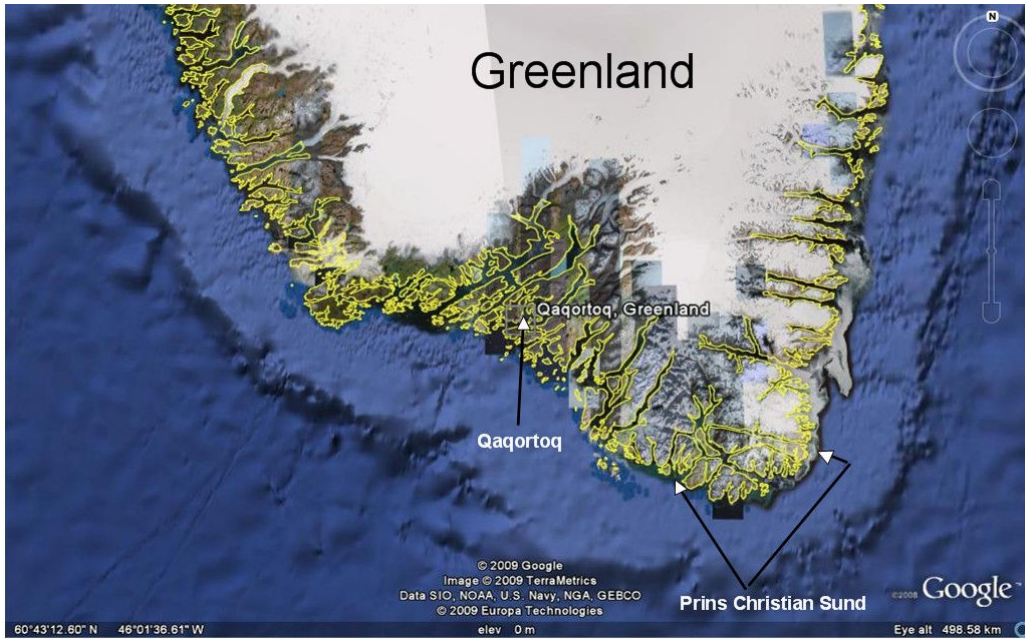
These sea birds had about same appearance as sea gulls but unlike seagulls they would land on the water to rest or feed. An example was some of them swimming in the water near the iceberg, as shown below.



At 7am the Maasdam dropped anchor near the passenger landing at the dock. The maps below show where the ship is located in Greenland and in the harbor at Qaqortoq.



As the map below shows, Qaqortoq is at the southern end of Greenland, not far from the Prins Christian Sund that we passed through yesterday.



Here is map that shows the streets of Qaqortoq and the relatively short distance we had to travel in the tender boats to get ashore.

This was a Sunday morning so before going into Qaqortoq we attended church services on the Maasdam, conducted by the Protestant Chaplain for this cruise, Rev. Dr. Herbert Meza, a retired Presbyterian minister. He was assisted in this work by his very able wife, Fran.



Qaqortoq with a population of about 3500 people is located on an island that is typical of the basalt ridges extending, like fingers, into the North Atlantic water. Going out on deck we could get a good view of Qaqortoq before venturing into the village. Here are a couple pictures of the small town. The passion the people of Greenland have for brightly colored houses is evident here.





Since the Maasdam was anchored in the harbor it was necessary to take tender boats to get into Qaqortoq. The ship has a system for minimizing the frustration when using the tender boats. When a group of people is ready to go ashore, they obtain a “Tender Boat Ticket” for each member of the group from a staff member in the Ocean Bar. These plastic credit-card-sized tickets are numbered so the passengers can wait in the comfort of the Ocean Bar Lounge and when the tender boat is available their ticket number is called over the PA system. The tickets are collected as we enter the tender boat. In this way there is always room for the passengers who show up at the gangway and we don’t have to wait in the drafty cold (and sometimes hot) hallway leading to the gangway.

Today we picked up our Tender Boat Tickets about 9:30am and were told to proceed directly to the gangway. We boarded the tender boat, as usual, and then took this picture on the right showing some passengers seated on the tender and a steward on the gangway assisting another passenger.



The Maasdam was anchored so close to the passenger pier that it took less than 5 minutes for the ride into Qaqortoq. We got off the tender and walked a short distance to the Tourist Office which was already filled with Maasdam passengers. Later in the day the Tahitian Princess passengers were also added to the mix of people visiting Qaqortoq.

We browsed around the Tourist Office and the display of native craft items they had for sale. We didn't need any maps and we didn't find anything we wanted to purchase so we started our walking tour around Qaqortoq. One of the first things we did was take a picture of Barbara and her library card in front of a large sign on the Tourist Office containing the city name of Qaqortoq.



We then came across what was indicated on our map as the oldest water fountain in Greenland, shown below.



Apparently an operating water fountain is a big deal because they would tend to freeze solid in winter. Maybe this one

froze up one time to many because it was currently undergoing some maintenance.

Close to the water fountain was a sizeable hole that had been dug to expose some of the city's utility lines for repair or replacement. Along with drinking water, the city utility department provides hot water that is pumped around town from a central boiler for heating the buildings. All of the pipes have to be insulated to keep them from freezing, even though they are several feet below the surface of the ground. The insulated hot water supply



pipe is visible at the far end of the excavation. Here is a close-up view of some new insulated hot water pipe that was ready to be installed.

While water related utilities are insulated and buried underground, the electrical utilities are not sensitive to temperature. Compared with water supply we saw a more casual and less expensive approach to supply of electricity. This was illustrated by the orange flexible



plastic conduit containing the electrical wire and draped over the bedrock near this streetlamp on the left.



On the subject of streetlight, one consistent observation is that even in these very small villages, there is extensive street lighting, probably because of the extended darkness of winter.

Located at various places around the town were stone sculptures and images carved into the rock. These were the product of the “Stone and Man” project begun in 1993 by Ms Aka Hoegh. She invited Nordic artists to produce works of art that represent Greenland

culture and could be displayed in Qaqortoq. The following are photos of some of the artwork that we saw.



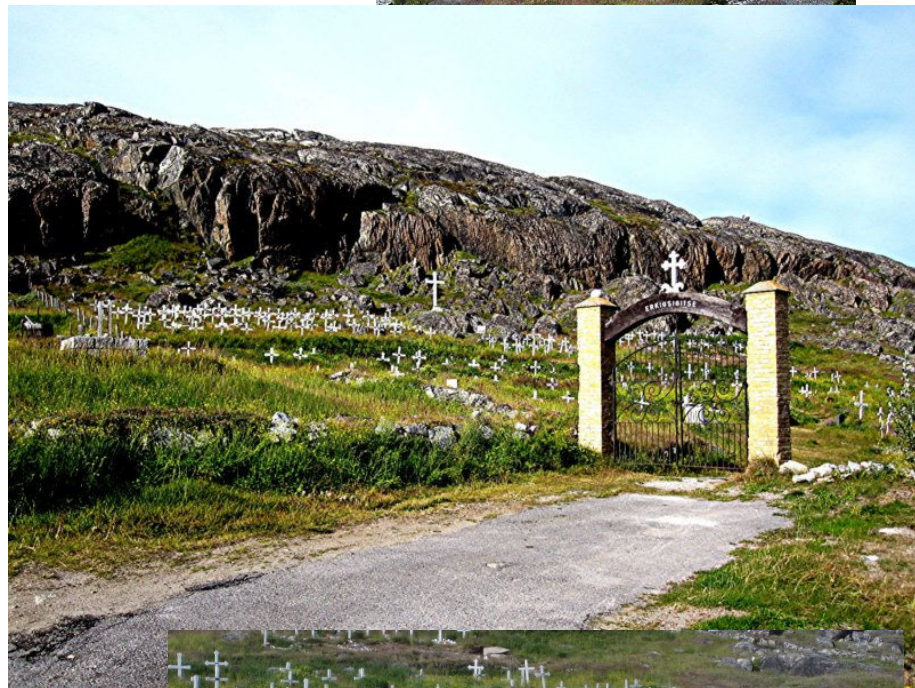


These artistic displays were the focus of attention for many of the visitors from the cruise ships today.

Since it was Sunday this church in the middle of town was busy with townspeople coming and going, as well as tourists milling around the area.



We continued our walk up the hill on the southern side of the town. We came across the town cemetery which appeared to be well maintained with simple white wooden crosses.



Many of the graves were decorated with plastic flowers and had candle lanterns like those we had seen in the cemetery at Nanortalic, Greenland earlier in the cruise.



An excavation of rock and earth had taken place near the edge of the cemetery. The wall of the hole showed that the solid rock foundation of the island was very close to the surface of the ground. This fact would seem to encourage shallow burial or cremation but we didn't get any information on that subject.



Education of children through the age of 14 is mandatory in Greenland. We found this schoolyard with a fully equipped playground. We assumed this stuff gets little use during the winter.



This large microwave antenna on the left was one of many that were visible around the area.

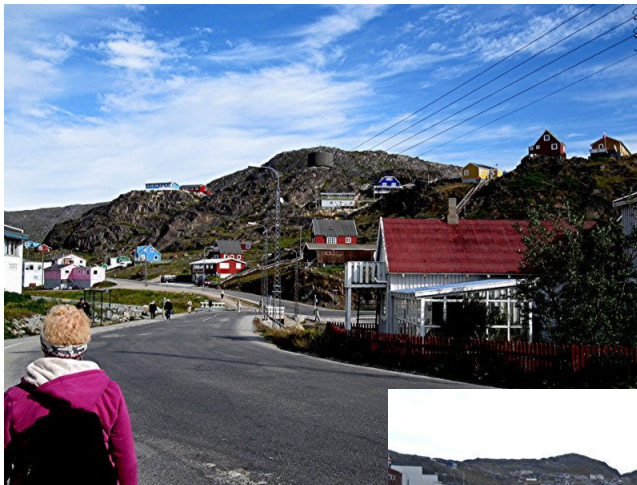


On the subject of infrastructure, nearby was some evidence that they had a sewer system installed as shown by this manhole, on the left.

Further on the subject of infrastructure, there apparently was an operating bus system, as shown by the presence of this bus stop, on the right. However, on this Sunday morning we didn't see any busses.



There was some car traffic on the well maintained asphalt streets but they were left mainly to the Maasdam and Tahitian Princess passengers. These views below give some idea of the pleasant, uncrowded and unhurried scene that we enjoyed in Qaqortoq.





As we were walking along the northern edge of the harbor we came upon a factory owned by Great Greenland.

Great Greenland is a company that produces fur garments for women out of seal skin. At the entrance was a sign that invited us to come in and make a purchase.



The store salesroom was filled with cruise ship passengers checking out the fashionable sealskin jackets, hats and gloves. The clothing was probably reasonably priced for fur

but we weren't really in that market. Barbara did find this cute little sealskin bear that had a zipper in the back so you could put something like your pajamas in there for fashionable storage each day. It was priced at about \$200 USD so she took a pass on that one.



There was a window in the wall of the sales area that provided a view of the sealskin cutting room which looked like it was left as-is after the last day of work, as shown on the right.



We asked the salesclerk where Great Greenland marketed its goods. They said primarily to Russia, and Japan. They said their factory employed about 45 people and that number was down a little bit from prior years. They said that the people of Qaqortoq worked at a wide variety of jobs, not just fishing.

A little further on our walk we came across the Qaqortoq Heliport. We took this picture of the helicopter which was parked there this morning. This one looks too small for medical evacuation so hopefully everyone will remain healthy until we get home.



We completed our tour of Qaqortoq and decided to return to the passenger landing and catch the tender boat back to the Maasdam. At the landing there was a TV News crew recording the visit of cruise ship passengers. We have noticed in a couple other ports how the TV stations are interested in these visits which probably have some positive impact on the local economy.

A lot of other people were planning to return to the Maasdam at the same time as us so a tender boat line developed, as shown on the right. Fortunately, the Maasdam was running several boats and it didn't take much time for us to get back to the ship.



In the afternoon, David Smith, one of the Explorations Speakers for this cruise gave a lecture on the subject of Greenland and the ice sheet that occupies most of the land. He gave an interesting talk that was very timely in view of where we were today. Two bits of information that he gave us were particularly interesting:



1. One was that the ice sheet which is nearly 2 miles thick at maximum has exerted so much pressure on the center of Greenland that the land mass has been

pushed down and now there is a depression in the middle of the underlying land. The depression has been large enough to put the center of Greenland below sea level. If the ice were suddenly removed the sea would rush in and create a huge bay in the center of Greenland. However, the science of geology suggests that the land would slowly spring back and after a few hundred thousand years the center of Greenland would be dry again. 2. Secondly, he speculated that the hot spot that has created Iceland was once under Greenland. That hot spot was responsible for the outpouring of lava that caused the initial formation of Greenland. The hot spot is long gone now and the Greenlanders can't tap in to the thermal energy that the Icelanders currently enjoy.

About 4:30 the last passengers returned from Qaqortoq and the Maasdam got underway. The Captain got on the PA system and told us he planned to go as fast as possible now so that he could get ahead of schedule on the path down to St. Anthony in Newfoundland. Then, in case we catch some rough sea from hurricane Bill he can slow the ship down for a more comfortable ride. As we cruised south down the coast of Greenland we passed through some real iceberg infested water. We were glad that our Ice Pilot, Raymond Jourdain, was on board to help the Captain navigate. Here are a couple photos of icebergs we took to illustrate.



Tomorrow is a day at sea on our way to St. Anthony, Newfoundland.