NEWS LESSON

Greenland Is Opening Up. Who Gets to Decide How Far?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes a destination feel special, and can that survive large numbers of visitors?
2. What risks does a small economy face if it depends heavily on one industry?
3. Do you think travellers have a duty to the places they visit? What might it include?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**motives**	☐	A	popular places that attract very large numbers of people
2	**urgency**	☐	B	great care to avoid mistakes or danger
3	**footing**	☐	C	a sudden, strong rise
4	**hotspots**	☐	D	to get or buy something
5	**caution**	☐	E	something valuable that you own or have
6	**acquire**	☐	F	the feeling that something must be done very soon
7	**surge**	☐	G	the reasons why someone does something
8	**asset**	☐	H	the base on which something stands or is built

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Three new airports have made one of the least accessible places on earth easy to reach. The harder question is who will benefit, and what a fragile, sparsely populated territory is prepared to give up in return.

1 By the standards of mass tourism, Greenland barely registers. Tourism supplied 4.9% of its GDP in 2024, according to the territory's first official tourism satellite account, and about 1,800 people worked in the sector directly, a little over 6% of all jobs. Yet the way the island is being reorganised around visitors is striking. Nuuk opened an international airport in late 2024, Qaqortoq followed in April 2026, and on 29 October the first direct flight from Copenhagen landed at a new Ilulissat airport with a 2,200 metre runway long enough for larger aircraft.

2 The motives are plainly economic and, increasingly, political. Greenland, with about 56,000 people, has long relied on fishing, and the Guardian argues that melting polar ice makes that industry's future precarious. The government wants independence from Denmark eventually, and Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen told the Associated Press that independence needs a firm economic footing. The American threats to acquire the territory, which the Guardian says filled residents with anger and apprehension, have sharpened that urgency. Tourism is attractive because it offers growth without giving up control to anyone else, and it spares the economy from keeping all its eggs in one basket.

3 Whether the boom is real is harder to say than the headlines suggest. The Guardian reports nearly 180,000 visitors in 2025 and expects a higher figure this year. The Associated Press gives almost 150,000 international visitors in 2024 and says the expected surge has yet to arrive. These figures do not quite add up, though they need not conflict, since the sources may count different kinds of visitor, perhaps including cruise passengers, and that is a good reason to treat any single figure with caution.

4 The tension that interests most observers is local. People in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French hotspots have protested against the strain tourism puts on daily life, and Greenland is not immune. The Guardian notes concern around the Nuuk airport about the effect on a historically isolated community and a pristine landscape, and a cruise ship was blocked from entering Ilulissat, where residents feel they see little return from foreign operators. A former regional mayor told the Associated Press that the town's environment and infrastructure could be overwhelmed. His question, how many can we invite, deserves a better answer than anyone has offered yet.

5 It matters, too, who is telling the story. The Associated Press reporter travelled on a trip organised by Visit Greenland, which the agency disclosed, and Visit Greenland, wholly owned by the government, commissioned the tourism accounts from a consultancy. Neither fact undermines the numbers, but both remind us that the loudest voices on tourism often have an axe to grind.

6 The sensible reading is cautious. Better access is a double-edged sword: it can bring jobs, income and a wider economic base, and it can also hasten the very changes that make a remote place worth visiting. If local people are consulted early and the benefits are shared beyond a handful of operators, Greenland may avoid the worst problems seen elsewhere. If not, a land that sells silence could find it has traded its greatest asset for a short-lived boom. Nobody can say yet how it will turn out.

Sources: The Guardian, Ibiza on ice: why is Greenland suddenly throwing open its doors to tourists?; The Associated Press (via KSAT), Greenland opens new international airport to lure tourists as it eyes future independence. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The tourism accounts were not written by Visit Greenland itself. T F NG
2. The Guardian and the Associated Press both say a surge in visitors has clearly arrived. T F NG
3. The two visitor totals could both be correct if the sources count different groups of people. T F NG
4. Visit Greenland receives most of its funding from cruise companies. T F NG
5. Tourism provides a smaller share of Greenland's jobs than of its GDP. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

commissioned	forfeit	hasten	immune	ration	sharpened	strain	undermines

1. Rapid growth in visitor numbers can place an intolerable _____ on housing and local services.
2. Poorly planned development may _____ the very decline that it was meant to prevent.
3. Concealed funding quietly _____ public trust in the findings.
4. The ministry _____ an independent study of the plan's likely effects.
5. No small economy is entirely _____ to swings in global demand.
6. The recent dispute has _____ the argument over how quickly the economy should open up.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of the figures makes any comparison between reports difficult. (RELY)
2. A growing _____ on a single season leaves a local economy exposed. (DEPEND)
3. Critics doubt whether growth on this scale is _____ in so fragile a landscape. (SUSTAIN)
4. The _____ of the market by foreign operators frustrates many residents. (DOMINATE)
5. Visitors should behave _____ in such a fragile landscape. (RESPONSIBLE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Look at what follows the gap. Some linkers need a clause, some a short phrase, and some join two sentences across a comma.

albeit **hence** **nonetheless** **provided** **thereby** **unless** **whereas**

1. The growth in arrivals is real, _____ modest by the standards of mass tourism.
2. Some residents welcome the new flights, _____ others fear the loss of the calm that drew visitors in the first place.
3. The new airport is widely seen as a success. _____ , critics ask who will actually profit from it.
4. The scheme will succeed _____ local people are consulted from the start.
5. Foreign operators keep most of the profit, _____ the resentment felt by many residents.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Is tourism a fair route to economic independence for a small territory?
2. Where does a community's right to protect its way of life end and a visitor's freedom to travel begin?
3. Would your own region cope with a sudden rise in visitors better or worse than Greenland would? Why?

9 Role-play: a new airport for a quiet town

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · a resident

A new airport has opened near your quiet town. You like the jobs, but you worry about crowds and damage to the land. Ask the tourism manager at least two questions and say what you want.

Student B · the tourism manager

You want more visitors because they bring money and work. Explain the benefits. Listen to the resident's worries and suggest a compromise.

Useful phrases

I'm worried that the town won't cope.

That's a fair point, but we need the jobs.

How many visitors can the town take?

What if we set a limit?

I'd be happy if local people got a share.

We're not against tourists, we just want a say.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you reach an agreement, and who gave up more?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 F · 3 H · 4 A · 5 B · 6 D · 7 C · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 strain · 2 hasten · 3 undermines · 4 commissioned · 5 immune · 6 sharpened

6 Word forms

1 reliability · 2 dependence · 3 sustainable · 4 domination · 5 responsibly

7 Language focus

1 albeit · 2 whereas · 3 Nonetheless · 4 provided · 5 hence

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