

Airports as Catalysts

Unlocking Greenland's economic
and social potential

Introduction & Agenda



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- A brief overview of Greenland Airports
- Contextual challenges
- Routes before and after 2024
- What airports enable in Greenland
- Economic, social and cultural impact
- Looking ahead and key takeaways

A Unique Context

- More than two-thirds lie above the Arctic Circle
- **81%** of Greenland's landmass is covered in ice
- No road network connecting population centers; only air and sea connections
- Aviation is not optional, it is foundational



A Brief History of Aviation in Greenland

1920s –1930s:

Early exploration
& mail flights

1950s:

Introduction of
transatlantic civil flights

1990s –2010s:

Regional turboprop &
helicopter services expand

1940s:

WWII 14 Military Air Bases

1970s –1980s:

Domestic airport
network

2009:

Self Rule Act

2015:

Principal decision to
expand Air Connectivity
(Airport Expansion Program)



Airport Expansion Program

- An initiative to expand and transform the connectivity in the region
- The program includes 3 airports; **Nuuk, Ilulissat, Qaqortoq**
- Greenland's parliament formally approved the expansion plan in 2018
- The estimated cost of the project \$795 million, an equivalent of $\approx 20\%$ of Greenland's total GDP



Qaqortoq Airport

Timeline of Airport Expansion 2015-2026

2015: Airport Expansion concept is initiated

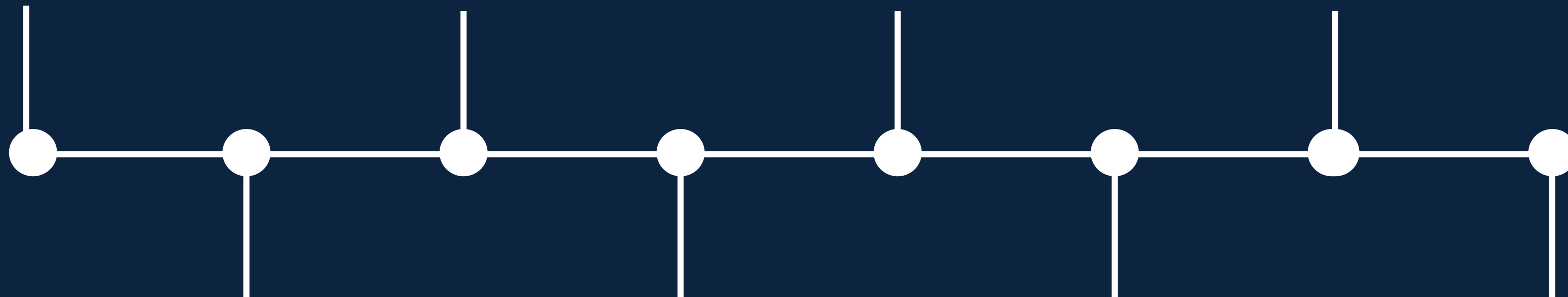
2017: Runways

2018: Framework agreement

2019: Design development (ZESO)

2019: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is approved

2024: Nuuk Airport opens
2024: Qaqortoq begins construction



2016: Kalaallit Airports (KAIR) is established & construction is initiated

2019: KAIR -Holding, -International, -Domestic is established, Danish state becomes a co-owner

2020: Nuuk begins construction
2021: Ilulissat begins construction

2026: Ilulissat & Qaqortoq Airports opens

Greenland Airports



Founded

- 2024, Mittarfeqarfiit and Kalaallit Airports merge and become Greenland Airports



Responsibilities

- 13 airports
- 46 helipads



Passengers

- Total number of passengers: (international and domestic)
2022: 695.000 → 2025: 765.000

Organization Structure





Airport Locations

International

Kangerlussuaq, Nuuk, Narsarsuaq

Regional

Aasiaat, Ilulissat, Maniitsoq, Paamiut, Sisimiut, Qaqortoq

Remote Locations

Kulusuk, Nerlerit Inaat, Qaanaaq, Qaarsut, Upernavik



International Flights Before 2024

- Two commercial international connections to and from Greenland (Iceland and Denmark) primarily on two airlines (Air Greenland & Iceland Air)
- All international travelers to Greenland transfer in Kangerlussuaq
- Single wide body aircraft connection between Kangerlussuaq and Copenhagen (Airbus A330-200)



International Flights After 2026

- Direct access to Greenland from both North America and Europe
- Several international connections to both Nuuk and Ilulissat on at least 4 airlines (Air Greenland, United, SAS & Iceland Air)
- Several wide body and code C aircraft serving both Nuuk and Ilulissat
- Capital and primary tourist destination serviced directly by international flights



Domestic Flights Before 2024

- All travel to destinations in greenland came through Kangerlussuaq

- International passenger arrival at Kangerlussuaq came on an Airbus A330-200 and switched to DASH-8-200

- Unable to fly directly from outside Greenland to the Capital (Nuuk) or the primary tourist destination (Ilulissat)

Domestic Flights After 2026



Domestic travel in Greenland comes through Nuuk and Ilulissat

The new Airbus A330-800 and the coming Airbus A320neo will service Nuuk and Ilulissat

Greenland's capital (Nuuk) and primary tourist destination (Ilulissat) are serviced directly with international flights



What Airports Enable in Greenland

- Business & Jobs
- Healthcare & Education
- Tourism & Travels

Impact



Economic Impact
Business & Jobs



Social Impact
Healthcare & Education



Cultural Impact
Tourism & Travels

Business & Jobs

- Jobs **directly** linked to aviation (≈ 1300):
Greenland Airports: ≈ 550 Employees
Air Greenland: ≈ 700 Employees
Smaller Airline operators: ≈ 50 Employees
- Percentage of the working population
Greenland: $\approx 4,5\%$ (≈ 1300 of 29.000)
Denmark $\approx 1,1\%$ (≈ 36.400 of 3,2 mil)
- Many other sectors benefits indirectly

GreenlandAirports

Mittarfearfiit

ZESC

Health & Education

- Patients needing specialized care are sent to Nuuk, Denmark, or Iceland (emergencies)
- In 2025, an increase of patients with access to specialist treatments in Denmark (~1500)
- 40% of university students study abroad
- In 2025, a small increase of students return after graduation (37% return within 1 year)

Nuuk Airport

Tourism & Travels

- Visiting Tourists: **+63%**
2022: 92,000 → 2025: 150,000
- Tourism Projection: **+33-100%**
200,000–300,000 visitors by 2030
- National Museum visits: **+145%**
2022: 11,000 → 2025: 27,000
- International passengers by air: **+34%**
2022: 86,000 → 2025: 115,000

Broader Impact

- Expanded employment opportunities in remote areas, particularly in tourism and fishing
- Greater representation of women in senior and leadership roles
- Enhanced career prospects in the three main settlements
- Broader range of social and recreational activities for children and youth

Future Proofing Airports

- Expectations and requirements of international travelers
- Terminal organization and structural principle for easy expansion
- Flexibility built into the terminal building for quick capacity increase





Looking Ahead

- Qaqortoq Airport opens in April 2026
- Ilulissat Airport opens in October 2026
- Increased connectivity to Greenland's east coast
- Further international connections

