



25 June 2019

For immediate release

GREENLANDIC INUIT STUDENTS PREPARE FOR FIRST VISIT TO SCOTLAND
Participants of The Polar Academy charity to host special visitors

Three teenage Inuit students and accompanied by Axel an Inuit fisherman and his family from south-eastern Greenland are in Scotland this week as part of a five-day cultural exchange initiative organised by Craig Mathieson, founder of the Scottish charity, The Polar Academy.

It is believed to be the first time that students from Greenland have visited Scotland.

The female students, who speak East Greenlandic, Danish and English and who were schooled in the small town of Tasiilaq, will be reunited with ten teenagers from Bathgate Academy in West Lothian and some pupils from Lochgelly High School in Fife. Debo was born in Kulusuk, Lea is from Tasiilaq and though born in Denmark, Anna now also lives in Tasiilaq.

In April this year, ten Bathgate Academy pupils returned from journeying unsupported for ten days in Eastern Greenland, as part of a life-changing expedition with The Polar Academy. In 2017/2018, pupils from Lochgelly High School in Fife undertook a similar expedition. Founded with the vision of using exploration to positively transform young lives affected by mental health issues, since 2013 and supported by Axel and his fellow Inuit in local communities, the charity has annually taken Scottish teenagers into the wilds of what is one of the world's largest and coldest islands.

While there is a small adventure tourism economy, Greenland is a country where many families still source food and clothing by hunting for fish, seals and even polar bear. Fruit and vegetables must be imported into the country that is 2.1 million km² and into which Scotland would fit over 20 times. With only 56,000 inhabitants, it has just 1% of the population of Scotland. There are very few trees in its vast landscape of rock and ice where winter daytime temperatures can easily be minus 30C.

Craig Mathieson who is Scotland's greatest living polar explorer, explained the significance of this unusual cultural exchange: "Over the past six years, Axel and many of his fellow Inuit have been extremely welcoming of The Polar Academy, providing our teams with both kind hospitality and invaluable logistical support.

“At the invitation of The Polar Academy, their visit to Scotland is an opportunity to repay their kind hospitality and to offer both Axel’s family and the young students an insight to Scotland’s rich heritage and culture. Though Greenland has currency and more recently the internet, many inhabitants still continue to lead simple lives and with hunting part of their DNA they have a close affinity with nature and the landscape.

“As a Greenlandic fisherman, I know that during his stay in Scotland, Axel is looking forward to experiencing some time angling on the river with Scottish actor and fishing presenter Paul Young. The students are also interested in visiting a real castle and I’m sure that they will be fascinated by the fact we have large supermarkets in which to choose our food!”

“Of course, this visit is also an opportunity for the teenagers from both countries to share experiences of their different cultures. By sitting down and talking they quickly realise that youths from very different parts of the world share similar challenges that with hard work and focus can be overcome and dreams achieved.”

The Polar Academy has also just announced that ten pupils from Bell Baxter High School in Coupar, Fife have been selected to benefit from the charity in 2019/2020. Supported by Tiso, the outdoor adventure retail specialist and other generous donors, the eight female and two male pupils will journey with The Polar Academy in Eastern Greenland in April 2020.

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www.thepolaracademy.org

Notes to the editor

The Inuit

Inuit were the first inhabitants of the (North American) Arctic and inhabited from the Bering Strait to East Greenland. Living across Russia, Canada and Greenland there are more than 100,000 Inuit. In Greenland, it’s believed the Inuit are descended from the Thule people who settled Greenland circa AD1200. With 88% (45,000) of its inhabitants Inuit, Greenland continues to be the least densely populated country in the world.

Language and climate

In Greenland, the Inuit speak Greenlandic (kalaallisut). Though global warming is having an impact on the massive ice sheet that covers much of Greenland’s interior, it remains rare for the summer mean temperature to exceed +10°C in June, July and August while in winter temperatures can easily be lower than minus 30C.

Housing

In Greenland, the Inuit usually live in permanent stone houses though in summer tents made of skin are also used. In winter, ice blocks are still crafted to create igloos.

Employment

Government agencies, the oil and gas industry, tourism and the arts and crafts industry all provide employment opportunities for the local populations.

Diet

Many Inuit continue to hunt and fish. Seal, whale, polar bear, fish and bird meat form much of the traditional diet. Fruit and vegetables must be imported.

Education

Inuit children are taught standard subjects at school such as maths, spelling, reading, and IT skills. They also learn about the traditional Inuit culture.

Technology

Traditionally whale blubber was burned as the fuel for cooking and lamps. Dogs were trained and used for transportation. Inuit increasingly have access to electricity and use TV's, mobile phones and social media.

Culture

Inhabitants should be referred to as Inuit not Eskimos. The latter is considered a derogatory term by many Inuit.

Drumming and dancing are part of traditional Inuit gatherings. Evenings at home may be spent carving ivory or bone. A traditional Inuit game is played on a board, using pieces in the shape of miniature people and animals.

Sport

In addition to skilled kayakers, ice hockey is popular due to the availability of ice.

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