

ENCOUNTERING POLAR BEARS

while hiking in Greenland



2 200 bears on the west coast

The polar bear population in Greenland is estimated to be sustainable. Around 2 200 polar bears live along the west coast of Greenland, and it is unknown how many polar bears live on the east coast. However, the population is likely smaller or larger to that of the west coast. Polar bear sightings in inhabited areas in Greenland are generally very rare, but they occasionally come near towns and settlements, attracted by the scent of food.

THE EAST COAST

Want to see a polar bear in Greenland?

East coast of Greenland

The best chance to see a polar bear is while cruising on the east coast of Greenland on expedition cruise ships. It's also the better way to see them. If you move around on land in this area, you should take proper safety precautions, including going with an armed guide.



How likely is it to encounter a polar bear while hiking in Greenland?

It depends very much on different things like the location, time of year, the situation with floating ice and so on - but generally, slim to none.



ATTACKS

An attack is when a polar bear makes physical contact with a person.

VS

CHARGES

A charge is when a polar bear moves deliberately toward a human with the intention to attack and kill. Unlike other bears, polar bears do not make warning charges to scare people off.



16

Charges

In 2012, biologists began keeping track of close human-bear interactions. Between 2012-2017, 16 polar bear charges have been registered.

2

Injuries

Between 2012-2017, 2 polar bear attacks have been registered where people were injured but not killed.

0

Killed

As of 2018, there are no reported deaths by a polar bear attack in Greenland in the last 25 years.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU MEET ONE?

Here's how you should act



1

The bear does not see you
Move away very quietly while staying out of sight. Position yourself so that the wind doesn't carry your scent towards the bear.

2

The bear sees you but stays calm
You move away from it very slowly and quietly. Talk softly, while keeping an eye on it.

3

The bear is curious and begins to move nearer
Wave your arms and make loud noises. Shout loudly or bang things together like two water bottles or a canister and its cap lid. Prepare weapon or signal flare.

4

The bear charges for an attack
Expose a signal flare directly in front of it. Prepare to shoot in self-defense. If the bear continues to charge, aim just under its chin and shoot.

5

The bear attacks
Fight with all possible remedies, like a knife or a stick. Kick or hit it hard on its nose and/or eyes. Protect your head, neck and core as best as possible.

6

You manage to escape a bear attack
Call for help via mobile, VHF radio or satellite phone.

OTHER WILD ANIMALS

Where you should keep your distance



1 GREENLAND SLED DOG

Yes, it sounds strange, but the sled dog is a wild animal with a predator instinct. This is why they are always leashed when they are not working. You should never touch a sled dog unless its owner has given you permission.



2 POLAR BEAR

Experts say there is no record of humans killing the polar bears in Greenland for the past many decades. We like to sleep this is because people were prepared. If a polar bear charges and you don't have remedies to protect yourself - like a rifle, knife or signal flare - your chance of survival are slim.

3 MUSK OX

Musk oxen are like giant goats but when they are in heat they can become quite aggressive and territorial. They're intelligent animals and predators, so it's best to keep a wide distance. Their behaviour can be unpredictable.



4 WALRUS

Male walrus can behave like big, bad bulls if you enter their territory and bother them. They can attack small, open boats and severely pierce the hull, let alone tiny kayakers. Usually, the walrus mostly stay in very specific areas, so just don't get near those hot spots.

5 ARCTIC WOLF

Packs of arctic wolves are extremely rare in Greenland and most live in the remote northern and northeastern parts of Greenland. While wolf attacks have been registered, this is not a threat to the vast majority of visitors to Greenland.

