





Penny's crew did overwinter in the sound in 1854 and they, and an American ship that had first overwintered in 1852, enjoyed very successful sprint hunts around Kekerten Island. At Kekerten, buildings were added in 1857, and many Inuit joined the whalers for the winter, living around the whaling outpost, finding employment as crews on whaleboats, transporting blubber from the floe edge back to the island, rendering whale oil, hunting to supply food for the camps, or providing fur clothing for the whalers. In return, the Inuit received rifles, telescopes, whaleboats, knives, needles, matches, kettles, and many more manufactured items. They were also exposed to many of the "white man's" diseases, and epidemics decimated their numbers. However, many survived and worked through the last half of the nineteenth century with the whalers. By the 1860s, ships from both England and the US were routinely wintering at the islands called Kekerten, and at Niantilik, Blacklead Island, and Cape Haven.

As the bowhead stocks were depleted, the hunt moved on to smaller marine mammals like seals, walrus, narwhals and belugas. The islands were beehives of activity in the late 1800s, as the whalers were joined

by scientists, government officials and missionaries. By 1912, the unrelenting hunting pressure pushed the bowhead whale population of the sound to below the economic threshold, and by 1917 the whalers were gone. Inuit continued the hunt for five more years, but the post at Kekerten was abandoned by the mid 1920s.

**Kekerten Territorial Park** is a special place of national historic significance, and was established to preserve the historic remains of a time when Inuit and whalers worked together in a harsh environment.

### CONSERVING HISTORY

Today, the island is entirely protected. A boardwalk trail connects points of interest, and people are encouraged to remain on the trail to protect the remains of many old houses and storage caches. Hundreds of barrel hoops, some wooden barrels, blubber-hauling pins, and several old iron try pots remain, along with fragments of old whaleboats and buildings, the foundations of an old forge used to work iron into harpoons and flensing equipment, and a slip used to haul the whaleboats out for repairs or storage. There are reconstructions of the whalebone frameworks used to support the roofs of Inuit winter houses, and many old tent rings and house foundations. An extension to the boardwalk trail leads to the whalers' graveyard and a whale-spotting lookout where the first Union Jack was raised in 1897 to assert sovereignty over the Canadian arctic. Signs with historical photographs and a printed guide tell the story of the island and its role in the Inuit and whaling cultures of the eastern arctic.

Bird and sea mammal watching in and from the park is generally very good, with glimpses of ringed and harp seals

and sometimes walrus and belugas or occasionally a narwhal. All three species of jaegers occur here, as well as sea ducks like common and king eiders and longtail ducks, and seabirds like the thick-billed murre, black gillie-mot, or dovkie are frequently seen. Peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons are possible around any cliffs. Shorebirds (Baird's and white-rumped sandpipers, red-necked phalaropes, and sometimes golden plovers) skitter along the beaches. This is one of the few places in the world where you might be able to see both the semipalmated plover and the ringed plover at the same time. Small perching birds include the snow bunting, Lapland longspur, common redpoll and horned lark.

### TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

Located about 50 kilometres south of Pangnirtung, **Kekerten Territorial Park** is accessible by snowmobile in springtime (early May through mid-June), and by boat in summer (mid-July to mid-September), approximately a three-hour trip in each season. To preserve the delicate sites, camping is not permitted in the park. However, local guides offer day trips to the island from Pangnirtung. They are well versed in the culture and the history of the whaling industry in Cumberland Sound, and willingly share their stories. Cruise ships visiting eastern Baffin Island often stop at Kekerten, and are joined by local guides who interpret the park.

The traditional Inuit community of Pangnirtung is accessible by air from Iqaluit, and is also the jumping-off spot for your trip to **Kekerten Territorial Park**. There's a lot to do in Pangnirtung. The scenery is gorgeous, and the people are friendly and helpful. The first language is Inuktitut, but many

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younger people speak English as well. The Angmarlik Visitors' Centre features displays interpreting the traditional Inuit life and the whaling history of the area, including displays of a Thule *qammaq*, or winter house, with all the implements of everyday living. The Visitors' Centre is a combination of museum, community library and elders' centre, where Inuit elders gather to play cards, knit or reminisce with each other. An old Hudson Bay Company Blubber Station with whaleboat slip is also preserved and open to visitors. Inside there are displays with historical photographs and a restored whaling boat equipped as it would have been for a whale hunt.

Pangnirtung has become one of the main venues for traditional knowledge workshops and meetings, and is visited by people from all over Nunavut as well as from outside the territory.

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Camping is permitted in Pangnirtung, at the **Pisuktinu Tunngavik Territorial Campground**, which offers sturdy tent platforms, windbreaks, "comfort stations", picnic facilities, and a stunning view of Pangnirtung Fiord. Staff at the Visitors' Centre will direct you to the campground, arrange for local guides and outfitters to take you to **Kekerten Territorial Park**, or various day trips around Pangnirtung and Cumberland Sound.

Visitors to Pangnirtung also enjoy the displays in the Parks Canada Interpretive Centre as well as visiting Uqurmiut Arts and Crafts, which includes the famed Pangnirtung Print Shop and Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio, which produces incredible woven tapestries.



For more information on **Kekerten Territorial Park**, the Angmarlik Visitors' Centre, and **Pisuktinu Tunngavik Territorial Campground**, check the Nunavut Parks website at [www.nunavutparks.com](http://www.nunavutparks.com), or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations and services. ■

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[katannilik@qiniq.com](mailto:katannilik@qiniq.com)

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[info@nunavuttourism.com](mailto:info@nunavuttourism.com)  
[www.nunavuttourism.com](http://www.nunavuttourism.com)

