

# BAFFIN ISLAND FLOE EDGE

NARWHALS & POLAR BEARS



ADVENTURE  
CANADA





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## NARWHALS & POLAR BEARS

JUNE 15 – 22, 2018

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**Duration:** 8 days

**Tour Stars & Ends:** Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet), Nunavut

**Cost:** \$6,675 CAD + 5% tax

**Credit Card Price:** \$6,940 CAD + 5% tax

**Single Supplement:** \$55 CAD + 5% tax

**Single Supplement Credit Card Price:** \$57 CAD + 5% tax

**Max:** 5-11 adventurers

**Fitness Level:** Easy

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**Guide:** Cam Gillies

Cam grew up enjoying the birds and Rocky Mountains of British Columbia. He is a keen birder and photographer and is excited to share his passion with others. Cam is the owner of Eagle-Eye Tours and is an highly experienced Arctic guide. Cam has participated in a variety of research projects; everything from catching endangered leopard frogs to snow-tracking wolverines. He completed a PhD studying the movement of forest birds in Costa Rica. He considers his travels in the north as some of his best: the beauty of the landscape, the incredible wildlife, and the wonderful people keep drawing him back!

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- 2 nights in hotels, 5 nights comfortable camping near floe edge (equipment provided)
- Ground transportation
- Includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to lunch on Day 8
- Guiding services
- Travel by komatik (sled) to the floe edge

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Commercial and group flights
- Personal items
- Mandatory emergency medical and evacuation insurance
- Discretionary trip cancellation and interruption insurance

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Unique opportunity to camp on floe edge, experience a fascinating culture and view rich marine life
- Close encounters with narwhal and opportunities to see polar bears
- Cultural experiences, from throat singing in town to travelling on the ice with local Inuit guides
- Visit bird nesting cliff
- Experience the land of the Midnight Sun!

**R**ugged mountains, stunning glaciers, flocks of northern seabirds, the wonderful Narwhal, and traditional Inuit culture—this is what awaits us on a truly amazing Arctic tour to the wilderness of northern Baffin Island.

We experience this dramatic Arctic landscape at a time of year when the sun never sets and wildlife is returning to this very rich area of the Arctic. There are northern birds in abundance, including thick-billed murre, black-legged kittiwake, and king and common eiders. Other highlights include Sabine's and Thayer's gull, red-throated loon and—with much luck—we may see the all-white ivory gull! In addition, the mixing of ocean currents from Baffin Bay and Lancaster Sound makes the marine life very rich! At this time of year, the sea ice is melting back and marine mammals are traveling north along the ice floe edge where food is concentrated. We hope to see several species of seals and the amazing spiral-tusked Narwhal. With luck we will also see polar bear or the endangered bowhead whale. Remote wilderness, striking Arctic landscapes, rich northern wildlife, and fascinating culture—this promises to be the experience of a lifetime!

# DETAILED ITINERARY



This is our intended itinerary. Wildlife sightings and some activities depend on favourable conditions. As with all of our adventures, weather, sea, ice, and road conditions are a determining factor and will dictate our itinerary.

## **Day 0 | Arrival in Ottawa**

Participants will need to be in Ottawa the night prior to our flight to Pond Inlet. We are happy to help arrange this night in Ottawa. If schedules allow, we can meet for an evening meal in Ottawa. Those arriving early may enjoy a visit the Canadian Museum of Nature before dinner. Night in Ottawa.

## **Day 1 | Travel to Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet)**

We meet for breakfast and head for the Ottawa airport in the morning for our flights to Pond Inlet at the northern tip of Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. After a plane change in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, we should arrive in Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) in the afternoon. After dinner we will have plenty of time for a short walk around town because the sun does not set at this time of year. Hotel night in Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet).

## **Day 2 | Travel to the floe edge**

In the morning we will explore the shoreline, tundra and ponds close to Pond Inlet. We will encounter some of the more common species such as lapland longspur, horned lark and snow bunting, and we will be looking for common ringed plover here and elsewhere. This mostly Palearctic species has a very small breeding range in North America, restricted to the eastern Arctic of Canada. After lunch, we will depart for the floe edge. We travel by komatik, which is a wooden sled lashed together and pulled behind a snowmobile. This is the traditional means of travel for the Inuit, the only difference is that snowmobiles have replaced dog teams.

Enroute we may have the opportunity to get up close and personal with several icebergs that have spent the winter frozen in place. These can be both beautiful and enormous as they await break up of the ice before they continue to drift southward.

The floe edge is where the winter ice meets the open waters of Baffin Bay and it is where the wildlife is concentrated on their northward migration. We should have wonderful opportunities to photograph and enjoy the wildlife. The birding at the floe edge should be superb! Hundreds of northern fulmars, common and king eiders, and all three species of jaegers will be a treat. We will see hundreds or even thousands of thick-billed murres, many black guillemots, and with luck, several dovebies in their very sharp breeding



Photo credits: Cam Gillies and Andrew Stewart

plumage! We will also see a collection of northern gulls: glaucous, Thayer's, Sabine's, black-legged kittiwake, and—with much luck—the ivory gull. You have to travel very far north to find this beautiful all white arctic gull, but here we will be in the heart of its range. Unfortunately, they have become quite scarce in the last several years and are now an endangered species. We will have the opportunity to watch as these and possibly other species move northward along the floe edge

### **Day 3–6 | Floe edge and Bylot Island**

Our daily activities will depend on the location of the floe edge and weather conditions, but will likely include these highlights. We will use a camp near the floe edge for these nights.

#### ***Bylot Island***

Bylot Island is part of the recently declared Sirmilik National Park and is one of the largest bird refuges in the world. We plan to go for a walk near our camp to see the remains of several traditional sod and whalebone houses, used until recently by the Inuit. On the tundra, we look for many of the common northern species that are returning from the south at this time of year. Shorebirds are sparsely distributed, but we hope to find several species nesting including American golden-plover, Baird's sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper and red phalarope. On the cliffs, we will look closely for Gyrfalcon, including white-morph individuals, and peregrine falcon. In the ponds on Bylot Island and around Pond Inlet, we will search for red-throated loon, greater snow goose, and long-tailed duck. It should be a spectacular setting being on the tundra surrounded by the rugged snow-covered mountains that rim the eastern Arctic.

#### ***Visit to Seabird Colony***

From our camp, if ice conditions permit, we will travel to the seabird colony on Bylot Island. North of Cape Graham Moore, these cliffs rise thousands of feet and host over 40,000 thick-billed murres and 6,500 black-legged kittiwakes. Hundreds of them will be coming and going from their precarious ledges as they head east to feed at the floe edge.

#### ***At the Floe Edge***

We will likely spend most of our time at the floe edge with the hope of seeing some of the more elusive species that will be moving by, including the marine mammals. Waiting patiently at the floe edge should improve our chances of seeing that amazing northern whale, the narwhal. We will be watching for groups of these magnificent creatures, with their long spiraled tusks—the male's tusk can be up to seven feet long! This will surely be a highlight! It is also possible to see bowhead whales, walrus, and that creature of legend, Nanook, the polar bear, but we will need some luck for these. The floe edge will also give us the chance to see ringed, and possibly bearded and harp seals.

### **Day 7 | Return to Pond Inlet and flight to Iqaluit**

After a final morning at the floe edge, we leave our camp for our return to Pond Inlet. On our journey we view the towering cliffs of Bylot Island plus the spectacular landscape of mountains and massive glaciers. We arrive in Pond Inlet in the afternoon in time to catch an evening flight to Iqaluit. Night in Iqaluit.

### **Day 8 | Travel to Ottawa and onward**

We spend an enjoyable morning in Iqaluit birding the surrounding area or visiting local galleries before catching our midday flight south to Ottawa, arriving in the afternoon, usually with time to catch connecting flights home. We will head home with many fond memories from this amazing adventure in the land of the midnight sun.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT**

Early June is still cold in the Arctic. Temperatures may not be much above freezing and it could snow, but warm layered clothing along with the waterproof boots should keep you warm. It is usually sunny though and the sun is up twenty-four hours, so bring sunscreen. We will provide all of the necessary camping equipment including a warm sleeping bag for the nights camping.

Our daily activities will be focused on looking for and watching birds and other wildlife at the floe edge or on the tundra, but we won't hesitate to enjoy other aspects of the natural and cultural history of this area.

While we have outlined the detailed itinerary, this schedule and our daily activities will be very dependent on the daily weather and ice conditions as well as possible schedule changes from the airline. In addition, we cannot guarantee single occupancy in our hotel in Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet).







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