



THE BESPOKE TRAVELLER

Ever heard a glacier sing?

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EVIGHEDSFJORD, GREENLAND — Special to The Globe and Mail

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Leaning precariously over the side of the Zodiac, I reach into the frigid waters of the Eternity Fjord and haul out a perfectly clear miniature iceberg. Mixologists in London or Tokyo would kill for ice this pure, but up here there's a bumper crop of 50,000-year-old glacier ice just waiting to be chipped into cocktail glasses.

I'm chasing ice in Greenland with the crew from Adventure Canada, a 27-year-old travel company that specializes in Arctic expeditions. Yesterday, our efforts to reach Ilulissat were thwarted when the icebergs in the magnificently named Disko Bay became so dense we had to turn around. Instead, we're deep down into the business end of Evighedsfjord, as it's known in Danish, off the country's west coast and we're about to have our minds blown.

Early this morning a few of us piled into Zodiacs to get a close look at the massive glacier that marks the end of the fjord. Close, but not too close, is the key. This is a tidewater glacier, meaning it's foremost edge extends out into the water, allowing it to produce icebergs. Tidewater glaciers are constantly moving and "calving" off great sheets of ice, some of them so massive as to produce enormous waves that could easily send us all tumbling into the freezing water.

Towering ominously above us, and framed by some of western Greenland's tallest mountains, the high walls of the glacier command respect, but also try to lure us in. While their tops and far edges are dirty with rocks and boulders that look like little more than dust against the magnitude of the ice, the facade, fractured by myriad crevasses, is the purest white. It is the glacier's raw, rare blue heart that is most beguiling, though.

For a variety of highly scientific reasons having to do with the way dense ice absorbs every colour of the spectrum except blue, whole swathes of the glacial face practically glow with a deep, intense gem-like quality. The effect is hypnotic. I've never seen a colour quite like it and stare mesmerized until a loud, nasal honking snaps me out of my reverie. A black-legged kittiwake has landed on a nearby chunk of floating ice seemingly for the sole purpose of yelling at us. In an area seemingly so barren and inhospitable, it's surprising just how much life there is up here. Hundreds of long-tailed ducks – like strokes of calligraphy on the water – and two-toned common eider ducks float beside cliff walls while glaucous gulls wheel overhead.

Almost constantly the glacier sings, at times drowning out even the cries of the birds. High snapping sounds, impossibly guttural rumblings, whispered sibilance and just now a great snap splits the air, the sound travelling right through us. Seemingly in slow motion, several tonnes of ice shift and rain down into the fjord sending sea birds scattering. The ice-filled water around our Zodiac heaves and we are raised up by the wave. The calving triggers a rock slide from a nearby mountain as the peak shrugs off huge boulders.

At this distance we aren't in any danger, but the raw power of the experience is breathtaking. We spend another hour or so cruising around the glacier and witness a few more small calvings, each one spectacular, although none quite as massive as the first.

Afterward, back on board Adventure Canada's ship The Sea Adventurer, with chunks of ancient glacier ice cooling down my Campari, I get to talking to filmmaker and Arctic expert, John Houston, one of Adventure Canada's cultural attachés. Houston has spent years in the Arctic and still returns several times a year. Huge icebergs, like geometric clouds made manifest, float past outside. I ask him what it is about seeing these great pieces of ice that is so compelling.

"It's a primal kind of experience," he says. "It's very real. Every day we're normally surrounded by asphalt and concrete steel and glass, all of which we've manufactured, all of which we put up and can tear down. This gives us a real feeling of power. In our general, everyday lives, most of us have this feeling that we're on top. It's an earth shattering experience to find ourselves surrounded by things over which we have little or no control.

"You're out there in the elements and that piece of ice is going to do whatever it's going to do regardless of what you may wish or not wish. At first that's kind of humbling, but it also puts you in touch and gives you a dose of reality, because in reality we don't control the universe."

I completely agree and it's a fascinating conversation, but a call has just come over the intercom: "Whales off the forward bow," and we all go scrambling to have a closer look.

If you go

*Adventure Canada's next Heart of the Arctic expedition is scheduled for July 17 through July 29, 2015.

*Prices start at \$3,995.

*More information is available at adventurecanada.com.

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