

[ARCTIC]

DISCOVERING THE True North



A beauty like no other is revealed on a travel adventure

in the Canadian Arctic.

BY BART CARD

My life has been filled with amazing experiences and I've had the chance to travel to some of the world's most exotic and remote locations. Last year I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit the Antarctic. It was a life-changing experience. When the opportunity arose this past spring to visit the Arctic, I just couldn't turn it down. I had seen penguins; now it was time to see polar bears.

Travel affords one the opportunity to experience different cultures and climates in a unique way that would not be possible otherwise. I have been travelling for my entire life, but it has only been over the past 10 years that I have really begun to appreciate the art of capturing what I experience with a camera. One photograph can tell a story that would be impossible to tell through any other medium. I could write an entire book and still never elicit the emotional response that one photo would. My family can attest to the fact that my camera has become not only one of my most prized possessions, but also my obsession. I am not obsessed with getting the "right" picture but instead cannot wait to capture as much as I can through one single image. The Arctic is a photographer's paradise. With its unique,

vast and often stark landscape, it takes a well-trained eye to truly appreciate and capture the beauty of it. I wouldn't call myself a master, but I was certainly going to give it a try!

My Arctic adventure, much like my Antarctic one, presented a number of clothing challenges, as choosing the right clothing can be the difference between life and death in the Arctic. Thankfully, I had gear from Canada Goose and the tutelage of the company that made the whole trip possible, Adventure Canada. Having booked my Antarctic trip with Adventure Life and having had such a life-changing experience, I had decided who better to see the other pole with than the same company. Although I did, indeed, book through Adventure Life, the operator for this trip would be Adventure Canada. Adventure Canada prepares you for every aspect of your Arctic expedition. From how to behave around the wildlife and in villages to photography tips and Zodiac travel, it covers it all. Truly a family business, it was started in 1988 and offers expeditions to both poles, western Europe, the Galapagos Islands, the Upper Amazon and New Zealand. The company prides itself on utilizing local knowledge and teaching its passengers about the unique destinations they visit.

Photography, Bart Card; Polar Bear, Seth Lender

My trip to the Arctic began in Greenland, which is covered almost entirely by a blanket of ice up to three kilometres thick. Habitable land is located on the east and west coasts. From Greenland we boarded the *Sea Adventurer* and headed toward the Canadian territory of Nunavut. With a 118-passenger capacity, the *Sea Adventurer* is one of just a few vessels in the world specifically constructed for expedition voyages to the far reaches of the Arctic. Its ice-strengthened hull permits it to glide easily and safely through ice-strewn waters that are not accessible to conventional cruise vessels. The *Sea Adventurer* has advanced communications and navigation equipment and newly installed state-of-the-art Sperry Marine Gyrofin stabilizers. It's a handsome expedition vessel, done in the style of the great ocean liners, when ships were ships. There's lots of varnished wood and brass, and the ship has all new outside cabins, with lower beds and private facilities. In addition to having the latest in expedition equipment, the *Sea Adventurer* is also made for comfort, boasting a bar, a library/card room, a gymnasium and a gift shop.

It took us a few days to reach Nunavut, which became Canada's newest territory in April 1999 and, with a total



Male Polar Bear at the Floe Edge, Hudson Strait.

area of 2,093,190 square kilometres, comprises most of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. When most people think of the Arctic, they think first of the vast ice and the wildlife, but there are villages, too, and visiting them is like stepping into a whole different world. Inuit culture in the Canadian Arctic has left little to no physical evidence. There are no pyramids, palaces or temples, yet the culture has been around for four millennia, and it is simply amazing that for so many generations, the northern peoples have survived in a land regarded by many as uninhabitable. While Nunavut covers nearly a fifth of our nation's land mass, its



Handcrafted garments are made locally in Nunavut; traditional Inuit coastal village; author Bart Card aboard *Sea Adventurer*.

entire population wouldn't even fill a major league football stadium. Small Inuit communities – rarely numbering more than 1,500 – are scattered across the coastal areas of the region and, despite the introduction of snowmobiles and satellite communication, they remain faithful to their traditional hunting culture.

On each of my trips, I try to buy at least one thing from the local people. This time I decided to buy handmade seal slippers and mittens. I had the opportunity to watch my slippers and mitts being made and to see how careful the local people are to ensure that the entire seal is utilized.

Leaving the villages behind, we once again ventured into the icy wilderness. I started each day aboard the *Sea Adventurer* by rising at 3 a.m., in full sunlight, to have a cup of coffee with the first officer on the bridge. It's amazing the things you can see and the stories you can hear when the rest of the world is asleep. In addition to my early-morning conversations, I also took full advantage of the ship's lecture series. Never one to sit in a classroom, I was blown away by how much I learned from the lectures available on board. They included everything from wildlife biology and drawing to photography and ornithology. Spending two weeks on board with some of the best photog-

raphers in the world is a truly humbling experience. I'm always amazed at how much can be learned from the people you are travelling with. For example, I met a fantastic professional wildlife photographer named Mike Beedell who has a vast and intimate understanding of the landscape and how to photograph it. Also aboard was John Houston, who lived in the Arctic as a child and is an award-winning writer, director and producer of Canadian and international documentary films.

In addition to photographers, bird lovers also flock to the Arctic, and for good reason. Visitors are often struck by the abundance of bird species found in this glacial environment. Although most spend their winters in the warmer southern climates, in the summer, the vast ice landscape is home to over 100 mostly migratory bird species, including the peregrine falcon, the ringed plover, the snowy owl and the fulmar.

As one might imagine, my bucket list is quite extensive. One of the experiences that had long been near the top of my list was photographing a polar bear in its natural environment. Having grown up in Bermuda, the idea of such a large mammal living in such a frigid climate, not to mention on a sea of ice, had always been foreign. I finally managed to fulfill my dream while on the bridge with the

first officer early one morning. I had my binoculars focused and was waiting. All of a sudden there he was. What a fantastic surprise, and a wonderful opportunity to put my photographic skills to the test.

Polar bears are the largest living land-based carnivore in the world, with the largest males weighing up to 800 kilograms. Although solitary, they do at times congregate in groups, especially in areas where prey is aggregated. And with their thick fur and blubber, these magnificent animals really are built for the cold. Even their small rounded ears serve to minimize heat loss. What an amazing experience.

Throughout the voyage, I couldn't help but think how lucky we are as Canadians to live in such a vast and diverse country. Many people never experience all that this beautiful country has to offer. The Arctic is a destination that most people don't even think about, but it's right on our doorstep and is something that should be on everyone's bucket list. ■

Bart Card is the food and travel editor for the Homes Publishing Group. To travel with Bart, contact him at 905.251.1258 or bartcard@rogers.com.

adventurecanada.com
adventure-life.com
canada-goose.com