



ADVENTURE  
CANADA

# OUT OF THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE 2019



ADVENTURE CANADA's  
**OUT OF THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE 2019**

September 2 – 18, 2019

Aboard the *Ocean Endeavour*

Story by David F. Pelly

Photos by Victoria Polsoni and Scott Forsyth



**GREENLAND**

**NUNAVUT**

**CANADA**

Kugluktuk

Coronation Gulf

Jenny Lind Island

Gjoa Haven

Boothia Peninsula

Fort Ross

Beechey Island

Bellot Strait

Devon Island

South Cape Fjord

Grise Fjord

Tasiusaq

Disko Bay

Ilulissat

Sisimiut

Kangerlussuaq

*"The person who leaves is not the person who returns."*

Traveller's motto





## DAY 1 – MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

Calgary to Kugluktuk

**Coordinates:** 67°49'N 115°08'W

**Weather:** Sunshine on arrival at the Arctic Coast, temperature just above freezing

### **We Arrive in the Arctic!**

There's no denying it—that was a heck of a way to start a holiday trip. We rose at 4:00 a.m. in order to get airborne and begin our Arctic adventure. But good planning paid off, and just a few hours later our two aircraft were flying north from Yellowknife, crossing the treeline. Below us was the Coppermine River as

we followed John Franklin's first route into the Arctic in 1819. At noon the jet planes landed one after the other on the gravel strip at Kugluktuk, right beside the coast of the Arctic Ocean. It was a moment not to be forgotten.

There were the good people of Kugluktuk to meet, the stunning views of the remarkably calm sea to enjoy, Adventure Canada jackets to collect, and the Zodiacs waiting to ferry us out to the *Ocean Endeavour*. Onboard necessities dealt with, a load of fresh fruit and vegetables embarked, an evocative and memorable welcome offered to all by the collective Inuit staff, and



an initial briefing from Expedition Leader Jason Edmunds behind us, the ship sailed as we sat down to dinner for the first time in the Polaris Restaurant.

As a finale for “the longest day” our host David Newland orchestrated the fastest ever introduction of the Adventure Canada staff, with staff member describing in thirty seconds or less their personal sense of connection to the North and their current role for *Out of the Northwest Passage*.

Perhaps the essential message of the day came from Newland himself: We are here to transit the Northwest Passage, yes, and we are “chasing the hand of Franklin” (to borrow a line from Stan Rogers)—all of which is exciting—but what is likely to have the greatest impact is the experience of Inuit Nunangat, the land of the Inuit. This is, after all, their home, as it has been for millennia. Franklin himself failed to find his way through, at least in part because he did not recognize or appreciate this. We will not make that mistake.



## DAY 2 – TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

Coronation Gulf

**Coordinates:** 68°33'N 110°36'W

**Weather:** Cloudy, temperatures hovering near freezing

### **A Day at Sea**

To wake up at sea in the Arctic, sailing west to east through the Northwest Passage, is for many a dream come true. Yet here we are; it's true. To underline that reality, we must first understand how we will manage the risk of an encounter with a polar bear, how we will mitigate the risk we represent to the archaeological evidence found across this land, and above all we must be fitted with good rubber boots for the many wet landings ahead!

A highlight of the day was the briefing by Tamara Tarasoff of Parks Canada, providing historical background for Franklin's 1845 expedition, and discovery of the wrecks of HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, the two ships that carried 129 men to their deaths. There's a plan afoot which has us all excited—if possible, our expedition will visit the site of the *Erebus* wreck. Among other elements of the presentation, we learned about the Inuk Ulibbaq who accompanied John Rae on the 1854 overland expedition, the first to gather direct evidence from Inuit concerning the fate of Franklin's men. Minutes later, Lois Suluk from Arviat took the microphone to tell us that she is a direct descendant of this man Ulibbaq. His real name, it is



important to know, was Maqqu—Ulibbaq was his famous father's name.

The afternoon unfolded with presentations, first by Susie Evyagotailak about Inuit culture, then Judith Kennedy with an introduction to Arctic seabirds, and finally Mike Beedell recounting his early days as a northern river traveller.

Before dinner, Captain Donael Soto formally welcomed us on board with a toast to our successful voyage, and spoke briefly about his officers, his crew, and his ship. The *Ocean Endeavour* is an ice-strengthened expedition ship, built in 1982 in Poland, and is 137 metres (449 feet) in length. Most interesting is the range of nationalities represented in the crew, from the Panamanian captain (also an accomplished tango dancer) to the Russian chief engineer, and the "hotel" manager from the Falklands Islands. On it goes around the world, a score or more of nationalities in total.

Just in case there was not stimulation enough by this point in the day, after dinner the staff urged the otherwise shy and retiring Marshall Dane to come out of his shell for an evening of high energy music (and dance!) in the Nautilus Lounge. It was a tired but happy crowd that headed off to bed this night.

## DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

Jenny Lind Island

**Coordinates:** 68°38'N 101°46'W

**Weather:** Cloudy with sunny breaks, temperatures just below freezing

### **Our First Walk**

During breakfast the ship dropped anchor in a bay along the southeast shore of Jenny Lind Island, a smaller island lying offshore of the massive Victoria Island, the second largest island in Canada after Baffin, which we had sailed past overnight beside the lights of the community of Cambridge Bay. It was entirely voluntary, but nearly everyone on board lined up for the Zodiac ride to the stony beach and a hike across the land. Divided into groups, we walked around and breathed the fresh air, mostly marvelling at the tiny details the land offered up: tales of post-glacial rebound, evidence of an apparently healthy population of muskox on the island, geese flying overhead about to head south, mushrooms by the dozen, and the brilliant colours of the lichens, from mustard yellow to burnt orange.

Later in the afternoon, Laurie Pelly explained in straightforward terms the complexities of the Nunavut land claim, which has changed the face of Canada and altered the future of the North.

Then the anticipation of what was to come suddenly began to build. First Jason and then Parks Canada briefed us for tomorrow, and the chance for everyone on

board to be a part of history, to be the first visitors ever to the site of the wreck of HMS *Erebus*. A palpable frisson of excitement coursed through the crowd in the lounge as we learned more about the plan.

Aptly, it was the day chosen to celebrate Adventure Canada's new "League of Adventurers" program, with the investiture of all onboard as Adventurers, a few as Voyageurs (two Adventure Canada trips) or Explorers (six or more trips). To celebrate the occasion, special Kaapittiaq coffee was served at tea-time, and complimentary wine offered with dinner.

The evening closed with a game in the Nautilus Lounge, a so-called "mixer" designed to both make us ask each other silly questions and induce plenty of laughter.



## DAY 4 – THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

Over the wreck of the HMS *Erebus*

**Coordinates:** 68°37'N 101°45'W

**Weather:** Cloudy, with a brisk wind from the north

### **We Are the First!**

The highlight of the day may well be the highlight of the trip, and for many perhaps the highlight of the year. We became the first members of the public ever to visit the historic site of the wreck of HMS *Erebus*. Not only that, but the archaeological work continued while we watched. Marc-André Bernier, Chief Underwater Archaeologist for Parks Canada, welcomed us on board the barge moored directly overhead the shipwreck, fifteen visitors at a time. It took all day, but nearly every passenger from our Northwest Passage ship took advantage of the opportunity to directly visit the wreck of what must be the most famous of all those ships which had preceded us on our journey and failed.

On board the Parks Canada barge, we watched a monitor linked to a video camera on the helmet of the diver below, as they examined spaces and artifacts inside the ship. It felt almost as if we were down there with the diver. We watched as the diver surfaced and passed into waiting hands a bag containing the latest artifact “excavated” from below.

In the lab on board the barge, an array of tub-trays along the counter contained



DAVID THOMPSON  
OTTAWA

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the last week's collection. We visitors looked on in awe, almost in disbelief at what we were witnessing, knowing how privileged we were just to be there. One of the divers explained the artifacts: various bottles, some of which still contained their 175-year-old contents; a boot sole, a glass decanter, a wooden handle—beautiful, physical links back to Franklin's crew, right before our eyes. It would be tough to have more impact than that.

“It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for an archaeologist,” said Bernier, modestly. Surely it is beyond that. But 200-odd guests from the *Ocean Endeavour* would agree that this day was, for them, a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and a genuinely historic moment.

All this was possible because Adventure Canada was selected by Parks Canada to be the partner responsible to deliver the first visitors to the National Historic Site at the wreck of HMS *Erebus*. Lucky us! As one guest said, “We are speechless, there are no words, we can only bow our heads in gratitude.”



## DAY 5 – FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

Rounding King William Island

**Coordinates:** 68°63'N 95°85'W

**Weather:** Cloudy, light winds, warm (3°C)

### **A Visit to Uqshuuqtuq (Gjoa Haven)**

No sooner was breakfast finished than we were loading the Zodiacs and heading to shore for our first visit to a Nunavut community. Hosts met us on the beach and escorted us through town towards the community hall, answering questions along the way. What's that truck for? Are the houses made of wood? Why is this graveyard in the middle of town? And so it went, with the hosts kindly answering them all.

In the hall, a display of drum-dancing was followed by traditional square dancing (learned from Scottish traders sent here by the Hudson's Bay Company), and then a free-for-all dance with everyone invited to join in. The real action, however, took place at the heritage centre, where it was reported the gift shop made sales totalling about \$7,000 for numerous art pieces, primarily soapstone carvings. Several guests left Gjoa Haven with excellent souvenirs, sure to be cherished for life.

Back on board, with the ship steaming northward for Rae Strait and beyond, the program continued, with Myna Ishulutak and Dawn Bazely talking about plants and people, Pierre Richard introducing us to the local marine mammal species, and Lois Suluk reflecting on the musical traditions passed down through the

generations, complete with demonstrations of her prowess as a throat-singer.

After dinner, Myna showed her film Qipisa to an enthusiastic crowd in the Nautilus before everyone headed happily to bed, knowing we would be steaming north all night, towards Coningham Bay and more adventures.





## DAY 6 – SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

Boothia Peninsula (west side)

**Coordinates:** 71°48'N 96°47'W

**Weather:** Sharp wind from the north at 20 knots, 0°C

### **Bears & Beluga**

It was called a “sleep-in”—the wake-up call came at 8:00 a.m. As we continued to steam north, the morning featured first an explanation from our archaeologist Latonia Hartery of the ancient and contemporary peoples of the Arctic—from the very first to arrive some 5,000 years ago to today’s Inuit who are descendants of the Thule people that spread across the North about 1,000 years ago. Then Joe Evyagotailak shared some of his knowledge of seal hunting and the uses of the skins, meat, and fat. At 11:00 a.m. the schedule indicated “Polar Bears” and sure enough at exactly that time, an announcement came from Jason on the bridge: “We have spotted a polar bear on an ice pan, four kilometres ahead. We will slowly









approach.” Excitement rose. In minutes, all passengers had assembled on the upper deck. We watched as the big male bear tore off pieces of seal meat from his recent catch.

Not to be outdone, the Coningham Bay excursion in the afternoon delivered in spades. Not long after entering the bay, over the sandbar at the entrance, we spotted a large pod of beluga. We stayed back (the Adventure Canada guideline is

to keep a minimum distance of one-hundred metres from all marine mammals) and watched as the adult white and juvenile grey whales swam along parallel to the shore. They enter here for a rest from the feeding routine out in the deeper water, in part because their largest predator, the killer whale, cannot follow them into the shallow water. But here's the catch: there is another predator waiting for them in here. The bears have learned of this haven for beluga, and now they often patrol the shore at this time of year hoping an unwary beluga will venture in close to the beach. It happens. Then the bear feasts. Sure enough, we spotted a solo bear doing exactly this, waiting and hoping, albeit without success on this occasion.

On board, Jerry Kobalenko's description of his "Arctic Eden" covered a wide-ranging array of subjects: animals, landforms, and his own adventure-travel in the high northern latitudes. Why, he asks, do we do this? Because it makes us happy, he says. Happy we were today, after witnessing the drama on the sea ice followed by the drama of Coningham Bay. The evening closed with a series of hunting stories from the Inuit on board—and lots of laughs. Every day brings new experiences.

## DAY 7 – SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

Bellot Strait

**Coordinates:** 71°59'N 94°48'W

**Weather:** Windy, occasional showers, 0°C

### **Across the Top of the Continent**

There was no wake-up call as yet, but by 6:00 a.m. the majority of passengers were up on the top deck watching the transit of Bellot Strait. As we entered the western end of the passage, a swimming polar bear seemed to greet us, followed soon thereafter by a small group of muskox on the shore. We passed Zenith Point, the northern-most tip of continental North America. Then just as we neared the eastern end of the passage, shortly after 6:00 a.m., someone spotted a pod of bowhead whales, which we continued to observe for some time.

The plan was to land at Fort Ross after breakfast. The wind, however, had other plans. It continued to build, whipping up seas which made going anywhere in the Zodiacs a very wet experience. As the gusts reached forty knots, Jason made the sensible decision to cancel the landing. Disappointing to be sure, but surely in keeping with Adventure Canada's mantra of safety first.

Within minutes there was a new plan. David Pelly served as pinch hitter, with a short story about Fort Ross—we'd all seen the buildings of the old HBC post on shore—followed by his signature presentation about the profound, almost spiritual



relationship between Inuit and seals, based upon the research for his book, *Sacred Hunt*. Marc Hebert followed with a discussion about polar bears and their behaviours, and then Peter Croal recounted a personal story of his father's role on Canada's first icebreaker, HMCS *Labrador*.

The afternoon passed in a relaxed manner, as we steamed slowly north through Prince Regent Inlet, with an array of workshops available, from painting with Andrew Sookrah to "Inuktitut 101" with Myna to a Q&A with the onboard naturalist team, or drum-dancing with Joe Evyagotailak and Inuit games of skill with Jason.

As another day came to its close, Marshall once again re-energized us with his music and accompanying thoughts.





## DAY 8 – MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

Beechey Island

**Coordinates:** 74°43'N 91°49'W

**Weather:** Cloudy, wind 20–30 knots WNW, 0°C

### **A Pilgrimage to the Arctic Mecca**

Once again, the day began even before the wake-up call, with a sail-past of Prince Leopold Island, a longstanding migratory bird sanctuary near the western end of Lancaster Sound, just north of Somerset Island. It has been an important seabird research station for the Canadian Wildlife Service since 1975, with an estimated 200,000 thick-billed murrelets, 44,000 northern fulmars, 58,000 black-legged kittiwakes, and 8,000 black guillemots all nesting here.





As we continued across Lancaster Sound toward Beechey Island, the onboard program featured Jerry reflecting on salient aspects of European exploration in the Arctic, from Frobisher to Amundsen. Andrew followed with his thematic talk on “Parallel Passions”—an exploration of colour—and then Mike Beedell with his tale of “sailing” the Northwest Passage (which often meant walking or dragging the boat over ice), west to east over three years, on a Hobie Cat.

As lunch ended, our landing at Beechey Island began. There’s no place like it. There’s the haunting air at the graves, where lie three men from the Franklin



expedition (right to left): Petty Officer Torrington, Royal Marine Braine, and Able Seaman Hartnell—plus the single later grave of Able Seaman Morgan from the *Investigator*. Nearby is the long quiet walk across the land, overlooking the harbour where so many British ships once anchored during the search for the missing expedition. We also visited the decaying Northumberland House, where hope resided even years later that at least some of the men would find their way back to find refuge. What must also be noted is all the misplaced commemorations to ego that have chosen to tag along on the coattails of the historic quest.

It seemed fitting to round out the day with songs and stories from David Newland, inspired by the Northwest Passage.



## DAY 9 – TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

Devon Island

**Coordinates:** 74°32'N 82°26'W

**Weather:** Mostly sunny, 4°C, light wind

### **A Day Along Devon Island**

As we finished breakfast the ship slipped quietly into Croker Bay to find a sheltered anchorage not far from the ice-front of the glacier licking down over the sea from the Devon ice cap. Zodiacs were lowered, passengers loaded, and off we went for what must be the nicest Zodiac cruise ever: calm seas, warm sunshine, and spectacular scenery. Collectively, a few seals, both harp and ringed, plus some beluga were spotted at various times, but what will no doubt remain foremost in the memory for all is the drama of the ice, so elegantly sculpted by nature as it makes its inevitable way down to the sea. Unbeknownst to most, one Zodiac quietly collected some 10,000-year-old glacial ice, most certainly bound to find a use on board in somebody's glass.

Over another sumptuous lunch back on the ship, the beauty of Devon's south coast slipped by—called Talluruti by Inuit. Talluruti refers to “a woman's chin with tattoos on it,” and the place name is derived from the crevasses and streaks on Devon Island that from a distance resemble the traditional tattoos. Not long after lunch, the ship turned into the anchorage for Dundas Harbour.



We expected to visit the archaeological site with old Thule sod houses, as well as the former RCMP post with its abandoned buildings, and the evocative cemetery with the graves of two Constables and the daughter from one of the Pond Inlet families hired to help out at the post. However, within minutes of entering the bay, first one, then another, and another—in total at least five polar bears were sighted along the shore. There was no choice: the planned landing had to be cancelled. Instead, we loaded into the Zodiacs for a cruise around the bay, once again enjoying being on the water in the warm sunshine, watching harp seals by the hundreds, and getting a better look at the bears.

The evening featured the “Explorers & Adventurers” costume party, with “unvaluable” prizes awarded to the best get-ups. They were many and varied, some more authentic than others, but all of them donned in the spirit of good fun. As we headed off to bed, the ship turned north toward Ellesmere Island, and an uncertain destination.



## DAY 10 – WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

South Cape Fjord, Ellesmere Island

**Coordinates:** 76°31'N 84°57'W

**Weather:** Wind 20-25 knots, mostly cloudy, -3°C

### Exploration at its Finest

First thing after breakfast, we learned that we would not be going to Grise Fjord today. There was meant to be a funeral there, and we would respectfully keep our distance. Other plans were in the works.





Meanwhile, Derrick Pottle described the Inuit lifestyle, more particularly his lifestyle, as a hunter and trapper. Most of the food in his house comes from the land, he said, and he sells skins from his harvest to the fur auction, comprising a significant portion of his annual income. It's hard work, but he clearly would have it no other way. He provided a distilled examination of the animals he hunts, and how they are used, and emphasized the importance of passing on these values of the land to the younger generations.

Laurie followed with an emotional and poignant review of the colonial history that underlies the Inuit quest for self-determination and renewal. It is difficult to hear the stories from the 1950s, of relocations, residential schools, tuberculosis, and sled-dog slaughters. But we all need to hear this. It also makes the Inuit accomplishments since the 1970s all the more impressive, which allowed the story to end on a somewhat positive note. For many on board, it was the most emotional and most important presentation of the trip.

Fortunately, we landed in the afternoon on a broad plain of moraine reaching down to the sea from the ice cap, surrounded by features the ice had carved out for us long ago along the south coast of Ellesmere, where we could all go for a long, solitary, contemplative walk. It was a well-timed opportunity for reflection, and a beautiful place for a long walk...on Ellesmere Island, no less.

After a ramble in the wilderness, and a good meal, what better than to gather round the campfire for a sing-along, before heading off to bed at the end of our day of exploration in Nunavut.







## DAY 11 – THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

Grise Fjord, Ellesmere Island

**Coordinates:** 76°24'N 82°54'W

**Weather:** Light wind, mix of sun and cloud, 0°C

### **The Northernmost Community in Canada**

We awoke to find the ship at anchor just off Grise Fjord, Ausuiktuq, “The place that never thaws.” Once ashore, we were embraced by this tiny community of 140 people (thirty-five of whom are school age!), even though it was a sad day for the town. An elder, Peter Flaherty, one of the original relocates who came here in the 1950s, was to be buried today, after a funeral the whole community was sure to attend. Nevertheless, they greeted our small invasion warmly, and showed us around Canada’s most northerly settlement.

In 1953, the federal government relocated three Inuit families from Inukjuak (in northern Quebec) plus one from Pond Inlet (it was thought the latter would help the “southerners” adapt) to a site just a few miles from present-day Grise Fjord. They were dropped off on an empty shore beneath a mountain with next to nothing, just their tents, a few dogs and the most basic belongings. The government agent in Inukjuak misleadingly told them they would be taken care of. Further, they were told it would be for just two years, and in a better hunting ground to boot. Forty kilometres to the east was Craig Harbour, an RCMP post established several





years before, but the government wanted to ensure these families were sufficiently remote to avoid dependence. The government's real motive, of course, was to establish Canada's sovereignty in the far north, on Ellesmere Island. A few years later, in 1962, the material for a school arrived by sea, and both Inuit and RCMP were moved into the present-day location of Grise Fjord.

Most people walked up to the monument carved by Looty Pijamini in 2010, erected by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., for which the plaque reads: “They came to these desolate shores, to pursue the Government’s promise of a more prosperous life. They endured and overcame great hardship and dedicated their lives to Canada’s sovereignty in these lands and waters.” It is a striking, larger-than-life sculpture.

Larry Audlaluk, who arrived here when he was three years old, clearly feels the move destroyed his father, who died after the first terrible winter in Grise Fjord. Audlaluk has become an unofficial spokesman for the relocated Inuit. “It was a struggle. We became strong, but at a great cost,” he said. He regularly makes the point that the Inuit of Grise Fjord, all hundred or more of them, are still asserting Canadian sovereignty—the term “human flagpoles” is often used—and doing so more effectively than military force could ever do.

As we sailed away from Grise Fjord, the magnificent lines of Ellesmere disappeared astern. We were leaving Canada, bound for the next chapter on our journey, with Greenland a day-and-half ahead.



## DAY 12 – FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

At Sea

**Coordinates:** 75°36'N 68°49'W

**Weather:** Light wind, sunny, 4°C

### **Crossing Baffin Bay**

We dodged the storm we had been anticipating, thanks to superb planning by Jason and the captain. By the time we awoke this morning, the high winds we'd expected were well astern, and the sea all around us was almost calm as glass.





Now, one could be forgiven for thinking a day at sea would be a relaxing experience, and for some it was. But for many on board it was a busy time of presentations, conversations, and workshops, with the greatest programming diversity for any day of the trip: soapstone carving, navigational charts, understanding clouds, and so much more. Some were content to eat cookies—we learned later that 1,000 cookies a day are being consumed by this gang.

Once again, the remarkable Inuit staff on this trip shared their insights, their stories, and their knowledge in the format of a panel answering a range of questions from the guests.

Just for fun, the evening featured a game of “Arctic Bluff”, with four rookie bluffers doing their very best to persuade you that their novel definitions of terms such as “mollymawk” or “retermirabile” or “gallimauphry” were in fact the correct ones. Much laughter ensued.

## DAY 13 – SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

Tasiusaq

**Coordinates:** 72°36'N 55°34'W

**Weather:** Light winds, cloud, possibility of snow, 2°C

### **A New Arrival**

First thing after breakfast we loaded into Zodiacs for the long, comfortable, and beautiful ride through the twisting arms of a fjord to land at Tasiusaq. A most pleasant walk over the strikingly lush land (to our eyes, as new arrivals) led within the hour to a rich archaeological site, perched overlooking the sea and offering a spectacular panorama of the mountains and glaciers across the fjord. Latonia,



Susie, and Lois spoke to us about the old Thule houses, meat caches, and a qajaq stand, all of which taken together gave us a glimpse into the lives of Inuit 200 to 600 years ago.

Back on board, after a late lunch, Judith entertained and informed us with her accounts of birds' superpowers, while Andrew helped the budding artists with their paintings, and Marshall put the wrap on the afternoon with an energetic concert.



And then an amazing thing happened. On many of its recent trips Adventure Canada organizes an auction in order to raise funds for one of the northern programs and charities it supports. This time it was for Myna's film project and the Ayalik Fund. Various people donated items for the auction, and the crowd generated all the excitement required, spurred on by the wonderful efforts of Ellie as auctioneer; in the end, the auction raised more than \$13,000, to be shared equally by the two beneficiaries. With this, plus the direct donations received as well, by way of example, the Ayalik Fund will be able to send another four youths on the challenging adventures that have the power to change young lives. There are too many people to thank, and insufficient words to express the gratitude we all feel.

## DAY 14 – SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Disko Bay

**Coordinates:** 69°27'N 53°40'W

**Weather:** Overcast, light wind, threatening sunshine, 3°C

### **Disko Dis, Disko Dat**

Perhaps, said one passenger, we need to pinch ourselves that we are now creeping down the coast of Greenland! We are, indeed, heading slowly south toward the trip's end, but there remains a lot to see and enjoy in the remaining days.



With the magnificent coast slipping by, Klaus offered us an introductory overview of Greenland, loaded with his insights and information derived from many years in the country. Then followed Latonia with an account of one of her heroes, Knud Rasmussen, whose epic Arctic travels are legendary, and whose ethnographic documentations are invaluable. To close the morning, Scott Forsyth shared some of his striking photographs, this time focusing on the coasts of Atlantic Canada.

By noon, we were coming to anchor in Disko

Fjord, pushing into the heart of Disko Island, at the entrance of Disko Bay. The afternoon was spent rambling, in as solitary a manner as one could want, over a vast range of terrain on Disko Island. Some folks even lay down on the tundra cushions for a nap. Others hiked up to the top of every hill around the landing site. Everyone enjoyed being out on the land for one last time. By the time we came back to the ship, the wind was blowing sharply across the open waters of the fjord, making for a wet ride in the Zodiac. More critically, the wind was such that Jason decided it was too risky to proceed with the planned Polar Plunge, so that pleasure had to be delayed to another day.

But one plan could proceed—we are after all in Disko Bay. All of the aficionados of disco-dancing gathered, suitably attired for the most part, for an evening of questionable dancing, while the more sensible among us headed for bed to get six or seven hours of sleep before the big day tomorrow at the mouth of the Ilulissat (Jakobshavn) Fjord, the real highlight of Disko Bay.





## DAY 15 – MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Disko Bay

**Coordinates:** 69°12'N 51°17'W

**Weather:** Light wind, overcast, 2°C

### Ice Galore!

At the wake-up call we learned that the Sermeq Kujalleq glacier at the head of the sixty-kilometre-long fjord leading down to Disko Bay had pushed out a massive amount of ice in recent days, enough to block our way into Ilulissat. The ship was brought to a halt a little ways offshore, barred in its approach to town by

impenetrable pack ice. As a result, the Zodiac cruise along the edge of the ice field, featuring the recently calved, towering icebergs was even better than expected. Back on board after the best ice experience of the voyage, there was an excited buzz through the ship, lots of smiles, and gaggles of photographers showing off their newly captured images.

Soon followed Jason's announcement that we would indeed be unable to land at Ilulissat and were instead proceeding to Ilimanaq, whose







name means “place of expectations.” It is a tiny village, with a population of under 100 people, south of Ilulissat across the mouth of the fjord, along the south shore of Disko Bay. Underway once again, we headed to a landing where almost all Adventure Canada staff on board had never been before. Jason’s morning quote seemed more apt than ever: “Adventures do occur, but not punctually” (TS Elliott).

An hour later we were just off Ilimanaq, ready to load up the Zodiacs once again. It was indeed a delightful little village. Right off the bat, though most of us had never been there before, we spotted the house of the son of Hans Egede, the first missionary to visit this coast of Greenland in the 1600s. The sense of old Greenland and its history pervaded the town, made the more impressive by the

obvious presence of hunting culture. We walked up to the highest point of land, overlooking the ice field at the mouth of the Jakobshavn Fjord, this time from the opposite side we had seen before from Ilulissat. It was stunning, the massive field of ice stretching across the horizon. Jakobshavn Fjord! Adventure occurred, indeed, but not when or where we expected.

Back on board, we felt the ship pick up speed again and start making way toward Sisimiut, to the south. Even as we headed into dinner, and the sun was setting in the west, we could see the many icebergs floating out to sea beside us in Disko Bay. Another good day came to a close, this time with more of David Newland's heartfelt northern balladry.





## DAY 16 – TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Sisimiut

**Coordinates:** 66°56'N, 53°40'W

**Weather:** Sunny, 4°C

### **Sunshine, Stroll, Shop**

As the ship approached Sisimiut, our last stop of the trip, the program on board culminated with a panel to discuss climate change, from the varying perspectives of both Inuit and academics, making it clear that perspectives vary on what is really happening to our planet. Once alongside the pier at Sisimiut, we offloaded and divided into groups for a guided walking tour of this picturesque town, the second largest in Greenland.



It is noteworthy that there has been a settlement here for more than 300 years, explaining in part why it appears so well developed compared with the far northern communities of Nunavut, established no more than sixty years ago. We visited the arts and crafts co-op, the museum, the qiviut shop, the cultural centre (best coffee and pastry in town), the meat market, the grocery store, and





learned much more about how the community functions. It is a thriving centre, its economy based most significantly on fishing and fish-processing. This fact stems from the history of Sisimiut as the northernmost year-round ice-free port along the western coast of Greenland.

Many people found souvenirs to buy from local artisans, or treats from the larger markets, or even lunch at one of the restaurants. All of this—which, it must be said, involved a lot of walking—was enjoyed on a beautiful, warm, sunny day.

Later in the afternoon it was arguably all upstaged by a local paddler in his tiny Greenlandic qajaq alongside the ship, who amazed us with his skill and endurance, rolling time and time again using different techniques, in water no more than 4°C.

Given that example, how could you resist the temptation to participate in the Polar Plunge? Thirty-six brave souls did just that and were justly rewarded with a badge declaring their newly minted membership to the Adventure Canada Polar



Swim Team. As a finale, after gorging on chocolate, we sat back to enjoy a video review produced by Scott Forsyth of our spectacular trip, accompanied by the piano stylings of Dylan White.

To cap it off before bed, the aurora borealis came out with its final blessing of our voyage.





## DAY 17 – WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

Sondre Stromfjord

**Coordinates:** 66°57'N 50°57'W

**Weather:** Light wind, clear skies, and sunshine, -2°C

### **Homeward Bound**

Overnight the *Ocean Endeavour* steamed 170 kilometres up Sondre Stromfjord, one of (if not the) longest fjords in the world. Shortly after breakfast, we anchored off Kangerlussuaq, and the preparations began for our journey home: luggage collected complete with yellow, green, or blue ribbons, boarding passes issued, and final goodbyes said to the ship's staff. Waiting around in the Nautilus Lounge, we chatted amongst ourselves, small groups of new-found friends, and then began to entertain each other with the traditional Adventure Canada variety show.

After lunch the final disembarkation began via Zodiacs ashore to waiting buses for a short trip up onto the land beyond the airbase, hoping we might spot some muskox. We did—at least one. A lone muskox sauntered alongside the road. From the hilltop beyond we could all gaze inland toward the ice cap, and say our final goodbyes to Greenland, at the end of a trip so memorable it defies words.

May it change lives, yours and others.



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