

# Traversing the Northwest Passage

**Toronto, Canada, North America to Anchorage, United States, North America (FNW)**

## Day 1 Toronto

Having made your way to Toronto Airport, check-in at our group hotel located near the airport for an overnight stay. Please visit the Aurora Expeditions hospitality desk to collect your luggage cabin tags and to speak with our ground operations team, who may have information to share with you about pre-embarkation procedures and also about the charter flight to Nuuk tomorrow. You will receive Aurora Expeditions cabin tags for your luggage. Please clearly label the tags with your name and ship cabin number. Accommodation: Westin Toronto Airport Hotel



## Day 2 Nuuk

After breakfast at the hotel, board our charter flight to Nuuk, Greenland, where our vessel *Sylvia Earle* awaits. After boarding, there is time to settle into your cabin before our important safety briefings. This evening, meet your expedition team and crew at the Captain's Welcome Drinks.

## Day 3 Sisimiut

Greenland's second largest town, Sisimiut is located approximately 54 kilometres (33.5 miles) north of the Arctic Circle, meaning that during summer, you can experience the midnight sun here. The town is famous for the old blue church with the gate made of whale bone. In the cosy

museum next door to the church, you will find an excellent reconstruction of an Inuit turf house as well as exhibits of local history and early life in Greenland. Sisimiut offers hiking trails with various degrees of difficulty. The easier trails take you through the town itself, its outskirts and into the mountains, where you will find spectacular vantage points. Approximately 4,500 years ago, the Saqqaq culture arrived from Canada and settled in the area. They lived here for approximately 2,000 years, after which they mysteriously disappeared from the area. The Dorset culture arrived around 500 CE and stayed until the 1200s until they were replaced by the Thule culture, and today, most of the population of Sisimiut are descendants of the Thule culture.

## **Day 4 Ilulissat**

In the afternoon we arrive in Ilulissat. Known as the 'birthplace of icebergs', this region produces some of the most dazzling icebergs found anywhere in the Arctic. Hike past the husky sledge dogs to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Icefjord and stand in awe at its immensity. Sermeq Kujalleq, also known as Jakobshavn Glacier, is the most productive glacier – not only in Greenland but the entire Northern Hemisphere. It produces 20 million tonnes of ice each day, all floating into the Ilulissat Icefjord and Disko Bay.

## **Days 5-7 Northwest Greenland expedition cruising**

Explore the northern stretches of West Greenland, home to traditional settlements and enormous icebergs that Greenland is famous for. Possibilities include Zodiac cruises, hikes and a visit to one of the small communities that are dotted along the coast. Kayakers can enjoy paddling among the icebergs and keeping watch for whales that frequent the area.

## **Day 8 At Sea**

Our team of experts entertain us with informative talks about wildlife, geology and epic tales of early explorers such as Franklin and Amundsen.

## **Day 9 Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik), Nunavut, Canada**

After clearance into Canada, we hope to visit Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik), a captivating Inuit community nestled on the northern tip of Baffin Island. Surrounded by towering ice-capped mountains, vast glaciers, and pristine fjords, this remote outpost offers an unparalleled wilderness experience. As you step ashore, you'll be greeted by the warm hospitality of the local Inuit, whose deep connection to the land is evident in their culture and lifestyle. Immerse yourself in their traditions through engaging cultural encounters and gain insights into their unique perspective on life in the Arctic.

## **Days 10-12 Devon Island (Tallurutit), Lancaster Sound**

At a latitude of almost 75° degrees north, we are now truly in the High Arctic. Here, nutrient-rich waters support an abundance of wildlife, giving the area the moniker 'wildlife superhighway' of the Arctic. Devon Island (Tallurutit) is the largest uninhabited island on Earth and features stunning geology, with flat-topped mountains and glacial valleys giving Devon Island its unique character. We hope to visit Dundas Harbour to enjoy offers walks on undulating tundra, and perhaps some birdwatching. A dilapidated Royal Canadian Mounted Police outpost and remnants of a Hudson's Bay Company trading post can be found here. In the bay, walrus are often present. Other possible places that we might visit include Croker Bay and Maxwell Bay. At the western end of Devon Island lies Beechey Island (Iluvilik), where we plan to land. Named after Frederick William Beechey, the island is a designated Canadian National Historic Site. During the Franklin expedition of 1845–46, Franklin attempted to sail through the Northwest Passage with HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, with perilous results – three of his men are buried here. Roald Amundsen landed at Beechey Island in 1903, during the first successful voyage by ship to fully transit the Northwest Passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Just a short distance away, Radstock Bay offers a captivating contrast to the open sea. Here, we'll disembark via Zodiac onto a beach strewn with remnants of the past. Explore the ruins of a Thule village nestled beneath the imposing Caswell Tower, where well preserved stone dwellings coexist with artifacts from later explorers. Witness the stark beauty of this remote bay, characterised by its dramatic cliffs, gravelly beaches, and the scattered remains of whale skeletons that have shaped

the landscape and the lives of those who called it home.

## Days 13–17 Expedition Cruising

In genuine expeditionary style, our itinerary for the following days is heavily dependent on weather conditions and unpredictable sea ice. The following places are some that we hope to visit.

**Prince Leopold Island (Appait)** On the southern side of Lancaster Sound from Beechey Island lie the towering bird cliffs of Prince Leopold Island (Appait), a historic site where in 1848, English explorer James Clark Ross overwintered during the search for the missing Franklin expedition. Prince Leopold Island is the most important bird sanctuary in the Canadian Arctic, with approximately 500,000 birds nesting here in summer. Ringed seals are often spotted on the sea ice around the island and polar bears often lurk nearby.

**Port Leopold** Port Leopold, a barren, windswept bay on the northeastern corner of Somerset Island (Inuktitut Kuuganajuk), is steeped in history. Here, the crews of HMS Enterprise and Investigator were forced to endure a harsh winter while searching for the lost Franklin expedition. Their presence is indelibly marked on a rock engraved with "1849" and the ships' initials. The desolate landscape is punctuated by a lone Hudson Bay Company hut, a failed trading post from the 1920s. Hikers will have the opportunity to explore the coastline, discovering the historic Hudson Bay Company house and intriguing Inuit archaeological sites. Be amazed by the otherworldly formations shaped by the region's freezing and thawing cycles, which our expedition team will detail during recap. Nearby, a cairn marks the spot where Ross's rescue expedition left vital supplies.

**Hazard Inlet (Qariaraajuk)** We hope to visit an Inuit site inhabited by bowhead whale hunters during the 15th and 16th centuries. The remains of over 100 bowheads are scattered across the village and beach, a testament to the community's reliance on this marine giant. Excavations have uncovered around 20 sod houses, though evidence suggests there may have been as many as 40. The cliff face behind the site holds community burial grounds, while caches, kayak, and umiak stands line the shore. This remarkable site offers a poignant glimpse into the lives of these Inuit families, who worked cooperatively to hunt bowhead whales for sustenance and building materials. It's an extraordinary privilege to experience this piece of history firsthand.

**Point Zenith** Point Zenith, a rocky promontory jutting into the ocean, offers breathtaking panoramic views. As you step ashore, you'll feel a profound sense of isolation and wonder. This is a place where time seems to stand still, and the only sounds are the wind and the crunch beneath your boots.

**King William Island (Qikiqtaq)** Remains attributed to the Franklin expedition have been found at 35 different locations on King

William Island (Qikiqtaq) and on nearby Adelaide Peninsula. South of Cape Felix, in Victoria Strait, we hope to Zodiac close to where the wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror were eventually found in 2014 and 2016, respectively. Cambridge Bay (Iqaluktuuttiaq) The administrative and transportation hub of the region, Cambridge Bay (Iqaluktuuttiaq) is the largest stop for passenger and research vessels traversing the Northwest Passage and unofficially marks the midpoint for voyages of the Northwest Passage. Zodiac ashore for an exploration of this Inuit settlement located in the high arctic. Enjoy a walk through the village, where you can visit the local church, visitor centre and support the local community by purchasing some locally made handicrafts.

## **Days 18-22 Coronation and Amundsen Gulfs**

Your experienced expedition team will create your day-by-day itineraries based on sea ice and weather conditions. Apart from Franklin, other heroic explorers including Amundsen explored this territory, and we may visit the same places as early explorers. We hope to meet the resilient locals who make the extreme far north their home. Below are some of the places in the area that we may visit: Johansen Bay, Edinburgh Island (Egloovikan) We hope to enjoy a Zodiac excursion within an estuary of at the northeast end of Johansen Bay and up the river towards the lake. Wildlife including caribous, reindeer, arctic foxes, hares and peregrine falcons frequent the area. Nearby, Edinburgh Island (Egloovikan) is a small and uninhabited island in Canada's Nunavut region. The scenery consists of colourful flowering shrubs, beaches tinged in stunning ochres, while the surrounding cliffs shaded in rich, deep tones. A possible walk to a lookout overlooking the lake offers spectacular views over lakes, sea and mountains. Port Epworth (Kugluktoalok) The Tree River area on the mainland — also known as Port Epworth — provides a spectacular backdrop our possible exploration, with its river and shallow lakes, striking sedimentary rock outcrops, and bright autumnal colours of tundra. This area is also known for its stromatolites – the petrified remains of ancient mounds of algae, formed some two billion years ago by the same microorganisms responsible for producing the oxygen we breathe today. Smoking Hills (Ingniryuat), Franklin Bay The Smoking Hills (Ingniryuat) in Canada's Northwest Territories have been smouldering, sending plumes of gas across the landscape, for centuries. Technically sea cliffs, you would be forgiven for thinking that the multicoloured fiery natural phenomenon is the set to an apocalyptic movie depicting the end of the world. The smoke is caused by layers of combustible, sulphur-rich

lignite (brown coal) that ignites and emit sulphurous gas into the air, when exposed to erosion and landslides, which also creates a dazzling colouration of the rocks.

## **Days 23-25 Beaufort Sea**

Excitement builds as we sail the Beaufort Sea. Whether you are out on deck or in the comfort of one of the observation lounges, watch as the captain navigates our state-of-the-art vessel through these waterways, which are frozen for most of the year. Keep a close watch for wildlife including Beluga whales and polar bears that are often seen here. Cruising further west, we hope to Zodiac cruise (subject to permitting) to Herschel Island. This historic island, inhabited by the Thule people for over a millennium, was first charted by Sir John Franklin in 1825. It later transformed into a bustling whaling station during the late 19th century, supporting a winter community of hundreds and a fleet of ships. However, the industry's decline in the early 20th century led to the island's gradual abandonment. Today, protected as a territorial park, Herschel Island offers a unique glimpse into the region's rich history and stunning Arctic wilderness. At Prudhoe Bay, we farewell Canada and enter the United States.

## **Days 26-27 Chukchi Sea and Bering Strait**

As we sail westwards to Nome, along the northern coast of Alaska to where the U.S and Russia are only 100 km (60 miles) apart, separated by the Bering Sea, there is ample time to reflect on our adventures while scanning the water for marine life. Share, edit and submit pictures in our photo competition and attend final lectures from our team of onboard experts. We hope to get permission to ship cruise close by Point Hope, Little Diomed and King islands in Alaska.

## **Day 28 Disembark in Nome, fly to Anchorage**

During the early morning, we cruise into Nome and disembark at approximately 8.00 am. Farewell your Expedition Team before transfer to the airport for a charter flight to Anchorage for an overnight stay. Accommodation: Captain Cook Hotel Anchorage

# Day 29 Depart Anchorage

Transfer to the airport for your onward journey.