PHOTO STORY | CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC AND GREENLAND

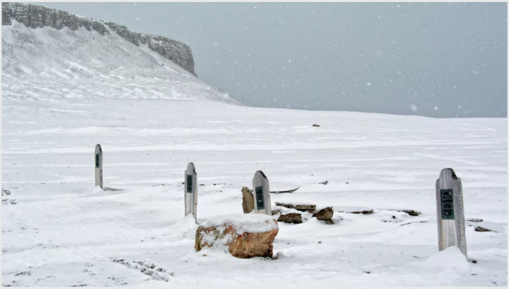
High Arctic Explorer's Top Ten Wonders

By **Adventure Canada** | November 14, 2020
Related expedition: High Arctic Explorer

© Dennis Minty

Each Adventure Canada expedition holds its own unique highlights. Stunning icy landscapes, iconic wildlife, and welcoming Inuit culture bring us back to the Far North time and time again. These are our ten picks for the top experiences of this trip of a lifetime, the High Arctic Explorer.

At the top of the planet is a whole other world. Here, the sea is solid, the night is bright, narwhals and polar bears outnumber humans, glaciers grumble, and history is—quite literally—frozen in time. When you sail through the Far North you become one of the lucky few on Earth to experience this sublime, surreal realm.



© Dennis Minty

1. Pay homage to adventurers past at historic, haunting Beechey Island

With shattered shale plains, eroding bluffs, and little greenery, Beechey Island appears utterly sterile. But to history buffs, it's hallowed ground. Here, three mariners with the lost Franklin expedition were interred. For 170 years—until the recent discovery of Franklin's ships—their graves were the prime monument to that tragic, mysterious voyage. Pay respects to the trio, explore artifacts left by Franklin searchers, and marvel at what it was like for Englishmen to live and die here, so distant from the only world they knew.

© Dennis Minty

2. See icebergs bigger than you ever imagined—all while sipping a latte

Ilulissat means “icebergs.” The name says it all. Beside this renowned town of 4,700 people is Sermeq Kujalleq (Jakobshavn Glacier), the busiest glacier in the Northern Hemisphere, spewing 20 billion tonnes of ice per year into the local waterfront. Appropriately, this is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, not to mention Greenland’s top tourist attraction. Tour amongst the skyscraping bergs by Zodiac (often accompanied by humpback whales!), peruse the local museums and shops (sealskin chic!), and dine on distinctive Greenlandic fare (muskox burgers anyone?).

© Martin Lipman

3. Take it easy with local wildlife

Marvel at the diversity of wildlife all around these beautiful vistas. On the cliffs, murres and guillemots nest by the countless thousands. On the land, foxes watch us from the outcrops, muskoxen trample the tundra, and walruses patrol the bays. And on the drifting ice floes? Keep your binoculars ready for seals and the white bears that love to feed on them.

© Dennis Minty

4. Visit Mittimatalik, one of Nunavut's most scenically situated communities

The biggest town in the High Arctic of Canada is also—we would argue—one of its most beautifully located. Mittimatalik, also known as Pond Inlet, nestles along whale-laden Eclipse Sound, peering toward the peaks and glaciers of Sirmilik National Park. For its 1,500 or so Inuit residents, this community is a cultural haven. Tour around town with warm local guides, hear (and likely learn a bit of) the Inuktitut language, witness a cultural extravaganza of Inuit sports and song, and purchase unique local carvings and craftworks.

© Dennis Minty

5. Stay cool while exploring the face of some of Canada's greatest glaciers

Devon Island, the world's largest uninhabited island, makes up for what it lacks in people in its ice—4,000 gigatons of the stuff, forming an ice cap almost a kilometre deep and sending glaciers churning down to the sea. By ship and Zodiac, explore the face of these tidewater glaciers, while watching for the calving of house-sized icebergs and weaving amongst iridescent blue "bergy bits."

© Dennis Minty

6. Have a whale of a time in Tallurutiup Imanga, a protected Inuit waterway

Overlaying much of these northern waters is Tallurutiup Imanga, a landmark marine sanctuary established through a pact between Inuit and Canada. Sail and Zodiac through this natural and cultural seascape, witnessing ecological wonders. Here, the greatest Arctic whales, bus-sized bowheads, skim for plankton—while belugas and narwhal gobble cod in the fjords and polar bears prowl the ice.

© Dennis Minty

7. Explore the west Greenland coast, where the Arctic is sublime

Everything about Greenland's geology owes its existence to ice. Inland is the greatest ice sheet in the Northern Hemisphere. Along the coast are a labyrinth of fjords, the product of eons of grinding ice—much of it still sparkling in the cirques. And at sea? If you're lucky you might spot bobbing bergs, sailing to who-knows-where. Explore this glittering land and seascape by ship, Zodiac, or on shore. Make sure your camera has a spare memory card, because you might just fill it up!

© Dennis Minty

8. Experience a polar hardship posting

A century ago the Arctic was disputed territory. Mounties and Inuit special constables were thus sent to Devon Island to fly Canada's flag, make sovereignty patrols, and staff a remote station at Dundas Harbour. After the Mounties left, this was the site of the first Arctic relocation, when Inuit families were infamously moved to bolster Canada's claims to the Far North. We'll tour the station's eerie structures, learn about the hardships here, and take in the beautiful tundra.

© Lee Narraway

9. Cross the Arctic Circle in west Greenland's greatest fjord

Sailing up Kangerlussuaq Fjord (Søndre Strømfjord) is a true polar pleasure. A whopping 190 kilometres long but just two klicks wide, this remarkable seaway is flanked all along by frosted peaks and glaciers. En route you'll cross the Arctic Circle—an achievement few travellers can claim. And at the end of it all is humble-but-historic Kangerlussuaq. Once a United States air base key in fighting the Nazis, it's now Greenland's main international airport. Look for muskoxen, scruffy trees, and several fine souvenir shops around the airport terminal.

© Dennis Minty

10. Sail historic Davis Strait, a crossroads of whalers, Inuit, and explorers

For at least a millennium, this shivering sea has united Europe and Arctic North America. Inuit travel here, as did Vikings, Scottish whalers, explorers like Franklin and Amundsen, and more. On the outer decks, keep your eyes peeled for pilot and sperm whales, sea birds, and fantastical icebergs.