PHOTO STORY | NORTHWEST PASSAGE

Ten Incredible Experiences on Out of the Northwest Passage

By **Adventure Canada** | November 24, 2020

Related expedition: The Northwest Passage

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Each Adventure Canada expedition holds its own unique highlights. On Out of the Northwest Passage, we're amazed by welcoming Inuit communities, far-northerly vistas, fascinating history, and aurora-viewing opportunities. Join us for this trip of a lifetime and tick these experiences off your bucket list.

For centuries it was among Earth's greatest riddles: Did a sea route link Europe to "the Orient" by way of the top of the world? Today the Northwest Passage remains wrapped in history and mystery—a fabled corridor of Inuit culture, glittering ice, prowling bears, snow-capped peaks, eerie ruins, and clues to the epic Franklin tragedy that are only now being pieced together.

People often ask us which of our Northwest Passage trips they should take. (Can't it be both?) Here, in our humble opinion, are the best experiences of Adventure Canada's *Out of the Northwest Passage* expedition.

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1. Achieve your own "farthest north" with a sail up surreal Smith Sound

The waters dividing Ellesmere Island from Greenland were once known as "the American route to the pole." Explorers like Kane, Hall, Greeley, and Peary came this way—and often came to grief. Follow their tracks, using the benefit of charts and sonar, sailing as far up Smith Sound as possible, into a realm ringed by ice floes, ominous headlands, and ghostly ruins like Camp Clay and Fort Conger. Up here, the animals are all white, the shadows are all long, the silence practically roars, and nearly everyone else on Earth is behind you—way down south.

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2. Sneak through haunting straits following the sea lanes of history

Along the south end of King William Island is the crux of the Northwest Passage, where the straits are shallow but the past runs deep. Squeak past bleak headlands and islands where Franklin's men fell in their tracks. Most eerie of all, sail near the graveyards of the Arctic's most infamous shipwrecks, the *Erebus* and *Terror*. Did they drift here? Were they sailed? Are there photographs, journals, or bodies aboard? Learn about the ongoing investigations and marvel at the mysteries of that most tragic expedition.

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3. 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.

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4. 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 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?).

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

Overlaying much of the Northwest Passage 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. On sea cliffs, murres and guillemots nest by the countless thousands. And on the drifting ice floes? Various seal species, and possibly white bears.

© Scott Forsyth

6. Tour the town at the top of the world, on dazzling Ellesmere Island

Welcome to *Ausuittuq*, “the place that never thaws.” Also known as Grise Fiord, this is Canada’s northernmost community, where 129 hardy locals thrive amidst glittering glaciers and peaks. This place wasn’t always so pleasant: the first Inuit residents, the Arctic exiles, were brought here in the 1950s to bolster Canada’s sovereignty and faced untold hardships. Witness the haunting monument erected in their memory, hear tales about the intrepid local culture, and take in sweeping views while trekking in the frosty foothills.

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

Greenland’s west coast is majestic—think icebergs, jagged isles, and misty summits. Explore this glittering land- and sea-scape by ship, Zodiac, or on shore. Sailing up the legendary Kangerlussuaq Fjord (Søndre Strømfjord) is a true polar pleasure. A whopping 190 kilometres long but just two kilometres wide, this intimate seaway is flanked by countless frosted peaks and glaciers. Stay alert for possible aurora sightings in the early autumn’s dark skies and be sure your camera has a spare memory card!

© Mark Edward Harris

8. 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 with its ample 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 faces of these tidewater glaciers, while watching for the calving of house-sized icebergs, weaving amongst iridescent blue "bergy bits," and marvelling at the diversity of wildlife—including greedily feeding seabirds and, often, polar bears, beluga, and narwhal.

© Scott Forsyth

9. Tour a town steeped in the legacy of the Amundsen and Franklin voyages

Snug in what Roald Amundsen proclaimed "the finest little harbour in the world" is historic Uqsuqtuuq, also known as Gjoa Haven, on King William Island. En route through the Northwest Passage, Amundsen spent two light-hearted winters here, learning how to drive dogsleds, make igloos, and wear fur from Inuit who chose to stay here with him. At the excellent cultural centre you, too, can learn from the locals—not just about Amundsen's journey but also Franklin's, including the key role Inuit played in finding, and now guarding, the long-lost ships *Erebus* and *Terror*.

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10. Enter a place that's a world apart: ancient, icy Northwest Greenland

Northwest Greenland is home to the isolated, resilient Inughuit, the world's northernmost people, who still prefer dogsleds over snowmobiles, skin kayaks over motorboats, and polar-bear trousers over flimsy commercial snowpants. It's also home to history: the verdant abandoned village of Etah, the coveted Cape York meteorites, and artifacts of the ancient Inuit, Dorset, and Paleo-Eskimos, all of whom passed this way en route to populating Greenland. Add dovekie colonies, muskox herds, and Arctic hares, and you've got one heckuva tundra hike.