

The Northwest Passage



EXOS

Into the Northwest Passage

A private expedition yacht sets off on a voyage through the fabled Northwest Passage, a legendary Arctic sea route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans along the north coast of the Americas. This labyrinth of channels weaves over 1,000 miles between the islands of Canada's Arctic Archipelago and has been the five-century dream of explorers in search of a route to Asia. Early explorers battled ice and horrific conditions, their stories preserved in the annals of polar history, but ultimately failing in their quest until the Norwegian Roald Amundsen became the first to successfully navigate the Northwest Passage between 1903 and 1906.

This short-cut across the top of the globe avoids the long detour around Cape Horn, saving thousands of miles on a sea voyage between Europe and the Orient. However, it presents a different challenge; these waterways far north of the Arctic Circle remain blocked by sea-ice for much of the year, only opening for a short window during late summer. This is the season to transit the central section of the Passage, heading east from Cambridge Bay into Lancaster Sound, Baffin Bay and on towards Greenland.

The waters of the Northwest Passage are home to an abundance of Arctic wildlife: polar bear, walrus, narwhal, musk oxen, as well as enormous numbers of seabirds, whales and seals. Among the wild, rugged landscapes discover the culture of the Inuit and the history of European explorers.



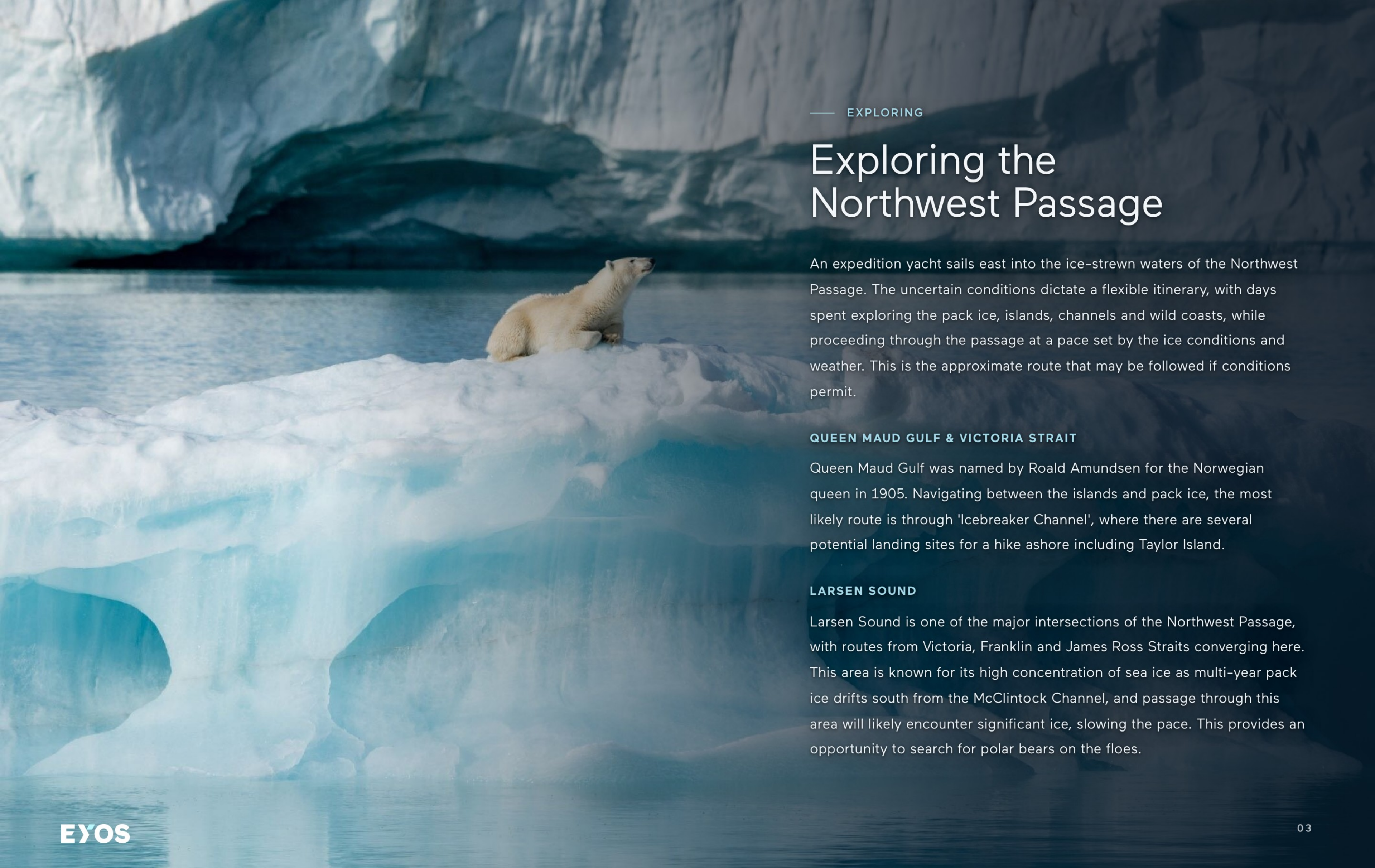


— VICTORIA ISLAND

Cambridge Bay

Travel from Yellowknife, on the shores of the Great Slave Lake, across the tundra and lakes of the 'barren grounds' of the Canadian Shield, to join your expedition yacht in Cambridge Bay on the southern coast of Victoria Island.

The Inuinnaqtun name for Cambridge Bay is Iqaluktuuttiaq (a good place with lots of fish). Archaeological sites in and close to the community show that people have lived in this area for at least 4,000 years. In the 1920s, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police established posts at Cambridge Bay, attracting local Inuinnait who settled nearby. The construction of a Distant Early Warning Site in Cambridge Bay in 1955 attracted more people to the area, and it has since grown in size to approximately 1,500 people.



— EXPLORING

Exploring the Northwest Passage

An expedition yacht sails east into the ice-strewn waters of the Northwest Passage. The uncertain conditions dictate a flexible itinerary, with days spent exploring the pack ice, islands, channels and wild coasts, while proceeding through the passage at a pace set by the ice conditions and weather. This is the approximate route that may be followed if conditions permit.

QUEEN MAUD GULF & VICTORIA STRAIT

Queen Maud Gulf was named by Roald Amundsen for the Norwegian queen in 1905. Navigating between the islands and pack ice, the most likely route is through 'Icebreaker Channel', where there are several potential landing sites for a hike ashore including Taylor Island.

LARSEN SOUND

Larsen Sound is one of the major intersections of the Northwest Passage, with routes from Victoria, Franklin and James Ross Straits converging here. This area is known for its high concentration of sea ice as multi-year pack ice drifts south from the McClintock Channel, and passage through this area will likely encounter significant ice, slowing the pace. This provides an opportunity to search for polar bears on the floes.



— SOMERSET ISLAND & BOOTHIA

Bellot Strait

BELLOT STRAIT

Bellot Strait is a very narrow passage that separates Somerset Island from the Murchison Promontory of Boothia Peninsula, and connects Franklin Strait with the Gulf of Boothia. The strait is 18 miles long and its width is reduced to less than half a mile in its fjord-like central section as it passes Zenith Point, the northernmost point of mainland North America. The tidal streams can run up to 8 knots through Bellot Strait, requiring a slack-water transit and making navigation challenging.

FORT ROSS

At the eastern end of the Bellot Strait is Fort Ross, the last trading post established by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1937.

PRINCE REGENT INLET

This body of water between Somerset Island and the Brodeur Peninsula is deep throughout and there are no islands within it, but is an area where there may be icebergs, typically the furthest west they travel into the passage from the glaciers of Greenland. These are waters that may see migrating bowhead whales and narwhal, but sightings are rare. Belugas are somewhat more easily seen as they come to these waters to moult at the end of their breeding season in Baffin Bay, and exploring the inlets on the coast of Somerset Island may be rewarded by sightings. Alternatively, the yacht may take the route through Peel Sound, situated between Prince of Wales Island to the west and Somerset Island to the east.

Beechey Island & Radstock Bay

A small island on the southwestern corner of Devon Island, Beechey Island is the most notable historic site in the history of the exploration of the Northwest Passage. During the 1845–46 winter, Sir John Franklin's ships HMS Erebus and HMS Terror anchored here and deployed some facilities ashore so that Franklin and his party of 129 could over-winter on this inhospitable island. Three of the complement died and are buried on the island. Franklin also left a cairn with a prominent mast on the plateau summit. From here the expedition departed for Peel Sound, never to return. Subsequently, the island became a major base for many Franklin search expeditions, an important depot and meeting place for searchers through the 1850s. In 1852–1853, Commander W.J.S. Pullen aboard the store ship HMS North Star of the Belcher Expedition built Northumberland House just along the coast from the graves. In 1903, paying respect to Franklin, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen stopped at the island during his successful voyage through the Northwest Passage.

Just to the east on the south coast of Devon Island is Radstock Bay, dominated by the steep rocky outcrop of Caswell Tower — a challenging climb that offers a fantastic view of the barren landscape from its summit. Thule cultural remains can be found at its base, and the rocks of the bay have been found to contain fossils 90 million years old. This area is prime polar bear denning habitat, and researchers have constructed a small cabin on the summit to monitor bear movements from above.





— CORNWALLIS ISLAND

Resolute

Located on the southern coast of Cornwallis Island, this community's English name is in honour of HMS Resolute, one of the ships in the Franklin search expedition. Its local name of 'Qausuittuq' in Inuktitut means the 'place with no dawn', because of the long winter night this far north. It is sometimes called Resolute Bay, after the bay which offers a good anchorage on the Parry Channel right in the middle of the Northwest Passage.

This High Arctic hamlet is the second most northerly community in Nunavut and Canada and, thanks to its long gravel runway, is a logistics hub for travel throughout the northernmost Canadian Arctic — serving as a starting point for international scientific research teams and expeditions to the North Pole.

— EASTERN ENTRANCE

Lancaster Sound & Devon Island

Lancaster Sound is the body of water lying between Devon Island and Baffin Island, forming the eastern entrance of the Northwest Passage. East of the sound lies Baffin Bay; to the west lie Viscount Melville Sound and the McClure Strait. The Sound is an important wildlife area, with Arctic cod feeding an abundance of marine life. Narwhal, beluga and bowhead whales; ringed, bearded and harp seals can be found here, along with walrus, polar bears, thick-billed murre, black-legged kittiwakes, northern fulmars, black guillemots, arctic terns, ivory gulls and snow geese.

Devon Island is the largest uninhabited island in the world, an area only slightly smaller than Croatia. Robert Bylot and William Baffin were the first Europeans to sight the island in 1616. It was named North Devon, after the county in England, by William Edward Parry as he charted the coastline in 1819–20, and the name changed to Devon Island by the end of the 1800s. The southern coast is indented by several deep fjords which can be good places to find wildlife, with many options for tender cruising and hiking.



— DEVON ISLAND

Croker Bay & Dundas Harbour

CROKER BAY, DEVON ISLAND

Croker Bay is the largest of the deep fjords on the south coast of Devon Island, and a spectacular area, since the 25-mile-long bay terminates in two massive tidewater glaciers. Sea ice and glacial debris ice can often be found drifting here late into the summer, making it a prime area for wildlife. Excellent examples of Arctic landscapes, from lowland plains to terraced mountains, can be seen along the length of the fjord, and the tidewater glaciers are some of the most impressive in this part of the Arctic.

DUNDAS HARBOUR, DEVON ISLAND

Dundas Harbour is the site of an abandoned Royal Canadian Mounted Police camp and several nearby archaeological sites. The RCMP outpost was established at the harbour in August 1924 as part of a government policy intended to curb foreign whaling and hunting. The Hudson's Bay Company leased the outpost in 1933, and the following year 52 Inuit were relocated from Cape Dorset to Dundas Harbour, where they remained for 13 years. The trading station was closed in 1951 due to difficulties reaching the harbour through heavy ice, and the RCMP detachment was moved to Craig Harbour on southern Ellesmere Island. The relatively lush vegetation here makes for excellent hiking.

— NORTHERN BAFFIN ISLAND

Pond Inlet

Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik) is a small community located at the northern tip of Baffin Island on the shores of Navy Board Inlet. With a population of approximately 1,400, it is one of the largest of the four hamlets above the 72nd parallel. Residents still rely on traditional pursuits — fishing for Arctic char and hunting polar bears, narwhal and other marine mammals.

Although snowmobiles and quad bikes are ubiquitous, it is still common to see dog teams in the village. Sirmilik National Park, the Bylot Island Bird Sanctuary and the surrounding area offer great opportunities for wildlife sightings. Pond Inlet is readily accessible by small airplane through a connection in Iqaluit.





— ACROSS THE STRAIT

Davis Strait & Greenland

A day's sailing across the Davis Strait lies the western coast of Greenland. The warmer waters of the Gulf Stream just reach the southern portion of this coast, preventing the sea from freezing in the winter and making it much more hospitable. As a result, about half of Greenland's 56,000 inhabitants live here.

Greenland's fourth largest town of Ilulissat, meaning 'icebergs', is located in Disko Bay and the ideal landfall. Aptly named, the town sits next to the fjord leading to Sermeq Kujalleq, the most productive glacier in the northern hemisphere, filling the fjord with some of the largest icebergs found outside of Antarctica and causing the fjord to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This procession of giant icebergs makes its way down the 30-mile / 48 km fjord to be released into the waters of Disko Bay and the Davis Strait at a rate of about 20 million tons per day.

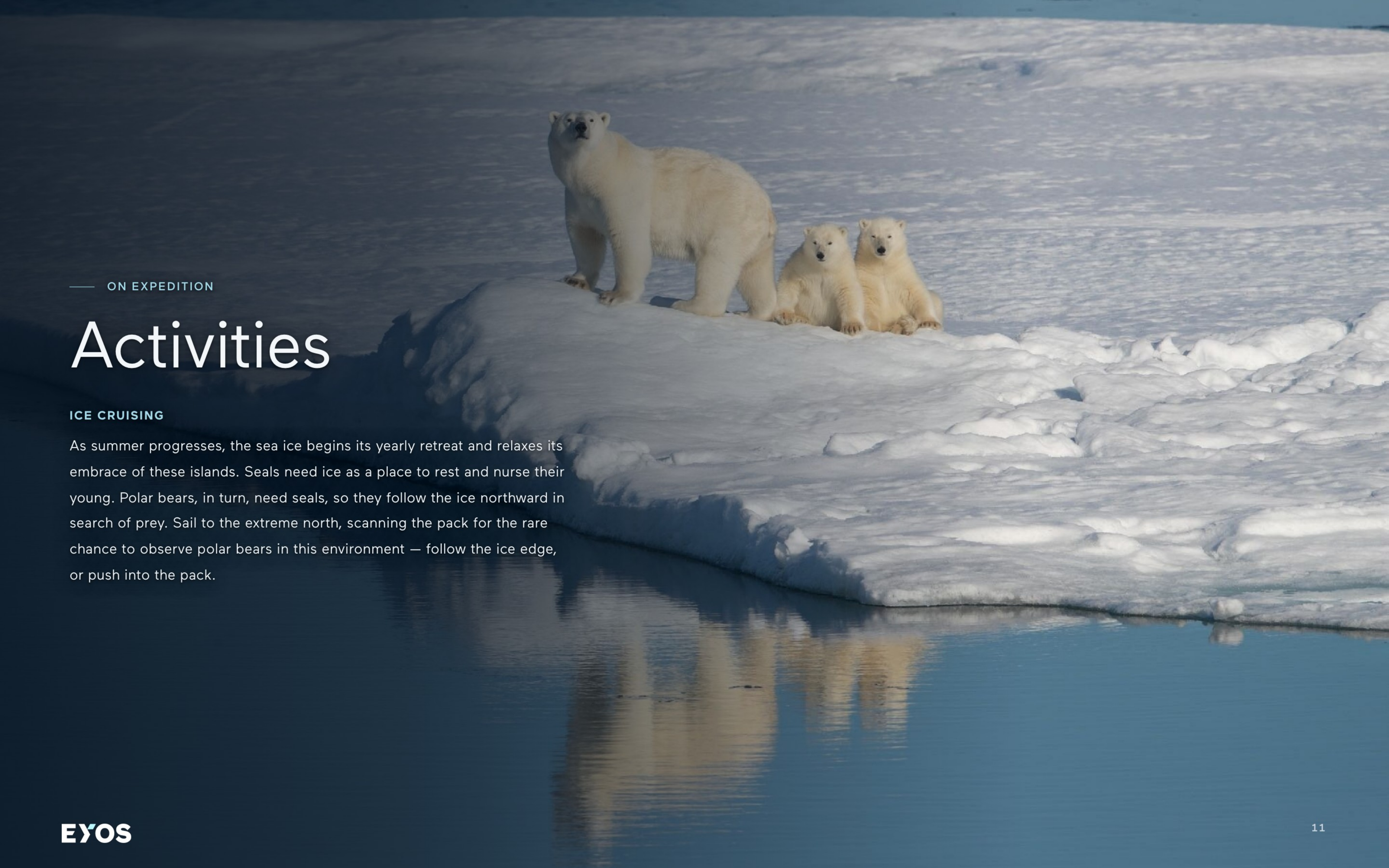
Sailing down the west coast of Greenland towards the capital Nuuk offers the opportunity to explore the many fjords and islands. Small settlements dot the coast, where the Greenlandic people continue their traditions of harvesting from the sea and the land. Ancient and colonial history combine with more modern culture, making for a fascinating journey through a High Arctic land.

Nuuk and other coastal towns to the north offer the opportunity to disembark, utilizing a charter flight to Kangerlussuaq (Søndre Strømfjord). This is Greenland's main airport and the only airstrip in this part of the country long enough to accommodate jet aircraft. Meaning 'big fjord', Kangerlussuaq lies at the head of a 170 km fjord of the same name, and if time permits the yacht could sail to the head of the fjord for disembarkation directly to the airport.



Among the wild, rugged landscapes,
discover the culture of the Inuit and the
history of European explorers.

THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

A photograph of a polar bear and two cubs on a large, irregular piece of sea ice. The adult bear is standing on the left, looking towards the camera. Two cubs are sitting to its right, also looking towards the camera. The ice is white and textured, with some shadows. The background is a vast expanse of sea ice under a clear blue sky. The water in the foreground is dark blue and reflects the bears and the ice.

— ON EXPEDITION

Activities

ICE CRUISING

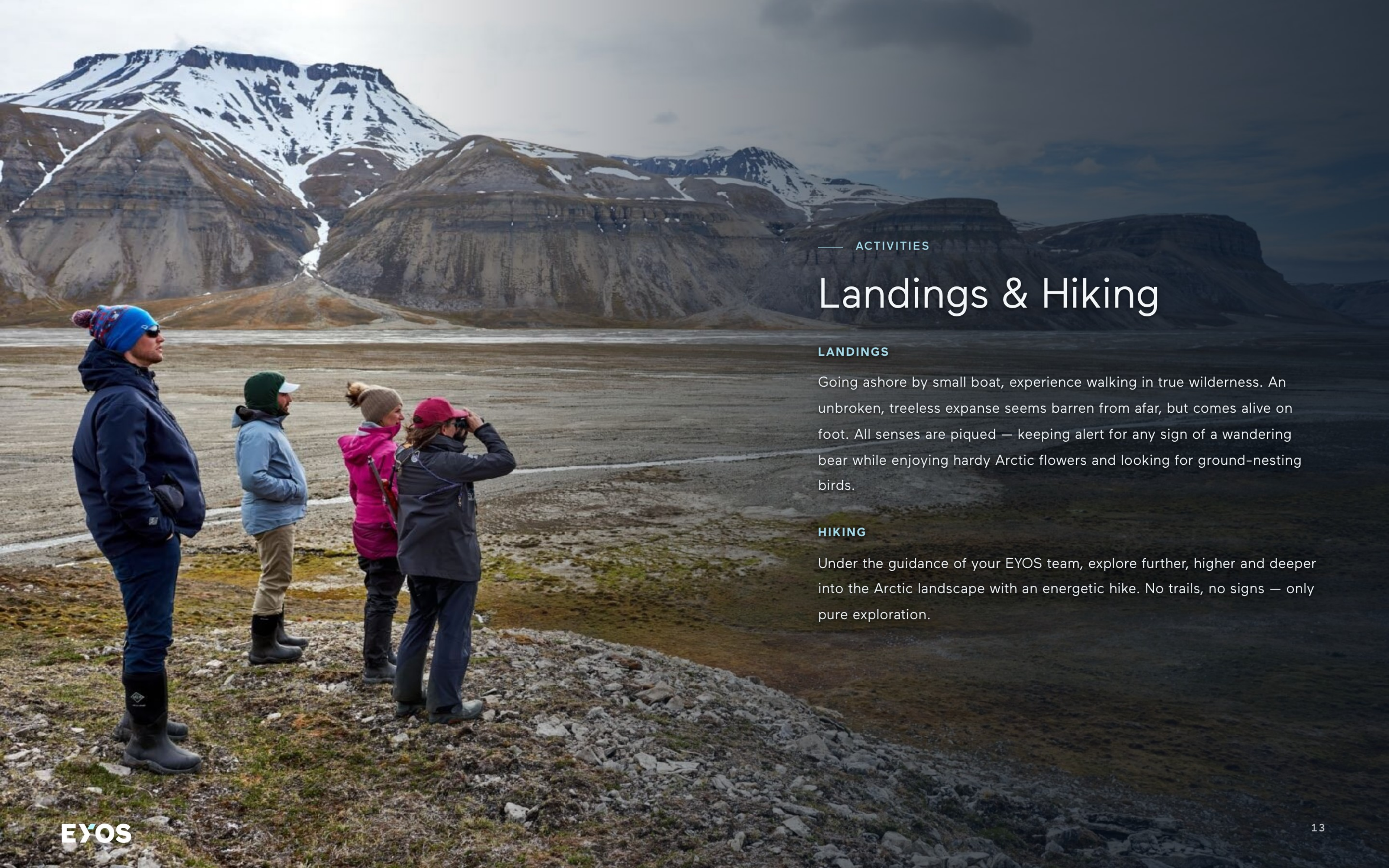
As summer progresses, the sea ice begins its yearly retreat and relaxes its embrace of these islands. Seals need ice as a place to rest and nurse their young. Polar bears, in turn, need seals, so they follow the ice northward in search of prey. Sail to the extreme north, scanning the pack for the rare chance to observe polar bears in this environment — follow the ice edge, or push into the pack.



— ACTIVITIES

Tender Cruises

Exploring in tenders is the polar version of a game drive on safari. These nimble craft allow close encounters and are excellent platforms for photography. Set off with your guide to explore these Arctic coasts in search of wildlife.



— ACTIVITIES

Landings & Hiking

LANDINGS

Going ashore by small boat, experience walking in true wilderness. An unbroken, treeless expanse seems barren from afar, but comes alive on foot. All senses are piqued — keeping alert for any sign of a wandering bear while enjoying hardy Arctic flowers and looking for ground-nesting birds.

HIKING

Under the guidance of your EYOS team, explore further, higher and deeper into the Arctic landscape with an energetic hike. No trails, no signs — only pure exploration.

— THE HIGH ARCTIC

Wildlife

POLAR BEARS

Usually solitary and always formidable, this apex predator of the Arctic roams the archipelago in a constant search for prey. Protected for half a century, and not habituated to humans, interactions with polar bears are usually characterised by mutual curiosity.





MARINE WILDLIFE

Walrus, beluga whale, and bearded seal are among twenty types of marine mammals that may be encountered.

HIGH ARCTIC WILDLIFE

Traveling for hundreds of miles over a frozen sea, reindeer reached the High Arctic centuries ago and made it home.

— YOUR EXPEDITION SUPPORT

The EYOS Expeditions Team

ABOUT US

Your expedition will be supported by both an on-board EYOS Expedition team and by a strong shore-based team on hand to provide 24/7 support for the duration of the voyage. Together we are underpinned by several decades of Arctic experience.

We are passionate about the Arctic and genuinely look forward to sharing it with you. Although our field staff members have completed hundreds of expeditions in polar latitudes, we have never lost our enthusiasm for ice and the adventures that it provides.

AECO

EYOS Expeditions is an active member of the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators. AECO was founded in 2003 and is an international organization for expedition cruise operators dedicated to managing respectful, environmentally-friendly and safe expeditions in the Arctic.

Please visit the link below for important information and guidelines for all Arctic visitors: aeco.no/guidelines/visitor-guidelines

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Discover the Northwest Passage

A private expedition through the fabled Northwest Passage by chartered yacht, with the full support of the EYOS team. To plan a voyage, we would be glad to help.

— FOR FURTHER INFORMATION —

EYOS Expeditions

info@eyos.com · www.eyos.com