Eagle-Eye Tours

Narwhals & Polar Bears: Pond Inlet Itinerary

Link: Narwhals & Polar Bears: Pond Inlet

Tour Overview

Rugged mountains, stunning glaciers, flocks of northern seabirds, the wonderful Narwhal, and traditional Inuit culture – this is what awaits us on a truly amazing Arctic tour to the wilderness of northern Baffin Island.

We experience this dramatic Arctic landscape at a time of year when the sun never sets and wildlife is returning to this very rich area of the Arctic. There are northern birds in abundance, including Thick-billed Murre, Black-legged Kittiwake, and King and Common Eiders. Other highlights include Sabine's and Thayer's gulls, Red-throated Loon and with much luck, we may see the all white Ivory Gull! In addition, the mixing of ocean currents from Baffin Bay and Lancaster Sound makes the marine life very rich! At this time of year, the sea ice is melting back and marine mammals are traveling north along the ice floe edge where food is concentrated. We hope to see several species of seals and the amazing spiral-tusked Narwhal. With luck we will also see polar bear or the endangered bowhead whale. Remote wilderness, striking Arctic landscapes, rich northern wildlife, and fascinating culture – this promises to be the experience of a lifetime!

Itinerary

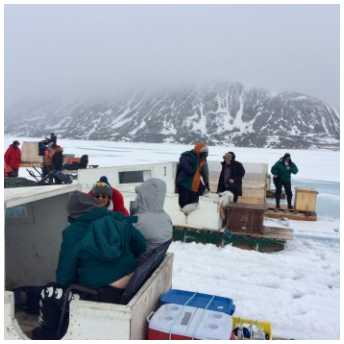
Day 0: Arrival in Ottawa

Participants will need to be in Ottawa the night prior to our flight to Pond Inlet. We are happy to help arrange this night in Ottawa. If schedules allow, we can meet for an evening meal in Ottawa to discuss our upcoming **polar bear and narwhal tour**. Those arriving early may enjoy a visit the Canadian Museum of Nature before dinner. Night in Ottawa.

Day 1: Travel to Pond Inlet

Our Arctic tour begins in earnest today! We typically depart early for the Ottawa airport for our flights to Pond Inlet at the northern tip of Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. After a plane change in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, we should arrive in Pond Inlet in the afternoon. After dinner we have a chance to visit a couple of local stores and walk around town. Hotel night in Pond Inlet.

Day 2: Travel to the floe edge



In the morning we will explore the shoreline, tundra and ponds close to Pond Inlet. We will encounter some of the more common species such as Lapland Longspur, Horned Lark and Snow Bunting, and we will be looking for Common Ringed Plover here and elsewhere. This mostly Palearctic species has a very small breeding range in North America, restricted to the eastern Arctic of Canada. After lunch, we will depart for the floe edge. We travel by komatik, which is a wooden sled lashed together and pulled behind a snowmobile. This is the traditional means of travel for the Inuit, the only difference is that snowmobiles have replaced dog teams. Enroute we may have the opportunity to get up close and personal with several icebergs that have spent the winter frozen in place. These can be both beautiful and enormous as they await break up of the ice before they continue to drift southward. The floe edge is where the winter ice meets the open waters of Baffin Bay and it is where the wildlife is concentrated on their northward migration. We should have wonderful opportunities to photograph and enjoy the wildlife. The birding at the floe edge should be superb! Hundreds of Northern Fulmars, Common and King eiders, and all three species of jaegers will be a treat. We will see hundreds or even thousands of Thick-billed Murres, many Black Guillemots, and with luck, several Dovekie in their very sharp breeding plumage! We will also see a collection of northern gulls: Glaucous, Iceland, Sabine’s, Black-legged Kittiwake, and with much luck, Ivory Gull. You have to travel very far north to find this beautiful all white arctic gull, but here we will be in the heart of its range. Unfortunately, they have become quite scarce in the last several years and are now an endangered species. We will have the opportunity to watch as these and possibly other species move northward along the floe edge.

Days 3–6: Floe edge and Bylot Island

Our daily activities will depend on the location of the floe edge and weather conditions, but will likely include these highlights. We will use a camp near the floe edge for these nights.

Bylot Island

Part of Bylot Island is a component of Sirmilik National Park and is one of the largest bird refuges in the world. We plan to go for a walk near our camp to see the remains of several traditional sod and whalebone houses, used until recently by the Inuit. On the tundra, we look for many of the common northern species that are returning from the south at this time of year. Shorebirds are sparsely distributed, but we hope to find several species nesting including American Golden-Plover, Baird's Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper. On the cliffs, we will look closely for Gyrfalcon, including white-morph individuals, and Peregrine Falcon. In the ponds on Bylot Island and around Pond Inlet, we will search for Red-throated Loon, Greater Snow Goose, and Long-tailed Duck. It should be a spectacular setting being on the tundra surrounded by the rugged snow-covered mountains that rim the eastern Arctic.

Visit to Seabird Colony

From our camp, if ice conditions permit, we will travel to the seabird colony on Bylot Island. North of Cape Graham Moore, these cliffs rise thousands of feet and host over 40,000 Thick-billed Murres and 6,500 Black-legged Kittiwakes. Hundreds of them will be coming and going from their precarious ledges as they head east to feed at the floe edge.

At the Floe Edge

We will likely spend most of our time at the floe edge with the hope of seeing some of the more elusive species that will be moving by, including the marine mammals. Waiting patiently at the floe edge should improve our chances of seeing that amazing northern whale, the Narwhal. We will be watching for groups of these bizarre creatures, with their long spiraled tusks – the male's tusk can be up to 7 feet long! This will surely be a highlight! It is also possible to see Bowhead Whales, Walrus, and that creature of legend, Nanook, the Polar Bear, but we will need some luck for these. The floe edge will also give us the chance to see Ringed, and possibly Bearded and Harp Seals.

Day 7: Return to Pond Inlet

After a final morning at the floe edge, we leave our camp for our return to Pond Inlet. On our journey we view the towering cliffs of Bylot Island plus the spectacular landscape of mountains and massive glaciers. We arrive in Pond Inlet in the afternoon in time for dinner and a possible final walk around town in the evening. Night in Pond Inlet.

Day 8: Travel to Ottawa and onward

Our Narwhals & Polar Bears tour ends today. Our exact plans depend on the flight schedule. We prefer to travel all the way to Ottawa in one day, but it is most likely that we will have an overnight in Iqaluit on the way south. We have breakfast and lunch in Pond Inlet with some final time to explore the community. We then catch an afternoon flight to Iqaluit where we will spend the night (not included in the tour cost). We some time to explore Nunavut's capital and browse the art shops. We will then finish our journey with an afternoon flight to Ottawa, arriving in the evening. We highly recommend you spend this night in Ottawa rather than trying to connect to a flight home. We will head home with many fond memories from this amazing Arctic tour in the land of the midnight sun.

What to Expect

Daily Schedule

The daily activities on our polar bear and narwhal tour will be focused on looking for and watching narwhals & polar bears. We will also be happy to enjoy watching birds and other wildlife at the floe edge or on the tundra, and we won't hesitate to enjoy other aspects of the natural and cultural history of this area on this incredible Arctic tour.

Participants should anticipate embracing a more relaxed pace on this tour, respecting the unhurried rhythm of Inuit culture, which often operates without strict adherence to timelines. Your flexibility and patience will enhance your immersive experience. While we have outlined an itinerary above, this schedule and our daily activities will be variable and great flexibility will be required. Our daily activities will be very dependent on the daily weather and ice conditions and may require us to stay at our camp if conditions are unsafe at the floe edge (usually due to wind). Keeping you safe is our top priority throughout this tour.

Food

We have a cook that prepares food for us at the camp. Breakfasts may include eggs, pancakes, hash browns, bacon, or cold cereal and oatmeal depending on the day. Lunches are usually out at the floe edge and we typically provide supplies to build your own wrap/bagel/sandwich plus we have hot soup. Dinners are back at camp and may be a stew, pasta and sauce, or something similar. We provide snacks, coffee/tea and hot water during the day. As we are camping in the high arctic and the diversity of local ingredients is limited, meals may be basic, but we aim to keep you well fed.

Walking

Walking on this tour is generally easy, but we will be walking on ice at our camp, plus we walk up small hills and on uneven tundra. We spend most of our time traveling in the komatiks (sleds) and will set ourselves up at the floe edge for wildlife viewing, but we typically do one or two optional hikes on the tundra for a couple of hours as well.

Travel

Please understand that due to the weather in the Arctic, flight delays are more common than elsewhere. If our flights are delayed we will do our best to adjust and get on our way as soon as possible. Additional costs due to flight delays (e.g. extra hotel nights or meals) are the responsibility of the participant, but should be covered by your trip interruption policy (see below).

Travel from the community of Pond Inlet to the camp typically takes about 4-5 hours including a couple of stops, but this depends on the weather and how rough the ice is. Travel from the camp to the floe edge will generally take an hour or more, depending on ice conditions and where the floe edge forms. The ride in the komatiks can be bumpy, but we will work to make you as comfortable as possible. We usually put 3 people in each komatik.

Climate

Late May and early June are still cold in the Arctic. Temperatures may not be much above freezing and it could snow, but warm layered clothing along with the insulated waterproof boots should keep you warm. It can be sunny though and the sun is up 24 hours and reflects against the snow, so bring sunscreen and sunglasses. We will send you a suggested packing list upon tour confirmation.

Insurance

Please note that the deposit for this tour is $1000 CAD/USD. Due to the remote nature of this tour and the high cost of evacuation, emergency medical insurance is **required** on this tour. Due to the potential for flight delays and cancellations due to weather, trip interruption insurance is also **mandatory**. Trip cancellation coverage is highly recommended.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

• 2 nights in hotels, 5 nights camping near floe edge (equipment provided)
• Ground transportation
• Travel by komatik (sled) to/from the floe edge
• Includes all meals and soft drinks from dinner on Day 1 to lunch on Day 8
• Eagle-Eye Tours guide plus local Inuit guides with 5 - 11 participants

Tour Price Does Not Include

• Round-trip airfare from Ottawa to Pond Inlet (approximately $3,175 CAD + 13% tax | $2,450 USD + 13% tax). Note that booking late typically incurs higher flight costs.
• Mandatory emergency medical and trip interruption insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages, note that alcohol is prohibited on the Floe Edge
• Taxes (5% GST)
• Additional expenses in the event of flight delays
• Hotel nights in Ottawa before and after the tour and possible hotel night in Iqaluit after the tour