

Italian excursions dispel passengers' myths / E3

Biking helps burn off river cruise's calories / E6

# Travel

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## CRUISE ISSUE



High arctic winds spin cloud formations into fan shapes at Baffin Island's Pond Inlet. STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOGRAPHY/COLORWORLD PHOTOS

# POLE POSITION

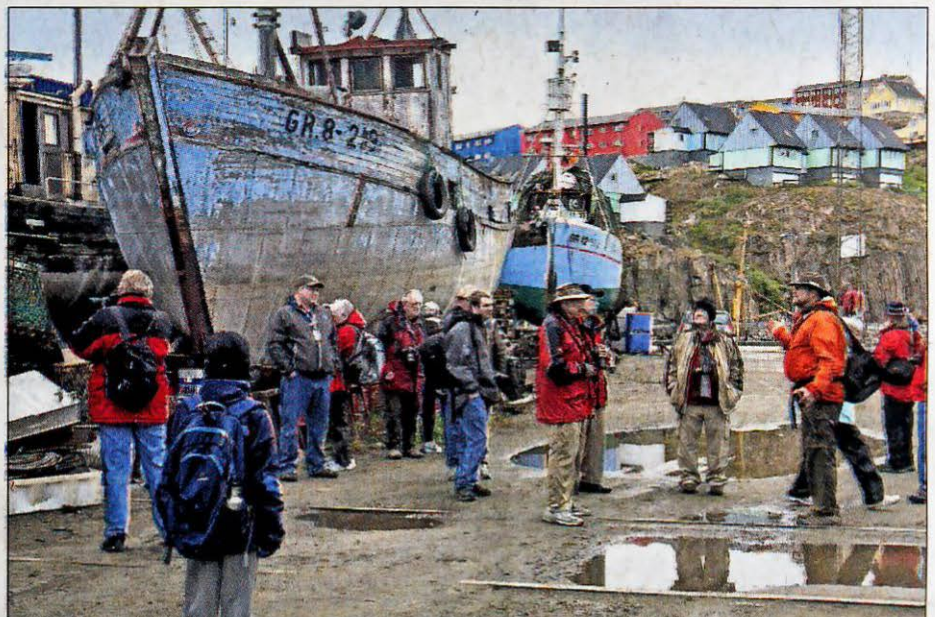
## Ship dodges icebergs in Arctic exploration

By Anne Z. Cooke  
Tribune News Service

**I**LULISSAT, Greenland — Capt. Oliver Kreuss trained his binoculars on the iceberg-choked fjord ahead.

"I can't talk now," he said as he steered the Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic ship Explorer around each floating titan like a dancer whirling his partner across the floor.

The half-dozen passengers on the bridge, there to watch the approach to Ilulissat on Greenland's ragged western coast, held their breath as the usually garrulous captain nudged the ship forward. Forty minutes later, with clear water and the anchorage ahead, all was forgiven.



National Geographic photographer Ralph Lee Hopkins leads a photo tour in the boatyard of the Greenland fishing village of Sisimiut.

SEE ARCTIC, E4

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# ARCTIC

From Page E1

"Sorry about that," Kreuss said. "The ship is always my first duty. You were asking about the notches in the rail?"

"For every bear we see, we cut one notch. If the bear has killed and is eating a seal, we color the notch red."

After 10 days on the Explorer, we had a pretty good idea why Lindblad Expeditions has been so successful leading expedition-style voyages to distant regions.

In Lindblad's early days, its ships were considerably more spartan. But after partnering with National Geographic (in 2004), changes included booking more university-trained naturalist-guides and ramping up the comfort index.

Most of Lindblad's cruises are booked a year in advance, according to Lindblad's reservation desk. But when a last-minute cancellation opened space on the 13-day cruise to Greenland and north Baffin Island, we jumped on it.

We were supposed to board the Explorer in Iqaluit on south Baffin Island, which is part of Canada, and then sail north through the Davis Strait. But when ice blocked Frobisher Bay, the Explorer couldn't dock.

Kreuss and the crew got to work, booking additional flights for all 140 passengers — at Lindblad's expense — and rescheduling Inuit village visits, tundra hikes, lectures, zodiac fjord tours, naturalist talks and glacier fly-overs. And they managed it seamlessly.

"They're successful because they're organized," said former investment banker Martha Tinker, from Des Moines, Iowa, who has taken 13 Lindblad trips. "They research the destinations so thoroughly that they're never caught by surprise. If something's canceled, they have a backup already identified. It happens so smoothly, the passengers don't even notice."

With the sun shining, we took off our coats to explore Inuit villages such as Greenland's Sisimiut, population 4,453, and Pond Inlet, population 5,500, at the north end of Baffin Island.

The tour of Sisimiut, a quiet fishing village built on a couple of rocky ridges, meant a long walk uphill and down dale to a history museum, crafts store and grocery. A half-dozen sled dogs, panting in the heat, snoozed at the end of their doghouse chains. But snow machines and ATVs were ubiquitous. Sisimiut



Greenland's coast has greened up by August. STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOGRAPHY/COLORWORLD PHOTOS

## IF YOU GO

### Arctic cruising

Lindblad cruises to the eastern high Arctic require passengers to fly through Ottawa and include airport transfers and an overnight and dinner there. Flights the next morning continue to Iqaluit, Canada, or to Kangerlussuaq in Greenland. For other Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic cruises, go to [www.expeditions.com](http://www.expeditions.com).

looked neat and prosperous; Greenland, a Danish territory, receives sizable support for its economy and schools.

Pond Inlet, the Canadian government's effort to bring distant Inuits from their traditional villages to a central location, seemed both more industrial and much poorer. But the Tununiq-miut Dance group's drum dance performance, held at the Community Center, provided a rare opportunity to see a genuine effort to keep some of the old culture.

On other days, guided zodiac fjord rides, shore tours and "walks" were available, as were National Geographic photography clinics. We hiked over rocks identified as the world's oldest, searched for 1,000-year-old burial sites and contemplated the fact that before Europeans arrived, the Vikings and two groups of ancestral Inuit lived here.

Sometimes we saw flowers so tiny that kneeling was



A female polar bear and her two nearly grown cubs check out the Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic ship Explorer from an ice floe in Prince Regent Inlet off Baffin Island.

required to appreciate their intricate shapes. We also saw 3-inch-high willows and silky-fine clumps of musk ox fur, shed during the summer molt. The musk ox were there, somewhere, but remained elusive.

The most fantastic afternoon wound up on a high note with a polar bear encounter. Spotting three bears napping on an ice floe, the ship slowed to a crawl, waiting for the ice to reach us. Meanwhile, the female stood up, stretched and ambled toward the ship, her two nearly grown cubs in tow.

In minutes, the cubs were directly below the bow,

where they spent the next 45 minutes sniffing the air, cuffing each other playfully and stretching out to cool. The female watched it all, then called the cubs, and the three ambled away.

You faced the passengers nearby, and they saw you. You shared a bowl of popcorn. They said hello, and you recognized them again when you saw them later. After four days together, you were talking. If you had been attending lectures in a typical auditorium, sitting in a row facing the stage, you wouldn't have met anyone.

The setup also improved the lectures. Wherever you sat in that lounge, you could



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see at least two of the seven wall-mounted TV screens, computer-controlled from the lectern. The speakers, uninterrupted by mumbling, fumbling with videos or explaining photos that popped up out of order, were more spontaneous, faster paced and often funnier.

As for the icebergs, it wasn't long before we were sailing among monstrous hunks — white giants bigger than skyscrapers. Worse, they had calved off the Jakobshavn Glacier, near Ilulissat, at the western edge of the Greenland ice cap.

They are the canary in the coal mine, evidence that Jakobshavn, said to be the world's "most productive glacier," is melting faster than ever, leaving some scientists worrying that the ice sheet itself might slide into the ocean. That was the bad news. But the good news is that we were there to see it in person, and to hope that the next decade's cruise passengers will care just as much.