

# Travel

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'I never found out precisely what the Pig Dance symbolised'  
Stanley Johnson in French Polynesia



You can see polar bears in Canada or off the northern Siberian coast in the Russian Arctic.

## 15 frozen planet adventures

Want to see polar bears in Siberia or penguins at the South Pole? Head off on a glacial expedition, says **James Ellis**

### Basecamp Spitsbergen, Norway

Head to Longyearbyen for a five-night stay in rugged Basecamp Spitsbergen. Built using driftwood, sealskin and slate, the glass ceiling allows perfect views of the northern lights. The former mining town has a frontier feel and, given the snowy landscape, transport is by snowmobile, dog sleds or skis. Use them to explore glaciers, fjords and floating packs of ice, or take a kayaking expedition around the coast, home to grazing reindeer and colonies of birds. For an extra adventure, spend a night on the Ship in the Ice in Tempelfjord, the only hotel boat frozen in sea ice in the world. **Details** From £1,990pp for five nights B&B. The price includes flights and

transfers and departures are year-round (020-7426-9888, blacktomato.co.uk)

### Wolves in Prince Albert National Park, Canada

While Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park is on the same longitude as London, its remote nature sees it turn into a winter wonderland. On this six-night trip to the vast boreal forest — the largest in Canada — you search for grey wolf, moose and great grey owls. Guides take you on daily excursions by snowshoe, dog sled or 4x4 in search of the elusive wildlife, following their tracks and telltale signs in an attempt to spot them. **Details** From £1,765pp for six nights B&B. The price also includes four lunches, five dinners, guide service.

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This month is the 100th anniversary of Robert Scott and Roald Amundsen's race to reach the South Pole

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national park entry and equipment and 4x4 hire. Departures are in February and March (020-8742-1556, windowontheworld.com).

### Scott's Antarctica

This month is the 100th anniversary of the race to reach the South Pole between Captain Robert Scott and the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, and this cruise follows in Scott's sledge marks. The 20-night cruise takes in remote parts of Antarctica, including Enderby Island, Macquarie Island and the Ross Sea region. The voyage to the Ross Sea will attempt to edge south to Cape Evans, where Scott's 1911 Terra Nova hut is located. The largest historic building on the continent, it was used in the



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◀ 1910-13 British Antarctic Expedition for scientific research and served as a base for the explorer's journey. The five-star expedition ship Orion has only 100 passengers on board and there are creature comforts such as a gym and boutique, and hairdressing, sauna and massage facilities. There are also specialist lecturers and a polar expedition team for venturing on to the ice.  
**Details** From £12,990pp for 20 nights on board. The price includes all meals and excursions. International flights are extra. Departs January 21 (020-7399 7620, orionexpeditions.com).

**In the wake of Shackleton**

While Scott and Amundsen are rightly gaining the centennial plaudits, this cruise

pays homage to fellow Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton. Over 21 nights, the cruise takes in the Falklands, traces Shackleton's historic trek across South Georgia — stopping at his grave — and makes Zodiac landings on some of Antarctica's islands to see king penguin colonies, wandering albatrosses and fur and elephant seals. There are onboard lectures on ornithology, marine biology, history, geology and photography workshops, as well as a young explorers' programme with workshops for children.

**Details** From £12,010pp for 21 nights on board, including all meals and excursions, as well as domestic and international flights. The trip departs January 1 (08456 18212, abercrombiekent.co.uk).

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 Western Hudson Bay is home to more than 20,000 beluga whales that are snow white in their maturity  
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**Fly-cruise to Antarctica**

Three things tend to put people off visiting the Antarctic: the crossing of the notoriously choppy Drake Passage, and the cost. While it's nigh impossible to do anything about the last, this fly-cruise itinerary at least manages to address the first two. Instead of boarding a ship in Argentina's Ushuaia, fly from Punta Arenas in Chile to King George Island in the South Shetlands and board the Ocean Nova expedition cruiser for a five-night cruise to the Antarctic Peninsula. This thin fingertip of land is the most accessible part of the frozen continent but is no less dramatic.

**Details** From £5,900pp for four nights on board and one in Punta Arenas, including all meals and excursions but not international flights. Departures are until the end of January (020-8347 3808, journeylatinamerica.co.uk).

**Belugas in Hudson Bay, Canada**

Sitting just below the Arctic Circle, Churchill, in the province of Manitoba, is one of the main towns on Hudson Bay — more than a million square kilometres of freezing water that flow into the Arctic and Atlantic oceans. The western bay is home to more than 20,000 beluga whales that are snow white in maturity. This five-night trip allows you to get into the water with these friendly creatures, either by boat or kayak, or with a snorkel for the very brave. On land, there's a Tundra Buggy excursion that takes in some of the region's diverse flora and fauna.

**Details** From £16,300pp for five nights. The price includes Tundra Buggy tour and two excursions with the belugas but not international flights. Departures are in July and August (01737 214291, discover-the-world.co.uk/Canada).



**JORDAN**

*Jordan Special Offer*

Petra, Dead Sea and 5-star in the Red Sea Resort of Aqaba

**Standard Accommodation**  
 3-star Days Inn Amman, Petra Palace, Dead Sea Spa and 5-star Mövenpick Resort Aqaba.

**Upgraded Accommodation**  
 4-star Crowne Plaza Amman, 5-star Mövenpick Petra, Aqaba & Dead Sea.

**Days 1 & 2 London to Amman**  
 Afternoon flight and overnight stay in Amman. Optional excursion to the Roman city of Jerash, known as 'Pompeii of the East' (£49). Transfer to Petra for two nights.

**Days 3 to 10 Petra to Aqaba**  
 Optional sightseeing tour of Petra (£50) and private Rock Camp dinner on the outskirts of Petra (£29). Continue to Aqaba for seven nights. Option to visit Wadi Rum including a 90-minute Bedouin jeep drive (£66). Pharaoh's Island Red Sea cruise (£41), sunset cruise (£14) and Yellow Submarine, a 'see-through' semi-submersible (£29).

**Days 11 & 12 Dead Sea to London**  
 Transfer to the Dead Sea with time to float in the mineral rich waters. Overnight stay. Early morning transfer to airport for return flight.

**11 nights from £945**

Thursday departures from Heathrow between January and March 2012.

Price includes: Air travel and visas, visa procurement (British passport holders), transfers, 11 nights' accommodation, breakfast daily, services of guides and local representatives.

Note: New Year (three) included when staying at Mövenpick Hotels.

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**VOYAGES JULES VERNE**

**Fjords in the High Arctic, Norway**

Arctic and Antarctic cruises don't come cheap — but on this one you are in the hot hands. The nine-night cruise is on board the National Geographic Explorer, a state-of-the-art expedition ship on which you'll be accompanied by naturalists and other specialists, including National Geographic photographers. Unlike other cruises, it follows no set itinerary aside from boarding and disembarking in the Norwegian town of Longyearbyen on Svalbard. The aim of the cruise is to track down some of the amazing Arctic wildlife and the ships sails through deep fjords, snow-capped mountains and massive ice sheets in search of polar bears, reindeer and walrus.

**Details** From £5,495pp for nine nights on board. The price includes meals on the ship and all excursions but international and internal flights are extra. Departures are in June and July (01803 866965, reefandrainforest.co.uk).

**Northern Russian Arctic**

While most Arctic trips set out from Canada or Norway, this 15-day Across the Top of the World cruise itinerary from World Expeditions chooses to explore the region from a Russian perspective. The trip starts in Anadyr before crossing the Bering Strait to the north Siberian coastline and the Longa Strait to Wrangel and Herald islands. Along the way there are stops at Cape Dezhnev, Eurasia's northeastern extremity, and Kolyuchin, which was once a Russian research station, as well as meetings with the native Chukchi people. Expect to see a huge range of biodiversity — Wrangel is known as the "polar bear maternity ward" thanks

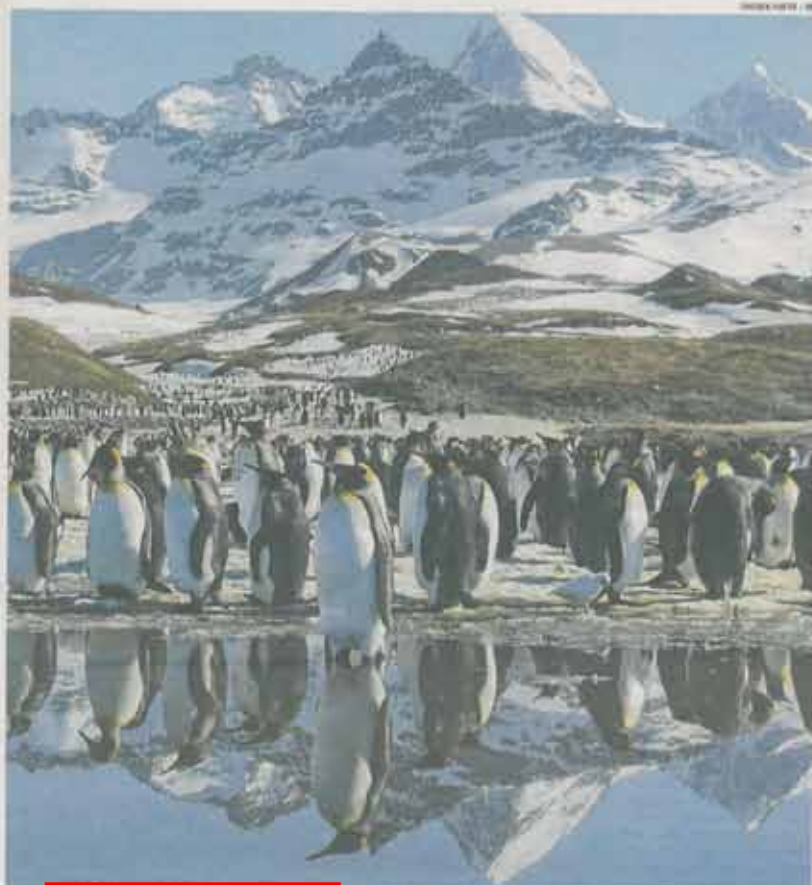
to the large number of cubs born there.  
**Details** From £5,972pp for 15 nights on board. The price includes all meals, excursions and lectures but international flights are extra. Departures are in July and August (020-8545 9030, worldexpeditions.co.uk).

**Scandinavian midnight sun**

Take in the Land of the Midnight Sun on this summer tour above the Arctic Circle. The 15-day itinerary takes in the most northerly regions of Sweden, Finland and Norway, where you can kayak, canoe and explore traditional fishing villages, and take long hikes in the mountainous Lofoten Islands. There is an excursion to the North Cape — said to be Europe's most northerly point — and the chance to hike the Sautso Canyon, one of Europe's largest. Accommodation varies between camping outdoors, cabin stays and a night in the traditional fishing village of Sjø. **Details** From £1,799pp for 15 nights' B&B. The price includes return flights, transfers, some other meals and the services of a tour leader. Departures are from May to October (08444 995901, explore.co.uk).

**Icebergs in Greenland**

The small town of Ilulissat in western Greenland lies almost 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle and takes its name from the Greenlandic for iceberg. The reason? The town is close to the Ilulissat Icefjord, where huge icebergs are calved from glaciers and become stranded at the mouth of nearby Disko Bay. Sled dogs outnumber the local population here and you can see whales, seals and the northern lights at the right time of year. Highlights of the trip include sailing among the icebergs, a journey to the Eqi Glacier, the opportunity to stay in igloos and a visit to



The 4,000-year-old settlement of Sermiut, where the Jakobshavn glacier can move 20m a day. Details From £2,250pp for six nights. The price includes international flights and transfers and activities, and departures are year-round (020-7838 5892, woxax.com)

### Husky mushing in Finnish Lapland

There can be no more traditional way to cross the Arctic Circle than on a sled pulled by huskies. Spend the first morning of this three-night trip learning to control your pack outside the Finnish town of Haminna, before heading out and covering 20 miles a day through snowy forests and past frozen lakes. Then stay in a

log cabin in the wilderness, where the lack of light pollution affords excellent opportunities for seeing the northern lights. On the last day, take a skidoo to high points for more aurora borealis-spotting. Details From £1,295pp for three nights' full board, including international flights, transfers and all activities. Departures are from now until mid-April (01670 789991, www.activitiesabroad.com)

### Ice Fishing in Tromsø

At 70 degrees north and with a population of 70,000, Tromsø is the largest city in northern Norway. It also has the world's northernmost university, brewery and cathedral, so there is plenty to do in the city itself on this four-night trip, including the opportunity to spend a day ice-fishing

Clockwise from top left: wedding with huskies; a penguin colony on Antarctica's South Georgia island; and a fly cruise polar expedition group walking on sea ice off Antarctica



Take a Skidoo with your guide and power across frozen fjords to find the best lake, then make a hole in the ice and cast a line to catch napper. Other activities include northern lights tours, as well as a cultural excursion with the local Sammi. Details Four nights' B&B at the Clarion Collection Hotel in Tromsø costs from £769pp, including international flights. The ice-fishing excursion costs £221pp, including all equipment and cold-weather gear. Departures are year-round (020-8758-4722, sunvi.co.uk)

### Polar Bear and Narwhal Safari, Canada

Canada's Sirmilik National Park is right along the edge of the ice flow in Baffin Bay and home to abundant wildlife in summer. As the ice begins to break, there is the chance to see pods of narwhal poking their tusks above water, polar bears and a variety of seabirds. Guides on this seven-night trip are Inuit elders who will explain their way of life as they take you on hikes to an old whaling station on Bylot Island, to visit an old shipwreck frozen in time and to see more than 20,000 nesting birds in towering cliffs. Enjoy tea made from iceberg meltwater and camp on the ice itself. There is also the chance to snorkel with the narwhal. Details Seven nights' all-inclusive costs from £9,445pp, including international flights, transfers and guiding. Departures are June 10 or 24 (020-7483 6555, brideandwidewalkers.co.uk)

### Stay with Eskimos in East Greenland

This seven-night holiday allows travellers really to immerse themselves in native culture by staying in guesthouses and eating dinner with local families each night. The trip is based in the Greenlandic town of Tasilaq, perched on an

iceberg-filled fjord surrounded by snowy mountains. A full-day excursion involves mushing dogs to an overnight hut, while the five nights in Greenland are bookended by two nights in the Icelandic capital Reykjavik. Here people can soak up the atmosphere in the iconic Blue Lagoon or visit Damon Albarn's pub Kaffibarnn. Details Seven nights' full board costs from £2,440pp. The price includes international flights, transfers and activities. Departures are throughout March and April 2012 (01129 217171, regent-hotels.co.uk)

### Visit the geographic North and South Poles

For a once-in-a-lifetime, money-no-object trip, some companies afford you the opportunity to set foot on the geographical North or South Poles. A Ninety Degrees North itinerary starts in the Canadian capital Ottawa, then heads farther and farther north by aircraft before a final leg to the North Pole. Weather permitting, the plane will land to record the achievement before returning via Greenland at Qanaq and Grise Fjord. Nine nights cost from £33,000, including accommodation, meals and international flights. The trip departs April 9 (020-8776-8709, frontier-canada.co.uk)

Alternatively, you can really follow in Amundsen and Scott's tracks on a Ski Last Degree trip. This sees you take on the last 60 nautical miles, from 89 degrees south to the South Pole. The two-week journey is a demanding expedition-style trip that promises to illustrate every bit of the hardship the two adventurers faced. Details From £35,600pp, including flights from Punta Arenas to Antarctica, tented accommodation, food and the services of professional guides. Departs December 5 and 17 in 2012 and January 4 in 2013 (001 801 266 4826, adventure-network.com). Frozen Planet is now available on BBC DVD, Blu-Ray and iTunes

## Snow's falling and so are prices on the slopes

What a difference a few days make. Last week the industry folk were anxiously eyeing the coal-blast skies and the dull green slopes of the Alps and thinking "This could be tricky." They even moved some of the World Cup ski races from Val d'Isère in France to Beaver Creek in the US because of a lack of snow—and that happens only when things are really desperate.

Flyas in to Chicago in Austria for the resort's glitzy opening at the end of last month and not a flake had fallen since early October.

Despite that, we had three days' superb skiing thanks to the resort's extremely efficient snow-making. There are 1,000 snow cannons, more than anywhere in the Alps.

Then, as winter winds in Europe with a vengeance this week, it's not merely a flash-in-the-pan early season flurry either. Many resorts have received more than 50cm since Saturday and, says Vicky Norman of the Ski Club of Great Britain, it's snowing down to 1,000ft in the gateway to the Three Valleys at an altitude of



550m. In La Plagne there has been 40cm of snow in the past 24 hours and 70cm in St Anton.

In Chamrousse Gavi, Foster of Ski Weekends reports half a metre of new

snow in his garden in the valley and is raving about making fresh tracks on it for the weekend to Val d'Isère. All the main French resorts will open with new snow this weekend, including Les Arcs, Avoriaz, Argentiere, Flaine, Chamonix and La Plagne.

Lisa Tyrrell of Inghams says that conditions are "fantastic" and that now is a perfect time to book a last-minute holiday. Inghams (020-8260-4447, inghams.co.uk) is among the big companies that have some terrific bargains on offer — half price in some

cases — over Christmas and the new year. For instance, you could book eight nights in La Plagne for £599pp (down from £1,099), departing on December 30, including chairlift board, flights and transfers.

If you can leave on December 10 for Alpe d'Huez, igluse (igluse.com) has seven nights' chair board plus flights from Gatwick for £390pp or £189 saving. Also has seven nights' chair board in Åre, Sweden, from December 23. Skigo first, frontairline to host, couldn't be better. Roger Alton



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