

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a city street intersection, likely in New York City. The scene is captured during the "golden hour" of late afternoon, with long, warm shadows cast across the pavement. Three yellow taxis are visible: one in the upper left, one in the lower left, and one at the bottom center. Pedestrians are seen crossing the street and walking on the sidewalks. The street features white crosswalk lines and a "BUS" lane marking. Tall city buildings frame the scene on the right and top. The overall mood is dynamic and urban.

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+ CRUISE INTO THE NEW YEAR



Northern Exposure

On board Atlas through the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, cruisers encounter a landscape of unfathomable beauty—and rapid change

ON THE FIFTH DAY OF MY ARCTIC CRUISE, my shipmates and I are hovering somewhere around the 80th parallel when the ship's captain booms over the loudspeaker with the announcement we've been aching to hear all week: "Polar-bear sighting on the starboard side!" Finally. We erupt in cheers, and I race to the deck to squint through my binoculars at a mother and cub lumbering playfully along the shore. Having the privilege of spying these two creatures going about their daily routines is the kind of goosebumps moment that I know well from years of safari-going in Africa and Asia.

I'm here in Svalbard, Norway, aboard Atlas Ocean Voyages' sleek *World Navigator*, a ship that marries the action of an expedition ship and the ease of a luxury sailing. The brand launched just last year with inaugural sailings to the Mediterranean and Antarctica, quickly earning a reputation for its deep-access itineraries to remote corners of the globe, utilizing some of the most environmentally sound vessels on the water today. Atlas's ships don't rely on heavy fuels, and their positioning systems are designed to have minimal impact on the natural environment. After a successful year exploring the reaches of Antarctica, Atlas ventured above the Arctic Circle, a few degrees shy of the North Pole. My expedition starts in Longyearbyen, the world's northernmost town. In fact, just about everything here comes with a directional honorific: the world's northernmost fuel center. The northernmost brewery.



A recently calved iceberg in Kongsfjorden

Opposite: The settlement of Nybyen, at the southern end of Longyearbyen

Northernmost post office. But when we venture even farther north, the region's remoteness truly comes into focus. I fling open my blackout curtains each morning to increasingly surreal views: craggy peaks ringed by halos of mist; glacier walls that unfurl for miles. There's an otherworldly quality to floating on top of the world, surrounded by nothing but ice floes.

Well, not quite nothing. On the *World Navigator*, I feel like I've crashed a convention of the world's most interesting people. My companions include retired spies, military officers, oceanographers, diplomats, and archaeologists—a fellowship of peripatetic overachievers who have traveled to nearly every country (and perhaps even played a role in forming a few of them). When the expedition team asks how many of us have been to Antarctica, nearly every hand shoots into the air.

Many of these curious sailors have been drawn to Svalbard because it is a hot spot of climate change—temperatures here have been rising nearly four times faster than the rest of the Earth. “The Arctic is melting at an alarming rate,” says Ed Sobey, PhD, a former research scientist who specialized in polar oceanography, during one of his daily talks on the region's history, terrain, and wildlife. I listen from a couch in the Dome, the ship's Deck 7 observation lounge, where the panoramic windows double as teaching assistants, as he gestures to moraines and crevasses in the glaciers. “You all need to carry the message home. We're at a tipping point.” →

PHOTOGRAPHS: CECILIA BLOMDAHL, CHASE TERON
ILLUSTRATION BY AMANDA GIUFFRÉ, NOUN NEW YORK



TREND WATCH

VOYAGES are going FARTHER

With more than two years of missed travel opportunities, the rise of remote work, and a collective human desire to make our moments count more than ever, it's no surprise that grand voyages—sailings longer than 21 days—are growing in popularity. “COVID-19 saw a massive reevaluation of life quality, so a great experience is critical,” says Tom Baker of the travel agency CruiseCenter. When [Holland America Line](#) launched its 73-day grand Africa voyage this year, it sold out so fast that the company created another one for 2023, which will take passengers from the beaches of Zanzibar to historic Petra. This month, [Oceania Cruises](#) kicked off an epic 218-day voyage from Miami. [Seabourn's](#) multicontinent grand voyage in 2023 will become two 80-day adventures in 2024. And [Silversea](#) will operate five times

as many itineraries of 21 days or longer next year than it did in 2019. Even river cruises, traditionally a week long, are offering longer sailings: After its inaugural 2023 Seven River Journey Through Europe trips sold out almost instantly, [AmaWaterways](#) created two more of its 46-night itineraries and two 49-night itineraries, and [Uniworld Boutique River Cruises](#) will launch its nine-country, 47-day Rivers of the World offering next year. “Think experiencing the Pyramids of Giza one day, and then the Moulin Rouge,” says Ellen Bettridge, Uniworld's president and CEO. As lines invest in enhanced digital connectivity via SpaceX's Starlink, the trend will continue to grow. “Smart lines will discount this to attract young affluent cruisers,” says Cruises By Linda's Linda Allen-Speer. The one hook stronger than fast internet? Having to unpack just once.

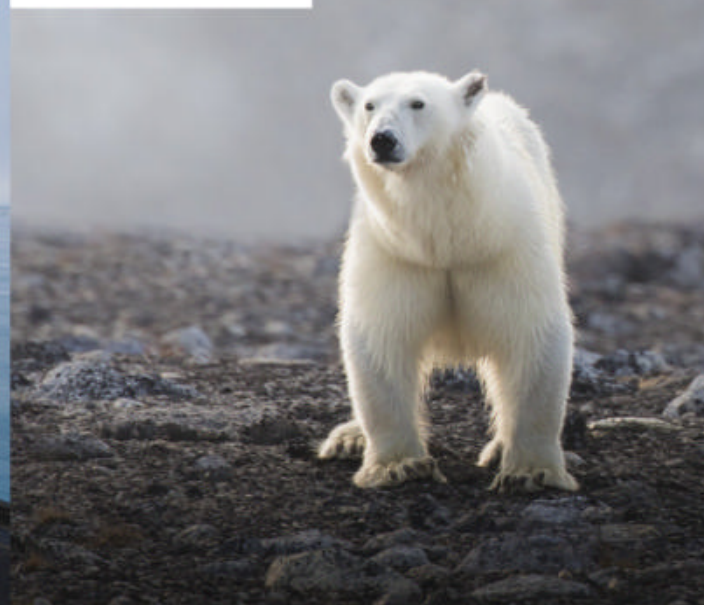
JANICE WALD HENDERSON

CRUISE



A mother polar bear near a whale carcass in Forlandsundet

Opposite: On the lookout for polar bears during a Zodiac ride



Twice-daily Zodiac sailings take us to some of the world's most vulnerable terrain. Even on the bumpiest rides, when water lashes our faces, or on the gloomiest days, so gray and misty that water, sky, and ice all blur together into a monochromatic canvas, these excursions are exhilarating. One sailing skirts the Bråsvellbreen glacier, where we watch neon turquoise waters pool along the top of the towering wall of ice before thundering down in waterfalls. "It's melting right there, before our eyes," says Karin, a fellow passenger. On one evening sail, when the sky is a luminous silver and the water a pristine periwinkle studded with marble mounds of ice, we slow down to watch a lone walrus on a floe. As he preens for our cameras, our expedition guide, Juan Berenstein, draws our attention to the blood streaking his shoulder. "Maybe it was a bite from a polar bear?" he speculates.

In the former Swedish Arctic research station of Kinnvika, we encounter something even rarer than polar bears: people. "It's an odd sort of place," Björn Svantesson tells me outside his spartan wooden cabin. He's part of a trio of Swedish conservationists dispatched to this abandoned outpost to restore a scattering of prefab huts, including a sauna ("the northernmost sauna in the world, I think"). "There's something about the untouched nature, the wildlife. It feels like a privilege to be in such a remote place," he says.

Back on board, conditions are considerably more cossetting than in Svantesson's cabin. I may love the unexpected thrills of an expedition cruise, but I also like the multicourse

ONLY BY CRUISE

"Mitarai is a remote island with traditional Edo-period architecture. Once travelers enter the village, they feel as if they have traveled back a century in time."

—RYO IJICHI, expedition leader,
Ponant, Seto Inland Sea itinerary,
launching May 2023

meals and multijet showers. Done up with 1940s Art Deco flair, the *World Navigator* has 98 rooms and suites with cloudlike beds and plush robes, as well as caviar, miso-glazed cod, and an alfresco ice cream stand. But there is one thing this opulent ship can't guarantee so far north: the internet. My aimless scrolling is easily replaced by fellow cruisers sharing tales about CIA missions in Iraq or a curious encounter with a young Michael Jackson.

The unpredictability of a sailing like this means embracing every change of plan: jumping off a massage table when you hear a rumor of a polar-bear sighting or casting aside plans to curl up with a book when the cruise director announces a polar plunge. Adventurers in these parts have long had an affinity for diving into the unknown, and, caught up in the excitement, I join the rest of my bathrobed cruise mates in the gangway to slide into the Arctic Sea. When I emerge from the glacial waters, frosty but exhilarated, a plush towel and a steaming cup of hot chocolate are waiting for me. Not a bad dose of adventure. SARAH KHAN

Atlas Ocean Voyages eight-night Longyearbyen trip, \$10,999 per person, based on double occupancy; atlasoceanvoyages.com

YOU SHOULD KNOW

More cruises are sailing in April and May and September and October in places like the Med, to avoid crowds during summer • • • Baltic itineraries haven't slowed in popularity with the closing of St. Petersburg, with many ships adding more stops in Norway instead • • • Booking windows are getting longer, with all the top cabins claimed aboard some lines into 2025