



FIRE & ICE

(and Everything in Between)

At its heart, adventure travel is about testing limits—of altitude, temperature and, at times, good sense. Here, some thrill-seeking pros explain the urge to take things to extremes.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVE MURRAY



CHILL FACTOR

Lindblad Expeditions: Steve MacLean



Lindblad Expeditions guide Steve MacLean has spent 50 years exploring the Arctic—25 of them leading cruise expeditions through some of the most remote and mind-blowingly beautiful terrain you could ever hope to see. Just don't feed the polar bears.

"I'M FROM CALIFORNIA, OF ALL places, and wherever I look there, I see the hand of man. I go to the Arctic and find nature living at its own pace. To me, this is the real world. I love it.

Most of our Arctic trips last a week, on a ship that holds 148 people. It's comfortable and there are a couple of bars, but there's no bingo or continuous buffet. We go in the summer, when it's a bit warmer—mid-30s to 40s. Come June, the sun doesn't set, so it's 24-hour daylight.

One of my favorite things is the plant life. People will say, 'There's nothing here!' So I'll say, 'Look down at your feet, these little tundra flowers.' As for animals, there are reindeer and arctic foxes, plus walruses, seals and whales, including blue whales. You know whales are big, but then you see one and it's like,

'My God, they're big!' Then, of course, there's the polar bear.

We use our Zodiac boats to creep up on a walrus or go looking for bears. Certainly, getting a good polar bear sighting is important—we don't try to see them on land, preferring to see them from the ship, but they can pop up. Sometimes they decide they don't want to 'share' our experience, and move away; other times they get curious and come right up to the ship.

It's difficult to describe the beauty of glacial ice, the magnitude of it. One of the things I like to do is to shut off the Zodiac's engines and just listen to the sounds of the glacier: the grumble, the occasional roar, the crackle as air that's been trapped for centuries is released into the atmosphere. It's a transformative experience."

XMAS IN JULY

A top pick for those who prefer snow to sand in July, the Argentine ski resort Las Leñas has some of the finest big-mountain terrain anywhere. The Marte chairlift ferries the daring to the mountain's highest point for access to white-knuckle backcountry runs. (laslenas.com)

COLD AND CHILE

For more downhill thrills south of the equator, look to Chile: Valle Nevado, at nearly 7,000 acres, is one of South America's largest ski areas, while Ski Portillo is one of its most historic and charming. Together they offer something for skiers of every skill level. (vallenevado.com; skiportillo.com)



MICHAEL S. NOLAN

PAWS FOR EFFECT While many travelers head to the Arctic with the aim of seeing a polar bear, the curiosity goes both ways

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