

Why a Trip to Canada's Remote Northern Territories Is Worth the Effort

By Sarah Purkrabek 6.9.2017 From the July/August 2017 issue

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Photo by B&C Alexander

The highlight? A seven-year-old tour guide.

On a 12-day expedition cruise around the Canadian Arctic and Greenland, AFAR contributor Sarah Purkrabek discovered that befriending a seven-year-old was just as thrilling as spotting polar bears and icebergs.

My guide wanted me to see the grocery store. She was hoping I'd buy her a soda, but I couldn't justify spending \$6 on can of Coca-Cola, no matter how good she was at her profession.

Did I mention my guide was a seven-year-old girl? I first met her when she ran excitedly to hug me as I stepped off a Zodiac boat that had just pulled into her hometown of Ikpiarjuk, an 870-person hamlet in the territory of Nunavut. Along with 180 other passengers from the *Ocean Endeavour*—a vessel operated by Adventure Canada—I had landed on Ikpiarjuk during a 12-day expedition cruise around the Canadian Arctic and Greenland. The trip is a dream for adventurers enamored with arctic landscapes and wildlife: We saw polar bears, narrow fjords, icebergs half-submerged in turquoise water.

The only way to reach this remote area is by boat or plane, and the Ikpiarjuk supply plane was late. The town's soda stock was dwindling, so the price had been jacked up higher than usual. My grade-school guru overcame her disappointment quickly and marched me across the village, pointing out landmarks. There was her cousin's house, the school, the moored sailboats where she and her friends played. There was another relative, her step-step-cousin, in a traditional *amauti* (parka) hand-sewn from seal skins and caribou hides.

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Bean went from suffering... to a sanctuary.

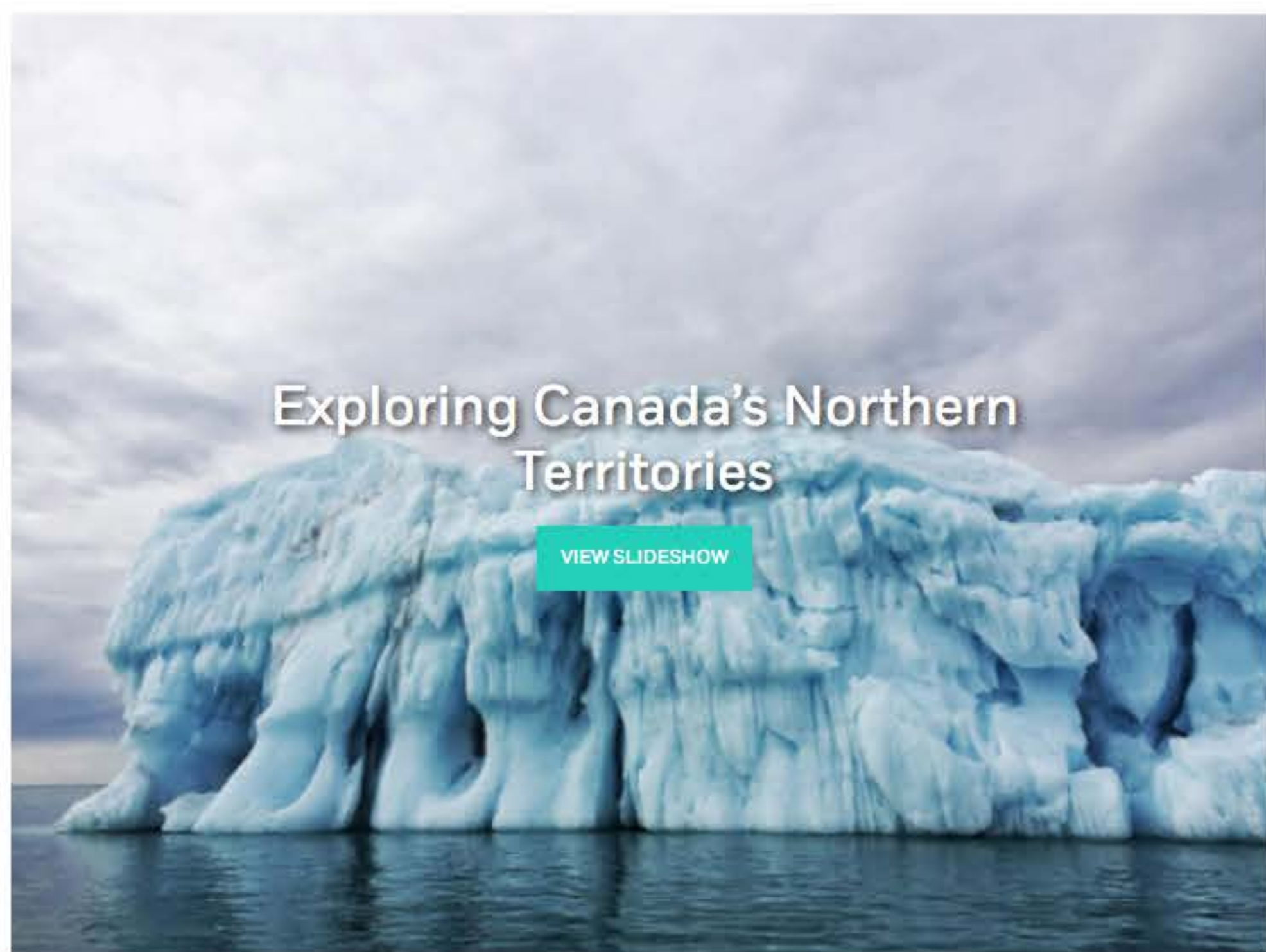


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YOU can help protect more bears like Bean.

And there was the jungle gym. By this time our group had expanded to include a bunch of little kids from the village. Clearly the playground was the grand finale. I spent the next two hours pushing swings, boosting kids up to the monkey bars, watching a series of informal gymnastics competitions. Looking back on the trip as a whole, I have the fondest memories of Ikpiarjuk, where I was more than a sightseer. I had the privilege of being someone's playmate.

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Exploring Canada's Northern Territories

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Photo by Sarah Purkrabek