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TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL

Cruise from Greenland to Nunavut full of Arctic wonders

DIANNE JACKSON AND ANDY DONATO, SPECIAL TO THE TORONTO SUN

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After an Arctic cruise, the Sun's Andy Donato was inspired to record the journey on canvas. The paintings, which are being exhibited at the U of T Faculty Club, include Yellow House in Kangaamiut, a small village on one of Greenland's remote islands.

An expedition into the heart of the Arctic -- our trip of a lifetime -- begins with a flight to Greenland, three-and-a-half hours from Toronto.

On arrival, our passports are stamped on the hood of an immigration-department pickup truck. Then we board buses bound for the wharf where our ship -- Adventure Canada's Ocean Endeavour -- waits 2.5-km offshore.

A fleet of Zodiacs takes us to the Ocean Endeavour and the next leg of the journey begins as we sail toward Sondrestromfjord above the Arctic Circle.

As the morning fog burns off, we see a magnificent glacier below massive jagged peaks, craggy with coloured detail. We seem to be almost on the glacier itself, so close is the ship's proximity.

It truly is a different world.

Our next destination is Kangaamiut -- a remote island village of some 350 people -- where we are greeted by locals in traditional black face masks, street musicians and local food.

Soon we sail for Nuuk, Greenland's capital with a population of about 17,300. While there, we visit a superb museum and cultural centre with exhibits of native artifacts, beautiful jewellery and beaded clothing. Hidden away, protected by glass, are the well preserved remains of a mummified Inuit family.

Back aboard Ocean Endeavour, our crossing of the Davis Strait begins. We spot our first iceberg, then another, and another -- wonderful ice palaces, no two alike. Heading for Canadian waters, we spend a day at sea crossing to the uninhabited Lower Savage Islands, where we take a Zodiac cruise around their perimeter.

Kimmirut -- a small community of about 200 on Baffin Island's southern peninsula -- is our next port of call. The whole town comes out to greet us -- friendly, helpful people who offer fresh bannock and a special treat of raw seal brains. The women and children wear elaborate beaded costumes, and the young men demonstrate intricate balancing acts and feats of strength.

Then it's on to Cape Dorset, a thriving community and the birthplace of Inuit printmaking. There are several active studios, where visitors can watch printmakers demonstrate the process. Many beautiful prints are on view and for sale, along with stone carvings of bears, birds and mythical creatures.

Immersed in the wilderness of the Digges Islands, we enjoy a leisurely hike amid wildflowers and nesting birds. High above, bear sentries stand watch, but none are spotted.

Cape Wolstenholme on the Hudson Strait offers drama as we see thousands upon thousands of birds fly to the cliffs where they nest. Further along into Douglas Harbour, the fjord walls rise hundreds of feet and are dotted with caribou.

En route to Iqaluit, we once again pass the aptly named Lower Savage Islands through mist, wind and waves. Our final day is spent in the bustling, colourful Nunavut capital city,

By now, words seem inadequate to describe what we've seen, what we are feeling, and what has been etched in our hearts forever by the journey.

NEED TO KNOW

DONATO'S ARCTIC

-- Andy Donato's tour of the Arctic inspired him to capture his memories on canvas. If you would like to see more of Donato's Arctic, an exhibition of 21 watercolours and 17 acrylic paintings continues through May at the U of T Faculty Club at 41 Willcocks St., Toronto.

CRUISE INFO

-- For details on expedition cruises with Adventure Canada, see adventurecanada.com.

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