

TRAIL OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS – MARCH 2018

OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 27 February 2018 – 21 March 2018

Tour Duration: 23 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$19,950

Single Supplement (\$AUD): TBC

Imagine waking up in a glass igloo in a remote forest setting with lights blazing in perpetual motion in a silent night sky. Imagine great swaying bands of colour dancing above the glass ceiling of your igloo as you watch from your cosy bed. Welcome to the greatest show on earth and the 23-day spectacular 'Trail of the Northern Lights'!

The *Trail of the Northern Lights* begins in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, before we take a breathtaking train ride to the west coast. Arriving at the beautiful city of Bergen we board our ship for a seven-day cruise along Norway's rugged west coast, past shimmering glaciers and majestic fjords to reach the most remote northern point in Europe, Kirkenes. Crossing the Norwegian/Finnish border, we reach the forest of Kakslauttanen, where we spend three nights in our unique accommodation set amongst snow-laden trees. A complete lack of pollution and unspoiled nature make this remote outpost a wonderful place to see Aurora Borealis. In the cosy warmth of glass igloos, we have multiple opportunities to see this amazing spectacle play out in the skies above us. Within the forest we move in reindeer sleighs among indigenous peoples before heading to the Gulf of Bothnia where we board an icebreaker ship for a spectacular sunrise cruise. Crossing the remote Arctic border with Russia, we reach the city of Murmansk, home to Russia's great northern naval fleet and birthplace of the Kursk submarine. From here we take the historic Murmansk to St Petersburg train – known as the Arktika – for a three-night sojourn in beautiful St Petersburg. Join us for a magnificent adventure through sweeping snowscapes and majestic fjords, on the *Trail of the Northern Lights!*

Tour Fitness Level: Active

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TOUR ITINERARY

27/02/2018 Australia – Dubai

Depart from your chosen Australian airport on the flight to Dubai.

28/02/2018 Dubai – Oslo (D)

Depart Dubai Emirates EK 159, 07.45

Arrive Oslo 12.00

The Norwegian capital lies between the Oslofjord and the green hills of Oslomarka. On the way to our hotel we visit the Viking Ships Museum and the superb 80-acre Sculpture Park. The park, located in western Oslo, features 212 sculptures by Gustav Vigeland. Every year more than one million tourists from all over the world visit the site.

Thon Hotel Opera

Oslo

01/03/2018 Oslo (BLD)

Today we explore Oslo's rich history in the grand buildings and museums at the 13th century fortress of Akershus in the centre of the city. The fortress is also a popular recreational area with wonderful views to the harbour. In the afternoon we visit the museum that houses the world's most famous polar ship, the Fram. We go aboard the ship and see how Norway's polar explorers lived and survived in the coldest places on earth more than 100 years ago.

02/03/2018 Oslo – Bergen (BLD)

Depart Oslo Train 5, 08.27

Arrive Bergen 14.57

This morning we board our train for the breathtakingly scenic journey to Bergen. Widely regarded as one of the most scenic rail journeys in the world, the train reaches the highest altitude of any train ride in Europe and passes through dramatic landscapes of magnificent glaciers, majestic forests and crystal-clear fjords. On arrival in Bergen we take a tour of this delightful city, famed for its beautifully preserved wooden houses, which are protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Early evening we board our ship for the six-night cruise north along the spectacular Norwegian coastline.

03/03/2018 Florø – Alesund (BLD)

Today we experience the breathtaking beauty of the Nordfjord. Sailing past the West Cape, we venture into open sea before navigating through skerries and islands to reach the Art Nouveau town of Ålesund. Aboard ship we have the opportunity to enjoy a colourful and enlightening presentation about the Aurora Borealis which we may begin to see in the coming days.

04/03/2018 Kristiansund – Trondheim – Rørvik (BLD)

This morning we arrive in beautiful Trondheim. The architecture and surroundings in this city create a beautiful and almost mythical setting. After exploring Trondheim we chart a northwest course, passing the beautiful Kjeungskjær lighthouse and numerous charming islets and rocky outcrops. After passing through the narrow Stoksund, the ship arrives at charming Rørvik.

05/03/2018 Bronnoysund – Svolvær (BLD)

The Arctic Circle marks the border to the Arctic region. In summer this means 24-hour daylight – often referred to as the ‘Midnight Sun’. During autumn and winter, being above this degree of latitude provides the best chances of experiencing the Northern Lights. We continue sailing along the beautiful coast of Helgeland up to Bodø with the impressive Borvass Mountains looming on the starboard side. Later this afternoon the sight of the 1,000m high Lofoten Wall appears on the horizon. The charms of the Lofoten Islands are revealed in small, picturesque fishing villages with their bohemian atmosphere.

06/03/2018 Tromsø – Skjervoy (BLD)

Arriving in Tromsø, gateway to the Arctic, we explore the town, including a visit to the Northern Lights Planetarium. After an exhilarating day, we continue our northbound journey. The ship now sails into the area along the coast where we have the best chance of seeing the Northern Lights and we gather on deck in the hope of seeing this breathtaking phenomenon.

07/03/2018 Oksfjord – Berlevåg (BLD)

Today we experience the magnificent sub-Arctic landscape as we cross the 71st parallel on our journey towards the North Cape, the northernmost point on the continent. After earlier stops in Hammerfest and Havøysund we arrive in Honningsvåg, the gateway to the spectacular North Cape. The Hurtigruten continues north, sailing into the very heartland of the indigenous Sámi people. We pass their ancient sacred site, the rock formation Finnkirka, as we approach the fishing village of Kjollefjord. Here we learn more about the lives and customs of the Sami people and explore the wonderful surrounding area.

08/03/2018 Kirkenes (BLD)

After breakfast we reach Kirkenes – 400km north of the Arctic Circle and just 15km from the Russian border. Here in this vast Barents region indigenous people live in their traditional way alongside a modern industrial society. Families from the Russian Revolution of 1917 still live in Kirkenes and signposts are in both Russian and Norwegian. Kirkenes has been the end point of the Hurtigruten for more than 100 years, yet it is also the start point of the Northern Sea Route to China, that shortens the distance of traditional shipping routes through the Suez Canal by more than 40%.

Scandic Hotel

Kirkenes

09/03/2018 Kirkenes (BLD)

Today we fully explore Kirkenes, visiting the Snow Hotel, the Russian Monument and the frontier museum. After lunch we explore the surrounding countryside and visit a typical fishing village.

10/03/2018 Kirkenes – Kakslauttanen (BLD)

Today we cross into Finland and head towards Kakslauttanen in our search for the Northern Lights. Aurora Borealis results from the collision of gaseous particles from the earth’s atmosphere with charged particles released from the sun. The subsequent burst of coloured light can last from less than a second to all night. Nestled in the wilderness near Urho Kekkonen National Park, our hotel at Kakslauttanen has one of the Arctic Circle’s best vantage points to see the Aurora Borealis. The complete lack of light pollution reveals millions of stars each night, and during March the location offers incredible views. Each of our glass igloos is fitted with thermal glass walls and ceilings that insulate the interior to keep it warm and cosy at night. The glass also contains a frost preventative, maintaining crystal clear panoramic views even when temperatures outside drop to -20 degrees Celsius.

Arctic Resort

Kakslauttanen

11/06/2018 Kakslauttanen (BLD)

This morning we experience one of the oldest ways to travel in Lapland – by reindeer sleigh. There are no petrol fumes or rumbling engines, just the swoosh of snow and the pounding of hooves as your wooden sleigh glides through the snowy landscape. This is nature in its purest form! We travel through the forests and meet with reindeer herders who live hand in hand with the wilderness. In the afternoon we visit a husky farm which is located near our resort.

12/03/2018 Kakslauttanen (BLD)

Today we have an early start as we drive south to Kemi on the Gulf of Bothnia. On arrival we board the Sampo, the former icebreaker of the Finnish government. We set sail for a unique experience as a fusion of steel, ice, sea and sunrise provides enthralling action. The thundering sound of more than 3,500 tons of steel crushing the thick ice of the vast open ice fields, combined with the ever-changing colours of the morning sky, is a unique experience that will live on in your memory long after you return home.

13/03/2018 Kakslauttanen – Murmansk (BLD)

This morning we head for the Russian border and after completing customs and immigration formalities we continue on to Murmansk. The city is located in the extreme northwest part of Russia, on the Kola Bay, an inlet of the Barents Sea on the northern shore of the Kola Peninsula. The name Murmansk is in fact a Russian term for Norwegians.

Azimut Hotel

Murmansk

14/03/2018 Murmansk (BLD)

With a population of more than 300,000, Murmansk is the largest city in the Arctic and an important Russian naval base and commercial port. During World War II (known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War), Murmansk served as a port for the Arctic convoys, and after the war became the Soviet Union's most important submarine base. The city also boasts the most northerly tram system in the world which runs through a maze of austere and gigantic Stalinist architecture. From the hills outside the city, there are fantastic views over the Kola Bay and the surrounding mountain ranges. In the afternoon we visit the nuclear icebreaker Lenin, the world's first nuclear-powered submarine which is now a museum.

15/03/2018 Murmansk – Teriberka – Murmansk (BLD)

Today we drive through undulating snow-covered tundra dotted with dwarf silver birch to reach the Arctic village of Teriberka. Originally home to Pomor settlers, Teriberka is proud of its maritime heritage, which peaked after the Second World War when large boats brought in catches of cod and haddock and the population reached 5,000. The village fell into slow decline as industry moved to bigger ports, and the economic collapse of the 1990s almost finished it off. Yet it remains remarkably atmospheric and was chosen as a film set for the award winning 2014 film 'Leviathan'.

16/03/2018 Murmansk – St Petersburg (BLD)

Depart Arktika Train 16, 09.50

The Murmansk Railroad was built by the Russian government during WWI to connect to the ice-free port of Murmansk. Construction lasted from 1914 to the spring of 1917 when the line was completed. Because of a labour shortage caused by the war, German and Austrian prisoners were pressed into service on the project from 1915 to

1917, particularly on the 1,054-kilometer northern section from Petrozavodsk to the tip of the Kola Peninsula. Although not completed in time to have a major effect on Russia's efforts in WWI, the Murmansk Railroad was to prove immensely important during the WWII.

17/03/2018 St Petersburg (LD)

Arrive St Petersburg 11.55

Formerly known as Petrograd and Leningrad, this most European of Russian cities is the country's intellectual and cultural heart. Perched on the banks of the Neva River, it is often referred to as the 'Venice of the North' because of its glorious canal system. After lunch we take a city tour of beautiful St Petersburg, seeing such sights as St Isaac's Cathedral, the Winter Palace and Peter and Paul's Fortress, where the bodies of Tsar Nicholas and his family are interred.

Angleterre Hotel

St Petersburg

18/03/2018 St Petersburg (BLD)

Today we travel out of St Petersburg to the town of Pushkin where we visit the beautiful palace of Catherine the Great. We explore the palace interior, including the recently-restored and magnificent Amber Room. This evening there may also be the opportunity to attend a performance by one of the great St Petersburg ballet companies.

19/03/2018 St Petersburg (BLD)

This morning we visit the Winter Palace. Completed in 1762, the palace was home to the Tsars until the Russian Revolution in 1917. It now houses the Hermitage Museum, arguably the world's greatest art collection. The afternoon is at leisure, providing the option of spending more time in the Hermitage. Others may prefer to stroll down the city's great boulevard, Nevsky Prospekt. In the evening there is the opportunity to attend a traditional Cossack folk show.

20/03/2018 St Petersburg – Dubai (B)

Early this morning we transfer to the airport for our flight home via Dubai.

Depart St Petersburg Emirates, EK 176, 16.25

Arrive Dubai 23.25

21/03/2018 Dubai – Australia

Connect with your flight back to Australia.