

WILD DINING

Fine dining, Inuit-fusion style, is a feast for the senses aboard Quark Expeditions' flagship, *Ultramarine*

WORDS BY JOCELYN PRIDE



PREVIOUS PAGE
A Zodiac expedition
past towering icebergs
© Jocelyn Pride

OPPOSITE Colourful
villages in Greenland
© Jocelyn Pride

Kasuutta!" we say, raising a funky cocktail made from lemon juice, blueberries, vodka and a secret ingredient that makes it fizz and turn pink when we add soda water. Loaves of focaccia, and pots of caramelised butter and sea salt with crowberries resting on reindeer antlers are spread across two tables set for 10. The napkin rings are made of seal skin.

Apparently synchronised with nature, the *iluliaq* ('iceberg') course is presented amid a chorus of 'wows' while we float past skyscraper-sized icebergs. Draped atop chunks of 10,000+ year-old ice, plump prawns and sweet snow crab nestle between turnip crudité with cream of horseradish and sprinkles of foraged leaves. A small cup of steaming seafood bisque sits beside the dish, to warm our hands and hearts.

A boutique restaurant aboard an expedition ship cruising the Arctic Circle may not be top of mind for an otherworldly foodie experience. But Quark Expeditions' exclusive Tundra to Table four-course degustation is more than culinary mastery – it's a cultural journey into the life of the Inuit: past, present and future.

GOING BACK TO GRASSROOTS

Inuit chefs Miki Siegstad and Peter Berthelsen were inspired to cook by their grandmothers. "Grandparents are very important in our families," says Siegstad. "It's how we learn to respect and live in our remote environment." When Berthelsen was six, he made pancakes for his grandmother and was instantly hooked. "I remember thinking on that day, 'I will make cooking my future.'"

The duo met at culinary college in Narsaq in southern Greenland when they were 16, and have been cooking together ever since. "When we started, most cafes and restaurants weren't serving Greenlandic food," Berthelsen explains. "People were missing it, so we wanted to embrace and support the hunters and fishers by starting pop-up restaurants." After gaining notoriety throughout the region, in 2021 they were invited by Quark Expeditions to help develop Tundra to Table as an exclusive, intimate dining experience for guests onboard their flagship Polar cruiser, *Ultramarine*. The 199 passenger, 1A+ ice class-rated ship is designed in luxurious fashion with balconied suites, a spa, sauna, fitness centre, plush lounge and dining room, plus two twin-engine helicopters at the ready for flightseeing and heli-hiking.



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SOLID ROCK

Served on fragments of ancient rock, the *asi* (landscape) course is a delicate ceviche of scallops with earthy flavours of sugar-snap peas, rye bread croutons, roasted thyme emulsion and mountain sorrel – it perfectly harmonises with our foray into the wilderness. Renowned for sustainable and authentic tourism, Quark excels in creating experiences that extend beyond the obvious.

During excursions with Siegstad and Berthelsen and other specialist guides, we explore landscapes that appear desolate, yet teem with riches – if you know where to look. We learn how to forage for edibles – mountain sorrel, angelica, fernweed, thyme, bellflowers and Labrador tea. Feel the spray from thundering waterfalls tucked into hidden valleys. And then marvel at the skills of the Inuit who brave the elements of the largest island on the planet to feed their families.

Between courses, our hosts enlighten and inspire with stories from the kitchen and beyond. "Everything you're eating is organic; nothing here lives in captivity," Siegstad says. "Even the herbs have a more intense taste because they take so long to grow in the permafrost."

The pair of chefs describe how they brainstorm ideas together to create dishes that truly showcase the ingredients. "We also want our food to balance in texture, colour, crunch and look beautiful on the plate."

ABOVE, LEFT The Tundra to Table dining experience

ABOVE, RIGHT Plating up the dessert course © Singh Nicolas

OPPOSITE PAGE Wild Arctic expeditions © Jocelyn Pride





HUNTING AND GATHERING

Piniartup nerisai ('hunters' meal) is our main course.

"Hunting isn't just for hunting's sake – it's survival," Siegstad clarifies. "In our culture we respect all living things, whether it's a small fish or large whale." As the 'canary in the coalmine' of the climate crisis, the Arctic is warming faster than any other part of the world, and food insecurity is a sad reality. Siegstad explains that all ingredients in the Tundra to Table are ethically sourced, and the needs of locals come first.

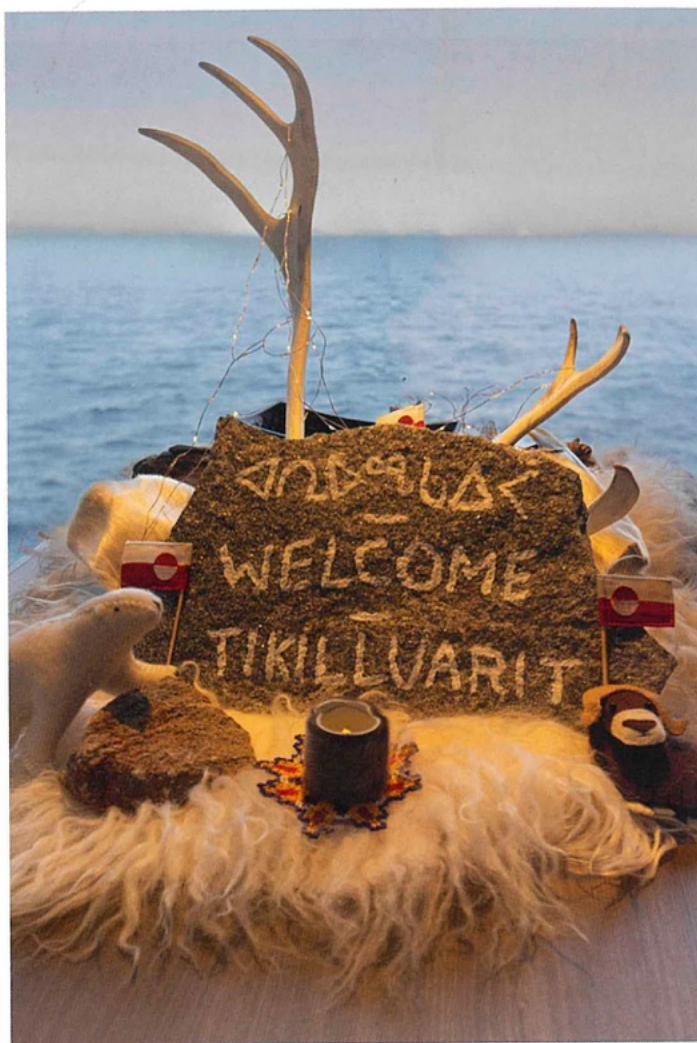
We have a choice of confit of muskox or Atlantic cod, both served with baby broccoli, beetroot puree, salt-baked onion, pommes Ejvind with Labrador tea *beurre blanc*. I'm keen to try muskox, especially after hearing Berthelsen reflect on his first hunt when he was nine, earlier in the week. "My father said if I got one, I must carry it myself, so I aimed for a calf."

Weighing up to 400 kilograms, the muskox is one of the only hoofed animals left from the last Ice Age, but on my Quark plate, it tastes far from 'old'. The meat is dense, cuts like butter and is surprisingly sweet, marrying perfectly with the onion and silky texture of the puree.

GREENLAND'S NATIONAL DISH

Issittumi seqernup tarrikkiartornera ('Arctic sunset'), is our final course, and it's a beauty. "Every family has their own recipe for a *kaffemik* ('coffee and cake')," says Berthelsen. "It's our tradition." With conditions good for foraging, the cake of the bitter-sweet 'herb of angels' (angelica) with Labrador tea and Greenlandic honey cream is topped with sublime bellflower sorbet made from glacier ice the chefs collected on a Zodiac ride around Cape York on the northwest coast.

"*Qujanaq* ('thank you'). *Qujanaq!*" we cry, breaking into thunderous applause and jumping to our feet. "*Pilluarit* ('congratulations') Miki and Peter." It's almost midnight. Outside, the icebergs take on hues of blue as streaks of pastel pinks and orange fill the sky and the sun sinks into the horizon. This is truly a meal for all the senses.



JOURNEY NOTES

Tundra to Table is exclusive to Quark Expeditions and offered as an added extra onboard *Ultramarine* on four designated Arctic itineraries each year, ranging from 10 to 17 days. The cost as a supplement is around AU\$200 per person. The meal is limited to 20 diners and early bookings are highly recommended. Profits generated from the feast go to support food-focused initiatives in the Arctic.

Rates for the 10-day 'West Greenland Ice Odyssey' start from US\$5,756 (around AU\$9,290). Wi-Fi and alcohol are complimentary on all voyages and each guest receives a signature Quark Expeditions parka to take home. quarkexpeditons.com

TOP, LEFT *Ultramarine* in the Arctic © Jocelyn Pride

TOP, RIGHT A warm welcome © Jocelyn Pride

