

The Sound of White

Walking with polar bears in Arctic Canada
with **Christine Retschlag**

If the colour white could be described as a feeling it would be pure calm. When I embarked on this journey, which started on a nine-seater plane flying over the Arctic to remote Seal River Heritage Lodge on Canada's Hudson Bay, I didn't imagine that I would feel calm – rather the opposite. But the pure perfection of those first flurries of snow announcing winter and the pristine fur of the polar bears who call this region home offers immediate respite. White is a quiet colour and so are the polar bears, their paws designed to glide effortlessly and quietly across the Arctic tundra on which I find myself. Some might argue this is pure madness, indulging in a polar bear walking safari. Yes, there's no vehicle to protect me, just the well-trained guides at Churchill Wild. There's testosterone out on the ice, both from the guides and the bears,

but I keep coming back to the white. White is a cool colour, and there are temperatures to match – it dropped to a chilly -14°C. When we were about 150 metres from the lodge a 400kg male with a scar over his eye ambled toward us, his huge bottom waddling almost comically. We were instructed to stand together as our guide began 'negotiations', chatting to him as if he was an old friend, disarming him with a human voice. Curious, the bear came within metres before moving on. I should have felt fear – the world's largest land carnivore could have killed me in an instant – but instead I felt bliss. Calm. White. **H**

// The writer travelled to Canada as a guest of Destination Canada (keepexploring.com.au) and Churchill Wild (churchillwild.com)



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