

A COSMOS OF COLOUR

On an expedition to the wilderness of Norway's Svalbard, the Arctic skies put on an unforgettable show.
Words: Connor McGovern

Just two lazy guard dogs separate me from the Arctic wilderness.

The rest of the group is perched around a dining table, blankets tucked over laps, fingertips finally defrosted. Comfortably sealed off in a heated, tented bubble, they eat carrot cake and sip tea. Dinner is winding down now, both the wine and the fatigue of a day's snowmobiling lulling us all into a stupor.

But nature has called, so I've slipped outside. Shrouded in wintry darkness, Svalbard's ceaseless expanse of winter is all I can see: a ghostly off-blue blanket of

thick snow sprawling outwards, onwards and upwards. Out there, polar bears roam the land, avalanches pose a genuine risk, and the temperature is in the region of -20C. Our guard dogs, all wagging tails and pricked ears when we arrived, are now curled up in their beds. I, like them, have decided to ignore the dangers.

For now I'm too busy admiring the sky. Stretching above is an almost faultless canvas of black; the sort city dwellers never see. And it's heavy with stars: some beacons of white, others wispy trails of faraway dust. An occasional comet races through the sky, and sprinkled throughout are ethereal clouds of bluish purple.

But the inky heavens, stars, and billows of Milky

Way are merely the support acts. For now, snaking through the sky, come enormous, jade-green ribbons of aurora, licking upwards from the horizon like languid flames, or weaving across the black and disappearing behind the mountains. In a landscape so hostile and unforgiving, I find solace beneath this cloudless evening sky. The temperature doesn't seem to matter as I stand alone in the snow; the night sky is rarely this colourful — and seldom so beautiful.

Cloaking it all is the unmistakable sense of silence — one most never experience.

I can see plenty, but hear nothing.

They say silence is golden, but now I know differently. In Svalbard, at least, silence is a cosmos of colour.

In five
Silence is rarely just golden

Two days of snowmobiling, with one night at North Pole Camp starts at NOK 9,990 (£929), full board, or from NOK 6,990 (£650) if you don't want to drive your own snowmobile.

basecampexplorer.com/no/svalbard

MORE INFO: visitnorway.com