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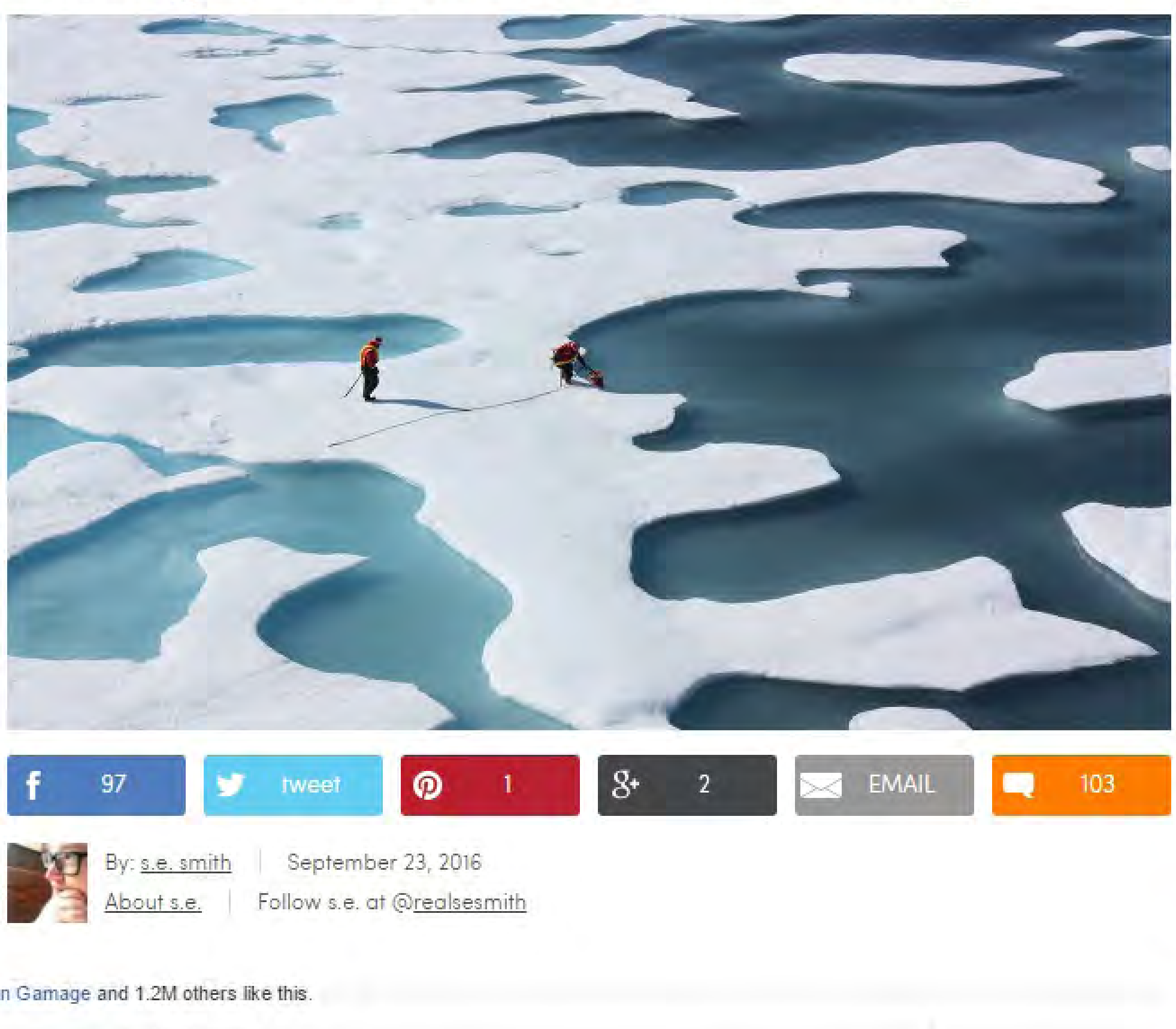
A Cruise Ship Just Sailed the Northwest Passage, Thanks to Climate Change



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By: s.e. smith | September 23, 2016
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It wasn't until 1906 that Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen successfully — but with extreme difficulty — navigated what had, until then, been a theoretical journey. In the years since, heavily fortified ships with icebreakers could only make it through the floes of the Arctic in summer, when sea ice was at its lowest.

Now, a massive 14-deck cruise ship has completed the journey that was a pipe dream just over one hundred years ago — and it's raising a lot of concerns.

It took the Crystal Serenity just a month to glide through the waters from Alaska to New York — Amundsen needed three years.

What made this speedy voyage possible?

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Climate change.

Rising temperatures have contributed to radical shrinkage of Arctic ice in a disturbingly short period of time. Researcher Peter Wadham, who has spent decades in the Arctic, predicts that the region will be free of ice by the middle of the century, which means that cruises like this one could become a lot more common.

"Extinction tourism" may be popular, but it comes at a high cost — and with a bitter legacy.

Arctic nations and indigenous people in the area have expressed concern about an increase in visitors.

Nunavut is already weighing restrictions on cruise ships and considering the impacts of maritime tourism. They're proposing limits on the number of people allowed ashore to reduce the strain on resources for highly isolated communities — especially since cruise ships only visit during a brief period of the year and cannot be considered a reliable source of income.

Canadian officials are also concerned about what the opening of the passage will mean for maritime sovereignty, as nations like China are eager to exploit the newly-navigable waters of the North.

But this comes with more than just political and social implications. There's a larger question at hand as we turn climate change into a tourist attraction.

The disappearance of sea ice is an indicator that climate change is progressing at a rate that's too rapid to stop. This won't just mean rising sea levels caused by melting ice — it could also speed up the warming of the climate.

Ice is more reflective than water and, thus, bounces radiation off the Earth's surface rather than absorbing it. The ice also acts like a giant cooler, chilling the air as it passes over and contributing climate control to Arctic nations.

The firm is already planning another cruise for 2017, even though some of the attractions it was hoping to showcase aren't readily available. Polar bears, for instance, have nowhere to go in a landscape of dwindling ice.

While wealthy cruisers pay upwards of $100,000 for the privilege of watching the world fall apart around them, local communities stand to hurt the most — and they're likely to ultimately join the growing ranks of climate refugees.

Photo credit: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

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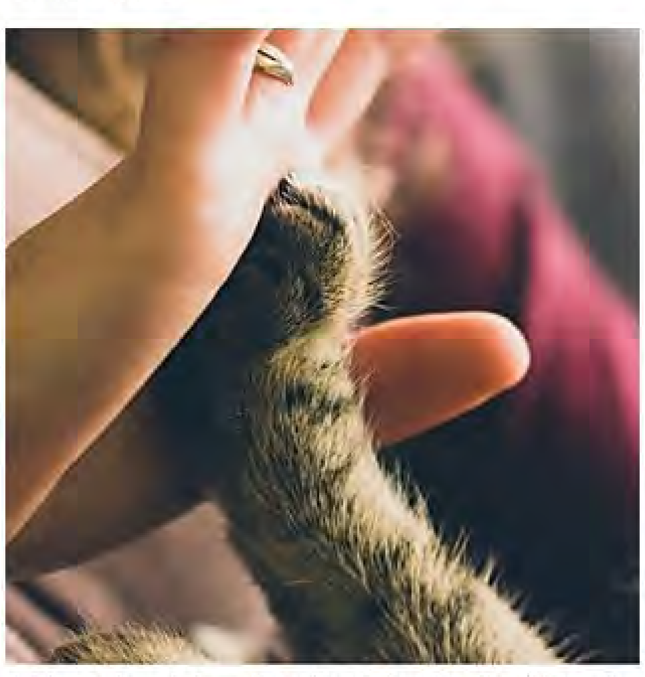

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renee lusian *7 hours ago*
We chose to live with our heads under the sand. I'd like to say up our ass,
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Dan Blossfeld *8 hours ago*
Patricia H.,
Unfortunately, the media leads the people to believe that there are only two viewpoints on climate change. One group (and political party) believes that it is a hoax, every change is natural, and there is nothing to worry about. The other group (and other political party) believes that we are past the tipping point, we are doomed, and there is nothing we can do about it. Fortunately, most people, especially scientists, believe that any change is a result of both natural and man made causes, and that these effects are not catastrophic, and are reversible. The problem is that both are political parties want to institute policies that benefit their donors, rather than the people, or the greater good. Once we convince the rest of the people of this, maybe they we stop believing both parties.
SEND

chris B. *14 hours ago*
Remember - now Trump will invade THAT space for oil. Be careful who you vote for. He is not the answer. Unless the answer is 'how fast can we destroy our planet'.
SEND

chris B. *14 hours ago*
I thought we tried to stop that. We should not be proud of this feat. We will only destroy anything we touch. This is very sad. Not an accomplishment. It's actually our fault that it was possible.
SEND

Muff-Anne York-Haley *yesterday*
:(
SEND

Sam Dyson *yesterday*
TY
SEND

Patricia H. *yesterday*
Danielle Menauge, good point, as we all know that nothing good ever comes from disaster.
SEND

Danielle Menauge *yesterday*
I'd rather say because of climate change instead of thanks to climate change! Nothing good in view for oceans and sea creatures
SEND

Teresa Antela *yesterday*
Scary.
SEND

Quanta Kiran *yesterday*
no global warming is a hoax! unfortunately it seems we are past the tipping point.
SEND

view all 103 comments

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