



Breaking the Ice

I fell through the ice on a drift ice walk in northern Japan
By Yvonne Gordon

“NOT THERE!” SAYS THE GUIDE. Too late, I think, as my left foot disappears into a slushy mix of water and ice, swiftly followed by my right foot and then the rest of my legs. It’s the first day of a multi-adventure trip that includes the questionable activity of drift ice walking—trekking across a frozen sea made up of ice piles and slurry holes for the thrill of it. I’ve now not only realized my fear of falling through the ice but also embarrassed myself in front of the ten super cool adventure travelers that I’ve only just met.

When we arrived on the Shiretoko Peninsula of Hokkaido, Japan the evening before, we got our first glimpse of the frozen sea as a huge orange sun was setting over piles of drift ice that had gathered along the shore. Our hotel overlooked a harbor where piers and breakwaters were set into a huge still sheet of white ice. Fishing boats sat quietly on cradles on the shore; a lonely lighthouse flashed at the end of the pier.

It looked amazing in the evening light, but also a bit terrifying, as the snow on top of the ice made

it appear quite breakable, and I’d have to soon walk on it.

The next morning we meet our guides at the shoreline and change into large drysuits with built-in hoods and rubber boots. My suit is so plump I end up waddling with my arms slightly out like a penguin. As we waddle, we pass a large

For anyone who didn’t see what happened, it looks like a different type of accident.

“Danger” sign warning pedestrians not to walk on the ice, but that’s exactly what we’re about to do. Some of the ice is clear and glassy, while other sections are covered in snow drifts, which the guides warn us can cover holes.

I take my first step onto the ice and get slight butterflies in my

stomach, a mix of fear and excitement. I have to remind myself why I am doing this: the thrill!

At first I try to step only where the guide in front of me has walked. It’s not so bad—the frozen sea surface stretches way off in the distance and seems to seamlessly connect with the cloudy white sky. Sometimes the ice collects into haphazard clumps, perhaps when large pieces collided during the ebb and flow of the tide.

We come to a particularly large pile of ice. Around the bottom, where it joins some rocks, the surface is mushy and we have to climb up over it. That’s when I manage to put my foot in the wrong place and sink into the frigid sea below. Thankfully, the two guides on either side of me catch me by each arm before too much of me goes under. For anyone who didn’t see what just happened, it looks like I had a different type of accident. Somehow, everyone but me has managed to stay dry. >

As we trek on, our guide finds a swimming pool-sized hole in the ice. The water is dark and there's no telling how deep it is. Seems like the kind of thing we're supposed to avoid, but he wants us to climb in for a dip. My instinct say "no way," but I remind myself that I look like a penguin who's peed her feathers. Besides, I don't want to regret missing out on something I'll probably never have the chance to do again. I mince my way in as if it's my first swimming lesson, push off from the edge and float. I even manage a smile. Getting out proves to be a challenge, however, so two guides drag me along the ice on my belly, like a fresh baby seal hauled off by a polar bear.

Over the following days, nearly everyone in the group has some sort of tumble, including a guide who takes a decidedly ungrace-

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ful spill during a skishoeing (a combo of skiing and snowshoeing) outing in the forest. Seeing all this helps me recover my dignity enough to sign up to walk on frozen ice again: this time to go out onto Lake Akan to watch the sunrise.

It's a crisp 5°F morning. When we reach the ice, I strike a balance between following the guide closely enough to walk in his exact footsteps, but far enough back that he doesn't realize he has a stalker.

After half an hour, I gain enough confidence to wander a bit on my own and make fresh tracks. I'm soon back to my dangerous old ways, lying on some shiny-looking ice to get a photo of ice flowers that have formed in the cold temperatures. If the ice cracks, I reason that the water would be shallow as it's near the shore. And at least this time if I go through it, I've taken time to admire the flowers along the way.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Romance Is Not Dead

Hotel staffs around the world often help guests ask the most important question of their lives: "Will you marry me?" Here, they recount their favorite moments *By Amber Love Bond*



FISH IN THE SEA

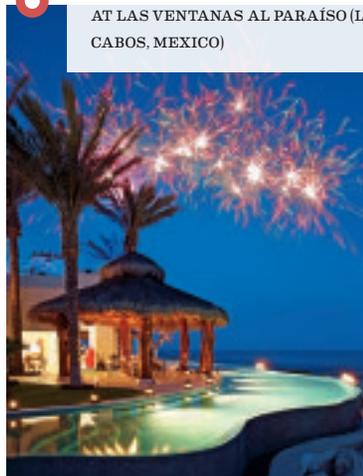
"This couple met in dive school. With the help of our underwater photographer and dive team, the boyfriend planned an underwater proposal that ended with a bride-to-be saying [or nodding] yes."

—MARSHA-ANN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF ROMANCE AT SANDALS SOUTH COAST RESORT (WHITEHOUSE, JAMAICA)

HEARTS ON FIRE

"The girlfriend found a note and red rose that led her to the plaza. There were candles, rose petals and a violinist, and her boyfriend on one knee. I handed them a box that caused heart-shaped fireworks to begin [in the plaza]."

—ROMINA TORRES, COORDINATOR AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ROMANCE AT LAS VENTANAS AL PARAÍSO (LOS CABOS, MEXICO)



WORTH THE TREK

"The future fiancé was woken up by staff for a hike, even though she doesn't like hiking. Every so often she was handed a video from her partner encouraging her to keep going and that it'd be worth it. At the top, he was waiting on one knee."

—ANISHA MAXIMIN, EVENTS MANAGER, SUGAR BEACH (SAINT LUCIA)

FAMILY AFFAIR

"A private jet got her to the hotel, where singers welcomed her with John Legend's 'All of Me.' The penthouse was filled with candles leading to the terrace with the boyfriend on one knee and 'Will You Marry Me?' in LED lights, along with the surprise arrival of friends and family."

—PETER BETZ, EXECUTIVE CHEF AT THE INTERCONTINENTAL NEW YORK BARCLAY



TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY OF SANDALS; COURTESY OF SUGAR BEACH; ERHARD PREIFFER AND COURTESY OF THE INTERCONTINENTAL NEW YORK BARCLAY