



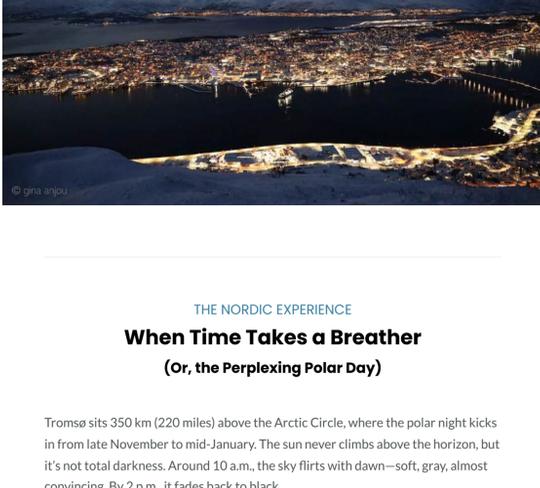
# Chasing Twilight: My Polar Night Report



Hey there,

Hope your year's off to a solid (or at least inspired) start! I know you're dying to ask: *Did Gina's Nordic adventure serve up magic, madness, or a bit of both?* Let's just say, it delivered.

Tromsø sits a swirl of snow-laced streets, northern lights playing hard to get, and an eerie stillness that made the whole place feel like it was holding its breath. Polar night messes with your sense of time—each day, the sky dipped into deep blues and moody purples for a few fleeting hours before sinking back into darkness. Surreal.



## THE NORDIC EXPERIENCE

### When Time Takes a Breather (Or, the Perplexing Polar Day)

Tromsø sits 350 km (220 miles) above the Arctic Circle, where the polar night kicks in from late November to mid-January. The sun never climbs above the horizon, but it's not total darkness. Around 10 a.m., the sky flirts with dawn—soft, gray, almost convincing. By 2 p.m., it fades back to black.

And let me tell you—it's confusing. In the fake dawn, I felt oddly refreshed, like I'd just woken up with a full night's sleep and a solid breakfast. But by noon? My stomach was already screaming for dinner. Every day, the same mental whiplash: *Wait, is the sun rising? Nope. Noon already? Dinner time? But I just had breakfast!*

A constant loop of *what even is time?*—like my brain was buffering reality. Compared to that, -17°C (1°F) barely registered. Wild watching your mind try (and fail) to make sense of a world that plays by its own rules. Guess that's how life is for AI.

## MY THREE FAVORITE SENSORY MOMENTS

### 1. Northern Lights – A Game of Luck & Timing

Spotting the aurora takes clear skies, geomagnetic activity, and a guide who knows where to look. December isn't prime season, but with the solar cycle in our favor, the odds were decent.

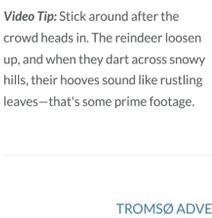
**Photo Challenge:** In real life, they're a ghostly shimmer—a whisper of color drifting across the sky; nothing like the neon streaks in photos (mine here included).



### 2. Orcas – Feasting at the Herring Buffet

North Atlantic Type 1 orcas (for the curious) trail the massive winter herring migration into the northern fjords. Typically, they hunt in pods, corralling fish into tight balls before striking. Here, the herring practically serve themselves.

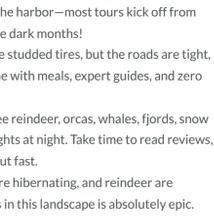
**Photo Challenge:** Tough to shoot—waves, small boats, and very fast orcas that surface and vanish before you can hit the shutter. 400mm lens.



### 3. Reindeer Feeding – From Grazing to Stew

This isn't exactly "wildlife safari" material. First, you hand-feed them; then, you're handed a bowl of reindeer stew while listening to Sami stories—which, to be fair, are cool.

**Video Tip:** Stick around after the crowd heads in. The reindeer loosen up, and when they dart across snowy hills, their hooves sound like rustling leaves—that's some prime footage.



## TROMSØ ADVENT TIME TRAVEL TIPS

- Accommodation:** Stay central—near the harbor—most tours kick off from there. Convenience is everything in the dark months!
- Self-Drive vs. Guided Tours:** Cars have studded tires, but the roads are tight, dark, and icy. Tours are pricey but come with meals, expert guides, and zero hassle. Worth the splurge?
- Excursions:** Most go for day trips to see reindeer, orcas, whales, fjords, snow adventures, and chase the northern lights at night. Take time to read reviews, then book early—the good tours sell out fast.
- Wildlife:** Keep it real—most animals are hibernating, and reindeer are herded, but scouting for rare sightings in this landscape is absolutely epic.
- Food:** Not cheap, but so good! Lots of vegetarian options, too—vegans, you might need to hunt a bit. If you love fish and seafood, you're in heaven!



## The Nordic Quiz Master

Did the arctic explorer Roald Amundsen come from Tromsø? +

Not quite—Roald Amundsen was born in Borge, Norway, but he spent much of his later life in Tromsø, using it as a base for his legendary polar expeditions. He famously disappeared on a rescue mission that departed from there. If you want to dive into his story, check out the Polar Museum's exhibition dedicated to his life and adventures. Stay tuned—you'll hear more about him in my upcoming book: <https://iamantarctica.com/>.

Orcas are found in every ocean, but where's the highest density? +

Antarctica takes the crown, with plenty of prey and hardly any humans. In the North Atlantic, Norway leads the pack, especially when winter fjords fill with herring. For some fascinating facts, check out the Norwegian Orca Survey: <https://www.norwegianorcasurvey.no/>

Which Arctic animal changes its eye color with the seasons? +

Reindeer! In the polar winter, their eyes shift from gold to blue to help them see better in low light and detect UV light. This change is thanks to a special layer in their eyes that boosts light sensitivity. It's subtle, so it's hard to spot in photos, but with the right lighting or a close-up, you can see it—like in the picture above. Pretty wild, right?

## ALCHEMIST'S TOOLKIT

### Winter Reading Gems

The best part of the dark season? All that extra "indoors time"—perfect for curling up by the fire with a great book. As I gear up to pivot from northern lights to cherry blossoms, Japanese writers have taken over my winter reading list. Four books, in particular, really stuck with me.

From Murakami's mind-exploring self-discovery to Basho's poetic reflections on nature, Ishiguro's character explorations, and Natsume's witty cat observations, these books all dive into how we navigate the world. With humor, deep thoughts, and surreal twists, they beautifully capture the messy complexity of being human. If you've got time for just one, I'd say go with Murakami.

**HARUKI MURAKAMI**  
**The City and its Uncertain Walls (2024)**

A surreal, introspective journey where a man confronts his past, questions his identity, and navigates a city that blurs the line between reality and illusion. Murakami invites us to reflect on how much of our reality is shaped by the walls—both literal and metaphorical—that we build around ourselves.

**MATSUO BASHO**  
**The Narrow Road to the Deep North (1689)**

Written during the Edo period, this collection captures Basho's travels through rural Japan, blending poetic haikus with deep reflections on nature, life, and the fleeting beauty of existence. It urges us to find meaning in life's smallest, most transient moments.

**KAZUO ISHIGURO**  
**Nocturnes (2009)**

Set where memory and music intertwine, this collection explores the lives of individuals facing loss, regret, and the passing of time. Ishiguro examines how the past lingers in the present, urging us to find meaning in moments of beauty and connection despite memory's limitations.

**SOSEKI NATSUME**  
**I Am a Cat (1905)**

Narrated by a witty, unnamed cat, this satirical novel critiques Japanese society during the Meiji era. Through the cat's perspective, it explores human nature and social dynamics, highlighting the absurdities of life and the complexities of identity in a rapidly modernizing world.

## HEALTH & WINTER WELLNESS

### Turmeric or "Golden" Milk



"What's that yellow stuff?" I get asked all the time when folks swing by for a winter sip.

It's turmeric milk, aka "golden milk"—the cozy bev that does it all.

With anti-inflammatory turmeric, creamy milk, honey, and a dash of black pepper, it's like a warm hug for your insides.

It's been an Ayurvedic staple forever, helping with everything from immunity to sleep.

Like my winter reads, it's all about finding comfort in the simple moments.

## OUTLOOK

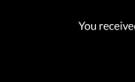
### Soulful Simplicity

Later this month, I'm swapping the northern lights for something equally fleeting—Japan's cherry blossoms. You're catching the drift: like the aurora, sakura season is all about impermanence—beauty that arrives, dazzles, and vanishes in the blink of an eye.

In Japan they have a term for it - mono no aware (物の哀れ) which basically means "the beauty in knowing things don't last." It's that bittersweet feeling when you see something gorgeous, knowing it's already fading—like cherry blossoms falling or the sun setting. It's about fully embracing the moment, even as it slips away.

I often find myself wanting to hold onto such moments. Many cultures have perfected the art of capturing life's transient beauty through photography or writing. But often, trying to preserve the moment subtracts from the experience itself.

So, at the end of my trip, I've chosen a serene temple near Mt. Fuji to practice the art of mindful simplicity—meditating on the beauty of cherry blossoms, fully present in their impermanence, without the urge to hold onto them.



I'll let you know how it goes.  
Happy Spring!

*Gina Anjou*  
Founder of the Soulful Nature Shift Program



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