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Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 24: Homey Comforts While At Sea

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After the novelty of being at sea wears off and thoughts of Fiji start replacing those of frostbite, crewmembers and scientists aboard the *CCGS Louis S St-Laurent* look to familiar comforts to remind them of warmer days and loved ones back home, or just to provide an escape for a little while.

The comforts vary from edible treats to lifelong stuffed companions. These are the unnecessary necessaries packed in people's luggage. In the admittedly cushy environment of the Louis, these things exemplify the personal items people just can't go without.

On every cruise she boards, Kristina Brown, an oceanographer with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), brings a stuffed bear that she received after graduating 8th grade. "It's nice to have something in your cabin that comes from home," she says, "little things that make your room look different than the rest of the ship."

The stuffed animal, affectionately named Bear, has been around the world. In addition to trips to Mexico, Switzerland, the Northern Pacific, and the Arctic, Bear has even made a rare trip through the Northwest Passage.

Coast Guard Cadet Leann Morgan brought along a stuffed moose she's had since she was a child. "He goes with me everywhere," she says. "I want to be buried with this moose."

Cadet Leann Morgan will be buried with this moose.

Many married crewmembers and scientists have images of family members as the backgrounds on their laptops, which offer reminders of home every time they check their email or send an urgent Facebook message. At lest one crewmember, Dan Dunlap, keeps a photo of his family on the wall of his cabin.

Other items brought to the boat provide entertainment. One scientist brought an external hard drive with a terabyte of movies and television shows that remains installed one the TV in one of the ship's lounges. Most nights, the lounge's wraparound couch is full with an audience.

DFO's Linda White brought a small collection of books, including a brief history of Islam and an account of a prehistoric man recently discovered preserved in the ice of the Alps.

The *Louis* comes with its population of coffee and tea addicts who can't imagine four weeks without their preferred brew.

Eri Yoshizawa, a researcher from the Kitami Institute of Technology in Japan, brought along a private stash of green tea. DFO's Glenn Cooper brought along his own sack of Seattle's Best extra smooth organic blend coffee. "This is my comfort," he says.

Arctic Wrangler Cooper adapts his coffee consumption to the rugged environment of the Arctic. Up North, he primarily drinks cowboy coffee, a mixture of coffee grounds and hot water steeped in a mug. Though Cooper enjoys this grainy reminder of home, on his next trip to sea he plans to bring a French press.

Though entertainment provides a temporary respite from the Arctic, the majority of extra items people bring seem to remind them of the one thing that really makes you feel like you're home again: food.

Anticipating a longing for the gustatory comforts of home, Yong Kim, a filmmaker from the Educational Broadcasting System in South Korea, brought his own jar of gochujang, a hot pepper paste common in Korean cuisine. Kim shares the condiment with two other Koreans on board, which they often mix with rice.

One snackaholic scientist brought his own stash of dried mangoes. Brown brought her snack food staples, black licorice and dark chocolate.

For Brown bringing treats from home doesn't remind her of a world she would rather be in. "These things," she says, "just make my time here even better."

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