

Iceland, Jan Mayen & Svalbard

Aboard *Sylvia Earle* | 14 – 27 June 2023





Reykjavik

DAY 1 | Wednesday 14 June 2023

Position at 1920 on Jun 14

Latitude: 64° 12.396'N

Longitude: 021° 59.380'W

Course: 298°

Speed: 10.3 knots

Wind Speed: 13.4 knots SW

Barometer: 1019

Air Temp: 13°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Today we started with a guided Golden Circle and Geothermal Energy tour. Our journey took us to the famous seismic sights of the Golden Circle route - Gullfoss waterfall, Geysir, and history-rich Thingvellir National Park, before we experienced first-hand how green, sustainable energy is produced at one of the largest single-site geothermal power plants on the planet at the Geothermal Energy Exhibition and Ljósafossvirkjun Power Station.

After the tour it was back to Reykjavik and onto Sundahöfen Cruise Terminal (Berth = Skarkabakki 315) to meet the *Sylvia Earle* and the Aurora Expeditions team/crew.

At the port we were welcomed by Expedition Leader Howard and Assistant Expedition Leader Dot. Follow that with a quick stamp in the passport, a photo with Scott and Justine then it was up the gangway to check-in at reception.

During check-in, we had time to enjoy embarkation refreshments before the ship's crew helped us navigate the decks to our cabins - our home away from home for the next 15 days. Howard then called us together to welcome us aboard the *Sylvia Earle*.

In the Lecture Theatre we were introduced to Aurora's Expedition Team, the Ship's Doctor, the Hotel Director, and his head of departments.

With a slight juggle to the plan, it was time to receive our lifeboat and safety briefing and ready ourselves for the abandon ship drill. The sound of seven-short-one-long rings from the ship's signal system was our cue to don warm clothes, bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster station to sample our safety gear. Our safety officers and crew guided us to the lifeboats to familiarise us with their whereabouts.

The Polar Class life vessels can hold 136 people each for five days!

As dinner approached, we completed our expedition jacket swap and were now fully prepared to face whatever weather the Arctic throws our way!

Equipped with a healthy appetite, we made our way to the Gentoo Restaurant to enjoy a delicious dinner prepared by our talented galley team and served by our welcoming wait staff.

After dinner it was time to gather once more for our mandatory Zodiac briefing. We learnt about the "Zodiac three-step", which will soon become second nature. Finally, our six intrepid kayakers met with their guides, Ivan and Wes for a quick overview of the kayak program and what was in store for the days ahead.

A lot of information to take in, but necessary so we could get started with our adventure to the Snæfellsnes Peninsula on June 15th.

Together we total 37 Expeditioners from Australia (8), Finland (1), India (1), Ireland (1), UK (6), and USA (20), an international Expedition Team and 86 ships crew from around the globe. We also have two local guides Diddi and Siggie to share their knowledge of their homeland with us.

After hours of travel to reach this corner of the world, it's time to kick back, breathe in the Icelandic air, and enjoy exploring the wonders of this magical land before we make our way north to Jan Mayen.



Snæfellsness Peninsula

DAY 2 | Thursday 15 June

Position at 0700 on Jun 15

Latitude: 65° 05.041' N

Longitude: 022° 43.263' W

Course: 103°

Speed: At anchor

Wind Speed: 2 knots NE

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 10°C

A first walk in any new country is one of the things which makes life on this planet worth being grateful for.

—Charles William Beebe

Today we anchored outside the town of Stykkishólmur, where we got into our Zodiacs and took a ride to the wharf. From there, we divided into buses with our local guides to explore Snæfellsness peninsula.

During our bus ride, we experienced incredible views of sprawling lava fields, and passed by grazing horses and sheep. We saw abstract sculptures formed by lava, valleys carved by snow and ice, and a glacier peeking from the mountains. Our first impression of Iceland showed us how varied and otherworldly the landscape can be.

After stopping for a brief walk at some lava fields, we headed for Ytri Tunga. There, we walked on a beach containing minke whale bones, layers and layers of seaweed, and lounging seals (both harbor seals and grey seals).

Our tour also included a stop at some impressive bird cliffs at Arnarstapi, screeching with kittiwakes and arctic terns as they circled around us. The green color of the surrounding hillsides showed us how important the birds are to fertilizing the area.

We were able to walk along the cliffs until we reached the statue of Bárður: a descendant of giants and men. He was the son of a king in Scandinavia, and he staked claim to the land of Laugabrekka by the Snæfell glacier at the end of the 9th century. Later in life, Bárður's giant nature became ever more apparent. In the end, he disappeared into Snæfell glacier and became a nature spirit.

The black sand beach at Djúpalónssandur offered basalt cliffs in all directions, allowing us to experience Iceland's rugged coastline. Scattered on the beach were iron remains from a shipwreck: a British trawler, the Epine GY 7, from 1948. As waves crashed against the shore, it was easy to imagine the rough conditions that many vessels have had to endure in Icelandic waters.

Some of us tested our strength by lifting the heavy stones at the beach, where we learned how sailors who rowed out from Dritvík did the very same—if they wanted to be eligible as an oarsman rowing a boat, they needed to be able to lift Hálfdrættingur (a 54kg/120lb stone) to a platform at least hip-high.

Our last stop was Kirkjufell mountain and the nearby waterfall, Kirkjufellsfoss. Kirkjufell means "Church Mountain,"



Patreksfjörður

DAY 3 | Friday 16 June 2023

Position at 0830 on Jun 16

Latitude: 65°35'754 N

Longitude: 24°00.358'W

Course: 057.2°

Speed: Alongside

Wind Speed: 15.3 knots, SE

Barometer: 1019

Air Temp: 16°C

Land was created to provide a place for boats to visit.

—Brook Atkinson

This morning we entered the Icelandic fjord of Patreksfjordur, conditions were calm with light winds and an overcast sky. After docking, we boarded two buses again to take us on our second day of exploring.

Our first site to visit was Rauðasandur (red sand) beach, a unique beach as most beaches in Iceland have black sand. We took the opportunity here to give back to Iceland by doing a beach clean-up where we filled several bags with old fishing nets, ropes and other plastics. The tidal flats behind the beach here provide a great habitat for many birds, including Arctic Terns and Whimbrels.

Our second site was the Latrabjarg cliffs, which are the largest bird cliffs in Iceland and considered one of the most magnificent cliffside nesting areas in the world. Fog and a cold wind were blowing but we were rewarded with close-up views of the very cute and colourful Atlantic puffins that nest in burrows along the top of the cliffs. Other birds seen at Latrabjarg were common guillemots, black-legged kittiwakes, northern fulmars and razorbills. Grey and harbour seals could also be seen lounging around on the rocks below.

The Latrabjarg Cliffs were for many years a site for harvesting eggs and hunting birds by rappelling down the cliffs, this practice was largely stopped in 1926 after two men died on the cliffs.

Many ships have been wrecked at the base of the Latrabjarg cliffs, the most famous being the wreck of the British trawler Dhoon on December 12th, 1947. Local farmers from Latrar quickly mounted a daring rescue operation to save the 12 crew members on board, which involved rappelling 70 meters down an ice-covered cliff in the middle of winter.

Once at the bottom of the cliff, the rescuers had to shoot a rope over to the ship 100 meters away and take the crew off in a rescue chair, the entire rescue took over a day to complete.

On the drive back we visited an old fishing trawler that was beached near the road many years ago.

Back on the ship we had recap where Kelsey informed us about the women's rights campaign in Iceland then Dot talked about the time of the Icelandic alcohol prohibition, finishing with what activities we had planned for the following day in Isafjordur.



Isafjörður

DAY 4 | Saturday 17 June 2023

Position at 0700 on Jun 17

Latitude: 66°05'6 N

Longitude: 23°05.11'W

Course: Various

Speed: 7 knots

Wind Speed: 4 knots SW

Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: 11°C

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Yesterday we visited the small community of Isafjordur, nestled deep into the Westfjords region of Iceland. It was the perfect day to visit Isafjordur since, in addition to surprisingly amenable sunny weather, the town was in full swing celebrating Iceland's Independence Day. Independence Day is celebrated in Iceland on June 17th in honour of the birthday of Jon Sigurdsson, and marks the day that Iceland became independent from Denmark.

The town was awash with locals in full Sunday best, carrying towering cakes to aid their celebrations. Children bounced joyously on the town bouncy castle – inflatable mounds for childish fun are the norm in most Icelandic towns. The celebrations were all happening in front of the old hospital, a stately building befitting its significant past.

Prior to all this celebration we visited the waterfall of Dynjandi. This spectacular fall tumbles over 100 vertical metres, and is an amazing pyramid shape – the falls are just 30 metres wide at the top, but over 60 metres wide at the base. The tiered rock layers all around speak of Iceland's relatively short but fascinating geological formation, and soft mosses and vegetation across the landscape gave us that undeniable sense of being in Iceland in the height of summer. A soft aura of abundance cushioning the bones of austerity that we know exists here in the winter. Nonetheless, sitting in the sun after exploring the waterfall felt like a lovely way to immerse in the location and enjoy this spectacular place.

To round up the day many folks stopped for a quick beer at the local brewery, Dokkan, before the ship set sail for Jan Mayen.

The expedition segment of our voyage starts here. Off to the north of the Arctic Circle we go, and see what adventures await us there.

But wait...

As most of the team prepared for rest, some of us started to notice a few things. Why had the ship slowed



down so much? What was the new sound, a kind of bumping and grinding on the hull? Pretty soon heads were popping out of cabins all over the ship to witness the new spectacle: Sea Ice! Unprecedentedly far south. Reminding us of our travel, every second taking us further north than the *Sylvia Earle* has ever been before.

A party atmosphere reigned on deck during the hours of the midnight sun, viewers oscillating between exuberant laughter and joy at the beauty of it all, combined with moments of more silent reflection. An incredible experience that delayed sleep in the best possible way.



Denmark Strait

DAY 5 | Sunday 18 June 2023

Position at 0700 on Jun 18

Latitude: 67°10'0 N

Longitude: 19°41.3'W

Course: 083°

Speed: 14.8 knots

Wind Speed: 23 knots NNE

Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: 8°C

To travel is to live

— Hans Christian Anderson

Our promised sleep-in this morning was consumed by a change in time zones, as *Sylvia Earle* travelled north-east towards Jan Mayen, obliging us to move our clocks forward an hour. Many of us had stayed up to watch the ship passing through some narrow bands of pack ice. It was easy to stay up late as the midnight sun created the false impression that it was still daytime. We won't see the sun set again on this voyage.

The first activity of the day, after breakfast, was a mandatory briefing from Howard on the guidelines that Aurora follows to protect the Arctic environment and respect the cultures of the people living here. Jeff then gave an informative presentation on how we would remain safe in polar bear habitat, which is as important for the safety of polar bears as it is our own. Following those talks, we undertook the mandatory biosecurity procedures to minimise the risks of spreading disease or other alien species to the Arctic. We also took the opportunity to visit the mudroom and ensure that our muck boots fit well.

Before lunch, Scott provided an entertaining and enlightening presentation on how to use our smart phones to take better pictures. It is quite amazing just how creative people can be with their smart phone photography.

Throughout the day, *Sylvia Earle* made good speed to compensate for the time that we lost when navigating through or around bands of pack ice.

After lunch, the kayakers gathered in the lecture room to run through the practicalities of their upcoming kayaking adventures.

Later in the afternoon, Heather delivered a fascinating lecture on the geological history of Iceland. Iceland sits astride the mid-Atlantic ridge; its volcanoes being generated by a stable hotspot in the Earth's mantle while the whole island is being wrenched apart by the separation of the enormous North American and European tectonic plates.

Late in the day, a willing group of birders braved the winds on Deck 8 to conduct a seabird survey as part of the ship's citizen science program. Four species of seabird were seen during that survey: the northern fulmar,

kittiwake, Atlantic puffin and a lone guillemot that was spotted flying away from the ship. Shortly before the survey, two unusual birds had landed on the ship: a small wading shorebird known as a dunlin and a perching land bird known as a wheatear. After breeding, these tiny land-based birds must head southwards across the ocean as they cannot survive the extreme conditions of the Arctic winter.

The day was rounded out by a 'recap' about Arctic sea-ice from John and a briefing from Howard about our 'Expedition Day' tomorrow at the isolated island of Jan Mayen. The plan is for us to go ashore where none of us have been before, climb a hill that nobody here has seen, then cruise the rarely visited wild west coast in our Zodiac boats.



Jan Mayen

DAY 6 | Monday 19 June 2023

Position at 0700 on Jun 19

Latitude: 70°33'9 N

Longitude: 10°17'4"W

Course: 017°

Speed: 15 knots

Wind Speed: 2 knots SE

Barometer: x 1015

Air Temp: 6°C

Nature is an infinite sphere of which the centre is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere

—Blaise Pascal

We woke up excited to see the remote Island of Jan Mayen as *Sylvia Earle* navigated through the extremely dense fog. The visibility was less than 50 metres which made us a bit worried about our plans – it is hard to do anything in conditions like this. As we were approaching the fog cleared up and the island finally showed up – and what a beautiful sight it was! It is hard to describe the numerous colours of steep cliffs with various magnificent shapes, it was unlike anything else. It was one of those “true expedition” mornings when you know that everything will change on the fly.

Plan A quickly changed to Plan C which led to an incredible Zodiac cruise along amazing cliffs in Kvalrossbukta (Walrus Bay). The kayak team went on a great paddle exploring the coast and checking out little caves. Ivan and Max made an Eskimo roll to celebrate the first kayak outing on Jan Mayen!

After the morning outing, we all got back onboard for a delicious but very quick lunch – we had an exciting afternoon ahead. Sissel, the head of the Norwegian base made it possible for us to go on a hike from Kvalrossbukta to the base itself on the other side of the island, which was a fairly long hike (around 10 km).

Once we set our feet on Jan Mayen's soil, we met Sissel – the base commander. She told us lots of interesting things about life on the island. In total, 17 people are living at the station year-round, working 4-6 months shifts. The head of the base is the only military in the team, the rest are workers and scientists of different specialisations. They get supplies once a year via ship and have an operating runway for bringing new staff and visitors. They also have enough accommodation to host lots of people in case of emergency. It was very funny to discuss the fact that technically speaking, Sessil is the commander of a microcontinent, which Jan Mayen is!

The hike was magnificent. The road went through beautiful volcanic valleys and some of us even made the climb up to the top of Neumayer Hill for a brilliant view from the top!

At the end of the hike, we reached the Norwegian base named Olonkin City. It was a surprise to see a Russian name on a map, so I asked Sissel what it is all about. It appears that the station (and one cape on the island) was



named after Gennady Nikitich Olonkin, a Russian-Norwegian polar explorer, telegraphist, and radio operator, who worked with Roald Amundsen from 1918 to 1925 onboard the polar ship Maud. In 1926 he took part in the first part of the Amundsen-Ellsworth Transpolar flight with the airship Norge from Rome to Svalbard providing radio contact with the different ground control stations. He served on Jan Mayen (with some breaks) from 1928-1936.

And of course, I should mention a very important act – Operation Mayonnaise! Visiting places like this, the team often ask if people at the station need any supplies. Sissel kindly asked us for some mayo since it was the only thing they had a shortage of. It was heroically delivered to the beach by our zodiac manager Nacho!

It was a day that we will remember! Visiting such a remote place and being able to do so many fun activities in such great weather conditions was a big privilege!

At Sea, Northward to Svalbard

DAY 7 | Tuesday 20 June 2023

Position at 0700 on Jun 20

Latitude: 71°30.4 N

Longitude: 00°23.0'W

Course: 063°

Speed: 13.9 knots

Wind Speed: 2 knots ENE

Air Temp: 6°C

Barometer: 1016

If one does not know to which port one is sailing,

No wind is favorable.

—Seneca

It was a smooth ride through the night, as we were snuggled down in our trusty ship *Sylvia Earle*. We were now beyond the drifts of pack ice that we had encountered in the Denmark Strait, that had drifted in from Greenland – there were no major switches in speed, changes in direction, little bumps and grinds. This all helped us remain in our deep slumber, dreaming of and reflecting upon the magnificent day we had at Jan Mayen.

Judging by how quiet it was at breakfast, I suspect that a few of us did not want to open our eyes, just to hold on, and keep fresh, a little bit longer, those memories from the day before. Today was a new day however, crafted by our expedition team to prepare us all for Svalbard... to educate us, to inform us, to elicit curiosity and to build anticipation.

Shortly following breakfast, we gathered in the lecture theatre to listen to Kelsey's enthusiastic presentation on "The Story of Svalbard". When people entered, it looked like some special convention as people paraded in, proudly sporting the whole line and choice of colors of Jan Mayen T-Shirts. Once settled, we learned of Barentsz Expeditions, in search of a Northeast passage and how he stumbled upon Bjørnøya (Bear Island), crediting him as the first to discover the Svalbard Archipelago. Kelsey also had us ponder other possibilities, that these lands may have been inhabited by stone age people, encountered by Viking explorers, or Russian Pomors may have found it searching for new hunting grounds. We learned about the many ages of exploitation of Svalbard's resources through the centuries... whaling in the 1600's, walrus hunting by the Pomors in the 1700's, hunting and trapping by the Norwegians in the late 1800's, and coal mining by the American, John Longyear and the Russians, still today. We learned of the age of exploration and the establishment of the Svalbard Treaty which was very forward-thinking in its protection of the environment and Svalbard's resources. Kelsey brought us up to modern times, the university and the rise in tourism.

As the day progressed, the sea remained calm and glassy, the cloud and fog ceiling would occasionally lift to reveal a hint of sunlight trying to break through. Alas it would remain foggy the rest of the day. As we travelled further Northeast and deeper into the Greenland Sea, we could notice a subtle change in the swell, it felt as though the long-period swell had more power behind it, having travelled a longer unbroken distance.

In the afternoon, John offered us a presentation on "Seabirds of the Northern Atlantic." John first started by helping us to understand the differences between seabirds and land birds, and how seabirds have a longer lifespan and their coloration is based in white and grey patterns. He continued on the various groups of seabirds and some fun facts about the more charismatic of the seabirds. John also enlightened us on a few other important topics, less we embarrass ourselves... chiefly, there is no bird called a seagull, do not call a ship a boat, and whales do not spout, they blow.

Shortly after John's presentation, he and Heather met up at the observation lounge to include expeditioners in a citizen science session of E-Bird (counting birds). Over the half-hour session they counted 13 black-legged kittiwakes, 9 northern fulmars and 1 arctic tern. While there they also happened upon a small pod of White-Sided Dolphins off in the distance.

After a bit more relaxation and socialising, we gathered once more in the Lecture Theatre for the day's recap. Jeff set the stage on how we institute more serious approaches to operating in Polar Bear country, and Dot gave us some interesting caveats and facts about Svalbard.

All too soon we were off to dinner, off to bed, and dreaming about new wonders to come.



At Sea

DAY 8 | Wednesday 21 June 2023

Position at 0700 on Jun 21

Latitude: 71°53.3 N

Longitude: 006°38.4'E

Course: 004°

Speed: 9.9 knots

Wind Speed: 6 knots ESE

Air Temp: 9°C

Barometer: 1012

Nature is an infinite sphere of which the center is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere

—Blaise Pascal

It's Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year when one of Earth's poles has its maximum tilt toward the sun. For us, the fog that has persisted for the past couple of days is still with us making it near impossible to see the sun. However, the seas have been kind and are as calm as calm can be.

After a relaxing breakfast we gathered in the lecture theatre for a presentation on Polar Bears- Birth to Death given by Ecologist Heather. A thoroughly entertaining and informative lecture!

As this was a day at sea, some of us took the opportunity to pound out a few kilometers on the treadmill or bike, pump a few weights or relax reading, completing a jigsaw or maybe catch up on some sleep.

Mid-afternoon and another lecture preparing us for our time cruising in the waters around Svalbard. This time, Whales of the Svalbard Archipelago presented by Marine Biologist, John. It's amazing how many species of whales live in the arctic waters.

The Summer Solstice couldn't pass without some celebration. So, for afternoon tea we were encouraged to dress in our best 'summer attire' and make our way to the Observation Lounge. We were served Solstice cocktails and canapes. It was surprising how many of us had made room for shorts and T-shirts in our luggage. We even braved the chilly conditions outside for a group photo.

Krishna, a very brave sole even threw off his shirt for the real summer experience during the photo shoot.

As we make our first landing on the island of Spitsbergen on June 22, everyone was at the nightly recap and briefing. After recaps from Kelsey and Heather it was Howard's turn to brief us on our upcoming activities. Svalbard is like no other place you will ever cruise to or land on. Everyone plays their part, as Expeditioners we can assist with preparations for our landing by being on the lookout from the ship for Polar Bears on the landing site. The expedition team (trained bear guards) will go ashore first to scout, then we will be on our way. You could feel

the buzz in the room, everyone is excited about this first landing.

By the time we reach Svalbard we will have cruised close to one thousand nautical miles since we left Iceland four days ago.



Gnalodden, Samarinbreen

DAY 9 | Thursday 22 June 2023

Position at 0600 on Jun 22

Latitude: 76°56.0' N

Longitude: 015°04.0' E

Course: 071°

Speed: 8.5 knots

Wind Speed: 15 knots ENE

Barometer: 1009

Air Temp: 7°C

Naming of Hornsund

They brought a piece of Deeres horne aboard, therefore I called this sound Horne Sound.

—Poole, 1610, The Place-Names of Svalbard

We woke up this morning to the sharp peaks of Hornsund— we had finally reached Spitsbergen after two days at sea. It was quite a foggy start this morning, but the conditions were constantly changing (in typical Svalbard fashion). Soon the sun broke through.

The expedition team sent a scout boat to our expected landing site and discovered a lounging polar bear! We rearranged our plans to go ashore and opted for a Zodiac cruise instead. How lucky are we? We got to observe a polar bear rolling and stretching on the tundra, resting in the summer sun. The enormous mountain Fuglefjellet behind the bear was full of birds, and the sound was incredible. Puffins, guillemots, kittiwakes, glaucous gulls flew all around us. There were eider ducks and barnacle geese paddling around near shore. Every now and then, the peak of the mountain appeared from behind the clouds.

We got a good glimpse of the trapper's hut at Gnálodden, which was the previous satellite station of Wanny Woldstad (the first female trapper in Svalbard). She was there in the 1930s, setting fox traps and hunting seals on the ice. Hornsund was her stomping ground. You can't blame her—the scenery is unreal, and it is often a polar bear highway when the ice from the east of Svalbard makes its way into the fjord with the currents. We also managed to spot a fox as it ran under the bird cliffs, and later on we saw a ringed seal swimming near the beach. So much to see, and it wasn't even noon yet.

After having a lunch break at the ship, we got into our Zodiacs again for an afternoon cruise around Samarinbreen. It was a stunning view: we were surrounded by walls of tidal glaciers, jagged mountains, and bays full of glacial ice. The glaciers were quite active, and we were able to experience several calvings. The sun was shining, and combined with the lack of wind, it felt like a warm summer's day in the Arctic. There were plenty of icebergs in the fjord for us to see, and it was nice to turn off the engines and listen to the sound of the crackling ice.

It's safe to say that our Svalbard experience had quite the kickoff, and we are looking forward to what else this trip has in store for us.



Kapp Schollin/Fridjovhamna, Bamsebu

DAY 10 | Friday 23 June 2023

Position at 0600 on Jun 23

Latitude: 77°25.5'N

Longitude: 014°00.3' E

Course: 045°

Speed: 6.6 knots

Wind Speed: 1 knots SSW

Barometer: 1008

Air Temp: 12°C

Brunnich's Guillemot Breeding Cliffs

The worn and torn pipes of a giants organ or the deteriorating spires and towers of a medieval church.

—Brunnich's guillemot breeding cliffs described by Lundgren and Carlsson

Today we awoke to very calm seas, low cloud and Howard's familiar voice of course. The morning was spent with a landing at Kapp Schollin/Fridjovhamna where we saw the remains of an old hunting site with a carcass drying frame.

This was followed by a Zodiac cruise along the Akseloya spit where we saw eider ducks, black guillemots and barnacle geese. In the water we spotted a pod of Beluga whales which past us and headed to the kayakers, a swimming Polar Bear was also spotted heading away from us to the east. Towards the end of our cruise we were rewarded with a group of walrus hauled out on the beach. We approached from downwind which left them undisturbed but we could smell them, a small price to pay for a great wildlife encounter. The walrus has played a prominent role in the cultures of many indigenous Arctic people, who have hunted it for meat, fat, skin, tusks and bone. The population has rebounded since the hunting of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the afternoon we made a landing at Bamsebu, a hunting cabin with the remains of hundreds of beluga whale bones and some old hunting boats. The hut featured bear resistant boarded windows complete with protruding nails to prevent the bear ripping down the shutters. The cabin had a supply of firewood and a pile of deer antlers. From the cabin Howard led a walk northwest across the tundra to the Zodiac pick up point. We didn't spot any polar bears, but we did see many Svalbard reindeer, they are a small subspecies of reindeer and have lived here for at least 5,000 years and have become well adapted to the harsh climate, being found on nearly all non-glaciated areas of the archipelago. By 1925 they had almost gone extinct due to over-hunting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over recent decades their population has increased and as of 2019 the total population across the archipelago is approximately 22,000. They are the only large grazing mammal in the European High Arctic and this makes them exceptional for studies concerning the introduction of pollutants to changing ecosystems. Their diet consists of lush tundra vegetation of vascular plants, including grasses, herbs, sedges and deciduous shrubs.

Back onboard we enjoyed another great recap by Heather who gave us a fascinating insight to the life of the Arctic fox.



Magdalena Fjord, Pack Ice (BBQ)

DAY 11 | Saturday 24 June 2023

Position at 0600 on Jun 24

Latitude: 79°25.5'N

Longitude: : 010°27.2'E

Course: 035°

Speed: 8.9 knots

For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear.

—Henry Beston (1888-1968)

Another magical day experiencing the raw nature of the North. We started out in Magdalena Fjord, iconic and renowned for its jagged peaks plunging directly down into the deep waters of a narrow fjord. This is one of the first fjords that Willem Barentsz visited on his discovery expedition to Svalbard and beyond back in 1596, so we were really following in historical footsteps by visiting here.

The weather draped the alpine-style peaks in moody wreaths of gentle cloud, and a firm breeze whipped the waters of the fjord to a light chop, so we all wrapped up well before boarding the zodiacs for a cruise around the fjord. Some zodiacs were treated to quite the display of curiosity from some passing seals, causing us to wonder at the feeling of privilege that comes from witnessing wildlife in the grandeur of nature and having the individuals we observe choose to come and observe us in return. Whether we saw these seals or not, everyone was then able to witness the incredible outpourings of avian life as we visited the Dovekie colony (on this side of the Atlantic these diminutive members of the auk family are normally referred to as 'Little Auks', but all agreed that Dovekie is a much more lovely name). Dovekies might be tiny, but they nest on the ground in rocky scree slopes, squirreling their nests away into nooks and crannies. Periodically, vast numbers of birds lift off from the colony, calling to each other, and take to the skies like a fluttering mass of marine butterflies. We kept our eyes sharp for arctic fox, for whom a dovekie is a tasty snack, but luck was on the side of the dovekies today and no fox was sighted.

Following this, we cruised downwind (what a difference in temperature!) to check out the face of the glacier at the head of the fjord. Almost at the moment that all boats arrived, a large chunk of glacier calved off, resulting in a chorus of "oooh"s that echoed around the bare rock walls. A lone beluga was also sighted briefly, feeding in the waters at the snout of the glacier.

Our afternoon was warmer and calmer, but no less spectacular. After a mother and cub polar bear provided a very pleasant interruption during lunch we watched spellbound as the captain took us to our furthest north point

Wind Speed: 12 knots SW

Barometer: 1010

Air Temp: 8°C

and immersed us into the world of sea ice. All hands were on binoculars, scouring the floes for more polar bear. The Sylvia Earle demonstrated her seaworthy prowess as her X-bow made short work of the icy chunks below. It was a memorable setting for an Arctic BBQ outside!

We enjoyed a delicious buffet spread, tasty glühwein and a playlist that kept us moving!

Special thanks to our wonderful crew for looking after us, to Jim for being born on such a magical date and of course to Wes for his excellent dance moves.



Ytre Norskoya, Hamiltonbukta

DAY 12 | Sunday 25 June 2023

Position at 0600 on Jun 25

Latitude: 79°55.8'N

Longitude: 011°22.9'E

Course: 215°

Speed: 3.9 knots

Wind Speed: 5 knots W

Barometer: 1015

Air Temp: 8°C

To dine with a glacier on a sunny day is a glorious thing and makes feasts of meat and wine ridiculous. The glacier eats hills and drinks sunbeams.

—John Muir

We returned to Svalbard this morning after our evening expedition into the pack ice zone to the north. Our first landing was planned for the small island of Ytre Norskøya in the far northwestern corner of the archipelago. This island was used as a shore-based whale processing site in the 1600's, and its high peak was an ideal lookout for whale-spotting.

We anticipated either a steep hike to the top of the bird cliffs or a less steep hike to view the remains of the whale processing operation and the gravesites of 165 Dutch whalers. However, this was not to be, as our scouting party found a set of fresh polar bear prints that led them straight to a sleeping bear. Landing cancelled, scouting party back to the Zodiacs and our planned landing was converted to a Zodiac cruise. First, we visited the snoozing bear, who just kept snoozing. Then we passed around the island to the historic whale processing site, along the way learning from Kelsey about the history of this island and the tough lives of the whalers who worked there.

We continued our Zodiac cruise around some nearby islands and the northwest coast of Spitsbergen, where we enjoyed the attention of an inquisitive ringed seal, watched seabirds on high, and found an abandoned polar bear den. At the end of this cruise, we took a final look at our furry friend. There we found that our snoozing bear was up and about: calmly walking over the jumbled boulders along the northern coast. Along the way, she found a seabird nest and feasted on the eggs, before walking down to the water's edge and swimming off into the distance. It was a great privilege to watch this beautiful bear going about her normal activities, without any apparent concern about the 40 colourful onlookers in their small black boats.

Back on board, it was time to warm up, re-fuel and ready ourselves for the afternoon's activities. As we ventured out into the Zodiacs, we were greeted by an incredibly beautiful scene. The water was like a mirror and the overcast skies had been replaced by blue skies and glorious sunshine. Perfect conditions for our stroll on the sea ice of a small bay in Hamiltonbukta. After all walking on water, we returned to the Zodiacs and cruised the ford. Each Zodiac had its own adventure, as we visited bearded seals and walruses on ice, drove our Zodiacs through some mushy ice, followed tracks through the snow and just took in the magnificent scenery. This was a day in a



Polar Plunge

DAY 12 | Sunday 25 June 2023



Lilliehookbreen, Signehamna

DAY 13 | Monday 26 June 2023

Position at 0600 on Jun 26

Latitude: 79°10.7'N

Longitude: 011°46.2'E

Course: 009°

Speed: 6.6 knots

Wind Speed: 7 knots SE

Barometer: 1015

Air Temp: 8°C

The ice and the long moon-lit polar nights with all their yearning, seemed like a far-off dream from another world; a dream that has come and passed away.

But what would life be worth without its dreams?

—Fridtjof Nansen, Farthest North

This morning we woke up at the end of Kongsfjord, in front of a glacier called Lilliehookbreen. It was an impressive view— the front wall is around 11km wide! After breakfast, we got into our Zodiacs and cruised around the bay. There was plenty of ice in the water, showing us that the glacier is quite active. We got to see some impressive icebergs, so many different shades of blue, and a couple curious ring seals who swam right up to our boats.

Every now and then, we heard a sharp crack and looked over to see ice calving from the front. In the ice, we could see distinct layers of time. The crackling and popping sound of glacier ice surrounded us. There are over 1,000 glaciers in Svalbard, and about 60% of the archipelago is glaciated. For that reason, Svalbard is still technically in an ice age.

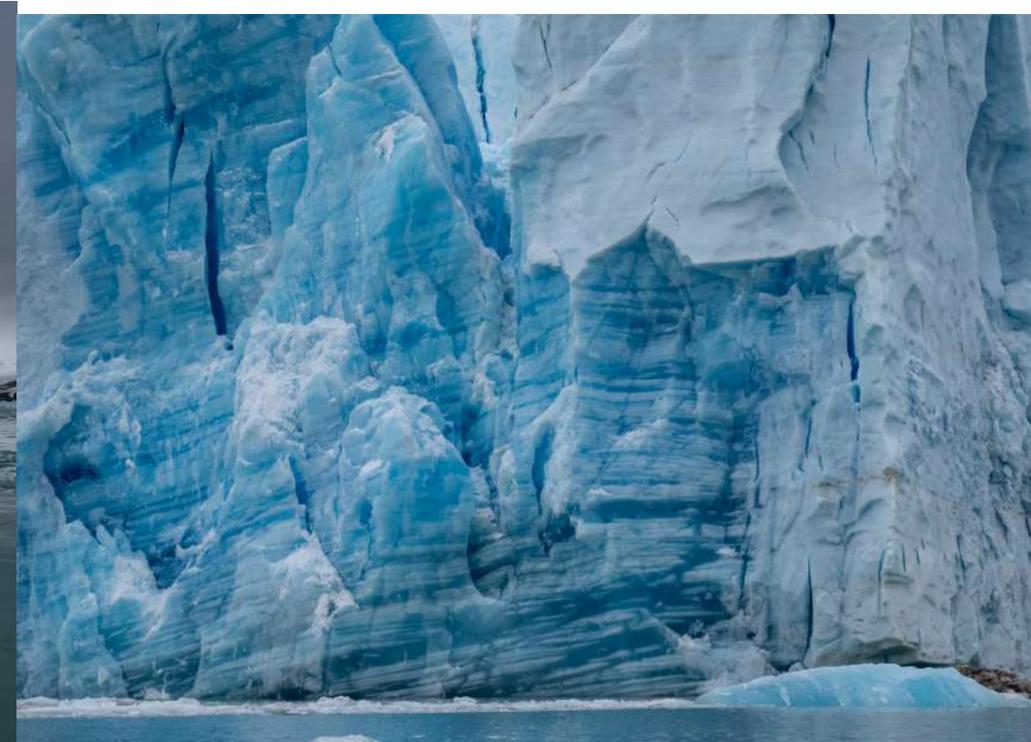
Glaciers attract plenty of wildlife due to the fresh meltwater streaming from the ice. The rivers falling into the bay create an upwelling of nutrients, which attract plankton, fish, and seabirds. The chunks of floating ice also attract seals and walruses, who love to haul out on the floes.

In the afternoon, we landed at Signehamna and explored the remains of a German weather station from 1941. The station existed during a time when the Svalbard settlements had been evacuated, and German forces had established manned weather stations in the archipelago. The station was well-hidden, impossible to see from the fjord. When we walked among the remains, we saw arctic terns, reindeer, and red-throated divers.

We split into walking groups and explored different areas of the bay. Some of us walked along the ridgeline of a mountain, while others walked around the lake filled with different birds to watch. Afterwards, we walked back down to the beach where our Zodiacs were waiting to take us back to the ship.

We had our Captain's Farewell Dinner in the evening, which was a great end to our voyage on the *Sylvia Earle*. Dinner was followed by a slideshow of all our greatest photos and memories for the trip, put together by our lovely photographer Scott.

What a beautiful last day of expedition cruising! Tomorrow we arrive to Longyearbyen, where we will explore the town and see what civilization is like at 78 degrees north.



Longyearbyen

DAY 11 | Tuesday 27 June 2023

Position at 0600 on Jun 27

Latitude: 78° 11.4'N

Longitude: 014° 33.1'E

Course: 061°

Speed: 9.7 knots

Wind Speed: 6 knots SW

Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: 10°C

Aurora Expeditions sends out a big thank you to you all for your great humour, infectious enthusiasm and smiling faces. It was a pleasure having you all on board and being able to share some of the pleasures that Iceland, Jan Mayen and Svalbard had to offer. May your memories live long and bright.



Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: Ivan Klochkov, Wes McNeil

Number of Paddlers: 6

Total Paddle Outings: 7

Total Distance Paddled: 4.5 km

Paddlers:

Hunter Turney

Kelly Shanahan

James Zuberbuhler

Max Zuberbuhler

Mary Shanahan

Eijamari Narvanen

Sierra Zuberbuhler

June 16th: Patreksfjordur to Talknafjordur - 9 km

While the majority of passengers took to touring Iceland by land, we decided to experience this day on the water. We towed our kayaks northward to get away from the potential ship traffic. Hunter and Wes got on the water from the zodiac and started paddling along spectacular cliffs sprinkled, highlighted by small ledges sprinkled with kittiwakes and their nests. Wes did some coaching sessions on the way. Within a short time, Hunter and Wes found their rhythm and before we knew it, we were at the confluence of the adjoining fjord, Talknafjorder. We rounded the cape, and started heading back to the east and tucked into a small bay to get out of the wind, and to observe a number of very, curious grey seals. Ivan and Wes had to keep their eye on Hunter, to make sure she didn't grab one of the seals to take home. It was hard to leave and keep paddling as the seals danced around us. As we continued our paddle, the steeper cliffs made way to some nice rock formation and flat grassy benches with small waterfalls. We noticed some big boulders that created a little harbor, so Ivan parked the zodiac in it so we could raft up with the kayaks for some lunch, and we could look out on a spectacular view. Hunter challenged us with thoughtful questions... revealing and get-to-know you type questions. We proceeded on our paddle, weaving through some passageways and islets, and noticing the occasional moon jellyfish Towards the end of the paddle the headwinds picked up and we decided to return to the ship. Wes and Hunter did some nice downwind paddling and a little surfing before they got back into zodiac. We were surprised on how long it took for the return to the ship. We had been so immersed in the paddle, that we had not realize how far we had paddled. What a great adventure!

June 19th: Kvalrossbukta, Jan Mayan - 4.5 km

It was very touch and go on whether or not we would be able to paddle at Jan Mayan, as It was very foggy when we approached the island, but as soon as we dropped anchor in Kvalrossbukta, (Walrus Bay). The clouds lifted and revealed majestic volcanic cliffs at the north end of the bay. The ocean was calm and glassy, with barely a stitch of wind. We were very excited to paddle along these wild black basaltic cliffs with bright red iron oxide layers and electric-green macroalgae near the surface of the water! This unique coastline was just unlike anything else! At the north point we found a cave, and a few kayakers that were interested, backed their kayaks into the dark, fissure-like cave. Once we finished exploring the amazing headland, we paddled to the south, past the ship and explored the coastline a little bit further. We then towed our kayaks back to the ship. This was definitely one of the most amazing moments of the trip!

June 22nd: Samarinibreen - 6 km

As we entered the fjord of Samarinvagen, heading to the Samarinbreen glacier there was a very low cloud ceiling. Once inside the fjord, cloud ceiling lifted unveiling the glacial headwall beyond. Within moments the clouds dissipated, the sun shone down on calm waters. Ivan led the paddlers, launching from the ship, and paddled south, towards the glacier. After some briefings regarding the distances from glacial faces and the first introductions to paddling in brash ice, kayakers made their way through the beautiful icy fjord, and listening to the gentle whisper of thousands of tiny air bubbles popping from bits of ice all around. It was a glorious first paddle in Svalbard, with warm temperatures, glassy water, and incredible views.

June 23rd: Kapp Schollin/ Fridtjovhamna - 4 km

We started our little adventure today by first joining the rest of our expeditioners in a short landing at Hamnodden, a finger of land protecting the entrance to Fridtjovhamna fjord. With a high point and artifacts from an old hunting camp. Ivan and Wes towed the kayaks out to meet everyone at the landing and proceeded to get everyone in their kayaks with what was intending to be a 9 -10 km, long paddle across the entrance to Jan Mijenfjorden, following along the east side of a prolific spit that is actually a thrust fault.

We started our crossing in a 1 km current, just up wind from a mild tidal-rapid, and began paddling SSE towards Maseneset. The geological uplift and tilt, and bending of the rock strata was impressive and made this spit have a very aesthetic appeal. We were just getting into our stride, when a polar bear was spotted in the water ahead of us. This meant that we needed to remove ourselves from the water ASAP. Once in the zodiac we continued forward to see if we might see the bear swimming across the fjord. We were a little late to the party but managed to see a few beluga, passing in the opposite direction. Knowing we were far from the bear we got back in our kayaks and proceeded once more on our crossing. Soon we heard on the radio a small walrus haul-out had been spotted ahead. The timing to complete our crossing had already been interrupted so we jumped in the zodiac once more to spend our remaining time seeing the walrus. Then it was back to the ship.

June 24th: Magdalenefjorden - 4.5 km

Three intrepid kayakers braved the bouncy conditions today in Magdalenefjorden. The wind was at 15 to 20 knots and making the water surface very lumpy. We were able to find a little shelter from the wind and waves by towing our kayaks to a semi-protected cove on the south side of the fjord and beginning our paddle from there. Wes gave a few pointers on holding position by lightly backpaddling, with our sterns to the wind and aligning ourselves with the waves. This prepared us for how to back away from danger, but also a good primer to surfing the waves. We then set to paddling east toward the Tetrabreen Glacier. On the way Wes introduced using a rudder stroke to help control our boats on a surf. The paddle was fast to the end of the glacier we took a break hoping to see some calving, but with the overcast skies and cool temps the glacier was relatively calm. The wind subsided enough for us to make a crossing to the north side and follow the shoreline back to the west. Then the winds increased leaving us to beat into the wind and waves. As we neared the end of our paddle, we were approached by two curious bearded seals. A sweet little ending... one of the seals followed us till the end of our session and kissed the nose of one kayaker's boat.

June 25th: Hamiltonbutka - 5 km

Our intention was to paddle in Hamiltonbutka, but we found it jammed with fast ice. We towed our kayaks over near the ice and cast them adrift, then landed the zodiac on the ice with the rest of the passengers. It was a glorious sunny and calm afternoon, so we made our little walk on the ice short, so we could get to paddling as soon as possible. All of the zodiacs headed south, so we went north to explore a nice rocky shore in relative peace. We rounded Hundneset and continued to a small shallow bay just south of Hornbaekfjellet. The bay actually had its own little tidal current pouring into it. Once we slipped into the bay and started floating around, we could see the bottom and then noticed a variety of tiny floating jellyfish-like creatures called Ctenophores. These tiny transparent bodies have little comb-like plates filled with tiny cilia that move and diffract light, like prisms in iridescent waves. Floating around our little discovered bay and bathing in the sunlight, mesmerized by the pulsing ribbons of colored light emitted by our little friends, it was hard to pull ourselves away and continue the paddle. Soon after we left the bay, heading north, Wes spotted two Walrus swimming directly head-on to the kayakers. Wes positioned himself in the zodiac between the walrus and the kayakers paddled straight out from shore into deeper waters. We observed the walrus from afar till they swam out of sight. Then it was time to return to the ship and we towed the kayaks back.

June 26th: Lilliehookbreen - 8.5 km

This, our final paddle, turned out to be a very sweet end. We had sunny skies and glass calm water. We launched from the ship and did a long crossing of the fjord, to the north, to tour a number of small icebergs and growlers, then across to a small island that acted as a guard from the Lilliehookbreen Glacier. We paused and took estimates as to how far we were from the glacier face. Everyone guessed much closer than we were, which speaks to how grand a scale the glacier was. Near the i

sland were a mix of grounded and floating icebergs, which we continued to explore and start our return south, across the glacier face, through the brash ice and towards the more substantial headwall and some spectacular blue towers of ice. As we crossed there were continual small calvings of the glacier, we kept our distance, as we paddled back to the ship.







Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	June													
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Red-throated Diver													•	
Barnacle Goose									•	•	•	•	•	•
Greylag Goose		•												
Brent Goose									•					
Whooper Swan		•	•	•										
Mallard			•	•										
Common Eider		•	•	•					•	•	•	•	•	•
Harlequin Duck		•		•										
Red-breasted Merganser				•										
Northern Fulmar	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
European Storm Petrel					•		•							
Northern Gannet	•		•		•									
European Shag		•	•											
Redshank		•	•	•										
Ringed Plover		•	•	•		•								
European Golden Plover		•				•								
Common Snipe		•	•	•										
Sanderling										•				•
Dunlin		•		•	•	•								•
Purple Sandpiper										•	•			•
Ruddy Turnstone		•												
Red-necked Phalarope		•												
Red (=Grey) Phalarope		•											•	
Eurasian Oystercatcher		•	•	•										
Whimbrel		•	•											
Black-tailed Godwit		•												
Arctic Skua		•	•						•	•	•	•		



Bird Species	June													
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Great Skua						•								
Sabine's Gull	•													
Herring Gull	•	•	•	•										
Glaucous Gull		•	•	•					•	•	•	•	•	•
Black-Headed Gull	•												•	
Greater Black-backed Gull		•	•											
Lesser Black-backed Gull	•	•	•										•	
Black-legged Kittiwake	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Iceland Gull	•					•								
Arctic Tern	•	•	•	•			•		•	•	•	•	•	•
Common Guillemot	•	•	•			•	•							
Brunnich's Guillemot				•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•
Black Guillemot				•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•
Razorbill				•		•								
Little Auk						•					•	•	•	
Atlantic Puffin	•	•	•			•	•		•	•		•		
Northern Wheatear				•	•	•								
Rock Pigeon		•												
Meadow Pipit		•	•	•										
Svalbard Rock Ptarmigan													•	
White Wagtail				•	•									
European Starling				•										
Common Redpoll						•								
Redwing		•		•										
Snow Bunting				•	•					•	•	•	•	•
Common Raven	•	•												
White-tailed Eagle	•													





Bird and Mammal Sightings

Mammal Species	June													
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Arctic Fox									•					
Reindeer										•	•			•
Polar Bear									•	•	•	•		
Harbour (= Common) Seal		•	•							•			•	
Grey Seal		•	•											
Ringed Seal									•	•	•		•	
Bearded Seal													•	
Walrus										•			•	
Minke Whale		•					•							
Humpback Whale		•							•					
Fin Whale									•					
UnID Baleen Whale					•									
Beluga										•	•			
White Beaked Dolphin		•												
White-Sided Dolphin							•							
Orca		•												







Expeditioners:

Sara Barbieri	Matine Rahmani
John Berman	Kelly Shanahan
Roger Black	David Slivken
Catherine Black	Shelby Smith
Cathleen Brough	Geoff Squires
Benjamin Call	Linda Squires
John Call	Debra Trammell
Neil Cameron	Hunter Turney
Thomas Carpenter	Robert Williams
Kristin Cook	Maximilian Zuberbuhler
Jane Cook	James Zuberbuhler
Michae I Fysh	Sierra Zuberbuhler
Rebecca Glatz	
Eric Goldring	
Nainika Gupta	
Karthika Gupta	
Charles Harpum	
Rachel Harris	
Joan Harris	
Barbara Harrison	
Linda Jackson	
Yiu Kwan	
Eija Naervaenen	
Bonnie Newman	
Krishna Poojary	

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Howard Whelan
 Assistant Expedition Leader: Dot Robertson
 Onboard Expedition Manager: Justine Bornholdt
 Marine Biologist & CS Coordinator: John Kirkwood
 Historian: Kelsey Camacho
 Ecologist/Geologist: Heather Chrystie
 Firearms Manager: Jeff Nagel
 Photography Guide: Scott Portelli
 Expedition Medic: David (from Dunedin) Palmer
 Kayak Guide: Ivan Klochkov
 Kayak Guide: Wes McNeil
 Zodiac Master: Ignacio (Nacho) Marino
 Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ari Benz Ciria
 Local Guide: Sigurdur (Diddi) Magnusson
 Local Guide: Sigurdur Andres (Siggi) Sigurdarson

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Arsen Prostov	Sous Chef: I Gusti Ketut Purnawirawan
Chief Officer: Gabriel Eduardo Centella Molina	Hotel Controller: Rey Satuito Nolasco
Second Officer: Fernandes Raymer Rosario	Receptionist: Jonalyn Rivera Ecija
Safety Officer: Clyde James Houston	Receptionist: Jaypee Alota Abonitalla
Ship Doctor: Gino Tiraboschi	Head Steward: Anil Kumar Kashyap
Chief Engineer: Praveen Kumar Kaushal	Bosun: Leo Francis Magnaye Marzan
First Engineer: Adrian Trasca	Able Seaman: Anthony John Narvaez Brosas
IT Officer: Nathaniel Vibares	Able Seaman: Eduardo Caranoo Aloyan
Hotel Director: Balvant Singh	Able Seaman: Nestor Fernandez Arangorin
Head Bartender: Restlie Dimasaka Baldemor	Able Seaman: Nurul Huda
Head Waiter: Naif Khan	Able Seaman: Luis Fernando Alvarez Santos
Chief Purser: Liza Merillo	Able Seaman: Ferdy Noel Diaz Roque
Executive Chef: Suresh Pai Karkala	

Photography thanks to:

Scott Portelli Wes McNeil Ivan Klochkov



