

Jewels of the Arctic

Aboard *Ocean Explorer* | 3 August – 16 August 2023





Longyearbyen

DAY 1 | Thursday, 3rd August 2023

Position at 2100 on 3rd August

Latitude: 78°16.2'N

Longitude: 015°17.1'E

Course: 255°

Speed: 8.8 knots

Wind Speed: SW 4 knots

Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: 16°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Here we are inside the Arctic circle, at 78° North. Surrounded by spectacular mountains in the picturesque coal-mining town of Longyearbyen, we got off our tour buses knowing that this will be our last glimpse of civilisation for a while. Throughout our voyage together, we are more likely to encounter a fox, reindeer, or guillemot than another human.

After arriving at the *Ocean Explorer*, we had our 'happy snaps' taken by our expedition photographer, Adrian, then we embarked what would be our faithful steed for the next couple of weeks, and the team welcomed us onboard.

Our next stop was the Latitude Bar for some delicious refreshments, then we checked in at reception and made our way to our beautifully furnished cabins.

The stewards helped us navigate the decks to our cabins and settle into our "home away from home" then it was time for the all-important safety and lifeboat drill.

The sound of the ship's horn signalled us to grab our bulky orange lifejackets, our beanies and warm clothing, and muster in the lecture theatre. We followed our crew up to Deck 7 where the polar class life vessels sit (they can hold 136 people each, for 5 days!). With the safety drill complete, we had a welcome briefing from our Expedition Leader, Christophe, as well as briefings from our Hotel Director, Ulises, Doctor Andres, and our Onboard Expedition Manager, Samantha.

Finally, we headed to the dining room for a delicious dinner prepared by our talented galley team and served by our smiley and welcoming wait staff.

The last task for the evening was the expedition jacket swap, so that we could all stay cosy in the freezing environment we are about to explore.

After dinner, the kayak team met for a briefing with guides Sigurd, Teal & Gabriel to prepare for the great paddling adventure that lies ahead.

Together we total 125 passengers from all around the globe: Australia, Canada, China, the UK, Czech Republic,

Germany, Italy, Netherlands, USA, New Zealand, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa & Switzerland, along with 80 crew members.

In addition, we have 19 members of the Expedition Team with a variety of specialities, including polar exploration, polar bear safety, geology, history, marine and terrestrial biology, photography, wilderness first responding, and kayaking.

After the many hours of travel to reach the frozen top of the world, it's time to kick back, breathe in the sea air, and enjoy the incredible scenery of Svalbard.



Scheibukta

DAY 2 | Friday, 4th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 4th August

Latitude: 79°03.9'N

Longitude: 009°59.7'E

Course: 009°

Speed: 6.1 knots

Wind Speed: NE 3 knots

Barometer: 1005

Air Temp: 11°C

At special moments when I have time to watch an undisturbed polar bear, I am often struck by an overwhelming sense that it is simply where it belongs. A wild polar bear is the Arctic incarnate. The Arctic is not a forsaken wasteland to a polar bear; it is home, and a comfortable home at that. For thousands of years, the climate, the ice, and the seals upon which it feeds have shaped and finely tuned the evolution of this predator so exquisitely that it has become not just a symbol but the very embodiment of life in the Arctic.

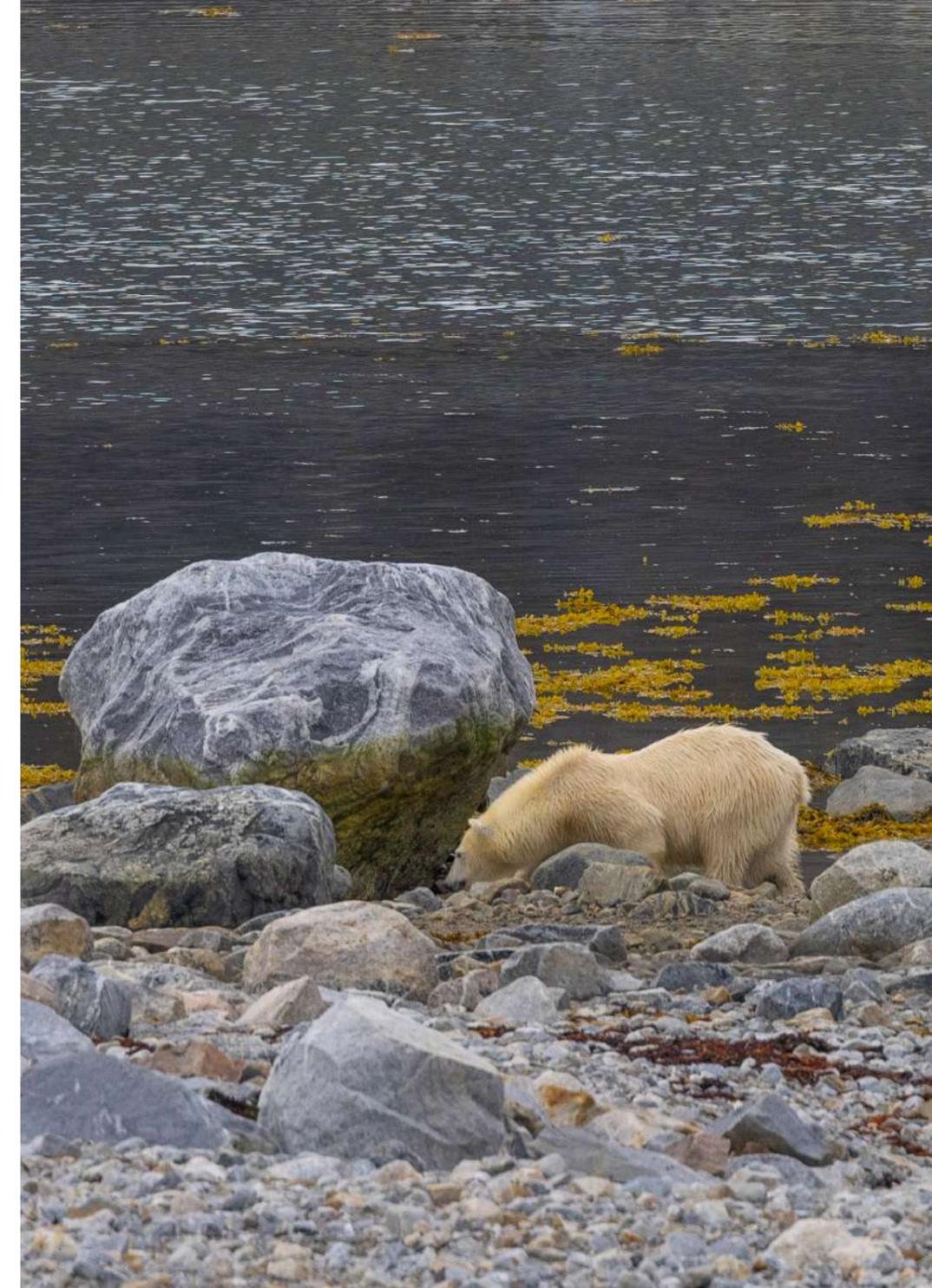
—Ian Stirling, Polar Bears

What a great first day in Svalbard! After we got all our mandatory briefings out of the way we learnt all about the history of Svalbard from our lovely local guide, Kelsey. Then, just as we were about to sit down for lunch, our first polar bear was spotted! We were on the way to our planned first destination and our captain Maxim spotted a polar bear swimming in the water. How apt to see our first bear in Bjornfjorden (which translates from Norwegian to English as Bear Fjord). We slowed down the ship and watched the bear swim towards the shore. It swam along the shoreline then got onto land and starting walking very slowly towards a group of harbour seals playing in the shallow water. We watched the bear inch closer and closer to the seals and even get in the water with the seals.

Polar bears have a very strong sense of smell and can smell their prey up to a kilometre away. They can even detect a seal in the water beneath a metre of compacted snow. Their sense of smell is seven times more powerful than working police sniffer dogs. Interestingly, the seals didn't swim away from the bear, the apex predator of the Arctic, instead they swam all around it, seemingly taunting it. It almost seemed as if they enjoyed following the bear around and getting just close enough, peeping their heads out of the water before making a splash and swimming off.

At one point there were 11 seals in the water swimming around the bear – what a fantastic sight to see! Unfortunately for him, there wasn't much chance of a catch; the seals are a lot faster in the water and he couldn't get close enough to grab that moving dinner plate.

A few fun facts about polar bears – they are amazing swimmers, and they have a fat layer four inches deep on their rumps to insulate them and increase buoyancy while swimming. Polar bears usually swim under water at depths of about 3-4.5 metres, and the longest polar bear dive observed to date lasted a total of three minutes



Hamiltonbukta & Svensksund

DAY 3 | Saturday, 5th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 5th August

Latitude: 79°47.0'N

Longitude: 011°57.1'E

Course: At Anchor

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: N 2 knots

Barometer: 1002

Air Temp: 10°C

Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.

—T.S. Eliot

A foggy morning greeted us this morning but accompanying that were glass like conditions with a small swell. The fog soon lifted, and the sun danced across the surrounding glaciers at Hamiltonbukta.

Zodiacs were lowered as conditions improved even more so and we sped across to the inviting bay. We were greeted by thousands of kittiwakes and guillemonts nesting on high cliffs, and we quickly spotted a pair of arctic foxes darting in and out of rocks, trying to ascertain whether the intruders on Zodiacs were friend or foe.

Heading further into the shallow bay, we were greeted by four glaciers that sadly would have been undoubtedly linked not so long ago. Zigzagging through pieces of brash ice we managed to witness a calving of some size, the freshly exposed ice glistening with its blueish hues and reflecting across the still water.

As Zodiac engines were switched off, we sat in the silence and absorbed the sights we were seeing and gathered some perspective that we were quietly sitting near the top of the world.

The afternoon saw us travel over to Kapp Svensksund and explore the land there.

We landed in amongst the driftwood logs on the beach and split into three different groups: the long hikers, medium and the short shore explorers.

Bathing kittiwakes and arctic terns sat happily while a menacing skua kept an eye on proceedings from higher above. Passing an old trapper's fox trap, we stopped as the group had a talk about the simplicity of the device. Out of necessity, the trap was designed to weigh down the animal in order to keep the pelt intact which was crucial, as fox pelts in their heyday were valued at up to twice the amount of a polar bears.

Hiking to the highest point we would get to that afternoon we gathered for a group shot as we overlooked the fjord and our ship in the distance.

We could see some fog rolling in, so the decision was made to head back to the Zodiacs which were at an alternate landing site. We escaped before the fog hit and as the wind picked up slightly, but the clouds gave some colour to the ocean to finish off the day nicely before we could head back for a well-earned meal and drink.



Poolepynten & St. Jonsfjorden

DAY 4 | Sunday, 6th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 6 August

Latitude: 78°09.8'N

Longitude: 012°13.7'E

Course: 143°

Speed: 11.8 knots

The ice was here, the ice was there, the ice was all around
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Rime of the Ancient Mariner

We woke up to a blanket of fog covering the landscape, but the seas were calm. We were at Prins Karls Forland, the westernmost island of Svalbard, and we were there to see the famous walrus at Poolepynten.

Luckily, after breakfast the fog started to lift. We got into our Zodiacs and took a cruise around the haul out. We could certainly smell it!

Walrus are pretty lazy on land. We got to experience their massive size, their lazy grunts, their long tusks sticking up in the air as they lay on their backs. A few were swimming along the shore, and it was interesting to see how graceful they are in the water compared to their behaviour on land.

After our Zodiac cruise, we headed back to the ship for lunch and a quick rest before our afternoon activity. We repositioned the ship to St. Jonsfjorden, which wasn't too far away.

There were some incredible glaciers to explore, so we went out into the ice with our Zodiacs. All around us was the sound of popping ice, and the kayakers had paddling near icebergs admiring the glacier front. We drove slow through the brash ice as ringed seals swam by us, and many of us eventually met a bearded seal hauled out on an ice floe.

The bearded seals in St. Jonsfjorden are quite unique because of the ginger colour on their heads and whiskers. The iron-rich sediments in the area make the seals collect an orange tint. The bearded seal is very large and can weigh up to 400kg. They are the second biggest seal species in the Arctic, and usually easy to identify because of their boxy sausage shape and long whiskers.

Gold deposits have been found in the St. Jonsfjorden area. The future may potentially see Spitsbergen's first gold mine on the southern side of the fjord, where Store Norske Gull (a sister company to the company that is running the Norwegian coal mine in Longyearbyen) is investigating occurrences. There is certainly gold there, but concentrations that justify mining economically remain to be proven.

Wind Speed: SSE 3 knots

Barometer: 1000

Air Temp: 4°C

Today was our last day in Svalbard. Considering our list of wildlife sightings, we should call our Svalbard trip a success. A polar bear, three different species of seal, walrus, fox, and all the lovely seabirds— what more could we ask for?

Tonight, we begin our crossing to Greenland.



Sea Day

DAY 5 | Monday, 7th August 2023

Position at 0700 on 7 August

Latitude: 76°59.1'N

Longitude: 002°33.6'E

Course: 241°

Speed: 13.5 knots

Wind Speed: NNW 7 knots

Barometer: 1006

Air Temp: 6°C

I must go down to the sea again, to the vagrant gypsy life,

To the gulls way and the whales way where the wind's like a whetted knife...

—John Mansfield

Today was a perfect day for sleeping in at sea. Last night, we started our crossing from Svalbard to Greenland, and this morning, the first glimpses from our windows revealed a breathtaking ocean surrounding us.

After breakfast, our educational program for the day started, and it was outstanding.

Kelsey delivered an incredible presentation about a unique Arctic expedition: The Andrée Balloon Expedition, also known as the 'Flight of the Eagle'. The goal of this expedition was to fly over the North Pole in under 20 days. As often occurs in expeditions, plans changed significantly, and while the goal was not achieved, it became an integral part of the history of these territories. The story is rich with challenges, mysteries, suspense, and even a love story.

Next, Bruno gave us an excellent introduction to ice, something we expected to encounter very soon! During this session, we learned about ice formation, the various names that icebergs are given depending on their size, as well as information about glaciers, sea ice, ice shelves, and ice sheets. We are preparing ourselves to our next destination, home to the second-largest ice sheet in the world: Greenland!

Following a hearty lunch, we took a moment to rest before John delivered his captivating presentation about polar bears. These incredible animals that graced us with their presence on the very first day of our expedition in Svalbard. Now, we have a deeper understanding of their lives, the challenges they face in hunting, the dynamics of a mother and her cubs during their early weeks, and much more.

Our learning continued with Adrian, who spoke about expedition photography. Many of us were eager to enhance our skills to capture a piece of this inspiring landscape and the nature we are fortunate to experience. Adrian generously shared his tips and insights – thank you, Adrian!

Inspired by the fascinating topics we explored today, we enjoyed a delightful teatime in the lecture theatre before heading up to Deck 8 to join Bruno and Linda for a Citizen Science Cloud Survey. By observing and documenting the clouds while gazing skyward, we contribute to refining the data received from satellites, ultimately advancing our understanding of clouds and weather patterns.

As the seas were calm and the wind was gentle after dinner, we noticed ice floes passing by. This appeared to be the perfect moment for a movie and popcorn night. And the featured presentation was... "Frozen Planet II: Frozen Oceans."

With a sense of contentment from the enriching day we had, we retired for a restful night, eager to embrace a new day of exploration tomorrow.



Sea Ice

DAY 6 | Tuesday, 8th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 8th August

Latitude: 75°53.7'N

Longitude: 007°44.8'W

Course: Ice Navigation

Speed: 1.2 knots

Wind Speed: SW 5 knots

Barometer: 1018

Air Temp: 7°C

All men dream, but not equally.

Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in

the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may

act on their dreams with open

eyes, to make them possible.

—T.E. Lawrence

Today we awoke in the Greenland Sea: where the cold waters of the East Greenland current bring the thick pack ice down from the Arctic Ocean. This ice may impede the passage of ships transiting from Svalbard to Greenland, but for us the ice was the attraction.

Shortly after breakfast, Christophe announced that a small contingent of the Expedition Team would venture out to explore the ice. This group found that there were many suitable and safe ice floes for us to walk on. There we were: 200 nautical miles from the nearest land, in an ocean that is over 3,000m deep, planning to leave the comfort of our lovely ship and walk on frozen water. Surprisingly, nobody found this particularly daunting.

The winds and currents had broken the ice that was once a contiguous sheet in the Arctic into ice floes of various shapes and sizes. The *Ocean Explorer* sat adrift while we launched the Zodiacs in preparation for our excursion onto the ice.

Our trusty Zodiacs ferried us to the ice floe in small groups. There, we drove up on to the ice and disembarked to walk on the (frozen) water. This was a surprisingly relaxing experience. Christophe and his team ensured that everything was done safely, while the rest of us just chilled out – literally.

It was a strange experience to be standing on a small piece of ice in the middle of the ocean in one of the most remote places on Planet Earth. Our feet crunched across the solid ice, the cold wind bit at our cheeks and we listened to the sounds of the water lapping against the ice. Each person enjoyed the experience in their own way: serenely taking in the magnificence of the place, laughing and joking amongst ourselves, taking the obligatory selfies and group photos, and even practicing some Tai Chi. Chen XueGang is almost certainly the first person to ever practice Tai Chi on an ice floe in the middle of the Greenland Sea: what a great way to celebrate the occasion!

After lunch, we discovered that our planned polar plunge had been cancelled because the rising winds were causing the ice to drift in too quickly for safety. Instead, we enjoyed an afternoon of informative talks, with Linda telling us about the curious and tragic history of scurvy in polar exploration and Jonathan introducing us to Greenland's history, culture, biology, mountains and more.

We will be continuing our sea journey tomorrow and expect to arrive in East Greenland on Thursday if the ice permits.



Polar Plunge

DAY 6 | Tuesday, 8th August 2023







Sea Day

DAY 7 | Wednesday, 9th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 9th August

Latitude: 73°48.7'N

Longitude: 015°42.7'W

Course: Ice Navigation

Speed: 0.4 knots

Wind Speed: SSW 4 knots

Barometer: 1018

Air Temp: 7°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

The day began with the sea ice surrounding us and the mountains in the distance.

On the dense ice pack in the distance lurked a polar bear enjoying its breakfast; once every one of us finished our breakfast we went out to enjoy watching the polar bear in its natural environment.

The bear at first was unsure of us, walking parallel with us as our fantastic bridge team navigated us through the ice so we could make the most out of our encounter. The bear was rolling around on the ice, indicating that it had been in the water and was therefore trying to remove all the salt from its fur. We stayed with the bear for most of the morning.

Once we started to move on it was time for a lecture. Today we were treated to another one of Kelsey's brilliant lectures, this time it was on Nansen's crossing of Greenland. This incredible story highlighted how easy we have it in the comfort of our superb ship, the *MV Ocean Explorer*.

Lunchtime came, and to our surprise, our afternoon activity was announced: the infamous polar plunge. The platform was set up and the crazy ones amongst us proceeded to jump in the water. A particular highlight was Andrew and Craig's stylish yellow suit jackets and shorts. Most of us watched from afar on the top deck laughing and joking about these mad people braving the icy frigid waters. Many of the plungers, after their complimentary shot of vodka, took their leave for hot showers, the jacuzzi, or the sauna.

Once everyone had warmed up, Sigurd told us about the fascinating history of the Qajaq (kayak). The importance of the kayak to the Greenlanders and all peoples of the Arctic, as well as how it made its way from Siberia to Greenland and a couple of thousand of years later to the United Kingdom and subsequently the rest of the world.

Following this, we had one of our Citizen Science activities, the eBird survey, led by John, Linda, and Snowy. They managed to spot 12 northern fulmars, five black-legged kittiwakes, five harp seals, and a ringed seal.

It was then time for our recap, where we learned about the amazing travel patterns of arctic terns from Linda, the basics of geology from Bruno, and the unreliability of ice charts from the Norsk Polar Institute from Christopher.

We went to sleep with the excitement of the prospect of being in one of the most spectacular places on the planet the next day: Greenland!



Kaiser Franz Joseph Fjord

DAY 8 | Thursday, 10th August 2023

Position at 0400 on 10 August

Latitude: 73°23.49'N

Longitude: 020°19.66'W

Course: Ice Navigation

Speed: 6 knots

Wind Speed: NNE 5/6 knots

Barometer: 1016

Air Temp: 5°C

The danger of an adventure is worth a thousand days of ease and comfort.

—Paulo Coelho

Opening the curtains to let in the light of this new arctic day. The landscapes we beheld were puzzle pieces of sea ice stretching towards the horizon. Stepping outside onto the *Ocean Explorer's* top deck, the panoramic view offered spectacular sights of Greenland's rugged east coast. Behind the rocky beaches, the gold and green colours of the Arctic tundra landscape gave way to rolling hills rising into the clouds. This morning the weather forecasters informed us of scattered showers, and 10 to 20 knot northerly winds. The 4°C air temperature was so brisk that only a few fellow expeditioners were outside.

The breakfast buffet always has so much selection it is hard to choose what to start with. A selection of fruit salads, cereals, yoghurts, hot Belgian waffles with maple syrup, or savoury cooked breakfast. There were smiles all around as fellow expeditioners enjoyed breakfast with coastal views of Mackenzie Bukta. Deep in the bay lies Myggbukta, a historical whaling and meteorological station operated by the Norwegians in the 1920s. This area and the land beyond are protected as the world's largest national park. Northeast Greenland National Park was established in 1974. With a size of 972,000 km², this unique Arctic tundra landscape, the endangered wildlife, and fragile plants, are conserved for future generations to enjoy.

Today large floes of sea ice densely pack the entrance to Kaiser Franz Joseph Fjord, so much so that the Captain of the *Ocean Explorer*, with class 6 ice durability decided it would be unsafe to proceed into the fjord. Arctic expeditions have always been challenged with pack ice.

Learning about various Arctic explorers with Jonathan in the lecture theatre this morning, changing plans due to ice is nothing new. In 1869, the 'German North Polar Expedition' attempted to reach the North Pole. One of the two vessels was crushed in the ice, and the other, 'Germania', safely surveyed this coastline naming places such as Kaiser Franz Joseph Fjord after the Emperor of Austria, who supported their expedition.

Ice charts showed less dense ice south along the Greenland coast. As our expedition changed course, a polar bear was spotted roaming along the ice in search of food. The cream-coloured polar bear camouflaged very well in its natural habitat. An incredible sighting!



Ellemandsberge

DAY 9 | Friday, 11th August 2023

Position at 0400 on 11th August

Latitude: 72°56.80'N

Longitude: 020°51.44'W

Course: Ice Navigation

Speed: 1.2 knots

Wind Speed: NNE 3 knots

Barometer: 1016

Air Temp: 9°C

Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language.

—Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

The ship made its way through the pack ice all night long. An occasional thumping noise reminded us that we had not reached open water, but the pack ice did open a bit during the night so we could make our way further south along the coast of Greenland.

An amazing still and quiet Arctic landscape, dominated by whites, greys and blues, awaited us this morning as we approached Kong Oscar Fjord. As the entrance to the fjord was packed with sea-ice unfortunately we could not continue our way into the fjord. There was no need to worry, though, as proper explorers, we came up with another plan: exploring the unknown territories of Vega Sund.

As the ship navigated through the pack ice to get closer to our destination, we spent our morning listening to Piotr's lecture on dog sledding in Greenland. He explained to us the history of this way of transportation that goes back thousands of years, the special characters of the dogs and he took us on some of his adventurous dog sledding expeditions.

After the lecture, it was time to head to Deck 8 to take in some of the majestic and magnificent sceneries that unfolded around us. The sky cleared, the sun was shining, and this formed a stark contrast with the reddish-brown, snow-covered mountains around us.

Some of us joined Bruno with the Citizen Science cloud survey and bird survey projects, and some of us just enjoyed the spectacular scenery. We were also amazed by the 'fata morgana' or 'mirage' that unfolded at the horizon, making small icebergs look like giant tabular icebergs.

After a very tasteful lunch it was time to explore Vega Sund. We loaded all the Zodiacs in the water and off we went. Making our way through the pack ice we saw some of those great big sculptures of icebergs that Greenland is known for, and after a wonderful Zodiac cruise we finally got to set foot on land.



We split up in three groups for different experience levels of hike in Odedal. All the hikes lead us to this beautiful glacial meltwater lake that had a spectacular milky-blue colour. We saw some tiny vascular plants along the way and interesting geological formations in the mountains around us. After some hours of exploring, it was time to head back to the ship for a well-deserved dinner and drinks.

Rich with experiences and memories that will hold a special place in our hearts forever, we cruised further south along the coast of Greenland.



Alborg Fjord & Carlsberg Fjord

DAY 10 | Saturday, 12th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 12th August

Latitude: 71°39.3'N

Longitude: 021°57.2'W

Course: At Drift

Speed: 0.4 knots

Wind Speed: SW 4 knots

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: 11°C

Believe me my young friend, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats... simply messing.

—Water Rat to Mole from *Wind in the Willows*

On this Saturday morning, we woke up on a perfect summer day. A day about as warm and sunny as it gets in this part of the world. The sky was clear, and no clouds were to be seen. Not the most suitable day for a NASA cloud survey, but no one would complain about that. Christophe, our expedition leader, had planned a full day of activities.

We started our morning with a landing in Ålborg Fjord. From the shore, we could see colourful, layered cliffs to the East. The succession of sedimentary layers represented a time where the whole area was covered by sea and sediments were deposited on a shallow shelf. By walking up the moraines, numerous rocks told us stories about the past 900 to 600 million years. Further up the glacial valley, we found traces of the current inhabitants of this semi-hostile, half-enchanting environment: musk ox droppings, numerous tundra plant species, and even (weeks-old) tracks of a polar bear.

After lunch, we took a Zodiac cruise into the entrance of Carlsberg Fjord. In addition to having a very refreshing name, this fjord had its share of surprises: fabulous, blue, and green-coloured icebergs; impressive, 1-billion+ years old geology, dramatic glacier fronts and their associated waterfalls, ice floes all around.

After this beautiful afternoon, it was time for our recap, during which Snowy explained us the ins and outs of the renowned X-bow technology of our floating home, the *Ocean Explorer*. Like the Orca, the X-bow penetrates the waves effortlessly, allowing us the highest standing of comfort.

After that, Bruno taught us how to read rocks, and told us about the ancient Iapetus ocean and the formation of magmatic chambers. Then, Piotr showed us a small film about a Greenlandic hunter travelling with his faithful companions, the Greenlandic sled dogs.

Eventually, Christophe shared with us his thoughts about why we should not be judging anyone else's ethics and choices – such as visiting the Arctic or any other place in the world – but rather question our own choices and way of living.



Ittorisseq & Ittoqqortoormiit

DAY 11 | Sunday, 13th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 13th August

Latitude: 70°25.6'N

Longitude: 022°22.7'W

Course: 288°

Speed: 4.4 knots

Wind Speed: W 3 knots

Barometer: 1016

Air Temp: 9°C

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath.

—Herman Melville

Our day began with a short landing on the tundra at Ittorisseq near the mouth of Scoresby Sund. The excursion had a different feel, as we were able to roam freely across the rolling grassy slopes inside a perimeter of guides standing sentry duty. Beautiful weather and easy rolling terrain enabled us to stretch our legs and enjoy the carpet of wildflowers. A now derelict old hunter's cabin was a reminder of the rich history of this region.

Following a briefing about Ittoqqortoormiit and lunch, we once again shuttled to shore to a landing alongside the local boat ramp. With its multicoloured, box-like houses, the settlement stretched up the steep hillside to an extensive cemetery. It was a colourful vista, with each building painted in a primary colour, which, in past times indicated a loose code about the ownership of the structure. Red buildings were for churches and tradespeople, yellow for medical structures, blue buildings associated with fishing and green with telecommunications.

For some, the first stop up the hill was the local museum. Located in one of the oldest buildings in the town, the entry held artifacts reflecting the life of a hunter's home replete with sealskin boots, stove, and memorabilia. Up a steep set of stairs, there were polar bear skin garments, a kayak and a gallery of photographs from the settlement's establishment in 1925. Danish explorer Ejnar Mikkelsen, under the influence of the Danish Government wishing to assert its sovereignty in the region, relocated 80 people from Ammassalik, the next community 80 km to the south, to provide these families with better opportunities.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was witnessing a local Inuk hunter feed his nine Greenland sled dogs seal meat. Hiking up the hill to the east, across the ravine, gave us a good view of the town and a memorial bust of founder Ejnar Mikkelsen. Proceeding to the top of the hill, we could see the radar domes and satellite dishes. Back at the beach, Inuit fishing and hunting parties were returning from their weekend hunting trips to cabins with musk ox skins and a seal. The other hotspot was the tourist office that sold Greenlandic tourist paraphernalia. The highlight here was being able to see sled dog pups.

The red painted church just across the way was immaculately maintained and beautifully decorated with blue and white walls and rafters. We enjoyed hiking the zig zag roads to discover and great views over the bay. We were all back on board shortly after 4pm.



Rømer Fjord

DAY 12 | Monday, 14th August 2023

Position at 0600 on 14th August

Latitude: 69°37.7'N

Longitude: 023°25.8'W

Course: 313°

Speed: 4.9 knots

Wind Speed: SW 1 knot

Barometer: 1015

Air Temp: 7°C

The whales do not sing because they have an answer, they sing because they have a song.

—Gregory Colbert

“Good morning, good morning expeditioners”, woke us up in the now familiar French accent. The MV *Ocean Explorer* sailed overnight out of Scoresby Sund and into Rømer Fjord. The incredible pyramid-like mountain backdrop beckoned us in for our final day of activities.

While eating breakfast, we reached our anchor point to find a local family of hunters from Ittoqqortoormiit (If you would like a fail-safe way to pronounce it before we disembark, say ‘EAT-DUCK-OR-DOOR-MEAT’ and repeat faster). They had camped out next to some hot springs, which took us all a little bit by surprise, and had built a natural hot tub from water flowing out of the springs.

Christophe called us down for our last landing of the voyage and penultimate activity of the day. We made our way to the landing site where we were welcomed ashore. From there, we explored the tundra, looking at all the small but incredibly beautiful arctic flowers. Once we reached the hot springs, we flooded Bruno with questions about all the volcanic rocks we were seeing.

Meanwhile, the kayakers left the ship and headed deeper into the fjord towards an island on the south side of the fjord. Once we reached this island, we headed across the fjord where we could easily see the waterfalls cascading down the mountainside. After double checking with Christophe, we landed on the beach and had a small walk up to the waterfall. We sat and enjoyed the serenity of the moment, watching the crystal-clear waters rush past us. Finally, we headed back to our beach and got into the Zodiacs, towing the kayaks behind us.

After lunch, it was time for our afternoon activity: one last Zodiac cruise exploring the coast of the Rømer Fjord. While exploring the coast, we found what we believed was a young male walrus relaxing on an island, dealing with the warm temperatures. There were also lots of eider ducks flying around, many with their ducklings.

For their last paddle, the kayakers headed west out of the fjord, getting up close with the columnar basalts all around them. Once again, we had lucked out with the weather as there was almost zero wind, making it a fantastic kayak day.



Ísafjörður Fjord

DAY 13 | Tuesday, 15th August 2023

Position at 0800 15th August

Latitude: 66°39.0'N

Longitude: 023°26.2'W

Course: 180°

Speed: 13.6 knots

A man ought to rate his achievements only by the satisfaction they give him, for they will soon be outdone, outshone, and speedily forgotten by everyone but himself.

—Bill Tillman

What an amazing day to finish this voyage! 'Jewels of the Arctic', was a very fitting name for this expedition.

Starting all the way north at latitude 79°, where we experienced 24-hour daylight in the land of polar bears and the midnight sun: Svalbard. Next, the voyage took us southwest across the Arctic Circle into the icy waters of Greenland, the second-largest ice sheet on planet Earth, where temperatures are more often than not freezing. The adventures in the ice, landings, and polar plunges eventually gave way to spectacular mountainous scenery, glacial valleys, and colourful tundras. Stories of geological events became visible between layers of different minerals. Expeditioners hiked high up hillsides, kayaked along stunning coastlines, and cruised with the Zodiacs into remote areas of the East Greenland fjords. Not to forget the amazing wildlife encounters with walrus, musk ox, and arctic hare.

With light winds and calm seas, the captain and team up on the bridge made amazing progress throughout the night, sailing the 200 nautical miles across to Iceland. Hundreds of seabirds, crowd favorites such as puffins and arctic terns, welcomed our arrival.

By the time breakfast was served, we were entering Ísafjörður, which translates, yeah you guessed it: Ice Fjord. This large fjord system in the northwestern tip of Iceland is home to two to three thousand permanent residents and diverse marine life. It wasn't long before the first whales were seen. They surfaced, spraying water metres up in the air. Everyone was soon up on the top deck or watching from windows as the local humpbacks surfaced and showed off their white and black tail flukes. Expeditioners took photos of their tail flukes and sending them to 'Happy Whale', an NGO working to protect and conserve whales across the globe. John later informed us during his cetacean lecture that the flukes are like humpbacks' fingerprints, with unique patterns so one whale can be determined from another. In awe and informed by these amazing animals, we all kept our eyes out to sea to see what else we could spot.

Adrian announced across the ship to gather on Deck 7 for an expedition photo. Excited faces, the 19 Expedition Team members, and 125 new Expeditioners—happy people crowded together to capture the awesome team

Wind Speed: SW 5 knots

Barometer: 1016

Air Temp: 11°C

that had an unforgettable 14-day adventure through the most amazing areas of the Arctic region. Adrian shared his amazing talent with us in the lecture theatre later on. Beautiful photos and precious memories were presented, capturing our expedition perfectly.

To top the day off, before our final dinner together, the Captain delighted us with his presence, farewell cocktails, and words of appreciation. We all lifted our glasses for a toast.

Thank you, everyone, for making this such a great time!



Reykjavik

DAY 14 | Wednesday, 16th August 2023

Position at 0500 16th August

Latitude: 64°14.0'N

Longitude: 022° 10.8'W

Course: 114°

Speed: 7.3 knots

Wind Speed: 5.4 knots

Barometer: 1017

Air Temp: 13°C

We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure.
There is no end to the adventures we can have, if only we seek them with our eyes open.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

Early this morning we arrived in Reykjavik, waking up to our last morning together onboard the *Ocean Explorer*, which has been our sturdy and comfortable base. Here we made our farewells to the Expedition Team before heading into town, to the airport, or continuing with own arrangements.

And what a voyage it has been, the lush tundra of the southern fjords of Svalbard, to the surreal world of the sea ice off Greenland's east coast.

The wildlife has amazed us: polar bears, walrus, arctic foxes, musk ox, great humpbacks whales, soaring fulmars, and even some red-throated diver. The ever-present backdrop of the ice featured throughout our voyage, whether cruising in front of a glacier or being lost in the enchantment of the sea ice. There were walks, hikes, paddles, plunges, lectures, games, surveys, and great companionship from a delightful bunch of fellow travellers.

Aurora Expeditions thanks you for joining us aboard MV *Ocean Explorer* to Svalbard, East Greenland, and Iceland. We hope to see you on the high seas again someday!



Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: [Sigurð Davidsen](#), [Teal Morgan](#), [Gabriel Wackenhagen](#)

Number of Paddlers: 19

Total Paddle Outings: 9

Total Distance Paddled: 45.5 km

Day 2 – Saturday August 5, 2023 AM: 3.62km

We cruised along the northwest coast of Spitsbergen, Svalbard yesterday. The team woke this morning with views into Hamiltonbukta. We could see steep cliffs with thousands of sea birds souring the skies. Deep within the bay, glaciers calved their way down the from the rugged mountain peaks to the sea.

Our group of adventurous expeditioners who chose to explore the arctic coastline by sea kayak joined the guide team yesterday to gear up in dry suits, neoprene booties, spray skirt and pfd. Energy was high as we prepared the kayaks for each paddler, adjusting foot pedals and testing rudders. By 10am everyone was on the water, rafted together and ready to explore. The mornings, plan was to get comfortable with the equipment and kayaks. As we paddled into the Hamiltonbukta, a pod of nine doubles, and two singles, the clouds cleared. Sun shone through illuminating the spectacular scenery. Everyone in awe, speechless taking in our surroundings. Observing the busy auk colony high up in the cliffs and the flocks of kittiwake soaring through the sky.

Our group paddled further into the bay, navigating past small icebergs. Stopping to soak in the glaciated surroundings, we all had our cameras out snapping photos of the turquoise glacier face. Hearing a loud crack, attention quickly turned to where the noise originated. A large chunk of the glacier face carved away, crashing into the sea below. Even at the safe distance of 400 metres or more, we felt the energy surge beneath us as the swell rolled past. Continuing our tour through the icebergs, the team became more capable in the kayaks and eager for more. All too soon, the time for our return came. We clambered into the Zodiacs with Teal and Sigurd. The kayaks securely attached by rope to the back, we motored back to our ship, the *Ocean Explorer*.

Day 2 – Saturday August 5, 2023 PM: 4.34 km

In the afternoon, the Captain had cruised the 5km across the fjord to where we would paddle along a stretch of rugged rocky coastline. We loaded up on the Zodiacs for a short cruise north into a sheltered bay. Once we had all transitioned into our kayaks, we paddled along the coastline. With wind behind us the team sailed along without too much effort. The mountainous landscape at the head of Raolfjorden had us so captivated in the scenery. We noticed thick fog sneaking up behind us, a classically quick arctic weather change. With the ship only 1km off, our group discussed options and chose to stay as a tight group and paddle back to ship before the conditions could deteriorate. Back on board after our first day in the kayaks, we congratulated each other, then headed up stairs for well deserved R&R.

Day 3 – Sunday August 6, 2023 PM: 5.5km

Sailing into St Jonsfjorden, brash ice and icebergs became more and more common, eventually reaching the head of the fjord. Glaciers, Osbornebreen and Konowbreen, stretched into the clouds and beyond. The klayak team geared up and launched from the Zodiac platform at the stern of *Ocean Explorer*. Gabriel called the group

together. Forming a raft of kayakers, Gabriel shared the afternoons, plan and reminded of safety precautions when paddling near icebergs and in the vicinity of glaciers. These glaciers were huge, as far as we could see. Teal joined us, leading the team safely through brash ice, closer in towards Osbornebreen. When the team was 1km away, investigating a house-sized iceberg. A crack, then crash was heard as we turned to witness a skyscraper size chunk of ice carve away from the glacier. The shock waves in form of swell reached us a couple minutes later. Pointing our kayaks towards where the swell originated, we felt the roll of energy pass underneath us but were safe! Aware of the ever-present dangers, our group maintained a safe distance from the glacier face. We kayaked west, testing our ability, paddling through thick brash ice. Hearing the pop and bubble from thousands-year old cubes of ice melting away in the 7°C temperatures.

We rounded the headland of Valentinryggin, where less then 50 years ago the two glaciers once converged. Konowbreen now at least 2km away, another impressive glacier face, at least a kilometre wide cascading into the sea. Unfortunately, 5pm was fast approaching and Sigurd pulled up with the Zodiacs. Guests aboard, kayaks safely tied behind, we headed back to the ship. Another amazing day in the icy Arctic.

Day 8 – Friday August 11, 2023 PM: 10.8km

The day began as the bridge team slowly navigated us through the thick belts of ice, the sun was shining and the winds were low and we were all itching to get off the ship. As we approached land, we could see big cliff and beautiful icebergs. We knew it would be a good day.

We got into our drysuits and were ready to go. Once on the water, we got going paddling westwards towards land. We reached a big iceberg about the size of a large house and under the guidance of Sigurd, took a two minute pause for us all to be silent, soak in the atmosphere and appreciate the incredible natural beauty around us. Moving onward we paddled towards the beach under the towering cliffs.

Sigurd went ashore first then Teal followed. We all joined ashore after and spun our kayaks around just in case we needed to make a quick exit. We walked along the shore looking at the large hollows in the ground formed by melting ice.

Once back on the water, we followed the beach along more and paddled around a small island, whose rocks had amazing colours. There was a huge iceberg about 4km in the distance and we set out for it. After another 30 minutes paddling, we reached our goal iceberg and met up with Gabriel in the Zodiacs.

Day 9 – Saturday August 12, 2023 AM: 7.6km

Our team was geared up by 9am. We launched from the stern of *Ocean Explorer* into the glassy calm waters of Alborg Fjord. We navigated around house-sized icebergs towards the head of the fjord. Following the shingle beach to the south, we observed colourful tundra growing in the u-shaped glacial valley. The geology of the area, 600-900 million year old sedimentary landscape. The colourful layers of reds, yellows and browns telling us stories the years past.

Day 9 – Saturday August 12, 2023 PM: 6,77 km

We sailed into Carlsberg Fjord anchoring the ship near Kap Greville where the kayak team planned to explore the coastline. Loading into the Zodiacs at 2pm, we cruised in closer to shore. About to transition into kayaks, a

radio call came through announcing a polar bear in the bay we hoped to kayak, so we cruised past the bay to where it was safe to paddle. The kayak excursion took us deeper into the fjord where glaciers carved through the landscape flowing into the sea. The team, keen for more, had to save it for tomorrow as a BBQ was prepared for the evening.

Day 10 – Sunday August 13, 2023 AM: 4.5km

The group gathered for the first paddle in Scoresbysund and we knew that we needed to get the most out of today's paddle, since we would have to hurry back to the *Ocean Explorer* in order to make it to the afternoon town visit in Iltoqqortoormiit.

The group launched from the marina. As we paddled west towards the shoreline, our front guide noticed that the pack ice was very interesting, so we decided to go and explore, we had an amazing paddle in between large pieces of sea ice. Where we cruised and enjoyed every opening between the ice, that our guides deemed safe. What an experience. After spending some time in the ice, we continued towards the coastline, where we paddled around the western end and headed further in to the Scoresbysund fjordsystem, with views of the majestic mountain range in the south.

Day 11 – Monday August 14, 2023 AM: 6.04 km

The waters were once again in our favour. With a light breeze and tide working with us, we were ready to explore Rømer Fjord. We got in our kayaks and began, with Teal and Gabriel leading us towards shore where steam was mystically rising from the ground due to the hot springs there.

We continued on our way into the fjord, marvelling at the huge mountains above us and the amazing layering of volcanic rocks obvious on the mountain sides. We came across plenty of eider ducks and their ducklings, and a couple glaucous gulls flying overhead. We were about to paddle around the island when we were told by Sigurd in the safety Zodiacs about our friend Wally the Walrus lurking around the corner.

Now it was time to paddle across the fjord, towards the waterfalls cascading down the valley on the north side of the fjord.

Whilst approaching the waterfalls, we were given the go ahead by Christophe. Once landed, Sigurd walked up to the first rise in the ground to look out for any special wildlife, and Teal gathered the group and we walked up towards the waterfalls. Once we reached the first waterfall, we stopped as a group and enjoyed looking at the crystal-clear waters and felt the nature around us in the remoteness of East Greenland. We walked back to the beach and hopped on the Zodiacs, thus ending our penultimate paddle.

Day 11 – Monday August 14, 2023 PM: 6.4 km

For the last paddle, after exploring the inner western part of Rømøfjærd in the morning, we headed east towards the open sea. On our way, we used the last hours to enjoy the barren landscape, and the layered mountains. As the group paddled against the wind, we saw the opening of the fjordsystem as a metaphoric end of the world, where we could almost paddle over the edge. All good expeditions must come to an end. This one ended with a Zodiac pickup 6.5km east of the *Ocean Explorer*. Thank you team, you were amazing.







Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	August													
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Red-throated Diver									•	•				
Great Northern Diver									•					
Pink Footed Goose			•	•										
Barnacle Goose	•													
Common Eider	•	•		•					•	•		•		
Common Ringed Plover									•	•	•	•		
Purple Sandpiper			•	•						•	•			
Common Redshank													•	•
Arctic Skua	•		•	•				•	•			•		•
Long-tailed Skua				•					•					
Glaucous Gull		•	•	•				•	•	•	•	•		•
Lesser Black-backed Gull												•		•
Herring Gull														•
Ivory Gull									•					
Black-legged Kittiwake	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•
Arctic Tern	•	•	•	•	•	•							•	•
Common Guillemot													•	•
Brunnich's Guillemot		•	•	•		•								
Black Guillemot		•	•	•		•				•	•	•		•
Razorbill														
Little Auk		•	•	•	•	•				•	•		•	
Atlantic Puffin	•	•	•	•	•								•	•
Northern Gannet													•	
European Shag													•	
Northern Fulmar	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•
Eurasian Blackbird													•	
Common Raven										•	•	•		
Snow Bunting	•	•	•							•	•	•		



Mammal Species	August													
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common/Harbour Seal		•												
Ringed Seal				•			•	•				•		
Bearded Seal				•								•		
Harp Seal							•		•					
Walrus		•		•								•		
Minke Whale		•												
Humpback Whale						•					•	•	•	•
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin													•	
White-beaked Dolphin													•	
Arctic Hare											•			
Arctic Fox				•										
Reindeer		•												
Musk Ox											•		•	
Polar Bear		•						•	•		•			







Expeditioners:

Peter Attrill

Cathy Baker

Margaret Barr

Zara Bhagobati

Ruben Bhagobati

Henry Bhagobati

Fang Bian

Terence Brown

Jeffrey Cabbage

Lori Cabbage

Shipeng Cao

Anita Carter

Bill Carter Jr

Siu Ling Chan

Haisong Chang

Xuegang Chen

Yongyang Chen

Ada Cheng

Thomas Clair

Renè de Dreu

Angela Ferres

Natalie Ferres

Wayne Fyffe

Andrew Gillard

Deidre Gorospe

Stephen Gouldstone

Craig Haifer

Aggi Haig

Ruth Harris

Nathan Harris

Birgitta Hassler

Bei He

Zhengyang He

Linda He

Graeme Hissey

Joan Hissey

Bin Hu

David Jackson

Dene Kelly

Veronica Kidd

Erich Krispler

Jiri Krivanek

Nada Krivankova

Tung Lam

Steven Lambert

Tamra Lambert

Tian Lan

Xuemei Li

Xiaoliang Li

Jihong Lin

Xiaoyang Liu

Xulan Liu

Ronald McDonald

Heather McNeice

Di McTavish

Bruce McTavish

Bronwyn Merritt

John Moore

Jocelyn Moore

Mary Morgan

Karen Muller

Marc Murray

Karen Murray

Roslyn Mustoe

Peter Ormerod

Graeme Orr

Catherine Poulter

Allan Poulter

Bronwyn Raphael

Bryan Raphael

Sophie Richmond

Greg Saggus

Christine Sales

Yunxiang Shen

Miha Sipec

Yang Song

Zhenyu Song

Yu Xin Song

Lois Spehn-Jackson

Harlee Strauss

Bill Stubbins

Lyn Stubbins

William Stuehler

Yan Sui

Lei Sun

Patricia Swallow

Yu Yang Tony To

Vilo Trska

Eva Trskova

Lulu Trskova

Irena Urbanc

Anne Van Loon

Standa Vecera

Venda Vecera

Standa Vecera

Lenka Vecerova

Bettina Voss

Alastair Wait

Sarah Wait

Nick Walsh

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Christophe Bouchoux

Assistant Expedition Leader: Piotr Damski

Onboard Expedition Manager: Samantha Deer

Firearms Manager: Graeme Snow

Zodiac Master: Jebidiah Pearce

Expedition Medic: Linda Steutal

Geologist: Bruno Lauper

Historian: Johathan Chester

Naturalist: John Kirkwood

Local Guide: Kelsey Camacho

Photography Guide: Adrian Wlodarsky

Mandarin Speaking Guide: Zhenhuan Zhang (Darwin)

Mandarin Speaking Guide: Chen Zhongyuan (Chen)

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Reza Rusooly

Onboard Expedition Manager Trainee: Lelia Cataldi

Senior Lead Kayaking Guide: Sigurd Davidsen

Kayaking Guide: Gabriel Wacernagel

Kayaking Guide: Teal Morgan

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Maxim Makarovskiy & Vadym Tavrovetsky

Chief Officer: Alexandru Taraoi

Safety Officer: Valeriy Zelenyak

2nd Officer: Jovanka Savovic

Bosun: Bobby Penuliar Payumo

Ship Doctor: Andres Peralta

Ship Doctor: Julio Lopez

Chief Engineer: Andrei Ciurea

Hotel Director: Ulises Cantillo

F&B Manager: Raj Murao

Chief Purser: Willie Lirio

Executive Chef: Cristiand Mini Pineda

Head Waiter: Jemuel Alcantara

Hotel Controller: Arnold Roque

IT Officer: Dimitrios Kasagiannis

Receptionist: Ana Fernandez

Receptionist: Johnny Valdez

Head Stateroom: Florante Jr. Lusong

Carpenter: Roberto Ixtan

Able Seaman: Gilberto Azusano

Able Seaman: Muhammad Karier

Able Seaman: Jongie Rebello

Able Seaman: Khenette Verzosa

Able Seaman: Joel Valdevieso Noble





