

Northern Lights Explorer

Aboard *Ocean Explorer* | 1 – 22 September 2023





Kirkenes

DAY 1 | Saturday, 2nd September 2023

Position at 2000

Latitude: 70°07.9'N

Longitude: 030°45.3' E

Course: 049°

Speed: 11.4 knots

Wind Speed: SW 3 knots

Barometer: 1017 hPa

Air Temp: 15°C

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, Dream, Discover.

—Mark Twain

Today we find ourselves in the charming town of Kirkenes, located in Finnmark county, in the northeastern part of Norway. This town is home to a modest population of approximately 3,500 residents.

Our day commenced at the local hotel with a delightful breakfast, as we gazed out at the serene waters of the long Varangerfjorden. The morning was ours to explore the town, perhaps do some last-minute shopping, all while preparing for the upcoming weeks of Arctic adventures.

In the early afternoon, we embarked on a guided tour of Kirkenes and its surroundings. During this experience, we gained insights into the rich cultural importance of the Sami people native to the region. We were also informed about the city's wartime historical past when we visited the Andersgrotta bomb shelter. Our journey then took us to the Russian border, where Norway's eastern neighbour was merely metres away.

Later in the afternoon, we gathered our belongings and made our way from the hotel to the pier for embarkation. The Ocean Explorer was upon us where we had a welcome buffet prepared by the friendly food and beverage team. With the assistance of attentive stewards, we smoothly settled into our cabins, which quickly began to feel like our "home away from home."

Safety first, as we assembled for the crucial safety drill. Seven long blasts followed by a short one signalled our readiness to grab our orange life jackets, beanies, and warm clothing. We convened in the lecture theatre, and with guidance from the crew, made our way to Deck 7 where the polar-class life rafts were located.

Afterwards, our Expedition Leader, Isabelle, offered a warm welcome followed by Piotr, our Assistant Expedition Leader and Samantha, our Onboard Expedition Manager, who provided us with valuable insights and tips. They were followed by a quick presentation of the whole Expedition Team, each an expert in their respective fields. We also had the privilege of hearing from our hotel director, Ulises, and our onboard doctor, Julio. Following this, we indulged in a delectable dinner, artfully crafted, and served by our exceptional hotel team.

Meanwhile, we received clearance to depart from the wharf and embark on our journey through the Arctic. We are a total of 112 expeditioners, along with crew from various corners of the globe and 17 Expedition Team members with a variety of specialties ranging from polar exploration and mountaineering to geology, history, biology, photography, medicine, and kayaking.

Just when we thought the day was ending, and we were ready to retire for a well-deserved rest, an unexpected announcement from Adrian, our expedition photographer, beckoned us to the open decks to witness the mesmerising northern lights. There, against the backdrop of the clear sky in northeast Norway, we were treated to the incredible natural spectacle we had eagerly anticipated.

What an extraordinary way to kick off our Northern Lights Expedition!



Honningsvåg

DAY 2 | Sunday, 3rd September 2023

Position at 0800

Latitude: 71°04.1'N

Longitude: 026°43.4'E

Course: 236°

Speed: 13.2 knots

Wind Speed: SW 2 knots

Barometer: 1017 hPa

Air Temp: 14°C

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

—T.S. Eliot

After a beautiful showing of northern lights last night, we woke up in the morning prepared for our first day of shore excursions. The weather was calm, and the city of Honningsvåg awaited us. As with Kirkenes, Honningsvåg is located in the Finnmark municipality and is the northernmost city within the Norwegian mainland. Once we were off the ship, we split into three different groups with unique itineraries and headed to our respective buses.

One group headed for a trekking trip to Kirkeporten, a beautiful 2km walk to a natural arch formation overlooking the Mefjord and the North Cape. We enjoyed quiet moments; a landscape full of crowberries, blueberries, and lingonberries; and saw lots of reindeer along the way. Our guides gave us plenty of information about the Sámi people, the local fishing industry, and the story of Northern Norway during WW2.

Meanwhile, another group headed for the North Cape. Although it was foggy when we arrived, it cleared up and we were treated to an incredible, panoramic view as we gazed north to the Barents Sea. Visitors from all over the world come to enjoy this sight, and it was well worth it!

The rest of us enjoyed a fascinating behind-the-scenes tour of the Honningsvåg seafood industry. We visited a fish factory and learned about the production of stock fish, clip fish, and king crab. This is one of the largest factories in the municipality, and one of the biggest exporters of king crab. We sampled some of the delicacies inside a lavvo (traditional Sami structure in the shape of a prism), which was a great way to dive into the local culture and experience a taste of Norway.

We headed back to the Ocean Explorer for a late lunch, and waved goodbye to Honningsvåg. Shortly after leaving, our wonderful captain surprised us with a ship's cruise past the North Cape. It was special to see the impressive cliffs from the sea, and a rainbow even appeared as we continued down the coast.

Later in the evening, it was time for the traditional 'Captain's Welcome' in the lecture theatre. We met Captain Vadym and some of the amazing crew members that make this voyage possible. With such a great team onboard, it's sure to be a memorable trip with lots of adventures ahead.

Even though stormy seas and windy weather are predicted over the next couple days, we are still feeling positive, and look forward to what tomorrow will bring.



At Sea

DAY 3 | Monday, 4th September 2023

Position at 0700

Latitude: 70°14.5'N

Longitude: 018°28.8' E

Course: 223°

Speed: 10.3 knots

Wind Speed: SW 6 knots

Barometer: 1002 hPa

Air Temp: 14°C

I must go down to the sea again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the winds like a whetted knife...

—John Masefield

Throughout the night the weather had deteriorated. The sun shone through the stratocumulus clouds, however in the distance, fog hung heavy and dark. Wind whipped the water into choppy seas, rocking the Ocean Explorer back and forth. Hand on the handrails, we made our way around the ship safely.

After breakfast, we all met in the lecture theatre for the mandatory Zodiac briefing with Piotr. We were introduced to basic Zodiac safety including the confident "three step" manoeuvre in and out of Zodiacs. The importance of the "Sailors Grip" was demonstrated, which we practiced with fellow Expeditioners. Excited for upcoming Zodiac exploration, Piotr reminded us to wear warm waterproofs and disinfect the Muck Boots for our safety and the safety of the pristine environments that we will soon be visiting.

Throughout the day, the wind picked up, and the swell rocked the boat around. Some took well deserved rest, others braved the weather and headed out onto the decks. Birders and volunteers of citizen science joined Paulina at the aft of the ship to observe and document the many northern fulmars, kittiwakes and various other sea birds catching the wind currents uplifted and eddying around the Ocean Explorer.

The Expeditioners expanding their Arctic exploration by kayak met for a "meet and greet" in the afternoon. As a team of the kayak guides, we were excited to see so many excited faces. Peter spoke about safety on the water, Teal shared the value of teamwork, and Gabriel gave information about the gear to wear on a kayak expedition. Heading down for a tour of the mudroom, kayakers donned drysuits and life jackets. Ready for adventure!

With a sweet treat and hot cup of tea, we took a seat in the lecture theatre to learn more about Norway with Jonathan. He explained how an ice cap covered the landscape 10,000 years ago during the last ice-age, and how glaciers carved long deep fjord systems and that the Atlantic gulf stream allows the climate of Norway to flourish with marine and terrestrial life. The seafood industry and discovery of oil and gas changed the Norwegian economy from one of the poorest to one of the richest countries in the world. Jonathan shared his passion of history with stories of the iron age, times of Viking rule through to more recent Norwegian polar explorers and modern Norwegian culture.

The evening recap consisted of many more amazing stories from Kelsey about the Sami people and how they've lived in northern Scandinavia for thousands of years. Teal shared a story of a fisherman's brawl in Trollfjord and some insight to where we will visit tomorrow. We learned about the sea eagle with Meike, finishing off with the exciting news that the local pilot was onboard. And with that we set sail for more sheltered waters of the unique Lofoten Archipelago.



Trollfjord & Svolvær

DAY 4 | Tuesday, 5th September 2023

Position at 0600

Latitude: 68°12.5'N

Longitude: 014°55.5'E

Course: 016°

Speed: 9.3 knots

Wind Speed: SW 6 knots

Barometer: 1004 hPa

Air Temp: 14°C

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

—Paulo Coelho

It was an early start, but everyone was keen, for it was for Trollfjord in the majestic Norwegian Fjords that we were visiting. As we weaved through the fjord system the sun rose in the distance, only to be interrupted by a few clouds. Then the rain started. And while it never stopped for the rest of the day, no one was deterred, remaining on deck to soak in the Norwegian weather.

We steamed toward Trollfjord and the sun attempted to poke through the clouds and past the mountains, every now and then scattering some golden light on the mountain sides and calm waters inside the fjord. We passed towering cliffs flanked by powerful waterfalls, one after the other they fell from up high in the lush green surroundings.

Houses lined the fjord, small villages appeared as well, as we looked on in envy envisioning the peace and serenity that accompanied anyone living in such a magnificent place. Among some gulls and cormorants, we were graced with the presence along the way of up to ten white tailed eagles. Some sat atop tiny islands, some flew above and even gave us a fly-by as it approached from the port side and flew across the front of the ship. As we approached the entrance to Trollfjord and turned in, the narrow waterway, which was flanked on either side by towering rock cliffs, was only as wide as the ship is as long, 100 metres to be exact.

Creeping along, the decks were full of wet passengers who were enjoying the enclosed proximity of the fjord and expressing their delight at travelling through such a unique destination. Rotating at the end in front of the hydro power station, we headed back out, turning to port at the end and heading toward our destination of Svolvær.

Svolvær, the capital and largest amongst the Lofoten archipelago sat at the foot of some magnificent mountains. The rain had not abated, so wet weather gear was donned and we all headed out to our afternoon activities. My group walked through the town and had a tour of the old fishing village. Learning about how fishing had shaped the lives and livelihoods of a lot of Norwegians in the past was very interesting, even if the taste of the dried cod that we received at the end was anything but.

Still the rain persisted as we wound our way through town and back to the ship, but spirits were anything but dampened due to the wonderful people and surroundings we found ourselves in.



Vegaøya & Brønnøysund

DAY 5 | Wednesday, 6th September 2023

Position at 0600

Latitude: 65°45.0'N

Longitude: 012°17.7' E

Course: 205°

Speed: 11.2 knots

Isabelle awoke us all early this morning as we had a busy day of activities ahead. Overnight we had sailed further south, crossing the Arctic Circle to reach the Vega Archipelago. This World Heritage site consists of over 6,500 islands. It is known for its outstanding nature and cultural heritage, centred around the Islanders' unique role as guardians of the eider ducks that nest here, practices that date back over one thousand years.

After a yummy breakfast, we got our first taste of a 'proper' landing as we were whisked out in Zodiacs from the ship to the pier. Many of us enjoyed the smooth run in, skirting in-between the small islets and rocky outcrops, the air in our hair, and the early morning sun rays peeping through the clouds playing on the simmering sea surface and the surrounding islands.

Once ashore, we split into four groups to walk to Holandsosen Nature Reserve, Kjellerhaugvatnet Nature Reserve, as well as visiting the old fishing village where we were among some of the beautiful hundred-year-old wooden homes, with their classic architecture that donned the coasts and islands. We were treated by a chance encounter with a Norwegian hunting dog trainer and breeder – Grete – who cheerfully recounted the ins and outs of a hunting dog competition and the rigors of training, while allowing us to play with her three adult Petit Bassetts and their cute eight-week-old pups.

While some were having their tour on land, the kayakers were gliding around the islets enjoying low wind and superb conditions for a paddle.

In addition, we all visited the excellent and informative Vega World Heritage Centre, which showcased the Islanders' traditional lifestyle, working as farmers or fishermen and tending to the local eider duck population. Here we were treated with freshly made waffles and coffee and greeted by a pair of billy goats.

The MV Ocean Explorer repositioned while we enjoyed a hearty lunch. We had arrived in Brønnøysund, which straddled the midpoint of Norway. Here we disembarked for either a hike to the "mythical mountain" of Torghatten or a visit to the Norwegian Aquaculture Centre. Mount Torghatten has an unusual and striking feature – a large hole cut through the centre of it, carved by ancient water erosion. We hiked up the 452 rock steps, curiously laid by Nepalese sherpas, and were escorted by spectacular views of the sea and a string of islands. Once midway up, we were able to pass through the mountain to the other side via the large cavern. The ones of us who visited the Aquaculture centre were able to gain insights into the process of fish farming, an industry that has grown rapidly in Norway over the last two decades to the point that it is now one of the world's largest producers of farmed fish.

All too soon, it was time to return to the ship for canapés and another delicious dinner. We had all enjoyed an eventful day!

Wind Speed: SE 2 knots
Barometer: 1021 hPa

Air Temp: 11°C



At Sea

DAY 6 | Thursday 7th September 2023

Position at 0700

Latitude: 67°11.8'N

Longitude: 008°14.1'E

Course: 300°

Speed: 13.4 knots

Wind Speed: SW 7 knots

Barometer: 1019 hPa

Air Temp: 14°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

After leaving Brønnøysund, Norway, we headed northward to the pilot station to drop off the pilot. Once the pilot was off the ship it was time to head west.

We woke in the morning, to breakfast as usual with a range of options. Now we were all ready to start our day at sea. The first activity of the day was our bridge visits; we met opposite the reception on Deck Five then made our way up towards the forward of Deck Seven. We were treated by Captain Vadym giving us our bridge tour.

Once all the bridge visits were over, we had a lecture from Paulina on 'Plate Tectonics: Formation of Norway and Greenland.' Here we learnt all about the structure of the planet and continental drift and about the Caledonian Orogeny, the mountain range that is now separated by the Atlantic Ocean. At the end of the lecture, Paulina showed an amazing graphic of what the earth would look like in 250 million years.

Before we knew it lunch came around, it was pizza day. Once we were all full again there was a little break in the activities before Jonathan's lecture on 'The Mystery and History of the Northern Lights.' We learned all about the different mythologies relating to the aurora. After Jonathan's lecture, JB did a practical demonstration of how the northern lights work and the science behind them, using iron filings and magnets.

The afternoon had rolled around quickly, and some of us were feeling the seas quite a bit. The crew then treated us to some fantastic crêpes suzette in the lecture hall. Gerald, the pastry chef, once again outdid himself with this fantastic treat.

Once the evening was upon us, it was time for our daily recap and plans for tomorrow. We had quite a few recaps this night, one very enlightening recap on the X-bow and how it works from Snowy, a lovely talk on gannets from Meike, an amazing talk from JB on salmon farming, and another epic journey from Kris where he read a beautiful poem at the end, from Rolf Jacobsen.



Jan Mayen

DAY 7 | Friday 8th September 2023

Position at 1000

Latitude: 70°29.6'N

Longitude: 006°17.3'W

Course: 299°

Speed: 14.5 knots

Wind Speed: NNW 6 knots

Barometer: 990 hPa

Air Temp: 0.8°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

Today we awoke to overcast skies on a slightly wavy seascape. Our goal, to navigate towards the needle in the haystack on the open sea known as Jan Mayen.

The discovery of Jan Mayen was made just over 400 years ago in the year 1614. The party who discovered the island was of Dutch origin and they were on the hunt for whales on their way to the recently discovered archipelago known at the time as Spitsbergen, meaning steep mountains (now known as Svalbard). It must have come as a surprise to see the now infamous Beerenburg volcano contrasting the horizon, standing at a staggering 2,277 metres above sea level. Not only is it the world's northernmost active volcano, but it is also contrasted by several glaciers which surround the main crater from all directions. Beerenburg means the bear mountain where one can assume that polar bears must have inhabited the area upon the first visit to the island.

Jan Mayen has had a very interesting history, which was brought to life before our eyes and ears when Meike gave her lecture 'Who discovered Jan Mayen? The story of Dutch whaling! Which whales were targeted when the whalers were making their way to the high Arctic in the early 17th century? We learned that it was primarily two species; the most popular had two names, the bowhead whale or the Greenland right whale, which has the scientific name of *Balaena mysticetus*. This whale can weigh as much as 80-100 tons, can live up to 200 years old and has so much blubber that it actually floats when dead. Alternatively, there was another type of whale called the North Atlantic right whale which has the scientific name *Eubalaena glacialis*. This whale can also weigh more than 100 tons but is more commonly found between 50-60 tons. A fun fact about the North Atlantic right whale is that each of a male's two testicles can weigh up to 500kg. Both whales were called the right whale as they were referred to as the "right whale to kill".

Jan Mayen was only used as a whaling station from 1614-50 as the whales followed the sea ice edge and were becoming more pelagic. As a result, the whaling vessels followed suit and learned to process the whales on their ships which was a dangerous affair as the ships were wooden and they would boil down the blubber into oil to be sold as lubricants, soaps, and as a lighting source. Jan Mayen was essentially uninhabited from the 1650's until



At Sea

DAY 8 | Saturday 9th September 2023

Position at 0900

Latitude: 72°36.0'N

Longitude: 018°42.0'W

Course: 299°

Speed: 11.7 knots

Wind Speed: NW 3 knots

Barometer: 1001

Air Temp: 6°C

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

Early in the morning the sea was mill-pond calm enabling us to make good progress across the Greenland Sea towards East Greenland. We could already see the mountains of Shannon Island, Sabine Island and Wollaston Forland, names that date back to the whaling era of the 1820s and earlier. Quite by chance a minke whale was also sighted this morning.

Beautiful icebergs were the main attraction just after breakfast. We were treated by Captain Vadym, who took the ship on a tight circuit of the pair of stunning photogenic icebergs, one of which sported a giant arch. Four more bridge tours were offered, helping us understand the around the clock work that goes on in a ship's state of the art command centre. Jonathan entertained us late morning with his 'Introduction to Greenland' presentation.

By early afternoon we were at the mouth of Kaiser Franz Joseph Fjord, named by Captain Karl Koldewey of the Second German North Pole Expedition of 1869-70, after the Kaiser Franz Joseph (1830 –1916) Emperor of Austria, and ruler of the Habsburg monarchy who was a patron of the expedition.

Another unusually large tabular berg inspired the Captain to bring the Ocean Explorer to within a stone's throw of this giant, football field size icy platform. He apologised for interrupting Paulina's glaciology lecture, but there could have been no better example of one of the classic iceberg shapes to illustrate one significant facet of the story of the Arctic ice cycle.

At the recap, Paulina was able to complete her glaciology lecture and Meike reviewed the mammals we are likely to see in Greenland. Zodiac Manager Nacho told us about the history of the Zodiac company and how they evolved from making WWI artillery observation balloons to dirigibles, and then in 1930 expanded these technologies to develop the rugged inflatable small craft that today are the industry standard expedition small craft.

It was a tough choice after dinner whether to participate in Kelsey and Kris's toga quiz night or head to Deck 8 to enjoy the shafts of orange light catching high clouds and lighting up the tops of the mountains either side of the fjord. A strong katabatic wind flowing down off the Walterhausen Glacier into Nordfjord made photography



a challenge, but it was well worthwhile braving the elements to capture the sunset magic and the dramatic geology of the Gauss Halvao on the north side and Gunnar Anderssons Land on the southern side of Kaiser Franz Joseph Fjord.



Nordfjord & Blomsterbugten

DAY 9 | Sunday 10th September 2023

Position at 0600

Latitude: 73°40.1'N

Longitude: 024°19.9'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 4.4 knots

Nevermore, however weary, should one faint by the way who gains the blessings of one mountain day; whatever his fate, long life, short life, stormy or calm, he is rich forever.

—John Muir, *My First Summer in Sierra*

Our day in the pristine wilderness of eastern Greenland was nothing short of extraordinary. It marked the inaugural landing of our entire voyage, a thrilling entry into the untouched beauty of this remote region.

Before we get into all the adventures, let me tell you that the morning started a bit windy, and some of us got a little wet. Don't worry, it just added a dash of excitement to the day! The day promised not one but two exhilarating landings, both accessed via our trusty Zodiacs.

A defining feature of this day was the freedom to tailor our experience to our own preferences and abilities. We could choose between three distinct hiking options, each catering to a different level of adventurer. There was the leisurely easy hike for those who wanted to take it slow, the moderate trek for those seeking a balanced challenge, and the long, adventurous expedition for those craving discovery over more terrain.

In the morning, Nordfjord beckoned with its enchanting beauty. The easy hike allowed for a relaxed exploration, offering glimpses of the Arctic's serene grandeur. As we ventured further, the moderate and long hike unveiled breath taking vistas and the rugged terrain of Greenland, a true immersion into the untamed wilderness.

During this morning adventure we came across the Nordfjordhus hut, a testament to the area's history and resilience. There, you also had the privilege of witnessing muskoxen with their young from a distance, a sight that stirred a deep sense of wonder. The sight of muskoxen skulls was a haunting reminder of the harshness of this environment.

In the afternoon, our expedition continued to Blomsterbugten, a place where history met nature seamlessly. Here, we had the opportunity to embark on hikes of varying difficulties, each leading us to astounding rock formations that left us in awe of geological forces at work. Additionally, we navigated around majestic icebergs with our Zodiacs, experiencing the Arctic's icy majesty up close.

As evening descended, we found ourselves on the outside decks savouring a barbecue feast. The chill in the air couldn't dampen our spirits as we dined, danced, and revelled in the joy of the moment. We watched the Arctic sunset a burst of colours as it set over the Arctic horizon.

Wind Speed: NW 6 knots

Barometer: 1010 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

This day was a testament to the spirit of exploration and the boundless beauty of eastern Greenland. It was a day filled with adventure, natural wonders, and shared moments of joy, leaving us with memories to cherish for a lifetime.



Alpefjord

DAY 10 | Monday, 11th September 2023

Position at 0600

Latitude: 72°12.2'N

Longitude: 026°26.4'W

Course: 185°

Speed: 6.1 knots

Wind Speed: SSE 5 knots

Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: 9°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

In the early morning light, we awoke to the breathtaking beauty of Alpefjord, nestled within the Segelsällskapets region, between the Vikingebrae and the Gully Glacier in Northeast Greenland National Park. The place that earned its name Alpefjord for the majestic mountains that adorned its eastern shores, standing tall and proud.

The day began with the promise of exciting adventures. After a hearty breakfast, we eagerly prepared for our first Zodiac cruise, while kayakers set out to explore the fjord's hidden corners. Cameras clicked away, capturing the natural wonders they were about to encounter.

As the sun made its ascent behind the towering peaks, it painted the sky with a stunning sun halo above the Gully Glacier. In front of the glacier a flock of long-tailed ducks gracefully flew by adding a touch of wildlife to the already magical scene.

After the morning Zodiac cruise, we had the surprise of participating in an exhilarating polar plunge off the marina. The brave souls who took the plunge were met with music, moral support, and warm towels from the E-team on the pontoon.

As the anchor was lifted to continue the journey through the fjord, an unexpected event occurred—the Ocean Explorer ran aground on an uncharted sandbank. Captain Vadym assured everyone that the ship was ok and we were all safe. During this day he kept us updated on the situation on a regular basis.

Amidst this unexpected pause, a family of musk oxen made an appearance, leisurely grazing on the shore's vegetation. As the musk oxen slowly disappeared, we made our way to the restaurant for a lovely lunch.

After lunch, Kelsey regaled the audience with the adventurous tale of Nansen's attempt to cross the Greenland ice sheet in 1888, reminding everyone of the spirit of exploration and discovery that had brought them to this remote corner of the world.



The day was filled with knowledge, and it concluded with hot chocolate and a fascinating lecture by Johnathan about the five poles: Magnetic North Pole, North Celestial Pole, Geographic North Pole, and Geomagnetic Pole. His lecture left everyone with information perfect for a future trivia night.

The evening's recap by our Expedition Leader, Isabelle, updated us with the latest information and assured us that the bridge team was diligently working to navigate the situation, keeping everyone safe. In good spirits, the Expeditioners gathered for dinner, all the while taking in the picturesque fjord with its first snowfall of the season, turning the mountaintops a gentle shade of pink in the evening light.

Expedition Leader, Isabelle, gathered everyone for the final update of the day. She shared that regulations dictated that our next destination will have to be Akureyri, a two-day sail from Alpefjord.

As the sun dipped behind the colossal mountain range, some of us gathered in the bar and lecture theatre, sharing stories of the day's adventures, and wishing each other sweet dreams for the night.







Alpefjord

DAY 11 | Tuesday 12th September 2023

Position at 0700

Latitude: 72°07.9'N

Longitude: 025°28.0'W

Course: 0 knots

Speed: 1014 hPa

Wind Speed: SSW 4 knots

Barometer: 1014 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

Just as the wave cannot exist for itself,
but is ever a part of the heaving surface of the ocean,
so must I never live my life for itself,
but always in the experience which is going on around me.

—Albert Schweitzer

We awoke to a beautiful, clear and still morning in Alpefjord. Some had not slept long as they had been enticed by the clear skies to search for the Aurora Borealis and had been rewarded with a colourful but fairly faint show in the wee hours of the night. Many ventured onto the outside decks prior to breakfast to gaze at the snow-clad peaks of the Stauning Alper, bathed in the golden morning sun and the mirror-like reflections from the still pale turquoise fjord. As always in Greenland, scale is deceptive and it was easy to forget that these peaks rise straight up from sea level to elevations of more than 2,000 metres and make the mighty Sefström glacier, with its 60 metre face, seem diminutive.

Breakfast was had while efforts to free the ship from its sandy shackles continued. Much of the crew laboured all night, redistributing weight and powering the engines in the hope of liberating the ship during the high tides. Much could be seen from the ship, and we were marooned in a stunning location. Paulina, Teal, Gabe, and Meike led a Deck 8 educational and interpretation of the surrounding landscape and life. Paulina explained aspects of the adjacent glacier and largescale geology. Teal discussed more of the small-scale features, such as the process of freezing and thawing that cracks the rocks, the fluid movement of the outer skin of landscape that can peel away and slump from the underlying permafrost and the deposition of erratics – seemingly strangely displaced boulders – that rather are clues to a glaciated past. Meike spoke about vegetation – surprisingly vibrant on closer inspection – and birdlife, already largely fled south as winter and harsher times encroached.

Later in the morning Piotr gave a personal insight into sled dogs and dog sledding, through his experiences in Svalbard. His insights went beyond facts and figures, also relaying the cultural importance of the relationship between the Inuit and sled dogs, and the wider “natural” world which they are intricately a part of, not separated from. He also revealed the day-to-day aspects of working with sled dogs, the dynamics between the dogs and the musher and the personal characteristics of these working dogs themselves.

During Piotr’s lecture we had a quick fly-by by the Danish Military Flyvevabnet Challenger plane, checking on our situation. Later, two boats from the revered Sirius patrol arrived and four officers boarded, offering their assistance.

After lunch, it was Snowy who relayed his experiences working with the Australian Antarctic Division as an electronics technician at Casey Station for 487 days during 1990-91; a lifechanging experience that led to a further 140 voyages to the Antarctic. The unique, and at times quirky challenges of living in such an isolated and nature-dominated environment, the strong friendships forged here, as well as a fondness for the environment itself were apparent.

It was knots for us in the afternoon. “Why not?” many may ask as the knot apprentices assembled in the lecture theatre. The challenge was on to perfect the reef knot, clove hitch, the elusive bowline, and then finally Gab’s quintessential Dragon Knot. Peter, Gabriel and Teal were there to give a ready hand and guide the knot novices. Farcical, frivolous yet fantastic was Kris’ contribution to the recap with Meike challenged to demonstrate her credentials by identifying “What’s that Bird?” from passenger’s mimics of bird calls. The post-dinner movie continued this atmosphere as we set sail on an Arctic adventure with a group of musical climbers and their ship, “Dodo’s Delight”.



Alpefjord

DAY 12 | Wednesday 13th September 2023

Position at 0700

Latitude: 72°07.9'N

Longitude: 025°28.0'W

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: SW 4 knots

Barometer: 1016 hPA

Air Temp: 7°C

Life is not measured by the breaths we take

But by the moments that take our breath away.

The day started with a slow September sunrise, enhanced by an energising Qigong session held by our wonderful May out on deck.

A nice thing about remaining here is that we've been able to observe the same glacial, alpine landscape over the past couple days. While travelling, it's not often we are able to watch the same space for such a long period, noticing the subtle changes in light and shadow. How special to see the gradual transformation of details, like the reflection in the water, the blooming bruise of twilight, and the appearance of star-freckled skies. In an industry defined by getting from Point A to Point B to Point C, we are currently... here and now.

Regardless of this optimistic perspective, our goal remains to continue on to Iceland. A research vessel arrived on the scene early in the day and started preparing for the first towing attempt. In the meantime, we had another full itinerary of lectures and storytelling provided by the Expedition Team. First up were Kelsey and Teal with some mini lectures on different explorers. Teal shared his story about one of his favorite explorers, the legendary Gino Watkins, who ventured around Svalbard and Greenland. Kelsey's focus was on Einar Mikkelsen and the Alabama expedition—a remarkable, and almost unbelievable, three-year-survival story.

Afterwards, many of us were compelled to go out on deck, into the sunshine and clear air. We donned our jackets and warm hats, filled our coffee cups, and walked into the chilled day. The mountains towered around us, and the fjord stretched north.

Soon enough, it was time for the first towing attempt. We all gathered together, spread between the observation lounge and grill restaurant. Some of us stood outside on the bow. The tough little research vessel was able to swing us at an angle and make a little progress. Our second attempt would commence the following morning, entailing a new method. Until then, we remained warm and well-fed on board.

Another eventful day. We enjoyed a film in the evening—The Last Husky, introduced by our very own historian, Jonathan. Afterwards, the observation lounge on Deck 8 called us for music, surreal views, and another fantastic showing of the northern lights illuminating a sky full of stars.



Alpefjord

DAY 13 | Thursday 14th September 2023

Position at 0700

Latitude: 72°07.9'N

Longitude: 025°28.0'W

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: SW 5 knots

Barometer: 1018 hPa

Air Temp: 7°C

Little do you know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.

—Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*, 1881

Clear skies beckoned a promising day. The sun rose over the Stauning Alps, illuminating the rock, ice, and snow-covered landscape with a warm glow of sunlight. The autumn is hanging on here, however every day the night grows six minutes longer. In two months' time, the nights will be so long, the flora and fauna won't even see the sun. The arctic willow and bearberry are turning golden yellow and rusty red, the Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenlandic word for the tundra region along the coast in Northeastern Greenland) is bracing for the seasons to change.

Propulsion commenced, the two-inch-thick steel cables attached to the Tarajoq became taught and the anchor groaned, slowly the 8228-ton expedition ship began to move to stern. The Ocean Explorer listed to the starboard 5°, 10° then 15° lean and then the announcement came through from the bridge "ladies and gentlemen, we are floating once more." Smiles of joy, laughs of delight and applause blossomed spread around the ship. Excited conversation begun between the passengers.

Re-righting the ballast water, a survey of the hull and operational system checks needed to be completed. The Arctic Command required a remote survey of the site before we would be able to depart the area. Waiting for Danish authority to grant permission for us to continue our voyage, The Tarajoq captain and crew members were welcomed aboard. Grateful for the assistance from this experienced team, we offered our thanks and gratitude!

In the afternoon, we learnt about various North Pole expeditions with Kris. He shared stories of controversial and successful attempts travelling by aircraft and over ice. Fascinated by the hardship these Expeditioners endured, such as Børge Ousland's solo trip to the pole, or crossing of the frozen ocean made our internationally dramatised stranding experience seem mellow in comparison. Grateful for patience from fellow Expeditioners, we shared a drink on Aurora, then sat back to enjoy another starry sky and show from the Northern Lights.



Alpefjord

DAY 14 | Friday, 15th September 2023

Position at 1100

Latitude: 72°07.9'N

Longitude: 025°28.5'W

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: W 7.5 knots

Barometer: 1018 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

Let us probe the silent places, let us see what luck betide us; let us journey to a land I know.
There is a whisper on the night wind, there is a star a gleam to guide us, and the wild is calling
calling...let us go!

—Robert Service

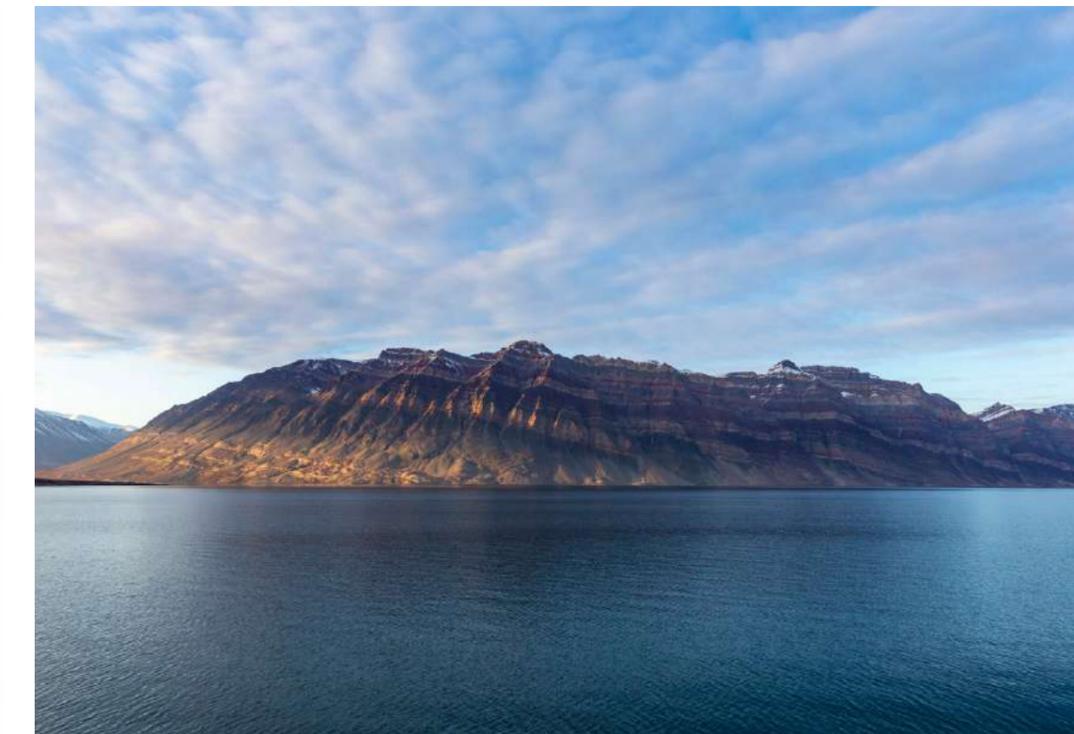
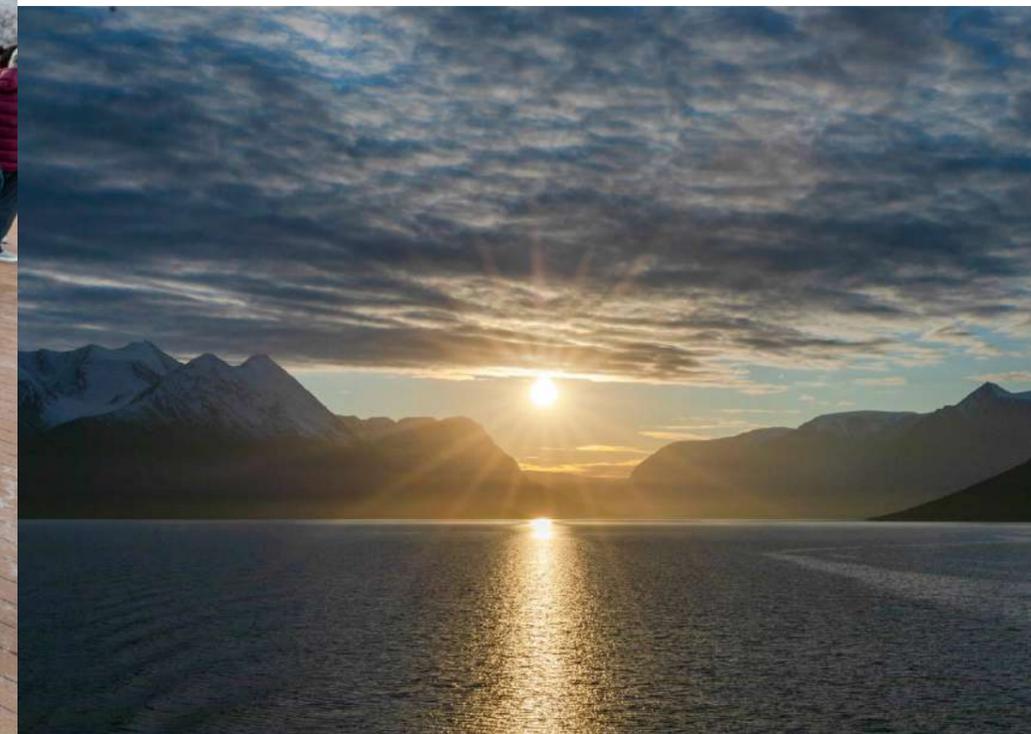
We awoke expecting the ship to be moving, hurtling toward Iceland and a rendezvous with a team of hull inspectors who were going to sign it off so we could continue the expedition proper. She wasn't moving though. The Captain had prepared the ship and ran tests on all the equipment and deemed us safe to travel, just pending the approval from the Denmark Maritime Authority.

Meike told a tale about whales (pardon the pun!) in the lecture theatre, and Isabelle sat everybody down and outlined once again why we were waiting. After lunch, it was time for the treasure hunt that the Expedition Team had organised. We teamed up in small groups and weaved our way through the questions, riddles, and activities provided. Along the way, we passed Kris parading around in his infamous toga, stopping to pose as the statue of liberty from time to time. Nacho had his juggling skills on display, and they were indeed quite impressive to see.

In the distance, we saw the Sirius patrol approaching again and they boarded and went to the bridge. Still no green light to go, but surely this meant we were close. At 5pm, Jonathan began his "Marine Superstitions and Traditions" lecture however he was halted after 10 minutes by a PA announcement from the Captain, who stated that we had been given approval to leave and sail for Iceland.

We went to the eighth floor on the outside decks to soak up the view of the glacier one last time. There wasn't a breath of wind in the air, the water as still as could be, and a gorgeous afternoon light kissed the glacier to give it a stunning glow. The engines started with a rumble, the ship began to swing around, we took one last look at our familiar surroundings, thanked it for its beautiful display of light throughout the last few days and nights, and we were off.

Steaming up the fjord, the Captain addressed everyone in the theatre and outlined the activities of the last few days to a rapturous applause of appreciation. Smiles appeared on faces. We sailed past the most breathtaking scenery, with the golden afternoon sun bouncing off the colourful layers of sedimentary rock of the surrounding fiords. We passed Gateau Point, which was meant to be our next stop the day we ran aground. It glowed for us.



At Sea

DAY 15 | Saturday 16th September 2023

Position at 1100

Latitude: 69°10.5'N

Longitude: 021°52.4'W

Course: 196°

Speed: 14.3 knots

Wind Speed: NE 3 knots

Barometer: 1018 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

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

—Gregory Colbert

We woke up to a sunny and calm morning on our first day at sea towards Iceland. Breakfast was had before Paulina announced a bird survey would be conducted, to be followed by a cloud survey. Twenty Expeditioners and 7 E-Team turned up, as well as 28 northern fulmars, 46 black-legged kittiwakes and one skua. The excitement took off when two whale blows were seen at the one o'clock position from the ship. The blows were identified as humpback whales by expedition guide Teal. Paulina was trying hard to get the cloud survey back on track as more blows were seen, but the whales won hands down.

However, the fog rolled in and the wind picked up, and as a result the 'Visual Stories of Greenlanders' with commentary by Piotr was implemented, depicting the everyday life of living in the vast country of Greenland as well as working and racing with the amazing Greenlandic dogs. Scrumptious hot bouillon was served afterward which proved very popular. Paulina did finally manage to do her cloud survey just in time for lunch.

Jonathan was up next with his 'Introduction to Iceland' lecture. He gave us a great insight to Icelandic history and facts. Coinciding with afternoon tea, we got a call from Isabelle in which we were all invited to come to the lecture hall for a briefing.

She told us in light of the situation, we would be going to Reykjavik and spending a few days there, with daily excursions around Reykjavik before being flown to Bergen to finish the trip there on the 22nd of September as planned. Meike finished the lectures for the day with 'Fulmars and plastic pollution'. Apart from giving us general information about this lovely little bird, she told us that for many years these birds have been found washed-up-dead on beaches, with their stomachs full of plastic. There are now plans in place to reduce plastic waste in the ocean to hopefully decrease this for the future.

Another delicious dinner was served, and the restaurant crew did a great job of serving it with grace despite the increasingly unsteady ship movements. We ended our day with the movie 'Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga' and had popcorn. A lighthearted comedy with great actors, nothing is better than a good laugh before bedtime.



At Sea / Reykjavik

DAY 16 | Sunday, 17th September 2023

Position at 1100

Latitude: 64°23.4'N

Longitude: 022°45.9'W

Course: 119°

Speed: 13.7 knots

The land was gone, all but a little streak, away off on the edge of the water, and down under us was just ocean, ocean, ocean – millions of miles of it, heaving and pitching and squirming, and white sprays blowing from the wave-tops,and we had the sky and the ocean to ourselves, and the roomiest place I ever did see and the loneliest.

—Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer Abroad

It was a rough night for many of us as the waves - up to eight metres high - rolled in, keeping many of us awake through the night. The outside decks were closed due to the conditions, so we began the day with a lecture from Jonathan on marine superstitions. He gave great insight into the traditions and reasons behind them. His favourite superstition was the saying about the cat o' nine tails; a whip with nine short tails that would be kept and used by the bosun to flog the sailors. When not in use they would keep it in the bag; where the term 'cat out of the bag' comes from and also 'not enough room to swing a cat' due to all the sailors surrounding the bosun in order to stop the whipping.

As we got closer to the shelter of the Icelandic coast, our dramatic rolling started to die down. It was time for lunch, where we were treated to some tandoori chicken.

Now we could see the rugged coastline of the west coast of Iceland, and could see a small town called Akranes. It is approximately fifty kilometres north of Reykjavik, with a population of 7,411 people. The area was settled in the ninth century and started growing in the late 17th century as a fishing village.

As we approached Reykjavik, we picked the pilot and headed into harbour. Reykjavik has a rich and captivating history that dates back over a millennium. The city's name means 'Smoky Bay', originating from the steam rising from the area's geothermal hot springs. Over the centuries, Reykjavik has witnessed the rise and fall of empires, survived volcanic eruptions, and evolved into a centre of commerce, culture, and innovation.

In 1786, Reykjavik was officially designated as Iceland's capital, marking a turning point in its history. The city gradually emerged as a center of trade, education, and governance. In the 20th century, Reykjavik experienced rapid urbanisation and modernisation, transforming into a bustling metropolis while still retaining its charming Nordic character.

Wind Speed: SE 5 knots

Barometer: 995 hPa

Air Temp: 12°C

Today, Reykjavik is renowned for its architectural marvels, including the iconic Hallgrímskirkja church, as well as its thriving music and arts scene. Visitors and locals alike can explore the city's museums, soak in geothermal pools, and immerse themselves in the captivating history of this extraordinary capital.

Once we were alongside, we waited for our clearance to go ashore then we headed into town to explore the city.



Reykjavik

DAY 17 | Monday 18th September 2023

Position at 1100

Latitude: 64°09.002' N

Longitude: 21°56.19' W

Course: 0°

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: N 2 knots

Barometer: 995 hPa

Air Temp: 12°C

Just let go...

And fall like a little waterfall

—Bob Ross

Port sweet port. This morning we awoke in the capital city of Iceland, Reykjavik. Located in the downtown area we could consider ourselves lucky to be in the centre of Reykjavik's happenings. Prior to breakfast, a morning announcement was made for groups to prepare themselves for the morning and afternoon activities, in which all passengers were given the opportunity to either join a city walk led by a local guide, or take a bus to the Perlan museum.

The passengers who joined the Perlan museum were able to experience a variety of different exhibits a highlight being the ice cave and glacier exhibition, which is comprised of 350 tonnes of ice! Iceland is famous for its glaciers - in fact, approximately 11% of the country's surface is covered by ice. The naming of the country is fitting in that sense.

Iceland is also known for its volcanoes, and that is how the country gets its name, aptly, as the land of Fire and Ice. The volcano exhibition depicted a lava show of the Geldingadalir eruption which is but a mere 30km from Reykjavik and has erupted twice in the last three years, after being dormant for 800 years. The exhibition also depicted the Hekla volcano, which has erupted over 20 times since Iceland has been inhabited.

There was also an aurora borealis show in the planetarium, with stunning 8k projectors which could demonstrate the power of the northern lights in Iceland. Other exhibitions depicted: forces of nature, dedicated to the power of volcanoes, earthquakes, and geothermal energy; Látrabjarg cliff, an augmented reality model of the largest seabird cliff in Europe; The ocean an underwater journey, which illustrated the underwater world of Iceland via the underwater virtual fish tank; Water in Icelandic nature, an exhibition focussed on natural history and the diversity of freshwater, among other exhibitions. After speaking with several passengers about the Perlan nature museum, the consensus was that multiple days could be spent inside in order to digest all the information available.

The hike with the local guide also proved to be exciting, where we were taken from the port towards the church and back via the infamous Laugavegur and Skólavörðusitur roads, where the famous pride street was also connected. We learned about a lot of historical happenings where one instance that stood out was the story of Leifr Ericsson, who discovered North America in the late 10th century.

We had an evening recap and heard about our upcoming plans for the next days. There was even a high forecast for aurora borealis for that evening, with a hopefully successful hunt late in the night for passengers.



Reykjavik

DAY 18 | Tuesday 19th September 2023

Position at 0600

Latitude: 64°09.002' N

Longitude: 21°56.19' W

Course: 0°

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: NNE 2 knots

Barometer: 1005 hPa

Air Temp: 10°C

Today we all set out from a rainy Reykjavik aboard three buses on the classic Icelandic Golden Circle tour. Our initial stop was the famous "Great Geysir", the first geyser to be described in a printed source and the first known to modern Europeans. Heading up the trail to the main site while battling 30 to 40 knot wind gusts, and trying to work out where to stand to get a picture without getting drenched was a challenge.

After what seem to be an interminable wait, there was a brief blast of boiling water that spurted about three or four metres into the air. It was easy to miss snapping a photo unless you had your finger on the camera shutter button or the video capture rolling. By all accounts, the wind and cold had dampened the force of the water blast, which in days gone by was known to reach 70 metres into the air. Some of us braved the winds and stayed for multiple geyser burps to ensure a good photographic record. Many surveyed some of the other thermal pools before we scurried back to enjoy some retail therapy. The size and range of stock in the gift shop was impressive.

The next stop, just a short distance up the road was the Gullfoss waterfall. Once again, we battled very strong winds just getting to the overlook of these magnificent thundering falls. It was a challenge maintaining one's feet, not to mention taking photographs. Some hiked down to the lower viewing spot for a more intimate perspective of this natural wonder. We then hiked back to the visitor centre for a delicious lunch of traditional lamb soup or mushroom soup. Again, the opportunities to purchase Icelandic souvenirs was impressive. The final stop was Thingvellir National Park, the site of the seven kilometre long rift where the North American Plate and the European Plate are moving apart at the rate of two centimetres per year. It is also the site of the world's first parliament or assembly at pengvillir – literally assembly plains. A board walk trail took us to a 13-metre-high waterfall, Oxarafoss, then we traversed the rift between the black columnar basalt walls. Back on board the Ocean Explorer, we were entertained at the recap with a panel of guides, Snowy, Jonathan, Paulina, Meike and Gabe answering questions from the M.C. Kris and passengers about their many and varied experiences. It was another great expedition day.



Reykjavik

DAY 19 | Wednesday 20th September 2023

Position at 0600

Latitude: 64°09.002'N

Longitude: 21°56.19'W

Course: 0°

Speed: 0 knots

The day began with the promise of excitement. As the sun gently illuminated the horizon, we were faced with an enticing choice: two distinct journeys awaited. The first group embarked on a thrilling hike to Glymur waterfall, an imposing natural wonder that stood tall at 198 metres. The three-hour trek was an immersive experience in Iceland's rugged beauty.

The hike to Glymur was not for the faint of heart, as we had to navigate two rivers. The first crossing involved balancing carefully on a log suspended over the rushing water, adding an element of thrill to the adventure. The second river crossing was a bit more unconventional, requiring everyone to don river shoes to wade through the cool, crystal-clear waters.

After conquering the hike and taking in the awe-inspiring sight of Glymur, it was time to replenish our energy with a well-deserved lunch. Following lunch, we indulged in the ultimate relaxation by soaking in the soothing warmth of Hvammsvik hot springs. The contrast of the hot springs against the crisp Icelandic air must have been a truly rejuvenating experience. Some of our adventurous companions even dared to jump from the hot springs into the invigorating embrace of the ocean before returning to the comforts of the hot spring, creating lasting memories.

Meanwhile, the second group embarked on a different but equally enchanting journey. Their day began with a visit to the world-famous Blue Lagoon hot spring, a mesmerising oasis known for its milky, mineral-rich waters. Here, we had the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the rejuvenating waters, perhaps applying a silica mask to our skin while savoring a refreshing beverage. It was a serene and surreal experience that left us feeling refreshed and revitalised.

Afterward, the group ventured to the Bridge between Continents, a remarkable geological feature where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates diverge. Standing at this unique location, we marvelled at the forces of nature that shaped the Earth.

Continuing our exploration of Iceland's geothermal wonders, we visited the Gunnuhver geothermal area and Krisuvik hot springs. The striking landscapes and bubbling geothermal activity provided ample opportunities for stunning photographs. And of course, no visit to Iceland would be complete without a snapshot of the iconic Icelandic horses, known for their unique charm.

Wind Speed: NNE 6 knots

Barometer: 1005 hPa

Air Temp: 11°C

As the day drew to a close, both groups reunited on board. A Captain's farewell ceremony marked the end of a remarkable three-week voyage across the North Atlantic. The highlight of the evening was a captivating slideshow presented by the talented photographer Adrian, showcasing the incredible moments and breathtaking scenery we had encountered during our journey.



Bergen

DAY 20 | Thursday 21st September 2023

Awakening with the sunlight dancing on the tranquil waters of the old harbour marked the beginning of our onward travelling day.

The next chapter in our exploration as we made our way to Bergen. With the dawn breaking beautifully over Reykjavik, we couldn't have asked for a more perfect start to our day.

The day began with a leisurely breakfast buffet, setting the stage for an easygoing morning. While some of us settled our accounts at the reception, the kayak group eagerly gathered for their own slideshow and recap in the lecture theatre. But for most of us, this morning was one last opportunity to uncover Reykjavik's hidden treasures on a brisk morning stroll.

Amidst our exploration, the dedicated crew and staff transferred our luggage from the ship to the pier, ensuring a seamless transition for our onward journey.

Today, a slightly earlier lunch was on the agenda, allowing us to be punctual for the buses that would bring us to Reykjavik airport. The time had come for heartfelt farewells to the phenomenal Ocean Explorer crew and staff who had made our voyage truly exceptional. At precisely 12:30, three buses pulled up beside the ship, ready to transport us toward new adventures. We boarded the buses and exchanged waves of gratitude with those who would remain behind.

Our 45-minute drive was nothing short of a visual feast, navigating through the awe-inspiring volcanic landscapes that Iceland is renowned for. The scenery was a symphony of rugged beauty, a reminder of nature's untamed grandeur.

Upon arriving at the airport, we were greeted by a delightful surprise: three dedicated check-in counters reserved exclusively for Aurora Expeditions passengers. The process was smoother than ever.

Gathering in the departure hall, we found ourselves in the cozy embrace of a restaurant, sharing tales and toasts with fellow explorers and the fantastic Expedition Team. Soon, a bus ushered us to our charter plane, operated by Iceland Air.

Half an hour into our flight, glancing out of the window on the port side, we caught a breathtaking sight of the Ocean Explorer gracefully sailing beneath us, bound for her next port in France. In the distance, the grandeur of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier, unfolded before our eyes, covering more than 8% of Iceland's majestic landscape.

Our beloved Anne, sounding remarkably like an air hostess, announced voyage details over the plane's intercom, eliciting smiles from all. As we touched down at Bergen airport, we were greeted by enthusiastic hostesses holding Aurora Expeditions signs who guided us to waiting buses.

Our destination was the Clarion Hotel Bergen, nestled in the heart of the historic Bryggen dock area, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This newly renovated gem preserved its elegant classic design, complementing the beautiful stone building and offering a fantastic location right on the Bryggen waterfront.

Anne awaited our arrival in the foyer, assisting us with our check-in at the hotel. Before retiring to our rooms, we all indulged in a sumptuous hamburger buffet, specially organised for us Expeditioners, with a vast array of complimentary drinks that flowed generously into the late hours.

The night came alive with a joyous hum in the foyer and bar, as the Expeditioners celebrated the final day of the voyage. It was a night of heartfelt goodbyes, new friendships forged, and the collective joy of a remarkable journey. As we bid each other goodnight and farewell, we couldn't help but reflect on the unforgettable moments we had shared together. Thank you for travelling with us; it has been an absolute pleasure to have you on board.





Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: Peter Wainwright, Teal Morgan, Gabriel Wackernagel

Number of Paddlers: 16

Total Paddle Outings: 5

Total Distance Paddled: 26.9 km

Paddlers:	Boyne Hohenstein	Meg Lamont	Tracey Varga
Susan (Sue) Carey	Merryn Hohenstein	Hung (Lanson) Lim	Ning Zhu
Yan Bing (Celine) Choo	Helen Hunt	Elisabeth (Lis) Salmon	
Steven Fraser	Mark Hunt	Lesley Thomas	
Gina Hill	Yifu (John) Jiang	Robert (Bob) Varga	

Day 4 | Tuesday 5 September, PM - Svolvær 5.0km

A drysuit was probably the most appropriate attire of the day given the abundant precipitation while we were there. Svolvær harbour is both a bustling and busy port but also retains a picturesque fishing village charm and plenty of nooks and crannies and islands to make for very pleasant paddling. Most importantly though it was sheltered from the swell and 20 knot southwesterlies. This was our introductory shakedown paddle and as we wound our way exploring the various corners of the harbour, we stopped and incorporated little coaching sessions on sweep strokes, stern rudders, draw strokes and efficient forward paddling technique. Towards the end of the paddle, we briefly ventured out to the more exposed coastline for some excitement in the lumpy waters before sneaking through a tiny side channel under a little bridge in a secret passage back into the main harbour. It was a varied and unique paddle and we still had time for a very quick explore around town.

Day 5 | Wednesday 6 September, AM - Vegaøya 7.8km

With all but two kayakers keen to explore the Vega Archipelago, we loaded into the Zodiacs and motored 7 kilometres west from the anchored ship into a sheltered cove. An old fishing boat, high and dry on the shore, slowly deteriorating away was an interesting sight amongst the low-lying islands. Splitting into two groups, Peter ran a thorough training session to those newer to sea kayaking and Teal guided the others through the tidal channels, around grassy islands where colourful sheep grazed happily. Herring gulls and herons seen fishing in the shallows or flapping around. The group reunited and paddled together past a small seaside fishing settlement and finished up the paddling excursion by landing at the heritage museum, where hot coffee and waffles were served while exploring some of the local culture and history.

Day 5 | Wednesday 6 September, PM - Brønnøysund 6.9km

In the afternoon, the Ocean Explorer repositioned to the town of Brønnøysund, where the Expeditioners chose from a variety of excursions. Most of our paddlers opted for the renowned hike up to Torghatten, "the hole in the mountain", supposedly pierced by a trolls arrow. Meg, more excited to go sea kayaking, headed out with Gabriel. Strong incoming tidal current flowed north past town, so Teal transported us past whale island, under the Brønnøysund bridge to a more remote section of coast. Once in our kayaks, we practiced some boat-handling

skills then cruised through the cluster of islands with the current and wind behind us. We spotted a sea eagle, observed the coastal life of the locals before heading back to the ship.

Day 9 | Sunday 10 September, PM - Blomsterbugten .5km

Upon arrival at Blomsterbugten we opened the marina door to 15-20 knots of wind and a lively chop from the rebound of the wind swell. Giant icebergs had been pushed into the bay and grounded. We loaded into our Zodiacs and headed south to get out of the clapotis, weaving past huge icebergs. Once on the water, the wind seemed to increase a bit and we made the quick decision to paddle into the wind to get acquainted to the lumpy conditions. Eventually we made a slow and calculated turn to head downwind along the jagged coastline. We found a beautiful 5 metre waterfall with a cave behind, and much entertainment was had getting pummelled as we took turns paddling through it.

Pressing on, we explored nooks and crannies and several small caves, until we reached our landing site with the Varghytten trappers cabin. Once there, we played around some icebergs including a giant iceberg that was ominously rocking back and forward in front of the ship, and then hopped out of the boats and onto shore.

Just as we were getting out of the kayaks on the beach a small iceberg that we had just been paddling near completely imploded and shattered into small pieces – a good reminder of why we keep our distance from the ice.

Day 10 | Monday 11 September, AM - Alpefjord 3.7km

With great excitement in such breathing scenery, we dressed quickly for our paddle. Light downflow winds coming out of the fjord made for an easy decision to do a downwind paddle, so we clambered aboard the Zodiacs and towed about 5 kilometres upwind along the magnificent Sefström tidewater glacier. Launching in the lee of a talus scree fan we soaked up the stunning scenery, mostly just floating along with the wind, staring at the jaw-dropping surroundings, and taking photos. We paddled close to some glacially polished granite rock walls, pausing underneath some steep creeks cascading into the fjord, before paddling further out into the fjord where we could better appreciate the magnitude of the rock walls on either side and avoid any potential rockfall. Coming across some islands of glacial moraine, Teal found some channels among the boulders and ice to paddle through before hopping back in the Zodiacs to get back to the ship in time for a quick polar plunge!







Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	September																					
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
Greylag Goose																	•	•				
Whooper Swan																	•	•	•			
Mallard					•												•	•				
Tufted Duck																	•	•				
Common Eider	•	•		•	•					•	•											
Long-tailed Duck										•							•	•	•	•		
Eurasian Wigeon																	•	•				
Rock Ptarmigan																			•			
Purple Sandpiper										•												
Eurasian Oystercatcher					•																	
Arctic Skua		•													•							
Great Skua		•					•	•	•													
Herring Gull	•	•	•	•	•					•		•	•	•								
Glaucous Gull			•																			
Great Black-backed Gull	•	•	•	•	•																	
Lesser Black-backed Gull		•		•															•			
Black-headed Gull																	•	•	•			
Common Gull	•	•		•																		
Black-legged Kittiwake	•	•	•				•	•							•			•				
Arctic Tern		•																				
Little Auk									•													
Northern Gannet		•				•	•								•	•		•				
European Shag	•																					
Great Cormorant	•	•		•	•																	
Northern Fulmar	•	•	•			•	•	•	•				•	•	•							
Sooty Shearwater				•	•		•									•						
White-tailed Eagle		•		•																		



Bird Species	September																					
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
Rock Pigeon																	•	•	•	•		
Meadow Pipit					•																	
European Starling																	•	•	•	•		
Common Redpoll	•																					
Eurasian Blackbird		•																				
Common Raven		•																		•		
Hooded Crow	•	•		•	•																	
White Wagtail	•	•		•	•																	
Snow Bunting																			•			
Redwing																				•		
Grey Heron																						
Barn Swallow																						
Common Magpie																						



Mammal Species	September																					
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
Common/Harbour Seal											•											
Bearded Seal																						
Fin Whale																						
Humpback Whale																						
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin																						
Arctic Hare																						
Reindeer	•	•																				
Musk Ox																						
Roe Deer																						





Expeditioners:

Jacqueline Barnard

Margaret Barr

Jamie Bell

Margot Bell

Rosemary Bett

Jane Beukema

Johnny Beukema

Alice Bills

Catherine Bills

Richard Bills

Mary Blackwood

Jennifer Bolton-Gibbs

Janice Brewer

Robin Brewer

Deborah Brown

Graham Brown

Elise Callander

Susan Carey

Sally Castell-McGregor

Leong Chan Kam

Jennifer Chapman

Peter Cherry

Melinda Guet Swee Ch'ng

Yan Bing Choo

Johanna Churchill

Carol Clarke

Philip Clarke

Gerard Conn

Simon Dalgarno

Jeanette Daly

Russell Daly

Anne Duley

Gregory Duley

Joy Duncan

Gary Edwards

Judith Edwards

Steven Fraser

Christopher Gibbs

Sheryl Gore

Helen Gorman

Mathew Grant

George Hall

Gina Hill

Boyne Hohenstein

Merryn Hohenstein

Kenneth Holzheimer

Helen Hunt

Mark Hunt

Sarah Isaacs

Ian Jennings

Yifu Jiang

Bruce Johnston

Shirley Johnston

Angela Jusevics

James Kernaghan

Judy Kobelke

Paul Kobelke

Christopher Lachman

Tashi Lachman

Belinda Lam

Michael Lam

Meg Lamont

May Seey Leong

Ka-Wing Leung

Alan Levy

Jian Li

Hung Lim

Heather Love

Fook Lye

Barbara Mathews

Paul Mathews

Caroline Mc Intyre

Noel McLean

Wanita McLean

Philip Minto

Bronwyn Morris-Harrington

Campbell Muir

Colin Muir

Deanne Muir

Noelene Muir

Elaine Neilson

John Nelson

Leonie Nelson

George Ott

Amanda Pinkster

Maarten Pinkster

Sarah Potosky

Kathleen Quigley

Anne Rymill

Elisabeth Salmon

Arthur Sawiejskij

Elisabeth Schupina

Maree Theiler

Roland Theiler

Lesley Thomas

Darren Thornton

Diane Thornton

Sing Ting

Sandra Tolliday

Robert Van de Berg

Robert Varga

Tracey Varga

Jeanette Walsh

Rodney Watson

Louise Welch

Ross Williams

John Woolass

Agnes Worsfold

Amanda Wouters

Anthony Wouters

Carol Yorke

Ning Zhu

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Isabelle Howells

Assistant Expedition Leader: Piotr Damski

Onboard Expedition Manager: Samantha Deer

Firearms Manager: Graeme Snow

Zodiac Master: Ignacio Marino

Expedition Medic: John Barry

Geologist: Paulina Pierzak

Historian: Jonathan Chester

Naturalist: Meike Sjoer

Local Guide: Kelsey Camacho

Expedition Guide: Kris Ronning

Photography Guide: Adrian Wlodarsky

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Anne Oyasaeter

Onboard Expedition Manager Trainee: Lelia Cataldi

Senior Lead Kayaking Guide: Peter Wainwright

Kayaking Guide: Gabriel Wackernagel

Kayaking Guide: Teal Morgan

Icelandic Local Guide: Hodei Orueta

Icelandic Local Guide: Sigurdur Sigurdarson

Icelandic Local Guide: Throestur Sverrisson

Photography thanks to:

Adrian Wlodarsky

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Captain: Vadym Tavrovetsky

Chief Officer: Alexandru Taraoi

Safety Officer: Alexandru Chiriac

2nd Officer: Jovanka Savovic

Bosun: Bobby Penuliar Payumo

Ship Doctor: Julio Lopez

Chief Engineer: Andrei Ciurea

Hotel Director: Ulises Cantillo

F&B Manager: Rajesh Murao

Hotel Controller: Les Paul John Bilgera

Chief Purser: Willie Lirio

Executive Chef: Cristiand Mini Pineda

Head Waiter: Jemuel Alcantara

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: Umar Makruf







 [facebook.com/
auroraex](https://facebook.com/auroraex)

 @aurora_expeditions

 [youtube.com/
auroraexpeditions](https://youtube.com/auroraexpeditions)

 Aurora Expeditions
(@Polar_Experts) / Twitter