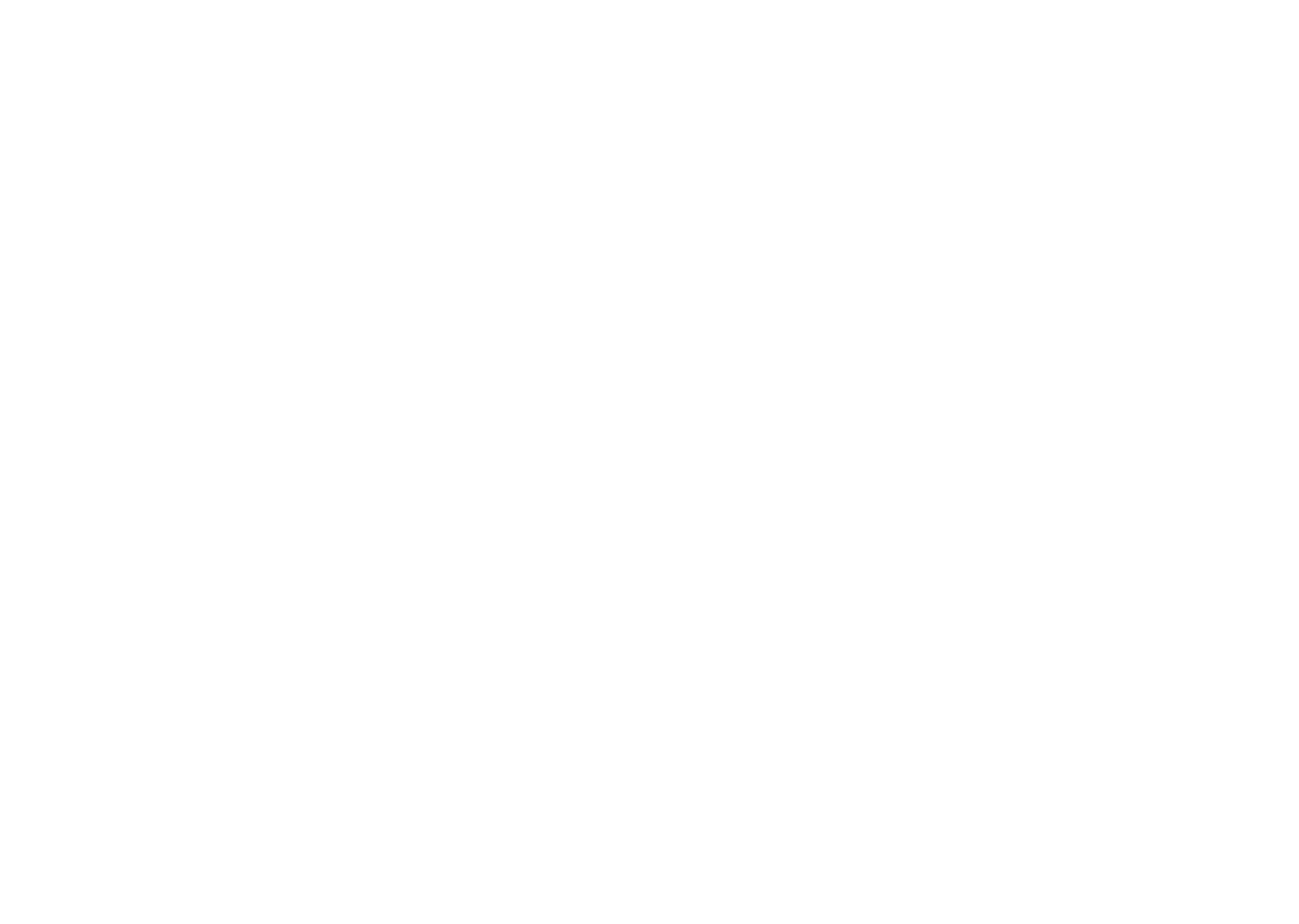


Svalbard Odyssey

Aboard *Ocean Explorer* | 23 July – 3 August 2023





Longyearbyen

DAY 1 | Monday 24 July 2023

Position at 2100 on 24 July

Latitude: 78°16.2'N

Longitude: 015°17.1'E

Course: 255°

Speed: 8.8 knots

Wind Speed: SW4

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.

We got into "expedition mode" straight away, donning lifejackets and waterproofs for a Zodiac ride to the *Ocean Explorer*. The Zodiacs are our 'ticket to fun' and they will soon become second nature to us. After arriving at the *Ocean Explorer*, we had our first experience of the mudroom, where the team welcomed us onboard the ship.

Once we had our photograph taken by Adrian, the next stop was the Elephant Island Bar for refreshments.

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 five days!). With the safety drill complete, we had a welcome briefing from our Expedition Leader Mario, and briefings from Hotel Director Ulises, Doctor Andres, and Onboard Expedition Manager Samantha, who gave us some tips for life onboard.

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 quite inhospitable environment we are about to explore.

After dinner, the kayak team met for a briefing with guides Dan, Sigurd & Nicole, to prepare for the great paddling adventure that lay ahead.

Together we total 102 passengers from all around the globe: the UK, Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany,

India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, USA, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore and Denmark, along with 80 crew members.

In addition, we have 18 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.



Skansbukta

DAY 2 | Tuesday 25 July 2023

Position at 0700 on 25 July

Latitude: 78°11.9'N

Longitude: 13°52.1'E

Course: 037°

Speed: 5 knots

Wind Speed: W3

Barometer: 1014

Air Temp: 14°C

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

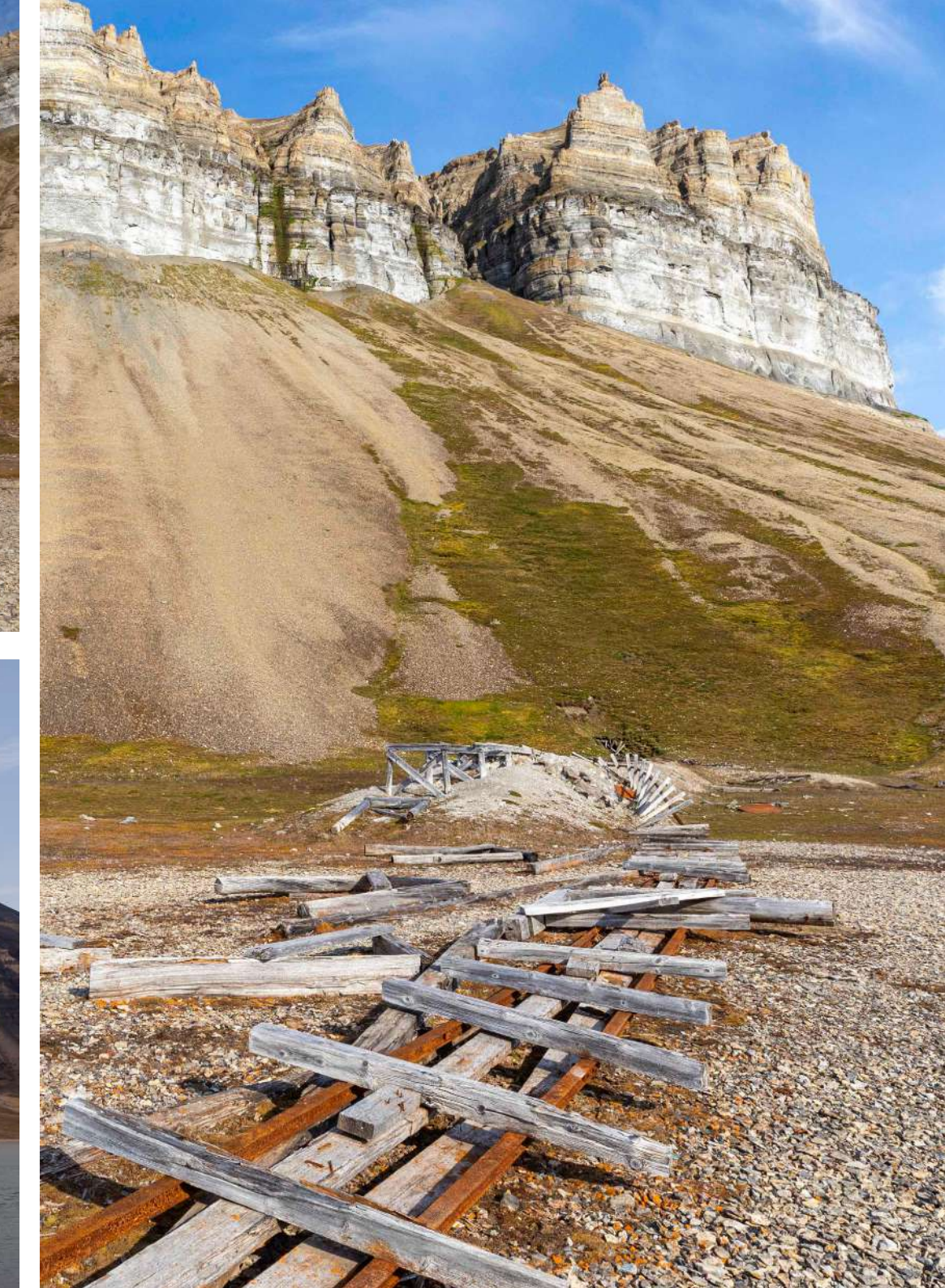
—T.S. Eliot

Our first night on board *Ocean Explorer* could not have been a better introduction to our Svalbard adventure. Leaving Longyearbyen in calm conditions, the mountains and glaciers for which Svalbard is famous were thrown into sharp relief by the brilliant evening sunshine. We spent the night cruising up Isfjord, the largest fjord system in Svalbard. After exploring the delights of the breakfast buffet, we assemble in the lecture room for our mandatory activities. Last evening's embarkation has given us a foretaste of this morning's Zodiac briefing, which took us through the current dance craze of the 'Zodiac 3 step' and 'the Sailors Grip'. An AECO animation engagingly laid out many of the conditions guiding our visit to Svalbard. After a briefing on the dos and don'ts of visiting polar bear country, and a biosecurity check and cleanse of our outdoor gear, we are ready for venturing out to explore the wonders of Svalbard.

Noon sees us heading up Billefjord, accompanied by a lone minke whale and warm sunshine. We drop anchor at Skansbukta on a perfect Svalbard afternoon – sunny, warm, with a slight cooling breeze. Here Mt. Skansen dominates the landscape, rising 500m above sea level, with its dramatic strata and skyline towering over the bay.

Our fleet of kayakers presented a handsome sight as they stretched out in numbers on their first Arctic seaborne venture. The land-based among us examined the hut on the beach, which is now used as a short stay holiday destination for Longyearbyen locals. Wandering along the fine gravel beach, we saw the battered ruins of the abandoned 'gypsum' mine from the early 20th century, and lovely old beached boat from the mining operation. A steeper ascent up towards the cliffs afforded great views across the bay, and occasional glimpses of a lone reindeer peacefully cropping its pasture. Botanically, a highlight was a sighting of the relatively rare pale blue blooms of the Boreal Jacobs Ladder. A Zodiac exploration of the cliffs at the entrance to Billefjord revealed almost classical marblesque rock architecture, home to puffins and guillemots.

Our day ended with Captain Maxim's welcome drinks, where he wished us well and introduced us to the heads of the various departments that keep life running smoothly. Another all too tempting dinner capped off a great first day on board OEx. Day's end saw us sailing up the west coast of Spitsbergen heading for a new day of adventures on the north coast.



Monacobreen & Moffen | Polar Plunge

DAY 3 | Wednesday 26 July 2023

Position at 0700 on 26 July

Latitude: 79°55.8'N

Longitude: 011°53.2'E

Course: 091°

Speed: 14.5 knots

Wind Speed: E4

Barometer: 1015

Air Temp: 6°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

The morning started early around 7am as we headed for Texas Bar. We stopped off at Reindyr Flyta, as the morning was turning out to be sunny and clear, whereas Texas Bar would be too foggy to conduct an operation. Soon, a polar bear was spotted swimming along the water's edge during breakfast, and we had a good observation for well over an hour.

At 9am, it was reported the bear had gone back onto land, so it was safe to carry out a Zodiac exploration along the coast. Zodiacs were launched and another bear turned up on land whilst the first bear returned to the water for a short spell before going back up on to land. We had a good couple of hours observing both bears in the glorious sunshine with reports of a third bear sighted. An arctic skua flew overhead, harassing a gull, and then an arctic tern, trying to get them to give up their catch. It was quite an aerial display!

After a delicious lunch, we cruised steadily down the open fjord with amazing views of the coast on both sides, eyes peeled for more wildlife sightings. In the mid-afternoon we reached our destination: Monacobreen. The mountains rose up majestically around the magnificent glaciers which reflected the brilliant sunlight in all its radiance. A Zodiac and kayaking exploration commenced over perfect flat calm water, mirroring the clouds as we glided along. The glacier calved often in the warm sunlight, sounding like artillery fire going off at times. Birds were in abundance, including black guillemots, northern fulmars, arctic terns, black legged kittiwakes, and glaucous gulls to name a few. There was also a sighting of a bearded seal in the water and some beluga whales too. On returning to the ship, the polar plunge was held and everyone who took part had a fantastic time.

After a quick recap and briefing, a delicious dinner was served then we were treated to a ship exploration near Moffen Island, with an amazing chance to view walrus both in and out of the water. It did not disappoint with many seen in their natural environment, truly an amazing way to finish off the day.



Polar Plunge

DAY 3 | Wednesday 26 July 2023





Phippsøya

DAY 4 | Thursday 27 July 2023

Position at 0400 on 27 July

Latitude: 80°34.65'N

Longitude: 018°25.57'E

Course: 060°

Speed: 9 knots

Wind Speed: NE2

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: 8°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

Yesterday was going to be a hard day to top. The expedition's first bears, a bluebird day with the sun shining, a glacier that kissed the sea who sat like a mill pond and an energetic polar plunge to bring to a close a highly active and fruitful day in the Arctic. This morning, we could feel the ship moving along and then we heard it, the rumbling of ice hitting the hull.

As we gathered on the upper decks, there was not a ripple on the water, which was littered with ice floes all the way until they were enclosed by the granite of the Seven Islands as we headed to Phippsøya. The ship was motoring through the ice nicely, carving as she went, and the chill in the air meant we were further north than we had been before. Excitement crept in.

The excitement was further enhanced by the sight of a polar bear sitting on the ice in the distance. The ship slowed to a stop, however the bear felt there were other places to be and decided to head into the water before most of the ship could leap out of their beds. Moving a little further on we were stopped by the ice bottlenecking between two islands and it was decided to attempt a landing. A shore party made it to land, however the ice quickly had other things to say about how they would retreat so the mornings outing was soon changed to a Zodiac expedition.

It was so peaceful and wonderful to be zig-zagging through the floes, soaking in the crystal clear water, iridescent hues radiating from the ice, flocks of eider ducks flying around us and one bearded seal that made an appearance and stayed around long enough for us to get a good glimpse.

The afternoon saw us pass a few walrus mothers and pups as we moved to the other side of Phippsøya in order to achieve a landing, during which the team and guests undertook a beach clean up, managing to collect a few large bags of plastics, fishing nets, buoys and trash that had been washed ashore and sat in amongst the driftwood. We weren't ashore for long before a thick fog set in and the landing was cut short, however, we had achieved such a great result with the clean-up already.



As the ship crept slowly through the fog, cutting its way through the ice once more, we realised how wrong we were. The day before was bettered, it was just done in a different manner and like most days in the archipelago of Svalbard, you just never know what you're going to encounter.



Sea Ice

DAY 5 | Friday 28 July 2023

Position at 0600 on 28 July

Latitude: 81°01.2'N

Longitude: 019°49.8'E

Course: Ice Navigation

Speed: 6.2 knots

Wind Speed: N2

Barometer: 1014

Air Temp: 4°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

Bears, Bears, Bears! What a day to be in the Arctic. Last night as we were sitting down for dinner, a polar bear was spotted out of the dining room window. Suddenly everyone rushed to the window, as the bear was right next to the ship. Some of us ran out of dinner and onto the outer decks, we ended up spending hours with the bear, it didn't seem bothered by our presence at all and at the end of the night it dug itself a little bed in the sea ice and went to sleep right in front of our ship. That encounter was worth going hungry for. After we said goodbye to the bear, we sailed north to the edge of the pack ice and woke up this morning with another beautiful polar bear right in front of our ship.

We watched the polar bear walking across the sea ice and then start stalking a ringed seal. Unfortunately for the bear it wasn't a successful hunt, but it was a really amazing experience to see how the bear's behaviour and movements change as it's hunting. It moved slowly, swimming around the ice and crawling across the ice with a low stance. No reward for the bear this time but definitely a reward for us. Following that amazing bear sighting we went to learn all about polar bears from the wonderful Heidi and learnt how to rate how healthy our bears are from 1-5 on the fatness index.

After Heidi's lecture we went to lunch and just as we were about to increase our own fatness index, another announcement came through: our 7th bear was spotted. The question was, shall I finish my éclair or go and see the bear? Just another bear on the ice.

Moving on, we found an adequate spot for a landing and commenced our excursion onto the sea ice with a split landing and Zodiac exploration. A beautiful scene with sea ice and melt pools, the sun was shining and spirits were high, then guess what? Another bear! One was spotted in the distance by our scouts, so we evacuated the landing, rightly so because a second bear turned up – two for the price of one. We all got back on board and watched the polar bears, one moved away from us and the second came right up to our ship. A very curious bear, he came right alongside to check us out and even stood on his hind legs at one point (an incredible sight to behold). He walked around the ship and sniffed out our landing site. The whole ship stood in awe. How lucky we were to have such an incredible encounter – a day we will always remember.



Torellneset & Alkefjellet

DAY 6 | Saturday 29 July 2023

Position at 0700 on 29 July

Latitude: 79°27.7'N

Longitude: 019°52.1'E

Course: 149°

Speed: 12 knots

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

Steaming down Hinlopen Strait on glassy seas, our morning landing at Torellneset appeared on our port side beneath Vegafauna, an ice cap covering the southwest corner of Nordaustlandet. Now free of a much thicker layer of ice, this region is under the influence of isostatic rebound.

While exploring ashore we walked over evidence of this in the way of raised beaches, some of which even had the remains of whales washed up centuries and lifted by these amazing forces in the earth. Svalbard's flower, the Arctic poppy, was out in bloom eking out a living in this polar dessert environment, but the real star of the show was the 'toothed walkers.' About 70 of these thick-skinned blubbery pinnipeds were hauled out or milling close to shore on the long gravel spit. These clam eating giants are on the comeback after years of being hunted for their blubber. Historically their thick hides were used for tents in other parts of the Arctic. With tusks sticking out in all directions it looked far from comfortable when one's neighbour nestled into the cuddle. As if to illustrate size, a tiny blue morph arctic fox entered the scene, sniffing its way along the coast line in search of any tasty morsel the last high tide may have left.

After exploring the tundra, we returned for our lunch whilst the ship repositioned to Alkefjellet where we took to the Zodiacs and cruised the length of a dolerite cliff line that plunges into the waters of Hinlopen Strait. Massive towers and a myriad of small ledges out of reach of the pesky little foxes make it the ideal place for birds to nest. A scattering on glaucous gulls, kittiwakes and black guillemots filled the outer extremities, but paled in comparison to the cacophony of sound and activity of around 60,000 nesting pairs of Brunnich's guillemots. Truly a site to marvel at as they came and went for food or pushed each other off a perch in neighbourhood disputes. Another arctic fox was spotted near the north end where sloping ground below the cliffs provided easy access to birds not making the water and this little fox had been lucky, running away with his catch, maybe to cache it for leaner times in winter.

With a tasty afternoon tea waiting, we headed back to the ship. On route, a fine example of dolerite intruding between limestone layers was visible in the mountains to the north.

Wind Speed: NW3

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: 8°C

Our Expedition Leader, Mario, laid out plans for tomorrow on Svalbard's most remote island followed by our historian Ben who brought the dramatic story of Andrées' ill-fated North Pole expedition to life.

As if we had not been satiated enough, the amazing hotel team served up a sumptuous BBQ on the top deck.

In true expedition style our plans altered as we bunked down and started dreaming about the ice walls we'll head for tomorrow.



Bråsvellbreen

DAY 7 | Sunday 30 July 2023

Position at 0700 on 30 July

Latitude: 79°14.4'N

Longitude: 024°12.9'E

Course: Ice Navigation

Speed: 1 knots

Wind Speed: 55

Barometer: 1014

Air Temp: 8°C

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

—John Muir

Our day started with the usual wake-up call from Mario, this time announcing that we were at sea off the south coast of the island of Nordauslandet. For the third time during our journey, the morning announcement included details of the current polar bear sighting. Today's bear was lying on a small ice floe in front of the Bråsvellbreen glacier front. This was our tenth bear of the voyage, which we viewed from the outer decks of the Ocean Explorer, this time with the blue ice of the glacier as a backdrop to our photographs.

After breakfast, a scout boat was launched and our expedition team went to investigate the conditions for an exploration. The wind was higher than we had experienced thus far but the Captain manoeuvred the ship to provide protection from the swell. We embarked on the Zodiacs to explore the front of the Bråsvellbreen glacier, which comes down to the sea from the ice dome of the Sørfonna Ice Cap. Many bergy bits and brash were mixed with sea ice floes along the glacier. The sounds of the splashing waves knocking the ice together was the backdrop to our morning. Some boats discovered bearded seals, some had spy-hopping harp seals. Once we were all back on board, the ship made its way south to continue on our circumnavigation of Spitsbergen.

The afternoon at sea was dedicated to our education program. As the ship made its way across Olga Strait, towards the east coast of Spitsbergen, Adrian gave a presentation on expedition photography. He covered the basics of shutter speed, exposure, light and ISO. We all wish we could capture images as dramatic as Adrian's, but at least we came away with a few more tricks and tips for composition in our photography. Piotr then gave a presentation on the history of Arctic dogs and dogsledding. The earliest known dogsledding dates back at least 9,000 years and has been critical in the settlement and exploration of the Arctic regions.

As Piotr's talk was wrapping up, we were closing in on the east coast of Barentsøya. This island is separated from the main island of Spitsbergen by a narrow and winding channel, called Heleysundet. The channel is made even narrower by another smaller island, Kükenthaløya. The tides race through this strait and we could see the water boiling at the sides of the channel, even though we were not traversing during a peak tide. In only 30 minutes the Ocean Explorer was through the strait while we stood on deck to watch the traverse. A few keen-eyed observers were out on Deck 8 keeping track of every bird that we encountered, completing a survey of nine species.

Tomorrow, new adventures await in the southeast area of Svalbard.



Sundneset & Kapp Lee

DAY 8 | Monday 31 July 2023

Position at 0700 on 31 July

Latitude: 78°32.7'N

Longitude: 019°13.2'E

Course: Drifting

Speed: Drifting

Wind Speed: S1

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: 8°C

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

—Paulo Coelho

Today was a day filled with wonder and excitement as we continued our voyage onboard the Ocean Explorer. Every moment was brimming with extraordinary experiences that will forever hold a special place in our hearts.

Awakening to the promise of new discoveries, we savoured a delightful breakfast that prepared us for the incredible adventures that awaited. Mario and the team organised a Zodiac exploration in Negribreen but due to the weather conditions our plan was deferred.

We repositioned to Sundneset, a breathtaking location on the western coast of Spitsbergen, and guess what? Our Arctic luck shined once again – a magnificent polar bear was feasting on a carcass! We cherished this raw display of nature from the comfort of our ship, feeling privileged to witness such a spectacle. Our experienced Captain ensured a safe distance, allowing us to marvel at the bear's majestic presence. Moments like these remind us of the fragility of our planet and the importance of preserving these pristine environments.

Following a delectable lunch, we visited Kapp Lee, a place steeped in history and teeming with wildlife. While we were getting ready for a new adventure, the scout team spotted another bear. Each encounter with these majestic creatures feels awe-inspiring. The Arctic's wildlife is beyond words, and our hearts skipped a beat as we watched the bears roam freely and the walrus bask in the Arctic sun.

The expedition team shared fascinating stories about the human history of the region, painting a vivid picture of life in the Arctic, a land of challenges and triumphs. Then it was time to go back to the ship, where we gathered for our daily briefing and recap of the day's adventures. Reliving our encounters and sharing stories of awe and wonder further fueled our appreciation for this unique expedition.

A sumptuous dinner prepared by our talented onboard chefs matched the grandeur of the Arctic landscape, and as the day drew to a close, Piotr and Ben held an enlightening discussion about the Arctic's rich history and geopolitics, deepening our connection to this incredible part of our planet. As we retired to our cabins, we felt a profound sense of gratitude for the wonders we experienced today.

Tomorrow holds new promises and surprises as we continue our expedition through this magical region. Adventures await us on the horizon.



Brepollen & Gnålodden

DAY 9 | Tuesday 1 August 2023

Position at 0700 on 1 August

Latitude: 76°52.1'N

Longitude: 015°06.4'E

Course: 052°

Speed: 14.4 knots

Wind Speed: SE 3

Barometer: 1017

Air Temp: 10°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

August 1st was to be another extraordinary day of exploration and wonder here in Svalbard. On this memorable day, we witnessed nature's spectacle at its finest, exploring the rich landscape and scenery that only the Hornsund fjord system can offer.

While the world around us was still wrapped and in bed (most of us were too!), a few daring souls responded to the call of the Arctic's majestic giants. Rising before dawn, they ventured up on deck to witness a few special encounters. Although brief, dolphins, humpbacks and even a sperm whale were reported, a truly rare sight.

After a hearty breakfast that fueled our spirits, we set out on an invigorating Zodiac exploration. Gliding through icy waters, we marvelled at pristine glaciers and towering icebergs, surrounded by some of the most beautiful mountains that Spitsbergen has to offer.

After a morning of thrill and adventure, we returned to the comfort of our expedition vessel for an exquisite lunch. Stories of the morning's adventures were amongst us, while outside the sun was starting to shine.

We repositioned our ship to the afternoon's landing site, and while doing that we enjoyed one of the most beautiful ship cruises of our whole voyage: the transit inside the famous Hornsund fjord system, the southernmost fjord system in Spitsbergen. This place inspired many of Svalbard's postcards and brochures, and there is a reason why. The scenery here is breathtaking, especially on a sunny day!

As we enjoyed the sail in, we started to prepare ourselves for an afternoon of discovery. Our destination: Gnålodden, a land of raw beauty and untouched landscapes. Stepping ashore was a great feeling, especially surrounded by these giant mountains and glaciers, full of colours and stories. The human story was present in the region as well, as we all came to learn while ashore.

The wildlife greeted us upon arrival, hundreds of kittiwakes chirping in the distance, high up the main cliff, made for the perfect soundtrack to this landing. We marvelled at the delicate arctic flora, bravely thriving against all odds.



As the day began to wane, we returned to our beautiful Ocean Explorer. With every moment etched in our memories, we set sail towards new horizons, eagerly anticipating the wonders that tomorrow would bring.

Recap and briefing took place at the usual time, and this was followed shortly after by yet another excellent dinner onboard.

As we get closer to saying farewell to this Arctic wonderland, we do so with immense gratitude for the experiences we've shared and the friendships we've forged. Let's make the most of the final day, savouring every moment and welcoming the adventures to come!



St. Jonsfjorden

DAY 10 | Wednesday 2 August 2023

Position at 0700 2 August

Latitude: 78°30.3'N

Longitude: 015°47.8'E

Course: 099°

Speed: 6.3 knots

And so, our last expedition day arrives as we gently roll into St. Jonsfjord, on the west coast of Spitsbergen. Our group of hikers set off for an ascent of Ankerfjella on the kind of perfect morning we have become accustomed to being blessed with on this voyage - still, sunny and amiable. The magnificent views from the top of Ankerfjella were augmented by a spectacular glacial calving. Those of us at sea level enjoyed the active and beautiful glacier front of Osbornbreen from Zodiac or kayak, according to the preference. Paddling through the brash, an occasional bearded seal graced us with its presence, and a guillemot or two bobbed nonchalantly amongst the ice. Silent Zodiacs provided an opportunity to contemplate the state of the planet as we sit for the last time in front of these massive testaments to the power of nature and of humanity's stewardship obligations.

United again back on board, a short trip south into Isfjord saw us on land again, strolling across an expansive tundra in the beautiful sunshine. Five reindeer - alternating between skittish, curious and blasé - their antlers showing all soft and velvety in the clear arctic air. The cobbled tundra sported a lovely show of Svalbard flowers and fungi. It was a beautiful occasion to just sit and absorb a last sense of the Arctic wilderness that has been the focus of our attention these last 10 days.

All too soon we are back on board and having a final and heartfelt farewell from Captain Maxim and his extensive and talented team. Representatives from the hotel department sashayed through the Lecture hall, flourishing the instruments and emblems of their various trades. Our expedition leader, Super Mario, took us through a verbal recapitulation of our circumnavigation of Spitsbergen. The fantastic slideshow produced by our shipboard photographer, Adrian, provided a visual retelling of key moments of our voyage, and polar plungers were rewarded with a certificate of achievement and a memorial t-shirt. A final sumptuous feast tucked us off to Heidi's hour of flower power and back to once again try and cram too many belongings into too small spaces. Our final sleep on expedition was under a calm sky and a visibly waning summer sun almost setting on the Arctic jewel that is Svalbard.

Wind Speed: NE3

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: 10°C



Longyearbyen

DAY 11 | Friday 3 August 2023

Position at 0700 3 August

Latitude: 78°13.7'N

Longitude: 015°36.2'E

Course: N/A

Speed: N/A

Early this morning we arrived in Longyearbyen, waking up to our last morning together onboard the Ocean Explorer which has been our sturdy and comfortable base for us throughout our expedition. To our delight the captain was able to pull alongside the dock, making for a relaxed stroll down the gangway and into the buses. Here we made our farewells to the Expedition Team before heading into town.

And what a voyage it has been, from the surreal marine world of the sea ice far in the north, to the lush tundra of the southern fjords.

The wildlife has amazed us: more polar bears than we ever expected, countless walrus; Svalbard reindeer with mighty antlers placidly grazing, arctic fox. We have seen birds of all descriptions flying in all directions. 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, and great companionship from a delightful bunch of fellow travellers.

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



Kayaking Log

Paddlers:	Emily Cozens	Rebecca Von Stein	Chris Yexley
Alice Cozens	Paul Cozens	Gerald Alan Von Stein	Richard Fryer
Elizabeth Cozens	David Kirkby	Meredith Gant	Helen Fryer
Thomas Cozens	Simon Leckie	Sandra Hawkins	
James Cozens	Benedict Pettit	Samantha Thomas	

26th July 2023 AM. Skansbukta - Distance: 4 KM

Arriving at Skansbukta, the kayakers were keen to get out on their first paddle in Svalbard. The huge cliffs and mountains of Tempelfjorden rearing high above the *Ocean Explorer*. The sculpted pillars of rock, and glowing gold of the hills, giving truth to the name.

After a quick safety run through, and last kayak checks, the team gracefully entered their kayaks from the marina. With all safely in their boats, it was finally time to kayak in the Arctic.

Cruising along the coastline, puffins whizzed past their heads, guillemot flew frantically between feeding and zooming back to their partners in the cliffs. High above sea bird colonies of kittiwakes could be heard in their raucous cacophony. The glowing light of the fjord and craggy mountains was the true highlight though. Soon it was time to turn into the wind and surf back along the shoreline, where the kayak team was able to land and enjoy the diverse history and geology of Skansbukta before catching a Zodiac home. A great conclusion to a first paddle in Svalbard.

26th July 2023 PM. Monacobreen - Distance: 4,6km

The 'More Pace' group, our first Glacier paddle, where we got introduced to paddling amongst ice, we saw some seals in the distance, but could not identify. We paddled along the glacier front and had the chance to get a small taster of paddling in the brash ice. A few good calvings and we enjoyed the calm day and beautiful weather. Monaco breen is named after the explorer prince Albert of Monaco who surveyed back in the day, and his grandson Prince Albert the second revised in the 90s.

For the 'more zen' group, our day in Mocanobreen, Svalbard, began with excitement and eagerness as we set out on a leisurely paddle, immersing ourselves in the breathtaking scenery and abundant wildlife. The weather couldn't have been more perfect, with clear blue skies, warm sunshine, and a gentle breeze.

Shortly after we started paddling, our delight grew as we spotted majestic beluga whales gliding gracefully through the pristine waters. The area around the glacier front was teeming with vibrant bird activity, adding to the natural spectacle. As we paddled closer to the glacier, we were enthralled by the echoing sounds of cracking ice and awe-inspiring calvings. The raw power of nature was a sight to behold.

Throughout the journey, we were in awe of the stunning landscape surrounding us, with towering glaciers and rugged cliffs creating a dramatic backdrop. Our group felt a profound connection to nature, and the peacefulness of the Arctic environment enveloped us.

With gratitude for the opportunity to witness such wonders, we concluded our adventure, returning to the comfort of the *Ocean Explorer*.

28th July 2023. Phippsøya - Distance: 5 km

The kayak team floated away from the Ocean Explorer into the calm of the sheltered Seven Islands. Everywhere ice could be seen. Small floes ricocheting along each other's edges, small chunks of brash, and the huge vast floe that stretched almost from the Nelsonøya, to the sandy shores of Phippsøya. This huge floe drifted between the two islands, and along its huge flank the kayak teams set out. The smooth silken waters, and scattered floes made for a wonderful slalom course, a shifting labyrinth of ice, moving with the invisible force of the tide.

This serene landscape meant the more relaxed group could rename their group as the zen paddlers. Taking the moment to sit still in their kayaks amidst the drifting white, the inky dark water, and the soft falling snow.

29th July 2023 AM. Location: Torrellnesset - Distance: 4km

The Ocean Explorer cruised in the Hintenlopen strait, the narrow channel that splits the Svalbard Archipelago into east and west. Here the eastern shore demonstrated the clear 'polar desert' of dry, sandy soil, crested by the mighty ice of the Nordaustland ice cap.

The kayakers left the ship in calm waters, with their eyes attentive for possible walrus in the water. The water was scattered with the occasional iceberg rolling in the swell, and the cloud hung low over the high western mountains. The paddlers headed for the shoreline, cruising past the ice, and to the high shoreline. There they could land on the steep gravelly shore, and head inland in pursuit of walrus on ground. After only a short walk, the team was with these incredible creatures. Perhaps fifty male walrus lolled about on the sandy soil, their huge bodies pressed together with no regard for personal space or giant sharp teeth. Another ten or so animals snorted and splashed in the water. After a few minutes another animal appeared, the opposite in spectrum from the giant walrus. A young arctic fox, a blue morph in its dark black brown coat. To see two such iconic arctic creatures in one place was a real privilege and a great way to conclude a great paddle.

29th July 2023 PM. Alkefjellet - Distance: 3.94km

The kayakers launched from the Zodiac, next to the low cliffs to the south. The cliffs in the south with waterfalls that are made up of steps. These cliffs were populated with a few Brunnich's guillemots, kittiwakes, and black guillemots. Gradually the cliffs become larger and more occupied by nesting birds. Gradually so that every place open where a bird could stand was taken as a place of nesting for the birds.

On the way we found a waterfall that came directly from the glacier, the perfect opportunity for the playful group to get a pure glacier bath while sitting in the kayaks.

1st August 2023 AM. Brepollen - Distance: 8 km

Embarking on an early morning kayak adventure, we paddled 8 km away from the ship into a realm where time seemed to stand still. Our voyage took us through 500 million years of awe-inspiring geology, revealing a vibrant tapestry of colours and glaciers. As we glided through the pristine waters, we felt a profound connection to the ancient landscape.

After an exhilarating journey, we found a peaceful haven on a small beach. There, we indulged in hot chocolate, savouring the moment amidst nature's wonders. Later, as the ship repositioned, we bid farewell to this enchanting place and paddled back home, hearts brimming with gratitude for the unforgettable kayak experience that immersed us.

1st August 2023 PM. Gnålodden - Distance: 3.5 km

A gusting northerly greeted the team after a serene morning paddle further to the east in Hornsund. But, not to be deterred, the kayak groups both headed towards land. Beginning to the west, the more zen group shot across the wind before finding shelter behind the land and paddling up into an incredible maze of rock gardens and shallow inlets. The wonder at finding another channel behind a wall of impenetrable stone, and the glowing cliff above, along with the ever present raucous noise of the kittiwakes above, all made for an overwhelming scene.

Rounding the last corner, the team attempted to land, but a last attraction; a bold arctic fox grooming by the shoreline was the final piece of icing on a wonderful day of kayaking.

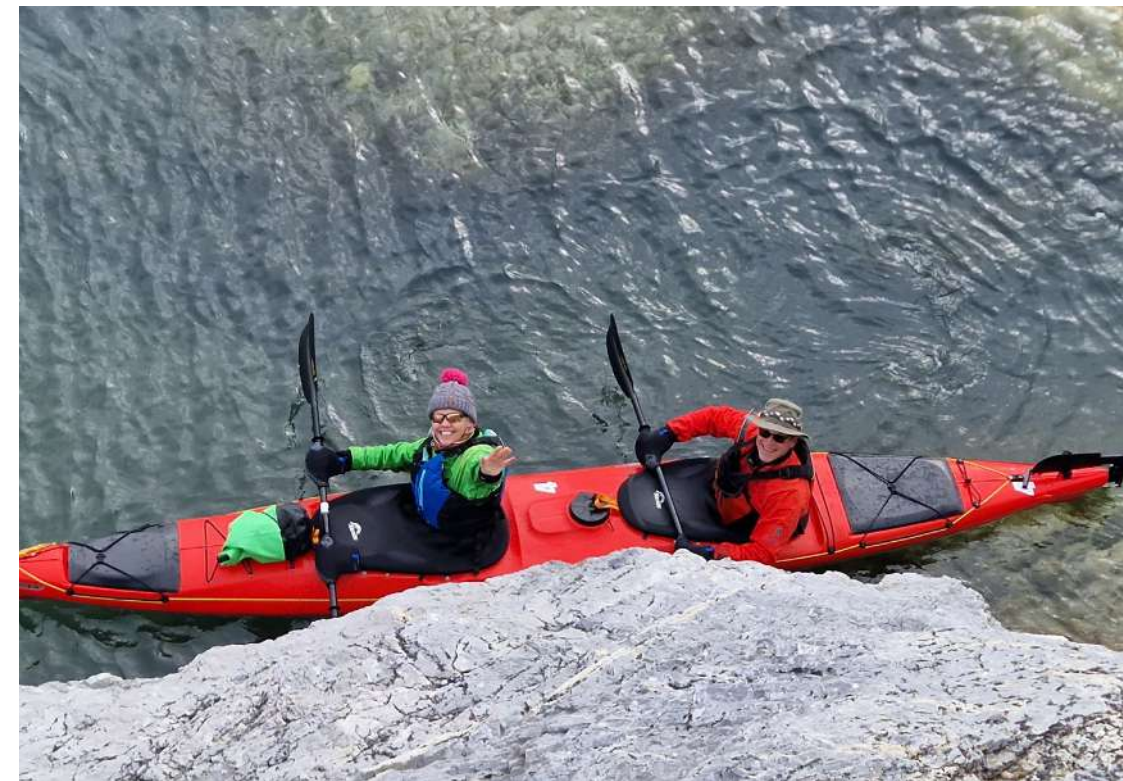
2nd August 2023. St. Jonsfjord - Distance: 7.5 km

As our incredible journey nears its end, we embarked on a momentous farewell paddle through the majestic St. Jonsfjord, a place of unmatched beauty. Today's paddle covered 7.5km, taking us on an immersive voyage surrounded by the breathtaking landscape shaped by two vast, deep blue glaciers.

Gliding through the enchanting waters, we navigated amidst brash ice, the gentle sound of ice clicking in the water creating a symphony of its own. Nature's embrace was profound, and each stroke of the paddle immersed us deeper into the Arctic's wonders.

Before bidding adieu to this magnificent place, we seized a daring opportunity, jumping from our kayaks into the cold water. Feeling the chill beneath our feet, we couldn't help but be humbled by the raw power and beauty of this untouched world.

We set course for home, cherishing the memories of our long and immersive paddle in St. Jonsfjord.





Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species

July - August

	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Red-throated Diver						●				●
Northern Fulmar	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pink-footed Goose		●		●				●		●
Barnacle Goose		●					●			
Common Eider	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Long-tailed Duck									●	●
Ringed Plover	●									●
Purple Sandpiper	●	●			●			●		●
Arctic Skua		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Pomarine Skua							●			
Great Skua									●	●
Glaucous Gull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Great Black-backed Gull										●
Kittiwake	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ivory Gull	●			●	●				●	
Arctic Tern	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●
Brünnich's Guillemot	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Black Guillemot	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Atlantic Puffin	●	●		●						●
Little Auk	●	●	●	●	●	●				●
Snow Bunting	●		●	●	●		●	●	●	

Mammal Species

July - August

	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Reindeer		●						●		●
Polar Bear			●	●	●		●	●		
Arctic Fox						●		●	●	
Harbour Seal										●
Ringed Seal					●		●			●
Bearded Seal			●	●	●		●			●
Harp Seal					●		●			
Walrus		●	●	●		●		●		
Minke Whale		●	●		●					
Humpback Whale							●		●	●
Fin Whale					●				●	
Beluga			●							
Sperm Whale									●	
Unidentified Whale					●					
White-beaked Dolphin									●	





- Sites visited**
- 1 Longyearbyen
 - 2 Skansbukta
 - 3 Reinsdyrfløya
 - 4 Monacobreen (With Polar Plunge!)
 - 5 Moffen Island
 - 6 Phippsøya
 - 7 Sea Ice Exploration (reached 81°12'N!) / Sea Ice Walk & Polar Bears !!
 - 8 Torellneset
 - 9 Alkefjellet (And BBQ!)
 - 10 Brasvelbreen
 - 11 Crossing through Heleysundet narrows :)
 - 12 Kapp Lee
 - 13 Brepollen
 - 14 Ghalloden
 - 15 St. Jonsfjorden
 - 16 Isfjorden Bonus Landing !





Expeditioners:

- | | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Rashidah A Rahman | Liz Drever | Susan Jackson | Tao Pan | Minjun Sun |
| Margaretz Barr | Christine Ennals | Christopher Jackson | Karin Patrick | Mary Tegen |
| Skender Bayaziti | Kay Feather | Xiaohua Jin | Paul Paul Ennals | Iruthayamary Thomas |
| Esha Bhojwani | Roger Feather | David Kirkby | Joan Perkins | Samantha Thomas |
| Rohaan Bhojwani | Juanita Foote | Katrina Kirkby | Mette Petersen | Alan Von Stein |
| Sebastian Boring | Arthur Foote | Margaret Lambert | Nicky Pettit | Rebecca Von Stein |
| Graeme Breen | Richard Fryer | Martin Lambert | Benedict Pettit | Shalini Wahi |
| Barbara Campbell | Helen Fryer | Alison Leckie | Jenene Redding | Sudhir Wahi |
| Jie Cao | Meredith Gant | Simon Leckie | Sebastien Ruffier | Dianne Walsh |
| Richard Caplan | Natalya Getman | Chang Liu | Linda Saunders | Ziyi Wang |
| Judith Caplan | Anomal Goonewardena | Huamulan Liu | Richard Saunders | Rosemary Williams |
| Jane Cook | Rae Green | Hongxin Liu | Xiaoyan Shen | Janet Willis |
| Carolyn Coombs | Beverley Hansen | Ruth Matthews | Yongyi Shen | Len Woods |
| Emily Cozens | Osnat Harari | Aidan McElduff | Nimrat Sidhu | Tian Ye |
| Alice Cozens | Geoffrey Harrison | Catriona McKenzie | Gurbir Sidhu | Christina Yexley |
| Paul Cozens | Allan Hart | Kenneth Morgan | Debbie Simmonds | Zhenqin Yuan |
| Elizabeth Cozens | Sandie Hawkins | Judith Newell | Tarunkumar Bhojwani | Liang Zhang |
| James Cozens | Michael Heath | Patricia Osborn | Catherine Stannard | Yueping Zhang |
| Tom Cozens | Prudence Holcombe | Timothy Osborne | Else Stork Sullivan | Hengyu Zhao |
| Helen Creasey | Jessie Inman | Hilary Osborne | Shaun Sullivan | Yuan Zheng |
| Xiaoning Dan | Vanessa Inslay | Georgia Paley | Diyuan Sun | |

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Mario Placidi Spring
Assistant Expedition Leader: Ashley Perrin
Onboard Expedition Manager: Samantha Deer
Assistant Expedition Leader Trainee: Piotr Damski
Firearms Manager: Stephen Anstee
Naturalist & Citizen Science Coordinator: Heidi Krajewsky
Glaciologist: Marcos Goldin
Historian: Ben Maddison
Expedition Guide: Tamsin Both
Expedition Guide: Eddie Hauzer
Mandarin Speaking Guide: Chen Zhongyuan
Lead Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert
Kayaking Guide: Sigurd Davidsen
Kayaking Guide: Nicole Genoud
Photography Guide: Adrian Włodarczyk
Expedition Medic: Scott Thompson
Zodiac Master: Jebidiah Pearce
Onboard Expedition Assistant: Reza Rusooly

Photography thanks to:

Adrian Włodarczyk

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





