

Jewels of the Arctic

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 19 June – 2 July 2023





Longyearbyen

DAY 1 | Monday 19 June 2023

Position at 1700 on 19 June

Latitude: 78°18.593'N

Longitude: 015°29.839'E

Course: Anchor

Speed: Anchor

Wind Speed: NW, 3 knots

Air Temp: 5°C

Barometer: 1034

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Here we are inside the Arctic Circle, at 778 degrees 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. Over the next nine days, 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 *Greg Mortimer*. The Zodiacs are our 'ticket to fun' and they will soon become second nature to us. We had our first experience of the mudroom, where the team welcomed us on board.

After a quick photograph taken by Max (our onboard photography guide), 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 drill.

The sound of the ship's horn signalled us to grab our bulky orange lifejackets, beanies and warm clothing, and muster into 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 Pascal, Doctor Andres, and Onboard Expedition Manager Rosie, who gave us some tips for life on board.

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

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

The kayak team met for a briefing with guides Dan, Liz and Nicole, to prepare for the great paddling adventure that lay ahead.

Together we total 85 Expeditioners from around the globe: 35 Australians, 26 from the USA, 13 from the UK, with



China, France, Italy, Lithuania, New Zealand and Switzerland making up the rest. Our ship's crew, also from around the globe, are 79 in number.

In addition, we have 15 Expedition Team with a variety of specialties, including polar exploration, polar bear safety, glaciology, geology, history, marine and terrestrial biology, ornithology, photography, wilderness first aid, 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.

At Sea | Lilliehöökreen

DAY 2 | Wednesday 20 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 20 June

Latitude: 79°015.4'N

Longitude: 011°41.4'E

Course: 015°

Speed: 7 knots

Wind Speed: S, 5 knots

Air Temp: 2°C

Barometer: 1031

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

Our first night on board the mighty *Greg Mortimer* was a calm passage up the west coast of Spitsbergen north of Longyearbyen. Morning finds us entering Krossfjord, and 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, and a further briefing on the dos and don'ts of visiting polar bear country. After a biosecurity check and cleanse of our outdoor gear, we are ready for venturing out to explore the wonders of Svalbard.

Early afternoon sees us dropping anchor in front of the spectacular glacier front of Lilliehöökreen. At 11km long, Lilliehöökreen is one of the largest glaciers in west Spitsbergen. But it used to be much larger. Analysis of photographs taken in 1906 and in 2006 allowed glaciologists to calculate that about 40% of the volume of the glacier has been lost in a century. It is still a magnificent spectacle, especially on a perfect Svalbard afternoon such as this - windless and with a promise of sun. Lilliehöökreen's vividly stratified faces, its towers of deeply riven ice, its creaks, cracks, groans and occasional small calvings, gave us a good sense of the immense forces at work in these massive structures. A handful of bearded seals lazed on bergy bits as we made our way through the 'brash' ice. Whether in kayak or Zodiac, the glassy conditions made it a perfect afternoon to be exploring Svalbard. As the afternoon wended onwards, the sun broke through and we made our way back to the ship bathed in warm sunshine.

Up anchor and away, we retraced our wake down Lilliehöökfjorden, accompanied by those quick-winged and enigmatic puffins and little auks. Magnificent sunshine and increasingly idyllic conditions made for perfect out-on-deck viewing, with the mountains now popping out to reveal the alpine interior of Svalbard. 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 the *Greg Mortimer*. As 'night' fell, we left Krossfjord, and headed towards Raudfjorden and the north coast of Spitsbergen, with the exciting prospect of a close engagement with the Arctic ice pack tomorrow.



Raudfjorden | Breibogen

DAY 3 | Wednesday 21 June 2023

Position at 0600 on 21 June

Latitude: 7948.5'N

Longitude: 012°00.5'E

Course: 155°

Speed: 6.5 knots

Wind Speed: S, 2 knots

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 4°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 for some of us. During the night we had sailed up the west coast of Spitsbergen, after leaving Lilliehöökreen, where we were met by the snow-capped peaks of Raudfjorden. Sailing up this beautiful fjord was an early start on the lookout for bears.

The water was a glassy calm as the *Greg Mortimer* sailed effortlessly, creating ripples flowing from the bow and dissipating into the mirrored calm of the fjord. Birds were in abundance as we cruised slowly along Brünnich's guillemots, kittiwakes, eider ducks and black guillemots. We reached our destination of Hamiltonbukta at around 7.00am. After breakfast, we had a sighting of a beluga whale off our port side and also a minke whale passing from port to starboard across the bow of the ship.

A scout boat went out to check for a possible landing site, and at 9.40am we were ready to take Expeditioners for an exploration of the coast by Zodiac, with the option for a 10-minute landing for those wishing to go ashore and explore the Swedish trappers hut and check out the area. Bear tracks were found there and along the shoreline, and arctic terns were very vocal and putting on displays diving into the water.

On returning to the ship, a delicious lunch was served by the restaurant team, and we headed back out of Raudfjorden and around the north coast into Breibogen, the sea flat and calm, and reflecting the grey sky with chunks of ice flowing slowly past us.

What a treat when we arrived! Ahead was a sailing ship at the edge of the sea ice, and lying on the sea ice was our first polar bear! We observed the bear for a long time, just soaking up the atmosphere with snowy mountains in the distance as a dramatic backdrop. He was sleeping, rolling over, stretching, then eventually moved up and down the water's edge, testing the air, tongue flicking out every so often, with the odd look in our direction,



probably trying to figure out what we were. He was a majestic sight! The kingdom of the ice bear.

We headed back out to sea early evening with the sun shining, kittiwake flying alongside the ship and a lot of buzz in the air, everyone excited about seeing their first bear.



Magdalenefjorden | Ny-London

DAY 4 | Thursday 22 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 22 June

Latitude: 79°34.0'N

Longitude: 010°56.6'E

Course: 265°

Speed: 10.3 knots

Wind Speed: N, 3 knots

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 4°C

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

—Henry Beston (1888-1968)

We waken to a foggy Magdalenefjorden, such a contrast to the brilliant sunshine we enjoyed in the channels around Smeerenburgfjorden last evening. Fog means very poor visibility, and so a greatly reduced capacity to scope out the polar bear clearance at our potential landing site. Luckily, we are flexible on the mighty *Greg Mortimer*, so we head south in the hope of finding clearer weather. As we motored through the fog, Heidi gave us clarity in a lecture introducing the diverse flora and fauna of Svalbard. Later, Ben gave us a brief rundown of the history of Svalbard through the ages, highlighting the successive waves of hunting and gathering that has been such a crucial part of the archipelago's history. Little wildlife was spared, from Dutch and English hunting of walrus and bowhead whale in the 1600s, through to the Russian Pomor trapping of arctic fox, beluga whale, and taking of walrus ivory tusks up to the 1850s. Scandinavian hunters and trappers continued the fox hunting and extended the quarry to reindeer meat and eider eggs, right into the 20th century. The Treaty of Svalbard (1925) reduced extensive commercial hunting and paved the way for the reinvention of the island as a haven for natural values.

With perfect timing, we were dropping anchor in Kongsfjorden just as we completed another great lunch. Clearing skies and light breezes were ideal conditions for our landing to the old industrial settlement of Ny (New) London. This was the first extended land excursion on our voyage, and it was great to stretch the legs with some gentle uphill exploring around the industrial ruins of the old marble quarry.

The quarry was the brainchild of Englishman Ernest Mansfield, who convinced investors in London to put up the capital for the marble enterprise. Bringing industrial equipment and 70 English workers with him in 1910, the local Norwegians across the bay at the coal-mining town of Ny-Ålesund soon nicknamed the new settlement Ny (New)-London. The marble enterprise was a failure due to the poor quality of the marble, and the enterprise had been abandoned by 1913, leaving behind the rusting industrial equipment we observed on today's ramble.

A walk up to the ridge east of the bay to greet our polar bear sentries on lookout, afforded great views along Kongsfjorden and across to Ny-Ålesund, now Svalbard's science research hub. Nature is never too far away in Svalbard, and the area also afforded excellent birding and botany. Down at water level, our kayak team had some



St Jonsfjorden | Poolepynten

DAY 5 | Friday 23 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 23 June

Latitude: 78°25.6'N

Longitude: 012°22.5'E

Course: 341°

Speed: 13 knots

Wind Speed: SE, 3 knots

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 5°C

The Walrus and the Carpenter were walking hand in hand,
The Carpenter wept bitterly to see such quantities of sand.
"If seven maids with seven brooms swept for half a year,
do you think," the Walrus said, "that they could make it clear?"
"I doubt it", said the Carpenter, and shed a bitter tear.

—Lewis Carroll from Alice Through the Looking Glass

Our last day in Svalbard and what a fantastic day it was!

We started the morning in St Jonsfjorden. The non-kayaking group split up and half of us worked for our lunch and half of us didn't! Some intrepid hikers climbed up the ridge line to get a good view of the fjord and the two beautiful glaciers on either side of the ridge. The other half of us went on a Zodiac exploration around the bay below the hikers. We cruised among the brash ice and were very lucky to see about 12 seals, a mix of bearded and ringed. Some were swimming in the water, popping their heads up every now and then to say hello and some were hauled out on the ice. Bearded seals owe their name to their strongly developed moustache. As Heidi pointed out, the moustache seal would be a more apt name. Ringed seals are the only seals that can keep a breathing hole open even in the dead of winter by using the claws of its fore flippers. The ringed seal are the most abundant seal species in the Arctic and are the preferred meal of polar bears.

The eager kayakers also covered a lot of ground, kayaking 10km in total, almost the same amount as the Zodiac exploration, which is quite the feat! Just as we were wrapping up our operation, the fog rolled in, and we all got on board for lunch as the ship repositioned to Poolepynten.

After lunch, the fog kept us on board for longer than expected but the silver lining was that we got to learn some great photography tips and see some of Max's beautiful photos from his adventures around the world. Just as Max finished his lecture, the fog cleared enough for us to get on land. We visited Poolepynten, a sandy spit that is well known as a walrus haulout spot. The beach was covered in driftwood, which has floated all the way across the Arctic Ocean from Siberia! As well as the travelling wood there were lots of big-toothed smelly, blubbery things. Walrus are amazing creatures; they can dive down to 90m, and have special adaptations to help conserve oxygen when diving. They slow their heartbeat, and during deep dives, their blood is pulled away from parts of



Crossing the Greenland Sea

DAY 6 | Saturday 24 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 24 June

Latitude: 76°14.9'N

Longitude: 005°34.2' E

Course: 218°

Speed: 14.1 knots

Wind Speed: W, 5 knots

Barometer: 1024

Air Temp: 2°C

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

—Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

A sea day, that means a sleep-in, and no wake-up call. I think some were happy, but some missed that cheerful Italian voice waking us up with an inspirational quote? We are moving away from Svalbard and heading to a new chapter – our exploration of Greenland. Ice and weather make this adventure unpredictable. But that only makes it more exciting.

A delectable breakfast was followed by a cloud survey out on deck with Marcos. The observations of clouds we make assist NASA with their research on weather and climate. Super important!

We were then treated to a fantastic lecture by Heidi about everybody's favourite white fluffy thing... the polar bear. Our questions were answered about the biology and the lives of these fascinating mammals.

The lunch buffet was a global phenomenon, with choices between sushi, chicken cordon bleu, pizza, the popular salad bar, and many more.

Next up, as we sailed through the vicinity of the Andree's Arctic balloon expedition, Ben recounted the story of this doomed mission. While we will never know what fate befell these men, we do know that many other expeditions also had significant difficulty due to the ice being drawn south by ocean currents.

I would like to expand on ocean currents a little and briefly talk about the East Greenland Current (EGC). The EGC plays an important role in the global climate system. The current transports cold, fresh water from the Arctic to the North Atlantic, and helps to regulate temperature and salinity of the Atlantic Ocean. The EGC also helps to export sea ice from the Arctic, which has implications for the global climate. It is driven by factors including the difference in temperature and salinity between the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic Ocean, wind, and Earth's rotation. The current helps to keep the coast of Greenland free of ice, and it provides a habitat for a variety of marine life. As the Arctic Ocean warms, the EGC is expected to weaken. This could have many implications, including the changing distribution of marine life.

After Ben's lecture, Pascal's voice came over the speaker, proudly announcing a traditional French treat: Crêpes Suzette. Due to the delicious smell, some of us had followed our noses to the Elephant Island Bar and were already waiting in line for our crêpes.

As much as we enjoyed the sweet treats, we aren't going to spot wildlife by looking inside the ship. So up to the deck again we went for an E-bird survey with Heidi and our second cloud survey of the day. Just as we crossed the Greenwich Meridian, Heidi spotted two whale blows in the distance, one of them a blue whale! Chief Mate Alex slowed the *Greg Mortimer* and eventually one whale came to just a few hundred metres from us, so we could get a great view and identify it as a fin whale. What an amazing encounter.

Our recap for the day included photo tips from Max, geology from Marcos, and a briefing about tomorrow from Mario, which included a tentative 'bonus' plan to visit Jan Mayen. This trip is full of surprises!



Greenland Sea | Jan Mayen

DAY 7 | Sunday 25 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 25 June

Latitude: 71°50.3'N

Longitude: 007°1.3'W

Course: 218°

Speed: 14 knots

Wind Speed: ESE, 6 knots

Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 0°C

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

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

The first glimpses out of our windows revealed a foggy morning with limited visibility. A good day for a sleep-in at sea. But we were refreshed from an extra hour of sleep last night, after we set our clocks back as we made our way west. Our educational program continued with an excellent geology presentation by Marcos. He covered nearly 4 billion years of earth's history using rock examples from Greenland. It was a tale of extremes: with 'Snowball Earth' approximately 500 million years ago to the hot and steamy time of the dinosaurs in the Mesozoic. We learned of shifting continental plates and volcanoes and constant change on our planet. Our next lecture, by Daniel, gave us an excellent Introduction to Greenland, with stories covering the flora, fauna as well as culture. He explained the concept of *Immaqa*, which roughly means 'perhaps', maybe.

This time at sea made for a great opportunity for a tour of the bridge. The officers were obliging in answering many questions about how equipment worked. Today is the International Day of the Seafarer, and we are very grateful for the skills and hard work that our entire crew provide!

With our approach towards the isolated Norwegian island outpost of Jan Mayen, the birdlife on the water increased. Through the mist, rafts of guillemot, puffin and fulmar passed the ship. Several flocks were circling around the ship. The sun came and went as the fog thickened and retreated. Finally, after a sumptuous lunch we had our first views of the island. The sea stacks on the north side of Kvalrossbukta rose sheer from the sea to a height of over 90 metres. The call was made that we were to have an exploration of this remote island by Zodiac. We approached the cliffs where northern fulmar were feeding in rafts on the water in flocks of hundreds, while many more flew to and from the cliffs above us where they were nesting. The sea stacks on the outer point had Brünnich's guillemot lined up like black and white keys on a piano, while flocks of little auk flew high overhead like small clouds of buzzing insects. All this incredible birdlife simply added to the overall beauty of these colourful, sculpted cliffs. The layers of volcanic rock appeared in so many different colours, from deep red to greys, blacks and oranges. The constant wind had sculpted these layered cliffs into myriad shapes, while the sea had bashed a sea cave below, just big enough for us to explore with a Zodiac. This excursion was a wonderful, unexpected

bonus. After the ship lifted anchor and we were once again on our way to Greenland the cloud cleared enough for a brief glimpse of the majestic ice-covered peak of Beerenburg, the high volcanic mountain of Jan Mayen.



Greenland Sea Ice

DAY 8 | Monday 26 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 26 June

Latitude: 70°22.06'N

Longitude: 018°04.7'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 12 knots

Wind Speed: E, 4 knots

Barometer: 1024

Air Temp: -1°C

Up there time comes whole, then is divided into four months of dark, four months of light and two seasons of twilight when the sun hangs at the horizon as though stuck between two thoughts.

—Gretel Ehrlich, *This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland*

Awakening to the promise of new discoveries, we savoured a delightful breakfast that prepared us for the adventures that awaited. Our Expedition Team had meticulously planned a series of immersive activities, ensuring that our sea day be fun and informative.

As we sailed through the icy waters, we were treated to breathtaking views of sea ice, mystical sea fog, and a rich diversity of seabirds soaring overhead. On our route to the coast, we encountered dense pack ice, prompting us to change course and navigate towards a southern route in search of a passage to reach Ittoqqortoormiit.

Despite the change in itinerary, our day was filled with excitement and discovery. Captain Maxim lowered the observation platforms, so we could get a great view of the GM pushing through the ice.

Following a delectable lunch, we were treated to a one-hour Arctic variety session. Mario, Marcos, Heidi, and Daniel shared their passion for the Arctic and provided presentations on different aspects of this region. Mario delved into the wonders of Arctic astronomy, while Marcos unveiled the secrets of sea ice formation and its ecological importance. Heidi mesmerised us with tales of Arctic seabirds and their remarkable adaptations, and Daniel enlightened us on the rich cultural heritage of the Arctic communities.

In the afternoon, our Expedition Team photographer Max gave us a fascinating lecture on smartphone photography in the Arctic, sharing his expert tips and tricks for capturing the beauty of this remote wilderness through our mobile devices. Equipped with newfound knowledge, we were inspired to venture out and immortalise the unique sights and moments that awaited us on this remarkable journey.

To celebrate the day's discoveries, we gathered at the Elephant Island Bar for canapés and refreshing drinks. The cosy atmosphere provided the perfect setting for us to mingle, share stories and forge new friendships.

The evening concluded on a high note with an entertaining trivia night hosted by Tamsin and Max. A friendly spirit of competition engulfed the room as we tested our knowledge. Some of the highlights included identifying

animal sounds, and doing quite creative charade impressions of a Zodiac, Svalbard and the *Greg Mortimer*.

Today has been an extraordinary chapter in our voyage. Tomorrow promised new horizons and thrilling encounters, but for now, we cherished the memories created on this unforgettable day of Arctic exploration.

Stay tuned for more thrilling experiences as we continue our voyage through the Arctic wonders.



Greenland Sea Ice | Polar Plunge

DAY 9 | Tuesday 27 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 27 June

Latitude: 70°02.07'N

Longitude: 022°03.8'W

Course: Variable, ice nav.

Speed: 0.4 knots

Wind Speed: E, 4 knots

Barometer: 1023

Air Temp: 1°C

Life is the essence of a never-ending adventure,
Exciting never boring,
Otherwise,
There is no life.

—Anonymous

The first glimpses out of our windows revealed land at last! We were a few miles east from the famous Scoresbysund fjord, the biggest fjord system on our planet. Stunning views amid the fog, and sea ice floes that surrounded us from every angle. The sea ice was too tightly packed for us to make our planned visit to the small settlement of Ittoqqortoormiit, but it was certainly not going to stop this from being a truly unforgettable day here in the vast and remote coasts of East Greenland.

After our breakfast, Mario's voice was heard through the PA system, announcing an exciting plan for the morning: the opportunity to walk over the frozen ocean surface! Yes, just as it sounds, the ship's gangway was lowered over the thick pack ice, and the Expedition Team went outside to scout the area for the landing. The morning's activity was about to start, when suddenly the plans changed... but for reasons equally (if not more!) exciting than the original plan itself: a sighting of a polar bear, the second one in our voyage so far. As soon as we heard the announcement, everyone on the ship went up and onto the outer decks, searching through binoculars for a view of this majestic animal, the true king of the Arctic. It was an impressive moment, as we witnessed how fast and elusive a polar bear can be in its own environment. His colour and pace, mixed with the chaotic jigsaw of the sea ice, were the perfect conditions for this hunter to pass almost inadvertently, making even the most experienced spotters struggle to spot him.

We sailed away leaving the bear behind, and ready for another adventure.

Lunch was served in the restaurant, and soon after it was time to start our afternoon's activities. At about 2.00pm the Expedition Team went outside once again, to finally to make our plans of a sea ice landing into reality... and this time it was a success!! We were able to walk on ice, take pictures, and as the fog fortunately lifted, really let the Arctic soak into us, a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

As soon as we all got on board, the next announcement was made: POLAR PLUNGE! Dozens of brave plungers endured the freezing ocean, earning themselves a hot shower and the respect of everyone around.

Taking into consideration the big energy expenditure from such a busy day, and taking advantage of the beautiful weather and scenery around us, a BBQ was organised and beautifully executed by the hotel team, accompanied by an exceptional live ice-carving demonstration. It was tricky having to choose between so many tasty options. The only thing left is getting some rest, or maybe singing some karaoke, and being open to the adventure that will surely follow.



Polar Plunge

DAY 9 | Tuesday 27 June 2023



Turner Island, East Greenland

DAY 10 | Wednesday 28 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 28 June

Latitude: 69°38.05'N

Longitude: 023°38.8'W

Course: Variable, ice nav.

Speed: 11 knots

Wind Speed: E, 4 knots

Barometer: 1017

Air Temp: 0°C

In familiar environments, it is easy to go blind in the sense that the initial excitement disappears with the passage of time. This is true for any environment—including the Arctic... The views are just as magnificent and the arctic wildlife remains just as exotic and exciting as before. The silence is still balm to the soul and the serenity is present all the time. But the first time experience is a once and for all experience that cannot be repeated.

—Magnus Elander, *Quiet days in the Arctic*

Morning finds us in position off the formidable coast of Turner Island. Like so many features on this coast, it had been named by the English whaling captain William Scoresby Jnr as he mapped the coast in 1822.

Turner Island is a prime example of volcanic action, its steep mountain sides dropping straight to the sea in a mixture of scree slopes, bluffs and waterfalls. The confined beach, and the prospect of having the landing site getting suddenly closed off by moving ice floes, meant that only four Zodiac-fulls could get on shore at any one time.

Walking along the gravel beach and snow slopes, gazing up at a frozen waterfall, it was great to get our feet on the ground in Greenland. The mobile sea ice got us in the end, just as the first group was making its way back to the ship, and it was necessary to close off the landing before Group 2 was able to enjoy the experience.

After lunch we sallied forth once more, heading out to a beautiful little peninsula, which is named Akileqitaa in East Greenlandic. Akileqitaa was one of the few ice-free places on this coast, and the only access was up a 70-metre slab of rock. The Expedition Team had never landed here before, but in the spirit of exploration they managed to devise a route up. It was Group 2 that was called first on this occasion. Stepping off the Zodiac straight onto the rock slope, we made our way up to the top of the bluff using handlines that the Expedition Team had secured. Here we enjoyed the views across the coast from this spectacular and elevated position. After a while the officers on board the mighty *Greg Mortimer* decided to reposition the ship in order to avoid becoming entangled in the ever-mobile ice floes that had been such a feature of our days on the Scoresby coast. As the wind picked up to above 30 knots (Aurora's threshold wind speed for safe Zodiac ops), it became necessary to close down the operation before Group 1 could be brought to shore. As disappointing as this was, it nonetheless balanced-out the day's opportunities between Groups 1 and 2.



At our daily evening briefing, Expedition Leader Mario showed us on the ice chart the extent of the pack ice along the coast, and explained that it showed no prospect of us being able to do anything more on the East Greenland coast.

Sitting down to dine, we watched the mountains of Greenland receding into the distance, as we headed out across the ice-filled Denmark Strait towards Iceland.



Crossing from Greenland to Iceland

DAY 11 | Thursday 29 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 29 June

Latitude: 67°53.07'N

Longitude: 024°36.1'W

Course: Variable, ice nav.

Speed: 5 knots

Wind Speed: NNE, 7 knots

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: -2°C

The pessimist complains
about the wind;
the optimist expects it to
change;
the realist adjusts the
sails.

—William Arthur Ward, Writer

So, we continue our journey through the ice, leaving the Greenland coast behind us. Our Captain and bridge team worked tirelessly to pick us a route between huge ice floes that still surrounded us. Come breakfast time at 8.00am, it was an overcast day with rain up on the observation deck as we surveyed the large ice floes passing by us.

At 10.00am, Ben gave a fascinating lecture on Nansen and his epic expedition across Greenland. A true adventure: from crossing the sea ice and rowing to shore, then ascending the glacier to crossing over the ice cap and wintering for six months, while waiting for a ship to pick them up the following year.

Plenty of time was spent observing the multitude of ice floes, and seeing if we could spot any sea birds in passing.

At 11.30am, Daniel presented a 1930s Greenlandic movie, *Palo's Wedding*, which showed the Inuit of Greenland pretty much living their everyday lives. Daniel gave an informative narration explaining what was happening as the film progressed.

A delicious lunch was served as we made our way from the Greenland Sea to the Denmark Strait. Then at 2.30pm, Marcos gave his excellent lecture on Iceland, 'the land of fire and Ice', giving us an introduction to the very active geology of this relatively young island (we're talking around 60 million years young!).

Afternoon tea was served, with a misty, damp atmosphere outside as we sailed onwards to our destination.

During evening recap, Mario showed us a recent ice chart, along with a track of our route. So far, we had been slowed significantly by sea ice, as was evident by the dotted line that we had weaved across the map. However, Mario and Captain Maxim were still optimistic we would arrive in Iceland by morning – as soon as we are clear of



ice, the *Greg Mortimer* can resume her usual average cruising speed.

This took us up to dinner time and an excellent menu was yet again served by our exceptional dining room team.

Liz and Tamsin enthusiastically gathered everyone in the lecture theatre for 'How Big Is It?'. Some of us were spot on with our guesses on the size of animals and their various anatomical parts. Some of us not so much... namely Stephen, who failed to guess the correct height of Heidi (his wife). He later redeemed himself with his interpretative dance depicting a seabird.

As we were wrapping up the activities, we finally felt a gentle rocking of an open ocean! Now we can speed ahead and hope to be in the land of fire and ice by morning.



Vigur Island | Ísafjörður

DAY 12 | Friday 30 June 2023

Position at 0700 on 30 June

Latitude: 66°07.0'N

Longitude: 023°05.5'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 1.7 knots

After the thick sea ice we had to navigate through yesterday, we weren't sure we would arrive this morning but we woke up in Iceland! So big thank you to the bridge team for all their hard work over the past few days.

As we arrived by Zodiac to the wonderful Vigur Island, we noticed a lot of birdlife, a twitcher's paradise! Many eider duck, black guillemot, arctic tern, puffin and a few harbor seal lying around on rocks! We were greeted by the lovely Gisli and his team. Gisli and his partner, Felicity, own the island and live there year-round with their son Priainn. What a fantastic way to grow up! Gisli and Felicity have actually spent most of their lives travelling the polar regions, Felicity on skis and Gisli in specialised vehicles; fellow polar explorers! We split into groups and took a great walk around the island. We learned about the collection of eider down.

Every summer over 3,500 nests appear over the island, each lined with eider down, which the female ducks pluck from their own chest. The down is collected in the same way it has been for centuries and cleaned by hand. The eider ducks tend to come back to breed at the place where they hatched, so the higher the survival rate of chicks, the more nests and more down.

As well as seeing eider we also got to see lots of puffin, or sea parrots, or clowns of the sea, as they are known because of their bright orange bills and feet! Puffin have summer and winter bills. After the breeding season the bill starts to flake off. Winter bills are less deep as in summer. The grooves are also still present in winter bills, but less distinct. During winter, as well as the bills shrinking, the bills and feet of puffin fade to dull shades of their summer colours. Every spring their beak and feet turn a vibrant orange in preparation for the breeding season.

We also had quite the experience of walking close to nesting arctic terns. Terns are very territorial and known for dive bombing any intruders. We had to carry wooden flag poles to get through the war zones and around the island.

At the end of the tour, we stopped for homemade rhubarb cake what a treat! The rhubarb cake is made from homegrown, black-guillemot guano-fertilised rhubarb right from Vigur Island!

We left Vigur and headed for Ísafjörður. After lunch some of us explored town and some of us hit the road and went on an 11-kilometre hike to the beautiful Búnarfoss waterfall. Unlike where I come from, it is completely safe to drink from Iceland's waterfalls, so we filled our water bottles straight from the falls; couldn't get much fresher than that! We returned to the ship, having earned our dinner. A great first day in Iceland!

Wind Speed: NW, 4 knots
Barometer: 1013

Air Temp: 4°C



Flatey Island | Grundarfjörður

DAY 13 | Saturday 1 July 2023

“Good morning, Good Morning. Another day has come, and it’s time to wake up.” Oh, how we have enjoyed Mario’s unique way of welcoming us to a new expedition day! We are heading for the appropriately named Flatey Island – it’s almost disappearing beneath the surface when it first comes into view, but as we get closer it looks charming, with its cluster of multi-coloured houses, green fields and smart mustard-coloured navigation towers. Flatey has been occupied ever since the Norse settlers came to Iceland in the 9th century, and the remains of a 12th-century monastery can still be seen. We wandered along the paths of the island, and some of the highlights included some excellent puffin-watching out at the point, and a sheep farmer bringing his flock from paddock to paddock with a vocal display befitting a Swiss yodelling competition. The church was a point of interest, with its lovely murals, featuring a white-tailed eagle flying on the ceiling, a depiction of Jesus wearing an Icelandic sweater, and puffin on the wing being chased by a net-wielding, bearded Flateyite! Around the back of the church was the world’s smallest library, with a lovely feel and some interesting black-and-white photographs of the old days on Flatey. Winter is pretty tough here in this windswept spot, so it’s no surprise to discover that only five people live on Flatey all year round, with most of the houses being occupied in summer only.

Another hearty lunch sees us coming into Grundarfjörður, and we were soon crunching our boots on the shore for the last Zodiac landing of the voyage. In bright sunshine, a stroll to a lovely waterfall or a more energetic hike up the flanks of the impressive Kirkjufell (Church Mountain) allowed us to savour the delights of wild Iceland. At 463 metres high, Kirkjufell is reputedly the most photographed mountain in Iceland. A cloud cover extending down precluded our high mountain team from reaching the summit, but the views and feeling from on the mountain were stupendous. A lovely Zodiac ride in freshening breeze and choppy conditions was a fitting reminder of the ways that nature throws down its challenges up here in the Arctic.

Back on the mighty *Greg Mortimer* we enjoyed our final briefing and goodbyes from the ship’s team. Max’s slideshow did much to remind us of the adventures we have had together, and the amazing hotel staff - always so cheerful, attentive and welcoming - treated us to a lively farewell performance as for the last time we sat together for dinner.

Contacts and photos were shared among newly made friends, and soon we were back in our cabins packing our bags for the morrow’s disembarkation.



Reykjavik

DAY 14 | Sunday 2 July 2023

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

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

The wildlife has amazed us: polar bear, walrus, Svalbard reindeer with mighty antlers placidly grazing, great baleen whale, soaring fulmar and the frantically flapping members of the Auk family. 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 *Greg Mortimer* to Svalbard. We hope to see you on the high seas again someday!





Kayaking Log

Paddlers:	Jane Cheers	Skye Kirne	Karolina Toleikyte
Steven Smith	Vincent Cheers	Maree Laffan	Dana Liu
Vicki Smith	Natalia Streltsova	Mark Go	
Reynald Kaltenrieder	Adrian Ward	Louise Reedy	
Andrea Kaltenrieder	Sydney Peterson	Jonas Garbaravicius	

20 June, Lilliehöökbrean. Distance: 5.5 km

The first day in the High Arctic, and the kayak team were ready to get on the water. After lots of briefings, gear fitting, before finally preparing in the kayak room, it was time to get on the water.

The ocean lay flat and shiny as a mirror. The incredible calm a beckoning sight as the kayakers climbed down into the Zodiac and were away.

Paddling straight to the glacier, the team enjoyed the incredible sights and sounds of the 11-kilometre-long icy wall. Mountains rearing above, and the glowing blue of the ice, all creating a sense of true wonder and awe.

Soon the team encountered its first band of brash ice. After a quick bit of coaching, the team was into the ice. The percussive paddling a new experience for everyone. Learning which bits to dodge, and which to push out of the way was quite an artform as the kayakers rapidly improved in their decision making and teamwork.

Soon it was time to turn towards the ship, and return to the comfort of the *Greg Mortimer*, after an incredible first kayak and a wonderful introduction to Svalbard.

22 June, Ny London. Distance: 4.5 km

After a foggy morning at sea, the *Greg Mortimer* anchored in Kongsfjorden. The kayakers slipped with varying levels of grace into their vessels and set out for another adventure in Svalbard. After a quick kayak across smooth waters, the team were at the shore, and could explore the nooks and crannies of this complex island. Small waterfalls streamed from melting snow above, and overhangs and caves beckoned to be explored.

The team made a quick landing at Ny London, where Ben spoke about the early attempts to mine marble in the early 20th century.

Soon the team were back on the water and off to explore further to the west. Paddling into small caves, the kayakers were delighted to find little paddle-throughs in the coastline, then small caves which, when entered, the sunshine streaming through holes in their roofs, together with a covering of snow on cave roof, lent an incredible blue tone to the light inside.

Soon it was time to turn for home, jumping into Liz's Zodiac, the kayak team returned to the *Greg Mortimer* after another great explore in Svalbard.

22 June, Hamiltonbukta, Svalbard. Distance: 2.5 km

As we launched into the glassy waters of Hamiltonbukta, Liz led our group towards the fast ice as the Brünnich guillemot flew around us. Suddenly, a curious bearded seal popped up among our kayakers and even made eye contact with Sydney as it swam by. Like a ninja, it followed our kayakers along the fast ice, delighting us with its presence, as it would pop its head up when we least expected it. Parking ourselves on the fast ice, Dan noticed polar bear footprints, which we followed along towards our landing site. Evacuation-ready, we rock-hopped along the shoreline, making our way towards the old trapper's cabin. Hearing the history from Dan about the trappers and Hamiltonbukta, we took photos of the scenery and many footprints of the arctic animals there before us. Launching our kayakers, we paddled back to the ship with smiles on our faces and memories in our mind (and our cameras).

23 June, St Jonsfjorden, Svalbard. Distance: 10 km

Oh, what a magical morning for our nine intrepid long-distance paddlers! As we paddled through St Jonsfjorden, the glaciers, ice, and wildlife did not disappoint. Navigating through the slalom of brash and growlers towards the glacier, we practised our manoeuvring skills (not always precise), laughing and taking photos along the way. Arriving at the glacier, the sounds of the snap, crackle and pop of the ice, made for a very ethereal experience as we gazed upon the deep-blue ice emerging out of the face. Hiding on the ice, bearded seal were hauled out looking around and posing for our photos. As we quietly meandered by, we could see their red-stained heads from the oxidised iron, and their whiskers that make up their beards. Making our way out of the ice, we raced to the second glacier in time to experience it before getting off the water. Then, 9.9 kilometres later, we made it to the second glacier, had our moment of Zen, and called our Uber to take us back to the ship... 100 metres later we made our 10 kilometres and cheered to a wonder-filled paddle!

30 June, Vigur Island Fjord, Iceland. Distance: 8 km

After making it out of the ice in Greenland, we finally made it to Vigur Island, in Iceland, where we had an #unexpectedbonus paddle. The winds were blustery, but inside the southern fjord, it calmed down and was looking good for another long-awaited paddle. After loading the Zodiac with our kayakers in tow, like Vikings, we were on our way to the serenity of the fjord. Inside the fjord, we were greeted by a harbor seal poking its head up every so often to see what the big, colourful kayakers were all about. With the winds at our back, we made our way into the fjord as we passed eider, oystercatcher, arctic tern, northern fulmar, and the occasional (and everyone's favorite) puffin! We even saw a couple of arctic fox chasing the birds along the shores. After a bit, some chose to go visit Vigur Island for some tea, coffee, and cake, while Sydney decided to keep paddling with Liz. As we paddled further into the fjord, the waters glassed out the deeper we got, and after multiple moments of Zen, #paddleiceland came to an end, but the ops on the way back will always remain within our memories.





Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	June - July												
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
Red-throated Diver		•		•	•							•	•
Northern Fulmar	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Pink-footed Goose									•				
Barnacle Goose	•				•								
Common Eider	•	•		•	•		•			•		•	•
Mallard													•
Long-tailed Duck										•			
Whimbrel													•
Ringed Plover				•			•						
Redshank												•	•
Golden Plover													•
Snipe												•	•
Oystercatcher												•	•
Purple Sandpiper				•	•							•	
Turnstone				•	•								
Red-necked Phalarope												•	•
Grey Phalarope				•									
Arctic Skua		•	•	•	•		•		•			•	•
Long-tailed Skua				•									
Great Skua					•		•						
Iceland Gull					•								
Glaucous Gull		•	•		•		•			•		•	•
Black-Headed Gull												•	•
Lesser Black-backed Gull								•		•		•	•
Kittiwake	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Great Black-backed Gull												•	
Ivory Gull									•				
Arctic Tern	•	•	•	•	•		•		•			•	•



Bird Species	June - July												
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
Common Guillemot													•
Brünnich's Guillemot	•	•	•			•	•		•	•			
Black Guillemot	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•
Little Auk	•	•	•				•	•	•	•			
Atlantic Puffin	•	•	•	•			•					•	•
Redwing													•
Snow Bunting				•	•	•					•		•
Raven												•	•
White Wagtail												•	•
Meadow Pipit													•



Mammal Species	June - July												
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
Arctic Fox												•	
Reindeer			•	•	•								
Musk ox													
Polar Bear			•						•	•			
Ringed Seal					•				•				
Bearded Seal		•			•					•			
Harp Seal			•		•								
Walrus					•								
Grey Seal												•	
Harbour Seal		•			•		•					•	
Minke Whale	•		•	•	•								
Beluga			•										
Blue Whale						•							
Fin Whale						•							





1. Lomhyearbyen
2. Liliehookbreen (Bearded seal, ring seal)
3. Hamiltonbukta (Bearded seal, guillemots)
4. Breibogán (Polar Bear)
5. Smeerenbugfjorden
6. New London
7. St Johnfjorden
8. Poolepynten (Walrus)



9. Jane Mayen(zodiac exploration, Kvalrossbujta)
10. Along the Greenland coastline
11. Suresby sound (Polar Bear)
12. Turner Island (Lading Fast Ice)
13. Alilegita
14. Sea day, Denmark strait



15. Vigor Island (Puffins)
16. Isafjordur (Waterfalls hike)
17. Flatey Island (Puffins)
18. Grundarfjordur (Waterfall, hike)
19. Reykjavik



Expeditioners:

- | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Cheryl Andrews | Qiao Han | Lynne Middleton | Anthony Tudor |
| Bill Andrews | John Hepworth | Andy Middleton | Debra Tudor |
| John Badcock | Maria Hepworth | Geraldine Millar | Wendy Turner |
| Beryl Badcock | Fan Jiang | Lauren Murphy | William Turner |
| Joshua Bar-Lev | Reynald Kaltenrieder | Michel Perrin | John Walton |
| Beryl Bar-Lev | Andrea Kaltenrieder | Sydney Peterson | Hong Wang |
| Adrian Bass | Graham Killick | Fabian Rastorfer | Ya Wang |
| Nick Bowen | Elizabeth Killick | Marina Rastorfer | Jan Wang |
| Christine Brunson | Skye Kirne | Louise Reedy | Adrian Ward |
| Paul Brunson | Maree Laffan | Allegra Rumbough | Marian Welsh |
| Hannah Charlton | Lin Lee | Leah Rumbough | Stan Wieg |
| Vincent Cheers | Ting-An Lee | Nyssa Rusterholz | Mary Wieg |
| Jane Cheers | Peter Lester | Kurt Rusterholz | Kate Wittig |
| Violet Chen | Fang Li | Lesley Rusterholz | Guy Wittig |
| Gabrielle Ford | Yonghong Li | Chris Schofield | Yiping Yang |
| Janelle Ford | Feng Li | Linda Schofield | Hua Ye |
| Wes Fuller | Dana Liu | Vicki Smith | Shunli Zhang |
| Jonas Garbaravicius | Khaled Malki | Steve Smith | Sheila Zhang |
| Mark Go | Carolina Mantella | Joe Song | Shan-Ren Zhou |
| Lynn Greig | Geoff McPherson | Natalia Streltsova | |
| David Greig | Judy McPherson | Steve Tilmann | |
| Gregory Hall | Jing Mei | Karolina Toleikyte | |

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Mario Placidi Spring

Assistant Expedition Leader: Isabelle Howells

Onboard Expedition Manager: Rosie Leaney

Firearms Manager: Stephen Anstee

Marine Biologist & Citizen Science: Heidi Krajewsky

Geologist: Marcos Goldin

Historian: Ben Maddison

Expedition Guide: Tamsin Both

Lead Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert

Kayaking Guide: Liz MacNeil

Kayaking Guide: Nicole Genoud

Photography Guide: Max Seigal

Medic/Expedition Guide: Scott Thompson

Zodiac Master: Jeb Pearce

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Reza Rusooly

Photography thanks to:

Max Seigal

Liz Macneil

Mark Go

Heidi Krajewsky

Daniel Stavert

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Maxim Makarovskiy

Chief Officer: Alex Taraoi

Safety Officer: Sergei Voina

Bosun: Giovanni Dela Torre

Deck Cadet: Miguel Delgado

Deck Cadet: Goncalo Costa

Ship Doctor: Andres Peralta

Ship Doctor: Julio Lopez Cortes

Chief Engineer: Dimitar Vasilev

Hotel Director: Pascal Joubin

F&B Manager: Raj Murao

Chief Purser: Willie Lirio

Executive Chef: Edgar Mangalinao

Head Waiter: Allan Liscano

Hotel Controller: Alvin Johnson

IT Officer: Ihor Yesmieniev

Receptionist: Ana Fernandez

Receptionist: Johnny Valdez

Head Stateroom Attendant: Roniel Garcia

Able Seaman: Tim Kitson

Able Seaman: Bobby Penuliar Payumo

Able Seaman: Hardik Rao

Able Seaman: Ajay Fnu

Able Seaman: Joel Valdevieso Noble





