



Around Spitsbergen

26th August – 2nd September 2019

M/V Plancius



M/V *Plancius* was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). *Plancius* was built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Dutch Navy and was named *Hr. Ms. Tydeman*. The ship sailed for the Royal Dutch Navy until June 2004 when she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions and completely refit in 2007, being converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel. *Plancius* is 89 m (267 feet) long, 14.5 m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5 m, with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12+ knots and three diesel engines generating 1230 hp each.



OCEANWIDE

EXPEDITIONS

Captain Artur Iakovlev

and his international crew

of 45

Including:

Hotel Manager:	Siegfried Penzenleitner	Austria
Assist. Hotel Manager:	Melanie Penzenleitner	Austria
Head Chef:	Heinz Hacker	Austria
Sous Chef:	Ivan Ivanovic	Serbia
Ship's Physician:	Claudio D'Ambrosio	Italy
Expedition Leader:	Philipp Schaudy	Austria
Assist. Expedition Leader:	Ali Liddle	UK
Expedition Guide:	Gerard Bodineau	France
Expedition Guide:	Daniels Karin Amby	Sweden
Expedition Guide:	Chloe Marechal	France
Expedition Guide:	Michelle van Dijk	Netherlands
Expedition Guide:	Johanne Skrefsrud	Norway
Expedition Guide:	Arjen Drost	Netherlands
Expedition Guide:	Benjamin Koster	Germany
Expedition Guide:	Andreas Alexander	Germany

Welcome on board!

Day 1 – Monday 26th August 2019

Embarkation in Longyearbyen

GPS Position at 8:00am: 78°16'N - 015°18'E

Wind: SSE 4 **Sea State:** In Port **Weather:** Overcast **Air Temp:** +5°C **Sea Temp:** +7°C



Longyearbyen is situated at 78° north and, as such is one of the world's most northerly settlements. It grew up as a coal mining town but now is home to around 2,000 residents who live and work here all year round. This number temporarily swells during the summer months with the arrival of thousands of visitors on cruise ships.

Some of us had arrived a day earlier than our departure day on board Plancius and had time to explore the town and maybe take a

day trip but many of us arrived at the airport during the afternoon and only had a short time to visit the town before making our way to the port to join our ship for the coming trip.

We were met by members of the expedition team at the gangway and as we went on board, we were met by Sigi, our Hotel Manager. From here we were shown to our cabins by the very welcoming hotel staff and found our luggage already there.

We had some time to familiarise ourselves with our cabin before we were called to the Lounge to meet Philipp, our Expedition Leader, Captain Artur and the rest of the team. We had a glass of champagne to toast our voyage and Sigi, the Hotel Manager also gave us a briefing about life on board Plancius. This was followed by the mandatory safety briefing which was given by our

Chief Officer Francois, which outlined aspects of safety on board and the abandon ship procedures.

We then gathered at the muster station, the Lounge, wearing our big orange life jackets, the only time we hope to be wearing them. We were shown to the lifeboats on deck and by this time for



dinner, which was a chance to meet with our fellow passengers before our last task of the day which was to collect our rubber boots from the boot room. With some sea swell causing Plancius to roll a little, a few people were feeling the effects of sea sickness and had an early night.

With 24 hours of daylight those of us who were feeling well enjoyed some time out on deck during the evening spotting Fulmars, Guillemots, Kittiwakes and the tiny Little auks. It was a very pleasant evening on board.



Day 2 – Monday 27th August 2019

Svitjodbreen & Raudfjord

GPS Position at 8:00am: 79°48'N - 011°01'E

Wind: ENE 5 **Sea State:** Moderate **Weather:** Partly Cloudy **Air Temp:** +5 C **Sea Temp:** +5°C



After a rough start to our voyage with yesterday's swell and rockiness, the conditions had calmed overnight, and we were ready to start our adventures outside. We found ourselves in the north-west corner of Svalbard with zodiac cruising along a glacier as the first activity on the program. We dressed warmly and found our way to the gangway to be distributed in zodiacs, each with a zodiac driver. We cruised between

some small islands in Fuglefjorden (Bird fjord), where we could see birds of several different species flying around and nesting on the smooth surfaces. Arctic terns were the most numerous and some boats were lucky enough to watch an Arctic fox foraging on the island for chicks and being dive bombed by the adult birds everywhere it went. Some kittiwakes were also seen sitting in groups on some smaller icebergs.

We slowly made our way towards the glacier, Svitjodbreen. An impressive wall of ice in blue and white colours made up the calving front of the glacier. Every now and then some pieces of ice fell down, and we were also lucky to witness some huge pieces calve off, creating impressive sound and following waves. We had to be careful to stay away from larger icebergs as the waves could make them turn over and hit us.



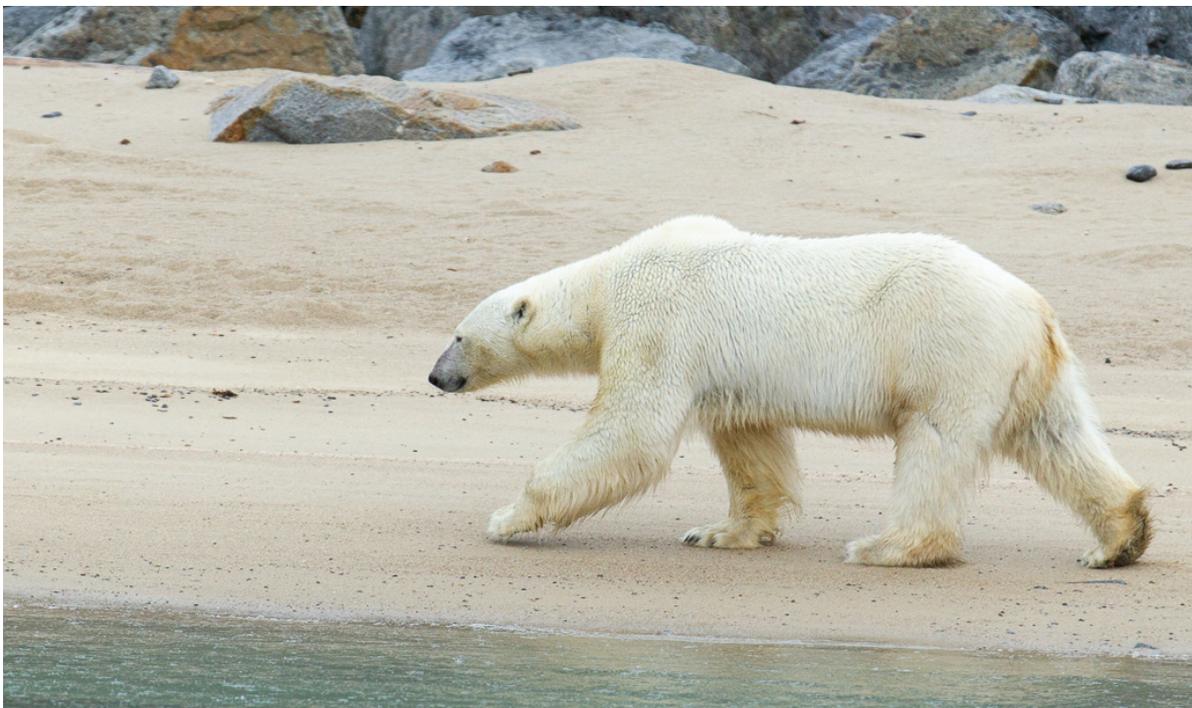
It was quite a special feeling to be this close to a calving glacier. With the engine off we could also hear the cracking of the smaller icebergs around us as they were slowly melting and the air bubbles inside popping.

In the afternoon the weather conditions got quite unpleasant with rain and overcast, but it didn't stop us going out on another zodiac cruise as we had spotted a polar bear from the ship. We approached with the zodiacs as a group towards the shoreline where a male Polar bear was slowly walking. It was quite a magnificent sight this close to the "King of the Arctic". He ended up on a small beach where we could approach even closer to him. On the sandy beach next to the blueish water we got some excellent photographs of this majestic creature as he lifted his head and checked us out. He then continued away from the beach climbing up the rocky hills.

As if that wasn't enough for today, we had just started our recap in the evening and Philip was telling us about the plans for the voyage. Then a Blue whale was spotted close to the ship. Despite the wind and rain outside on deck, we had to go outside to get a better view of the whale. We could see it breathing and making blows high up into the air. With the sight of the small dorsal fin we could only try to imagine how huge this creature is, the biggest mammal on earth, even beating the biggest dinosaurs.



What an amazing first day we had had! Hopefully we haven't used up all our luck already. With these magnificent impressions in mind we could relax and enjoy dinner in the dining room. How lucky we are to get to experience this!



Day 3 – Tuesday 28th August 2019

Faksevågen & Lomfjorden

GPS Position at 8:00am: 79°38'N - 009°29'E

Wind: SE 7 **Sea State:** Moderate **Weather:** Rain **Air Temp:** +2°C **Sea Temp:** +3°C



During the night, the weather had changed. The wind had picked up and peaked at over 50 knots (Beaufort 9). In our Plan A-landing site, Palanderbukta, the wind was still blowing at 30 knots, so Philipp came up with Plan B. This was Faksevågen, a small bay in Lomfjord on the western side of Hinlopen Stretet. This turned out to be a super idea.

As soon as we came ashore, the weather cleared up and we were even walking in warm sunshine after a while. On shore, we split up in three different groups, one

with the mountain goats, who hiked all the way to the top of the hill to have a great view over the fjord (and saw the bad weather still lingering around in Hinlopen Stretet). The medium hiking group also went uphill, but not as far as the first. They spent some time watching the groups of young Ptarmigan, Snow Grouse on the hill. They were just losing their brown downy feathers and had their white winter feathers around their lower belly and legs. The views from the hills were beautiful, up to the glacier and down to the fjord. The last group was the beach group, who took a much more leisurely walk and enjoyed the beach. A little hike uphill brought them to an old fossilised beach and another group of Ptarmigan.

Back on the ship, Philipp decided we probably had found the best spot in the area in terms of weather, so during lunch, we only crossed over to the other side of Lomfjord, where we went ashore for another landing. This place, known as Gungnerodden is rarely visited by cruise ships, if ever. None of the expedition staff had ever been here for a landing but also judging by all the garbage that littered the beach it rarely gets any visitors at all. In the more visited places, people often pick up a few things, cleaning the beach with all people together, but here, all rubbish that had drifted ashore was still there. Here lay a nice task for us. Many bits and pieces of plastic were picked up, including a massive fishing net that had washed ashore.



During the afternoon we split again in the three usual groups and all enjoyed the scenery of this beautiful place. The long hikers headed up to the moraines for views over the glacier and the length of the fjord. Their hike was challenging in places, with steep rocky sections and snow but the views were more than worth it and the group got to name a new rocky outcrop, 'Monkeytoppen' as in profile the rock looked just like a monkey's face.

The medium and leisurely hikers encountered a little bit of mud on their journey across the tundra! With water draining down from the mountain the tundra was really wet and it was easy to sink in deeply, as Arjen especially noticed. Fortunately, all managed to come back in one piece and everybody could enjoy their walk either up the glacial valley or along the shore and coastal lagoon where the reflections were beautiful.



As we were enjoying clam conditions and sunshine in Lomfjord we could still see a wall of fog and white, wind-blown water out in Hinlopen Stretet so we all appreciated that the right decision had been made to stay in this area for the day. Plan B or maybe C was definitely a good one!

'Monkeytoppen'

In the evening in the bar many stories were exchanged and Rachel, our bartender, also had a busy evening. As we were heading towards the ice, Philipp allowed us a lay in the next day, so there was no need to go to bed early, though many of us did, full with excitement of what our ice day would bring us.



Day 4 – Wednesday 29th August 2019

Day in the Ice

GPS Position at 8:00am: 81°19'N - 018°11'E

Wind: SSE 3 **Sea State:** Ice **Weather:** Overcast **Air Temp:** +0°C **Sea Temp:** +0°C



We entered the pack ice at 07:45 in the morning, which was much further north than we had expected and that the ice chart indicated. The southerly winds we had encountered in the Hinlopen Strait had clearly pushed the ice a long way north. However, at breakfast we could all enjoy the beautiful view on the ice from the windows in the restaurant. The weather was really nice and we had great visibility. The initial ice edge was quite slushy and with small ice floes it wasn't great ice for polar bears but as we pushed

further north, we began to find ourselves in much better ice with large floes and less icy water. There were also plenty of Polar bear foot prints across the ice floes so things were looking promising.

So, after breakfast many of us went out on deck or up on the bridge with binoculars ready! Time for wildlife spotting. Some of us were extremely lucky to see a sleeping Bowhead whale in the ice close to the ship. These whales were almost hunted to extinction but their numbers are slowly beginning to increase again and they are being seen more frequently around Svalbard. They are the longest living animals on the planet. Individuals have been found with harpoon heads still in their bodies which can be dated to over 200 years ago.



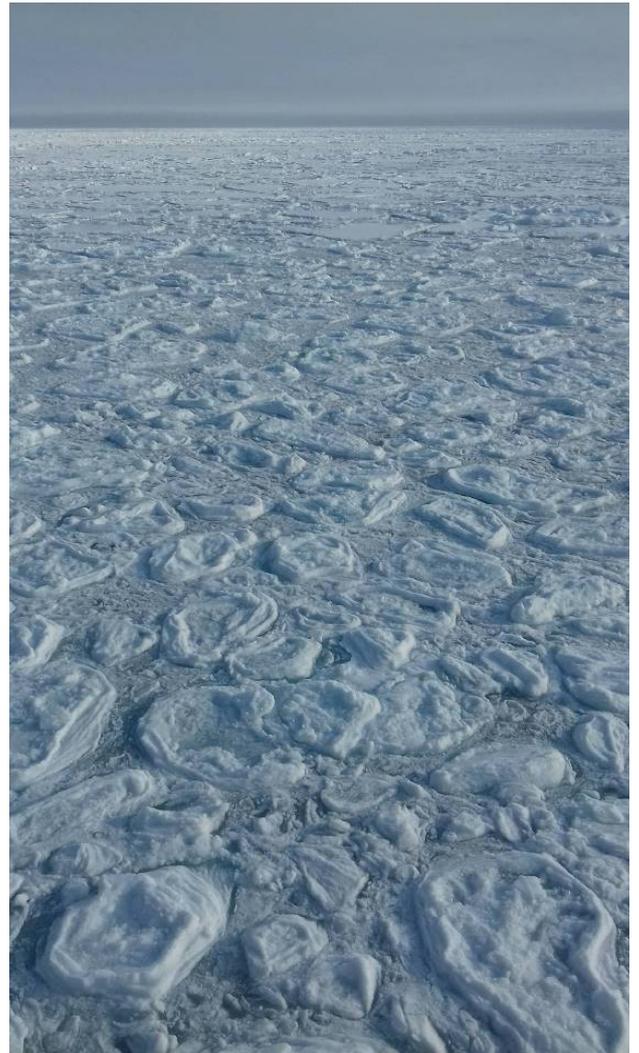
A little bit later Ivory gulls and Pomarine skuas were spotted aft of the ship. Then the announcement that we all had been waiting for came! A polar bear had been spotted in the far distance by the guides, and so Captain Artur began to navigate Plancius closer towards it. We all went out with our binoculars and cameras to see this young male who was quite curious about us. It crossed the ice floes heading in our direction and then stood and watched and sniffed very close to the starboard side of the ship. We stayed around the polar-bear for quite a while and it was a magnificent experience to see this wonderful Arctic animal in its right habitat. After a while he clearly decided that we were not really so interesting and certainly didn't smell of seal and he headed off over the ice in search of food.



In the afternoon Arjen gave a lecture about polar-bears and we learned a lot of interesting facts about these fascinating animals. During the lecture another Bowhead whale was spotted just next to the ice, and we all went out to see it, sadly it dived just before we came out and was not seen again. We spent the rest of the day in the ice where the conditions in terms of sunshine and light just got better and better. When the time finally came to leave the Arctic ice, we were all disappointed but

felt privileged to have experienced the ice and of course seen a Polar bear in its perfect environment. In these times of changing climate this environment is slowly changing, and not for the better.

In the recap Arjen showed us a movie that he made from 'our' polar bear in the ice and Johanne explained what sea ice really is, how it is formed and why it is so important. After this long day some of us spent the evening in the bar, a few stayed until after midnight and could enjoy a wonderful Arctic sunset and sunrise.



Day 5 – Thursday 30th August 2019

Texas Bar & Monacobreen

GPS Position at 8:00am: 79°38'N - 013°29'E

Wind: W 2 Sea State: Calm Weather: Rain Air Temp: + 5°C Sea Temp: +4°C



This morning, at 06:00 we had a very special wake up call from Philipp, “Good morning everyone, there are two Blue whales ahead of the ship...” We hurried to dressed up in order to quickly go outside on the deck. The two big cetaceans were there, quiet and peaceful, very close to the boat. It was a mother and its calf, which seems already quite big. What a nice sighting! We spent an hour watching them as they came to the surface, breathed a few times and then dived down to deeper water, with one of them showing its tail fluke

each time. In the calm conditions their blows reached around 9 metres in height and the morning light was just beautiful. A great start to the day and then it was time to finally get our own breakfast.

When the Plancius arrived in Liefjorden, where we were going to spend the day, the weather did not look too promising. It was raining and there was low cloud over the mountains. The staff launched the boats and incredibly just as Ali loaded the first zodiac with passengers the rains stopped and the skies began to clear. We landed on the west side of the fjord near to a hut named “Texas Bar”. The hut was built in 1927 by two famous Norwegian trappers: Hilmar and Peterson Nøis. The hut is still in



good shape and is now use by field scientist and locals from Longyearbyen. As we started to split into different walking groups, the weather became sunny and warm. What a scenery! The “fast walking group” went climbing a mountain to enjoy the view on the fjord. The “medium walk



group” found a type of flowers, *Arabis alpinas*, that our botanist guides Karin and Michelle never saw before! The “leisure group” listened to Arjen’s stories about Norwegian trapping and Ali took a group up to a waterfall in the valley. After a wet start it had turned into a beautiful morning on shore.

In the afternoon, we moved deeper into Liefjorden and zodiacs were dropped into the water in order to cruise along the majestic Monacobreen glacier.



As we cruised in the middle of ice pieces, toward the glacier front, two bearded seals were spotted by Michelle. They both seemed unconcerned by the boats floating nearby and gave us great views of their curling whiskers as they watched us from their ice floes. Kittiwake, Northern Fulmar and Arctic terns were flying around us. Suddenly, an impressive block of ice felt from the glacier, provoking a loud sound. It is always impressive to see a calving. As we

continued cruising, another surprise were waiting for us: a young walrus! He was swimming around and climbed on the ice. This animal was probably around 2 -3 years old and had only recently left its mother. It swam around and found a good ice floe near the glacier front where it hauled itself out and lay down to sleep.

After this amazing cruise, Melanie a Sigi welcomed us back on board with a delicious hot chocolate. A nice way to warm up after a chilly afternoon in the ice.

We ended up this beautiful day with our daily recap: Philip described the plans for tomorrow. Arjen explained how to identify whales and Chloé held a short presentation about the small critters living in the sea ice.



Day 6 – Friday 31st August 2019

Ny-Ålesund & Signehamna

GPS Position at 8:00am: 78°56'N - 011°55'E

Wind: Variable 1 **Sea State:** Calm **Weather:** Rain **Air Temp:** +7°C **Sea Temp:** +6°C



When we looked out of our windows this morning, we didn't see much. It was dark, foggy and raining. Apparently, we had used all our good weather for the first days of this trip. But that didn't keep us from going ashore in the small research settlement of Ny Ålesund. In this little town, we were allowed to walk around ourselves and we could have a look at the very nice museum, the old post office and the telegraph station. A little later the shop opened and many of us spent some time inside, some for buying some souvenirs, others just to get out of the rain for a while.

A little later Arjen and Michelle told the story of Amundsen and Nobile and their race to the North Pole and the role of Ny Ålesund in this to the English and German speakers, respectively. The groups then took a walk out to the mast to see exactly where the air ships had been moored prior to their departure to the North Pole and beyond. Despite the heavy rain at times it was a very enjoyable morning seeing the human side of Svalbard at this northernmost settlement.

After this, it was time to go back to the ship and get dry and warm again. After another splendid lunch prepared by our hotel team, the Captain brought our ship around the corner into Krossfjord for our afternoon landing at Signehamna. Here the weather was still very damp but with light mist on parts of the mountains and very little wind at all it was a quiet and atmospheric afternoon in the fjord. After the heavy rain of the morning and still plenty of wet clothing on board only half of our group decided to join the landing ashore while those remaining on board were offered a presentation about Glaciers from Andreas in German and Gerard in French. Those who did make it on shore were landed at a little cove and from here took a walk up the hill where there were lovely views over a mirror like lake. In the usual groups we all took a nice hike on the rockier kind of tundra than we were used to and saw the remains of an old German weather station from the Second World War. Here the Germans secretly built a small station to be able to make weather forecasts for the northern sea route. In 1943 the station was discovered and destroyed and now only some rusty barrels (with still Kriegsmarine [German Navy] written on it) and some wood is left.



The scenery (at least what could be seen through the fog) was very nice, with a big lake and many Kittiwakes, Arctic terns and Arctic skuas on it. Several juvenile Kittiwakes were seen being chased by Arctic skuas, who were after their last meal. Those who stayed on the ship could listen to lectures by Gerard and Andreas about glaciers.

Back on the ship, it was time for recap, with many stories about Ny Ålesund and the Second World War on Spitsbergen. It concluded with a beautiful short video of our day in the ice which had been prepared by Arjen. After this, we were all invited to the back deck, where the hotel team had prepared a nice BBQ. Many of us came outside to have dinner and the dance afterwards continued for quite some time...



Day 7 – Saturday 1st September 2019

Poolepynten & Alkhornet

GPS Position at 8:00am: 78°26'N - 011°55'E

Wind: NNW 3 **Sea State:** Moderate **Weather:** Fog **Air Temp:** + 4°C **Sea Temp:** + 5°C

This morning, as we were woken by Philipp we found ourselves in a bit of a foggy world once more but it kept clearing from time to time and we were hopeful that by the time we got to Poolepynten we would find conditions good enough for going ashore. Landing in fog isn't safe in Polar bear country. Shortly after breakfast we heard that Walrus had been seen on shore and conditions were improving so we were set for a landing.



The first 5 Zodiacs went ashore and the group went for a walk across the coastal area at the back of the beach. They first had to navigate through all the driftwood that was washed up on the shore. Most of this comes from the forests of Siberia where it gets washed into the rivers and is brought here by the circum-polar currents. Beyond the driftwood there was a flat area and there was a large group of Brent geese, which are not commonly seen in such big numbers here on Svalbard. There were some distant reindeer grazing on

the tundra so it was a nice gentle walk with plenty to see.

The second group walked straight along the beach to the group of Walrus that was hauled out on the sandy point near the huts. There was around 25 animals, all male lying together in a large pile sleeping and generally relaxing on a Sunday morning. Walrus like to haul out together on these low lying point to rest after feeding out at sea on molluscs and clams. They don't need to stay together to keep warm but enjoy the social interaction of the groups and the physical contact that comes with it. This morning they occasionally lifted their heads and shifted position which caused some grunting and complaining but other than that it was a very quiet encounter with these big, blubbery marine mammals.

Each group had around 30 minutes with the Walrus and had time to explore the area near the landing site and then it was time to head back to the ship for lunch and to navigate to our final landing destination of Alkhornet.





As we were sailing along the coast we suddenly heard a helicopter and Philipp announced that the Coastguard were going to use Plancius for a training drill for medical evacuation from a ship. The drill lasted around 20 minutes and during that time three people were lowered to the back deck along with a stretcher and all the time the pilot kept the helicopter in a steady hover by the side of the ship. It was amazing to watch the skill of the team on board the helicopter but also the skill of our crew who did a great

job of receiving the helicopter crew. It was a noisy, spray filled experience for us but certainly a good one.

From here we headed to the peace and tranquility of Alkhorner where we went ashore at the base of the horn for our final landing. In our usual groups we walked the tundra in search of reindeer while the long hikers headed for the moraines and for views of the glacier. Every group had time to enjoy the views and of the course the reindeer that were completely unconcerned by our presence as they grazed on the rich tundra. They need to fatten up before the winter comes and this is a



perfect place to do it. There were Arctic foxes on the upper slopes, many of which were already in their white winter coat. They were constantly moving, foraging for any food they could find beneath the bird cliffs. It was a lovely place for a final landing.

At the end of the landing a few brave people decided to take a swim in the Arctic Ocean. With sea water temperatures around 5°C it was certainly a quick swim but a memorable one! Back on board there was time to warm up before we were invited to Captain's Cocktails as we made our way towards the port of Longyearbyen. Here we had a chance to meet with our Captain once again and raise a glass of champagne to a successful voyage.



It was a very pleasant evening on board as we enjoyed our farewell dinner and the company of new found friends.

Day 8 – Sunday 2nd September 2019

Longyearbyen

Some people had left the ship at midnight in order to catch the 2am flight to Oslo but for the rest of us we enjoyed a final wakeup call on board from Philipp and our last breakfast served by our lovely Philipino crew.

After breakfast we had our final landing and it was a dry one! We had been away for 7 days but it feels like we have been away for much longer on our Arctic voyage. During our trip we have seen Polar bears on the pack ice and on shore, watched walrus on the beach and on the ice. We have seen countless seabirds and walked the tundra and Polar Desert. It has been an amazing journey and one we will remember for many years to come.



Your Expedition Team!

Northern most position:

80° 42.6'N

016° 14.9'E

Total distance sailed on our voyage:

Nautical miles: 943 nm

Kilometres: 1746 km

**On behalf of everyone on board we thank you for travelling with us
and wish you a safe journey home**



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