



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

North Spitsbergen Polar Bear Special

29 June - 6 July 2017
on board

MV Plancius



MV *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.



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EXPEDITIONS

Captain Alexey Nazarov and his international crew of 45 including:

Hotel Manager:	Sebastian Duma	[Romania]
Assist. Hotel Manager:	Sava Savov	[Bulgaria]
Head Chef:	Gabor Kiss	[Hungary]
Sous Chef:	Ivan Yuriychuk	[Ukraine]
Ship's Physician:	Edwin van Leeuwen	[Netherlands]
Expedition Leader:	Christian Engelke	[Germany/Norway]
Asst Expedition Leader:	Katja Riedel	[Germany/New Zealand]
Expedition Guide:	Michel Ginzburg	[Deutschland/Russland]
Expedition Guide:	Sebastian Arrebola	[Argentina]
Expedition Guide:	Michelle van Dijk	[Netherlands]
Expedition Guide:	Birgit Lutz	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Aleksandr Romanovski	[Russia]
Expedition Guide:	Lydia Messingfeld	[Deutschland]

welcome you on board!

Day 1 – Thursday 29 June 2017

Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen

GPS Position 08:00: 78°14.4' N / 015°37.3' E

Wind: W – 3

Sea state: port

Weather: overcast

Temperature: 6°C

We gathered from all points on the globe on an overcast day in Longyearbyen, capital of Svalbard. The rugged hills around were striped with snow, but the day was not too cold. Once off our flights, we were dropped in town where we explored the small settlement, had a coffee or went bird watching. For some of us it took a bit longer to go to town as our luggage got delayed at the airport in Oslo due to a malfunction of the luggage belt. Just after four o'clock, we began boarding the ship, we settled in to our cabins, and later found our way to the Observation Lounge. Once we had all gathered, the chief officer Arthur and third officer Warren presented the mandatory safety briefing to show us how to use the big orange lifejackets and how to muster in case of emergency. As soon as we finished the briefing *Plancius* set sail. Our departure was immediately followed by a safety drill, to ensure we knew how to muster in the lounge and proceed to the lifeboats if ordered to by the Captain.



After we returned our lifejackets to our cabins, we were again invited to the lounge. Our hotel manager Sebastian helped us settle in with more information about how the ship works, and Christian, our expedition leader, explained us the lost luggage situation and gave us the new plan for the next day with the hope of recovering the all the luggage. The expedition team introduced themselves and our doctor said a few word regarding seasickness and safety on board. Captain Alexey Nazarov spoke a few words of welcome and proposed a toast to our voyage. After the meeting, we went to our first dinner on board. There, we sat at tables of six and more, making new friends and wondering what would come in the days ahead.



Our first stop of the trip was in Yoldiabukta where we saw the beautiful Wahlenberg glacier coming down from the mountains all the way to the sea. The clouds slowly disappeared and the sun, coming in an angle, created a fascinating light for pictures. We kept cruising around with the ship until midnight, and some of us stayed out on deck enjoying the beautiful spectacle, taking in as much as possible on our first day of this great adventure.



Day 2 – Friday 30 June 2017

Isfjord: Billefjord & Skansbukta

GPS Position 08:00: 78°39.8' N / 016°49.1' E

Wind: W – 2 Sea state: calm Weather: cloudy Temperature: 5°C

Plancius was slowly sailing along Nordenskjold glacier, when Christian, the expedition leader, announced a wake up call. Windy, but sunny morning was greeting us with moderate arctic breeze. Nordenskjold glacier, picturesque and magnificent, is one of the biggest ones on Svalbard. It is situated in the Northern end of Billefjord, one of the branches of Isfjord.



When the breakfast was over, we all had a chance to see Pyramiden. Once a famous Soviet coal mining settlement, now Pyramiden is a mysterious ghost-town with only a few inhabitants. The coal mining era is over, the mine is abandoned, all the houses are empty, but the hotel is still active. Mimerbukta is very shallow, so *Plancius* had no chance to approach closed to the town, so we just sailed by.

The Arctic is beautiful, but obviously not very friendly to humans, so it requires additional knowledge of safety information for us to explore and admire it's nature during the landings and "Zodiac" cruises. Next couple of hours was dedicated to it – Christian was giving us mandatory safety briefings about Polar bears, rules of behavior and "Zodiac" cruises. Besides this knowledge, there was one more thing for us to receive this morning – rubber boots! It's an expedition cruise, we are in the wild nature, the pier is left in Longyearbyen and all of the upcoming landings are supposed to be taking place in much less comfortable conditions, but it promises to be much more adventurous. To keep our feet dry when jumping out of the "Zodiac" and when exploring swampy tundra we need rubber boots. The expedition team was distributing this footwear on deck 3. All of us had to come up and try on a pair to be sure that the boots suit fine and then take it.

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And here comes the first landing! Landing in Skansbukta – a picturesque tiny cove with a great scenery, wildlife and a historical site. A century ago one businessman decided to organize gypsum mining here and invested big money for the mine to be built and equipment to be bought and shipped here. After the first season of mining it appeared, that the mineral he was taking for gypsum was in fact anhydrite and costed nothing. Poor guy went bankrupt. The mine is still there, but, of course, the entrance is closed for safety reasons. Also it is possible to see the remains of a railroad from the mine to the shore, and even an old motorboat that was used for transporting “gypsum” from the storage on the shore to a big ship, anchored nearby. The boat is still in relatively good condition. Besides, there is a cabin, that belongs to the hunters and fishermen community of Longyearbyen.



Wildlife of Skansbukta is really amazing! We saw a pack of reindeers, eating the small Arctic grass on the slope of the mountain. Some of them were very friendly and let us approach very closed to them and take pictures. Upper on the slope is a colony of Arctic fulmars, birds who like to soar above the water. On the cliff at the entrance to the cove there is a small colony of puffins, funny birds with big and colorful beaks. Here and there we also could see barnacle geese and small snow buntings, the only songbirds on Svalbard.

When we returned back on the ship, lunch was already served.



Suddenly we heard a roar of a helicopter. Apparently, the Sysselmann rescue service was having regular exercises and asked our captain a permission to use *Plancius* for training an emergency evacuation of patients. Soon a yellow ninja-looking guy landed on the deck by the rope. Later they landed a special stretcher and lifted it back to the helicopter. It repeated for several times and afterwards ninja-guy left the deck the same way he arrived.

Around 4 PM *Plancius* had to drop the anchor in Adventfjord in front of Longyearbyen. The good news was, that all the missing luggage was finally delivered to the port and it was needed to pick it up, so it was just a short technical stop. Many of us used the chance to catch cell phone reception, while the expedition team was transporting the luggage on the ship. When everything was done, *Plancius* left Adventfjord and sailed west towards the ocean.

When we were about to leave Isfjord, Christian announced that a blue whale was spotted! Everybody dressed up and went outside to watch this biggest animal on Earth swimming around. Half an hour later we had to leave the whale alone and continue our way.



The first full day of our voyage and so many events! And it is only the beginning!

Day 3 – Saturday 1 July 2017

Sea Ice Edge

GPS Position 08:00: 79°56.7' N / 011°48.0' E

Wind: N – 2 Sea state: ice Weather: cloudy Temperature: 1°C



Bang, crussssshhhhhh.....

What's that noise? It is still early...

Oh yeah Christian told us yesterday that we would wake up from the sound of the ship sailing through ice.

Porthole! We have to see it. Wauw!!!!!! What a view!

The ice, the weather, the whites, the blue, the sun, and there is hardly any wind.

What more can one wish for?

Wildlife would be great!

But first getting dressed for a coffee outside, followed by a breakfast.

It is only straight after breakfast when a bearded seal is laying on a ice floe next to the ship, and ten minutes later a group of harp seals swims by.

We are all out on the decks to enjoy the magnificent view, while at 10 o'clock our expedition leader make the announcement, that we just past the 80° North.

Ahead of us is the sandbank called Moffen, from the upper deck you can see clearly that it is just a ring of sand with water in the middle. The shape of this island is also the reason why the old Dutch whalers called it Moffen, it translates as Muff.

Even with the best weather, you still get cold outside while sailing through the ice. The best way to warm up, is with a cup of tea, coffee or hot chocolate, while listening to an interesting lecture on sea ice. And while Katja talks in German, Michael gives the information in English.

Not long after the lecture a polar bear was seen by our captain. He drove the ship closer. We all could witness the hunting of this polar bear, she had smelled a bearded seal on an ice floe further out. Slowly she made her way towards it. Sometimes you could only see the head, sometimes she completely disappeared. When she was gone for a few minutes, the guides told us: 'Keep an eye on the seal!'



And then.... Out of the water she jumped. The seal was now replaced by the bear. She almost got it, but the seal escaped. Of course we were all sad for the bear, but happy for the seal.



And while we were all watching this spectacle, diamond dust came down. It snowed from the blue sky.

Right after the main course was served, someone saw a walrus on an ice floe at starboard side.

The next moment everyone ran to the starboard side of the dining room.



Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

It was decided the dessert would be served in de lounge later, so everyone could get out to enjoy the walrus in its full glory.

We ended the day with a lecture of Birgit, who has skied to the North Pole twice.

What a dedication and what an endurance!



Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

Day 4 – Sunday 2 July 2017

Smeerenburgfjord

GPS Position 08:00: 79°43.5' N / 011°01.5' E

Wind: light air Sea state: smooth Weather: clear Temperature: 6°C

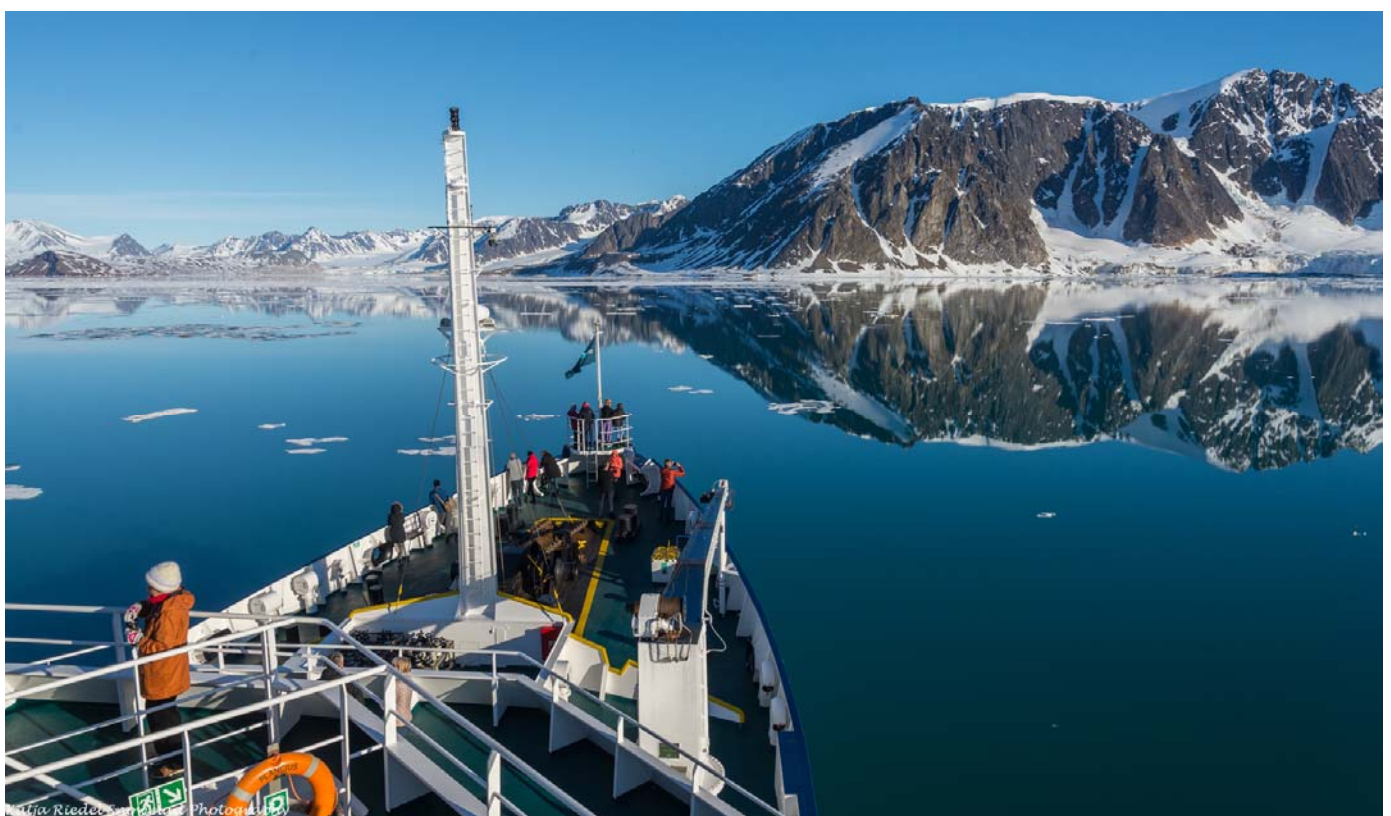
Today we woke up to a stunning weather, beautiful calm seas and a sunny morning. After yet another nice breakfast, we were all invited to come ashore on Amsterdamøya, to visit the remains of the 17th century Dutch whaling station Smeerenburg (“Blubbertown”). The foundations of the blubber ovens were easy to see from a safe distance. We split up into three groups and we took turns to go and see a group of Walrus hauled out on the beach. The males were very relaxed and did not mind us coming in up to 30m, enabling marvellous pictures of these magnificent animals. We also checked out the remains of the blubber ovens and the history of whaling activity in Spitsbergen. During the walk on the beach we saw all the wood that drifted all the way from Siberian forests to the beaches of Svalbard, but unfortunately it wasn't the only material present on the beach, there was also some rubbish washed ashore that came drifting North with currents. On our way back we picked up around 1m³ of the plastic garbage and brought it back to the ship to be discharged in Longyearbyen.





Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

A little after twelve, everybody was back on the ship and a tasty lunch buffet was prepared for us. During lunch the Captain set off deeper into Smeerenburgfjord where we left the ship once again to go on a Zodiac cruise. The glacier itself has a really nice ice front with a lot of cracks as it is sliding down the mountain, but it was also quite clear that it is melting: there were quite a few bits breaking off of the front and in the bay there were “bergy bits” and icebergs. We could clearly see how far the glacier once reached thanks to the still visible moraines that were once in the middle of the glacier, where various glacial tongues met to form a bigger glacier to fill the fjord. After dinner we went through the pack towards Raudfjord, where we did an evening cruise and spent the night. The weather was still perfect, so we found ourselves having difficulties going to bed. we rather had one more drink and photo taken on deck.



Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

Day 5 – Monday 3 July 2017

Sea Ice Edge

GPS Position 08:00: 80°02.1' N / 012°27.2' E

Wind: light air Sea state: ice Weather: clear Temperature: 4°C

Back in the ice! When Christian announced the beginning of a new expedition day, *Plancius* was slowly making its way through drifting ice flows. It was, probably, the most beautiful morning of the cruise – not even a slightest blow of the wind, bright sky, morning sun and white ice flows everywhere as far as the eye can see. Somewhere in the South-East there was Northern coast of Spitsbergen.

The mirror of the water was disturbed from time to time by packs of Harp seals, swimming around and jumping out in order to inhale some air.



Katja Riedel Snowmad Photography

At 10:30 AM we all were invited to listen to a lecture about Polar bears. Michelle was lecturing in English and Katja in German. From the lectures we knew how to differ male bear from female, what do the bears eat, when do they mate and give birth to cubs, in which parts of the World they are protected, and where they are hunted. Very interesting.



After the lunch we kept on scanning the surface of the sea. Again we saw Harp seals playing in the water, and Bearded seals laying on ice flows. Brunnich's guillemots, common guillemots and Black guillemots were swimming, flying and diving here and there. Also we saw small and funny birds called Little Auks. Of course, Kittywakes were flying around *Plancius* waiting for us to move this or that ice flow to catch some krill, hiding under it. Evil Glaucous gulls were flying by and sitting on peaks of ice ridges watching us.

Around 4 PM Sebastian, our Argentinian guide was lecturing in the observation lounge telling us a story of Roald Amundsen, the famous Norwegian polar explorer, who first reached South pole and took numerous efforts to fly to the North pole and eventually did it! A hero of Norway and probably one of the greatest and bravest explorers ever.

During daily recap at 6 PM Michael told us about ice alga and Katja explained why the ice is blue.

And after that there was a surprise, organized by the crew – a special Arctic barbecue dinner on the aft-deck.



Day 6 – Tuesday 4 July 2017

Ny London & 14th of July Glacier

GPS Position 08:00: 79°01.5' N / 011°26.3' E

Wind: light air Sea state: calm Weather: clear Temperature: 3°C



After all these days of sun, we finally had some clouds. But still there was hardly any wind, so we could get out on deck and enjoy the Kongsfjord that we had sailed in to over night.

We did our morning landing at Ny London on Blomstrandhalvøya. Halvøya means 'half island' therefore peninsula, and it was one, until the Blomstrandglacier retreated. These days it is an island, so Blomstrand-øya would be a better name.

We were not the only ones on the island, two field inspectors of the Sysselmannen (governor of Svalbard) were staying in one of the houses of Camp Mansfield. The inspectors check on the impact of tourism on nature and cultural heritage.



Ny London was build by Ernest Mansfield, who wanted to mine for marble, but in the end the marble was worthless and the houses were moved to Ny Ålesund. Now, the so-called London-houses are the home base of the Dutch Arctic station.

The group split up into 3 groups, a long and fast hike up the mountain, a medium walk around the area and a short walk with a lot of time to look around. We saw reindeer, a longtailed skua, long tailed ducks, red troated divers, Arctic terns, barnacle geese and many different plants. And last but not least the Arctic silence.

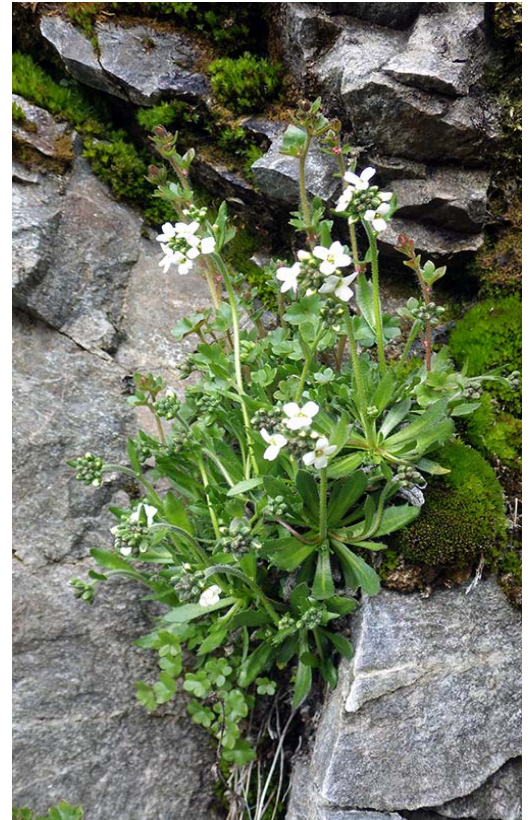
In the afternoon, we could do another landing in the 14.Julibukta. This glacier and its bay is named after the national day of France. It was named in 1906 by Duke Albert I of Monaco.

At the north side of this bay, there is a 'hanging garden'. The conditions on that spot are perfect, and therefore the plants grow much larger than anywhere else on Spitsbergen. Right above it you'll find a nesting kittiwake colony, but when you are close to the hanging garden you don't hear the screaming birds any longer. On the tundra around it, there were several reindeer and barnacle geese with goslings on a pond.

While half of the passengers were on shore, the other half went on a zodiac cruise to the bird cliffs.

Among the nesting birds were also puffins, and who doesn't like to see them?

We ended the day with recap. Lydia explained something about the Arctic terns, Sebastien about reindeer and Christian about the plans of the next day.



Day 7 –Wednesday 5 July 2017

Ingeborgfjellet & Recherchefjord

GPS position 08.00 am: 77°43.8'N 014°20.8'E

wind: NW – 2 Seastate: calm Weather: overcast Temperature: 5°C

The day promised to be very busy and to bring us many unforgettable moments of the Arctic experience. Everybody was quite optimistic and excited despite the 15 knots of wind blowing from the Northwest. Two landings! Two different spots on the coastline of Bellsund!

The waters of Bellsund near Ingeborgfjellet – our first landing spot – keep many surprises, such as shallows and stones, so *Plancius* could not approach too close to shore due to the wind and currents and stayed adrift. This distance we covered on Zodiacs.



Once on land we walked up to the steep slope of the mountain in order to get closer to a colony of Little auks – small black and white birds that nest in burrows between rocks. It was hard at some moments and even a bit slippery, but those who chose this adrenaline-raising adventure trip were rewarded with a scenic view, and a chance to take plenty of good pictures of Little auks. After a while some of us went for a walk on the tundra to warm up a bit from the drizzling conditions. It was a pleasure to step on the soft carpet of mosses of the tundra and enjoy watching wildlife without being in a hurry. During the walk we saw Barnacle geese with a leusistic one among them, Kittiwakes, and some friendly reindeer, one of them even put a show for us, getting closer to our group, scratching its antlers and posing for pictures.

When it was time to go back to the ship, we gathered together at the landing spot and started being driven back by Zodiacs.

Our lunch turned out to be just a break between landings. While we were taking a breath and enjoying our meals, the captain was heading *Plancius* towards Recherchefjord.



Our last landing of the trip was right in front of the Recherche glacier. We walked on the terminal moraine and enjoyed the view of the lagoon that was formed between this and the glacier. Many birds were resting on the bergy bits in the water and the view was breathtaking. It was the perfect end of a wonderful trip.

Once we were all onboard *Plancius* set sail towards Longyearbyen. We settled our account and returned our trustful rubber boots. Before dinner it was time to head back up into the lounge for our final recap and briefing. After a toast from the Captain, there were thanks to all of the people who made the trip so enjoyable, and all the information we need for our disembarkation. Our last dinner was full of talk and laughter and we moved from the dining room to the lounge, enjoying our last night on board, but still remembering to pack our bags for their early departure from the ship.

Day 8 – Thursday 6 July 2017

Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen

GPS Position 0800: 78°14.2' N / 015°35.6' E

wind: NW – 3

Seastate: port

Weather: partly clouded

Temperature: 6°C

We woke far too early, at anchor in Longyearbyen, sad to know we will be leaving the ship. Our last breakfast seemed too early in the morning, but was very much appreciated, as we don't know where our next meals will be coming from!! We were back at the port of Bykoya in Longyearbyen, and it was time to leave the ship for the last time. On the dock, we found our luggage and sorted ourselves into the busses. We farewelled our new friends and set off on our travels and flights home, sad to be leaving, but also looking forward to our next adventures.



Total distance travelled:

922 nautical miles

1708 kilometres

Furthest North

80°08.917' N / 014°28.017' E

***On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions,
the Captain, Crew and Staff
on board MV Plancius:***



***It has been a pleasure travelling with you, and we hope
to see you again!***

www.oceanwide-expeditions.com