



OCEANWIDE

EXPEDITIONS

Around Spitsbergen, in the realm of polar bears and ice

15 July – 24 July, 2023

On board *m/v Plancius*



M/v Plancius was built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Dutch Navy and was named “Hr. Ms. *Tydeman*”. The vessel was completely rebuilt as a passenger vessel in 2009 and complies with the latest SOLAS-regulations (Safety Of Life At Sea). *M/v Plancius* is 89 m long, 14.5 m wide and has a maximum draft of 5 m, ice class 1D, 10,5 knots average cruising speed and has 3 Diesel- Electric engines.

Captain Miia Holma

And her international crew of 49 sailors

Chief Officer:	Romanas Vicas	[Lithuania]
Second Officer:	Yaroslav Pyetukhov	[Ukraine]
Third Officer:	Martin Hansson	[Sweden]
Hotel Manager:	Volodymyr Cherednychenko	[Ukraine]
Head Chef:	Khabir Moraes	[India]
Sous Chef:	SergiySklyarov	[Ukraine]
Ships doctor:	Anneke Planting	[The Netherlands]
Expedition Leader:	Christophe Bouchoux	[France]
Ass. Expedition Leader:	Michelle van Dijk	[The Netherlands]
Expedition Guide:	Koen Jongerling	[The Netherlands]
Expedition Guide:	Jess Owen	[United Kingdom]
Expedition Guide:	Elizabeth Robinson	[United States]
Expedition Guide:	Annina Scholl	[Germany]
Expedition Guide:	Carina Ketterer	[Switzerland]
Expedition Guide:	Karoline Baelum	[Denmark]

We welcome you on board!

Day 1 – Saturday 15th of July, Longyearbyen, embarkation day

12h00 GPS Position: 78°14.6'N / 015°32.6'E

Wind: SE4 • Sea: Smooth • Weather: Clear • Air temperature: 12°C • Sea temperature: 8°C

We began arriving in Longyearbyen in the afternoon, having travelled from all over the world to reach the spectacular archipelago of Svalbard. Once everyone was on board, we took part in all the necessary safety briefings and were shown where important safety features of the ship are. We then spent some time familiarising ourselves with the layout of our new home MV Plancius and enjoying the views outside as we set sail. Before dinner Captain Miia wished us well on our journey with a toast in the lounge and Expedition Leader Christophe introduced himself. We then set off to the restaurant for a delicious first buffet dinner.

A few hours later, after some drinks and unpacking, we had a very special encounter with a fin whale. We had great views as it surfaced several times. Fin whales are the second largest animal in the world, only a few meters shorter than a blue whale, and we could clearly hear its blow as it refreshed its breath at the surface before diving. What an incredibly special start to the trip.



Day 2 – Sunday 16th of July, Blömstrandhalvoya and Ny-Ålesund

12h00 GPS Position: 78°57.4' N / 012°08.0' E

Wind: W2 • Sea: Rippled • Weather: Fog/Cloudy • Air temperature: 7°C • Sea temperature: 7°C

Here we go, our first expedition day. We start off with the wakeup call from our expedition leader Christophe and shortly after we got invited to the restaurant to enjoy a delicious breakfast on deck 3. Throughout this morning we have multiple obligated briefings planned to ensure a safe and secure Arctic operation for everybody including topics like Zodiac safety and Polar bear safety. All briefings were held in the Lounge area on deck 5. Here Christophe started out with welcoming us again onto the ship and explaining the plans for the following 9 days. He presented himself and the expedition team who all said a little about themselves. With a team filled with geologists, marine biologists, botanists, and naturalists there was no doubt about it that we were going to learn a lot during this expedition. We also got informed how the zodiac operation would work and how we had to get in and out of the zodiac in the most secure way. Polar bear safety and the AECO guidelines animation video were all common sense as nobody would want to stand face to face with a Polar bear in the wild or destroy plants or old human artifacts.

Now ready to make the first step out of the ship we got informed that due to the mist in the Fjortende Julibukta we had instead made our way into KongsFjorden to see if the weather would clear up. With luck on our side, it did, and we started to see more and more of the splendid nature around us. Our EL had made the choice to do a Zodiac cruise instead of a landing that we had planned in Fjortende Julibukta so everybody prepared themselves for a beautiful cruise close to Blömstrandhalvoya and its neighbouring glacier fronts. The cruise started out near to Ny London, an old and small mining settlement set up by the Northern Exploration Company (NEC). Here Marble was mined but due to the poor quality of the marble the settlement eventually was abandoned. Afterwards we made our way to the open drift ice which was created by the many glaciers that are coming down into the fjord system. There were beautiful and artistically shaped icebergs in many different sizes. The intense azure blue colour was intensified due to the reflection and refraction of the sunlight bouncing back and forth on the ice and water. Some were clear as crystal and others had a milky white colour due to the air bubbles trapped within. A spectacular sight to see. Adding to it was the view of the three mountain peaks at the back of the fjord called Dana, Nora and Svea. This morning could not have been better.

In the afternoon we got the chance to walk through one of the most northern scientific settlements in the world, Ny Alesund. A small town made purely for scientific work where people from many different countries work on topics like climate change, local flora and fauna, and even high up in the universe studying distant galaxies. It was therefore of the utmost importance that we had our Wi-Fi and Bluetooth turned off on our mobile phones and the ships Wifi while we were in the area. In town we could visit several places like the Museum with extended explanations about the history of mining and Arctic exploration starting from Ny Alesund. There was also a chance to send a letter to family and friends from one of the most northern post offices in the world. At

the same place they managed a store where they sold many souvenirs. At 16:30 the tour to the zeppelin mast started. The group was divided in German speakers and English speakers and were told the story of Roald Amundsen and his achievements in polar exploration. After an extended explanation we walked to the mast where the Zeppelin of Amundsen and Nobile left from to reach the north pole. Not long after we all returned to the ship to join the daily recap and dinner.

The day had been filled with many new experiences, but the day was not over yet. During dinner Expedition guide Elizabeth spotted two polar bears on a distant shore. An incredible achievement spotting them from 6 km away. The captain and the EL had made the decision to approach and see if we could see them more clearly. After dinner everybody had been informed and made it to one of the outer decks. As they were not as close to the shore it was not as easy to spot them. Not even with binoculars. For a long while it was white dot nr 1 and yellowish dot nr 2. With some time and patience everybody was able to spot the bears walking over the hills in the distance. Even though this was not an amazing view of polar bears, the fact that we saw two walking in their own habitat in the middle of nowhere was a great experience and achievement. And although everybody hopes for a closer encounter this was already an amazing way to start our 10 day trip around Spitsbergen.



Day 3 – Monday 17th of July, Liefdefiorden, Texas Bar and Monacobreen,

12h00 GPS Position: 79°36.9'N / 012°43.3'E

Wind: NNW-1 • Sea: Rippled • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: 5°C • Sea temperature: 6°C

After another brilliant breakfast we started to go ashore for our first hikes in the true wilderness of Spitzbergen. We were visiting a site called Texas bar, named so because of the old trappers hut on the shores of the beach which has in wooden letters on the outside the words 'Texas Bar' – a name given to it by one of the trappers.

We all gathered at the hut and then split into our three hiking groups. Koen, Elizabeth, and Jess led the long hikers up to some beautiful view points on the moraine where they found interesting bones from animal remains and beautiful flowers. The medium group, led by Karoline, Carina, and Annina, visited a waterfall, and saw an Arctic skua on its nest. The leisurely group learnt all about the flowers with Michelle such as moss campion and mountain avens. Everyone of very happy to stretch their legs and be out in nature taking in the Arctic scenery.

After lunch and a bit of a rest, we embarked the zodiacs again, this time for a cruise along one of Svalbard's most well-known glaciers – Monacobreen. The sun came out just as we lowered our zodiacs and set off towards the glacier. It was looking spectacular in the sunshine. As we slowly made our way along the face of the glacier, we could see birds like kittiwakes and Arctic terns feeding at the base of it where there had been recent calving events, eating small fish and crustaceans that had been disturbed by the falling ice. Arctic terns have the longest migration of any bird species, flying all the way from the Arctic to Antarctica each year. Some of the boats even saw some brown jellyfish.

As well as seeing Monacobreen in all its glory, we also had brilliant views of smaller glaciers that feed into Liefdefjorden such as Seligerbreen, Emmabreen, and Idabreen.

On the way back to the ship we saw some fantastic icebergs with arches and shades of brilliant blue.

We then enjoyed a beautiful plated dinner before relaxing in the lounge and enjoying the scenery outside.



Day 4 – Tuesday 18th of July, Pack ice and Polar bear encounter

12h00 GPS Position: 80°50.7'N / 019°53.0'E

Wind: NW4 • Sea: Ice • Weather: Drizzle • Air temperature: -1°C • Sea temperature: 0°C

Pack ice day! We woke up to good visibility and ice flows outside the windows at more than 80 degrees north. Being in the pack ice, hearing it move, seeing the colours and feeling the magical atmosphere at the top of the globe is a unique experience.

After breakfast it was all eyes on the ice to spot wildlife. We saw plenty of seals, guillemots, kittiwakes and even an ivory gull. Shortly after 9 the bridge spotted two bears in the distance. Everyone came on deck and Captain Miia maneuvered the ship northwards through the ice. After about 2 nautical miles the ice was too dense to proceed further but we got a surprise, it was not only two bears but three! A mother with two cubs. We could observe the bears through binoculars and the ships scope as they slept and later moved around on the ice. At the same time a Fin whale appeared on the starboard side of the ship, what a start to the day.

After a nice lunch the ship turned southwards in search of an area with bigger ice flows and more wildlife. Finding the right ice takes skill, experience, and a bit of luck. The ice charts are a best guess from models and available satellite data. The resolution is in kilometres not meters and the maps only show the percentage of sea covered in ice, not its thickness nor the size of the flows. Luckily, we have many experienced staff and crew onboard to guide the search.

In the afternoon the ship cruised through the ice, we saw more ivory gulls, seals and even a bloody ice flow where the *Ursus Maritimus* has probably had dinner. Sitting in the observation lounge with a cup of coffee watching the ice flow by is not the worst way to spend an afternoon.



There were lectures on ice habitats, geology, birds, and seals in the early evening before a 3-course dinner. Tonight, we will relocate to Nordaustlandet (the northeast land), Svalbard's 2nd largest island (after Spitsbergen), and be ready for new adventures tomorrow.

Day 5 – Wednesday 19th of July, Crozierpynten and Claravagen

09h00 GPS Position: 79°56.9'N / 016°48.9'E

Wind: N3 • Sea: Smooth • Weather: Partial clouds • Air temperature: 3°C • Sea temperature: 4°C

Once upon a time there was mist. And not just here but also over there. We ran, we jumped, but it did not go anywhere. So, we changed our position to the other side of the strait to find a better place to land our feet. And we did. Entering Sorg Fjorden after a small delay we found a beautiful blue sky and a very interesting landing spot called Crozierpynten. Sorgfjorden and Crozierpynten have a lot of history. From the most northern naval battle between 40 Dutch whaling vessels and three French battle ships to the Arc the Meridian expedition realized by the Swedish and Russians to prove the theory that the polar region is more flattened than the rest of our round planet.

At the landing site we were able to observe the old huts that were used during the Arc the Meridian Expedition. Although they are in a poor condition now this does not take away from the importance they once had during past human discoveries. On top of the hill the group was split up in 3 smaller groups and started the exploration of the area. There were many things to be found including plants like the Svalbard poppy, the Spider Saxifrage and Mountain Avens. Some of the hikers found stone circles which are a frost pattern made in the upper layer of the permafrost. There were multiple cairns found made by the expedition between the years 1899 and 1902. During this morning many people also picked up a large quantity of plastic garbage that was found on the beaches. In the end a large bag was filled with many kinds of items from fishing nets to bottle caps.

The morning was not over until we had plunged in the ice-cold water of the Arctic. Arranged for the brave hearts that weren't afraid of the burning sensation that the freezing temperatures created throughout your whole body. Great job everybody that choose to join in this experience.

After lunch the plans were to enter Claravagen. A large lagoon separated from the Hinlopen Strait by a small entrance and connected with two smaller lagoons further inland. It was still quite misty outside but good enough to start the zodiac operations. Passing though the small entrance was already an experience on its own as the tide was rising and there was a strong current entering the lagoon. We bumped up and down but nothing that our zodiacs could not handle. Entering the lagoon, we were able to see nesting Glaucous gulls and some common eider ducks swimming by. Some of the zodiacs saw a bearded seal swim by and footprints of a large fluffy white friend. We kept on going further into the smaller lagoons where suddenly we got a call from our Expedition leader. A bear had been found on the coastline of the second lagoon. Obviously, all zodiacs made their way directly to that specific place. It was a young female bear sleeping at the coastline. She was really relaxed with our presence and maybe looked up twice to see if we were still there or not. Christophe made the decision to do a carousel with the boats to give everybody to best possible view and to be less invasive to the bear being on the move in different directions. She had a collar on that is very likely used by a science project to track the bear and to study its behaviour. The WWF has a program like this to study the polar bears. After a few rounds we left the

bear alone and kept on going with the Zodiac cruise. We entered the third and last lake, through a small passage with a strong current, where we found a very old long boat in a reasonably good condition. And there were a group of Brent geese in the very end of the lagoon. By this time, we were already a little bit late and made our way back to the ship which was still quite the ride. Back at the ship we had little time to change for we got invited to the daily recap where Christophe explained us what the plans were for the next day. And we got an explanation from Elizabeth why bears are being tracked and what we do with the information having gathered it. She showed a video of a bear walking and swimming for a whole year which seemed like immense distances following the pack ice up north and back down again. A day filled with new adventures. We can only start dreaming now about what has happened and what could possibly happen tomorrow. Good night.



Day 6 – Thursday 20th of July, Alkefjellet, Wahlbergoya/Ardneset, Brasvelbreen

10h00 GPS Position: 79°35.9'N / 018°31.8'E

Wind: N1 • Sea: Calm • Weather: Partly Cloudy • Air temperature: 5°C • Sea temperature: 4°C

7:45 – time to wake up. Will it be foggy as well today? Will we be able to follow Plan A for a change and go to this magical place that Christophe told us about? A quick look outside the window tells us the visibility is better than yesterday. The sun is trying to find its way through the mist and there is almost no wind. Plan A is a go. So we head out to Alkefjellet for a zodiac cruise along a



bird cliff. Here we find thousands and thousands of birds. 60 000 breeding pairs of the Brunnich's Guillemot with their chicks, some still have eggs. We start at a waterfall coming down from Odinsjökull, a small ice cap, and then drift along the cliff for most of the time. The rock is of volcanic origin and we can see basalt-like pillars in a vertical orientation. Every possible spot, however small it is, is occupied by birds. Their droppings have turned the dark rocks in a greyish color and we can smell the guano. Some of us get guano on our clothing – the guides tells us that it is for good luck. We choose to believe them. We continue along the cliff and find some fluffy Glaucous gull chicks that are cute enough to almost forgive their parents for “harvesting” guillemot eggs and chicks. A bit further along the cliff there is someone that checks out every corner in order to find food. It is polar foxes. The size of a cat, they allow us to have an impression on how high the bird cliff actually is. They come close to the water line, roll in the snow patches for a moment and then go back to trying to find food for their hungry pups. They disappear high up in the cliffs. Our last stop of the Zodiac cruise is a short visit at the glacier Odinsbreen. Most of the Expedition Team hasn't seen Alkefjellet in calm weather like this including the sun that shines for us today.

After lunch, Christophe informs us that we have changed plans again. Instead of visiting Torelneset to see a walrus colony, we start a zodiac cruise along the beaches of Wahlbergoya. He didn't tell us the reason for the change of plan but advised strongly to not miss out on this zodiac cruise. So we head into a little bay, not knowing what to expect – and there he is. A young male polar bear is resting on a snow patch. After a moment he gets up and starts walking along above the beach and then crawls down to the waterline. We realise that he is now standing on a whale carcass. Scratching on the snow and ice cover he digs up some pieces to eat. What an honour to see him in

his natural habitat completely comfortable with our presence. We are ready to leave him and see what else the island has to offer, but then 3 more polar bears come over the hill. It is a mother with two large cubs that want their part of the carcass. The young male quickly gives way to the three bears. For a moment he stands on the beach playing with algae before he goes into the water. We leave the 4 bears and move around the corner to have a look at the walrus haul out at a sandy beach. Some are in the water and try to find out who we are. After spending a while just observing their behaviour on land and in the water, we are about to head back to the ship when we realize that there is a bear in the water. The large bear comes on land close to the walrus and walks along the beach. That is bear number 5 of the day.

Dinner is a little different today. There is a BBQ on the aft deck. It's foggy again but for the moment that it is okay because we spend the evening chatting and dancing together. Finally the fog is lifting again, the sun is coming out and pieces of ice appear in the water around us. We are on the way to Brasvelbreen, the famous ice wall at Nordaustlandet. The atmosphere is magical as the ice wall becomes visible. We sail along the edge and see some of the famous waterfalls of meltwater. It is late on the evening already. How can we go to sleep now? It's just too beautiful to miss a single minute. What an incredible day it was!



Day 7 – Friday 21st of July, Kapp Waldburg, Kapp Lee

12h00 GPS Position: 78°16.6'N / 022°09.0'E

Wind: WSW5 • Sea: Slight • Weather: Partial Clouds • Air temperature: 5°C • Sea temperature: 5°C

We were awoken like every morning by a gentle "Good morning". There was an announcement of strong wind and the first changes in plan for today. In Freemansundet we could already see the white foam patches on the waves from afar, this means too much wind for a safe Zodiac ride. So, a new landing was found, just around the corner. It was time for another expedition. A new territory for all of us. When we arrived, the first great things were already waiting for us – many ancient whale bones. In addition to the buoys and the driftwood, there was also polar bear droppings to see. Much of what a polar bear has eaten can be deduced from this piece of faeces. On our hikes we learned a lot about why driftwood and whale bones are so far inland. We then learnt more during our recap, where Karoline explained isostatic land elevation to us. Many years ago Svalbard was still under an ice sheet, the ground was pushed down. After a large part melted away, the ground partially rose to around 60 meters, so it was then that ancient whale bones were found further inland.

After stretching our legs, we headed back to the ship where another wonderful lunch awaited us. In the afternoon we landed in Kapp Lee. There we had an incredible encounter with many walruses and reindeer. These large animals, which can lift themselves up on the ice with their tusks, were curious as to what kind of visitors were arriving on their land. After our daily recap, there was a delicious dinner and then we were already on our way to Hornsund.



Day 8 – Thursday 22nd of July, Gashamna and Burgerbukta

12h00 GPS Position: 77°00'.4 N, 015°57'.6 W

Wind: Light • Sea: Calm/ice • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: 7°C • Sea temperature: 5°C

Today we made our way back to the western side of the Spitsbergen Island and into Hornsund, a beautiful fjord situated at the very southern end of the island. Geologically speaking, a natural gem with many kinds of layers from the old bedrock that is 1 billion years old to the newest glacial moraines. Our first landing would be in Gåshamna (goosebay). A bay that has been used since the very beginning of human activities on Spitsbergen. Here we can find old remnants of the English whalers that arrived here in 1612. The blubber ovens that they used to use in this bay are still partly visible. It looks like a whale graveyard which really represents the activity of whaling within this area. A Norwegian hunter even used this site to build his cabin/shelter in the 1900's. He built it right inside a blubber oven from whale bones and scraps of wood. As always, we organized a short hike, middle hike, and long hike. The short hike stayed around the landing site looking at the whale bones and blubber ovens with the expedition guide Koen. They saw a Arctic Fox running off with a Black Guillemot in its mouth. It was quite fast running over the tundra, but we got a pretty good glimpse of it. The middle hike went further up the beach towards a peninsula with a viewpoint into the Hornsund. Here they found a lot of kelp laying around on the beach which Michelle explained the importunacy of. From the look out the group was able to look across the bay at the Polish research station. A station that is still active during the season going around Hornsund doing new research. The long hiking group followed Karoline and Elizabeth up a mountain on a steep gravel terrain. Walking over the spine of the mountain they followed a path towards a beautiful high look out point. A morning filled with history and beautiful nature.

During the afternoon we made our way into Burgerbukta. A beautiful side fjord of Hornsund with giant limestone walls where waterfalls pour out of the middle of the wall. The fjord was filled with growlers and small icebergs. We started at the walls nearby the ship with big orange stripes coming down which indicated that iron that was hidden within the limestone wall. Further down into the fjord we found giant waterfalls coming down the mountain and above there were many gulls flying around which are nesting on the steep cliffs. Getting closer to the glacier wall we saw a hanging glacier revealing itself whilst we came around the corner of the steep mountain walls. Some zodiacs even saw an Ivory Gull flying around the icebergs. The icebergs themselves came in many different shapes and sizes with beautiful colours of blue. The way back to the ship went quite slow as there had entered a lot of small growlers into the bay. This did however make it a very beautiful experience being surrounded by so much ice.

On our way out of the Hornsund Fjord we got lucky and were able to observe several groups of White beaked dolphins swimming and feeding around the ship. They jumped out of the water near to the many flying birds that were taking advantage of this feeding frenzy. Later, we even were able to see Fin whales feed beside the ship. We got an

incredibly good view from them while they came up to breath near to our bow. What a beautiful way to end the day.



Day 9 – Friday 23rd of July, Bjonahamna and Tunabreen, Tempelfjorden

08h00 GPS Position: 78°13.042'N / 013°51.460'E

Wind: NE6 • Sea: Slight • Weather: Clear sky • Air temperature: 13°C • Sea temperature: 8°C

During the night the ship sailed from Hornsund and into Isfjorden, the largest fjord system in Svalbard. We woke up to calm and clear weather, perfect conditions for today's activities in Tempelfjorden, the innermost branch of the fjord. The fjord is named after Templet, the spectacular mountain guarding its northern entrance. The 700m high cliffs are 250-million-year-old lime- and clay stones from the Permian period and are full of fossils of ancient marine life such as brachiopods and corals.

As usual we divided into 3 groups and did some nice hiking along the beach and up near the slope of the mountains to look at the boulders that have tumbled down from

above. The rocks and cliffs above them are home to many birds and we saw our first ptarmigans.

After lunch we arrived in the bottom of Tempelfjord near the Tunabreen glacier for our last zodiac cruise. The weather was perfect as we cruised between icebergs and rubble ice. We saw ringed and bearded seals on the ice floes, kittiwakes, terns and glaucous gulls in front of the 50m high calving glacier front. We even observed some large pieces breaking off the glacier.

After the farewell toast by the captain and a great slideshow of all our adventures it was time for the last supper and one last drink in the bar as the ship sailed towards Longyearbyen.



Day 10 – Saturday 24th of July, Arrival back into Longyearbyen

08h00 GPS Position: 78°14.6'N / 015°32.6'E

Wind: NW3 • Sea: Smooth • Weather: Clear sky • Air temperature: 14°C • Sea temperature: 7°C

After a final wonderful buffet breakfast, we said farewell to the Plancius and its team and we began our journeys home and onto other adventures. Our wildlife encounters on this trip have been truly spectacular. For many of the guides this trip they had their best polar bear sightings yet. For the most part the weather has been fantastic, and we have loved sharing our love for the Arctic with you.



Total distance sailed on our voyage: 1'120 nautical miles

Northernmost position: 80°51.044'N / 019°53.287'E

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Miia Holma, Expedition Leader Christophe Bouchoux, Hotel Manager Volodymyr Cherednychenko, and all the crew and staff of M/V Plancius, it has been a pleasure travelling with you.