



OCEANWIDE
30 YEARS OF EXPEDITIONS

Arctic Ocean - Foula, Jan Mayen, Ice edge, Spitsbergen

26th May – 6th June 2024



M/V Plancius

MV Plancius was named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geographer, and minister 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.

Captain Ernesto Barria

and his international crew

Chief Officer: **Elizbar Kadaria**

2nd Officer: **Don Buren**

3rd Officer: **Anar Babaiev**

Chief Engineer: **Daniel Liliac-Zajontz**

Hotel Manager: **Oleksandr Lyebyedyev**

Assist. Hotel Manager: **Bogdan Manevski**

Head Chef: **Ivan Yuriychuk**

Ships Doctor: **Bastiaan van Nieuwenhuizen**

Expedition Leader: **Jan Belgers**

Assist. Expedition Leader: **Eduardo Rubio Herrera**

Expedition Guides: **Paolo Bellezze**

Michelle van Dijk

Koen Hoekmeijer

Matthias Kopp

Tiphannie May

Alexander Romanovskiy

Day 1 – 26th May

Vlissingen - Embarkation Day

12:00 GPS Position: 51°27.6'N / 003°41.8'E

Wind: var, Sea State: Port, Weather: Sunny, Air Temp: 15.6°C, Sea Temp: 13°C



Finally, the big day has arrived! We gathered at Vlissingen train station, where we were picked up by two coaches to bring us to Plancius, our home for the next 12 days. When we arrived at the pier to embark on Plancius around 16:00h, we were greeted by the Expedition Team members. They all were very friendly and helped us a great deal with our luggage, which was tagged

carefully and transferred to the ship. After sorting our luggage, we had to report to the customs, prior to boarding the vessel. We were lucky to be able to use the coach as a waiting room, while in the meantime it started raining cats and dogs. Onboard we received a warm welcome from the Oceanwide hotel department. Soon after, our expedition leader Jan welcomed us on board and invited all of us to the observation lounge for a mandatory safety briefing and a ship's safety drill.

After completing the mandatory drill, the sun was out again, and we went out on deck. Departing the home port of the vessel, we were waving to the other Oceanwide vessels, and those crew were waving at us. We were also greeted by the horn of Ortelius. We were on our way!

At 19:00h it was dinner time, although we already had some delicious canapés, it was now time to further enjoy our galley team's buffet in the dining room. We enjoyed our food while sailing close past Vlissingen.

After dinner we were greeted by our captain Ernesto Barrera. A toast to a good and safe voyage, of which Expedition Leader Jan explained about the plans of the coming days. In the late evening, some were still out to watch for wildlife, while others dreamed about it.



Day 2 – 27th May

Day at Sea – Towards Aberdeen

12:00 GPS Position: 53°38.2'N / 000°49.0'E

Wind: S-2, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 12°C, **Sea Temp:** 18°C

Most of us enjoyed a good night with a slight movement of PLANCIUS. We woke up having the coast of Great Britain in sight and we followed that coast the whole day, aiming for Aberdeen.

After a good breakfast it was time to get fresh air, enjoying the scenery in all aspects. However, not just wildlife surrounded us, but also numerous windfarms, producing energy with the blowing slight wind. Later during the morning hours Koen gave an interesting lecture about wildlife photography.



The weather developed becoming friendlier, with sunshine and some clouds and it was very pleasant staying on the outside decks. A lot of seabirds were all around us, amongst them, the largest ones up here in the north, the Gannets, but also nice smaller species like the Common Tern and Guillemot and Puffins. In the afternoon we got the rubber boots and the life jacket which we both need for our outings by zodiac. By getting those, we discovered new parts of the PLANCIUS. While we sailed with good speed along the coast

towards our first destination, Matthias gave an informative talk about seabirds. After seeing them on the screens in the lounge it was time to enjoy them in real outside. Our first day on board PLANCIUS was great, looking forward for more. Jan, our Expedition Leader presented the plan for the next day in the surrounding of Aberdeen during a meeting in the lounge. Having nice conversations during the dinner and afterwards the day ended with a beautiful sunset.



Day 3 - 28th May

Aberdeen

Sands of Forvie, Bullers of Buchan & Foot Dee

12:00 GPS Position: 57°08.6'N / 002°05.1'W

Wind: WSW-2, Sea State: Port, Weather: Partly cloudy, Air Temp: 13°C, Sea Temp: 17°C



As soon as we woke up, we all felt a sharp desire to wear a kilt and play the bagpipes.

What happened, you might ask?

The answer is simple – Plancius, our ship, was approaching the shores of Scotland. Through the binoculars, we could already see the green fields, where various grains and other plants grew, pastures with shaggy, funny-looking cows grazing on them, and small villages scattered along the coastline and inland. Directly ahead of us was the large city

of Aberdeen. Just north of the city, enormous wind turbines rose straight out of the sea. Their blades slowly rotated in the wind, allowing the generators to produce electricity. The sight was mesmerizing but, admittedly, somewhat eerie.

Plancius approached the harbour and slowed down. A few bottle-nosed dolphins, which had taken to escorting our ship and probably hoped to do some bow riding, swam away disappointed and confused. Soon, while manoeuvring through the port area, Plancius turned stern-first and slowly backed up further. The dolphins, seeing this scene, were completely bewildered, and decided that something was definitely wrong with this ship, swam away to frolic in the waves and wait for another vessel.

Meanwhile, Plancius was securely moored next to one of the quay walls, and as soon as the gangway was lowered, strict border guards promptly climbed aboard. The expedition team politely greeted them and escorted them to the main lounge on deck 5. We lined up in a long queue and one by one, passport in hand, visited the border guards to ensure there were no spies or wrongdoers among us. Once the border control procedure was completed, we descended the gangway to the pier, where buses were already waiting for us.



The weather was simply wonderful – warm and sunny – and an exciting, adventure-filled day awaited us.

We boarded the buses and sped through the narrow streets of Aberdeen, and after leaving the city, we zoomed down the highway towards Sands of Forvie, an incredibly interesting natural site. Many of us were not used to seeing a bus drive on the left side of the road, and the steering wheel of our vehicle was on the "wrong" side, but seeing the unflappable confidence with which the driver did his job, we quickly calmed down and began to look out the windows, admiring the Scottish pastoral scenes.

What are Sands of Forvie? It is a picturesque spot on the ocean shore, representing the estuary of the River Forvie, surrounded by grass and shrub-covered sand dunes. But the most interesting thing about Sands of Forvie is not even its natural beauty, but the animal inhabitants that have chosen the riverbanks as their home. These include primarily eider ducks and some other birds, and also seals! Sometimes, they say, up to three thousand of them can gather there.



The buses parked at a lot near a small hotel with a restaurant, and we walked along a narrow asphalt path towards the sea. Soon, the asphalt turned into a wooden boardwalk, and eventually, we had to walk on sand. Around us, bushes with bright yellow flowers were growing densely. There were so many flowers that it seemed like some kind of carpet.



Soon, we reached the estuary of the River Forvie. The tide was out, and the ocean had retreated, exposing algae-covered rocks, mud, and tightly packed sand. There were no seals on the shore, but there were plenty of ducks! Those of us who were into birdwatching set up their tripods with spotting scopes and began observing the feathered horde, while the rest of us strolled along the shore. The River Forvie isn't wide: if you took a stone and threw it with a good swing, you could reach the opposite bank. (But don't do that, remember there are many birds!) From time to time, strange-shaped heads with disproportionately large nostrils could be seen surfacing in the middle of the river – these were grey seals. They snorted and eagerly and curiously sniffed the air filled with unfamiliar scents.



The time allotted for our walk flew by surprisingly quickly, and soon it was time to return to the buses and head to the next natural attraction, called Bullers of Buchan, whatever that meant. Another bus ride, another road, more pastoral scenes, and after half an hour, we arrived at a car park, where, after getting off the buses, we found a sign with an arrow saying "Bullers of Buchan." After walking a couple of hundred meters and

passing several charming Scottish houses with front gardens, we found ourselves on a high and steep seaside cliff. The cliffs were exceptionally picturesque, but the most important thing was the sheer number of birds: black-legged kittiwakes, guillemots, Northern fulmars, razorbills, and others. Our ornithologists, glowing with enthusiasm, began walking along the edge of these steep cliffs, stopping from time to time to set up their tripods with spotting scopes, adjusting the eyepieces, and occasionally taking a break from their observations to take a few shots with their cameras. Those who were not interested in birds simply enjoyed the natural beauty, fresh air, and good weather. It was already two o'clock in the afternoon, so many of us, finding a suitable spot, settled down for lunch, pulling out sandwich packs from our backpacks, which we had prepared earlier in the morning during breakfast. Delicious!



Before we knew it, it was time to return to Aberdeen. With a sense of satisfaction from a day well spent and filled with impressions of the local natural beauty, we returned to the buses and took our seats. The road back to Aberdeen didn't take much time. Along the way, we even managed to stop by a supermarket and spent half an hour shopping. To tell you the truth, the main purpose of visiting the supermarket was to withdraw cash from the ATM located there, but alas, the ATM was out of order,

so everyone faced a major disappointment. However, against the backdrop of all the day's events, this failure seemed like a triviality, and no one was upset.



Aberdeen greeted us with warm but no longer cloudless weather. Before returning to the ship, we made one more stop in a village called Foot Dee or Fittie. The village, located near the harbour, has long since become part of the city, but it retained its fairy-tale charm and uniqueness. Walking through it, it felt like stepping into the pages of Charles

Dickens' novels. Narrow streets, front gardens, benches, cats, knick-knacks in the windows, and laundry hanging on lines. Even the hearts of the most hopeless sceptics of man-made attractions melted and were touched. Truly, the village of Fittie was the cherry on top and a fitting conclusion to this wonderful day.



As soon as we returned to the ship, Plancius was unmoored, after which it set course northward – to the island of Foula. The dolphins, apparently deciding to make amends and apologize for their morning behaviour, escorted our ship into the sunset, bustling around and waving us with their dorsal fins.

Day 4 – 29th May

Foula

12:00 GPS Position: 60°07.9'N / 002°01.9'W

Wind: var 1, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Sunny, **Air Temp:** 14°C, **Sea Temp:** 17°C



We awoke to our expedition leader Jan Belgers calling us over the intercom that it was a beautiful day outside and we should get up and prepare for the day. We headed to the dining room to have a delicious breakfast and make our packed lunches for the day.

We were scheduled to have our zodiac briefing later in morning, but Jan called us again after breakfast and gave us the good

news that we were arriving at Foula earlier than expected and could be disembarking as early as 11am. So, we all filed up to the lounge to have the zodiac briefing we would need before we could take our first zodiac ride. At the same time our expedition leader Jan gave us a briefing about our expedition to the island giving us options of a medium or long hike. After the briefing we went outside to enjoy the approach to Foula. It is a beautiful summer's day in Scotland.

At 10:15 the zodiacs started to be set to the water ready to take us on our adventure. We were all ready and excited to make our first zodiac landing. At 11:00 we were called to the gangways and alighted our zodiacs for the short trip to shore. We were dropped at the pier to meet our local guides Sheila and Magnus who would take us on our hikes. The long hikers would head to the north coast of the island to visit the Gaada stack. A beautiful rock formation out in the sea and hopefully see some puffins along the way. The medium hikers went south along the coastal walking route hopefully to also see some puffins.





The sun shone bright as all the groups went their separate ways. Both were lucky enough to see the puffins and the man other nesting birds along the cliff edges. Sheep and Shetland ponies grazed the cliff tops as we wandered along Foula's incredible coastline. Harbour seals lazed in the inlet in the sunshine while Northern Fulmars nested all along the grassy banks. The puffins we did see bobbed about on the water from where some flew up to the burrows treating us to their funny gait as they rushed home.



On our way back to the landing site we stopped by the school with only 5 students who had worked hard to make trinkets for us to buy from them. Each child had their own stall with their

own handmade wares including painted shells and funny pictures of the sheep.



After a hot beverage in the school, it was soon time to head back to the landing site and back to the Plancius. We put back on all our waterproof gear, loaded into our zodiacs and headed for home.



On board we headed to the outer decks to enjoy our last views of the cliffs of Foula before it was

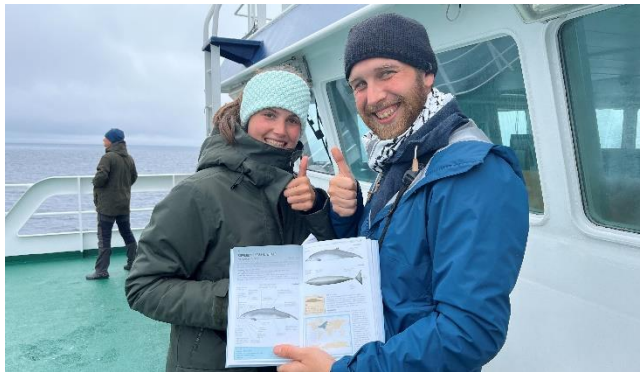
time for a delicious dinner. What an adventure!

Day 5 – 30th May

Day at sea

12:00 GPS Position: 63°23.8'N / 004°04.9'W

Wind: W 4, Sea State: Slight, Weather: Overcast, Air Temp: 7°C, Sea Temp: 10°C



Today we were woken up by the news that there's pilot whales and perhaps dolphins outside! We turned the vessel, reduced speed and soon we were standing in the water enjoying dozens of pilot whales and white sided dolphins swimming near Plancius.

After the usual delicious breakfast, we headed out on deck again and this time the youngest birders spotted a small pod of the rare Sowerby's Beaked Whale at 9 o'clock from the ship, close and swimming towards us. It was a brief sight but enough for most people on the outer deck behind the bridge to see it. New Species to most of us!

During the day we also enjoyed a mind-bending presentation by Eduardo on the deepest oceans in the world where the sunlight never reaches. Alien places thousands of meters deep where 'strange to us' creatures' live lives under different principles. Michelle gave us today a detailed, anecdote full account on how to identify whales.



The sea day carried on in good weather. Overcast but with great visibility and calm sea conditions.



Then in the afternoon, once again another pod of pilot whales, again we slowed down and then yet again another pod, this time with a Humpback whale in the mix. Where the pilot whales rounding up and shoaling fish that the humpback was benefiting from? Maybe, they all seemed to be having a good feeding session.

Towards the end of the day, one final surprise was in store for us, a tall straight blow in the horizon, a large baleen whale!



We still don't know for sure what it was, but she came close at one point. The ship was divided, half the observers thought it was a Sei Whale, the other half thought it was a small/young Fin. True is... nobody could tell for sure. Perhaps if we had seen its right jaw, we would have been able to identify it with more

confidence. Fin whales display a white right jaw.



Another day at sea and so many sightings!

Day 6 – 31th May

Day at Sea

12:00 GPS Position: 67°39.1'N / 006°36.7'W

Wind: SW-4, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 6°C, **Sea Temp:** 8 °C

Today we woke up into a blue-greyish sea. The clouds were relatively low in the sky and the sea was calm. These conditions marked our entrance to a new region of the world, the arctic region. Officially, we crossed the Arctic circle today at around 6:30. This circle is an imaginary line drawn by the learned man over centuries ago that divides the region where the Sun shines for at least 6 months a year, from sometime around March 21. to September 23. The other half of the year is a zone of perpetual dusk and darkness, having a very cold period from November to February. This was the first event of the day.

After a very energetic wake up call made by our Expedition Leader, we enjoyed a good breakfast and then we started the activities of our daily program.

Jan reunited everybody around 10 in the Lounge, in order to offer a short explanation of our current position and to share with everybody the charts of the region of the world where were sailing. The first of those activities was a lecture given by Eduardo with the title "Navigation, Einstein, Clocks and GPS". In this presentation he described the problem of how to navigate across the world and how it

was solved firstly by astronomers, watchmakers and sailors since the late 17th Century until the middle of the 20th Century. Then Eduardo described how the ideas of



Albert Einstein, the concept of space-time revolutionised our understanding of nature, allowing us to build the networks of satellites with accurate clocks that we use today to navigate, the Global Positioning System -GPS. The GPS is our modern way to navigate, and the system needs to take into account the details of space-time in order to work accurately.

Lunch came at noon and with it, we all recovered our energies.

Timely, shortly after lunch a pod of Killer Whales appeared in the horizon. We estimate that we saw about 20 of these whales swimming and displaying around our ship. It was a fantastic sight given the calm conditions of the ocean. The animals displayed very well, allowing us to identify a couple of big and tall dorsal fins, -the males of the group. We also could identify a couple of big females and a couple of small calfs swimming among the waves. This was a magnificent sight for everybody on board.



Later starting around 14:30, Michelle gave a presentation about the early history of whaling in the Arctic. She presented a lot of interesting material covering this subject. Among all the themes presented by Michelle, perhaps the most interesting one was to hear the human side of this endeavour; here she described for example the garments, clothing and tools used by these early visitors. Similarly, her presentation showed how the acts of these early

visitors affected the wildlife and how in their pursue, they exterminated whales, bears and birds also in this beautiful area of the world. Michelle got a good number of questions at the end and a good applause from the public.

In the late afternoon Tiphonie presented a lecture with the title "The Island of Jan Mayen". In this presentation, she introduced all the guests to the history and geography of this desolated island. Being herself an islander, she found many parallels between her native Falkland archipelago and the life at Jan Mayen for the members of the station. Her presentation also showed images of the military and meteorological base located there describing how rare are the flights from mainland Norway to the island carried by the Lockheed Hercules C-130 planes of the Norwegian Air Force. With vivid images and good descriptions, of the whole island, her presentation earned a big applause at the end.

At 18:30 we had our daily recap, where Jan described the details of the plan we had for Jan Mayen, as well as the regulations that apply to the island under the Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators --AECO. Today was our first evening without 'night' because we have reached such a high latitude that the Sun stops setting.

As we sailed the remote far North Atlantic, our vessel Plancius plough into the weaves against the wind, and into the fog and the twilight of the night.

Day 7 – 1st June

Jan Mayen

12:00 GPS Position: 71°00.7'N / 008°39.5'W

Wind: S-3, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 3°C, **Sea Temp:** 10°C

The bright and already northerly low sun bathed the turbulent ocean in light. It wasn't exactly stormy, but the waves were quite high, and their crests foamed now and then. Rocking and tilting alternately to the right and then to the left, the Plancius moved northward. It was still very early in the morning when we began to discern the shapes of a huge mountain emerging through the mist—straight ahead lay Jan Mayen Island.

We stood on the open decks, armed with binoculars. We were dressed up in warm jackets. The wind tousled our hair, and a sense of adventure filled the fresh air. We were full of hope, as a landing was planned for today!



Plancius rounded the western tip of the island and was now moving northeast towards Kvalross Bay. According to local regulations, this is the only place where travelers allowed to land, and take a walk a few kilometers inland. Huge waves furiously crashed against the shore, sending myriad sprays into the sky. This filled our hearts with anxiety, but we continued to hope for a favorable outcome. There is no dock on Jan Mayen Island—it is simply impossible to build one because, as with most other volcanic islands, the depth increases rapidly. Can you drive piles into a nearly vertical cliff? No, you can't. Therefore, the landing was planned to be carried out by beach landing using our Zodiacs. Upon reaching Kvalross Bay, the ship stopped. The expedition team, already fully equipped, boarded two Zodiacs and set off to scout. They needed to assess the conditions and find a place on the shore where the landing would be safe. All we could do was watch them go and empathize.



The two Zodiacs sped confidently towards the shore, raising sprays. The swell was large, so sometimes the Zodiacs simply disappeared from view, hidden behind the crests of the waves, only to reappear a few moments later. Almost reaching the shore, they suddenly stopped and hovered on the water's surface, being rocked up and down by the big waves. It seemed this was the moment when the expedition leader, with the help of his colleagues, was making a decision. We, in turn, also froze, watching this from the open decks of the Plancius. So, what was it going to be? Landing or no landing? The Zodiacs moved again and, passing along the shore to the place where the sandy beach ends in a wall of sheer cliffs, set a course back to the ship.

As the Zodiacs approached the lowered gangway, Jan, our expedition leader, just looked at us and shook his head. That was enough to understand that there could be no question of a landing. It was too dangerous, and Jan, more than anyone, knew the cost of a possible mistake. The Zodiacs were lifted onto the deck, the gangway was raised, and we continued our journey.

The captain decided not to head north immediately. Instead, we followed the northeast along the coast of Jan Mayen and spent a few hours admiring the views of the island and especially the huge volcano, Beerenberg. Its slopes were covered with glaciers, and the summit was hidden in clouds. This is probably how J.R.R. Tolkien envisioned the Lonely Mountain, in whose depths, after driving out all the dwarves, the dragon Smaug settled.

After some time, we finally set the course North, and Jan Mayen Island, now behind the Plancius, gradually began to recede and fade into the mist. Well, we hope that the island will be a bit more hospitable to other travelers.

We spent the rest of the day watching a film about orcas and observing wildlife from the open decks.



Some of us occasionally spotted bottlenose dolphins, seals, and various seabirds. We continue moving north.

Day 8 – 2nd June

Day at Sea

12:00 GPS Position: 75°45.1'N / 006°07.1'W

Wind: SE-2, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Fog, **Air Temp:** 1°C, **Sea Temp:** 2°C

Good morning Plancius!

Today we woke up in a white world. Not because we had reached the ice already, but because the ship was surrounded by a thick layer of fog. No wind is always nice because it means a comfortable and stable ship, but in the high arctic it also means that we're often encountering fog. For today it wasn't so bad as we still had to sail quite a distance to reach the pack ice. However, for spotting wildlife, fog is quite a dealbreaker as it simply limits our visibility. Still, many of our guests took the opportunity to be outside for some fresh air and to keep an eye out for arctic animals.



In the lounge Michelle kicked off the lecture program with a very interesting presentation about polar bears. She prepared us well with lots of information and now we kept our fingers crossed hoping that we would see one of these impressive animals in the ice from the ship. With so many bird lovers onboard our chances of spotting a bear

would be a lot higher since the birders are keen on seeing ivory gulls. And when you spot ivory gulls, quite often a bear is around since the ivory gulls feed on the carcasses killed by polar bears. Michelle illustrated that with a good sense of humor ;).

After another delicious lunch it was time for a small snooze before our house astronomer Eduardo recited his Climate Change lecture. A very interesting and eye-opening presentation that made quite an impact and led us to think about the future. Eduardo shared the causes of climate change, where we are heading if we don't undertake any action, and what influence climate change will have on our natural and wildlife world. But it wasn't all about doom scenarios, Edu also talked about initiatives taken related to new clean energy sources, a changing economic model and future innovations that might contribute to influencing climate change positively.

The afternoon snack was a delicious home baked chocolate chip cookie and with a warm coffee or tea at hand our excitement increased as we could reach the pack ice at any moment now.

The very first tiny bit of ice was spotted by our guests outside on deck 7 and when they saw it, they produced a loud cheer!





The ice we encountered unfortunately was too fragmented and that's usually not 'good' ice to spot polar bears. Polar bears prefer larger ice shelves as this helps them to maintain good energy levels because they don't have to swim and climb back onto the ice as much. Therefore, expedition leader Jan and captain Ernesto decided to leave this ice in search of more suitable polar bear ice. And with that also increasing our chances of potentially seeing bowhead whales. Fingers crossed for tomorrow!

Good night!



Day 9 – 3rd June

Day at the Ice

12:00 GPS Position: 77°08.5'N / 002°05.4'W

Wind: N-5, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Fog, **Air Temp:** 0°C, **Sea Temp:** 0°C



Since the early morning, the weather didn't bode well: a strong northern wind blew, the low sky ominously hung over the ocean, fierce waves continuously crashed against the bow of our ship, the Plancius. We continued moving north. The idea was to reach the pack ice and explore it for representatives of the local fauna.

The Arctic seemed quite unwilling to welcome us into its domain. Whether we arrived too early or somehow angered the local gods (or any other

kind of justice under the sky) by excessively enjoying life during our Scottish landings on the shore – it was unclear. What was clear, however, was that the weather conditions put us to the test.

Closer to noon, the gray low sky on the horizon started to take on a lighter, whitish hue – a sure sign that the pack ice was nearby. And indeed, within minutes, the first ice floes emerged from the mist and gray clouds, followed immediately by others, forming a dense ice belt. There it was – the ice!

The Plancius, staying at a distance of several dozen meters from the ice edge, moved in a northern direction. We all poured out onto the open decks and, setting up our tripods to which binoculars and scopes were attached, began scanning the surface of the ice for representatives of the local wildlife – seals and perhaps even those large, white, furry beasts that hunt these seals.

The ice remained absolutely lifeless, but at one moment, right near the edge, a Bowhead whale emerged for a few seconds and spouted! A rare representative of cetaceans. Many of us managed to capture this moment, and if not take a photograph, then at least simply observe this unique animal.

After lunch, we continued scanning the space around the ship for wildlife, but had no particular success. Moreover, the weather continued to deteriorate, the wind strengthened, and the waves grew higher and higher. Unfortunately, some of us began to show symptoms of seasickness.

The Plancius patiently moved northward, the bow of the ship, lifted by yet another huge wave, soared up and then fell down, cutting through the water and sending billions of splashes that flooded the windows even on the uppermost decks, up to the captain's bridge. The captain even had to order the closure of some open decks, as it was unsafe to be on them.

A barbecue was planned for the evening, but it had to be canceled too, because the elements were not to be trifled with. No big deal, though, dining in the restaurant – a pleasant thing in any weather. Late in the evening, at 20:45, Sasha, one of the guides, gathered us all in the main lounge and told us his story of relations with Spitsbergen and shed light on some episodes of his life in one of the Russian settlements of the archipelago. Those of us who weren't laid low by seasickness listened with pleasure. Spitsbergen is getting closer and closer!



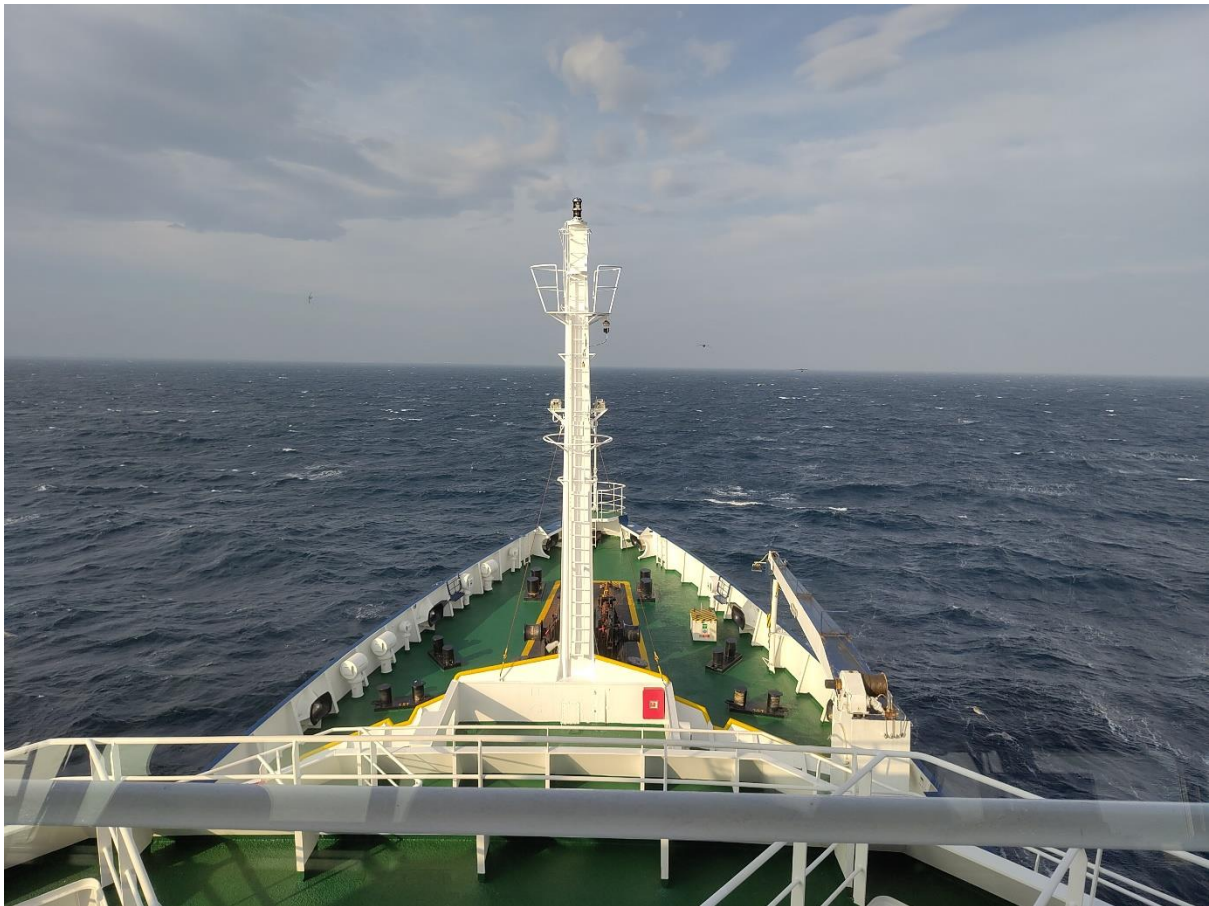
Day 10 – 4th June

Day at Sea

12:00 GPS Position: 78°00.8'N / 007°39.3'E

Wind: ENE-4, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 4°C, **Sea Temp:** 4°C

We once again awoke to the sound of our expedition leader Jan Belgers calling over the PA. He had good news for us that the wind was finally dying down and though we hadn't made as much progress in the night as we hoped during the storm, he had a plan. After a hearty breakfast we made our way to the lounge for our first talk of the day at 10 am.



Jan would give us a briefing of the plan for today, and also give us the mandatory polar bear briefing. So, the new plan was to cruise the sea shelf of Svalbard where good upwellings would entice whales! After our mandatory polar bear briefing we were treated to a wonderful lecture from our expedition guide Michelle van Dijk entitled "Discovery of Spitsbergen and the political situation today". It was interesting to find out what an interesting and complex place it is to live.

After the lecture it was then lunch time, but we didn't have too long to relax as we soon arrived at the sea shelf and the sun began to shine. We enjoyed some time on the deck every now and then sighting a blow in the distance. At one point we were treated to White Beaked Dolphins bow riding next to the ship. We spent most of the afternoon navigating along the shelf, there were several blows but unfortunately none were too close.



In the late afternoon at 4:30 it was time for another lecture this time from our expedition guide Paolo Bellezze entitled "A Brief History of North Pole Exploration". After the lecture we are heading back outside again. Peeking out of the mist we started to view the snowy mountains of Svalbard! So exciting!

We had a delicious dinner later and then spent the rest of the evening admiring the views coming out of the mist. As we sailed into St. Jonsfjord and got closer to the land a polar fox was sighted and a little later another one, and another one, running along the coast.



Day 11 – 5th June

Poolepynten & Ymerbukta

Day at sea

12:00 GPS Position: 78°21.1'N / 012°20.9'E

Wind: NE 5, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 1°C, **Sea Temp:** 2°C



We are finally here! We woke up in Svalbard! The night was windy, but conditions have improved, and our expedition team heads out to assess conditions and scout for polar bears. There is a first scouting session done from the bridge and outer decks with binoculars and telescopes before sending zodiacs ashore and confirm no polar bears are on sight.

Once all is given the green light we are called by group and the first little adventure of the day is called “swell at the gangway!” boarding the zodiacs

is challenging but working as a team with guests, Able Seamen and Guides we are all soon on our way to shore where our second little adventure awaits! landing.

There is a bit of a swell, and the landing is a little splashy but fun, after some ‘sit and slide’ towards the bow, we swing our legs towards the driver and climb out with the help of the guides ashore.

We are now in Poolepynten, named after Jonas Poole, a British Whaler. A wide-open plain with long beaches and a Walrus colony at the point!

There are a couple of these charming, blubber full walrus in the water as well as some hauled out at the beach.

We get chance to snap many pictures... we will remember this encounter.



After heading back to the ship, once again we are served a delicious lunch as we relocate to our afternoon location, Ymerbukta. The expedition team has planned a zodiac cruise. Winter has only started to retreat here, and we wrap up warm for a wind chilled ride accompanied by sleet.

As we slowly plod into the waves, we approach the coast and Jan first spots a swimming walrus, then a flock of eider and king eider ducks. Not long after we find them a few more eiders arrive, and a mighty fight starts between them! Someone was not happy with the new arrivals for sure!



We then cruised towards a glacier front until reaching the fast ice remaining from winter. We followed the ice edge and find harbor seals, a walrus climbed on an iceberg, guillemots, eider ducks, long tailed ducks, barnacle goose, etc.

It was a great cruise, a chilly one for sure, but a fitting end to our Arctic adventure.

Once back on the ship, it was an emotional last evening. The captain said goodbye and the final slide show reminded us of all the things we've seen, from sunny Vlissingen, Aberdeen and Foula, the sea days, Arctic ice edge and Svalbard.

It really was something very special enjoyed in the best company.



Day 12 – 6th June

Disembarkation

12:00 GPS Position: 78°13.8'N / 015°36.2'E

Wind: N-4, **Sea State:** Port, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 4°C, **Sea Temp:** 1°C

Our bags were packed and left outside our doors for the staff to collect. After a last breakfast, we disembarked the ship and said goodbye to Jan and his team. We can't thank him and the rest of the staff enough for all their hard work. Except for some who will stay on for the next trip, we leave with some sadness but also with many fond memories we will never forget. A few of us are already thinking about coming back to the Arctic.



Thank you for your enthusiasm and support, but most of all for joining us on this exploratory North Atlantic voyage. We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be!

Total distance sailed: 2291 nautical miles

Farthest north: 78°20.0'N / 009°47.8'E

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Ernesto Barria, Expedition Leader Jan Belgers, Hotel Manager Oleksandr Lyebyedyev, and all the crew and staff of M/V Plancius, it has been a pleasure travelling with you!