



**OCEANWIDE**  
30 YEARS OF EXPEDITIONS

East Spitsbergen Explorer  
Home of the Polar Bear, Summer Solstice  
20<sup>th</sup> June – 27<sup>th</sup> 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: **Sebastian Alexandru**

Hotel Manager: **Oleksandr Lyebyedyev**

Assist. Hotel Manager: **Bogdan Manevski**

Head Chef: **Ivan Yuriychuk**

Ships Doctor: **Jon Messing**

Expedition Leader: **Phillipp Schaudy**

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

Expedition Guide: **Alexander Romanovskiy**

**Beth Hitchcock**

**John Rogers**

**Koen Jongerling**

**Paolo Bellezze**

**Tiphanie May**

## Day 1 – 20<sup>th</sup> June

### Longyearbyen - Embarkation Day

**12:00 GPS Position:** 78°14.0'N / 015°37.4'E

**Wind:** SSE 3, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 5°C, **Sea Temp:** 5°C

Today is the today! It is finally time for us to embark upon our arctic adventure! The day was suitably arctic with clouds and a strong breeze, but the gales from the early morning had abated. In the late afternoon we arrived at the dock where we could see our ship Plancius, our new home for the next 8 days, at anchor in the harbor. We had a bonus Zodiac shuttle to start our expedition. Onboard we all checked in and were quickly escorted to our respective cabins. We excitedly started exploring the ship and wandering the decks enjoying the views of Longyearbyen.



Once we were all aboard, we were invited to the lounge to take part in a mandatory briefing and abandon ship drill. After we completed the mandatory drills, it was time for the ship to leave. At 18:30 we weighed anchor and were on our way out of the harbour.

Whilst the crew made sure we left the harbour soundly, our expedition leader Phillipp invited us back to the lounge for the Captain's Cocktails, where we met our captain Ernesto Barria, and the rest of the expedition

team. We celebrated our expedition with some bubbles and canapes before we were called for the final activity of the day: dinner!

We all filed down to the restaurant for a delicious buffet and an opportunity to meet all our fellow travellers. For this voyage about half of us had been on the previous voyage as well – and were going back-to-back – making introductions that much easier.

Our day was not done yet as after dinner we located the Boot Room and collected our rubber boots, and the long walkers convened in the lounge for an introductory briefing. We were another step closer to being able to start our off-ship activities.



We spent the rest of the evening enjoying the long summer light into the evening before returning to our cabins to prepare for tomorrow's adventure!

## Day 2 – 21<sup>st</sup> June

### Hornfjord

**12:00 GPS Position:** 77°00.1'N / 016°09.5'E

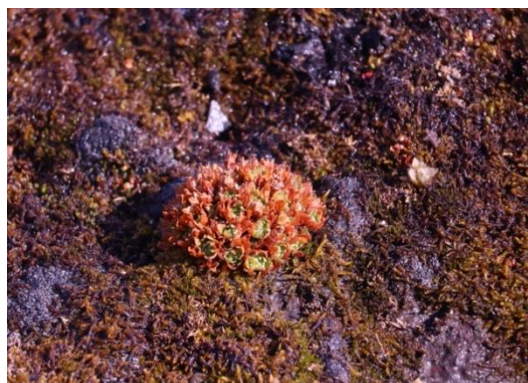
**Wind:** S 2, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 1°C, **Sea Temp:** 1°C



After our first night underway, heading south, we arrived at the entrance of Hornsund early in the morning. The wind was strong, gusting up to 50 knots. The mountains were topped with lenticular clouds and fast ice lined the inner reaches of the fjords. We made our way into the inner most bay of Hornsund called Brepollen. This is a bay surrounding by glaciers from all sides. These glaciers once rumbled down the valleys much further than they do today, even reaching as far as Treskelen in 1900, the site where we went ashore.

Excited guides and guests wandered the decks off Plancius with their binoculars to hand. The patchy snow at this time of year makes spotting challenging so you must focus if you want to find anything around here. Dark grey seals were spotted on the fast ice, resting next to a convenient hole in the ice.

After breakfast, we had our mandatory briefing for how to board and unload zodiacs, a useful lesson particularly when the weather is not so calm. Our expedition leader Phillip also introduced the plans for the morning's walks in more detail and polar bear safety.



At the landing site, on the western side of Treskelen, we set off exploring the rocky, snow laden peninsula in our groups. We divide into groups so we could go at our own pace, whether that was slow and steady for taking many photos, or a brisk walk to get to the hilltop and see the views to the east. From the high ridge, we could see from above the large areas of Brepollen covered in fast ice. The wind was strong, blowing us backwards as we tried to walk up the loose rock to the ridge. Each step on the snow was a surprise, sometimes a foot would sink in, deeper than your knee, other times the hard ice below would hold your foot near the surface.

In our groups we observed the flowers and mosses that persevere in this harsh environment, growing into a colourful display during the short burst of summer. Tufted Saxifrage and Purple Saxifrage were amongst the most common seen, which are pioneer species colonising the landscape. The rocks which we walked on were also of interest. They are sedimentary layers that were laid down during a time when the climate and setting were quite different for Svalbard. We began walking on limestone type rocks, representing a time when Svalbard was further south, near the equator. By the time we made it to the top of the ridge, we found ourselves walking on dark coloured rocks called shales. These represent a change in the conditions as Svalbard slowly drifted north due to plate tectonics, reaching a climate where fine muds were deposited in cold shallow seas.



A group also went for a longer walk, taking a packed lunch ashore to allow an extension along the coastline. We had lunch at an old trapper's hut which is used occasional by private trips visiting Hornsund. Our walk ended near a stony beach where we were shuttled back to Plancius.

The afternoon was spent zodiac cruising for those who did not join the long hike. Burgerbukta is split into two fjords now that the glaciers have retreated beyond the rocky spur. We made our way into the eastern fjord of Burgerbukta where the glacier Mühlbacherbreen forms a calving glacier front.

The fast ice covered a lot for the bay making an area that was impassable to the zodiacs. One kittiwake was attacked by an arctic skua, which was caught on camera by some. Brunnichs guillemots and fulmars were also seen. The impressive landscape was wonderful to see from the water, making us feel small in such a vast setting.

In the evening, Phillip, Beth and Eduardo gave some talks on the plans from the following day, the geology we had seen today and the importance of this day as the summer solstice: a day that is important for many cultures around the world!



## Day 3 – 22<sup>nd</sup> June

### Cruising the Pack Ice

**12:00 GPS Position:** 77°24.8'N / 019°59.3'E

**Wind:** NW 2, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** P. Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 3°C, **Sea Temp:** 0°C

After a night of a little more movement than we are used to from the ship, we were awoken by our expedition leader Phillip to find a beautiful sunny day outside and some of our first glimpses of the pack ice. The ship skirted around the edges as our expedition guides and crew scanned the horizon for wildlife. We are trying to work our way north.



We gently cruised along the edge for the first part of the morning. At 10am our expedition guide Koen Jongerling gave us a talk about sea ice. It was extremely interesting, and we learned a lot about the state of the sea ice in Svalbard.

By about 11am Plancius started to make her way inside the pack ice so we could see for ourselves. Pieces of ice were gently crunching against the side of the hull. Many of us hung out on the decks as we entered a whole new world. We could already see the land ahead of us, but it was an optical illusion caused by the reflection of the

water making it seem larger and closer than it really was. Soon time for lunch. We enjoyed the buffet watching all the pieces of ice float by the windows.

After lunch we headed out onto the decks again to enjoy the sunshine. Then the PA system announced that a seal had been spotted. The ship moved very slowly closer towards it and we saw that it was a bearded seal. It was so cool! Then the PA system went off again and our expedition leader Phillipp announced that some walrus had been spotted on the ice and we would be trying to get a closer look. We managed to get quite close with the ship and were able to enjoy watching them laying in a pile on the ice. They gave each other no space at all as they wriggled and annoyed each other in close contact. It was magical!



As we continued our wildlife search through the ice, we were informed that hotel manager Alex and his team would be serving hot apple juice on the deck behind the bridge with a little extra kick if wanted. We all gathered behind the bridge and enjoyed the hot juice and the atmosphere of being in this wonderful place bathed in sunshine.

Afterwards it was time for us to join the expedition team in the lounge for recap. Phillipp gave us the plans for tomorrow and expedition guide Tiphonie gave us a recap about Walrus followed by a recap about the Arc of Meridian expeditions given by expedition guide John.

Afterwards we all filed down to the restaurant for a great dinner before retiring for the evening.

## Day 4 – 23<sup>rd</sup> June

### Russebukta and Habenichbukta

**12:00 GPS Position:** 77°35.5'N / 020°59.6'E

**Wind:** S 2, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 2°C, **Sea Temp:** 3°C

Good morning, everybody. What have you seen so far? Well, absolutely nothing to be honest. Only mist and water.

This was the start of our day. Luckily our EL had already made up a plan, before breakfast, to “hopefully” get to a better area with more visibility. Everybody was informed after breakfast that we had set sail down south to an area called Russebukta. We sailed for about 2 and a half hours through the mist, and it never seemed to clear up. Luckily just before arriving at Russebukta we got out of the mist. It clearly showed that there was a bank of mist at the northern end of Edgeoya so it was a great idea heading south in the end. No time was wasted, and activities started right away.



We landed at a small beach which was the start of a large open area filled with many lagoons and small hill tops made of Dolomite rock. Everybody got the chance to choose the leisure, middle or long hike. Meanwhile, while waiting the Snow Buntings filled the area with a song and the Grey Phalarope colored up the area with its red breeding colors. The hikes took us up the plateau and passed by small lagoons where many birds were breeding and feeding. The first birds that everybody could see were Pink Footed Geese and King Eiders. The long hike immediately took a distance from the medium group and headed to some Svalbard Reindeer that were grazing further in the tundra. The medium group took some time photographing the birds and the leisure group took a left turn at the first lagoon. The terrain was a bit wet here and there but was generally quite easy to hike through. Every group had the chance to hike a good distance seeing many kinds of birds, flowers and rock formations. The views around with a blue sky were very pleasant and many people were able to take a moment for themselves to realize where they were in the world. This is a real wild place that has hardly been touched by any human. Pristine and beautiful. A memory that will last for a very long time.



The guides definitely had taken the maximum time to enjoy this amazing place, so lunch was pushed back a bit. The weather stayed pleasant and calm as we arrived at the afternoon landing site called Habenichtbukta. The expedition team prepared for a landing however, together with the bridge team they had spotted 2 larger white spots walking over the tundra far inland. This was both a pleasant surprise and gave for a difficult choice. We were not able to make out if the white spots were polar bears or not. With the chance that 2 bears were walking around at the area we wanted to land the EL made a necessary choice to do a Zodiac cruise instead.

We headed out through the Habenichtbukta looking for wildlife and a possible sighting for two large white dots. During the cruise we were able to cruise along the Dolomite wall at the coast with dramatic basaltic columns. Here we were able to see a variety of birds including the Arctic Tern, Long Tailed Duck, King Eider and Kittywakes. On land we spotted some Svalbard reindeer and could see the remains of a Pomor summer station where these Russians hunted for Walrus around the 1800's. There were sadly no sightings of the earlier white spots. After a 2-hour cruise we turned back to the ship. Which we could have found even if there had been mist as there was a particular smell coming from the back deck.



The hotel department and Kitchen had prepared an Arctic Dinner for us. A BBQ on the back deck surrounded by mountains and ice while music was playing in the background. A moment that would not soon be forgotten. Some stayed and danced to the Macarena and YMCA, whilst sometimes looking out from the

dancing circle remembering where we were and how special this moment really was. Another great memory made for the rest of our lives.

## Day 5 – 24<sup>th</sup> June

### Freemansundet and Cruising the Pack Ice

**12:00 GPS Position:** 77°49.7'N / 020°50.5'E

**Wind:** SW 3, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Foggy, **Air Temp:** 2°C, **Sea Temp:** 3°C



The hopes were high after a fantastic day yesterday and glassy seas and clear skies on arrival to Freemansund. Unlike the day before where we had found heavy pack ice, tonight everything is pointing towards a beautiful morning operation in great conditions. But it wasn't to be. Arctic climate is challenging at best and thick fog was the only thing we could see out of our windows after waking up. Thick fog and thick ice! Not a great combination for relocating fast anywhere. We moved west out of Freemansund and south again to try and find a clear spot, how frustrating for us all, guests, and

crew. Is simply not possible sailing fast in these conditions, is not safe. Is also frustrating to think we went past, twice by the Walruses hauled out at Kapp Lee and maybe even the usual polar bears roaming the coast of Edgeøya, but we could not possibly see them. Nature follows its own agenda and no good will or desire can change it.

Instead, today we had an easy but infotainment packed day with presentations for all taste, 'Svalbard Reindeer', 'Svalbard Plants', 'Arctic Fox' and a talk on mirages and other visual effects typical of these latitudes.

Later in the day, before dinner, the fog lifted enough to make being outside a good option again. Northern Fulmars were flying less than a meter away from camera lenses as they gently ridge soared the bow of the ship.

The weather gods did not smile upon us today but that's nature and luckily, we have two more days to change our luck.



## Day 6 – 25<sup>th</sup> June

### Hornsund – Gåshamna and Gnålodden

**12:00 GPS Position:** 76°56.6'N / 015°49.1'E

**Wind:** NW 3, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 2°C, **Sea Temp:** 3°C



Today we entered the fjord system Hornsund again. Everybody was with high hopes for good weather and especially having no fog outside. When we arrived, the weather looked quite decent although mist was around and blew around the ship just before 08:00. Luckily it was just a bit of



mist and weather cleared enough for us to decide to make a safe landing. This morning landing was at Gashamna. A place where old remains of an English whaling station could be seen right at our landing site. In the beginning everybody was free to walk around the blubber ovens but making sure not to step on anything with moss as there would be whale bones laying there. The two ovens were in poor condition but that was something to be expected if you leave a structure unattended for 380 – 350 years.

Afterwards everybody was divided into groups. The long hikers went round the tip of the bay to look for a Pomor station. Russian hunters that were in the area around the late 1700's and during the 1800's used this site as a station. The long hike was not too strenuous although the guides did get the group a little bit up the hill. The middle group also made their way towards the Pomor station but afterwards walked further too the tip of the peninsula looking for wildlife and different rock formations. The leisure group stayed with Koen and John and explored the vicinity of the whaling station and hiked a little bit towards the rock formations made of limestone/ dolostone where they found an imprint of a clam. All in all, a good morning out.

In the afternoon we went to Gnalodden. A giant wall situated at the beginning of the fjord Burgerbukta. filled with bird colonies. Black Legged Kittiwakes, Northern Fulmars and Brunnichs Guillemots breed here in large quantities. The approach was a bit difficult with all the ice on our way towards the coast and there was quite a bit of swell at the landing site. We did make it happen and landed everybody on the coast. We met at the hut just over the hill where we met a surprise. Two



Arctic Foxes came running over the hills just above us out looking for food. One ran up the hill quickly but the other stuck around for quite a while. Everybody had a good time taking pictures of the Fox although some people had to take care as they were getting attacked by Arctic Skuas that were nesting at the coastline. One of the Skuas even attacked a Fox while he was running over the hill. Phillip made a choice to make it a perimeter landing which meant that everybody was able to walk freely within the set borders where the guides were standing. This was a nice surprise to finally have some time for yourself to fill in and do what you like to do. Some people sat/ laid down. Others walked as far up the hill to see the bird colonies and foxes from up close.

At the end of the landing everybody was offered to join in the Polar Plunge. An experience that many people choose to skip as the waters were ice cold and it was lightly sprinkling. Some brave souls did choose to jump into the water, which made for quite the spectacle. The pool of water was very calm and some people even



to stay in for a short while. The water was measured to be around 4°C. Not too cold, but definitely not comfortable.

In the evening, we had our general recap where we heard about the plans for the following day from Philip. We learned a bit more about Wanny Woldstad who lived in the trapper's cabin for a while with her sons during the 1930's from John. And we learned from Koen why the geological map from Svalbard is so colorful and where it has been for the past 1 billion years.

A great day in the Arctic which gave a lot of good energy for the following and final day of our trip.

## Day 7 – 26<sup>th</sup> June

### Bellsund

**12:00 GPS Position:** 77°33.3'N / 015°04.9'E

**Wind:** NE 4, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 5°C, **Sea Temp:** 4°C

Today we really packed in activities making the most again of good weather. In the morning we landed at Bamsebu, a location with a beautiful wooden cabin surrounded by the reminders of an intense beluga whale hunting. This bay with its shallow waters was attractive for beluga and so it was for whalers who would round the beluga with nets and drag them ashore for their slaughter. Several piles of bones are a testimony for the activity that went on here. We had different hiking groups, the most energetic ones hiked from Bamsebu at Kapp Toscana towards



Recherchefjorden, the other groups spread in hikes of different intensity. Some went towards the base of Aldegondaberget others hiked NW along the coast towards the cabin in Pitnerodden. We found a polar bear carcass, an old rowing boat, remains of a capstan used to tow belugas up the beach and at Pitnerodden, a cabin that appeared to have been broken into, perhaps by a bear. We kept our distance.



All hikes enjoyed good encounters with a small herd of Reindeer, there were males, females, and calves. It was a good quiet moment to observe and take in the sight of these endemic animals.

We then returned to the ship and relocated during lunch time, this time sailing to Recherchefjorden where we would have another landing and we were planning to pick up the long hikers.

On our way to our landing near Calypsobyen at the northwest shore on the entrance of Recherchefjorden, our colleague Sasha spotted hauled out walrus at the southern tip of a spit of land, perhaps a terminal moraine of the Renardbreen (glacier) in Josephbukta and a new plan was hatched.

We would again split in groups for different hikes landing near Calypsobyen and from there we would walk whilst also being shuttled to near the walrus colony to have some time observing these very calm and sleepy beauties.



Some hikers went to see Renardbreen, whilst others hiked to the 1918-19 remains of the Northern Exploration Company, Calypsobyen. These buildings show excellent examples of artifacts, buildings and a number of small rowing boats including a large barge very well preserved. They attempted to exploit a seam of coal that reaches the beach and where the collapsed entry to the mine is still visible. It is also possible to see a narrow gauge railway track coming from the mine and some carriages. In the NW end a 'lucky' building which narrowly escaped the fall of a tall telegraph pole.

After two hours of walking, we headed back to the landing site and were shuttled to the walrus haul out. What a great experience! There were around 20 beautiful walruses, sleeping and rolling in the sand, we had a quiet moment to appreciate them fully and take pictures with the perfect backdrop of the glacier.

Finally, we returned to the ship and the very last zodiac had the chance to enjoy a minke whale which appeared at the last moment. It was very interactive, and it showed its jaw out of the water a couple of times before swimming away. What a great moment to finish our last operation.

In the evening, the Captain's Farewell Cocktails and beautiful dinner was wrapped up by Sasha's unique and very special invitation for his slideshow of the trip. He had worked every free moment in producing this long and detailed video diary for our trip and it really showed. We all loved going through the memories of what was the trip of a lifetime.





## Day 8 – 27<sup>th</sup> June

### Disembarkation

**12:00 GPS Position:** 78°15.3'N / 015°06.3'E

**Wind:** NE 6, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 5°C, **Sea Temp:** 6°C

All too soon we arrived back in Longyearbyen. Almost half of us were staying aboard for the next voyage but for the rest it was time to say our goodbyes. The staff and crew took care of our luggage, battling the strong, gusty wind and rain to transport it by Zodiac to the dock. We had our last breakfast aboard the Plancius then gathered the last of our things and headed for the Zodiacs ourselves. The drivers did an excellent job of keeping us as dry as possible. We said goodbye to the whole team and took the buses waiting for us to start the journey home or to our next adventure.



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: 865.0 nautical miles.**

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