



**OCEANWIDE**  
30 YEARS OF EXPEDITIONS

North Spitsbergen Explorer  
Versatile landscapes, sea ice & wildlife  
27<sup>th</sup> June – 4<sup>th</sup> July 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 Kalaria**

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: **Michelle van Dijk**

Expedition Guide: **Alexander Romanovskiy**

**Beth Hitchcock**

**John Rogers**

**Paolo Bellezze**

**Ross Wheeler**

**Tiphanie May**

## Day 1 – 27<sup>th</sup> June

### Longyearbyen - Embarkation Day

**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

Today is the today! It is finally time for us to embark upon our Arctic adventure! In the late afternoon we arrived at our ship Plancius, our new home for the next 8 days. She rocked gently against the pier as we climbed the gangway onto the decks. The day was suitably Arctic with clouds and chilly wind – but we were warm and comfortable aboard. 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. During the drill we cast off and were on our way out of the harbour.

Whilst the crew made sure we left the harbour soundly, our expedition leader, Phillip, invited us back to the lounge for the Captain's Cocktails, where we met our captain Ernesto Barria, and 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. Our day was not done yet as after dinner we located the Boot Room and collected our rubber boots. We were another step closer to being able to start our off-ship activities.

We spent the rest of the evening enjoying our first evening cruise and the never-ending daylight before returning to our cabins to prepare for tomorrow's adventure!



## Day 2 – 28<sup>th</sup> June

### Smeerenburgjorden & Alicehamna

**12:00 GPS Position:** 79°45.3'N / 010°57.1'E

**Wind:** W 4, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 3°C, **Sea Temp:** 3°C

It was a restless night's sleep for many, due to the motion of Plancius in the swell off the west coast of Prince Karls Foreland. We headed north throughout the night, aiming to make good progress to our first planned destination in Raudfjord.

However, not long after our walk-up call, our expedition leader came over the PA system informing us of a polar bear on our port side! We have never jumped out of our beds so quickly after a bad sleep. With layers piled on, we rushed to the outer decks to see the charismatic wildlife that brings so many visitors to these cold, high latitudes.

We watched the bear move across the shores, casually swaying as it strode along the beach. Although the movement seemed slow, the progress was so rapid that we had to adjust our description to newly appearing guests on the deck. The rain did not bother us as we stood, gleefully watching the polar bear before breakfast on the first full day of our expedition!

After we had some time observing the bear, we moved on, heading north. Where we had seen our polar bear, at Sjørgattet south of Danskøya, was still a few hours from our planned morning landing site. Therefore, we adjusted our plans in true expedition style and headed towards the plan B option for the morning.

Just as the mandatory briefings were about to begin, not one, but two bears were spotted on Amsterdamøya, a small island still not where we had planned to go. Major adjustments were made again. A short compulsory briefing was given by Phillip in the lounge before we rushed into our layers and headed for the gangway. We piled into the Zodiacs, eager to get out on the water in the low cloud to search for the polar bears. By this stage we had our eyes on 4 bears! (and 2 puffins)



Two of the bears were playing at the shore when we arrived. As we watched we could see that it was a mother with a cub, probably just over 2 years old, nearly ready to leave his mother. He was being taught how to hunt harbour seals, a useful skill when there is a resident harbour seal colony in the next bay over.

A mother with a younger cub appeared over the low-lying rocks, highlighting to us how hard it can be to spot a polar bear in what appears at first to be flat ground. The mother and younger cub began to approach the

two playing on the shore. Their vulnerability was clear with such a youngster and the older cub came from the water, to state his claim. After some exchange of glances and altering course, the older cub and mother headed towards the carcass which lay along the beach.

It was an incredible series of behaviours which we were able to observe. Everyone returned to Plancius with beaming smiles, discussing the activities we had witnessed and the other significant wildlife and history of this area on the east side of Amsterdamøya called Smeerenbrug.



After a quick stopover on board for briefings and lunch, it was time to head off again. Eventually making it to our planned morning landing site – not that we would have changed a thing from our rescheduled morning!

Alicehamna is a beautiful site on the east side of Raudfjord. This fjord has spectacular dramatic scenery on the west coast and conveniently accessible rolling mountains on the eastern side. We landed near a small hut from the late 1920's built by Stockholm-Sven, as he is locally known. The more recent renovations have left the hut in good condition for visitors like us and those seeking an emergency shelter (not us).



We divided into groups to satisfy our interests; whether that be to have a good hike with superb views, a shorter hike with fascinating talks or a short stroll with plenty of information and discussions around what we could see.



Back at the landing site we readjusted lifejackets and headed back to Plancius. Before a delicious plated dinner, we had a final recap to round up this unbeatable first day in Spitsbergen!

## Day 3 – 29<sup>th</sup> June

### Chermsideøya and Sjuøyane

**12:00 GPS Position:** 80°32.9'N / 019°41.1'E

**Wind:** Nil, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 6°C, **Sea Temp:** 5°C

We awoke to our expedition leader Phillipp telling us over the PA that we had arrived at our first destination and that the weather was beautiful outside. Our first landing would be at the island of Chermsideøya, a beautiful Arctic island with an interesting history.



After a hearty breakfast we dressed in our outdoor clothing and waited for our chance to board the Zodiacs. The expedition team went ahead and prepared the site for us. We shortly followed and arrived quickly at the beach. The landscape is very rocky with lots of boulders everywhere. We dropped our lifejackets and made our way up to Paolo and Beth at the top of the rise where they told us the significance of some rock graffiti made of small stones set into the hillside. There were several names and some years laid out. These stones were placed by old expeditions. On the right-

hand side there were names and the date 1898 which was created by the Swedish section of the Arc-de-meridian expedition, then next to that a swastika created by some young Germans during WWII in 1939 and finally some ship's names and dates related to the search for the Nobile in 1928. Very interesting history in the middle of nowhere.

After we learnt the significance of these markings we were divided into hiking groups; fast, medium and leisurely. We set out on our respective hikes with the fast hikers racing to the top of the hill on the island. The mediums took the low ground and hiked around the base of the hill. The leisurely enjoyed the area close to the landing site and assisted with some clean-up of the plastic on the beaches. The medium hike also assisted and helped arrange the collection of a fishing net found on the shore. After some good hikes across some tricky ground, it was time to head back for a great lunch.



Whilst we enjoyed our meals, the ship repositioned to our next destination which would be Parryoya an island in the Seven Islands. The way to the landing was very shallow so our zodiac drivers had to drive us quite a long way to get us to the landing, but it was so worth it. When we arrived at the beach the sun was shining, the sand was yellow and the water a beautiful turquoise. It was like we had arrived in the Mediterranean and not the Arctic! We landed all on the beautiful sandy beaches and split into our preferred hiking groups. The fast hikers set off at a blistering pace in an attempt to summit the nearest hill, followed by the mediums to hiked up over the saddle to the lakes on the other side of the island. The leisurely group enjoyed exploring the hillside above the landing site and made good progress up to the saddle.



It was a beautiful day, but it wasn't over. We all headed back to the landing site as it was time for a special event for some of us. The polar plunge! Our expedition leader Phillip had surprised us with the news at lunch seems we had the perfect beach and perfect weather. This was an opportunity that could not be missed. As we reached the beach, the hardy swimmers quickly made preparations to enter the water. Squeals could be heard across the bay as they ran into the icy waters and then ran much faster on the way out. Once everyone who wanted to swim had done so we all headed back to the ship in time for a wonderful plated dinner by the

hotel team. It was truly a perfect Arctic day!



## Day 4 – 30<sup>th</sup> June

### Cruising the Pack Ice

**12:00 GPS Position:** 81°19.3'N / 022°28.6'E

**Wind:** W 3, **Sea State:** Choppy, **Weather:** P. Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 4°C, **Sea Temp:** 2°C

After heading in a northeasterly direction overnight, we were greeted with a beautiful blue-sky morning

within the pristine Arctic pack ice. As Plancius was carefully being maneuvered through the expanse of ice surrounding us, Phillipp provided a slightly later wakeup call at 07:45 which was soon followed by breakfast in the restaurant.

With all eyes scanning the horizon from both the bridge and bow, the morning was spent eagerly searching for any wildlife that calls this inhospitable landscape home. We were not disappointed as a beautiful adult bearded seal was sighted close to Plancius on the port side. This seal was accompanied by several sightings of harp seals both on the ice and in the water as well as many species of birds including Brünnich's Guillemots, Puffins, Kittiwakes and Fulmars. As the morning progressed, the sky became more overcast with a slight increase in wind, however, we had luck on our side as walrus were sighted ahead of us swimming in and around the ice flow.



After lunch, we briefly exited the pack ice and picked up some speed in order to seek out a new area to continue our experience in the ice. Whilst we were transiting through the open water the wind increased, peaking at 25 knots from a westerly direction. This caused the pack ice to compact together making it difficult to find a navigable way, we therefore skirted the ice on our port side whilst continuing our search for wildlife.

At 15:30 our Assistant Expedition Leader Michelle provided a very insightful lecture on the life of Polar Bears before we re-entered the pack ice at approximately 17:00. At 18:15 we all gathered in the lounge for an extended series of recap presentations which included a briefing from Phillipp on our plans for the next day, as well as a talk from Tiphonie on sea ice and a summary of the birds seen so far during our expedition from Ross.

Our day finished as it started, surrounded by pack ice with beautiful blue sky and sunshine; however, the day was not over as we all headed outside onto the open decks for a barbecue dinner and drinks as Plancius slowly started to make its way south towards the Hinlopen Strait for our next day of exploration.

The highest latitude reached throughout our day in the ice was 81°20.5' North.

## Day 5 – 1<sup>st</sup> July

### Hinlopen Strait - Alkefjellet and Torellneset

**12:00 GPS Position:** 80°35.7'N / 018°30.2'E

**Wind:** W 1, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 7°C, **Sea Temp:** 3°C

Stepping out on deck brought a smile to our faces this morning as the warmth of the sun glistened off the mirror like water. Rafts of Brunnichs Guillemots could be seen as we neared their nesting cliffs, Alkefjellet, in the Hinlopenstreit. Large flocks flew by, some in 'V' formation and others in a perfect line as they travelled to and from the feeding grounds. The keen photographers among us were out on deck tracking the flight path of passing birds.

After a leisurely start to the day, we headed out in the Zodiacs and towards the towering cliffs of Alkefjellet. This site is famous for the incredible numbers of Guillemots that nest on the ledges of these cliffs. In addition, the cliffs are made of an interesting geological formation where lava intruded into limestone. The cooled magma forms impressive towers, much some standing proud from the cliffs behind. The echo of Guillemots, Kittiwakes and watchful Glaucus Gulls surrounds us as we get up close in the small boats. Looking up into the blue sky, we see black swarms all around the cliffs as thousands of birds arrive and depart from the cliffs.

There are an estimated 65,000 breeding pairs here at Alkefjellet making perfect feeding grounds for those who enjoy a taste of fallen eggs, chicks or unwell adults. We caught a good sighting of a Glaucous Gull dissecting a Brunnichs Guillemot providing a feast. Later we spotted some small grey and fluff Glaucous Gull chicks, perched on a ledge. The Guillemots were still incubating their eggs at this time of year.

Those in the first 2 zodiacs were lucky enough to spot an Arctic Fox. These animals are territorial and in the productive areas underneath the cliffs of Alkefjellet, there is plenty of food for a healthy population of foxes as long as they make the most of the summer activity!



The Zodiac cruise ended at a glacier front where Odinjökulen falls from the side of the cliffs into a small bay filled with brash ice. The blues and layers of black sediment made beautiful artwork out of the glacier front.

After a nice lunch on board, sharing our stories from the morning, we headed out on deck and enjoy the sights of the Hinlopenstreit. To our port side were the flat topped, sandy yellow mountains of Nordaustland. The small islands occupying the sound are low lying dark islands. The strong currents that run through the Hinlopenstreit bring productive waters which can be a good place for spotting whales. With many binoculars in use on deck, we were able to spot walrus playing in the water as we neared Torellneset: our next landing site.





It was only a short Zodiac ride to get from Plancius to the shingly beach of Torellneset. We split into 2 groups so we could each approach the walrus and have a walk in the high arctic tundra. The walk was very interesting as the landscape differed significantly from what we have seen in Svalbard so far. The flowers were mainly the Svalbard Poppy (*papaver cornwallisense*) which is typical for the high arctic tundra. There were also plenty buttercups, drooping saxifrage and scurvy grass. The landscape also showed clear raised beaches - a feature that forms when you have a changing sea level over 100's of years. With the sun shining and no wind, it was the perfect time to investigate and chat about all the features that we could see from plants to landscape to ice.



The haul out of walrus on the beach was impressive with over 60 of them all grunting and making entertaining noises. We had to keep a good distance (>150m) from the walrus as we were lucky enough to have a group that had mothers and pups. These are easy to spot as the young pups don't have fully developed tusks yet. We looked down the beach at the walrus with an incredible backdrop of the mountains of

east Spitsbergen. Occasional groups of water passed by the landing site, inquisitively moving along the coast.

Back on board we had our evening recap and a delicious dinner before settling down in the lounge to watch the beautiful midnight sun and the calm waters of the Hinlopenstreit. Another spectacular day of glorious sun for wildlife watching in Svalbard!

## Day 6 – 2<sup>nd</sup> July

### Bockfjorden and Liefdefjorden

12:00 GPS Position: 79°27.9'N / 013°18.7'E

Wind: W 3, Sea State: Calm, Weather: Overcast, Air Temp: 5°C, Sea Temp: 11°C

Today we awoke as usual to our expedition leader Phillipp calling us to seize the day. We all readied ourselves for breakfast and headed to the dining room for a good start to the day. A glance outside showed that the weather was not quite what we had become used to over the last few days. It was quite overcast and dark in Bockfjord where we would make our first landing of the day, but we were not to be deterred.

After breakfast we put on our expedition gear whilst the expedition team went ashore to scout before us. As soon as the all clear was given we loaded into our Zodiacs and headed for the shoreline. The landing beach was covered in large pebbles and boulders but as we looked up towards the hillside we could see it was covered in thousands of little flowers.



We split into our usual three hiking groups and set off. The long hikers going straight for the high ground, the mediums taking the hillside and the leisurely group following the lower levels of the hills. All groups got to enjoy the beautiful flowers and managed to reach the sinter terraces; large deposits of minerals left by the thermal springs flowing through some of the area. The weather improved as the morning went on and soon it was time to return to ship to relocate to the location of our next activity.

As we enjoyed our lunch in the dining room the ship relocated to our next site called Monacobreen - a huge glacier over 5 km wide! We cruised the glacier with the ship for about an hour enjoying fantastic views. Then we were off again for our third and final destination for the day.



In the afternoon the ship arrived at Texas Bar, the site for our last landing of the day. Plancius anchored nearby a small sailing ship called the "Rembrant" also a member of the Oceanwide family. Our guides quickly lowered the Zodiacs and went to the landing to prepare it for us. As soon as it was ready, we headed to the shore. Texas Bar is a lovely bay containing a small hunting cabin with the name Texas Bar written on the side. Inside it looked like a bar with many empty liquor bottles inside but it was very cozy. We split into our usual hiking groups and set off towards the hillside. The long hikers heading for the elevation gain whilst the medium hikers made the waterfall the goal. The

leisurely group enjoyed the stunning views from the lower hillsides.



As we started hiking, the sun came out and the bright sunshine brought out all the wonderful colors of Monacobreen in the distance and all the beautiful flowers. Those that made it to the waterfall spent some time enjoying the ambiance of fast water. All too soon it was time to return home. We wandered back down the hillside to the beach. Before we knew it, we were back on the ship and it was time for recap. We had a wonderful array of recaps but the one we enjoyed the most was Paolos explanation of the seasons using an orange, a melon, and a load of volunteers. The results were hilarious, and we came away with knowledge of the midnight sun. After recap it was time for dinner. We headed back to the dining room to enjoy a good meal and conversation before bed. Tomorrow would be our last expedition day. What will it bring?



## Day 7 – 3<sup>rd</sup> July

### Lillehöökbreen and Signehamna

**12:00 GPS Position:** 79°20,3'N / 011°38.3'E

**Wind:** E 3, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 9°C, **Sea Temp:** 5°C



After a long overnight sail, we arrived this morning to our destination in Lillehöökfjorden and its 10km+ long glacier front. Around 6 glaciers converge in this end of the fjord to give us two hours of slow and gentle Zodiac cruising. We could see waterfalls coming from the glacier front, sediments, moraines, different types of ice and along the glacier front we saw some very high ice walls. It was interesting hearing the glacier thunder and grunt. The hollow and dry sound of breaking ice blocks, cracking somewhere in the distance but loudly. We also

got to witness a few calving events, the glacier slowly but constantly moving forward, breaking in giant pieces as if crumbling against the water.

Black legged Kittiwakes were not far behind each calving and made their way to the waters that had been stirred by falling ice. There was a lot of life around the glacier front and birds helped providing scale. Those walls really were enormous. It was a slow and gentle Zodiac cruise, peaceful and very rich in colours and textures from the ice.

In the afternoon on the other hand, we moved back towards the fjord's mouth and landed in Signehamna. This site was not only beautiful, but it had a lot of history too.

In the autumn of 1941 during WWII the Germans decided to set a network of hidden weather stations in Svalbard that will eventually provide hourly, coded reports that were essential for the weather forecasting in the North Atlantic and





Arctic, as well as North and Central Europe and consequently essential for shipping and flying operations. It was the 'Weather Wars'.

In the walks we had stunning views towards the fjord and glacier as well as an Arctic Fox, Arctic Skua and a few herds of Reindeer. To wrap up our day we had a lovely sendoff toast by the Captain, the Expedition Leader, and a guest. Last as a very fitting grand finale, Sasha shared his masterpiece, a slideshow that showcased all highlights of our trip and condensed in 20 minutes a week that will stay in our memory for ever.

## Day 8 – 4<sup>th</sup> July

### Disembarkation

**12:00 GPS Position:** 78°13.8'N / 015°36.1'E

**Wind:** ENE 2, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** P. Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 7°C, **Sea Temp:** 5°C

All too soon we arrived back in Longyearbyen and it was time to say our goodbyes. The staff and crew took care of our luggage, placing it carefully on the dock. We had our last breakfast aboard Plancius then gathered the last of our things and headed for the gangway. We said goodbye to the whole team onboard and alighted the bus waiting for us to start the long 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: 1041.25 nautical miles**

**Farthest north: 81°20.5'N / 022°35.6'E**

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