



**OCEANWIDE**  
30 YEARS OF EXPEDITIONS

**Around Spitsbergen**  
**In the Realm of Polar Bear & Ice**  
**04<sup>th</sup> July – 13<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 Lyebedyev**

Assist. Hotel Manager: **Bogdan Manevski**

Head Chef: **Khabir Moraes**

Ships Doctor: **Jon Messing**

Expedition Leader: **Phillipp Schaudy**

Assist. Expedition Leader: **Michelle van Dijk**

Expedition Guide: **Emily Clarke**

**Paolo Bellezze**

**Ross Wheeler**

**Tiphonie May**

**Andrea Schwetz**

**Pierre Gallego**

## Day 1: 4<sup>th</sup> July

### Longyearbyen - Embarkation Day

**12:00 GPS Position:** 78°55.7'N / 011°56.2'E

**Wind:** NW 3, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 8°C, **Sea Temp:** 6°C

Today is the day, 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 10 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 began to explore 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 an 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, Phillipp, 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 all enjoyed our first dinner onboard!



We all filed down to the restaurant for a delicious buffet and an opportunity to meet some of our fellow travellers. Our day was not done yet, 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.

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

## Day 2: 5<sup>th</sup> July

### Ny-Ålesund & Smeerenburgfjord

**12:00 GPS Position:** 78°55.7'N / 015°56.2'E

**Wind:** N 5, **Sea State:** Smooth, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 2°C, **Sea Temp:** 9°C

Our expedition leader Philip woke us up for the first time today as we were already in Kongsfjord. Despite the overcast skies, the scenery was beautiful, with gentle moraine slopes and glaciers in the background. The research town of Ny-Ålesund was already in sight. During breakfast our Captain Ernesto manoeuvred our ship Plancius alongside the harbour and the gangway was lowered. We were able to disembark straight after breakfast.

Ny-Ålesund is such an interesting place both because of its interesting history with the Zeppelin expeditions which were launched from here, but also because it is the northernmost research settlement in the world.



We were able to explore its narrow little streets filled with wildlife: barnacle geese and their tiny chicks, arctic terns dive-bombing us if we came too close to their nests. Some of us rushed into the souvenir shop, whilst others decided to begin with a visit to the museum. Soon enough it was time to gather in front of the Chinese research station for the guided walk outside of the settlement to the zeppelin mast, under the guidance of our assistant expedition leader Michelle, and escorted by our guide Paolo who was carrying a rifle for polar bear safety. Michelle gave us an exhaustive account of the historical expeditions which departed from here, of Amundsen and Nobile and rescue missions. After some more strolling through the settlement and last-minute souvenir shopping, we all headed back onboard for our lunch whilst we transited towards Smeerenburg.

After lunch we all took part in the various mandatory briefings. Once we worked our way through the briefings, our guides spotted a polar bear in the distance on top of a hill, and we were all able to watch the bear before it disappeared behind a hill. First day, first polar bear, a great start. We then decided to have a short zodiac cruise in Smeerenburg where we observed a small group of walrus hauled out on the beach. One of them went back and forth in the water and was easily identifiable as a large male because of his voluminous throat, thick neck blubber and very sizable tusks.

We then headed back to Plancius right on time for a delicious dinner prepared by our star chef Khabir. What an amazing way to end our first expedition day. So many new memories already.



## Day 3: 6<sup>th</sup> July

### Liefdefjord, Monacobreen & Texas Bar

**12:00 GPS Position:** 79°32.8'N / 012°34.6'E

**Wind:** N 2, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 2.2°C, **Sea Temp:** 4°C

We awoke to the sound of our expedition leader Phillip Schaudy calling us over the PA to awaken and seize the day. We prepared ourselves and headed to the dining room to enjoy a hearty breakfast. We could already see our first destination for the day through the windows of the dining room. The impressive Monacobreen could be seen, a huge glacier shrouded in morning fog standing at over 50 metres high.



After our breakfast we quickly dressed ready for our first activity which would be a two-hour zodiac cruise of the glacier and the surrounding smaller glaciers. Our expedition team prepared the zodiacs, we loaded in and off we went to see what we could find. We cruised along the vast glacier front, enjoying all of the beautiful colours and shapes found within the ice. We saw lots of kittiwakes, arctic terns, black guillemots and even some arctic skuas feeding as we travelled along in the zodiacs. Next thing there was a giant rumble then a crash! Part of the ice had calved falling into the sea making a huge splash and even a small wave. It was so exciting!



All too soon our two hours were up. We sped back across the harbour in our zodiacs and arriving just in time before the first spots of rain fell. We all changed back into our ship clothes, and it was time for lunch. Whilst we ate, the ship repositioned to the location of our next activity, a lovely spot called Texas Bar.

After lunch we prepared to make our first wet landing of the trip. Once again, we loaded into our zodiacs and our drivers delivered us safely to the shoreline. There we removed our lifejackets and made our way up to the small cabin nestled on the hillside. The cabin had its names marked on it proudly in large letters and we were allowed to enter to see what life would be like inside. It was basic inside apart from the large amount of liquor bottles decorating the inside. Once we had all arrived at the landing site. We were presented with three options for hiking: fast, medium, and leisurely. The fast group would head for the high ground, whilst the medium group would go for some distance on the lower hills and the leisurely group would enjoy the beach area. Our expedition team pitched their hikes to us, and we divided ourselves into our various levels before setting off.

All hikers were able to enjoy the wonderful flora of the area. So many flowers littered the ground and as we climbed higher, we saw lots of bird life. Snow buntings, Arctic skuas, pink footed geese and many other birds roamed the area. Once we had explored the area high and low. It was time to head back to the ship. We said goodbye to Texas Bar and loaded back into our zodiacs. On returning to the ship, we were invited up to the lounge for our recap. Our expedition team had prepared a series of short talks about the things we had seen today. They were so interesting and straight afterward we were called down to the dining room for a wonderful plated dinner.



We thought the day was over, but we were wrong. As soon as we finished our dinner, there was an announcement over the PA system; a polar bear had been spotted! Swimming in the water past the ship. We gathered our gear and headed for the outer decks to catch a glimpse of this powerful animal swimming from island to island. It was a long way from the ship, but we got to see how fast he could swim and with such ease. As we started to leave the decks to call it a night, the PA system went off again. This time we had belugas on the port side. Once again, we lined the decks and we could see the white flashes of the backs of the belugas as they swam along the shoreline. It was the perfect end to a great expedition day.

## Day 4: 7<sup>th</sup> July

### Cruising the Pack Ice

12:00 GPS Position: 81°06.9'N / 06°27.7'E

Wind: NE 3, Sea State: Moderate, Weather: Overcast, Air Temp: -0.9°C, Sea Temp: -1°C



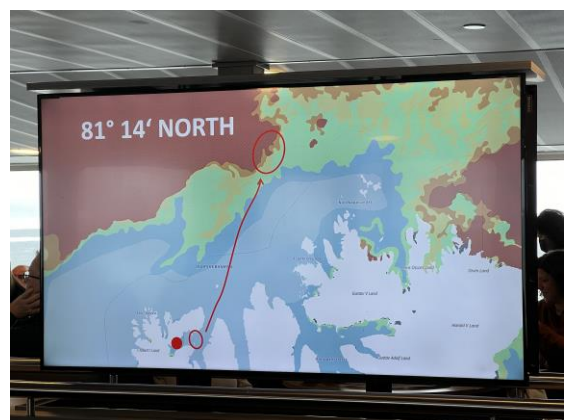
We were woken up a little bit later than the previous days. At 7.45 we opened our eyes and realised that Plancius had arrived at the edge of the pack ice. The overcast weather made for a nice contrast to the blue shades of the ice floes. There was an excited feeling amongst us as we headed out onto the decks before breakfast, glancing at the surreal surroundings. The vastness of the ocean with ice floes everywhere gave us an image of the harsh conditions that polar bears are facing here, but still call it their home. There were many Bearded seals observed resting on the ice in all directions.

After breakfast guests and expedition guides scouted and scanned the horizon from the bridge and outer decks ambitiously in search for wildlife. During our scouting we could see many species of birds including Brünnich's guillemots, puffins, kittiwakes and fulmars. For those who remained on the decks spotting wildlife in the cold, their efforts were rewarded with several Ivory Gulls and at one point even a Sabines Gull was spotted on the ice. These two are especially rare and very the sightings were much appreciated among the birders on the ship.

After lunch, we continued our search for possible sightings of polar bears, the weather had changed with a lot more fog, making spotting difficult. To keep everyone entertained during the period of poor visibility our Assistant Expedition Leader Michelle provided a very insightful lecture on the life of Polar Bears. As the wind picked up by the late afternoon, we slowly headed back in a southerly direction, leaving the pack ice behind.

The highest latitude we reached today was 81°14.0`North. At 18:15 we all gathered in the lounge for an extended series of recap presentations which included a briefing from Phillip on our plans for the following day, as well as a presentation from Tiphane on sea ice, a short biography of Prince Albert from Monaco the First who the Monacobreen was named after from Paolo, and an introduction on Beluga whales from Andi.

After our delicious plated dinner, we sailed into a slight storm and our ship Plancius began to roll a little bit. Finally some authentic Arctic weather to end our day.



## Day 5: 8<sup>th</sup> July

### Gyldenøyane & Faksevågen

**12:00 GPS Position:** 79°44.1'N / 021°08.6'E

**Wind:** SE 6, **Sea State:** Calm, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 5°C, **Sea Temp:** 1°C

With a forecast of winds increasing in the North we leave the pack ice, and sail south overnight. We are looking for shelter and good wildlife sightings. Our planned destination is Wahlenbergfjorden. After a good night's sleep aided by the gentle rolling motion of the vessel, we wake up earlier than expected to the sounds of Phillip on the PA system. Is too early for breakfast surely? It happens that around 06:30am, in the entrance to Wahlenbergfjorden we spotted a mother



bear and her Cub roaming on Gyldenøyane Island, it was beautiful, this cub of approximately 1.5 years of age followed mum from a distance whilst she was roaming perhaps for eggs in nests.

After some time spent watching the bears we carried on our way to our planned landing, unfortunately the wind was too strong with gusts well over 30knots. If conditions deteriorate further once everyone is on land it would be difficult to evacuate everybody back to the ship. Therefore, the landing was cancelled and we continued east, deeper into the fjord to Pemmicanpynten, here we found calmer conditions. We scouted from the bridge ... no bears on sight, we lowered the zodiacs and as the expedition team got ready to head for the landing, there it comes a bear walking in sight! It showed up right where we were planning to land, it appeared from nowhere from the dead ground behind the landing and in the same way, walked away out of sight. After more scouting, we spotted the bear snoozing near the beach on a single patch of snow.

In these conditions it is impossible to land, we would never risk a situation where a bear comes to confront a group of tourists. Too much risk for both tourists and bears. Instead, Captain Ernesto placed the vessel broad side, and everybody was able to observe the bear from the safety of the outer decks. There is still more of the day to be embraced as we head for Faksevågen in Lomfjorden in the afternoon. Enjoying a delicious lunch in the meantime.



In the afternoon we head over to the bay of Faksevågen as planned. The winds were strong from the SE blowing out of Lomfjorden, luckily the captain placed us in a sheltered area for our operations to run normally. We



landed and split into 4 different walks, we all had something to see, walking at our own pace. We tried today to make the most of the afternoon in spite of the wind, a good location was found and great scenic hikes were had by all, the views SW towards the Skinfaksebreen and braided river were stunning and so were the views to the red rock cliffs of Myteberget on the south side of the fjord.

To wrap up the day, we had our first VERY wet zodiac ride back to the ship. It was half a mile straight into the waves and wind and there was not an inch of our clothes left dry! This is adventure!

## Day 6: 9<sup>th</sup> July

### Alkefjellet & Torellneset

**12:00 GPS Position:** 79°34.1'N / 018°53.9'E

**Wind:** SE 4, **Sea State:** slight, **Weather:** Overcast, **Air Temp:** 4°C, **Sea Temp:** 4°C



After a little bit of a bumpy night, we awoke to a foggy morning in Svalbard. We had arrived at the location of our next activity, a bird cliff called Alkefjellet. Unfortunately, we were unable to see it at first because of the fog. It was breakfast time anyway, so we all filed into the restaurant to enjoy a delicious breakfast. By the time we were done with breakfast, the fog had started to clear, and our expedition leader Phillip announced that we would go ahead with the planned zodiac cruise.



We quickly got into our expedition gear and loaded into our zodiacs ready for two hours cruising one of the most amazing wildlife hotspots in Svalbard. As we approached the cliff we could see the air, water and the cliff face were absolutely bursting with bird life. Approximately 75,000 pairs of Brunnich's guillemots lined every ledge on the huge, towering cliff face. Waterfalls poured down from the ice on top and gave the whole place an ethereal feel. There was so much noise from the guillemots as they cackled at us as we floated by. As we observed the cliff the weather improved more and more until we were cruising along in beautiful sunshine. In amongst the guillemots there were several other birds such as black guillemots, kittiwakes, and glaucous gulls. We even observed one glaucous gull chick poking its head out of its nests. As we passed the cliffs and started passing some of green hillsides, the hunt was on to find one creature we hadn't see yet. The arctic fox! We were so lucky, just as the zodiacs were about to leave the cliff face one was spotted. It was scurrying across the rockfalls and grass. We could see it quite clearly as it was still quite white in colour. It was so exciting! After the fox disappeared up into the rocks we made our final cruise at a small glacier at the end of the cliff. We enjoyed the beautiful colours within the ice and sounds of the water rushing out from within it. All too soon it was time to return to the ship so we could make our next destination.



Once back onboard we busied ourselves with preparing for lunch when our expedition leader Phillip came over the PA again. A bear had been spotted on the side of an island and we were on our way to take a look. We all rushed out on deck to see a bear climbing a very steep slope. It was clearly visible against the dark rocks, and we all enjoyed watching it until it lay down in a snow patch and went to sleep. That was our 7<sup>th</sup> bear of the trip!

We left the bear to its nap and headed to the restaurant for a nice lunch. At about 15:00 we arrived at our final destination for the day, a landing called Torellneset, which is a known place for walrus to haul out. Only 50 people are allowed to visit the walrus at once, so we spilt into two groups. One would go to the walrus first and the other would go for a walk first then swap at some point. On the hike we were lucky to find a very curious reindeer. It kept following us and coming close so we could take nice pictures. When it was our turn to view the walrus, we approached very carefully so as not to spook them and got a nice look at them. There were about 50 on the shore resting in big piles, growling and poking each other with their tusks. It was so special. We spent about 30 minutes each with the walrus and then it was time to return to the ship in time for recap and a delicious dinner. It was a wonderful day and we can't wait to see what tomorrow brings.



## Day 7: 10th July

### Sundneset & Kapp Lee

**12:00 GPS Position:** 78°12,2'N / 021°06.8'E

**Wind:** E 3, **Sea State:** Slight, **Weather:** Partly Cloudy, **Air Temp:** 4°C, **Sea Temp:** 4°C

Sundneset this morning, we landed by an old but well-preserved cabin Würzburger Hütte, built by Julius Büdel's Staufferland Expeditions in 1959-1967 dedicated to Natural history, especially Geomorphology. The area we hiked had raised beaches and we saw multiple whale bones high up and far from the water, these bones may be 4000 years old or more. There were also two natural ponds and here we found red throated divers, king eider ducks and barnacle geese. During the walk we saw plenty of reindeer, some of them with young calf's,

always a sweet sight to see them together with their mothers. The ground was wet underfoot, and the artic tundra showed itself in flower. These hikes were thoroughly enjoyed by all.



In the afternoon we had a short sail across Freemansund and landed at Kapp Lee. Here we found the remains of an old Pomors hunter cabin as well as the skulls and bones of hundreds of walrus with their noses and tusks chopped off. This site was a walrus hunting and slaughtering site in the 1700s yet it was somehow



beautiful to see now dozens of walrus hauled out meters away from the graveyard...nature has prevailed, and walrus are returning to the area. We also saw three cabins occasionally used by scientists staying on the site. We explored the area, observing multiple reindeer.

It is striking to see the number of bones scattered all over the place, the whole area is full of them.

We return to the ship in tricky conditions, with a very shallow beach and a difficult, choppy sea at the gangway, luckily, it is day 7 and all guests are getting the hand of our zodiac procedures.

## Day 8: 11<sup>th</sup> July

### Hornstulodden & Treskelen

12:00 GPS Position: 76°38.3'N / 015°37.7'E

Wind: NW 4, Sea State: Calm, Weather: Overcast, rain, Air Temp: 6°C, Sea Temp: 4°C



On the morning of the 11th of July our Expedition leader Phillip woke us up as usual at 7.15. We had already entered Hornsund on the southwestern side of Svalbard. The weather outside was foggy and misty. After breakfast Philip announced that despite of the fog he had found a suitable spot for us to make a landing, the name was Hornstulodden. We were informed that not many landings are made there. After putting our gear on, we soon headed out on the zodiacs towards the beach. We approached a dramatic mountain range with some ice slopes running down from it and some waterfalls. A wild dark beach with some whale bones awaited us. When we left

the zodiacs, some of us observed puffins on our way to the beach and a few Eider ducks were flying above our heads. As usual we were divided into four separate groups and soon after, all groups began their hikes. Many unusual and impressive rocks and volcanic formations, millions of years in age, caught our attention. Then towards Plancius a pod of Beluga whales appeared close to shore, so we could have a nice look at them. After lunch we cruised further into the bay towards the glacier onboard Plancius, for a nice view of Samarinbreen. When heading out of the bay, we were lucky enough to spot 2 humpback whales which were swimming close to the shoreline. Due to weather our Expedition leader Phillip had to change our afternoon activity to Treskelen which was a moraine. Although it was muddy all groups were able to have a pleasant hike with a view towards the mountains of Starostinfjellet. When we returned to the ship, Philip briefed us about our plans for the last day and we enjoyed a recap from Paolo about fog and Pierre educated us with some interesting facts about humpback whales. Another delicious dinner and off to bed after another adventure filled day!





## Day 9: 12<sup>th</sup> July

### Bjørnhamna & Skansbukta

12:00 GPS Position: 78°23.8'N / 016°51.6'E

Wind: NW 1, Sea State: Calm, Weather: Cloudy, Air Temp: 5°C, Sea Temp: 5°C



Our expedition leader Philipp woke us up as usual at 7:15 am to a relatively windy and cloudy day. After breakfast we all prepared for our landing, unfortunately it had to be cancelled because there was too much swell on the beach, and our expedition guides got completely soaked when they attempted to land. So, the ship had to reposition, and Philipp decided to try a landing at Bjornhamna. Less than an hour later we were at the site and this time the conditions were perfect. No polar bears on the landing site either, and once on land we all split into our four groups, a fast hiking group, a medium fast, a medium photography group, and a leisurely group. We all decided to walk along the slope of the hill which had very interesting vegetation and minerals. All the groups except for the leisurely made it far enough to see some reindeer, and

even a polar fox which was very well camouflaged at the top of the hill right under a bird colony.

We all returned to the ship a little later than planned because of the cancelled first landing attempt, and straight after lunch we were already at our afternoon landing site: Skansbukta. This is a very nice landing where we have access to a puffin colony up on a cliff, and there are also historical remains of an old mine. We were all able to spend as much time as we wanted as it was a perimeter landing. At the end of the landing we had our polar plunge where our brave guests jumped into the icy waters of the Arctic!

Back on the ship we all got dressed for our farewell cocktail drink with the captain. After toasting with the captain and thanking all the crew involved in this expedition cruise, Ross showed us the slideshow he had prepared for us during the entire trip. We all got quite emotional seeing all of the places we had been and all the things we had experienced during these past ten days.

It was then time for our last plated dinner served by our chef Khabir, and as usual, it was absolutely delicious. Right before dessert the entire galley, restaurant, and hotel department crew came into the dining room to say goodbye and we all acclaimed them for their extremely nice work during this entire trip. They were always helpful and smiling. We will miss them very dearly.

We all gathered in the bar for a last drink with the new friends we made along this expedition cruise, and exchanged contacts. Incredible memories and friends were made along the way. We will never forget this trip.





**Day 10: 13<sup>th</sup> July**

## **Longyearbyen - 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: 1182.8 nautical miles**

**Farthest north: 81°14'N**

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!