

Spitsbergen



Triplog

s/v Antigua

23 September – 1 October 2021

The s/v *Antigua* was built in 1957 in Thorne (UK) and served for many years as a fishing vessels, until it was completely re-built in the early 1990s in the Netherlands as a barkentine and equipped as a passenger ship. A barkentine has three masts with square sails on the foremast.

Captain – Mario Czok
First Mate – Tom Hulsbosch
Deck hand – Hans Pellegrims
Deck hand – Hylke Talsma
Deck hand – Bert Fransen
Chef – Piet Litjens
Chief Service – Sabrina Fleischer
Service – Ela Mrowiec
Service – Valeriya Mikhalskaya
Expedition leader – Michelle van Dijk
Guide – Jaap van Rijckevorsel
replaced by – Irene Kastner
Photography-guide – Alexander Lembke

September 23.

Longyearbyen

Position at 14 o'clock: 78°14' N 15°36' E

Temperature: 7 °C – Partly cloudy – Wind --

Finally, a miracle. Longyearbyen! For the last one and a half year our travel plans were mashed up by Covid-19, it is hard to believe that we are really there.

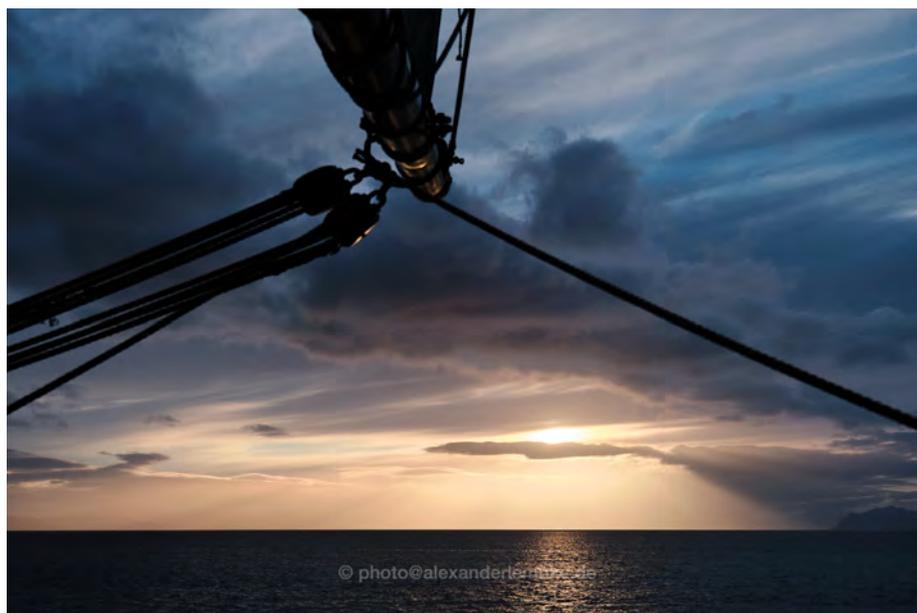
Around 2 pm most of the passengers arrive at s/v *Antigua*, a blue sailing vessel that was going to be our home for the upcoming nine days. We all had to visit the wheel house to sign in. After that we were welcomed inside with coffee or tea and cookies. Captain Mario introduced the crew, followed by the board-safety briefing by our 1st officer Tom. Thereafter, we set sail and left the



harbour of Longyearbyen. Our adventure had begun. After dinner, expedition leader Michelle gave the mandatory AECO-briefing, and told us the do's and don'ts on land. Also, she told us more about the program for the upcoming week.

Because of a storm, we would not be able to leave Isfjord, so we headed to Pyramiden instead.

The cold made us hungry, and at 7 it was dinner time. Immediately we recognised the skills of our chef Piet. A salad, and pasta with different sauces to choose from, and fruit salad for dessert!



After dinner at 21 h we moored in Pyramiden. Although it is a settlement, we were not allowed to go ashore because the settlement is empty and only a week earlier a polar bear was filmed on the pier.

September 24.

Billefjord: Pyramiden, Nordenskiöldbreen & Skansbukta

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°39,3' N 016°22,8' E

Temperature: 8 °C - Overcast – Wind force 2 East

After waking up to our first breakfast buffet onboard Antigua, Michelle introduced Valeriya, member of the ships' service staff, as our guide in Pyramiden. Having lived and worked as a guide in this abandoned Soviet mining town for more than a year, we were all lucky and grateful that Valeriya offered to sacrifice her resting hours and showed us around as a true local.



Already on the wooden pier, the origin of Pyramiden as a mining town was visible by the crane and big bags of coal standing around. In 1998 the settlement was abandoned, after it became unfeasible for Russia to operate two mines in both Barentsburg and Pyramiden. After being a ghost town for nearly a decade, activities have slowly been starting up with the hotel, the culture house and some other buildings being renovated. The number of people living year-round in the settlement and visits by tourists

and locals from Longyearbyen are increasing. Maybe these are the first foundations for Pyramiden to, once again, become a meeting point for people around Svalbard?

The focus of our tour was on the 'golden years' of Pyramiden, when up to 1100 people were living in the settlement. Life in the mining town was comfortable and well-paid, both for Soviet and for Svalbard standards alike. Because Pyramiden was so close to 'the West', it acted as a showcase for a successful socialistic society, supported by the Soviet government on the mainland. In the 70's, visitors from Longyearbyen (who would often be guided by KGB agents) would be both jealous and surprised to see fresh fruit, vegetables and meat from the local farms and greenhouses. Equally



impressive was the main street, officially called the '60th anniversary of the great October revolution' but better known as the Champs Élysées, the only place on Spitsbergen where grass would grow due to 3 meters of imported soil.

Walking past 'Paris' and 'London', the 'Arctic skyscrapers' housing the women and men of Pyramiden, and crossing 'Broadway', the raised wooden walkway, we made our way to the culture house, where our multi-talented deckhand Hans treated us to a mini-concert playing *Stella di Mattino* by Ludovico Einaudi followed by *La cathédrale engloutie* by Claude Debussy on the piano.



After a quick visit to the souvenir shop and seeing the various music classes, ballet class and sports hall, we continued our walk down the Champs Élysées past the canteen and back to Antigua, where our chef Piet had a tasty chicken curry lunch waiting for us.

In late afternoon we cruised to the very end of Billefjorden, around Petuniabukta and in front of Nordenskiöldbreen, on the lookout for something spectacular, which happened in the form of a glacier calving.

Afterwards we started preparing for our first zodiac landing of the trip, in a location that houses another one of Spitsbergen's mining stories: Skansbukta. Here it was attempted to mine gypsum in the 30's, but because the mineral turned out to be anhydrite instead of gypsum, the operation was abandoned quickly. The mine entrance, the railway, an old supply boat and remains of some buildings were all



left behind and provided good photographic motives. Later that evening Alex gave an inspiring lecture in which he explained how we see images and how our mind 'reads' images, whilst the ship was sailing North, through the Forlandsund, destination Krossfjord.

September 25.

Krossfjord: Lilliehöökbreen & Signehamna

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°55,6' N 011°13,6' E

Temperature: 4,8°C – Overcast – Wind force 1 variable

This morning not everyone appeared at breakfast as some of us had suffered sea sickness over night and needed to sleep in, now that we were in the sheltered Krossfjord. We had been sailing all night, but had not reached our final destination yet. So, at 9.30 h Michelle started a lecture about 'The discovery of Spitsbergen and geopolitics today'. She told us the optional answers to the question: Who discovered Spitsbergen? And about the whale war and other disputes around the



natural resources of the archipelago. And still are the natural resources disputed: who is allowed fish or drill for oil? Where is the borderline? Shortly before the lecture ended, Michelle ended the lecture, as she was distracted by the view through the porthole.

The fjord was full of pieces of ice – we were getting closer to our destination. And this fjord filled with ice was so nice, that it would be a pity to stay inside any longer. Ice everywhere, some pieces a bit bigger, others smaller, white, blue & clear as glass and at the end of the fjord, we

could see the majestic Lilliehöökbreen. At around 11.30 we were laying in front of this impressive glacier. Jaap told us that the glacier front is more than 10 Km wide. The soft autumn light brought out all the different shades of blue, and we just could not stop photographing. Unfortunately, there is also one thing that we could not photograph: the sound. The cracking sound of the escaping air bubbles and the rumbling of the glacier. We had seen pictures of glaciers before, but the sound was new to us and made it even more spectacular. A few times the glacier calved, and of course this was what we try to catch with our cameras.





After lunch we landed in Signehamna, a small bay at the west side of Krossfjord. It was hard to imagine that 1941 & 1942 German submarines were laying at the position of our lovely Antigua. These submarines were there to supply material for a German weather station. In 1941/42 that was 'Knospe' and in 1942/43 that was 'Nussbaum'. We went to see the remains of the weather stations and concluded that it was a good spot indeed. It was not visible from the fjord, but it had good

possibilities to keep an overview over the surrounding areas, and there are two fresh water lakes. Michelle also told us about the weather station Haudegen, which was operating in 1944/45 in the North-east of Spitsbergen. At the remains we split up into two groups, Jaap took one group for a longer hike around the lake, while Michelle & Alex spent some more time to get into detail. On the way back to the ship, we all went via a hill that provided us a picture of the Antigua in the bay with ice in the foreground and the Lilliehöök-glacier in the background. Some of us were lucky to see an Arctic fox.



After we all got back on board, we sailed to Ny-Ålesund with a beautiful sunset.



September 26.

Kongsfjord: Ny-Ålesund

Forlandsund: Sarstangen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°55,7' N 011°56,3' E

Temperature: 4 °C – light rain – Wind --

After spending the night on the quayside of Ny Ålesund in Kongsfjorden, we spent the morning exploring this settlement; but only after turning off our digital devices to not disturb the sensitive



atmospheric research equipment that is continuously collecting data here. After coal mining ceased in 1963, the former coal company Kings Bay AS now manages the town to host various research stations from different nations.



In the museum, Michelle gave a lecture about the early life and expeditions of Roald Amundsen, and his desire to be the first person on the North Pole. Just outside the settlement, we passed two harbour seals resting on a sand spit, and stopped at the steel mast that Amundsen used to anchor the airship 'Norge'. Here Michelle continued her



story: 'Norge', flown by Amundsen, Umberto Nobile and Ellesworth, was the first to fly over the geographic North Pole and across the Arctic Ocean to Teller, Alaska. Also blown North by the wind, but much more off-course than Amundsen ever was, was a Northern Wheatear (D: Steinsmätzer, NL: Tapuit, SLO: Skaliarik Sivy, or FI: kivitasku) hopping along the shoreline: after consulting with two ornithologists, Michelle contacted two ornithologists and got confirmed that this species is very rarely sighted here, and only when blown out of their natural habitat. We made our way across the tundra to the old campsite, providing good views of the old mining facilities. Back in town we found out that airships are still flying in Ny Ålesund, this time a research zeppelin from the Alfred Wegener Institute flew overhead taking air measurements for TROPOS.

After a visit to the souvenir shop and the rest of the museum, we used the increasing Northerly wind to set sail Southwards through the Forlandsund. A shallow reef runs across the sound, where the only safe passage is through an opening 100 meters wide. When sailing past this 'Forlandsrevet', we spotted a group of walrus lying on the sand spit of Sarstangen.





We landed some distance away and quietly approached these huge marine mammals, seeing how they would lift their heads and flippers, or even roll over their 600-900 kg bodies. After this astonishing wildlife encounter we continued our course, sailing overnight to the Bellsund.



September 27.

Recherchefjord: Recherchebreen

Van Keulenfjord: Ahlstrandodden

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°37,1' N 014°19,8' E

Temperature: 2 °C – Overcasted – Wind force 2, West

Because of favourable winds, we could sail a long way overnight, all the way from Kongsfjord to Bellsund. Our morning destination was Recherchebreen, a glacier at the end of Recherchefjord, which are named after the ship "La Recherche", which carried a French expedition to northern waters and countries in the years 1838-40. In 1838 the "La Recherche" also came to Bellsund. At 9.30h, we wanted to land on the land spit in front of the glacier, but then Alex spotted a bear at our landing site. And he was not alone... The bear had a catch, and a fox family of five were very interested in some food. They tried to get close and snap a bite, but the bear was guarding his precious seal. This was of course something that we enjoyed to watch. The whole morning the ship stayed at anchor in front of the bear so we had time to observe his natural behaviour in his



natural habitat. This was very interesting, so we all stayed outside as long as we could, and only dropped in for a hot beverage every now and then. The crew noticed that we were getting cold, so Sabrina made some hot wine to warm us up. That was just what we needed.

During lunch, the ship was repositioned to Fleur de Lyshamna and we landed at Ahlstrandodden. The first thing we saw, where three picturesque boats on the beach. But when we turned around and looked up, we saw a mountain of which layers were not horizontal, but vertical. These vertical layers of rocks continued into the tundra, and we could walk between them, as some of the softer rocks had been eroded away.



We could see that these layers once were a seafloor, as there are plenty of fossil shells. We walked over to two cabins, one new from Sysselmesteren and one old that was used for research, this last one also had been researched by a polar bear. We continued over the tundra and had to stay up high to avoid the wet areas. We saw some reindeer in the distance and spend a lot of time photographing the landscape. We needed so much time, that we were running late, so Jaap went ahead to welcome the other group ashore. But then.... Michelle spotted beluga whales in the fjord.



Then they disappeared, but after a while they were visible again. White dots in the water. The hiking group saw them from land, the others from the ship. What an irony that we got to see them at the place where they were slaughtered a century ago.



Next to the cabin 'Bamsebu' piles of beluga bones show the history of this place. The result of hectic and valuable summer-hunting during the interwar years. The beluga blubber as well as the skin was sought after. The beluga whales swam in large groups into the fjords where trappers were waiting with large seine nets to close the mouth of the fjord, trapping and slaughtering the whales.

The last two years this cabin was occupied by two Norwegian ladies, who overwintered here. But by the time they would have been picked up, it was Corona-time so they had to stay a bit longer. You can read their story at: www.heartsintheice.com

After dinner, Alex gave a lecture on photography again. This time it was about composition; the rule of thirds, the golden spiral & the golden triangle.



September 28.

Bellsund: Akseløya

Van Mijenfjord: Fridtjovhamna

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°37,6' N 014°49,9' E

Temperature: 5 °C – light rain – Wind variable

Although we went to bed in Van Keulhamna, we woke up in another location: Midterhukhamna, around the corner. It turned out that during the night Antigua's anchor had lost its grip, so the crew had to quickly move the vessel to a safer place; some of us in the forward cabins definitely noticed the operation of the anchor chain. This new harbour came with an unexpected advantage: after breakfast, a pod of belugas swam close between the shoreline and the ship!



Moving North towards the entrance of the next fjord, we landed on Akseløya, a long and narrow island that closes almost the entire entrance of Van Mijenfjorden. The geological layers on Akseløya are 'dipping vertically', which means they are tilted almost 90 degrees upright. As a result, the top of the island looks like a 'highway' with lines on it, and by 'changing lanes' from west to east we can move 100.000's years in time within a few steps. From the highest point on the island (60m), we could see

Tommy Sandals trapper cabin, from which he lives a traditional hunters life hunting and collecting local wildlife. While we were collecting marine plastic debris whilst waiting for the zodiac on the beach, we found another surprise: fresh polar bear tracks, maximum 1 day old!

It was with a little extra relief we had lunch and continued our way North to Fridtjovhamna: a nicely sheltered bay that is dominated by the front, calves and moraines of the Fridtjovbreen. Here Michelle presented us with 3 afternoon options: enjoy the glacier from onboard Antigua, walk along the beach, or hike up the side-moraine to gain an elevated viewpoint on top of the glacier front. Although everyone was treated to beautiful afternoon light conditions, the long hike was rewarded for their efforts with a unique view: beluga's hunting in front of the glacier front! Due to the elevated position, the hunting strategy of these white whales could be observed, something that is normally reserved professional researchers with access to helicopters or drones.

The zodiac ride back to the ship provided great opportunities to photograph Antigua in ice, whilst afterwards our deckhand Hylke expertly navigated the ship cruising between the bergs along the glacier front. Clear from the ice and shallows in Fridtjovhamna, we found a good Easterly wind and set sail towards a beautiful, long-lasting orange sunset. Out of Van Mijenfjord we turned North with destination Isfjorden.



September 29.

Grønfjord: Grønfjorddalen

Trygghamna: Harrietbreen

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°58,2 N 014°18,3 E

Temperature: 3,5 °C – light snow/rain – Wind force 2, South-east

Overnight we had been sailing, at 5 in the morning captain Mario had dropped the anchor deep South in Grønfjorden. When we woke up, we could see the influence of the warm West Spitsbergen Current (WSC). The deeper in the fjord, the lower the snowline on the mountains. The West Spitsbergen Current is the only current transporting warm (>3°C) Atlantic water into the Arctic Ocean. Heat from the WSC makes Eastern Fram Strait the northernmost perennially ice free sea area in the world and is the dominant factor controlling air temperature over Svalbard.



Alex knew that we were close to a famous cabin, which had been falling over because of erosion. As this is an expedition cruise, it fitted well in the program to search for it. Michelle and Jaap looked on the map and decided that to split the group up. The faster group would go and search the cabin, and tell the others if it would be doable also for the other group. Of course we were all very curious. Jaap and Alex took the fast group along the river bed and over the moraines in search of the Bretjørna hytte.

The group that stayed with Michelle were lucky with two playful and curious seals which followed them along the beach. After a while, Jaap called Michelle to tell that it was not hard to get to the cabin: 'Just follow the river bed and keep the big black erratic rock on your left hand. Then cross a moraine hill or two, and you will see the cabin further to the right than what you would expect.' So also Michelle's group went for it. Bretjørna hytte is almost on a 90° angle, one side already hanging in the water of the glacier lake Bretjørna. If one would enter the cabin, he has to use a rope to climb in, as the stairs are not usable anymore. Too bad that this cabin, which belongs to a Russian botanical foundation, is now in this condition. We all could imagine ourselves to use it, spending a few days at this lake.

For the afternoon, we sailed across Isfjorden to Trygghamna. The crossing was not a very smooth one, so most of us spent it in bed, waiting until we reached the Safe harbour (the original name of Trygghamna). We sailed all the way North, to land in front of Harrietbreen. This glacier calves into a lagoon, of which the entrance is not deep enough to let the bergy bits out. Standing on the beach we could play with the ice, the light and atmosphere was fantastic, and many Christmas-card-photographs were made.





We walked along the lagoon to the eastside of the glacier. From there we could walk upon the glacier itself. Because of all the rocks on top of it, we did not realise instantly that we were actually standing on it. But the crevasses were real, and once we were down to earth again, and we could see where we had been, it was certain that we had been on the glacier. We ended this impressive landing with five minutes of Arctic silence, but the Zodiacs came already to pick us up.



Captain's dinner!
Something we would not like to miss. We were all welcomed with a glass of bubbles. Our chef Piet had already proven to be a good cook during the whole trip, but tonight we could have been as well in a top restaurant.

Starter: Creamy fish soup & Salmon bonbon with a Wakame-cucumber salad.

Main course: Reindeer served with root vegetables and red wine sauce.

Dessert: Lava cake with home made blueberry ice-cream.

After dinner, captain Mario sailed the Antigua to Colesbukta, our anchoring place for the night.

September 30.

Isfjord: Diabasodden

Sassenfjord: Gipsvika

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°06,8' N 14°56,9' E

Temperature: -3 °C – Partly clouded – Wind --

Already before breakfast the anchor was heaved, and during breakfast we were underway to our morning destination. Also the orange boat was lowered as Bert & Jaap had to leave, due to a cancelled and unfortunate rebooked flight. We said goodbye and farewell. By the time the orange boat was in the port of Longyearbyen, another guide was ready to be picked up to replace Jaap on land. Her name is Irene, she is an experienced guide and in



Longyearbyen since 1999. She was guiding on Antigua the trip before ours, and happy to help us out. On our way to the morning landing site, Alex gave another talk on image composition. He talked about the fore-, middle- and background, and the positioning of the horizon.



Our first landing was at Diabasodden, named after the type of rocks of which the rocky outcrops exist. These outcrops are home to many birds during the breeding season, and due to their fertilisation, it was here that we saw more plants than the whole trip together. The tundra was covered by a thin layer of fresh snow, and the sun did its best to conquer the clouds. The soft light gave the world a friendly look.

Reindeer tracks were seen in the snow, and a reindeer skull with big antlers was a perfect photo motive. Before returning to the ship, we inhaled the arctic atmosphere in five minutes of silence.

Our last landing was in Gipsvika. Gypsum lends it name to the area and is easy to see as long, white, horizontal stripes in the plateau rocks around Gipsvika. As in Brucebyen and the area around the Billefjord. Gipsdalen and Gipsvika form a Scottish cultural landscape where the Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate (SSS) has left its mark on the landscape. It was the black gold, coal, they were looking for, and this they found, but with the primitive equipment of the day, the results of their mining operations were not very fruitful. In 1952, the Norwegian government bought all the



SSS property for 550,000 kroner. Spread around in the area by this cabin and toward Gipsdalen there are many cultural remains left by the mining company and their activities carried out here in the beginning of the last century; a cabin, an old rusty American tractor and some tractor trailers.



East of Gipsdalen is the majestic mountain Templet, which looked good wearing a coat of fresh snow, which showed the shape of the mountain even more. At the foot of the mountain were two young, curious and brave reindeer, which came very close to the hiking group, led by Irene. All of a sudden the hiking group turned into a standing group. Nobody would have thought that reindeer would come so close. What a nice way to end our expedition cruise.

Thanks to Irene, who had brought a better beamer along. In the evening it was time to evaluate our photos. We all could submit one photo to Alex, and now he would explain how our favourite pictures could be even better.

October 1.

Longyearbyen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°13,7' N 15°36,7' E

Temperature: 3,5 °C – Light rain – Wind force 3, East

After a final, good *Antigua*-style breakfast it was finally time to say goodbye. In the morning we had some time to explore Longyearbyen. Michelle had printed a list with the opening hours of the shops and musea, and helped us with organising taxis. Hard to believe that the trip had come to an end, and that so much beautiful Arctic experience could fit into our photographs!

Many of us knew already now that this was not our last visit to the Arctic.



Triplog is written by Michelle van Dijk and Jaap van Rijckevorsel.

Photographs by Alexander Lembke.

This triplog can be found on <http://www.spitsbergen-svalbard.nl>

The s/v *Antigua* will continue to sail in Spitsbergen's waters in the years to come; the other sailing ships of the Tallship Company fleet, *Artemis*, *Elisabeth* and *Atlantis*, sail the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea and the IJsselmeer.

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Lectures, Emphasis & Sailing

23 September	Sailing	
24 September	Pyramiden history (in Pyramiden)	Valeria
	Seeing & reading images	Alexander
25 September	Discovery of Spitsbergen	Michelle
	German weather stations (in Signehamna)	Michelle
26 September	Amundsen (in Ny Ålesund)	Michelle
	Polar landscapes	Jaap
	Sailing	
27 September	Composition of images I	Alexander
28 September	Fox	Michelle
	Polarbear	Michelle
29 September	Composition of images II	Alexander
	Evaluation of photographs	Alexander

Kvitøya

Nordaustrlandet

SV Antigua - Spitsbergen

Arctic autumn photo trip
23 sept - 1 okt 2021

- 24.9 1. Pyramiden
2. Nordenskjöldbreen
3. Skansbukta
- 25.9 4. Lilliehöök breen
5. Signehamna
- 26.9 6. Ny Ålesund
7. Sarstangen
- 27.9 8. Recherchebreen
9. Ahlstrandhalvøya
10a. Van Keulehamna
10b. Midterhukhamna
- 28.9 11. Akseløya
12. Fridtjovhamna
- 29.9 13. Grønfjorddalen
14. Trygghamna
- 30.9 15. Coles Bay
16. Diabasodden
17. Gipsvika
18. Longyearbyen

60 km