

# Spitsbergen

## Photography trip



## s/v Antigua

24 September – 2 October 2024

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 – Serge Geurtz  
First Mate – Hans Pellegrims  
Second Mate – Rubin Kramer  
Deck hand – Ids Bruinsma  
Head of Service – Elbrich Bruinsma  
Service – Charlot Laumen  
Service – Wessel Riedstra  
Chef – Piet Litjes  
Expedition leader – Michelle van Dijk  
Guide – Martin Fiala  
Photographer – Jan Lambert

September 24.

## Longyearbyen

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

Temperature: 2 °C – Clear skies – No Wind

It was Tuesday, the 24th of September 2023 14:00 o'clock, when we all met for the first time to begin our journey in the Svalbard Arctic. We all gather aboard the *Antigua*, moored on the floating pier in the harbour of Longyearbyen. Everyone moves into their cabin, and soon gathers their first impressions of the vessel; its cosy salon, spacious outer decks, and towering masts. By three, everyone is on board. After an introductory talk in the salon by captain Serge, we gather on deck for a safety briefing as we leave the town. The outside air is crisp and temperatures are cool, but little wind, and the four o'clock sun casts a warm golden light across the barren mountainscape. We are soon out of Adventfjord and find ourselves in the large and wide Isfjord.



Around dinner time we exit the mouth of the fjord, and head north into the Forland sound. The night sky is clear; stars and a bright quarter moon flanked by Mars and Jupiter illuminate the water. Just before midnight, faint northern lights appear behind us on the southern horizon. We continue heading north, dropping anchor at one in the morning in the bay of Selvågen on the island of Prins Karls Forland.

Many dreams already came true that night, and it was just the beginning of our journey.



September 25.

## Prins Karls Forland: Selvågen & Grimaldiholmen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°33' N 011°16' E

Temperature: 2,5 °C - Cloudy – Wind force 1 North



Snow came down in the night, and we wake up to find the entire landscape white all the way down to sea level. Barely any wind, not too cold, and a warm light breaks between the clouds over the mountain summits. After breakfast and a short introduction on zodiac routines on the deck, we make our first landing on the island of Prins Karls Forland. We come ashore near a small lagoon on the north side of the bay. A curious seal comes to investigate our presence. We split into two groups, some of us hang around the lagoon with Jan and Martin, spending more time focusing on photography, particularly long exposures. Several sandpipers run about by the lagoon. Meanwhile, the other half heads out with Michelle for a longer walk along the coast, taking in the scenery, and coming across some reindeer. We eventually cross paths again at the nearby remains of a log cabin before coming back together.



Lunch is served directly as we are back on board, and we immediately set out of the bay for our next destination a little further north, on the way passing by majestic ice falls, dropping down from the island's rocky pinnacles straight into the sea.

At two in the afternoon we anchor in Grimaldibukta. The bay is shallow with many rocks, so we need to go by zodiacs for about another mile. By three o'clock we land on the backside of the tiny islet of Grimaldiholmen, so as not to disturb the walrus colony we found on the other side. We land on a small beach, surrounded by the imposing pointed mountains and steep glaciers. Our coming ashore requires some further detours with the zodiacs, on an account of several groups of walruses swimming about all around the tiny island. Once everyone is ashore, a brisk walk immediately gets us to the top of the island, offering a full panorama and a lovely view down towards the walruses, though we were able to hear them much sooner with all their loud grunting. The colony includes some females with calves. Many of the animals are quite active, rummaging around on land and frolicking about in the water. After a while we head back, some people sticking around a while longer to take some landscape photos. More curious walruses come and check out some of us as we head back to the ship, while some who stayed on the ship were fortunate to have a humpback whale sighting. Before six we are all aboard again, and the *Antigua* sets out further north.



In the evening after dinner, Jan gives a lecture in the salon on landscape photography. During this time we arrive into Kongsfjord, and as night falls around ten o'clock, the faint lights of Ny-Ålesund come into view. We moor there shortly thereafter, staying for the night.

September 26.

## Kongsfjord: Ny-Ålesund & Ossian Sarsfjellet

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°55,7' N 011°56,1' E

Temperature: 5°C – Overcast – Wind force 3 East



The day begins in the port of Ny-Ålesund. After breakfast we stroll into town, where they have opened the small gift shop for us. This is followed by a visit to the small local museum just across the street, where Michelle also gives the first part of a lecture on Amundsen's attempts to reach the north pole. Afterwards, for those interested, we take a walk to the mast that towers just outside the town's limits, where the airships *Norge* and *Italia* were moored before their famous voyages to the North pole. Here, Michelle finishes her lecture on Amundsen and Nobile's ill-fated expeditions. Some then head back into town, while those keen continue a little further on, towards the Italian expedition monuments and leftovers of the coal mines.





On the way back to the ship there is a chance to drop by the small but cozy telegraph museum, as well as a preserved example of one of the town's old family houses. We all gather back at the ship after one o'clock for lunch, while the *Antigua* sets out into Kongsfjord.

The sound of the ship's engine slows down as we approach the mountains of Ossian Sars for our afternoon landing, yet it is not followed by the distinct sound of the anchor drop. Captain Serge managed to beach the ship; no anchor needed. From the front deck the shore is a stone's throw away; the bowsprit almost reaching out over the land. Following the briefest of zodiac drives, we again split into two groups. One group does a short walk in the surrounding hills, while the other heads further up to get more of a view of the ice field to the east and the fjord to the west. Along the way we come across several reindeer grazing about. We also run into another group of hikers from another ship. The weather in the North East is getting worst, sending other expedition ships from the area down into this fjord in search of shelter. We do the same. In the evening we shelter ourselves nearby behind the island of Blomstrandhalvøya. Lovely sunset colors. Dinner is followed by another lecture from Jan, this time on wildlife photography.



September 27.

**Kongsfjord: Gerdøya**

**Forlandsund: sailing**

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°57,8' N 012°09,4' E

Temperature: 2,5 °C – Cloudy – Wind force 3-4 North



Before leaving our anchorage, Michelle checks the coastline, and chances upon a polar bear sleeping on a nearby small island. Slowly sailing through the fresh ice, avoiding the shallows, we managed to get in a little closer and observe it for a while from the ship, doing one of the things polar bears do best; napping on the tundra.





*Journal*



We then make our way out of Kongsfjord; the lousy weather from the north is forecast to come down this way, so we set sails and head south. Under sail and with the engine off, the ride now becomes smooth and quiet. In the late afternoon, Michelle gives a lecture on polar bears.

Clear skies as the sun sets behind Prins Karls Forland. We continue sailing through the night, passing Isforden, then down into Bellsund, eventually all the way to the back end of Van Mijenfjord.

September 28.

## Van Mijenfjord: Rindersbukta & Sveagruva

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°49,7' N 016°22,3' E

Temperature: 2 °C – Overcast – Wind force 2 West

In the morning we wake up in the back of Van Mijenfjord. It cuts so deep into the island that we are in fact closer to the east coast than to the west coast from where we came yesterday. Unlike Kongsfjord in the north, with its warm autumn colors, here we find total winter; the land covered in snow and the water starting to freeze in. It was our intention to get closer to Scheelebreen, a glacier that has surged two winters ago. It advanced rapidly from the back of its valley, its massive ice front filling in most of the narrow fjord. The sea ice, however, keeps us from getting close.



We instead make a landing sooner, at a cabin which was built in the nineties for the film *When the light comes* - based on a true story from the eighties about a Dutch girl that spends the winter with a trapper. The actual cabin is located further north in Wijdefjord, but the filming took place here, logistically more accessible. Still, the film was shot almost entirely on location. Half of the group takes photos along the coastline, while the hiking group ventures out into the moraine. Tricky terrain, lots of fresh snow, and small, slippery steep mounds make hiking fairly tricky. Quite soon the group gets back to the coastline, just at the start of sea ice in the fjord, then follows the shore back to the landing site. We all make it back to the ship just in time as a swell picks up.

Shortly after we are back on the ship, several belugas swim nearby.

During lunch it's a quick hop to our afternoon landing, at the former mining settlement of Svea, a small company town that was shut down in 2020. It has since been completely dismantled. The deep sea harbor, the world's most modern coal mine, a powerplant, the houses, the airport runway... Gone. The site is now largely an empty plain with only traces where bulldozer tracks meticulously raked the ground flat over the course of several years. Scattered about are only the metal scraps and some leftover bits of machinery from the Swedish coal mining days dating to



before 1946, as anything older than this date is automatically protected cultural heritage, regardless of what it is. This rule has spared three red buildings, now appearing to be randomly scattered about. A rather surreal sight. Further up the mountain side, we could still find some old Swedish cranes and carts, and a wide view over the entire site. We then walk back down to the shore, past a derelict old Swedish pier from where the coal was shipped, back to our pick up spot.



In the evening we have screening of the film *When the light comes*, while we head back west to the opening of Van Mijenfjord.

September 29.

## Van Mijenfjord: Berzeliusdalen & Fridtjovhamna

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°47,1' N 015°15,5' E

Temperature: 3 °C – Overcast – Wind force 1 North



Further west only on the mountain peaks have snow on them, while down by the sea the landscape has once again the rusty brown shades of autumn. We anchor in front of the vast glacial valley of Berzeliusdalen. Having landed on the beach, the hikers go for a stroll in the valley, while the photo group stays behind to take pictures of the coast and a nearby old wooden boat stranded on the ground.



Our afternoon landing is nearby, in Fridtjovhamna, a small bay flanked by jagged mountains on its west coast, and low hills on the east. Its end is capped by the large glacier front of Fridtjovbreen. We land on the eastern shore, and once again split in two groups. One group strolls along the shore towards the glacier, the beach full of small chunks of ice. Meanwhile the other group hikes up along the side moraine to get a look down at the glacier and its crevassed surface. During the excursion, the sun slowly sets behind the mountains. It is now getting noticeably colder in the evenings, especially as we are blasted by a strong wind.



Once back on the ship, after dinner Jan gives a lecture on post processing photographs. We stay in the bay for the night.

September 30.

## **Bellsund: Akseløya**

### **Van Keulenfjord: Ahlstrandhalvøya**

Position at 8 o'clock: 77°46,4 N 014°35,6 E

Temperature: 1 °C – Cloudy – Wind force 1 variable



After breakfast we lift anchor and make a morning landing on the small island of Akseløya. It is an odd feature in the landscape - the island comprises exclusively of rock strata that have been turned ninety degrees on their side, creating a wall that almost completely blocks the entrance of Van Mijenfjord, save but for two narrow passages on either side. We land on the fjord-facing side where the water is calmer, and stay towards the north end of the island, as on the south end there lives trapper Tommy Sandal. The hiking group wanders across the island, where the exposed strata run along the surface and can be seen continuing up in the surrounding mountains in both directions. In crossing this narrow island of only a few hundred meters, one moves across several different geological periods in quick succession. The photography half of the group stays down along the beach. We spot two foxes, and then the landing is cut a little short after the sighting of a white fluffy ear behind some rocks, maybe perhaps a bear, we don't stick around to find out. While most are on land, those who stayed on board the ship get a training from Rubin and climb the ship's mast.





After lunch we planned to land nearby on the north side of the fjord at Ingeborgfjellet, but a heavy swell at the mouth of the fjord forces us on an alternate route. Instead we head further south into Van Keulenfjord, and land at the cabin of Bamsebu. The site features hefty remains of beluga whaling from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, lying in several large heaps all along the shore. The photo group hangs around the cabin and boneyard, taking photos along the way, and eventually also spotting a seal.



The hiking group sets out and walks across the snowy tundra over the ridge into the next bay, Fleur de Lyshamna. Overhead, more massive mountains with dramatic fold lines, the continuation of those we saw earlier. Here too these lines of rocks cut through the terrain, and we walk in between their walls until we come down to the next bay. Along the way we spot a herd of reindeer, who curiously approach us. The light changes quickly. Turning the sky from blue to pink, and by the time we reach the other side, it begins to get dark. The bay of Fleur de Lyshamna has

two small cabins, one old cabin currently used by some Polish researchers, and a newer cabin used by the governor's field inspectors. Further along the beach, one finds three old wooden boats, remains from the whale hunting days. As we investigate these, the *Antigua's* masts appear over the ridge, and very soon the ship sails to our position, drops anchor, and we get a pick up with the zodiacs. Just in time for dinner, for which we stay in the bay in order to shelter from the swell further out.



After dinner, Michelle lectures about the discovery of Spitsbergen and the geopolitical status of today and we learn how Norway would like to make the archipelago entirely Norwegian. We motor through the night back north into the Isfjord, with the ship rolling heavily due to the swell along the west coast.

October 1.

## **Ekmanfjord: Coraholmen**

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°38,5' N 14°41,3' E

Temperature: 1 °C – Overcast with snow – Wind force 1 variable



We reach the island of Coraholmen at dawn and land after breakfast. Tucked in the northern corner of the Isfjord, this island is peculiar for its landscape. Here we find the so called Old Devonian Red; sandstone which colors the mountains, the ground, and even the water with a rich earthy reddish hue. When the nearby glacier of Sefströmbreen had a surge in 1896, it plowed through the seafloor and pushed it up and over the island - but only halfway - before retreating again over time. In its wake, the glacier left a labyrinthine moraine of tiny mounds on half of the island, while the other side stayed flat green tundra. The mountains of Kolloseum and Kapitol form an imposing backdrop to this quirky landscape.





Once back on board for lunch, the *Antigua* heads across the vast Isfjord back in the direction of Longyearbyen. On the way, whoever is up for it submits their favorite photos from the trip to Jan, who compiles it into a small presentation we then all review together in the salon. We finish just in time to clear the salon, so the service team has time to prepare for the last evening; the Captain's dinner. Here, Piet the cook treats us to a special 'menu du chef' to conclude our trip. It's a special occasion not only because it is our last dinner together on this trip, but it is also the last Captain's dinner of the season, and of the *Antigua* on Svalbard. This is her final year up here in this northern wonderland. Still, the tour is not over quite yet. The evening stretches into a the night with some drinking, partying and dancing.

October 2.

## Longyearbyen

Position at 8 o'clock: 78°13,7' N 15°36,9' E

Temperature: -3 °C – Overcast – Wind force 2 East

In the morning, in the Longyearbyen port, it felt like winter, and the floating pier was covered with a thin layer of ice. After the final, good Antigua-style breakfast, it was time to say goodbye to the crew and Antigua, our lovely home of the past over two weeks. In the morning we had some time to explore Longyearbyen. 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.



*Thank you Dear Guests for this wonderful experience, your enthusiasm, and trust! All the beautiful moments that we experienced together will stay in our hearts for a long time. We are happy to welcome you on board again!*

Triplog is written by Martin Fiala

Photographs by Jan Lambert

Edited by Michelle van Dijk

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

The *s/v Antigua* will continue to in the year 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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### - Itinerary -

- 24.09 Day 1 Leaving Longyearbyen - up through Forlandsundet, aurora in the south
- 25.09 Day 2 Selvågen - walrus at Grimaldiholmen
- 26.09 Day 3 Ny-Ålesund - Ossian Sars
- 27.09 Day 4 Polar bear on Gerdøya - sailing down Forlandsudet
- 28.09 Day 5 Rindersbukta - Svea
- 29.09 Day 6 Berzeliusdalen - Fridtjovhamna
- 30.09 Day 7 Akseløya, with foxes - Bamsebu & Fleur de Lyshamna
- 01.10 Day 8 Coraholmen - return to Longyearbyen - captain's dinner
- 02.10 Day 9 End of the tour in Longyearbyen

### Lectures, Emphasis & Sailing

24 September	Aurora borealis	
25 September	Basics of landscape photography	Jan
26 September	Amundsen (in Ny Ålesund)	Michelle
	Basics of wildlife photography	Jan
27 September	Sailing instructions	Rubin
	Sailing	
28 September	Glaciology (at Scheelebreen)	Michelle
	When the light comes	film
29 September	Post processing of photographs	Jan
30 September	Sailing	
	Ropes	Rubin
	Situation of Spitsbergen	Michelle
1 October	Evaluation of photographs	Jan

## SEA- AND LANDMAMMALS SVALBARD

LATIN	ENGLISH	DUTCH	GERMAN	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1
<i>Alopex lagopus</i>	Arctic Fox	Poolvos	Polarfuchs / Eisfuchs							X	
<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>	Bearded Seal	Baardrob	Bartrobbe								
<i>Dephinapterus leucas</i>	Beluga	Beloega	Weisswal					X		†	
<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	Blue Whale	Blauwe vinvs	Blauwal								
<i>Balaena mysticetus</i>	Bowhead Whale	Groenlandse walvis	Grönlandwal								
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Common/Harbour Seal	Gewone zeehond	Seehund		X	X			X	X	
<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	Fin Whale	Gewone vinvis	Finnwal								
<i>Pagophilus groenlandicus</i>	Harp Seal	Zadelrob	Sattelrobbe								
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Humpback Whale	Bultrug	Buckelwal		X						
<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	Mink Whale	Dwergvinvis	Zwergwal								
<i>Monodon monoceros</i>	Narwhal	Narwal	Narwal								
<i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i>	White-beaked Dolphin	Witsnuitdolfijn	Weisschnauzendelphin								
<i>Orcinus orca</i>	Orca (Killer Whale)	Zwaardwalvis	Schwertwal (Orca)								
<i>Ursus maritimus</i>	Polar Bear	IJsbeer	Eisbär				X			?	
<i>Phoca hispida</i>	Ringed Seal	Ringelrob	Ringelrobbe								
<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>	Sei Whale	Noordse vinvis	Seiwal								
<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	Sperm Whale	Potvis	Pottwal								
<i>Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus</i>	Spitsbergen Reindeer	Spitsbergenrendier	Spitzbergen-Rentier		X	X		X	X	X	
<i>Odobenus rosmarus</i>	Walrus	Walrus	Walross		X						