



World's Leading Polar
Expedition Operator

Spitsbergen Adventures

9th August – 19th August, 2012

On board the *M/V Plancius*



MV Plancius is named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar 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 refitted in 2007, being converted into a 114-passenger expedition vessel. *Plancius* is 89m (267 feet) long, 14.5m (43 feet) wide and has a maximum draft of 5m, with an Ice Strength rating of 1D, top speed of 12 knots and three diesel engines generating 1230hp each.

Captain Evgeny Levakov

his international crew of 36

and

Expedition Leader – Delphine Aurès (France)

Assistant Expedition Leader – Jim Mayer (Britain)

Guide & Lecturer – Christophe Gouraud (France)

Guide & Lecturer – Mike Brown (Ireland)

Guide & Lecturer – Marion van Rijssel (The Netherlands)

Guide & Lecturer – Barbara Post (Austria)

Guide & Lecturer – Kelvin Murray (Scotland)

Kayak Guide – Pete Gwatkin (Scotland)

Hotel Manager – Marck Warmenhoven (The Netherlands)

Chief Steward – Rebeca Radu (Romania)

Head Chef – Ralf Barthel (Germany)

Assistant Chef – Mathias Schmitt (Germany)

Ship's Physician – Jan van der Linde (The Netherlands)

Day 1 - 9th August 2012

Embarkation: Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen

GPS 16.00 Position: 78° 13.9'N, 015° 38.7'E

Weather: Light wind, a little over-cast with the occasional shower, 9°C.

Our adventure began as we climbed up the gangway from the pier in Longyearbyen. We embarked on *M/V Plancius*, our comfortable floating home for the next ten days.



Since Longyearbyen's foundation as a coal mining settlement in 1906 by John Munro Longyear, it has been the start point for many historic and pioneering expeditions. As we cruised into the Isfjord we spotted several fulmars, black guillemots and even our first Atlantic Puffin!

We gathered together in the lounge for briefings and introductions. The lifeboat drill provided an opportunity for dressing up and getting to know each other as we huddled together like orange-breasted sea birds on the deck, peering into lifeboats.

The evening continued in safety with champagne and high hopes for a successful voyage. Expedition Leader Delphine Aurès proposed a toast to our expedition aboard *Plancius*.

After our first dinner on board, there was still plenty of daylight. Some retired to the bar or strolled on deck while others headed to their cabins to catch up on sleep, in preparation for our adventures ahead!

Day 2 – 10th August 2012

Ny Ålesund & Fortenjelibukta

08.00 Position: 78°056'N, 011° 55'E

Weather: Wind SE, rain, mist, 4°C

Following a bumpy night sailing along the west coast we reached the relatively calm waters of Kongsfjord in the early morning. It was cloudy and mist covered the mountain peaks but as the morning moved on it brightened up. All around, the beautiful pastel colours of the sea and tundra contrasted with the steel grey of the sky. The white glacier ice seemed to have an inner glow and small blue bergy bits drifted past our ship.

The mandatory briefings were completed at 11.00 and by 11.30 we were ashore at Ny Ålesund. This is the world's most northerly civilian settlement. Here we visited the tower used in 1926 and 1928 to anchor the airships of the Norge and Italia expeditions. Jim and Christophe led walks to the site and gave an account of the history. Nearby we saw the bust of Roald Amundsen who died when his airplane crashed during an attempt to rescue the crew of the Italia. There was time to buy stamps, souvenirs and post cards, and to visit the tiny museum which is dedicated to the coal mining history of this charming settlement. We saw our first Ivory gull and many geese were spotted along with wading birds around the tundra pools.

Back on board for lunch and soon it was time for another activity. We entered Fortenjelibukta at 15.00. Here we divided into two groups and spent the afternoon walking and zodiac cruising. In the Arctic landscape what appears to be of little is always full of life when examined closely. Ashore we saw lush vegetation; rare at this latitude of almost 80°N. Glaucous gulls were feeding on the remains of a Polar bear kill and Reindeer grazed on the high slopes. We saw our first Puffins nesting on the sea cliffs along with Guillemots. Around the shore Barnacle geese swam amongst the bergy bits. The photographers enjoyed the beautiful blue ice and the cruise to the glacier front was thrilling.



We were all back on board at 19.00 and it was time to relax in the lounge. Delphine briefed us on tomorrow's proposed activities and Marion answered questions regarding life in Ny Ålesund. After dinner the ship was very quiet as most folks had an early night following a great first day in the Arctic!

Day 3 – 11th August 2012

Eolusneset in Sorgfjorden and Alkefjellet in Hinlopen Strait.

0800 Position: 79°56.1'N, 16°43.1'E

Weather: Wind WNW, mist, slight rain, 4°C

After travelling considerable distance the ship dropped anchor during breakfast off Eolusneset in Sorgfjorden. During the night our course passed beyond 80° degrees North and we hope to sail further north as the trip continues.

Landing at Eolusneset in Sorgfjorden our intrepid guests had the option of various hikes along the shore, around the streams and lagoons or near the headland marked by an ancient memorial cross. Jim and Delphine set a good pace on the long hike while Mick, Kelvin and Barbara provided a more leisurely paced walk. Christophe, Marion and Pete stayed with a group near the remnants of trappers' activities and a graveyard dating back to the whaling period. Slightly misty weather didn't dampen our spirits as we explored the tundra.

After lunch the *Plancius* reached the impressive bird cliffs at Alkefjellet, home to tens of thousands of Brünnich's guillemots. As birds filled the cliffs, the sky and the sea around us the Captain steered the ship for a close but careful view of the stacks and spires of the rock face on which these birds nest. Sharp eyes also spotted a pair of Arctic foxes, white in their winter coats. We then travelled out into the Hinlopen Strait and headed north and into the teeth of 30 knots of wind.





Despite the Force 6 conditions it was still possible to spot the blows of large whales as they exhaled upon surfacing. Kelvin and Chief Officer Alexey kept a lookout from the Bridge and we were soon rewarded with a close encounter with Fin whales (*left*)! These are the second largest animals to have ever lived and despite the

cold and blustery conditions most of the ship's company was out on deck photographing these magnificent mammals.

As much as a privilege as this encounter was, soon we witnessed the icing on the cake – a Blue whale (*right*)! Again, we had a really close view as our quiet ship maintained a respectful distance and allowed the whale to carry on feeding. All this activity meant recap was postponed until after dinner, however no sooner had Kelvin finished talking about the mighty Blue whales when yet another was seen! What a finale to an incredible Arctic day!



DAY 4 – 12th August 2012

Phippsøya & Pack-ice

GPS position 08.10hrs: 80° 41. 1' N 020° 47. 0' E

Weather: Fog with sunny patches. Temperature 0°C

This morning's destination was the island of Phippsøya named after the British explorer John Phipps and part of the archipelago known as the Sjuøyane (Norwegian for "Seven Islands"). The morning started with a scouting party going ashore, as usual, in order to scout the landing area before guests arrived. As much as we like to see Polar bears from the safety of the ship or zodiac, we would not like to have a close encounter with one on land, hence this normal precaution. The report came back that there were no bears within sight.

The fog became more and more thick, our expedition staff decided to offer us a zodiac cruise around the southern part of the island where walrus had been spotted during the scout. We left *Plancius* and disappeared slowly into the fog and after a few minutes we felt the real Arctic ambiance.

A first group of Walrus had been spotted swimming between us and the shore where about 15 more were resting, probably digesting the many kilos of clams they consume in a single meal. As everybody was enjoying the walrus, a Polar bear appeared on the slope, walking some 400m behind the beach. The bear, knowing how risky it is to attack a group of big and healthy male walrus, preferred to lay down for a nap.

We stopped a last time near a group feeding in successive dives of about 3 minutes each. With SD cards full of pictures and movies, we made our way back to *Plancius* where Barbara (in German) and Christophe (in French) provided us with further explanations on this impressive Arctic species – Kelvin having done the same in English with the second group. The morning landing ended just after mid-day and the *Plancius* heaved anchor and made her way into northern waters, looking for the edge of the sea ice as another nice buffet was waiting for us in the dining room. After 6 hours sailing in the fog, the word came over the PA system we finally reached the edge of pack-ice, in other words, we were entering in the Polar bear world.



Everybody came on the bridge and on outer decks to scout every single square meter of ice looking for the big predator. The first hours were unsuccessful but some of us enjoyed the Ivory gulls and even 3 Pomarine skuas.

At 11.45 pm, we got the information through the PA that a Polar bear was approaching the ship!! The animal, probably a young female, was very curious and came to 5m from the aft deck!!! This close encounter was the prelude to a long night...



Day 5 – 13th August 2012

In the Pack Ice and Karl XII Øya

08:00 position: 81° 40. 6' N, 22° 46. 8' E

Weather: Winds ENE Force 3, cloudy, +2°C, although it felt much colder!!

After the exciting encounter with the young, curious Polar bear on the pack ice almost everyone went for a sleep knowing that the guides would be watching for more. Everyone that is except for Thorben and Markus, who wished to experience a polar night in the pack ice. They saw another bear swimming at some distance and moving away. No reason to wake up all passengers. At 04:40, however, a Polar bear with two cubs was spotted in the direction to which we were heading. Some moments later a second bear with a cub appeared in the vicinity of a red stained spot on the ice. *Now* it was time to wake up the passengers! Within ten minutes people were dressed and on deck to see both Polar bear mothers with their young.



The twin bears communicated with their mother with high yelps that could easily be heard in the arctic silence. Both mothers led their young to the kill that was

hidden behind a ridge of blocks near the bloodstained ice. The mothers approached each other slowly and after a short inspection by nose contact with open mouth all started to pull meat from the carcass sharing the kill.

The ship retreated and most passengers took a little rest for the remainder of the night. During the early morning the most northern point of our voyage was reached at 81° 45. 5' N.

At the morning call we were still in the ice and heading for Karl XII Øya. During the morning Ivory gulls, Little auks, Kittiwakes, Bearded seals, Ringed seals and Harp seals could be seen. The latter mostly in groups taking turns in looking around in their typical 'bottle' movements. After breakfast there was time to do some souvenir shopping at the reception. We left the pack ice around 11.00hrs and it was time to listen to a presentation by Marion on the Marine Ecology of Arctic Seas. The main message of the talk was that all life in the Arctic is running on sunshine captured by microscopic algae during photosynthesis.

The water was calm when we reached Karl XII Øya, a small island seldom visited because it is either in solid ice or surrounded by crashing surf. It turned out to be a marvelous little island with a volcano shaped cliff and a long strip of beach attached to it. It looked like a scene made for a fantasy pirate movie production. Delphine hoped to land there and to find more bears and perhaps Walrus too. She led a team of guides to explore the island while Kelvin gave a presentation on Whales, a recap of the day before.

People were already gathering at the gangway when a Polar bear decided to come for a swim around the ship. It was so curious that it approached the ship closing to a distance of about fifteen meters and the gangway had to be hauled up to make sure it would not board the ship!



When the Polar bear was done with its inspection of the rear of the ship it was time for a zodiac cruise along this island with no less than six bears. An impressive big male was lying on the beach. While watching it, the zodiacs became surrounded by Walrus that came very close. Only because dinner could no longer be postponed the cruise of more than two hours ended. The end of yet another wonderful day in the Arctic!



Day 6 – 14th August 2012

Kvitøya

Position at 0905hrs: 79°55.8`N, 032°19.2`E

Weather: North-westerly winds up to Force 6, very rough to moderate sea; 3°C

While travelling to the distant island of Kvitøya, Christophe gave us a talk about plant adaptation strategies to the coldness. After lunch the *Plancius* reached the impressive ice-cap of Kvitøya. The name Kvitøya means “white island”, referring to the giant ice-cap that covers 99 % of the approximately 700 sq km island. As the sea was too rough (Force 6 conditions!), landing was not a good option. However we were able to get a closer look to one of the three small patches of ice-free land named Kraemerpynten with a sleeping Polar bear on it.

In the afternoon Barbara presented a talk about “Life in Ice” followed by Jim’s presentation about the life of the trappers, the longest-running historical activity in Spitsbergen. During the early evening, the sea calmed and the sun came out! Everybody on board was glad about this sudden change of the weather. Hurray!



After dinner Kelvin spotted our fourth whale species, the Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). These great mammals are between 12 and 13 meters long and weigh up to 30 tons, which makes them smaller than the Fin and Blue whales already seen (but larger than the Minke whales). They belong to the group of baleen whales, each whale having 270 to 400 baleen plates on either side of their mouth to filter plankton.



They entertained us for more than an hour, showing us how to feed on krill and schooling fish using “bubble netting”. This is where one or more whales exhale a stream of bubbles, forming a wall in the water column. This wall is often curved into a cylinder through which the whale then swims, capturing its prey. A popular photo motive was the tail, exposed just prior to a deep dive. Each tail, with its wavy rear edges and a distinctive black and white marking is unique for each individual animal, as finger prints are for humans.

After this spectacular end to the day we sailed through the night along the 190 km long ice edge of Austfonna.

Day 7 - 15th August 2012

Torellnestet & Bjørnsundet

Position at 08.00: 79°56.0'N 021° 45.0'E

Weather: Light airs, 7°C

Last evening's un-missable Humpback whale experience meant we had to reschedule our planned evening ship cruise past the Bråselvbreen glacier. Instead, at 06.00hrs and in brilliant sunshine we began our sail past this mighty ice wall. Measuring almost 200 kilometers along the face, we also had a fantastic view across the top of the ice. One hour later we were ready for breakfast having had a great start in perfect conditions. At 09.30 we were ashore on the beach at Torellneset and as always we had three options for walking. In addition a herd of Walrus were also hauled out for us to view.

The long walkers hiked to the edge of the ice cap passing through the most beautiful Polar desert landscape. Massive sand dunes, like those found in the Sahara desert, rose above the ice and altogether it looked like a science fiction movie set. A pair of Red-throated divers were seen along with Arctic skuas. The Svalbard poppy, still in flower, looked lovely as it pushed through the rocky soil in this true high arctic desert.

The medium walkers enjoyed a half way hike which took them up the slopes of this 'raised beach' area and they saw the remains of whale bones and other evidence of how this ground was once a former sea bed. The leisure group enjoyed strolling along the strand and watching the herd of Walrus as they lay sleeping, groaning pushing each other and generally being bad tempered and playful at the same time. They occasionally swam close to the beach.

With warm sunshine and no wind it was time for the Polar plunge! Well away from the Walrus, some of our brave souls cooled off for a few seconds in the sparkling crystal clear Arctic ocean.

After lunch and a good siesta it was time for more Arctic adventures. Three walk options: Jim led the long group inland to a high ridge for marvelous views across the

mountains. The medium folks entered the valley for a view across the outwash plain. Several Reindeer were seen grazing on the tundra and Pinkfoot geese flew overhead en route south at the beginning of their migration. The leisure group beach combed and in the process also collected 2 bags of plastic garbage to take back to the ship for proper disposal. There was a distinct 'autumnal' feeling as the low sun cast long shadows across the islands. Pete led a kayak group in perfect conditions and at one stage he saw a swimming bear. We had plenty of time to relax ashore and at 19.00 we reboarded the *Plancius*.

A few minutes past midnight when most folks were falling asleep Kelvin announced another group of Humpback whales feeding close to the ship. The days are long when the sun shines throughout the day and night!



Day 8 - 16 August 2012

Büdelfjellet, Barentsøya and Årdalsnuten, Edgeøya.

0800 Position: 78°14.2'N, 021°59.5'E

Weather: Overcast, fog, calm, 4°C

Our day of adventure started quite literally at midnight with yet another sighting of Humpback whales. A call went out around the ship to arouse slumbering guests and soon the foredeck was bristling with cameras capturing the bubble-net feeding behaviour of these gentle giants.

Shortly after breakfast the staff went ashore at Büdelfjellet and scouted for bears around two small ravines that provide perfect nesting conditions for a substantial Black-legged kittiwake colony. This area is a 'bear highway' and all season we have been unable to get ashore. This site proved to be such a delight, with extremely close views of the roosting birds and their young, the air filled with the sound of their distinct calls. A family of curious Arctic foxes patrolled near the colony and two playful youngsters provided great photo opportunities. The bones of Svalbard reindeer, whales and even a Polar bear skull were also found, giving us a chance to learn more about the biology of these animals.



Our afternoon landing at Kapp Lee had to be cancelled due to the presence of a Polar bear mother and cub near the landing, plus a third bear further along the rocky shore. A lone male Walrus seemed unconcerned by the bears as he sat on the beach. Adapting our plans is standard procedure onboard *M/V Plancius* and soon

we had another destination in our sights. We took advantage of the available time and had an extensive recap covering some of the sights we had enjoyed over the previous days, learning about glaciers, Kittiwakes, Humpback whales and of course Polar bears.

As an extra activity we made an evening landing on the southwest corner of Edgeøya took place soon after dinner. A lush, green [and sometimes boggy!] landscape greeted us. The tundra supported a rich carpet of mosses, lichens, fungi and other hardy Arctic plants – grazed upon by reindeer. Small lakes provided temporary home to



Long-tailed ducks, Red-throated divers, Barnacle geese, Arctic terns and Kittiwakes. The sun settled lower towards the horizon and bathed the landscape in a soft amber light and giving contrast to the sculpted forms of the craggy cliffs and rolling clouds. This was a peaceful and tranquil finale to our day, once again highlighting the special nature of this wilderness.

DAY 9

Brepollen & Samarinvågen (Hornsund)

GPS position 08.00hrs: 76°46.1' N 016°11.9' E

Weather: Overcast and rain. Temperature: 4°C

Wake-up call was at 08.30hrs this morning!!! After rounding the southern tip of Spitsbergen during the night the *Plancius* sailed north towards the entrance of the Hornsund, one of the most beautiful fjords of the archipelago. It was a little bit swelly off shore but fortunately the sea conditions improved as we entered the Hornsund. The weather was overcast this morning but clouds were high enough to allow us an excellent view of the impressively sharp mountains and their glaciers. We were even able to see the highest mountain of south Spitsbergen: the very steep Hornsundtind reaching 1431m!

At 12.30hrs the Captain was gently bringing the *Plancius* into the Brepollen – a wide bay with an almost completely glacial coastline comprising the Hornbreen and the Storbreen. There we have spotted a Polar bear resting on an small iceberg which is not that common! This young small bear appeared to be thin and seemed to have no energy; we decided to leave it in peace.



After lunch, we entered Samarinvågen, named after a member of a Russian section of the Arc-de-Meridian expedition (1898-1902). There we all got the opportunity to join a zodiac cruise along the Samarinbreen, a very active glacier. Approaching the western part of the glacier there was a sudden change in the colour of the water, due to the out-pouring of glacier flour – very fine particles of rock, milled to a flour by the scouring action of the glacier and now suspended in the water column.

As the rainfall was getting stronger, we all made our way back to the ship, where we enjoyed an Arctic BBQ! Whilst most people chose to eat inside, the British stayed outside as this is normal BBQ weather. After a great dinner with a spectacular view, the evening ended at the bar with fantastic light on the mountains. *Plancius* left the Hornsund and headed towards the north and the Bellsund. Again, this day will remain an other unforgettable memory!

Day 10 – 18th August 2012

Vårsolbukta & Recherchefjord

GPS position 08.00hrs: 77°44.7' N 014°24.5' E

Weather: Wall-to-wall sunshine! No clouds, no wind! Temperature: 12°C

Our last full day of exploration dawned bright and clear. As we approach our proposed morning landing a little swell was observed in the tidal current. This was not enough to put us off but the sight of a Polar bear on the tundra close to the landing spot was! This bear was number 27 for this cruise!

Expedition leader Delphine moved us onto plan B and after a short reposition we landed ashore at Midterhuken for some lovely walks ashore. Close to the landing spot we found the foundation of an ancient house, probably dating from the 1700s when the Pomors would build small cabins for their hunting expeditions.

Four different walks departed from the landing spot, even the leisurely group managed to cover some ground on the easy terrain. The long hikers took off around the corner, and the medium group enjoyed a few moments of silence to soak up the view.



As we enjoyed our lunch on-board, *Plancius* cruised slowly into Recherchefjord and dropped anchor for our final landing. A few passengers stayed on-board, sitting in the sunshine and enjoying the view. For those on shore, the rich tundra carpet was a joy to stroll on. Jim pointed out the ruins of a British mining adventure which failed to make any money. All that remains now are a few trial pits and the ruins of a cabin.

Plancius heaved anchor for one last time and turned her bows to the north. During the cruise we joined Captain Levakov and Expedition Leader Delphine for a farewell drink in the bar.

It was only a short voyage to Isfjord and Longyearbyen, and a short night's sleep for many as friendships formed on the voyage were celebrated into the small hours!

Sorry to see you go!



On this voyage:

**the Galley team have cracked 1,782 eggs,
we have seen 27 Polar bears,
the engineers have made 217 tonnes of fresh water,
you have taken as many photos as there are birds at Alkefjellet
and we have sailed 1,429 nautical miles!**

* * *

**Captain Levakov, Expedition Leader Delphine and the
whole expedition team thank you for sailing with us and
wish you bon voyage!**



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