



OCEANWIDE
EXPEDITIONS

Spitsbergen

July - July 2014

on board the

M/V Plancius



MV Plancius was 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 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.

with

**Captain Evgeny Levakov
and his International Crew**

Expedition Leader – Philipp Schaudy (Austria)

Assistant Expedition Leader – Christian Engelke (Germany/Norway)

Guide/Lecturer – Michael Wenger (Switzerland)

Guide/Lecturer – Brent Houston (USA)

Guide/Lecturer – Katja Riedel (Germany/New Zealand)

Guide/Lecturer – Henryk Wolski (Poland)

Guide/Lecturer – Michelle van Dijk (Netherlands)

Guide/Lecturer – Sandra Petrowitz (Germany)

and

Hotel Manager – Michael Thallium (Spain)

Assistant Hotel Manager – Thijs de Lint (Netherlands)

Head Chef – Heinz Hacker (Austria)

Sous Chef – Sean Steele (Canada)

Ship's Physician – Inna Kammerer (Germany)

Welcome onboard Plancius!

Day 1 – Thursday, July 2014

Embarkation – Longyearbyen, Svalbard

GPS 16.00h Position: 078°14.0'N / 015°35.2'E

Weather: Cloudy **Wind:** NO 3 **Sea State:** Slight **Temperature:** +6°C

So here we are in the Arctic at the borderline of civilization! Longyearbyen marks the beginning of an once-in-a-lifetime adventure. For many of us this is a lifelong dream coming true. The excitement comes in different forms for each person, but even the most experienced of us feels genuine excitement to depart on such a magical journey.

All passengers were at the gangway in time at 16:00, ready to board *MV Plancius*, our home for the next week. We were greeted by members of our Expedition staff who sorted our luggage and sent us on board to meet our Hotel Managers Michael and Thijs. We were then checked into our cabins with the assistance of our fabulous Filipino crew.



A little while after boarding we convened in the lounge on deck five to meet Expedition Leader Philipp Schaudy who gave a toast to our imminent voyage. Michael, our Hotel Manager, then took over the microphone and gave us a general overview of the ship. A short while later First Officer Tuomo led us through the details of the required SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea) Safety and Lifeboat Drill, assisted by the crew and staff.



On hearing the alarm we reconvened for the mandatory safety briefing and abandon ship drill donning our huge orange life jackets that will keep us safe should the need arise. After this lifeboat drill we returned to the outer decks to watch us leave the Longyearbyen pier with an escort of different seabirds. Prior to dinner we gathered in the lounge once more for champagne and a chance to meet Captain Evgeny Levakov and the Expedition staff for our voyage. At 7:30 we sampled the first of many delicious

meals onboard, prepared by Chefs Heinz and Sean and their galley staff. This first evening on board was occupied with more exploration of the ship, adjusting to her movements, and settling into our cabins. In the late hours of the evening we would be out in the open waters outside Isfjorden (=icy fjord) and heading north towards the ice and snow. By now the rainy and grey weather had changed to a beautiful sunny setting. For many of us this was the first meeting with the midnight sun. What a view!

Day 2 – Friday, July 2014

Ny-Ålesund & Signehamna

GPS 12.00h Position: 78°56.0'N / 011°55.0'E

Weather: Overcast Wind: NW 4 Sea State: Slight Temperature: +6°C

The first morning of our voyage began with breakfast and briefings about the use of our Zodiacs, and the Code of Conduct for tourist's behaviour in the Arctic. Soon after the briefings, Plancius was anchored in the



long and wide Kongsfjord with a series of massive tide-water glaciers at the back of the bay. The Zodiac boats were lowered for our first landing at the pier in Ny-Ålesund, a busy settlement and research station. Some of us went on a short hike with Michelle and Katja or with Christian and Brent to the Airship Mast. The mast was used to hold Amundsen's and Nobile's Airship, the *Norge*, before it set out on its flight across the North Pole in 1926. Most of us also walked around town on the lookout for birds. Barnacle Geese with their chicks, a few Purple sandpipers, Red-throated divers, and plenty of

Arctic terns were spotted. Many people took the chance to send postcards from the small post office, and most of us picked up some Arctic souvenirs from the lovely shop.



After lunch, Plancius repositioned just outside Kongsfjord to a place called Signehamna. Despite the rain, almost everyone went ashore to walk, hike, or stroll around the area. The tundra was alive with green and brown, and red, and pink, and yellow, and black colors of the low-lying and slow-growing mosses, grasses, flowers and lichens. This surprisingly verdant place was the area where in World War 2 there was a German weather station, and a few of the leftover remains were lying around, mostly those of the aerial antennas. Thoroughly soaked, we headed back to the ship for a hot drink and our Recap and Briefing in the Bar and Lounge – a regular occurrence each evening to look back at the events of the day and also to look ahead to our plans for tomorrow.

Day 3 – Saturday, July 2014

Buchananhalvøya & Smithbreen

GPS 12.00h Position: 79°41.2'N / 012°13.4'E

Weather: Cloudy **Wind:** W 2. **Sea State:** Slight **Temperature:** +5°C

At 07:00 we woke up in the Raudfjord and experienced the true Arctic. It was snowing! The mountains around us were partly covered by snow. Raudfjord means “Red fjord”, and we could see why it was called so. Near the glacier the water was reddish instead of blue. This reddish colour is caused by the sediments



taken from the 'Old Red' sandstone which erodes very easily. Our landing in the morning took place at Buchananhalvøya, a peninsula deep inside the Raudfjord. This peninsula is called after John Young Buchanan, a member of the expedition of Prince Albert I of Monaco in 1899. The terrain is a mixture of large rocks, gravel and tundra.

We split up into three groups. The long hike was going for a real mountain hike to take a look at the glaciers on the other side. The medium hike also wanted to take a look, but did not need to go all the way up. The short walk stayed on the lower parts and did some more exploring. We all got to see reindeer and flowers and noticed it is a hard life in the Arctic.

In the afternoon we went for a Zodiac cruise south of Hamiltonbukta at the west side of the Raudfjord. It was still snowing so we dressed ourselves as warm as possible. Cruising along Smithbreen, named after the Scottish artist who also was onboard with Prince Albert I of Monaco, we tried to estimate its height. The black lines of sediments gave a beautiful marble-effect. At the shoreline there was a carcass – a bear, fox and some gulls probably had had a good meal here. Although dressed warmly, we slowly got cold, and just as we started longing for a hot chocolate on board our warm Plancius, our Expedition leader Philipp called on the radio that a polar bear was seen. Immediately the cold was forgotten! And when we got closer it turned out to be a young animal that was not afraid of us at all. It slept in the snow just above the shoreline so we could have a very close look. It was quite hilarious when it woke up to have a shit, and right after it lay down again and continued sleeping.



All happy we went back to the ship where the best polar bear pictures were shown to our fellow passengers. But the day was not done yet. We sailed further north through fog and snow until we reached 80° shortly before 9:00 in the evening. Our captain hit the ship's horn, but when we looked outside we did not see the crossing of a “red line” but the island Moffen. And here we found our first walruses. Ten animals lay on the beach and a few swam in the water next to the island. One animal was particularly curious and swam past the ship at a distance of only 10 meters. So a day full of highlights came to its end while outside it was still snowing.

Day 4 – Sunday, July 2014

Pack Ice and Sorgfjorden

GPS 12.00h Position: 80°25.3'N / 016°00.9'E

Weather: Overcast **Wind:** W 4 **Sea State:** Slight **Temperature:** +0°C

This morning we woke up to another world. The realm of the Pack Ice! The Captain was navigating in an ever-changing environment, as the currents and wind are always moving the frozen ocean around. It was the first time this season that the ice had gone very far north, so that when it came south again as today, it was a jumble of old sea ice, some newly formed summer ice, and rotten ice from this winter. Not great polar bear habitat, but fun to crash through with our sturdy ship – ice-cruising, wind, light, keeping watch.



In the afternoon we went ashore in Sorgfjorden where there is a nice sheltered bay that was already known by the early whalers in the 17th century. Its earliest known name is Beere Bay in 1660, which translates into Bear Bay. In 1693, the world's northernmost sea battle took place here when a Dutch fleet of 40 whalers was attacked by three French warships. 13 Dutch ships were captured, the rest escaped. Since then the name of the bay was changed into Treurenberg Bay, Treurenberg being Dutch for "hill of grieve". When Norway got sovereignty over Spitsbergen in 1925, they decided to translate all names into Norwegian, so the bay was called Sorgfjord.



All of the groups ashore went on the walk to Krosshaugen (cross hill) to take a look at the Dutch whalers' graves. Michelle explained that scurvy was the most common cause of death. Because all sailors were on a diet of ship's biscuit, salted meat and fish, they did not get enough vitamin C which caused scurvy. When a man died during the crossing from Holland to Spitsbergen, the body was kept in a coffin filled with saw dust. After the ship arrived at Spitsbergen the dead would be buried. Quite a few burial sites are known. The most famous are Jan Donker (now known as Gravneset) in Magdalenefjord and Grave Point & Doodemans Eylandt in the Smeerenburgfjord (now known as Likneset & Likholmen). The total of the graves found on these points, amounts to several hundreds.



After the landing Brent gave a talk on the seabirds of Svalbard, mostly an identification talk to remind people what the names of the birds we have been seeing are.

Day 5 – Monday, July 2014

Hinlopen Strait & Palanderbukta, Nordaustlandet

GPS 12.00h Position: 79°38.5'N / 020°12.8'E

Weather: Cloudy Wind: N 4 Sea State: Moderate Temperature: +5°C

After the exciting day in the ice yesterday, we were woken up by Philipp at Faksevågen in Lomfjord. A very unusual sight awaited us outside: sunshine and some blue sky. The hills around were gleaming in various colors, and in the bay chunks of ice were floating in the water, a little reminder that we still were not entirely safe yet. Even our Captain Levakov seemed to take these chunks serious and at breakfast time, we started to sail out of the bay. For most of us, this meant a fast breakfast and then out onto the decks to enjoy the ride through the ice. Northern fulmars, various gulls and especially guillemots flew around the ship and over the white and blue floats of ice. Every now and then a seal popped out of the water to eye us with curiosity. Slowly, *Plancius* pushed her way through the ice and soon we reached



fairly open water. In the meantime, Henryk and Michelle helped us passing the time with entertaining and informative lectures about navigating in the ice and the early days of whaling on Svalbard. We sailed full speed ahead towards our destination of this afternoon, Palanderbukta on Nordaustlandet.

The second largest island of the Svalbard archipelago awaited us in sunshine and with lots of wind. The scout-boat of the guides was thus overflowed by waves (as were the guides themselves). Therefore, we were forced to look for another landing site. Luckily, another place was just around the corner and we were able to put our feet ashore in a seemingly lifeless desert. But on our hikes we realized that even in this place, life had found a way to survive. Svalbard poppies, various saxifrages and a number of moss and lichens could be seen between and on the rocks. Even bones of reindeer and of whales marked our path onto the hills. Within the rocks we found fossilized remains of brachiopods and other marine organisms. These told us about the marine past of the archipelago. Time flew by and soon we had to return to the ship. At Recap Christian was giving us a nice little lecture about ice in all its forms: glacier ice, sea ice, icebergs... This was followed by a delicious Arctic BBQ. We satisfied our hunger with lots of meat and salads, and we danced and had fun until late into the night. Tired but smiling we placed our heads onto the pillow and our last thought went to the next day: What will it bring?

Day 6 – Tuesday July 2014

Alkefjellet, Torellneset & Bråsvellbreen

GPS 12.00h Position: 79°34.7'N / 018°35.0'E

Weather: Partly cloudy Wind: S 3 Sea State: Calm Temperature: +6°C

The program of today quoted Shackleton's newspaper announcement before his Endurance expedition: "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success". Of course this was more than hundred years ago, and it was about a journey to Antarctica, but we could get a sense of it after our adventures yesterday. While we got up, the ship had already lifted anchor and was on its way through the ice towards Alkefjellet in Hinlopen Strait. The wind had dropped, and it was lovely to enjoy the sunshine on the outer decks. When we got closer to the bird cliffs our guide Sandra spotted a bear and cub on the island in front of us. All Zodiacs were dropped and we made a Zodiac cruise to get a closer look. We could not have been luckier with the weather, it was flat calm and the sun was shining – Brünnich's guillemots and ice around us everywhere. We spent one and a half hour looking at the bear until the captain called us back because of changing ice conditions. The ice started to close in a bit, but we all made it in time back to the ship.



There was no way that we could Zodiac-cruise along the bird cliffs in these conditions, but our fantastic captain managed to cruise along with *Plancius*. We got so close that we could even smell the birds. Ten thousands of Brünnich's guillemots were sitting at the cliffs, or were swimming and flying around.

In the afternoon we went to Torellneset, a place that is known as a haul-out for walrus. The plan was to split up into two groups. While one would take a look at the

walruses, the other group would walk around for an hour. But a polar bear was spotted in the far distance, so the hike was cancelled. Nevertheless the walruses were great. They lay as a heap of sausages on the beach, lazy and sunbathing. Every now and then one looked up; but only for a moment, then back to sleep. From our position we could see about twenty, but when the ship sailed on, we saw a few more, closer to the beach on the other side.

Around 10 o'clock we reached Bråsvellbreen, a part of the Austfonna ice cap that meets the sea at the south side of Nordaustlandet. In the evening light this was just magnificent. The white of this huge glacier was pinkish against the blue of the sky, whilst the sun was still shining.

Day 7 – Wednesday, July 2014

Kapp Waldburg & Sundneset, Barentsøya

GPS 12.00h Position: 78°15.5'N / 021°56.9'E

Weather: Partly Cloudy Wind: WNW 5 Sea State: Slight Temperature: +2°C



This morning was an exciting hike at the seemingly barren Kapp Waldburg. Ahead in the distance, however, from the landing we could already hear the familiar call of the kittiwakes. The canyon was awash with them, nesting and flying about, and some of the young just sitting there for our photos. All of the groups went to the birds, and most of us climbed up higher to an area rich with fossils. There were ammonites, clams, mussels and all sorts of ancient marine life all over the ground. In addition we saw some fox in this place which appeared to be a “fox wonderland”. Taking young birds, eggs and later in the year the newly born chicks, they are steadily busy during summertime.



In the afternoon we landed in a very protected bay called Sundneset, still on Barentsøya. Sandra and Brent went “beach crawling” looking at the mudstone rock formations and how the sea ice jammed into the shoreline. At the end of the beach there were columnar

basalt cliffs and two of the hiking groups went on top of the cliff.

The “mountain goat” group even saw a polar bear in the far distance, but it was not a concern as it was sleeping miles away. Still we were constantly following its actions while we were admiring the rich tundra and the curious reindeer which came up close to some of our groups. In addition, we saw a lot of interesting flowers which especially Michelle pointed out to us: Spider plants, hairy lousewort, different buttercups and northern campions were just a few of the plants seen here.

Day 8 – Thursday, July 2014

Gåshamna & Burgerbukta, Hornsund

GPS 12.00h Position: 76°56.74N / 015°50.4'E

Weather: Overcast Wind: N 2 Sea State: Calm Temperature: +8°C



There was fog all around us during the night and the early morning, but while having breakfast when we sailed into Hornsund, the southernmost fjord of Spitsbergen, the visibility became better. Our morning landing was in Gåshamna which translates to goose bay. This bay was used in the 18th century by English whalers, and the remains can still be found in the shape of whale bones and skulls laying around. Other remains here are from the Swedish-Russian *Arc de Meridian* expedition. Between 1898 and

1904 very precise astronomic determinations were done in Sorgfjord and Gåshamna to see if the earth was round or flattened at the poles. The Swedes worked in the North and the Russians in the South.

We split up into three groups, the long walk going for the moraines in the back of the valley to catch a glimpse of the glacier. The two other groups took a little more time for the historic remains, the reindeer, moss campion (*Silene acaulis*) and the Arctic skuas. The moss campion are also known as 'compass moss' because the flowers at the south side come out first. We checked it with the compass, and as it turned out, the flowers can be used as a compass indeed.

When the short-walk group went back to the beach, the Belgium tour leader Yan spotted beluga whales in the bay. Seeing those true Arctic whales at only a few meters distance was stunning. Those among us who wanted to swim in the bay like the belugas could do so in the end of our landing. Almost all the Belgians went for the "polar plunge", but among the others there was a bit of a hesitation.

After lunch we went Zodiac cruising in Burgerbukta; it was an amazing experience to cruise between the glacial ice and hear its sound. Five boats even saw a huge glacial calving in front of Mühlbacherbreen. A curious ringed seal showed up and followed Sandra's boat for a while. Coming back on board the hotel staff was waiting for us with hot chocolate. In the late evening, on our way to Bellsund, we went to the continental shelf for whale spotting.



Very close Humpback whales that were spotted shortly before eleven and a big group of Harp seals half an hour later made a perfect ending to that day full of activities.

Day 9 – Friday, July 2014

Snatcherpynten & Ingebjorgfjellet, Bellsund

GPS 12.00h Position: 077°34.8'N / 014°36.0'E

Weather: Cloudy Wind: S 3 Sea State: Slight Temperature: +10°C

A little earlier than usual we were woken up by Philipp. For most of us it had been a very short night after our encounter with the humpback whales and harp seals. Nonetheless we were looking forward to our



next, but last day on Svalbard. Straight after breakfast we went ashore at Snatcherpynten in the Recherchefjord. Clouds overcast the sky and it seemed as if even the sky was shedding a tear or two because of our last day. A bit above the landing site, we found a very wobbly hut, the Gjaervilla. At the beach, we also found the remains of wagons and other mining utilities. These leftovers are strongly connected with Ernest Mansfield, who had unsuccessfully attempted to mine for

iron, marble and other minerals. In the end, he had to flee to America and left several millions of pounds of debts.... Plus those remains which served as photo motives for us now. Before we started with our hikes, Philipp informed us about a tragic plane crash, that had occurred over the Ukraine. In the course of this disaster more than 150 Dutchmen lost their lives. Therefore, the *Plancius* sailed with flags on half-mast as a sign of respect and mourn. Despite the sad news we still wanted to take in this polar region on our last day



and started with our activities. While one group attempted to reach a mountain ridge with a view on the Renardbreen, a second group started to hike over the tundra, followed by a climb on the side moraine to have a glimpse on the glacier. The beach strollers for once left the beach and hiked over the tundra as well. A ringed seal, many Arctic terns, barnacle geese

and reindeer were found along the way and made the cameras clicking. But soon, our return to the ship



had come and on board we were greeted by Michael, Hotel Manager, to settle our accounts. During our last lunch, we crossed Bellsund and dropped anchor at Ingeborgfjellet. This spot is home of thousands of Little Auks and had been previously shown in a BBC documentary. Because where there are birds, there also are polar foxes to be found. Despite high waves at the gangway and continuous soft rain, we stormed the pebble beach. From the ship, we had spotted some huts and

remains which dated back from the "gold rush" times of Svalbard. The entire area seemed lush and green (also because of the rain) and the numerous scat piles signaled a great activity of reindeer here. On the other side, dark huge rocks poked out of the ground and made our walking quite treacherous. We marched to the site, where all the Little Auks had made their home. The slope of the mountain was steep and we carefully climbed to our observations spots. On the way, Michael spotted the first fox which seemed effortlessly move between the rocks on the search for food. But Little Auks, which are nesting in between the rocks, are hard to get thanks to their size. For almost three quarters of an hour we sat there and watched the birds passing over our heads and landing on the rocks around us. It was magic despite the rain. But soon we had to say Goodbye and we went back on board for a hot shower and a drink. At the traditional Captains' Farewell, our expedition leader Philipp brought back the memories of our amazing trip and Captain Levakov invited us all to visit the *Plancius* wherever we would see her. Our last supper was another highlight from the kitchen and Hotelmanager Mike presented finally the entire Hotel team. Those of us, who were supposed to have an early start, found their way to their beds. A few others decided to enjoy the last hours on board of our *Plancius* to the end. Sleeping would be for another time.

Day 10 – Saturday July 2014

Disembarkation in Longyearbyen

GPS 08.00h Position: 078°14.0'N / 015°35.2'E

Today is disembarkation day in Longyearbyen. On the pier we bade farewell to many of the friends we have come to know over the past week, and had one last look at the *Plancius*, the ship that took us on such an incredible voyage around Spitsbergen. This trip will last us a lifetime – in our memories, our imaginations, and in our dreams.



Thank you all for such a wonderful voyage, for your company and enthusiasm. We hope to see you again in the future, wherever that might be!

Total distance sailed on our voyage: **997 nautical miles**

Most northerly point on our voyage: **80°28.23'N / 016°06.72'E on the 13.07.2014**

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Evgeny Levakov,
Expedition Leader Philipp Schaudy and all the crew and staff, it has been a pleasure
travelling with you.