

Greenland Odyssey

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 11 - 25 August 2022





Reykjavik

DAY 1 | Thursday 11 August

Position at 1600 on 11 August

Latitude: 64°08' N

Longitude: 51°55' W

Course: Anchored at Reykjavik

Speed: 0.0 kts

Wind Speed: 6 kts from NW

Barometer: 1010

Air Temp: 8°C

Little do you know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.

—Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque*, 1881

Here we are in the vibrant capital city of Iceland, Reykjavik. Home to around 123,000 people, it has a vivid nightlife, modern museums, world-class restaurants, galleries, shops and bars.

The warm and stable *Greg Mortimer* beckoned us on board, where we had a welcome buffet prepared by our Food & Beverage Team. The stewards helped us navigate the decks to our cabins and settle into our “home away from home”.

After a welcome briefing from our Expedition Leader, Flo and speeches from our Hotel Director, Patrice and Doctor Andres, we had a series of briefings. We learnt about the overview of our upcoming expedition across Greenland’s varied environments, while Justine gave us some handy pointers about how best to make the most onboard of the upcoming two weeks. A lot of information to take in, but necessary so that we could get started with our adventure across the Denmark Strait.

Finally it was time for the all-important safety drill. Seven long blasts and one short blast of the ship’s horn signalled us to grab our bulky orange lifejackets, our beanies and warm clothing, and muster in the lecture theatre. We followed our crew up to Deck 7 where the polar class life vessels sit (they can hold 136 people each, for five days). Our briefings finished for the night, we headed to the dining room for a delicious dinner prepared and served by our amazing Hotel Team.

Down at the expedition desk, the jacket exchange ensued, so now we are kitted out to face whatever weather Greenland throws our way.

Under the evening light, we were given the all-clear to pull away from the wharf and begin our Arctic expedition across Greenland’s incredible landscapes.

Despite the challenges of travel, there was a definite buzz of excitement in the air!

On board we have 86 passengers with 97 crew. This includes 15 Aurora Expedition Team members with variety of specialities, including polar exploration, mountaineering, geology, botany, history, cetaceans, marine biology, terrestrial biology, photography, medicine, and kayaking.



Across the Denmark Strait

DAY 2 | Friday 12 August

Position at 0700 on 12 August

Latitude: 66°16'N

Longitude: 35°29'W

Course: 305°

Speed: 7.8 knots

Wind Speed: 9.9 knots W

Barometer: 1025

Air Temp: -3°C

A first walk in any new country is one of the things which makes life on this planet worth being grateful for.

—Charles William Beebe

Overnight, deep in slumber, Captain Maxim steered the good ship the *Greg Mortimer* out of Icelandic waters and out for our transit across the Denmark Strait.

Flo woke us up with a gentle wakeup call before we devoured a delicious breakfast prepared by our galley team. The perfect preparation for a full day's worth of briefings.

First up was John's lecture on seabirds of the north. We learnt about the major different groups of seabirds that we'll see in Greenland: auks (such as puffins), gulls (including skuas and terns), tubenoses (petrels & albatrosses), gannets and cormorants. We learnt about different feeding behaviours, and that some seabirds can drink seawater due to the presence of a nasal salt gland.

Outside of the lecture theatre, we were being treated to an incredible showing of blows from minke, humpback and sperm whales, and the occasional dolphin riding our bow.

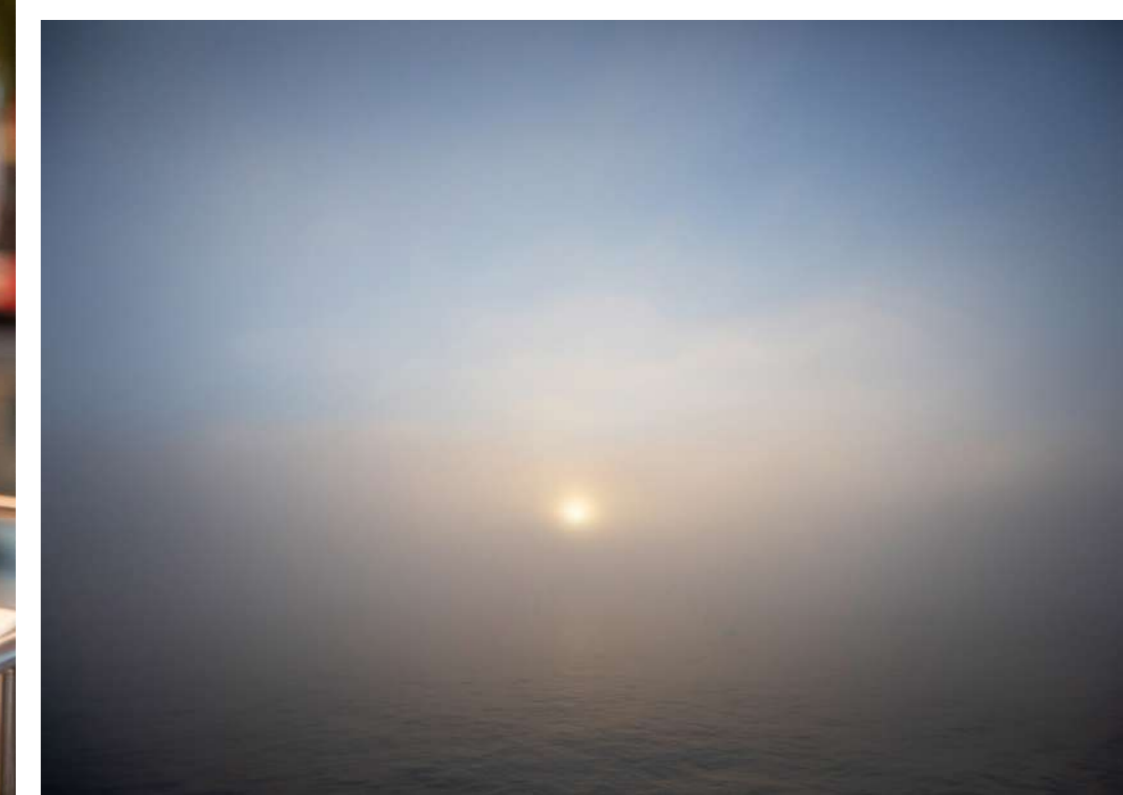
Next up, it was time for to prepare to go ashore in Greenland. We learnt about AECO guidelines (Association of Arctic Expedition Cruising), before heading down to the mudroom to get acquainted with our muckboots and vacuumed our backpacks to make sure we get rid of all seeds and residue we might have brought from home.

After lunch, there was no rest for the weary. Michael stepped through his Photography 101 lecture; while the kayakers were kitted out with booties and drysuits.

Next on the itinerary was a Greenland 101 briefing from Flo. We learnt about the three distinct regions of Greenland: from the East to the South to the West. Next was learning the "Zodiac three-step", which will soon become second nature. A lot of information to take in, but necessary so that we can get started with our adventure early the next morning.

Our activities finished for the night – or so we thought. Orca! We raced to the Observation Deck in hopes of seeing these incredible marine mammals – but alas, the orca were moving quickly and we only saw a few spouts. We headed to the dining room for a delicious dinner prepared and served by our amazing hotel team.

After the many hours of travel to reach the frozen north of the world, it's finally time to kick back, breathe in the sea air, and enjoy the marvels of this beautiful land.



Kangertigtivatsiaq Fjord & Storø Island

DAY 3 | Saturday 13 August

Position at 0700 on 13 August

Latitude: 65°55.8'N

Longitude: 33°24.8'W

Course: 305°

Speed: 12.5 knots

Wind Speed: 6 knots N

Barometer: 1025

Air Temp: 4°C

And yet, there is only one great thing, the only thing, to see in huts and on journeys: the great day that dawns, and the light that fills the world.

—Inuit poem

With a bonus hour's sleep, we awoke to sea fog as we entered Kangertigtivatsiaq Fjord – our first stop in Greenland. In calm seas we were treated to views of the fjord through the mist as it came and went, but Greenland was a little shy at revealing for full grandeur too soon.

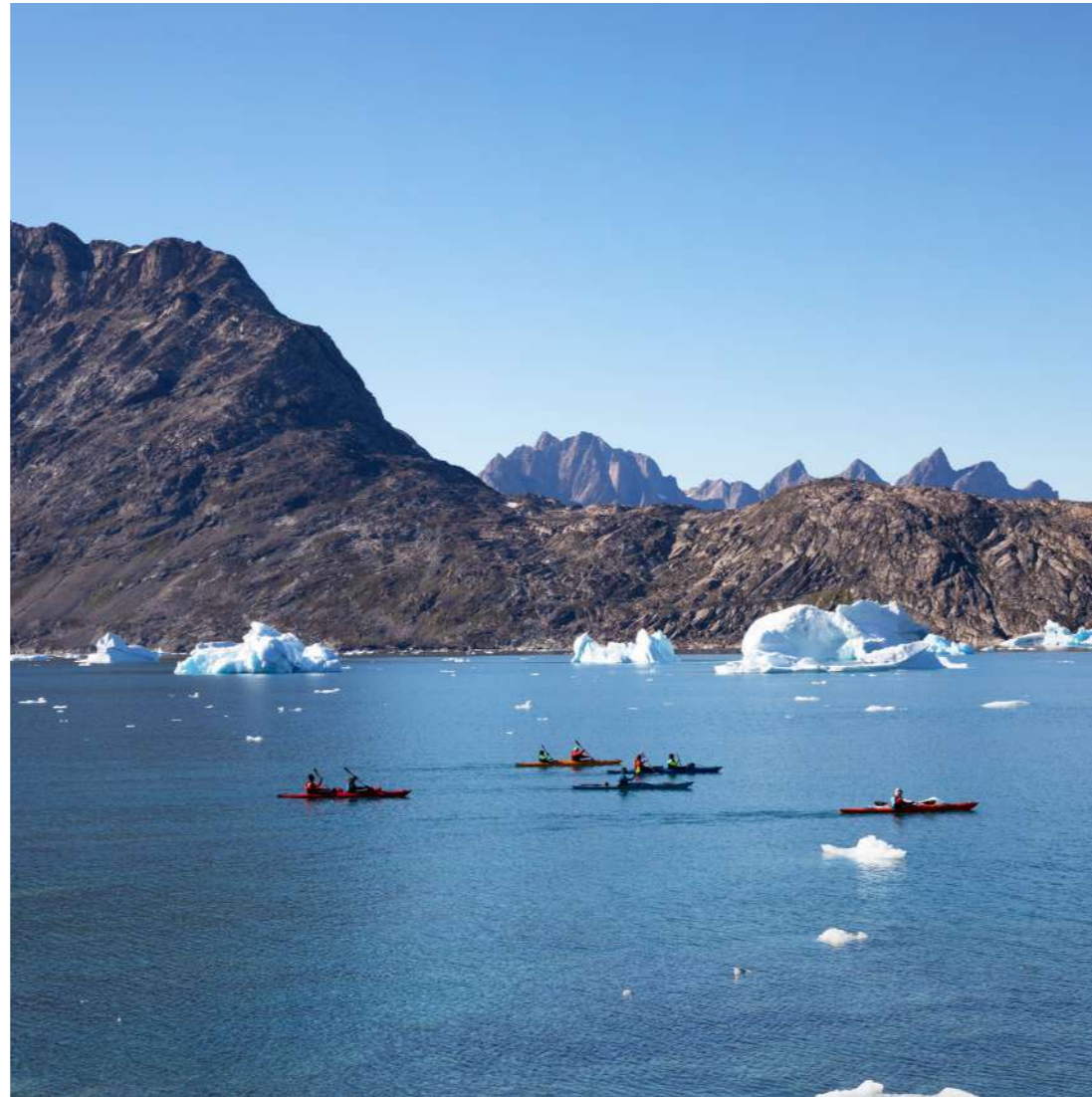
Captain Maxim skillfully navigated our way weaving through the numerous icebergs and bergy bits with their mirrored reflections against the water. For those who ventured out onto the outdoor decks, care was taken to avoid the patches of ice on the decks that had formed overnight in the sub-zero temperatures. The towering peaks that lined the fjord made the *Greg Mortimer* feel very small as we were rewarded with a close-up view of the Glacier de France with its distinctive black moraine stripes. You could clearly see the bands of lighter coloured rock on either side of the glacier that indicated the extent of glacial retreat.

After we had turned around at the head of the fjord, we set course for Storø Island at the entrance of the fjord. The ship anchored a short distance from the island at 1pm in brilliant sunshine at N 66°23.8205 W 035°48.2570. Zodiacs were launched for those visiting the island.

The Expedition Team headed to the Island to find a landing spot and scout for polar bears and shortly after which passengers were making their first Zodiac beach landing in Greenland. Meanwhile Russell and Liz were setting up the kayakers for their first adventure on this voyage in what would have to be considered perfect conditions. The kayakers were excited to be on the water and got to see an iceberg carve not far from their location, they also made a landing and visit to Storø Island.

Storø Island had two old wooden huts with two turf houses close by to them. Two unknown graves were located on the island also. While the *Greg Mortimer* was at anchor it positioned itself to use its engines to push away a berg that had moved too close to the stern of the ship. John and some of our keen birders spotted a Gyrfalcon soaring high over the island.

Before dinner, Cecile spoke about Paul Emile Victor – a French explorer and ethnologist, while Jocelyn gave a talk on Citizen Science covering understanding cloud cover for NASA, Micro Plastics, Secchi Disc, eBird and Happy Whale.



Tasiilaq & Seremilik Fjord

DAY 4 | Sunday 14 August

Position at 0730 on 14 August

Latitude: 65°37'N

Longitude: 37°37.6'W

Course: At anchor Tasiilaq

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 10 knots NE

Barometer: 1025

Air Temp: 5°C

In familiar environments, it is easy to go blind in the sense that the initial excitement disappears with the passage of time. This is true for any environment—including the Arctic... The views are just as magnificent and the Arctic wildlife remains just as exotic and exciting as before. The silence is still balm to the soul and the serenity is present all the time. But the first-time experience is a once and for all experience that cannot be repeated.

—Magnus Elander, *Quiet days in the Arctic*

Incredible Tasiilaq! After an extra hour's sleep as we moved timezones (again) to Nuuk time, the morning dawned perfectly clear with barely a breath of wind. A lazy Sunday morning ensued: after RAT tests in the morning, we headed ashore to explore Tasiilaq, east Greenland's largest town with a population of approximately 2000 inhabitants.

Formerly Ammassalik and overlooking King Oscar's Harbour, we clamboured over green meadows and set off to explore the town at leisure. Some followed Cecile up to the turf houses to explore the interior of these intimate and cosy dwellings that were inhabited from the 9th to the mid 20th century – and could house up to four families. The more exposed 'beds' were 'reserved' for unmarried men, while the more sheltered for large families. The museum proved to be a favourite, with its fascinating chronology of Greenlandic housing and techniques – with windows made out of seal intestine. Others chose to meander around the township, with brightly coloured buildings: visiting the small school, the supermarket and admiring the shapers where we could buy small figures whittled from various horns. The wildflowers were aplenty as well.

While we enjoyed a sumptuous lunch back on board, we navigated down to nearly Seremilik Fjord, the largest in southeast Greenland for a Zodiac cruise and kayak.

We took to the Zodiacs for an incredible cruise amongst gigantic bergs in an iceberg playground. We admired the waterfalls cascading off the side of a large tabular berg as we Zodiaced over 10 kilometres into the fjord. Jack's Zodiac tried some trigonometry and worked out that one of the icebergs was over 90 metres high, while Jocelyn's Zodiac tried some Citizen Science measuring the cirrus clouds that we could see.

The dark blue of the water contrasted with the pearly, clear white of the various bergs – all with their unique shapes as a consequence of physical weathering and melting; as well as being formed by the current, wind and swell. The deep blue we could see emanating from some bergs was the consequence of additional ice pressing down on the lower sections of the bergs, literally squeezing the air bubbles from the ice to create clear ice. Light



penetrates deeply into clear ice and the only light wave to reflect back is blue, making clear ice appear blue. The kayakers were spoilt by a showing of breaching humpback whales and huge icebergs, while they watched breathless from their kayaks.

Back onboard, smiles were aplenty as we enjoyed the cocktail of the day and another recap, before observing the supermoon on our port side.



Skjoldungen

DAY 5 | Monday 15 August

Position at 0800 on 15 August

Latitude: 63°20'N

Longitude: 041°15'W

Course: 226.7°

Speed: 9 knots

Wind Speed: 9 knots NE

Barometer: 1026

Air Temp: 8°C

The impression which the floe-ice of the Arctic seas makes upon the traveler for the first time he sees it is very remarkable. Most people will find that what they actually see is not a little different from what they have expected. A world of wonders and enchantments, a complete horizon of wild fantastic forms, ever changing, ever new, a wealth of brilliant rainbow hues playing and glowing amid the cold purity of the crystal ice, such are the features of the picture which the ingenuity of the imagination so often fondly creates.

—Fridtjof Nansen, *The First Crossing of Greenland*

Today is another one of those spectacular days where you wake up and wonder if you really are onboard a ship in Greenland... the sun shone tirelessly over us as we entered Skjoldungen Sound around 8am.

The wings of the *Greg Mortimer* were opened so passengers could enjoy the views from either side of the ship close to the surface. The reflections of the peaks (some soaring up to 1500-2000 metres) and glaciers were quite incredible. During the morning, Joselyn called for a Citizen Science activity called Cloud Observer. The idea being to report what we see from a land (or ship) based point of view when a satellite passes over us. Today was an easy report as there was absolutely no cloud to be seen but an absence of cloud is still a data to pass onto NASA for their program.

We enjoyed a lovely lunch and then got ready for a landing at Dronning Marie Dal in the afternoon. This place is simply spectacular, especially with this kind of weather. Towering peaks and carvings glaciers surrounded the landing beach.

Onshore, something we could almost call a jungle welcomed us with forests of willows and birch up to our knees. Lots of other plants and flowers were surrounding us, with clubmoss, angelica, wild berries and very colourful ones as well such as dandelions and Arctic harebells. The welcoming committee would not be complete if we forgot to mention the armies of flies and mosquitoes that accompanied us along the way. Flo offered a hike up the riverbed that took the hikers a couple of kilometres inland for a great opportunity to stretch their legs.

Back onboard we resumed our navigation around the island that is encircled by Skjoldungen Sound, Skjoldungen meaning 'shields on the sides of a ship' in Danish. Towards the end of our navigation, we sailed past a cluster of houses with a small jetty. These are the only remains of what was once a small community forcibly placed here in the 1930's. Life was never easy there as hunting is not the best and the inhabitants were relocated back to bigger villages in 1965.



Prince Christian Sound; Kangersuneq Qinngorleq Glacier

DAY 6 | Tuesday 16 August

Position at 0800 on 16 August

Latitude: 60°08.284' N

Longitude: 042°49.497' W

Course: 198.4°

Speed: 11.1 knots

Wind Speed: 6 knots SE

Barometer: 1018

Air Temp: 7°C

Civilization began to lose its zest for me. I began to long for the great white desolation... the long, long Arctic day, the silence, the vastness of the great white lonely North. And back I went.

—Robert Peary

As we continue sailing south, the first lecture of the day was given by John on 'Arctic Oceanography', giving details about thermohaline circulation, the different kinds of ice and the many animal species that live and thrive in this environment, such as bears, walruses and several species of seals.

This morning, as announced by Florence yesterday, the weather turned to less perfect conditions, featuring some clouds, gusts of wind up to 30 knots and a bit of rain... Nevertheless, we entered Prince Christian Sound around 10am and started a scenic navigation through deep fjords sandwiched between towering peaks. Our daring captain decided to enter a side arm of the sound and got us all the way to the end to enjoy nice views of the Kangerluq glacier. He then made a u-turn and came back to the main sound to resume our navigation. We sailed in a drizzle that did not hinder the beauty of our surroundings. There were many hanging glaciers to observe along with some beautiful waterfalls. Conditions improved and Michael called the photography enthusiasts to the outside decks as the light and scenery were quite amazing and offered great photo opportunities.

A bit later on, Joselyn, John and Ian introduced the Citizen Science ebird activity and met on Deck 8 to make a census of all species in view.

After lunch, Cécile gave a lecture about Fridtjof Nansen, the Norwegian explorer who became famous for crossing the Greenland ice cap, trying to reach the North Pole with the polar ship Fram and later on received the Nobel Peace Prize.

As conditions improved outside, Florence called everyone to enjoy a cruise in front of Kangersuneq Qinngorleq glacier, a name that none of the guides were ever able to pronounce. There was lots of brash ice but once the brash belt was left behind, the small boats we were able to cruise along the edge of the coast passing waterfall after waterfall and beautiful hanging gardens coming in and out of the mist. The kayaks were also taken out as well as a special Zodiac that was dedicated to photography.



Tarsemiut Fjord/Klosterdal

DAY 7 | Wednesday 17 August

Position at 1300 on 17 August

Latitude: 60°32.725'N

Longitude: 044°28.229'W

Course: 020.7°

Speed: 10 knots

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath.

—Herman Melville

Truly an epic day. We began in bright sun and blue skies with our visit to Klosterdal, a majestic valley bordered by glacier-carved granite peaks and named in association with the monastery that today remains only as vague foundations peeking up from amongst the lush shrubby growth of dwarf birch and willows.

We landed on a small beach and after a short walk uphill we gathered in groups to head out into the country. Some chose to stay closer to the landing and ruins area while others struck out for more adventurous territory, discovering meadows of old-growth lichens covering just about any flat ground both out in the open and underneath shrubs' sheltering boughs. Our way was dictated by the density of undergrowth, in some places decidedly too "thickety" to pass and we had to work our way around in a new direction.

Eventually we did have to return to catch our ride home for lunch, but not before we enjoyed the rush of the waterfall at the river's outlet and took bets on how close the kayakers could paddle to the falls themselves. The stunning weather continued into the afternoon, with a surprising lack of insects. Lucky us! As the wind was still howling outside of the fjord we stayed in our idyllic surrounds, making our way to the end of Tarsemiut fjord to bask in the glory of the Greenland Icecap falling just about into our laps.

We spent time at the base of the icefalls, staring into the icy maw of a cave disgorging a torrent of glacial meltwater. A few portraits were made with chunks of the icecap as a backdrop while others explored the smooth-ground granite rock and examined a variety of colors and crystals embedded in the bedrock.

We were also able to explore around a different glacial-outlet area, where a lake drained into the fjord via a short stretch of whitewater rapid. Some Zodiacs were able to make it up the watercourse to see the valley ahead and explore the inlet falls at the head of the lake. Others were able to make a landing nearer to the fjord and explore from there, trying to appreciate the overwhelming scale of 2000 metre peaks and untold volumes of meltwater flowing past every minute.

Wind Speed: 7 knots SE

Barometer: 1018

Air Temp: 5°C

A perfect cap to the day was returning to the ship where the kayak platform awaited the hardy souls willing to bare (just about) all to the frigid waters and fellow expeditioners alike... the famed Polar Plunge! Grimaces and shouts of both pain and delighted were made and several multi-plungers really showed us how it was done. Nothing like a swim in the sunshine, regardless of latitude. What a fitting end to an absolutely stunning day.



Polar Plunge

DAY 7 | Wednesday 17 August



Hvasley; Qaqortok

DAY 8 | Thursday 18 August

Position at 1400 on 18 August

Latitude: 60° 43.014'N

Longitude: 046° 02.178'W

Course: 40°

Speed: 11 knots

Wind Speed: 12 knots SE

Barometer: 1018

Air Temp: 6°C

Up there time comes whole, then is divided into four months of dark, four months of light and two seasons of twilight when the sun hangs at the horizon as though stuck between two thoughts.

—Gretel Ehrlich, *This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland*

We awoke this morning to yet another perfect sunny day in South Greenland. Overnight, Liz and Jack had been on the lookout for the Aurora Borealis from Deck 8. They did see some barely visible green glowing spots but nothing spectacular enough to wake the whole ship.

This morning's excursion was to Hvasley Island (Whale Island) to visit the best-preserved ruins of a Norse settlement in Greenland. This site is also a UNESCO World Heritage site because of its outstanding historical significance. The settlers here were descended from Vikings who arrived in Greenland around 1000AD. They established a small farming community and supplemented their diets through long expeditions to North and East Greenland, where they hunted walrus, seals, narwhal, belugas and polar bears. That provided them with meat and also skins and narwhal ivory to trade with European merchants. The Norse settlements were abandoned around 1450AD for unknown reasons.

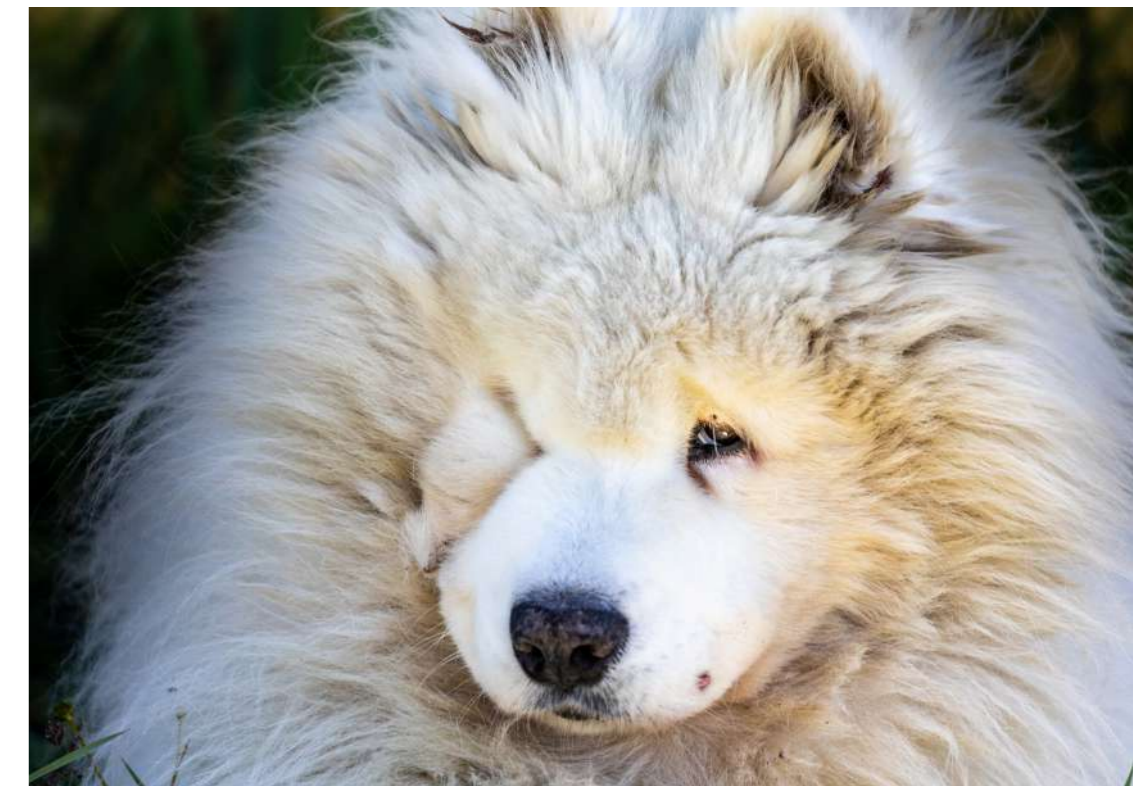
We spent some peaceful time wandering through the ruins and learning about the history and architecture of Norse settlements. This was also an opportunity for short walks along the beach or up the hillside to take in the scenery and look for wildlife. A highlight for some people was seeing white-tailed eagles at this landing.

In the afternoon, we visited Qaqortok, the capital of South Greenland. This town of around 2,000 people is the largest town and administrative centre of South Greenland. Being the closest major settlement to Europe and the US, this is the most visited town in Greenland, with up to 44,000 people a year landing here: mostly on cruise ships but also on expedition ships such as the *Greg Mortimer*.

We spent a pleasant afternoon in Qaqortok, where people were free to do what they liked. Many people visited the local museum to learn more about the history and culture of the region. Others bought some souvenirs to take home or postcards to send to loved ones. It was also nice just wandering the streets, admiring the colourful houses and chatting with the locals. One highlight was the stone carvings of fish and people that adorned the rock face behind the market stalls.

After a very pleasant landing at Qaqortoq, we re-boarded the *Greg Mortimer* and left the protected calm waters of the fjords for the open ocean. Fortunately, the seas were not too rough and the skies were clear. While some needed some sleep after busy days of landings and hikes, others stayed up late in the hope of watching the Aurora overnight.

Just before 12am, the call was made. Aurora Borealis! Over 20 brave souls headed outside and watched the most spectacular lightshow on earth. Colours: purple and orange and green, lit up the sky in brilliant spirals and clouds.



Paamiut

DAY 9 | Friday 19 August

Position at 1800 on 19 August

Latitude: 62°00.846' N

Longitude: 049°52.480' W

Course: 305.1°

Speed: 10 knots

Wind Speed: 15 knots N

Barometer: 1020

Air Temp: 5°C

So tremble the northern lights their silver veil across the heaven,
soon gold, soon green, soon reddish; spreading; gathering again in a breathless
rush; vibrant illuminated silver threads in exuberant folds;
sparkling luminous waves that journey on, and the brilliance lost only for a moment.

—Fridtjof Nansen

Good evening, everyone... this is your wake-up call to let you know that the Northern Lights are out! A welcomed message to some and, to others, not so much. As we gathered outside on Deck 8 watching the lights dance above us, the stoke level was off the charts! Rays of light danced through the sky as we practiced our night modes hoping to capture just a glimpse of the sensory overload we were feeling, and the day was just getting started!

After Flo's morning wake-up call, we crawled out of bed in anticipation for our day in Paamiut. At breakfast we shared stories and photos of our night under the Aurora Borealis and we were greeted by humpback and minke whales. Oh, and good news... we beat Seabourne! #beatseabourne #aurorabridgeteam. Loading into the Zodiacs, we headed to town and were led on a hike through the beautiful outskirts of Paamiut — lakes, streams, wildflowers, vista points, bog, and the occasional mosquito were in the mix as we followed our amazing guides down an unmarked trail... a true Greenlandic adventure! Those of us not on the hike enjoyed our exploration in town — the colorful museum, church, park, and colorful local houses inspired photos, whilst the friendliness of the locals warmed our hearts and made us feel welcome.

After lunch on the ship, all our options came out — town, Zodiac cruising, ship snooze and kayaking lined the expedition desk as we signed our names for our favoured activity. There were islands to explore for the cruisers and kayakers, and more time to explore the quaint little town, and naps to be had because we're on holiday! During our Zodiac cruise, the kayakers came across a group of locals harvesting a minke whale, which had been caught in the waters outside of town. As they graciously allowed us to watch and take photos, it was interesting to see the detail and precision they used in their cuts — one whale can feed and sustain multiple people and families within the community. The kayakers made their way into some swell improving their skills as they rock gardened along the shorelines! Leaving anchorage, the humpbacks gave us a show... flaunting their flukes as they swam and dove around the ship.



As we made our way into the recap and briefing, it was great to see the lecture theatre full again with our fellow expeditioners! Excited for our day in Nuuk, we went into the restaurant to feast on Chef Cristian's cuisine and share and toast in our amazing day full of dancing lights, whale flukes, and stoke!



Nuuk

DAY 10 | Saturday 20 August

Position at 0800 on 20 August

Latitude: 64°09.970'N

Longitude: 051°43.239'W

Course: 164.6°

Speed: Alongside

Wind Speed: 4.5 knots NW

Barometer: 1015

Air Temp: 7°C

For three whole days, from noon on August 17 to the morning of August 20, we were now confined to the tent by a violent storm and uninterrupted rain. The whole time we only left our sleeping-bags for the purpose of getting food and for other small errands.

—Fridtjof Nansen, *The First Crossing of Greenland*

Today we got to visit the capital of Greenland, Nuuk, the smallest in the world with just under 20,000 inhabitants (so basically a third of the country's population). It was a very different feeling to visit an actual town with traffic lights and rather big buildings as opposed to small villages without any. Nevertheless, the locals were happy to see us and we saw lots of smiles and heard plenty of Halu calls.

Buses with local guides were organized to have an overview of the city, the guides were actually young students explaining the sights and what life is like in the big city (Nuuk York city). We made three stops, one in the new area of town with fancier buildings, one close to the university and the cemetery and the last one in the old part of town, where Hans Egede's statue, the church and the museum are located.

The National Museum of Greenland is probably the nicest and biggest one in Greenland, with various exhibitions showing the means of transportations used by the Inuit (Kayak and Umiak), the interior of houses in the 19th century, the traditional costumes featuring the kamik (sort of boots made of bear or seal skins/furs), beads, ornaments, the anorak and so on.

The museum also displays the masterpieces that were discovered in Qilakitsoq in 1972. Two local hunters found two graves containing eight very well preserved mummies including 6 women, 1 child and a baby. They are believed to have been living around 1475 and have been kept in that state thanks to the dryness of the climate and the cold temperatures. Two of the women and the baby are on permanent display in one of the dimly lit rooms of the museum, perhaps a disturbing but also a mesmerizing sight.

There was also ample time to roam around the city, enjoying the local souvenir shops selling beautiful reproductions of tupilak (avenging monster fabricated by a shaman), jewellery, sportswear, lovely books... and also sample local dishes for those who stayed ashore for lunch, such as muskox, reindeer, and lots of different types of fish.

The clouds stayed low during our call, but the big city has much to offer and when we departed it was with a bit of nostalgia, en route towards West Greenland and new adventures.



Sisimiut, At sea

DAY 11 | Sunday 21 August

Position at 1820 on 21 August

Latitude: 67°57.569' N

Longitude: 054°06.573' W

Course: 005.8°

Speed: 8 knots

All nature is, as it were, sunk in her own dreams, and gently and quietly the mind, too, is drawn back into itself to pursue the train of its own thoughts, which unconsciously borrow a reflection of the colours of the sky.

—Fridtjof Nansen, *The First Crossing of Greenland*

This morning, we pulled in alongside the wharf at Sisimiut for a morning of exploration of this town and its historic peninsula. This town is 40 kilometres inside the Arctic Circle and has 5,600 people, making it the largest Arctic town on the North American continent.

This visit provided an opportunity to explore on our own, join a history hike or take a bus tour of the town. The one-hour bus tour was offered at three different times to enable people to do the tour and enjoy their own exploration.

Once away from the busy port area, Sisimiut showed itself to be a lovely town of separate enclaves amidst a jumble of rocky hills and vegetated valleys. The bus first took us to a high point where we could look out over the town and the surrounding hills and fjords. Like other Greenlandic towns, Sisimiut comprises clusters of brightly-coloured buildings scattered over the hillsides like over-sized Lego blocks. Second stop on the bus tour was 'Dog-town,' where the local people keep around one thousand Greenland huskies at the edge of the human town. These working dogs spend the whole year outside, with their thick fur insulating them from the Arctic cold. The cute husky puppies were a highlight of this visit.

The walk around the small peninsula to the west of Sisimiut was also a tour into the 4,500 year history of this ancient settlement. The Saqqaq people were the first to live here and spent almost 2,000 years in the area before mysteriously disappearing. It was then occupied by successive waves of people from the Dorset and Thule cultures; the latter arriving 900 years ago and being ancestors of the Inuit people who live here today. They were followed by the Europeans, who have lived in the area for almost 500 years.

The name of the town comes from the Inuit inhabitants, who were called Sisimiut or "people who live in foxholes" for their housing style, which had long entrance tunnels reminiscent of fox dens. We found the remains of several of these stone houses with kitchens in their long entrance tunnels so that cooking smoke did not enter the main house. We also found some historic graves, comprising piles of rocks through which the bones of the deceased are still visible 500 years since they were buried.

Wind Speed: 4.5 knots SW

Barometer: 1024

Air Temp: 7°C

Before we left Sisimiut we were entertained by an impressive display of kayak-rolling by a young Greenlander who won the Greenland kayak-rolling championship a few years ago. Russell also entertained us with his own kayak-rolling skills but was unable to emulate the extremely difficult 'no-paddle' roll of the national champion.

After Sisimiut, we sailed north towards Disko Bay. Along the way, we were informed by lectures on the whales of Greenland and the curious tale of Charles Francis Hall's 1871 Polaris Expedition to Northwest Greenland. After dinner, many of us watched the documentary *Chasing Ice*, which showed the drastic loss of glacial ice that is occurring in West Greenland.



Eqip Sermia, Ataa

DAY 12 | Monday 22 August

Position at 07:00 on 22 August

Latitude: 69° 48' N

Longitude: 050° 27' W

Course: 105°

Speed: 6 knots

If you wish to see Nature robed in her mantle of might, look at a storm at sea; If you want to see her robed in her mantle of glory, look at a sunset at sea.

—Ernest Shackleton, British Antarctic polar explorer

The names Ataa and Eqi look like the letters you are left with after a game of Scrabble – the ones you simply can't make into a word that makes any sense. The Inuit language seems full of such names, packed with Q's and A's.

The weather was fine, a thin high layer of light cloud which softened the harshness of the sun, a gentle breeze and smooth seas.

Our day started with a Zodiac cruise amongst the ice at Eqi. It was perfect weather for it. For almost three hours we slipped between icebergs and bergy bits (the technical term for very, very small icebergs) of infinite shapes and colours. Some bergs looked like submerged crocodiles, gnarly backs and head just showing above the water's surface, while others were polished round and shiny. One huge berg had its own waterfall pouring from the top of its ice cliff 100 metres high straight down into the sea. All the bergs were beautiful in their own way but some of the larger ones were best treated with respect, all were in terminal decline and liable at any minute to collapse or roll over.

During lunch the *Greg Mortimer* repositioned and dropped anchor just off Ataa. The small village seemed abandoned until a thin wisp of smoke was spotted, rising from a steel barrel at the top of the beach. When we landed Flo went and talked to the family who were staying in one of the houses. It transpired that they lived many miles away in a much larger community but had come to visit the place where the mother had been born almost 50 years ago. They were very welcoming and told us about the history of this community which once had several families living there. When French explorer Paul Emile Victor had arrived nearby back in 1947 on an expedition onto the ice cap, the community of Ataa had helped him unload all the equipment from his ship onto the ice. That included some huge tracked vehicles called Weasels which Victor hoped to use in his travels across the ice. Sadly, since those days Ataa village has lain abandoned for many years with just the occasional visit.

Wind Speed: 25 knots SE

Barometer: 1020

Air Temp: 1°C

The surrounding land was indeed wild and spectacular and we set off on a walk along the rocky lichen strewn slopes of the shoreline. As we walked through the outskirts of the village we passed an austere graveyard with many simple white wooden crosses. Some expeditioners chose to take a walk inland along the shores of a large crystal clear lake. It was wonderful to walk through such a beautiful land.

After such an active day it was great to get back onboard the *Greg Mortimer* to a fab dinner.



Ilulissat

DAY 13 | Tuesday 23 August

Position at 0700 on 23 August

Latitude: 69°14'N

Longitude: 51°07'W

Course: At anchor

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 20 knots S

Barometer: 1009

Air Temp: 7°C

Icebergs

Icebergs originate from calving glaciers that terminate in the ocean. One tenth of the iceberg is visible, while the remaining nine tenths are under water. Dirty icebergs or icebergs without any air bubbles originate from the very base of the glacier, where the ice is dragged across the bedrock, and is under so much pressure that air bubbles can escape from between the ice crystals.

We'd heard stories from the Expedition Team over the last two weeks about the town of Ilulissat in Disko Bay and the Jakobshavn Glacier, but it was truly astonishing to wake up completely surrounded by huge icebergs and brash ice as far as we could see... a first during our time in Greenland. The 'atmospheric' grey cloud cover added to the feeling of exploration as we set out for our final full day exploring Disko Bay and West Greenland.

Woolies on, muckboots check, we scrambled into the Zodiacs for our various activities ashore. Those who booked the scenic helicopter flight over the glacier headed off, while the rest of us were bussed up to the world heritage site.

The Ilulissat Icefjord stretches for one kilometre and is responsible for most of the icebergs that calve into Disko Bay and then are dragged by the currents up the West Greenland stream and back down the coast of Newfoundland. The amount of ice that calves off the glacier itself each day can power New York City for a year. We meandered down the boardwalk and were awe-struck by the size and the height of the massive freshwater bergs.

Back on board, it was time for hot showers, refuelling at lunch then a quick siesta before our afternoon Zodiac cruise exploring Ilulissat's outer harbour. Michael and Ian took our photographers as they toured several impressive pieces of ice; while others negotiated the brash ice and checked out the massive tabular bergs that had been swept into Ilulissat's harbour. Particularly notable were the local fishermen, expertly manoeuvring their boats at high speed through the massive bergs.



At sea, Eternity fjord

DAY 14 | Wednesday 24 August

Position at 0700 on 24 August

Latitude: 67°06'N

Longitude: 54°13'W

Course: 185°

Speed: 12 knots

Wind Speed: 24 knots

Barometer: 1009

Air Temp: 4°C

On a small piece of paper, too, I wrote a short account of the progress of the expedition so far, packed it carefully in a little tin, and enclosed this in the bread-box which had belonged to our sealing-boat. In my account I wrote that we were quite hopeful of reaching the west coast, if we were only favoured with sufficient frost; as it turned out, we were favoured with a good deal more than enough.

—Fridtjof Nansen, *The First Crossing of Greenland*

Our final day on Greenland's West Coast began with lectures galore as we navigated back down the coast and towards Kangerlussuaq – at the head of a 40 kilometre fjord. With a following sea, there was a fair bit of rocking that kept some of our number from the breakfast table, but with a full schedule of lectures on the cards, we grabbed hot beverages and found a comfortable spot.

First up was a talk with Ian titled 'A Thousand Wild Dawns'. We listened captivated as Ian spoke about his lifetime of filming in the polar regions – especially up in the High Arctic for films including David Attenborough's *Frozen* and *Human Planet*. Ian spoke about the importance of place, of waiting and of listening to the environment around us.

After, Jack delivered a thought-provoking presentation on Arctic politics and foreign policy. He spoke about the icebreaker gap – issues of perceived relative imbalance in the quantity of icebreakers, the impact of climate change on the Arctic and implications for trade, transportation, oil and gas exploration. As the Arctic spans over several continents, the ongoing retreat of the sea ice in summer is presenting challenges for longstanding cooperation over everything from environmental policy to territorial claims as part of a country's continental shelf. Jack spoke about the architecture of the Arctic Council, why it isn't as resilient as it could be and how it could be strengthened.

Lunch, siesta, then time for the disembarkation briefing. Christian and Justine walked us through the various activities for tomorrow's visit to Kangerlussuaq, and the ins and outs of our disembarkation and charter flight to Toronto.

But there was no rest for the weary. Flo announced that we had made good time down to Serenity Fjord and there was just enough time to get our feet on Greenland one last time. We clambered onboard the Zodiacs and headed for a short cruise towards a lichen-covered glacier front and then ashore to check out a glacial meltwater stream winding its way towards the sea from the glacier face.



Kangerlussuaq

DAY 15 | Thursday 25 August

Position at 0700 on 25 August

Latitude: 66°57' N

Longitude: 50°56' W

Course: At anchor Kangerlussuaq

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 6 knots SE

Barometer: 1012

Air Temp: 8°C

The lure of the North! It is a strange and a powerful thing. More than once I have come back from the great frozen space, battered and worn and baffled, sometimes maimed, telling myself that I had bade my last journey thither, eager for the society of my kind, the comforts of civilization and the peace and serenity of home. But somehow it was never many months before the old restless feeling came over me. I began to long for the great white desolation, the battles with the ice and the gales, the long, long Arctic night, the long long Arctic day, the handful of odd but faithful Eskimos who had been my friends for years, the silence, the vastness of the great, white lonely North.

And back I went...

—Robert Peary

Overnight we arrived in Kangerlussuaq, waking up to our last morning together onboard the *Greg Mortimer* which has been our sturdy and comfortable base for the last two weeks. To our delight, we were able to enjoy a scenic Zodiac ride to the jetty, before we were shuttled away in brightly coloured buses for a full days' exploration of Kangerlussuaq fjord. As we disembarked, we made our farewells to the Expedition Team and the crew before heading to the airport for our charter flight to Toronto via Baffin Island.

And what a voyage it has been, adventuring to the far reaches of Greenland's fjords and towns. From the surreal marine world of the colossal icebergs on the east coast, to the lush tundra of the southern fjords, the historic sites and small townships of the west coast to the high polar desert of Disko Bay.

The wildlife has amazed us: countless whales, birds, mosquitoes and Arctic hares. The ever-present backdrop of the ice featured throughout our voyage, whether cruising in front of glaciers or being lost in the enchantment of the tabular bergs of Illulisat or Prince Christian Sound. We have tasted the wild berries and herbs growing in bushes and thickets along Greenland's southern coast; while socialising with locals in remote fishing villages in the west. There were walks, hikes, paddles, plunges, and great companionship from a delightful bunch of fellow travellers.

Aurora Expeditions thanks you for joining us aboard MV *Greg Mortimer* to Greenland. We hope to see you on the high seas again someday!



Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: Russell Henry, Liz MacNeil

Number of Paddlers: 9 Total Paddle Outings: 12 Total Distance Paddled: 54.5 km

Paddlers:	Lesley Thomas	Jane Newman	Nick Fletcher
Kathleen Wright	Thomas Quinn	Craig Newman	
Fred Strebeigh	Ronald Chik	Mari Fletcher	

Day 1 | Friday 12 August: Denmark Strait

A day at sea to get ourselves all ready for Greenland. Today was full of lectures, briefings, and naps (both intentional and unintentional). The kayakers met up for a couple hours where Liz and Russell went through a slide show, then outfitted everyone in their gear and got the psych going.

Day 2 | Saturday 13 August PM: Storo Island. 3 kms

Our first paddle! After a lovely ship cruise in the morning up the magnificent Kangertigtivatsiaq Fjord we got on the water in absolutely glorious conditions at Storo Island in the afternoon. The sun was shining without a cloud in the sky and I don't think there was even a puff of wind on the water. The backdrop in this part of Greenland was just breathtaking with nice icebergs to weave and rocky shoreline to dip and dive through (Ronald especially enjoyed this). We even saw a huge iceberg calve!

Day 3 | Sunday 14 August PM: Sermilik Fjord. 3.5 kms

The weather continues to cooperate giving us sunshine and low winds. Everyone seemed to have a lovely time wandering the quaint little town of Tasilaq in the morning. So many nice people and such cool history. After lunch we made it to the wide and iceberg filled Sermilik Fjord. Only seven paddlers including Russell and Liz and as soon as we got on the water everyone realized their luck... there were whales! At first far away it seemed unlikely we were going to catch them but after all the other Zodiacs had left our jaws dropped when they started to breach. We tried to paddle over but quickly realized we weren't fast enough, so we hailed in Uber Jeff and caught a lift. These two humpbacks seemed to be a mother and calf and they were absolutely full of beans. They must have breached for 30 minutes. It was amazing, what a day.

Day 4 | Monday 15 August PM: Dronning Marie Dal. 5.5 kms

Another magical day. After the ship cruising the breathtaking Skjoldungen Fjord in calm, sunny weather all morning we found ourselves with another incredible paddle in the afternoon. Liz was on the water with the crew while Russell lounged in his socks in the Zodiac. The team paddled under huge rock faces up to a very cool, very active calving glacier. Liz, Ronald, Craig, and Fred all managed to stand up in their kayaks for a cool photo opportunity. Paddling back from the glacier in the calm sunny waters was dreamlike. What a cool paddle.

Day 5 | Tuesday 16 August PM: Prins Christian Sund. 4 kms

It was a rainy day that seemed like it may be a dud for paddling... We had a small crew again due to some folks in isolation still but still headed out into the downpour and gray skies. To our (or maybe just my) surprise it ended up being such a nice paddle. All the rain coming down off the huge cliffs made waterfall mania including one we all paddled directly under. Working our way down the coast paddling through ice and along the cliffs was peaceful and serene as can be. Liz then whisked us up and brought our soggy smiles back to the ship.

Day 6 | Wednesday 17 August AM: Tasermiut Kangerluat Fjord. 3.5 kms

Holy moly granite! Another stunner again today. This fjord is just plain bonkers. Huge granite walls jutting out all over the place. Everyone but Ronald got out on shore to check out the ancient monastery ruins with the huge Ketil Mountain as its backdrop. With the river, the mountains, the ruins, the waterfall, this place was nuts! Ronald and Liz made their way surprisingly far down the coast while the rest were on shore. Eventually we Zodiac cruised to catch up with them and all paddled in a light breeze back down to the ship. Liz made a quick detour to get everyone paddling into the rushing waterfall.

Day 6 | Wednesday 17 August PM: Tasermiut Kangerluat Fjord. 4 kms

The afternoon found us searching for a route to a lake that Russell and Liz could just not figure out... It ended up being alright though since the paddling around the estuary was nice and had a stunning backdrop. It's hard to go wrong here it seems. Eventually we gave up, hopped out of our boats for a look, and had a quick gander. We then hopped back in our boats, boogied back to the big boat, and then got in a medium sized boat (Zodiac) and ripped over to touch the Greenland Icecap. To cap the day off Craig, Jane, Fred, Russell, and Liz all did the Polar Plunge.

Day 7 | Thursday 18 August AM: Hvalsey. 4 kms

This morning we went for another nice calm paddle around the bay surrounding the ancient Norse ruins at Hvalsey. We got out and had a nice walk through the old church and just had a very pleasant time relaxing in what seemed to be a delightful Greenlandic summer's day.

Day 7 | Thursday 18 August PM: Qakortot. 3.5 kms

After lunch we found ourselves exploring the bustling little town of Qakatot and surrounding waters. Led by Mari and Nick, a crew went out for a paddle down the cool rocky coastline from town and got zipped back to the ship via Zodiac.

Day 8 | Friday 19 August PM: Paamiut. 9.5 kms

After a morning either wandering through town or through the boggy, rocky hills we got out on the water for what ended up being a really interesting paddle in the afternoon. With a nice archipelago of rocky islands dotting the coastline, we picked our way through them in calm waters until we saw a group of local fishermen on a rock working on something they caught. We paddled over and discovered that they were butchering a small Minke whale. We watched for a while, Russell and Ronald ate some, and then we continued on our way a little shocked,

but very glad we were able to observe such a traditional Greenlandic way. The rest of the paddle was marvelous. We paddled out around the open coast where we got to experience some small swell and that wonderful sensation of exposure.

Day 9 | Saturday 20 August: Nuuk

No paddling today. Everyone headed into town to see the museum, wander about and experience Greenland's capital.

Day 10 | Sunday 21 August AM: Sisimiut. 4.5 kms

Today we experienced a true urban paddle. Launching from the back of the ship tied up to the dock, we headed for a small canal that Russell was sure created an island. Turns out he was wrong! With a small portage through a culvert ahead of us, everyone was gung-ho so off we went, walking our kayaks through a tunnel. The paddle then took us past some puppies on an island, around the peninsula, under a big bridge, and around some fishing boats. Although not as scenic as we've grown used to, it's always nice to get out on the water. After this, we had a local Greenlandic kayaker come to the side of the ship for a cool demo on rolling.

Day 11 | Monday 22 August PM: Ataa. 5 kms

This morning everyone was hopeful for a paddle but the weather had other plans. Winded out, we got our own kayaker filled Zodiac and got to enjoy some warm beverages hidden from the wind behind a spectacular iceberg. The afternoon found the whole ship exploring a new area of coastline at Ataa. Liz paddled down the bedrocky coastline with the group and was picked up by Russell in the Zodiac.

Day 12 | Tuesday 23 August PM: Illulisat. 4.5 kms

A rainy day in ice town. I think all the kayakers got out on the boardwalk this morning to see the ice chalked fjord on the other side of town. What a sight! After lunch we got out on the water for our final paddle. And what a paddle it was! The Illulisat Glacier kicks off so much ice, and SUCH massive ice it's absolutely breathtaking to paddle through. The team paddled through the ice and eventually found themselves in an amazing ice harbour. They got picked up by the Zodiac, and enjoyed some final time as a kayak bunch on the slow, then speedy ride back to the ship.

Day 13 | Wednesday 24 August: Eternity Fjord

Final day on the move for everyone. No more paddling but still a lovely outing for everyone at the toe of a large glacier. Earlier, we had our final kayaker get together where, we sipped champagne, orange juice, and watched the amazing slideshow Liz put together.





Flora Sightings



Alpine knotweed



Common harebell



Lapland rosebay (*Rhododendrum lapponicum*)



Alpine knotweed



Arctic catchfly (*Silene involucrata*)



Dwarf golden saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium tetrandrum*)



Mountain avens



Arctic poppy (*Papaver radicum*)



Bog bilberry



Gravel cinquefoil (*Potentilla arenosa*)



Northern asphodel (*Toefeldia coccinea*)



Expeditioners:

Holly Antolini	Elton Edwards	Steven Kirby	Larry Reisner
Rosy Au leong	Julie Edwards	Michael Kuhl	Raimondo Restelli
Robert Baker	Michael Elkan	Therese Lavender	Janice Roberts
Margaret Barr	Nick Evans	Achim Leistner	Helen Rose
David Boigne	Mari Fleri	Kim Littler	Barbara Sewell
Debbie Bradford	David Gallagher	Marie Lund	Fred Strebeigh
Richard Bradford	Kim On Glisson	Trevor Lund	Robert Switzer
Terry Brant	Gayle Gordon	Yvonne Lynn	Lesley Thomas
Tyler Broyles	Sigrid Gray	Tim Maroney	Sandy Thomas
Frank Bunnik	Susan Green	Jane Mellem	Peter Thompson
Marion Bunnik	Cameron Gruber	Tom Mellem	Kim Valenti
Pete Cherry	Cindy Hartman	Sue Mellows Facer	Monique Van Hoof
Ronald Chik	Jeff Hartman	David Mellows-Facer	Kristina Wearing
David Churches	Kate Hennessy	Richard Mohr	Heather Wheat
Gordon Clements	Patrick Hofmann	Craig Newman	Georgia Wilson
Fiona Crawley	Andrea Hotchkiss	Jane Newman	Graeme Wilson
Julie Cronin	Ian Hotchkiss	Barry Nicholson	Iris Winter
Janet Doherty	Eileen Jensen	Debbie Novak	Dutch Wright
Tom Doherty	George Jensen	Bill O'Brien	Kathleen Wright
Lindsay Doig	Barbara Kemp	Jan O'Brien	Lillian Wright
Alan Dudley	Keith Kemp	Mario Paez	
Stacey Dudley	Judy Kirby	Thomas Quinn	

Artwork thanks to:

Holly Lyman Antolini

Photography thanks to:

Michael Baynes Russell Henry Christian Genillard
Liz MacNeil John Kirkwood

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Florence Kuijper
Assistant Expedition Leader: Christian Genillard
Onboard Expedition Manager: Justine Bornholdt
Firearms Manager: Jeff Nagel
Biologist/Citizen Science Coordinator: Joselyn Fenstermacher
Historian: Cecile Manet
Expedition Guide/Naturalist: John Kirkwood
Expedition Guide/Naturalist: Ian McCarthy
Expedition Guide: Jack Alscher
Lead Kayaking Guide: Russell Henry
Kayaking Guide: Liz MacNeil
Photography Guide: Michael Baynes
Medic/Expedition Guide: David Palmer
Zodiac Master: Sergei Hincu
Mudroom/Shopkeeper: Gabriel Hernandez
Mudroom Support/Wellness Therapist: Dasha Vasiljeva


Senior Officers & Heads of Department:


Master: Maxim Makarovskiy
Chief Officer: Oleg Kapko
Second Officer: Sergii Voina
Bosun: Bobby Penuliar Payumo
Deck Cadet: Vlad Nicolescu
Ship Doctor: Andres Peralta
Chief Engineer: Sergiy Melnyk
First Engineer: Ion Toma
Hotel Director: Patrice Degron
F&B Manager: Ulises Cantillo Zapata
Chief Purser: Liza Merillo
Executive Chef: Christiand Carlos Mini Pineda
Head Waiter: Diogenes Encinares
Hotel Controller: Richard Cayeta
IT Officer: Ihor Yesmieniev
Receptionist: Jelyn Merilo
Receptionist: Jeremiah Castillo
Head Stateroom: Florante Jr. Jimenez Lusong
Able Seaman: Muhammad Karier
Able Seaman: Bobby Penuliar Payumo
Able Seaman: Hardik Rao
Able Seaman: Ajay Fnu
Able Seaman: Joel Valdevieso Noble
Able Seaman: Giovanni Dela Torre





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