Expedition Log
North East Greenland

31st August – 12th September 2014

On board the
M/V Ortelius

MV Ortelius was named after the Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) who published the first modern world atlas, the Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (Theatre of the World) in 1570. MV Ortelius was built in 1989 in Gdynia, Poland, as a research vessel for the Russian Academy of Science and was named Marina Svetaeva. In 2011 she was purchased by Oceanwide Expeditions. The vessel was re-flagged and renamed Ortelius. Now the ship is sailing as a 126-Passenger vessel. Ortelius is 91 m long, 17,6 m wide and has a maximum draft of 5,80 m, with an Ice Strength rating of UL1/1A, top speed of 13 knots and one diesel engine generating 3200 kW.
Captain Eero Isotalo and his International Crew of 40

Including

Hotel Manager – Katrin Schlegel (Austria)
Chief Steward – Dejan Nikolic (Serbia)
Head Chef – Christian Gossak (Austria)
Sous Chef – Toni Pirker (Austria)
Bar Steward – Rolando Garcia (Philippines)

together with the expedition staff:

Expedition Leader – Delphine Aurès (France)
Assistant Expedition Leader – Jim Mayer (Great Britain)
Expedition Guide – James Cresswell (Wales)
Expedition Guide – Simon Cook (Wales)
Expedition Guide – Erin McFadden (Scotland)
Expedition Guide – Victoria Salem (Great Britain)
Expedition Guide – Sarah Mayer (Great Britain)
Expedition Guide – Jordi Plana (The Seas)
Expedition Doctor – Floris Van der Berg (the Netherlands)

Welcome you all on board the *Ortelius*!
Day 1 – August 31
Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen
16:00 GPS position: 78° 13.7’ N / 015° 36.1’ E
Weather: +3°C, cloudy with sunny spells, wind from W (Force 3)

At 14:00 some of us touched down at the airport in Longyearbyen and were met by Jordi, one of our Expedition Guides. Jordi helped us put our luggage onto the luggage truck and directed us to the bus that would take us into town. Many others had already spent a night in town having flown in the previous evening. Longyearbyen is a former coal mining settlement and has a population of about 2,200. It is one of the world’s most northern settlements and it is named after the American, John Munro Longyear (1850-1922), who was one of the founders of the Arctic Coal Company (1906-1916). Coal is still produced in a mine near Longyearbyen, but not in quantities like in the twentieth century.

We had a couple of hours free to explore the town before heading to the ship. Longyearbyen town centre has many outdoor clothing shops as well as a great café and a few good bars. There is also an excellent museum in the large modern university building. On display in the museum are both the whaling history of the archipelago and plenty of information about wildlife, early exploration and World War II.

After enjoying some time exploring Longyearbyen we headed to the pier at 16:00. Our expedition ship Ortelius was alongside and waiting for us. This would be our home for the next 12 days. Once we were on board members of the staff and crew helped us to find our cabins. A short time after embarking we all gathered for a mandatory safety briefing and after listening to the third officer discussing safety on board Ortelius we all then proceeded with the mustering and abandon ship drills. These drills got us familiar with the emergency procedures on board and gave all of us a chance to laugh at one another in our big orange life jackets!
By 18:00 it was time to set sail. As the crew cast off we waved goodbye to the town of Longyearbyen. Many of us were out on deck taking photographs as we slowly drifted off the pier and out into Isfjorden where the snow dusted mountains made for a very picturesque scene. We were even treated to a little sunshine for our departure, which can be quite a rarity in Longyearbyen.

A warm welcome in the bar was next on the agenda. Hotel Manager Katrin started with a useful speech about the ship, followed by our Expedition Leader Delphine who introduced us to Captain Isotalo. A glass of bubbly was the perfect toast to the great adventure ahead.

By 20:00 it didn’t take much coaxing to get us down to dinner. The Head Chef Chris prepared a great welcome dinner. That evening we continued out of Isfjorden, watching the Arctic scenery gliding past us as we sailed west towards the open sea.
**Day 2 – September 1**
**North-western Spitsbergen, Raudfjord & Moffen, Svalbard**

08:00 GPS position: 78° 37.5’ N / 010° 06.7’ E

**Weather:** 0°C, grey, sunny later, wind from NW (Force 3)

This morning *Ortelius* took a shortcut between some of the snowy, north-western islands and we were rewarded with walrus. At first we could see just one swimming, but moments later more were spotted on the nearby stony beach of Fuglesangen. In total there were nearly 20. The ship was close enough for their huge brown bodies to be clearly visible and we could also see their ivory-coloured tusks. What a start to the day!

However, off in the distance a white line stretched across the horizon – sea ice! The ship went into it, which gave us the chance to get very close to some bear food – a Bearded seal. There were others nearby and some Harp seals too, but then whale spouts were spotted. The animals were identified as the biggest on the planet – Blue whale. Fantastic! They were feeding in a clearly-defined area of sea amongst the ice and it looked as if it was a female and a large calf, which stayed very close to the bigger animal. We had close and prolonged views of these impressive mammals before heading off towards nearby Raudfjord.

Then, just after lunch, a bear was spotted! A zodiac was sent out to keep track of it until everyone could get into the rest of the boats. Initially the bear was in the water, but after a while it came out onto a small islet where there was a partly-consumed White-beaked Dolphin. The remains of other animals (mostly just bones) were on other nearby islets. After letting the bear get used to us, our zodiacs edged nearer and
ended up just a few metres away from this hugely impressive, but unconcerned predator. This was another prolonged encounter and for a lot of the time the bear was lying down snoozing. Periodically it got up to sniff and taste the air or glance casually towards the noisy seabirds feeding on the nearby carcass; it looked superb against a backdrop of snowy mountains and a glacier, which calved once or twice. The bear was in the sun too, making it perfect for photos!

After looking our fill we drove north from the bay towards the ice edge, but the two walrus that were there quickly dropped into the water. Not to worry – dozens of puffins were seen instead.

Our next destination after recap & briefing, was the foggy, atoll-like island of Moffen; from the ship we saw about 50 walrus hauled out. It was a superb way to end the day!
Day 3 – September 2
At sea, en route to Greenland
08:00 GPS position: 79° 10.0’ N / 006° 20.3’ E
Weather: +4°C, cloudy, wind from NE (Force 3)

Sailing through fog and ice was slow going and from our bunks we could hear the ship pushing through ice for much of the night. By the morning, Spitsbergen was still in sight. Early risers were treated to sightings of Sei and Fin whales from the bridge, then a pod of Orca (Killer whales) were spotted and the ship slowed to a halt to watch them. They appeared to be a group of perhaps eight to ten animals, a mixture of males and females. The Orca were travelling at some speed in the direction of Spitsbergen, so we watched them depart and resumed our westerly course, bound for Greenland. Orca are rarely seen in these waters so this was a particularly special encounter.

After a hearty breakfast, James gave a lecture about “Sea Ice”, explaining the various stages of its development, how the extent and thickness of sea ice in the polar regions has altered in recent years and the role that sea ice plays in our global climate system.

In the bar before lunch, we were introduced to some ‘special guests’ on this voyage: a team from the UK-based charity ORCA, carrying out a survey of marine mammals; Katryn Latarius, an oceanographer from the Alfred Wegener Institute who has been collecting data from a ‘sea glider’ deployed off the Greenland coast (which she hopes to retrieve en-route); and Peter Prokosch from the international organisation Linking Tourism & Conservation. We were excited to learn that we’ll gain three more passengers in Greenland - mountaineer-kayakers who are sure to have some great stories to tell.
As the last mountains of Spitsbergen disappeared in our wake, Victoria entertained us with a run through its history, from possible Stone-age hunters, through Vikings and Pomors to the official discovery by Barents in 1596 and up to the present day. The action included whaling, trapping, war time meteorological observations, the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 and even modern mining.

Following our marvellous sighting of Blue whales yesterday, Erin gave a talk exploring the physiology of whales in comparison to our own bodies and explaining “How Whales Dive”. We learned that deep-diving whales have chest cavities designed to collapse as pressure increases; that their blood and muscles hold huge reserves of oxygen, and how each type of whale has developed to be perfectly suited to the type of prey it catches.

Story time in the bar was a fun way to end the day. Jim told tales of his misspent youth, skiing across Greenland and Spitsbergen and the things he learned along the way.

Day 4 – September 3
At sea, en route to Greenland
08:00 GPS position: 76°54.9’ N / 002°52.4’ W
Weather: + 4°C, rain, wind from E (Force 5)

We started rocking and rolling during the night, unfortunately. Atmospheric as this was (we are getting the full Arctic experience!), some of us chose to linger longer in our beds than originally planned. Undaunted, Simon delivered a talk on “Seabirds of Svalbard & Greenland” at 09:30 and a surprising number of folk were up in the bar to learn something about
ornithology, especially of the species we’ll be looking at over the next week or so.

A break for coffee followed; some of us headed for the bridge to check on Ortelius’ progress, whilst the brave ventured out on deck in the rain to try out their sea legs. At 11:00 James appeared with brightly-coloured geological maps and proceeded to tell us all about “The Geology of East Greenland & Svalbard”; this was a complicated subject, but he really brought it to life for us in accessible language and there was a bit of a Q & A session afterwards, which took us up to lunch time.

Weather conditions were improving marginally, but the hotel department had made the wise decision to serve our lunch rather than have us staggering around the restaurant with full plates of food! An added motivation to make it in to lunch was the Ortelius shop, which displayed its goods at reception both before and after our chilli con carne, adding some retail therapy to our day on board.

Then it was siesta time for most of us! Later in the afternoon there was an interesting programme of guest speakers, featuring first Katrin Latarius (from the Alfred Wegener Institute) on “The Global Ocean Current” and the instruments (“gliders”) we hope to collect from the ocean on our route; and after the cake had appeared for afternoon tea in the bar, Peter Prokosch (from the Linking Tourism and Conservation organisation) told us all about his vision for the future of the Arctic.

Mulling over the day’s increase of knowledge, we realised that it was now past 18:00 and it was Happy Hour at Rolando’s bar! A relaxing drink slipped down nicely during recap & briefing, at which Jim told us all about knots and Jordi thrilled us with the life story of the well-travelled Arctic tern.
The day was not quite over, for after dinner James regaled us with a short personal account of Arctic seal organs and marmite from his youth! As we retired for the night, we were anticipating our rendez-vous in the morning with one of Katrin’s “gliders”, which we hoped to intercept some time during breakfast.

**Day 5 – September 4**
The Greenland Sea & entrance to Kaiser Franz Josef Fjord
08:00 GPS position: 73°55.1’ N / 015°26.2’ W
Weather: +3°C, good visibility, wind from NE (Force 5)

As we awoke this morning the ship was closing in on the submarine ‘glider’ that belongs to the Alfred Wegener Institute. This incredible device has been autonomously ‘flying’ around the Greenland Sea since its deployment in June, measuring salinity, depth and temperature and emitting a signal every 30 minutes to tell us its exact position. As the ship neared the spot many of us gathered on the bridge to try to catch a glimpse of the antenna above the waves. Others gathered near the gangway to watch two zodiacs being launched into swells far larger than normal operating conditions for passengers! The first zodiac (driven by Jim) also contained James and Erin and acted as a safety zodiac. The second zodiac (driven by Jordi) also
contained First Officer Sven and Alfred Wegener scientist, Katrin; this was the boat which actually retrieved the glider.

Once back on board the expedition staff gathered in the bar for celebratory photos. These were followed by Sarah’s presentation on the Vikings who settled Greenland and her heroine, the female Viking Gudrid the Rare, who was born in Iceland, married in Greenland, gave birth to her first child in Vinland and later went on to visit Rome - becoming the most travelled woman of her time.

One of our passengers, photographer Sergei Anisimov, presented a film of his photographs from ‘Global Arctic Awards’ in the Lecture Room at 11:30; now we know the standard we’re aiming for! Lunch followed soon after this, and then siesta time; sea days are made for relaxation...

In the early afternoon it was Jim’s turn to present a thriller tale of “The War for the Weather” - a talk about World War II in Greenland and Svalbard. By the time his story drew to a close, the East Greenland Coast was in sight. As we approached nearer and nearer, it was decided to postpone Jordi’s presentation on “Polar Ecosystems”; instead we went out on
deck and enjoyed the views as we watched the cliffs of Hold with Hope (a great name!) pass by. Our geologist, James, explained over the PA system that these cliffs were made of Cretaceous sediments capped with Palaeogene lavas.

It was then time for a very special recap. Scientist Katrin had very kindly purchased the whole ship a drink in the bar (a special green or pink cocktail!), and the bright yellow glider ‘Dorte’ was brought in so everyone could have a close look. In the recap Katrin told us more about the glider and Delphine detailed the plans for tomorrow’s exciting day in the heart of East Greenland’s fjords.

Day 6 – September 5
Blomsterbugt & Ella Ø, NE Greenland
08:00 GPS position: 73° 19.7’ N / 025° 17.5’ W
Weather: +5°C, cloudy with rain/sunny spells, light airs

Early this morning the ship was in position next to a mountain the expedition staff have nicknamed “Sunrise Mountain”. Although the sun did rise today, the clouds meant that we could not see the 1,340m peak of Teufelschloss (The Devil’s Castle) lit up in all its glory. Never mind - Katrin and the restaurant team were in a sunny mood as we enjoyed a hearty breakfast prior to our first landing in Greenland.

We stepped ashore at Blomsterbugt on Ymer Ø (Ø is Danish for island. Many of the places in this, the northern section of our Greenland adventure, only have Danish names. As we venture further south into areas with active indigenous populations, so we find sites with both Greenlandic and Danish names). The name means Flower Bay and one or two plants were still in flower. The small trappers’ cabin, built by Norwegians in 1929 still stands. We divided into four groups for walks of different lengths.
Each group was able to get reasonably close to Arctic hares that were very easy to spot, as their brilliant white coats stand out against the browns, oranges and reds of the autumn tundra. Those on the longer walks found some Musk ox further inland. These huge, woolly animals resemble large, fantastic prehistoric sheep.

We enjoyed our first leg stretch after three days at sea so much that we were almost late for lunch! Out of necessity this had to be a quick meal as *Ortelius* took us through stunning scenery towards our next landing spot and we did not want to miss one bit. James explained the geology of Antarctic Sound, which has been folded by the Caledonian Orogeny (mountain building period) into amazing shapes. The water too was exciting, studded as it was with icebergs.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at Ella Ø, just as the clouds were clearing and the sun was coming out. This island, named in 1899 by Swedish explorer A.G. Nathorst for his wife, is home to the historic Ørnereden, “Eagle’s Nest” cabin, built by Lauge Koch for his geological expedition in 1931. The cabin was subsequently used by the Sledge Patrol during the Second World War and the present day Sirius Patrol now maintains a base nearby.

After landing we split into several groups, to pursue interests in geology, photography and history. Victoria told us the story of the cabin while Jim brought everyone up to date on sledge patrol activities, taking a close look at
the design of some of the sledges. James’ geological map failed to lead him to the fossils he was hoping for, but the walk was fun never-the-less.

Once back on board we enjoyed a super dinner before heading back out onto deck to experience fully the fantastic light under clearing skies.

**Day 7 – September 6**

**Segelsällskapet Fjord, Alpefjord & Kong Oscar Fjord**  
08:00 GPS position: 72° 25.0’ N / 024° 55.6’ W  
**Weather:** +5°C, partly cloudy, calm

Ice and rocks were the stars of our Greenland show today as we sailed through more fabulous fjords lined with Eleanora Bay (Eleonore Bugt) sediments. Our morning landing was in ‘Sailing Club Fjord’ (Segelsällskapet Fjord), named after the Royal Swedish Yacht Club.

As we dropped anchor, we spotted some dots on the shore. They were the three Austrian adventurers we were hoping to meet. While we explored ashore, they were taken on board *Ortelius* for their first showers in three weeks.

We landed on a beach with rocks reminiscent of giant swirls of ice cream. There were marvellous outcrops of chocolate-brown and strawberry pink limestone with creamy coloured calcite stripes and even ‘chunks’ of dolomite, formed when part of the calcium in the rock was replaced by magnesium. Some of the rocks had stripes of harder, darker layers resulting from periods of greater iron oxidisation.

The long hikers strode off uphill and gained some wonderful views. Meanwhile, the medium hikers...
walked inland to a small square-ish lake. Nearby was a fox den surrounded by Arctic hare skeletons and several birds. The tundra was rich and we found plenty of blue and bear berries.
After lunch, we continued our voyage through Alpefjord until our way was blocked by the combined snouts of two glaciers, Gully Glacier and Sefstrøm Glacier, which almost stretched the whole width of the fjord. We lowered the zodiacs and spent a happy couple of hours cruising the width of the ice front, among recently calved icebergs. The light, colours and shapes of the ice were fascinating and it was interesting to identify new moraine features emerging from the receding glaciers. Some of the zodiacs made a short landing on an island formed from the glaciers’ terminal moraine.

While cruising, we spotted a handful of Musk oxen on the rocky shore, a flock of Long-tailed ducks and a few Ringed seals which popped their heads up to look at us, but soon disappeared again.

Back on board Ortelius, we rounded off another superb Greenland day with recap in the bar and the beautifully rugged scenery of Kong Oscar Fjord.
Day 8 – September 7  
Hurry Inlet, NE Greenland  
08:00 GPS position: 70° 48.8’ N / 021° 06.8’ W  
Weather: +3°C, overcast in parts with sunny evening, slight wind from SE (Force 2)

Breakfast was at 08:00 today and we enjoyed our little lie-in since we had a morning at sea to look forward to. The lecture programme kicked off at 09:30 with Peter Prokosch’s second talk entitled “Living Planet – Connected Planet”, in which he detailed the work of his Linking Tourism & Conservation organisation. Plenty of questions and discussion points followed.

After a break for coffee and a stroll round the deck Victoria was in the Lecture Theatre at 11.15 to tell us all about the explorers Elisha Kent Kane (1853-55) and Fridtjof Nansen (1888) and their expeditions in Greenland. Kane got frozen in, only surviving through help from the local ‘Arctic Highlanders’; his men mutinied and the entire expedition only saved itself by escaping south 1,300 miles in tiny ship’s boats to Upernavik, nearly starving en route. Nansen, in contrast, successfully skied across the Greenland ice-cap in 41 days, pioneering expedition clothing, skis, sled and stove – a historic first. Both made compelling tales.

After lunch Expedition Leader Delphine was looking for somewhere for us to land in the Scoresby Sund region – we had passed Ittoqqortoormiit at the mouth of the fjord mid-morning, and were now heading north to explore this very picturesque and famous fjord system. There was quite a bit of swell and our first scout boat came back reporting that the plan A landing site was impossible. Nothing daunted we sailed on until we came into calmer waters; plan B was to make an afternoon stop at Hurry Inlet.
We disembarked the zodiacs onto a wide, pebbly beach, which quickly merged into a rolling stone-and-tundra landscape, backed by a massive striped and ridged cliff face (Jurassic rock containing a basaltic sill). The terrain was bleak at first sight, but we found mushrooms (including some impressive puffballs) and a few flowers as well as horizontally-growing shrubs. James managed to find fossils in one of the many stone gullies that swept down to the shoreline – these originated as stone circles, but have been converted into parallel lines by gravity and water action. And as we strolled, the sun began to burn its way through the cloud layer.

We explored this wild landscape in small groups for just over an hour before heading back to *Ortelius* for a recap and dinner. Delphine briefed us on a very full day of activities tomorrow; James geologized, Sarah explained how stone circles/lines form on permafrost and Victoria told us about the Scoresbys (junior and senior) – famed whalers and explorers from the early nineteenth century. There was some time left before dinner to go out on deck and enjoy the sight of large icebergs gilded by late sunlight and magnificently outlined against a backdrop of mountains. Many of us had difficulty dragging ourselves in to dinner, though we somehow managed it!

After a duck dinner, some of us hurried back out to enjoy the rest of the daylight from deck as we sailed Scoresby Sund. Others met in the Lecture Theatre for a talk delivered by a member of the ORCA research group who are travelling with us, entitled “Orca and dolphins of the Bay of Biscay”. Just time for a quick nightcap in the bar and so to bed in order to gain the energy for another day in Paradise tomorrow!
Day 9 – September 8
Harefjord, Rødefjord and Røde Island
08:00 GPS position: 70° 56.0’ N / 027° 47.9’ W
Weather: +3°C, sunshine & calm seas, wind from W (Force 3)

‘Rocks, rocks, rocks!’ was the sound that came over the P.A. at 7:00 this morning. It was half an hour before the official wake up time, but our geologist James was already up and enthusiastically explaining the rocks. We were in the inner reaches of Ø Fjord heading towards our landing site in Harefjord. All around us were great towering cliffs, with white and red banded rocks. These rocks were one billion years old and formed beneath a great mountain chain. The red bands were made by millions of crystals of garnets while the white bands represented areas where the original rocks had completely re-melted to form a type of granite with huge white crystals.

After breakfast the ship came to rest in Harefjord and the zodiacs were launched. Once ashore the guides made a perimeter landing and we were free to roam within this densely vegetated area. On the beach Jordi and Victoria found Polar bear (and Musk ox) tracks. James climbed high up the slope to an area where red Permian sediments could be seen in a gully. The view from the top of the slope was magnificent. On the opposite coast of the fjord the mountain of Praedikestolen was capped by a thrust fault on which sat three billion year-old metamorphic rocks, the oldest rocks of our trip! Also to be seen was a glacier draining from the inland ice. High above the landing site were three Musk oxen. Many of us got a distant view of them.

Once back on board Ortelius then proceeded south down Rødefjord (which means red fjord). The fjord is named after the red rocks that formed in desert conditions about 250 million years ago. The weather was magnificent - sunny, no waves and perfect reflections. As we neared our destination of Røde Island we saw the huge Rolige Brae glacier that was draining the inland ice and producing the many icebergs we were admiring. We then launched all zodiacs and set off for an exhilarating zodiak cruise around Røde Island. On the landward side of the
island great basalt dykes cut through the red sediments. In one place there was an arch which the zodiacs could pass through. We then headed to the iceberg graveyard, where many icebergs were grounded on the shallow bottom. The icebergs were so numerous that they blocked our path around the island, so we landed on the island near to a mushroom-shaped pillar. We then ended this fabulous zodiac cruise around the large icebergs on the north of the island. This is one of the only places in the world where white icebergs can be photographed against a red background.
We were out until quite late, enjoying the magnificent scenery and icebergs all around us for as long as possible. Even when we reluctantly returned to *Ortelius*, we had a barbeque dinner out on deck behind the bridge to look forward to, so didn’t need to miss any of the amazing views! There was complementary mulled wine, red and white wine, beer or soft drinks and we sat at tables which had been set up on deck, chatting and enjoying this most unusual of barbecues. Afterwards we moved indoors to warm up and spent some time with friends at the bar before bed.

**Day 10 – September 9**  
Ø Fjord, Bjørnøer & Sydkapp  
08:00 GPS position: 71° 05.7’ N / 025° 42.8’ W  
Weather: +3°C, calm wind, almost flat seas; some low cloud & thin fog over cliffs, clearing up later on

Today was yet another day of good weather, partially covered with the most stunning combination of high clouds and morning fog stripes over the spectacular mountain landscape of Ø Fjord.

Delphine gave us a bit of an early morning wake-up call so that we could see the first sunlight hit the mountain tops while sailing through the fjord, bracketed by the mountains of Milne Land to the south and Renland to the north. There were several beautiful cliffs, but the focus this morning was on the very pointed and steep (cathedral-shaped) Grundtvigskirken (1882 m). The fjord is about 1000 m deep.

At the end of this fjord we arrived at the Bjørne Øer (Bear Islands) group of islands. The waters around Bjørne Øer are not charted, meaning that the ship had to sail slowly as we approached and find a suitable anchor position. While the captain and the officers up on the bridge were doing this and we were all having breakfast, Delphine and Jordi went out on a scout zodiac to check the area and find a good landing spot.

After breakfast we launched four zodiacs and landed on a small beach, pretty close to where the *Ortelius* was anchored. From there we were split into different groups according to our
different interests, to take long, medium and short hikes. The fast hiking group headed out immediately for a mountain ridge climb, soon dividing into two groups as photographers were mixed with keen walkers. Both had many ups and downs – mountain-wise – and had beautiful views over the islands, the icebergs stuck between them and the rugged Ø Fjord landscape, that gradually appeared from behind the clouds and thin fog.

The medium group had also been divided into two, as this group included the rest of the keen photographers. As we walked through the densely vegetated tundra and its surprising amount of mushrooms and lichens, we reached a nice look-out point from which we had a fantastic view of the sea, icebergs, the islands and the fjord. Later, the medium sub-groups joined together again by a small freshwater lake, where we discovered what looked like a cross between a tadpole and a crustacean, and later turned out (after research) indeed to be called a Tadpole shrimp!!
A small group of passengers decided to have a relaxed morning and join a more leisurely walk over the tundra and some rocky outcrops.

Lunch was served around 13:00 while the ship moved towards Sydkapp at the entrance of the Nordvestfjord. At the head of this very long fjord a large glacier produces the almost 100m-high gigantic icebergs that are stranded in the area and in Hall Bredning south of Sydkapp. It was amazing to sail in Ortelius around these huge icebergs as we got closer to our landing site.

As we reached our anchor position, the captain informed us that it was not possible to get closer than a couple of miles from the historical site we planned to visit, due to the large icebergs around and shallow seas, so we dropped seven zodiacs to head together to the spot. We cruised slowly amongst icebergs and came close to two trappers’ huts that were erected by a Danish man and his Greenlandic wife who came here to hunt and fish in 1946. They stayed here for only one year before they abandoned the huts, perhaps due to little hunting success. In more recent times the huts have been utilized by hunters from Scoresbysund or by Scandinavian hunting parties.

As we drove the zodiacs to the Thule remains our guides wanted to show us, we spotted two Musk ox pretty close to the shoreline and we stopped to have a good look at them – eventually drifting quite close to these magnificent wooly animals. A bit further a full herd of around ten individuals was grazing contentedly together, including at least one young animal.

Finally we set foot on land and we could enjoy around half an hour in the area of the Thule
house remains, which were located on the tundra and close to the beach, attending the historical explanations of Victoria and Sarah, while the other guides set a safe perimeter around the historical settlement. And Simon discovered some great plants still in flower between the hut remains and the beach.

Shortly afterwards we reluctantly went back on board to start our long sail through Scoresby Sund towards Ittoqqortoormiit. During dinner our attention was constantly seized by the fabulous icebergs passing us by, their shapes and colours, the red water as the sun was setting, and some of us even skipped dessert in order to go straight out on deck to take pictures of this marvelous spectacle.

Day 11 – September 10
Ittoqqortoormiit and at sea en route to Iceland
08:00 GPS Position: 70°28.6’ N / 021°58.4’W
Weather: + 1°C, cloudy with sunny spells, no wind
Today we were blessed with a flat-calm sea, which meant our planned morning landing at the settlement of Ittoqqortoormiit could go ahead as there was very little swell on the beach. From the ship we could see the colourful houses of the town dotted across the slopes and as we made our way towards shore in the zodiacs we could hear dogs howling.

Once ashore we were able to explore the town as we pleased. Near to the shore there was a local craft shop and a souvenir shop, where many of us bought mementos of our trip and most of us took the opportunity to send postcards to friends and family. There was also a lovely small church where a kind local guide was present to give us some detailed information, including that the church was built in 1928 and was actually sinking due to the permafrost melting!

Some of us ventured up to the weather station where a weather balloon was launched at 11:00 and en route many of us stopped to talk to Gary – an Englishman who now lives in the
town with his beloved sled dogs. He is always very welcoming and enjoys telling people about the many adventures he has had with his doggies.

At 12:00 it was time to head back to the ship, but before we set off in the zodiacs a local drummer came to the pier to send us off with a traditional drumming dance. By 12:45 we were all back onboard and were sailing out of Scoresbysund and towards the open sea to begin our journey to Iceland.

The afternoon was spent enjoying some rest and relaxation. Then, just as James was about to give his presentation about “Glaciation” at 16:00, Humpback whales were spotted from the bridge. Needless to say the presentation was delayed for a short while as many of us piled up onto the bridge or out onto deck to enjoy the whale sightings.

James wasn’t delayed for too long and he began his lecture at 16:15. Considering the impressive glaciated landscapes we have been enjoying while exploring Greenland, it was a very interesting talk. At 18:00 it was time for our new Austrian expedition passengers to tell us about their adventures climbing and kayaking in East Greenland. We listened intently as they discussed the ups and downs of their expedition, which took place in the same fjords we had visited during our voyage. It was a fascinating insight into a very different way of travel.

After yet another great dinner it was time for Simon to take the stage. As many of us enjoyed a nightcap in the bar he recounted a few stories of his previous adventures including: nearly being eaten by a Killer whale in Antarctica and being mistaken for the Pope in Papua New Guinea. It was a cheerful ending to a superb day.

Day 12 – September 11
At sea, en route to Iceland
08:00 GPS Position: 57°18.6’ N / 019°55.4’W
Weather: + 4°C, cloudy, clearing to sunny spells, wind from SE (Force 3)
We could feel the waves in the night, but the swell remained within reasonable limits judging from the number of people who made it into breakfast!

Our final day of lectures kicked off with Jordi at 9:30, who gave us a thought-provoking talk comparing and contrasting the polar north with the polar south – “Polar Ecosystems”. After a coffee break we gathered for the last lecture of our trip, which was Victoria speaking on “Mermaids” – their origins, evidence for their existence, their presence in literature, art and even some natural history...After that, of course we were all out on deck looking at the ocean from quite a different angle, hoping to catch sight of a lithe half-human, half-fishlike form leaping through the waves.

Giving up with a sigh we came in for lunch – delicious chicken curry. Thoughts began to turn to packing; we were summoned to pay our bills and return our boots (not particularly fun!), then to listen to Delphine speaking for the final time in the Lecture Room, telling us about future expeditions we could book with Oceanwide and sharing her experiences filming a French documentary a few years ago during the winter in Ittoqqortoormiit (much more fun and interesting). And finally, we were invited to Captain’s Farewell drinks (to toast our trip), to watch Photographer Olga’s film
show of our trip and then to eat a final excellent dinner onboard Ortelius (all very definitely fun).

After dinner, our packing done, we met before bed in the bar for a last evening of conviviality, a last opportunity to chat together about our shared experiences with Oceanwide Expeditions in North East Greenland.

Day 13 – September 12
Akureyri, Iceland
08:00 GPS position: 65° 41’ N / 018° 06’ W

The time had come to say farewell to our great adventure, to our floating home Ortelius and to our lovely new friends. We descended the gangway for the final time (on THIS trip!) at 08:45 and boarded our bus to Reykjavik. Bon voyage until we meet again!

Total distance sailed on this voyage:
2105 nautical miles

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Captain Eero Isotalo and the Officers, all Crew, Expedition Team and Hotel Team, it has been a pleasure travelling with you!

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