Expedition log
M/S Nordstjernen
Svalbard July 28th – August 01st 2017
Friday, July 28th 17:00 78°10’N

**Longyearbyen**

Longyearbyen is a Norwegian settlement and the ‘capital’ of Svalbard. It was originally a mining community, but now science and tourism are slowly taking over. It is named after the American John Munroe Longyear who started the first coal production in the Longyear valley in 1906. It was bought by a Norwegian mine company in 1916. Today Longyearbyen is a modern town with almost every facility you can imagine. The population is approx. 2300 and increasing.

After breakfast at the hotel we went sightseeing around town, and visited the museum and the gallery. In the afternoon we embarked the M/S Nordstjernen and our Arctic Adventure started. The ship sailed out of Adventfjorden and west towards Barentsburg, passing the former coalmining settlements Grumant and Coles Bay.

Friday, July 28th, 20:00, 78°14’N

**Barentsburg**

Barentsburg is a mining settlement found on the east side of Grønfjorden. It is currently the only Russian settlement on Svalbard – there used to be two more: Grumant which closed down in the 1960’s, and Pyramiden which closed down in 1998. The first house was built in 1912 by a Norwegian company and then sold to the Dutch N.V. Nederlandsche Spitsbergen Compagnie. It was bought by the Russians in 1932. In Barentsburg there are currently approx. 400 inhabitants. We went on a guided tour with a Russian guide, and we joined a genuine and entertaining modern Russian folklore show, which the mine workers perform in their spare time. We also visited the hotel, and some of us tried the Russian vodka and beer.
Saturday, July 29th 09:00, 79°35’N

**Magdalenefjorden**

Today we woke up on the way into Magdalenefjorden which is one of the best known and beautiful fjords on Spitsbergen with its jagged mountains. These are said to be the mountains Wilhelm Barents first saw when he discovered Svalbard in 1596 and named the biggest island Spitsbergen after them (Spitsbergen = pointy mountains).

Entering the fjord a small peninsula reaches out from the southern shore. The outer part of this peninsula has a small hill. This is Gravneset where Dutch whalers came to bury their dead in the 17th and 18th century. Today stone gatherings and wooden coffins remain from the around 130 graves.

The Governor on Svalbard – Sysselmannen – has two park rangers on duty here during the summer to take care of this cultural heritage, and the environment in the area.

On our walk along the beach we could see remains from three blubber ovens. This is where blubber from whales was melted and distilled into oil. The guides told us about the history of the whaling period on Svalbard while we had a walk to the other side of the peninsula with great views towards Gullybreen, in a misty, partly foggy weather.

Some crazy and brave people took a short bath in the icy cold Arctic water!
Saturday, July 29th 15:00, 79°40’N

Svenskegattet and Sallyhamna

While passing Smeerenburg fjord during lunch, we spotted a polar bear at the shore line west of our ship. We stopped and watched this beautiful creature while it was feeding on a spermwhale carcass. Our guides told us about how rare it is to be able to see something like this.

Not long after we discovered walruses lying on the beach of Smeerenburg. It was a group of about 25 animals, resting in their natural habitat.

After lunch we made a landing by the left-over of the cabin ‘Svenskegattet’, built in 1920. From there, we walked the 2.5 km distance to Sallyhamna-bay where there is a newer cabin, built in 1937. This one is renovated and in good condition, being used in summertime by the Sysselmannen’s field inspectors.

We went ashore and our guides told us how the life of the hunters up here was. We even saw remains of blubber ovens which were much better preserved than the ones at Graveneset in Magdalenefjord.

After dinner we sailed further East and we were lucky to spot two blue whales! The blue whale is the largest animal ever to exist in this world. They range between 24-28 meters in length, and weight up to 200 tons.

We anchored up in Worsleyhamna during the night.

Liefdefjord and Texas Bar

This morning we woke up to beautiful weather in front of a lace called Worsleyhamna, on the Southern side of Reinsdyrflya.
We did our first landing by the cabin “Texas Bar”, built in 1920 by one of the most famous Norwegian trappers: Hillmar Nøis. We had a look at the hut and then continued our walk across the tundra. The guides gave us information about the different trapping techniques and trapper life, and we found some old traps meant for Polar Foxes on our way. We also got to see some Arctic flowers and could hear and see hundreds of Kittiwakes, as we walked under a bird cliff. Some crazy and brave people even went swimming in the icy cold Arctic water!

Sunday, July 30th 16:00, 79°35’ N

Monacobreen

In front of the mighty Monaco Glacier we did a tender boat cruise in beautiful sunshine. The Monaco Glacier got its name from Prince Albert the 1st of
Monaco, who arranged several expeditions to Svalbard in the late XIXth and early XXth century. The guides explained to us how a glacier is formed and about the different types of glaciers found on Svalbard.

During dinner, we sailed out of Liefdefjord, away from the magnificent **Monaco and Seliger Glaciers**.

After dinner we crossed the 80th parallel and this was celebrated on the aft deck with a toast.

The North Atlantic is in fact the only place on the planet where you can be almost certain to pass the 80th parallel with a ship – the southern hemisphere is mostly ice-covered and at 80°S you will hit a continent. An interesting thought is that there were probably no other people between M/S Nordstjernen and the North Pole at this time!

A perfect way to end a perfect day.

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**Monday, July 31st 09:45, 78°50’ N**

**Ny-London**

This morning, we went ashore on the Blomstrand Island, where remains after a British mining activity on marble is to be seen. The place was called “Marble Island” at that time (1910), and the small settlement “Camp Mansfield”, after its founder, Ernest Mansfield. Later on, the place got ironically called New-London, which is nowadays the official name. We took a walk to have a look at the historical heritage on the site.

North of Blomstrand Island, you can see the Blomstrand Glacier, both named after a Swedish geologist, who took part in the Swedish Spitsbergen Expedition of 1861, together with the admiral Liljehöök.
We arrived Ny-Ålesund in a fantastic weather! Sun, no wind and 8+. The guides give us a guided tour in the settlement. We were able to visit the museum and the local shop “Kongsfjordbutikken”.

Ny-Ålesund is the world’s northernmost community. As we came onshore we went on a guided tour in town. Ny-Ålesund is a former mining village which has become an important international research centre - mainly on the atmosphere and ozone layer but also geological, biological and glacial research is carried out here. Downtown Ny-Ålesund there is a small centre with a shop, a post-office and a museum.

Ny-Ålesund was the focal point for the world’s attention several times during the 1920’s. In 1925 Roald Amundsen attempted to reach the North Pole from Ny-Ålesund with the seaplanes N24 and N25. In 1926 Amundsen returned to Ny-Ålesund, accompanied by the American Lincoln Ellsworth and the Italian Umberto Nobile, to set out on a joint expedition with the airship “Norge”. This expedition was a success. The airship flew over the North Pole as planned and landed in Teller, Alaska.

In 1945 until 1962 we experienced the second mining period. But the problem with the coal layers in Ny-Ålesund is that they are almost vertical and gases develop in the mines. 70 miners have lost their life in the mines of Ny-Ålesund and the worst accident of them all happened November 5th 1962. Late at night that day there was a big explosion in the Esther Mine and 21 miners lost their life. A committee made an investigation and they concluded that the Norwegian state should have been more concerned about the safety in Ny-Ålesund. Since Kings Bay was a state enterprise the public blamed the government. In August 1963, Prime Minister Gerhardsen and his government resigned as a result of this tragedy.

Research started in Ny-Ålesund in 1964 and during the 1990’s research increased from 4,100 man-days in 1990 to 10,031 in 2000. Each year scientists from at least fifteen nations run more than 120 research projects.
Monday, July 31st 17:00

**Farewell gathering**

We gathered with the ship’s crew and the guides for a farewell ‘ceremony’. Certificates were handed out to the true heroes among us that took a swim in the chilly arctic water and to everyone who passed the 80th parallel. And that was the end of the Svalbard summer adventure for this time.

Are you sad to leave Svalbard? Are you curious about what it is like in the winter? Grab a copy of our catalogue or visit www.hurtigrutensvalbard.com. We hope to see you back again for another arctic adventure.

*Best regards from your cruise guides,*
*Charlie, Heiko, Robert, Remi, Veronica, Signe, Maryam*