



Around Spitsbergen: In the Realm of Polar Bear and Ice

27th July – 2nd August 2025

On board *m/v Hondius*



M/v *Hondius* was built in 2019, as the first-registered Polar Class 6 vessel in the world, meeting the latest and highest Lloyd's Register standards for ice-strengthened cruise ships. Surpassing the requirements of the Polar Code adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), *Hondius* represents the most flexible, advanced, innovative touring vessel in the polar regions, thoroughly optimized for exploratory voyages that provide you the utmost first-hand contact with the Arctic and Antarctica. *Hondius* complies with the latest SOLAS-regulations (Safety Of Life At Sea). M/v *Hondius* is 107.6 m long, 15.3 m wide and has a maximum draft of 5.3 m, Polar Class 6 (equivalent 1A-Super), 15 knots average cruising speed and has 2 x ABC main engines; total 4,200 kW.



Captain Ernesto Barria Vargas

and his international crew of 70 sailors

Chief Officer:	Sven Holzhausen	[Germany]
Second Officer:	Solina Duguay	[Canada]
Second Officer:	Eline Schuurman	[Netherlands]
Third Officer:	Erik van de Reijden	[Netherlands]
Hotel Manager:	Ingrid van de Loo	[Netherlands]
Head Chef:	Kabir Moraes	[India]
Sous Chef:	Norman Estrada	[Philippines]
Ships doctor:	Joost Moerman	[Netherlands]
Expedition Leader:	Christian Long	[New Zealand]
Ass. Expedition Leader:	Jerry Zhao	[China]
Ass. Expedition Leader:	Koen Jongerling	[Netherlands]
Expedition Guide:	Eric Wong	[China]
Expedition Guide:	Jakub Malecki	[Poland]
Expedition Guide:	John Rogers	[United States]
Expedition Guide:	Juan Berenstein	[Argentina]
Expedition Guide:	Li Ye	[China]
Expedition Guide:	Simon Davies	[UK]
Expedition Guide:	Lucia Romero	[Argentina]
Expedition Guide:	Rose Li Hong	[China]
Expedition Guide:	Tiphannie May	[The Falklands]
Expedition Guide:	Wang Wenyan	[China]
Expedition Guide:	Charlotte Taplin	[UK]

WE WELCOME YOU ON BOARD!



Day 1 – Sunday 27th July, Embarkation: Longyearbyen

08h00 GPS Position: 78°15.8 'N, 015°30.2'E

Wind: W2 • Sea: Calm • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: +8°C



Today was the fantastic and exciting day when our voyage finally began. The weather was warm, and we were all buzzing with anticipation about what the next six days might bring. After all the planning and travel, it felt surreal to finally be here, ready to set off. We embarked the ship at 1600. As soon as we were aboard, we were called to take part in the ship's safety drill. We all put on our bright orange lifejackets and made our way to our muster station, where the crew showed us exactly what to do in an emergency. We were even shown our lifeboats—just in case.

After the drill, we headed to the lounge where we were welcomed with a drink from the captain and a selection of tasty canapés. It felt like the voyage was really underway now. Then Chris, our Expedition Leader, gave us a welcome briefing, outlining what to expect and setting the tone for the days ahead. We had a buffet dinner afterward, which gave us a chance to relax and chat about what lay ahead. But after all the excitement—and the long journey to get to Svalbard—we were pretty exhausted. Most of us headed to bed early, eager to catch some sleep and wake up ready for whatever tomorrow might bring.

Day 2 – Monday 28th July, Kongfjord & Ny Alesund

08h00 GPS Position: 78°58.1 'N, 011°43.3'E

Wind: ESE 2 • Sea: Calm • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: +6°C



What an incredible and eventful day it was today! We started our morning with a mandatory but very insightful AECO briefing, where we learned all about visiting the Arctic safely and responsibly. It was also a great opportunity to get to know more of the friendly staff who are guiding us on this amazing journey. Soon after, we disembarked in the settlement of Ny-Ålesund, under cloudy but wonderfully calm skies. We explored this international hub for Arctic research, with its unique atmosphere and historical significance. We took a lot of photos, especially around the Chinese Yellow River research station, a key part of the scientific community here. Our guides shared fascinating stories about Amundsen and the history of North Pole exploration that took place right here, as we walked toward the famous historical balloon mast. We also enjoyed visiting the northernmost post office in the world, where many of us sent postcards home, a truly special souvenir! On the tundra, we were thrilled to spot some Arctic Foxes and even a few Reindeers. We arrived back at the ship around 12:30, filled with countless memories and fun photos.



After a delicious lunch, the afternoon brought the highlight of the day! A sudden announcement drew our attention to a distant speck in the ice, about 11km away. It was a Polar Bear! Our captain skillfully maneuvered the ship to get us closer, and we were able to watch the magnificent King of the Arctic from a respectful distance of about 500m. It was an absolutely exhilarating and unforgettable moment for everyone on board! Later in the afternoon, we had another important session: a mandatory Zodiac briefing to prepare us for upcoming landings, followed by the distribution of our expedition boots. It really got us excited for the adventures that lie ahead! The day concluded with our daily recap and a wonderful dinner, as we all buzzed with the excitement of the day's events. Tomorrow, we set off for the sea ice in the Arctic Ocean, and we can't wait to see what new wonders await us!

Day 3 – Tuesday 29th July, Into the pack ice

08h00 GPS Position: 80°54.9 'N, 015°43.1'E

Wind: E 2 • Sea: Glassy • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: +2°C



Today aboard the MV *Hondius*, we experienced one of the most memorable days of our Arctic voyage as we ventured deep into the pack ice north of Svalbard. The morning greeted us with ideal conditions, partly sunny skies and an almost glass-like calm on the water. It was a perfect setting for a day of exploration in one of the planet's most remote and breathtaking environments.



We reached the ice edge early in the day and began slowly navigating northward, eventually crossing the 81°N mark. The landscape was utterly otherworldly—vast, silent expanses of drifting sea ice punctuated by the occasional lead of

open water, with shimmering light playing off the icy surfaces. It was the kind of environment that evokes both awe and respect for the raw beauty and isolation of the Arctic.



Wildlife was abundant, especially marine mammals. Seals became the stars of the day, spotted frequently on the ice floes and in the water. We had excellent sightings of four different species: the robust and distinctive Hooded Seal, the sociable Harp Seal, the elusive Ringed Seal, and the stately Bearded Seal. Their presence provided fantastic opportunities for observation and photography, and many guests spent time on deck trying to identify the differences between each species.

Birdlife also featured prominently during the day's journey. Large flocks of Little Auks fluttered across the sky like scattered confetti, while both Brünnich's and Black Guillemots were regularly observed diving and feeding near the ice edge. Kittiwakes trailed the ship, occasionally settling on nearby ice floes. A few Pomarine Skuas were





spotted, their powerful silhouettes unmistakable as they cruised above the ice searching for opportunities. Despite the wealth of wildlife and the serene atmosphere, our main goal for the day - the sighting

of a Polar Bear on the ice, remained elusive. We searched diligently for hours, with many eyes scanning the horizon, but the "King of the Arctic" did not make an appearance today. Fortunately, previous days had already provided guests with excellent bear encounters, softening the disappointment of not finding one amidst the pack-ice.

Throughout the day, the expedition team provided an engaging and educational lecture program. Charlotte gave a fascinating presentation on Polar Bears, reinforcing our understanding of their behavior and habitat. QB followed with an inspiring session on polar photography, offering tips to capture the essence of this stark and beautiful landscape. Jacob's talk on the history and future of ice was particularly moving, a passionate reminder of the fragility of this environment in a rapidly changing world. As evening approached, the ship slowly turned south, leaving behind the icy wilderness as we continued our circumnavigation of Svalbard. Although we did not find a bear today, the haunting beauty of the pack-ice, the rich variety of seals and seabirds, and the peaceful silence of this polar frontier made for an unforgettable day aboard the *Hondius*.

Day 4 – Wednesday 30th July, Alkefjellet, Torrelneset and Brasvelbreen

08h00 GPS Position: 79°33.9 'N, 018°40.8'E

Wind: NW 3 • Sea: Calm • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: +5°C



The day began with a mysterious and quiet beauty as we found ourselves surrounded by dense morning fog at Alkefjellet. The towering basalt cliffs loomed above us, barely visible at first. As the fog slowly



lifted, it revealed one of the Arctic's most spectacular bird cliffs, alive with the calls and flapping wings of thousands of Brünnich's guillemots, kittiwakes, and other seabirds nesting in dizzying numbers. The soundscape was a constant chorus of life, echoing against the cliffs.

By late morning, the sky began to clear completely, unveiling a striking contrast between the deep blue sky, the dark volcanic cliffs, and the glistening sea below. The sunlight highlighted the intricate patterns in the rock and the dynamic movement of the bird



colonies—an unforgettable scene for both bird lovers and photographers alike.



While exploring the area by Zodiac, sharp eyes spotted two Arctic foxes gracefully navigating the narrow ledges and boulder-strewn lower cliffs. They were moving between nesting sites, likely searching for fallen eggs or chicks—a raw yet essential part of the Arctic ecosystem.

Back on board, we enjoyed a warm lunch in the dining room, sharing stories of the morning while watching the cliffs disappear into the distance from the windows.



But as if it couldn't get more thrilling, during our navigation away from Alkefjellet, a majestic blue whale surfaced in the vicinity. There was a collective gasp on deck as we witnessed the world's largest animal rise from the depths. We slowed our speed and respectfully observed the whale as it moved through the cold Arctic waters, a once-in-a-lifetime encounter.

In the afternoon, we geared up for our landing at Torelneset, a remote headland on the eastern coast of Nordaustlandet. The landing site greeted us with a vast, open tundra landscape leading toward the beach. After a short hike, we encountered a walrus haul-out—a tight-knit group of these enormous marine mammals resting ashore. It was a

powerful moment to stand quietly just meters away, watching them snort, grunt, and shift their weight, occasionally lifting their heads to observe us with their small, curious eyes. After spending time respectfully observing the walrus, we took to the Zodiacs for a coastal cruise. In the waters around us, we spotted more walrus swimming, their massive bodies surfacing and diving with surprising grace.



We returned to the ship in the late afternoon, just when it got windy and wavy and on time for our daily recap with the expedition team. The team shared insights on walrus

behavior, seabird nesting, and the geology of the cliffs, and introduced our plan for tomorrow's destinations. That evening, the ship's hotel team had prepared a special Arctic barbecue dinner on deck. Despite the chill in the air, many guests chose to eat outside, bundled in parkas, embracing the unique joy of dining under the Arctic sun with the brisk wind on our faces and the vast wilderness stretching around us.

As the evening light mellowed, we sailed toward the majestic Bråsvellbreen Glacier. Spanning over 200 kilometers in length, this glacial front is one of the largest in the Svalbard archipelago. Under perfect weather conditions, we slowly navigated through a field of icebergs and smaller bergy bits, which shimmered in the soft light. The scale and silence of the glacier were humbling—a moment of deep calm and wonder. Later, the lounge transformed into a lively space for music and karaoke, where laughter and singing carried late into the Arctic night. Spirits were high, and there was a shared sense of gratitude for the extraordinary experiences of the day. With full hearts and a sense of anticipation, we're ready for whatever wonders tomorrow may bring on this unforgettable Arctic journey.

Day 5 – Thursday 31st July, Kapp Waldburg and Sundneset

08h00 GPS Position: 78°12.0' N, 021°06.8'E

Wind: E 1 • Sea: Calm • Weather: overcast • Air temperature: +8°C



We had an early start today—earlier than expected—because the Expedition Team had spotted a polar bear near a walrus haul-out on land. Chris, our Expedition Leader, came around with the news, waking us all up with the kind of urgency you don't mind in the Arctic. Within minutes, we were bundling into layers and jumping into the zodiacs, still shaking off sleep.



As we cruised slowly toward the site, the water was calm and the air crisp. Almost immediately, we found ourselves surrounded by walrus—huge, whiskered beasts, some of them drifting in far too close for comfort. But they were clearly curious about us, and it was

mesmerizing to watch them. Their deep grunts echoed off the water as they bobbed around the boats.

Just behind them, the polar bear lay sleeping. At first, it was barely visible, curled up on the beach. But then, after a while, it stirred, stretched, and began walking—right toward the walrus. The moment it moved, the walrus reacted. There was a sudden burst of noise and splashing as half the group stampeded into the sea in a panicked rush. The bear didn't seem particularly hungry—it just strolled along the shoreline, majestic and unbothered. With the morning sun lighting up its fur, we had the most incredible, clear view of it. It felt like time slowed down for a while as we just drifted there, watching.



After nearly two hours on the water, we made our way back to the ship, all of us buzzing from the experience. Breakfast never tasted so good. Later in the morning, the ship repositioned to Sundneset—a place we rarely get to land because it's known for having bears. But luck was on our side: no bears today, so we went ashore for a beautiful hike. The landscape was open and wild, dotted with reindeer grazing quietly on the tundra. We spotted two Arctic Foxes, both completely white, darting around the rocks, and watched Long-Tailed Ducks casually swimming in the pools of water. Purple Sandpipers moved along the shoreline, their calls carrying in the breeze. There were a few small lakes along our route, and it was peaceful just walking between them, soaking in the silence and the scenery.

We returned to the ship for a late lunch, tired but happy. In the afternoon, Tiphannie gave a great lecture about seals—informative and full of stories from the field. Then, in the evening, we had recap and shared highlights from the day, followed by a delicious plated dinner. What a day—Polar Bears, curious



walrus, Arctic Foxes, and the rare treat of hiking in Sundneset. Every moment felt like something out of a nature documentary, except we were in it.

Day 6 – Friday 1st August Gashamna and Burgerbukta

08h00 GPS Position: 76°59.1 'N, 016°06.7'E

Wind: E3 • Sea: Rippled • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: +6°C



After a long overnight transit, *Hondius* arrived in Hornsund in the early morning. Unfortunately, we were greeted with low clouds and very strong wind. In fact, the wind was too strong, and our Plan A, for a landing at Gåshamna, was not possible. So, it was on to Plan B as we cruised further into the fjord and into the side-fjord Samarinvågen. Here we

found very, very different conditions with almost no wind. It was remarkable how quickly the conditions changed. We made a landing by Zodiac shuttle adjacent to a huge glacier, Eggbreen, with a massive ice fall.

The terrain ashore was completely different than at any other landing. There were no plants or tundra at all – just rocks of all shapes and sizes and many colors. Above the



rocks we found snowfields and the glacier itself. We had fun walking over to the ice and playing in the snow. As the expedition staff provided a safety perimeter, many of us climbed a peak for a spectacular view of the jagged and multi-colored mountains.

We had been prepared, and wore our swimsuits under our outerwear, so that we could go for a Polar Plunge! There were many laughs, and some shivers, as the brave plungers took their swim, while the rest cheered. Either climbing or swimming, all of us had certainly earned our lunch.



In the afternoon we boarded the Zodiacs again, this time for a cruise. We stayed in our sheltered corner of the fjord and cruised the glacier front of Samarinbreen. As a backdrop, the red and yellow mountains added a contrast to the deep blue of the ice. The many booming reports kept us looking to see the calving happen – but usually too late. The calm sea added a mirror reflection to the whole scene. The highlight was when all the Zodiacs assembled for a group photo on the water. Great fun.

Back aboard, we gathered in the lounge for the Captain's Farewell. Our captain, expedition leader Chris, and the entire expedition team offered heartfelt thanks and reflections. That evening, we shared a final plated dinner with new friends, bonded by icy landscapes, polar wildlife, and memories etched deep by the Arctic light.

Day 7 – Saturday 2nd August – Disembarkation: Longyearbyen

08h00 GPS Position: 79°50.2 'N, 011°59.2'E

Wind: SW 2 • Sea: Calm • Weather: Overcast • Air temperature: +6°C

The time has come to leave the ship and to say goodbye to our fellow passengers and to the crew and staff who has looked after us for the last week. It has been such a fantastic voyage with so much wildlife, now we will go home to look over our photos and tell our friends and family all about our trip. The staff put our luggage on the dock for us and once we disembarked we grabbed our luggage and we went to town for a look around before our flight later in the morning. We already can't wait to come back to go
Antarctica!



Total distance sailed on our voyage 947 NM

Northernmost point: 81°32.25'N

On behalf of Oceanwide Expeditions, Ernesto Barria Vargas , Expedition Leader
Christian Long, Hotel Manager Ingrid van de Loo and all the crew and staff of M/V
Hondius, it has been a pleasure travelling with you.