



Greenland

September 14-22 2023

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At the end of August we very suddenly found ourselves with some time off. While running through options Lindsay checked to see if there were any Antarctica trips available. It was the wrong season for traveling there, but the same websites had last minute Arctic trips. Based on time, cost, and itinerary we chose the North Greenland into the National Park trip. It was basically 2 for one, however the cheaper rooms were sold out. We ended up with a balcony room for around \$3800 per person, which worked out well for us. The trip left from Reykjavik, Iceland and was about 36 hours to Ittoqotoormiit, the only village we stopped at in Greenland. We were on the Ocean Albatross with around 150 passengers as well as two influencers and their camera men.

This trip is mainly billed as a scenery trip with hopes of seeing wildlife and the northern lights. What I never expected was how little effort was made to find or show us wildlife. There didn't seem to be anyone on the expedition team actively watching for wildlife. If they were, they rarely notified anyone of anything they found. The other issue is the Greenland government. There is a 4 mile buffer around known Walrus haul outs. This is apparently for conservation purposes, so that seems like a good thing. I

was also told that the expedition team knew exactly where to find Narwhal but was prevented from going there for hunting reasons as opposed to conservation. With all the things working against us, we were still able to see 9 species, 7 of which were new for me. To accomplish this I spent a lot of time on deck scanning with binoculars and a scope.

Our room on the ship was very nice with floor to ceiling sliding glass doors. We were on the 4th floor. They serviced our room 3 times a day. There were two restaurants on the boat with the main one having a lot more variety than the one on the 8th deck. I often ate on the 8th deck as it was close to the viewing deck and I could spend less time eating. The food was pretty good and there were a lot of options. All food was included as well as one drink at three events. Beer was \$6 for Coors going up to \$9 for a local Greenland beer. Wine started at \$20-25 a bottle and went up from there. There were several lectures, however I skipped most of them to spend time on deck. You could also watch the lectures live in your room. There was a decent movie selection on the TV.



Day 1: We checked into the ship in Reykjavik around 1430. We completed check in and relaxed until the boat left just before sunset. I watched for cetaceans until dusk with no luck. Shortly after dark we were notified that there were northern lights visible, which turned out to be spectacular and lasted for a few hours.

Day 2: We woke up to calm seas, heavy overcast, and rain. After breakfast we were in our room and there was a call for Killer Whales. Luckily, they were on our side of the boat and we stepped out on our balcony and watched two for 10 minutes. Later we saw several Humpbacks from the observation deck. We took a nap when it started raining harder and missed a Sperm Whale (very painful miss) and a Fin

Whale. Birds included Northern Wheatear, Northern Gannet, Black-footed Kittiwake, Iceland Gull, Great Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Thick-billed Murre, and Northern Fulmar.

Day 3: I woke up early and headed up on deck as we cruised along the Greenland coast and into Ittoqqortoormiit. Our morning activity was to land in the village and wander around. I didn't expect any mammals in town so didn't put much effort in. I ended up missing a pair of Arctic Hares in the cemetery.

For shore excursions only half the guests could go at once. We were divided into 4 groups, I think based on language. I was grouped with the English speakers, who always went with the Chinese speakers. The other groups were Danish and Norwegian speakers.

The afternoon was mainly spent cruising north. I spent this time, as well most other time I was not eating during daylight hours with my scope on deck. I didn't find much but did see a few Dovekies. One of the expedition guides spotted what they thought was a large pod of Narwhal, and a lot of effort was put into refinding them. They turned out to be Harp Seals, which I was happy for the initial misID, they would never have turned the ship around for seals.

Day 4: We woke up in Kong Oscar Fjord to beautiful scenery. Our morning excursion was landing at Eagle's Nest on Ella Island. There had been a tsunami recently and we were the first on site. There was a fair amount of damage to things at lower levels which was documented, and the Sirius Patrol was notified. There was a lot of Muskox dung around, some of which was fresh, but no live animals. There were Muskox and Caribou skulls on one of the roofs.

After returning to the ship, we cruised up Vega Sund for the evening zodiac cruises near Kista Island. Relatively early I spotted a Muskox through the scope. I ran down to the bridge and asked if we could get closer, and they said no, as they didn't know the depth along the shore. We ended up seeing 47 Muskox on the north side of the Fjord on Geographical Society Island. I mainly searched that due to the lighting on the south side of the Fjord, Traill Island, making it difficult. As we pulled up to Kista Island, we spotted a lone bull Muskox walking along the beach. We were in the second group for the zodiac cruise, which was to last about an hour. We went around Kista Island and found the Muskox, but it was higher on the island and backlit. Still the closest we got to one. We then had a couple King Eiders go by, and another boat called out a seal. We were getting towards the end of our zodiac cruise when I spotted something white pop up on the ridge of a small island. I got on it and a Polar Bear stepped onto the top of the ridge. I called it and our zodiac driver radioed the other boats and we all went and checked it out. We stayed about 150 M away and watched it for 20 minutes as it walked along the ridge and lay down a couple of times. Mainly just posing in various ways in perfect light. I ended up getting a free bottle of champagne for spotting it.

There was a kayak trip while we were on the zodiac cruise, they had a great experience with a couple of Ringed Seals. It was an extra \$250 per person.





Day 5: We woke up to superb scenery in Keiser Franz Josephs Fjord. There was a Muskox on the shore and I eventually spotted 6 very distant Arctic Hares on a ridge. Waltershausen Glacier was our next stop. I had seen seals on sea ice near glaciers in Alaska, so I was on the look out here. I did end up seeing two Bearded Seals, one of them pretty well. There were another 5 or so seals that were too distant to ID. We then cruised up Muskox Fjord where I saw more muskox on the shore. One group even had a couple wallowing in ocean water and interacting with young ones. We spotted two Ringed Seals and a Bearded

Seal on sea ice. We stopped at a hunting camp and that's where we went ashore. I saw no mammals, but the polar bear guards had good views of Muskox and Arctic Hares.



Day 6: Our first activity for the day was to land at a place called Myggbukta. We were in the second group to land and decided to sleep in. Shortly after the first group was called, the intercom said the landing was canceled due to a Polar Bear being spotted. We jumped up and started getting dressed to go on deck. As we were walking out, they came back on and said it was actually an Arctic Fox. We got up on deck to see the fox running along the shore. It was full winter white. Soon after a white morph Gyrfalcon buzzed by within 10 M of us. It headed for shore and went by the fox, which stopped to watch it. It then headed up a hill and went after a flock of Snow Buntings. When I did get to shore, I was notified there were distant Arctic Hares spotted. We took our scope and walked as far as we were allowed and watched them until we saw them move and were sure we were seeing rabbits. They were probably around 1.5-2 K off, so very distant views. After the landings were finished the ship headed south. I spent most of the afternoon on deck with no mammals sited.



Day 7: We woke up in Carlsbergfjord where we had our last zodiac ride. We saw some nice ice and a seal that was very scared of us, and I was unable to ID. Afterwards we headed south again.

Day 8: Full day at sea, a Humpback may have been seen early but not by us. I was on deck a lot of the day. Large numbers of the same birds that we saw on the way north.

Day 9: Departed the boat early and began our trip in Iceland.

Species

Arctic Hare: I saw two groups and missed a pair in the cemetery and several at our second landing. Distant scope views only.

Arctic Fox: We saw one with decent view from the ship at Myggbukta.

Muskox: We ended up seeing around 75, but all distant. We did see good interactions with calves and wallowing in the ocean.

Polar Bear: This is the species we saw the best. Long view in great light from a reasonable distance.

Bearded Seal: Good views of three on sea ice.

Ringed Seal: Good views of one on sea ice, with a second more distant.

Harp Seal: Large group at sea, I think 150 is a very low estimate.

Killer Whale: A male and female seen well in Iceland waters.

Humpback: Several seen the first day at sea, with one in particular very close.

What I missed.

Sperm Whale and Fin Whale were both seen from the ship and I did not see them. Other species occasionally seen are Minke Whale, Beluga, White-beaked Dolphin, Northern Bottlenose Whale, Bowhead and Sei Whale. Narwhal are apparently very hard to see from a ship, and we were prevented from going to the most likely areas.

Walrus and Hooded Seal were both possible, and I did see several seals I couldn't ID, so I may have seen a Hooded Seal.

On land, some sources say Northern Collared Lemming is present, and there may be Arctic Wolves, which the locals only see tracks of.

In conclusion, the trip turned out well and I filled in a lot of big holes in my life list. This is not the trip I would have chosen, but the one I was able to afford and had time for. While it didn't seem to target wildlife most of the time, I was able to see a lot. I was able to see Muskox in its native range, which was important to me. I think a longer small boat cruise of the area with permission to visit the Walrus and Narwhal areas could be a spectacular trip.

If you're interested in seeing media from the trip, check Youtube and Instagram for Jordan Tually and Nicole Isaacs. While they did spend a lot of time filming, they were always polite to everyone while I was around and didn't display any of the bad behavior I have seen from influencers in SE Asia.