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# Tour Report
# Svalbard Photo Expedition
11 – 19 May 2026

Svalbard reindeer



MS Stockholm



Walrus



Polar bear



Compiled by Bret Charman

**Monday 11 May 2026**

**Day 1:**
London to Oslo

The group was scheduled to depart on an afternoon flight from London Heathrow to Norway's capital, Oslo. Leaving from Terminal 2, the group enjoyed smooth progress from check-in, through security and the boarding itself. Making good time, the flight arrived a little early into Oslo, with us making fast progress through immigration and onto baggage reclaim. It was here that the group all came together, and once everyone had collected their bags, we walked the short distance to the Radisson Red hotel.

With everybody checked in, we agreed to meet for dinner in the hotel restaurant, giving everyone a little time to freshen up in their rooms first. Enjoying an excellent first meal together, the group were able to get to know each other, and I was able to give them the necessary information for the following day. Everyone was excited for what the week ahead had in store for us and we went off to bed eager for our journey north the next day.

**Tuesday 12 May 2026**

**Day 2:**
Oslo to Longyearbyen; board MS Stockholm

The group awoke in the Radisson, enjoying a hearty breakfast in the hotel, before we all met up in reception and proceeded to walk the short distance back to the airport terminal. Everybody was soon checked in, arriving at security with a very short queue. It wasn't long before we reached passport control, leaving the Schengen Area as we waited to board our flight to the High Arctic.

It seemed we were in luck on this trip, with the flight boarding and departing on time. Making good time in the air, we touched down in Longyearbyen ahead of schedule and were quickly waiting for our bags in the airport. Once all the bags had been collected, we loaded them (and ourselves) into the minibus and proceeded into the town centre. Here, those that had hired winter rubber boots were able to collect them, while the others wandered into town to explore a little. We had just over an hour before we were being picked up again and driven the short distance down to the ship.

Everyone was promptly back and we arrived at the ship at almost exactly 4 pm. There we were warmly greeted by Christian and Beau, our expert guiding team, before being helped with our luggage along the jetty and aboard the MS Stockholm. Our home for the next seven nights, MS Stockholm is an old girl, but absolutely perfect for heading into the icy wilderness of the Arctic. We were all shown to our cabins, being able to quickly unpack as the ship left the jetty and our expedition voyage began.

First things first, a mandatory safety briefing. Once we had learned what was what, it was time to head down to the dining area for our first meal aboard this charming ship. Our chef, Carl, and the hostess Emma greeted us warmly and Carl explained what would be on the menu this evening. What a fabulous first meal. Just a taster of what was to come.

Our plan was to head out of Isfjorden (the largest fjord system in Svalbard) before heading north along the west coast of the main island of Spitsbergen. It was here, as we entered into the Forlandsundet (the strait between Spitsbergen and Prince Charles Foreland off of the west coast), that we came across a tall ship sailing in the opposite direction. The evening sun was casting golden hues across the mountains behind the ship, providing a magical first evening for those enjoying the icy air on the ship's bow. It's always hard to be disciplined on these voyages. With 24 hours' daylight, it is all too easy to stay out until the early hours and end up a little sleep-deprived. It was with this in mind, after a long day of travel, that we all headed back to our cabins for our well-deserved sleep.



**Wednesday 13 May 2026**

**Day 3:**
Smeerenburgfjorden, Fuglefjorden, Raudfjord & Moffen Island

Having sailed north overnight, we awoke to the magical scenery of Smeerenburg Glacier. Nestled in the fjords of Spitsbergen's north-west, the Stockholm was working her way towards this spectacular glacier before breakfast.



One of the magical things about any voyage aboard Stockholm is her ability to go to areas that larger ships aren't able to visit. The ship sailed as close as she could, providing us with incredible views and some great photographic opportunities of this wall of ice and dramatic mountain vista. What an incredible way to start the day!

Another of the bonuses about any time aboard the ship is the exceptional food that is provided throughout. Heading down to breakfast as we left the fjord, we worked our way along the fjords of the north-west and headed round into Fuglefjorden. Our plan after breakfast was to head into the glacier and try our first zodiac cruise. With everybody kitted out in their flotation suits and lifejackets, we boarded the zodiacs with Christian and Beau helming, before zipping across the water towards the glacier.





As we headed to the far side of the glacier, there was a huge calving event. An enormous piece of ice crumbled and slid into the water, creating a huge wave. With Beau at the helm of one of the zodiacs, it was quickly whisked away, just to ensure everyone was kept safe and sound. It wasn't long after this, as we navigated our way through the brash ice (broken up bits of glacial ice), that we enjoyed a close encounter with a harbour (common) seal. This beautiful little seal was incredibly quick, and certainly not the easiest of subjects to photograph. However, one particularly close approach did allow for a very attractive shot in the soft blues of the brash ice.



All of this excitement and we hadn't even got to noon. However, we had plans to sail away from the area this afternoon, after checking out another fjord in the area. And so, with this in mind, it was time for us to head back to Stockholm, and the crew speedily craned the zodiacs back aboard.

Our next port of call was Raudfjord and as we entered the fjord, there were clear polar bear tracks along the shoreline. Many of the group were already on the bow, enjoying the incredible scenery. At the end of the fjord, the glaciers were peeking out through the low clouds, providing a spectacular scene, but everyone was holding their breath for the king of the Arctic – the polar bear. As most of us focused our efforts on the tracks working their way along the edge of the fjord, there was a shout from a crew. They could see a polar bear, but it was on the other side of the water, walking along a snow-covered peninsula. This was a chunky bear. However, a large, rotund bear means it is a healthy bear, and it was great to see our first of the voyage.



To start with, we watched the bear working its way up the slope, with rocky patches and areas of deep snow. But soon, this large male bear was wandering higher up the slope, and it was in a large snow field. It was here that the bear decided to roll around in the snow. We were a long way from the bear, but we had a completely clear view of the bear as he worked hard to clean his fur in the pristine white snow of the hillside. It was while the bear was at this point that we realised that the bear was actually getting close to a herd of Svalbard reindeer which were up by the ridgeline.

Meanwhile, as the bear continued to roll around, you could clearly make out the dark pads on the paws. It made for some really charming, high-key photography. At this time of year, with the landscapes being so dramatic and/or minimalist, it is always fun to try and capture polar bears in the environment. It was evident that the bear was going to keep moving. Working its way higher and higher, the bear disappeared over a false top, before scaring the reindeer, which all darted across the hill for safety. We couldn't see the bear any longer and it was then that Christian suggested we head around the peninsula and see whether we might get lucky with the bear coming down the other side.



As we rounded the end of the peninsula, we saw plenty more reindeer, but for quite some time we had no view of the bear. When it did eventually come into view, it was further than our original sighting and seemingly had no intention of getting any closer where we were positioned. There were definitely no better photographic opportunities than those we had already had. With distance to cover, we had to make the difficult decision to leave the bear, but hopefully we'd have plenty more chances over the coming days. The ship turned around, leaving the bear in peace and headed out to open water and on to Moffen Island.

It would be a few hours as we made good progress to the north-east, working our way to Moffen. It was then that I was able to give a photography lecture, giving some tips and tricks, but also hopefully some inspiration as to how to photograph the wildlife of the Arctic on our week-long expedition. Before we knew it, it was time for dinner and we were treated to another exceptional meal cooked by our chef Carl.

As dinner came to an end, it was time for us to suit up once more and disembark from Stockholm onto the zodiacs. Moffen Island is a bird breeding colony, but also a popular haul-out for walruses. In fact, the walruses that are often found here were the focus of our zodiac cruise, and it didn't take long to enjoy some remarkable encounters with these huge pinnipeds (seals). Thanks to prolonged protection in Svalbard, this once heavily-hunted species has made a remarkable comeback and can now be seen with relative ease throughout the archipelago.

With the two zodiacs working their way along the shore of Moffen, we had walruses moving in and out of the water, one individual rolling down the shingle bank to save energy (this always elicits chuckles from the group) and even some close approaches from curious walruses already in the water. In fact, we were treated to some exceptional views and some fantastic photography opportunities. Due to the sheer size of these marine mammals, capturing images of them when they approach can be particularly challenging. It did, however, provide some fantastic portrait opportunities as and when the walruses surfaced.



We spent around an hour on the water, making the most of all the opportunities of these charismatic, albeit rather smelly creatures. What an action-packed first full day we'd had. Wildlife and photography galore in one of the world's most magical wilderness areas.





**Thursday 14 May 2026**

**Day 4:**
Lomfjord, Alkefjellet & Hinlopen Strait

This morning we were woken by multiple bangs on the door and the call of polar bear ringing out. Our alarm was the voice of Christian. Within minutes most of the group was on deck and we were looking out into the ice of Lomfjord. There, a fair way into the ice, was a mother polar bear and her cub. This was a cub born earlier in the year and what an incredibly rare treat this was. Seeing any cub is special, but to see such a youngster was particularly special.





We enjoyed photographing the mother and cub separately at first. The cub was in tow, but they weren't actually together. Keeping our distance in order to avoid disturbing them, we went about capturing some stunning images of them in their icy realm. It wasn't until the pair came together that things really took on an even more emotionally charged moment. The mother was busy rolling in the snow and ice, keeping her fur in tip-top condition, with the cub watching on close by.



It's really hard to get across just how special this encounter really was. Seeing a mother and cub is rare enough, but to have them so relaxed and to allow us such clear (albeit distant) views was truly exceptional. So as not to disturb them, we made sure to leave them in the ice before heading south to our main focus this morning – the bird cliffs at Alkefjellet.

Being so early in the season, we had the unique opportunity to take the ship close to the cliffs, allowing us unrivalled views from an elevated position. Thousands upon thousands of Brunnich's guillemots were rafting on the water, while thousands more were already staking their claim to nest on the cliffs.



Our skipper parked the bow of the ship right in front of the cliffs and we were able to just marvel at the sights and sounds all around. We had more plans though; we were soon to be climbing into the zodiacs and enjoying a cruise along the base of the cliffs. This is an experience like no other. The sheer number of birds coming to and fro is a sight to behold, while the constant sounds of the calls resonate from the cliffs.





As well as the Brunnich's guillemots, the huge cliffs are also home to glaucous gull, black-legged kittiwake and black guillemot. It was here that we saw a pair of glaucous gulls ripping apart a kittiwake on a small boulder, while later on there was another pair feeding and stripping the carcass of a Brunnich's guillemot at the base of the towering cliffs. For me, the thing that was particularly striking and something new was the sheer number of birds rafting on the waters around the cliffs. The maelstrom and the birds stretched all the way to the horizon – something I had never seen in all the years I've been visiting this magical part of Svalbard.



What an incredible experience we had. The only slight downside was that we couldn't find any Arctic foxes here. Usually, this is one of the more reliable locations to find them, but that's wildlife for you.





Our plan for the afternoon was to head south and find the pack ice in the Hinlopen Strait and so it was time to head back to Stockholm, enjoy lunch, and set out in search of the wildlife in the ice. This is one of the most beautiful areas of the archipelago, with the huge ice sheets of Nordaustlandet and the mountains of Spitsbergen providing a beautiful backdrop whichever direction you look.

Working our way through the ice, we stumbled upon our first good encounter with a bearded seal, but it was the polar bears that were everyone's minds once again. The habitat was perfect, and we worked our way through some stunning sections of pack ice. However, it seemed like we might not strike gold again today. We'd already been spoilt with the mother and the cub first thing this morning and you can never be too greedy. There was another small ship operating nearby and it looked as if they had a bear in sight. We were moving in their general direction when we realised there was at least one polar bear, possibly even

two.
Once we had realised there were two bears, they were slowly making their way across the ice to our position in the strait. Between our expert guides and the skipper, it was decided we would try to minimise our noise and stay where we were. Hopefully, the bears would come to us.

Unfortunately, it seemed as if the bears hadn't quite got the memo and they turned when they were around half a mile away. They didn't stop moving as it was clearly a large male following a smaller female. And so, we took a risk and decided to move around the bears and see if they might appear where we were heading. Our gamble paid off – we saw them slide into the water and swim from one patch of ice to another, before climbing back out and moving out across in front of us.



It looked as if they would walk off into the sunset together, so to speak, but they had something else in mind. It got to a point where the male had wandered slightly further away from the female, and she was suddenly aware of his absence.

This was likely a mating pair, and the female was putting the male through his paces. Once the female had clocked that the male wasn't with her, she turned around to see if she could find her admirer. It was only when she realised he was still doing his best to keep up that she carried on her way and started to make her way towards where we had parked the vessel in the ice.

What happened next was out of this world. We had both bears on the move, but now they were heading straight towards the ship. Any second, it was inevitable that they were going to turn and disappear once again into the tangle of broken ice. However, both bears carried on their path towards us and provided us with some truly exceptional photography. There were excellent chances to capture some stunning imagery of the bears in their icy surroundings, before they slowly made their way closer and provided some fantastic opportunities as they strolled across the ice.



This is what visiting Svalbard aboard Stockholm is all about. The skill of the crew, the strength of the hull and the expertise of Christian and Beau is hard to beat. And just like that, the bears were moving away from us once again. There was no need to follow. That was more magnificent than you could have ever dreamt of. It was a once in a lifetime encounter. To have one bear approach is rare, but having two within metres of one another was incredible.

Remarkably, it seemed as if the bears knew our schedule, as by the time they were strolling off into the icy wilderness, it was practically time for us to sit down for dinner. Wow! What another exceptional day. The dinner table was buzzing with excitement. Nobody could quite believe what had just happened. This is what coming to the Arctic on a small ship is all about.

**Friday 15 May 2026**

**Day 5:**
Gimlebreen & Lady Franklin Fjord

Waking up at my usual time, I headed up onto the bridge. It was here I found out that there was a distant polar bear with a kill. Knowing we would all be up imminently, the crew hadn't woken us, and instead we headed to the bow as we surfaced from our cosy cabins.

It was the same mother and her cub that we had seen 24 hours earlier. It was likely that she had killed a ringed seal and she was busy making the most of her prize. We dared not move any closer, only moving the ship to see if we could get a better view. Alas, the views were very distant and photography was almost impossible. It was as we cruised along the ice that we realised she was settling down to rest and it was unlikely she'd be moving any closer to the ice edge. With that in mind, we made the decision to move off and head back across the Hinlopen Strait and explore the ice which was left in Wahlenbergfjorden.

There was a strong breeze today, being funnelled through the strait by the surrounding terrain. Working our way along the ice, we hoped to find some cooperative walrus or seals on the ice, but despite our best efforts, none seemed keen on playing ball. Today was going to be a day of ice.

We ended up at Gimlebreen, one of the huge glaciers coming off of the ice cap at Vestfonna, and it was here that we found a huge chunk of blue ice surrounded by broken fast ice. The skies were moody today, with dark foreboding clouds in the distance, accentuating the vivid blues of the glacial ice.



The glacier itself was equally impressive, with a wall of ice stretching across much of the horizon. It is always hard to do these magnificent landscapes justice and so it is often best to take multiple pictures and create a panoramic. With this in mind, it was fantastic to focus in on smaller areas of the glacier front and build up an extra-wide image of this staggering scene.



We searched high and low for any polar bears, but it seemed as if today we might have a bear-free day. Tomorrow, we were hoping to head north of Nordaustlandet and explore the pack ice. The ice found up here expands all the way across the Arctic Ocean and the expanse of this wilderness and the sense of solitude is truly remarkable. However, before we got that far, we were going to be visiting the northern coastline of Gustav V Land and seeing what we could find.

As we sailed north, the weather started to clear with the sun beginning to cast its warm evening hues across this icy world. We worked our way along the northern coast, turning around the island of Lågøya and heading south into Lady Franklin Fjord. The fjord was full of pristine fast ice – a white expanse of flat ice stretching all the way to the huge glaciers several kilometres away. It was absolutely beautiful. There wasn't a drop of wind and we were completely on our own. This part of the archipelago hasn't been charted. Stockholm's own soundings allow us to explore here without the chance of being disturbed, allowing us unrivalled wildlife watching capabilities in the maze of shallow bays and rock-strewn passages.



Working our way along the ice edge, the water was a rich, ultramarine blue, while the ice-white expanse provided a stunning contrast.



It was then that the call went up for a bear. It was a long way ahead of us walking along the fast ice where it

met with the fjord's edge. The ship slowly manoeuvred closer to where we could see the bear, but it wasn't really possible to capture any images due to the distance. The bear was busy digging and diving into the snow, obviously scenting some potential prey. It slowly moved further and further away, heading deeper into the fjord system. Following the ice edge, it wasn't long before the bear moved out of view, around a hillside jutting out into the fjord. However, it wasn't just the bear to focus on here. There was also a large pod of belugas feeding under the ice. We could see the characteristic creamy white bumps as they came up for air, before disappearing again into the depths of the fjord in their search for food. The crew lowered the engine power, and we idled on the ice edge, allowing the belugas to come about as close as possible to the ship. These cetaceans are notoriously secretive and this was a sight to behold.

It was not remarkably late, around midnight, and with many of the group already in bed, it was time to leave the beautiful conditions and the belugas behind and head north towards the pack ice.

**Saturday 16 May 2026**

**Day 6:**
81° 11' N in the pack ice & Phippsøya

We awoke to an absolutely beautiful morning with bright sunshine and the deep blues of the Arctic Ocean. On the horizon was a clear band of white – the pack ice was within reach. Our plan this morning was to make the most of this unique experience. This year, spring had come early to the high Arctic and the ice was much further north than you would usually expect.

For most of the morning, the group enjoyed the spectacular sight of sea ice stretching to the horizon. This sea ice was broken up, with the currents and relatively warm waters of the North Atlantic pushing the ice ever further north. There's something magical about being in a small ship and manoeuvring between the huge ice floes. The sound and the movement of the ice against the hull is captivating and the strength of Stockholm is always impressive. The whole time we moved through the ice, the ship was being followed by the agile northern fulmars. Hoping for an easy meal, these birds follow vessels as they churn up the Arctic waters and provide some fantastic photographic opportunities as they twist and turn in the skies above. The whole time, our guide Beau was up the ship's mast scouting for potential polar bears.



We spent the whole morning exploring the ice and revelling in the majesty of it.



Our plan for the afternoon was to head down to the Seven Islands and explore (this area is usually frozen solid until the end of May). We hoped for more wildlife watching opportunities in this beautiful area – potentially even another chance for bears. As we cruised through the islands, we could see a large expanse of sea ice which had been caught in a bay and it was here we could see walruses on the ice. Unfortunately, when they heard the ship, they slipped into the water. However, their curiosity got the better of them and they decided to take a closer look at us. We were blessed with some fantastic views as they spy-hopped between the ice floes.





With the walrus satisfying their interest in us, we moved away from the ice and proceeded to make our way through the islands and start our journey west. It was as we passed a thin band of ice that we spotted a beautiful bearded seal on the ice. We didn't realise, until we were right up close, that the seal actually had a pup hidden behind her. We did get to see them both superbly before they slipped into the water and out of

sight. They would likely return to the same patch of ice within minutes of us moving away and with that it was time to leave the shelter of the fjords and start our voyage west towards the north-west tip of Spitsbergen.



**Sunday 17 May 2026**

**Day 7:**
Magdalenefjord

Overnight, we sailed across the north side of the main island of Spitsbergen and ended up in the north-west corner. Strong winds were coming from the north-east, switching to the north, and this was the perfect place to escape the worst of the weather and enjoy some of the stunning landscapes and wildlife on offer. We planned to land at Gravnesodden this morning and undertake a short hike through the snowy landscapes and enjoy the magical scenery.



The ship anchored in the bay, with the engines off and the peace and quiet settling around us. Once everyone

was ready, we put our lifejackets on and boarded the zodiacs for the short transfer to shore. Upon our arrival, we took off our lifejackets and we had a brief safety briefing before we set off. The site is of historical importance as there are a large number of graves (over 100) in the area, and so there are fenced-off areas. Because of the deep snow cover, we made sure to follow Christian's tracks across the snow-covered landscape.





Once we climbed up a small rise, we enjoyed fabulous views across the fjord and it was here we took a group photo. As we walked back to the ship, there were some stunning vistas with the group in front of the towering peaks behind. Having the opportunity to stretch our legs and explore such a beautiful part of the Svalbard archipelago was an absolute joy. On the walk, we came across some fresh Arctic fox tracks, as well as distant views of snow buntings and little auks flying overhead. Wildlife photography opportunities were not really possible on this occasion, but it was still a fantastic experience. We returned to the ship in time for lunch, with plans to head out once again in the afternoon.

After lunch, everyone got their things together as we were planning on making a zodiac landing at Gullybukta. This spot opposite a stunning glacier is known for its walrus haul-out. We knew there were quite a few there, so we boarded the zodiacs once again, making our way to the far end of the beach so as not to disturb them. We arrived to find the walruses were in two separate groups. To say they were relaxed was an understatement. Other than the odd glance in our direction, they were completely unperturbed by our presence.



It was incredible to get so close on foot with so many walruses; the backdrops made it all the more spectacular for the photographer. No matter which way we looked, the jagged peaks and the glacier made for some stunning environmental imagery. It was another excellent opportunity to capture several images and combine them to make a very impactful panoramic. The mountains, glacier and the walrus haul out perfectly aligned for a stunning image in this magical place.



There was also the opportunity to capture some excellent portraits and close-ups of the walruses when they were in the shallows and on the beach. The only thing that the images couldn't capture was the smell that always accompanies these leviathans.



With everybody firing off hundreds of shots, we were able to build up quite an impressive portfolio and something very different to what we had already been treated to. We really couldn't have asked for more. A massive thanks had to go to Christian and Beau for their expert knowledge and putting us in the best places for standout imagery. However, arguably the most magical experience was yet to come. The crew prepared the ship to sail towards Waggonwaybreen at the end of the fjord. There was some incredible blue ice.



It was one of those moments where you pinch yourself. The sound of the ice crackling in the water was magical and the sight of the vista ahead of us was mesmerising. Unfortunately, we couldn't spend the whole evening here and it was time for dinner. What an unbelievable day we'd had. Not only were the photographic opportunities out of this world, but the whole experience was one that will live long in the mind.

Leaving the fjord behind, we headed out into open water and proceeded south towards Kongsfjorden. The sun was now shining, and the scenery was jaw-droppingly beautiful. The snow-covered mountains were bathed in the warmth of the evening sun, while the deep blues of the ocean provided a stunning contrast.

**Monday 18 May 2026**

**Day 8:**
Kongfjorden, Ny Alesund & Ny London

Overnight, we continued to sail into Kongsfjorden and docked at the pier in Ny Alesund once we were all in bed. We awoke to an overcast morning. It had a very different feeling to the night before and it was noticeably colder too. Our plan this morning was to explore the old mining town of Ny Alesund, which is now a leading scientific centre for Arctic research.

After breakfast, it was time to walk off the ship and set foot in 'civilisation'. Christian and Beau led the way, talking about the history and leading us to a piece of history. Outside of the settlement, there is a steel mast towering over the landscape. This mast was used as a tether point for a zeppelin that made the first confirmed flight to the North Pole, before carrying on across to Greenland. This piece of history also happens to be in an area that is particularly reliable for Svalbard reindeer. So far, we had only enjoyed distant views of these endemic mammals, and it would be good to finally enjoy some closer views and capture some imagery of this iconic species. We worked our way into position and found a reindeer sitting on the snow-covered tundra, which rose to its feet when we made our approach. Luckily, for us at least, the reindeer walked along a low ridge and with snow falling and the sea behind, it made for a stunning composition.



Once we had captured some shots of this handsome reindeer, we made our way back towards the town and had the chance to visit the museum filled with the fascinating history of the settlement. There was also the opportunity to visit the community-run shop, giving everyone the chance to buy some souvenirs and support the endeavours of the research centre. One of the nice things about Ny Alesund is that it is safe for people to walk around without a rifle, and so the group could walk freely and make their own way back to

the ship in time for lunch.




As we were enjoying another feast rustled up by Carl, Stockholm had already moved off the dock and was making its way across Kongsfjorden to another historical site – Ny London. This was a historic site for marble mining that was destined to fail, organised by a British consortium (hence the name). The ship anchored offshore, from where we could already see a couple of reindeer up on the hillside. We had to use the zodiacs to reach shore and make our landing. Taking a closer look at the historic cabins and old mining equipment, we were able to capture some striking imagery.

The reindeer we had seen from the ship, and when we had first landed, didn't seem overly keen on cooperating and were keeping their distance. With that in mind, we didn't make any attempt to move closer. Instead, Christian led us to the old quarrying site (surprisingly small) and it was then that we moved up to a rocky rise and spotted another trio of reindeer.

Rather than attempt to approach, bearing in mind we were quite a large group, we decided to stay put and see if their curiosity got the better of them. There were also a number of barnacle and bean geese in the background. Now we just had to wait. One of the reindeer suddenly caught sight of us and moved across one of the rocky rises. The backdrop was beautiful, and it made for some simple but striking photography.





Before we knew it, all three reindeer were approaching where we stood as a group. Many of us got low to try and improve the angle for photography. We never expected these inquisitive adolescents to keep on coming. Before we knew it, they had walked around an area of deep snow and approached us across the tundra.

They had spent the winter undisturbed by these strange bipedal mammals, but now there was a whole group of them and they were seemingly worth investigating. It allowed us to capture some stunning portraits as they continued to approach. Every now and then, there would be a moment where their intrigue turned to fear, with one individual repeatedly approaching before darting back. Once they realised that we weren't a threat, they carried on going about their business, feeding on the tiny plants that had now been exposed by the retreating snow. What made this encounter even better was when two of the reindeer came together and nuzzled one another – right in front of the group.





It was an exceptional encounter with a charismatic group of these diminutive species of reindeer.



It had been another incredibly busy day, but it was our last full day in the Arctic wilderness, and it was time to head back south towards Isfjorden and the town of Longyearbyen. There was one last surprise in store for those who were lucky enough to see it – a minke whale. It made a few surfacing appearances before we lost it. It was soon time for dinner and so we enjoyed one final gastronomic feast prepared by Carl and served by Emma. After dinner, we headed up to the lounge where we had some bubbles and a few speeches by the skipper, Magnus, Christian and Beau.

What an incredible week we'd enjoyed aboard the Stockholm. It really is a family onboard this ship and everyone was made to feel like an extended part of this family. Sadly, the voyage had come to an end, but the memories would stick with us all for a lifetime.

**Tuesday 19 May 2026**

**Day 9:**
Longyearbyen to Oslo; Oslo to London Heathrow

We awoke this morning to find ourselves moored alongside the jetty in Longyearbyen. We'd arrived in the early hours, but coming alongside was so smooth it seemed as if the majority of us had slept right through it. With our bags packed, we enjoyed our final breakfast aboard, before saying our goodbyes and hopping on the minibus into town to drop off our expedition rubber boots. It was then only a short drive to the airport (via the Global Seed Vault).



After checking in and dropping off our luggage, we were soon through security and had the chance to unwind in the lounge. Our flight actually departed early, landing in Oslo well ahead of schedule. Except for a delay, thanks to confusion regarding the immigration process for non-Schengen transits, we had a simple enough transfer through the airport for our onward flight back to London Heathrow. Once again, the flight left a little early and landed in London ahead of schedule. With no queues at immigration, we made speedy progress through to baggage reclaim and didn't have to wait too long for our bags to show up. We said our goodbyes and made our own respective journeys home.

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