

VOYAGE INFORMATION

Voyage Name	Franz Josef Land Explorer
Voyage Code	FJL001G
Dates	24 July-07 August, 2021
Duration	15 days / 14 nights
Embark	Kirkenes, Norway
Disembark	Kirkenes, Norway
Ship	Greg Mortimer
Forms Due	24 April, 2021

Welcome!

Thank you for joining Aurora Expeditions on our *Franz Josef Land Explorer* expedition.

Experience a rare chance to explore wondrous islands on our Franz Josef Land voyage. Cross the Barents Sea to a world few have seen. Enter the Russian Arctic National Park and watch for polar bears, whales, walrus, and seals. Enjoy hikes on tundra and witness geological oddities. Get up close to spectacular bird cliffs and visit fascinating historic huts of explorers like Fridtjof Nansen.

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

Day 1	Kirkenes. Embark the <i>Greg Mortimer</i>
Day 2	Murmansk
Days 3-4	At Sea & Novaya Zemlya
Days 5-11	Franz Josef Land
Days 12-13	At Sea
Day 14	Murmansk
Day 15	Disembark Kirkenes

VOYAGE HIGHLIGHTS

- Photograph unique stone spheres at Champ Island
- Look out for walrus, narwhals and elusive bowhead whales
- Watch for hunting polar bears on pack ice and on land
- Marvel at the frozen landscape of Franz Josef Land – 85% of which is glaciated

EXPEDITION INCLUSIONS

- Airport transfer and Kirkenes city tour on day 1 prior to embarking *Greg Mortimer*
- Group sightseeing tour of Murmansk on day 2
- Group transfer from ship to airport in Kirkenes on day 15
- On-board accommodation during voyage including daily cabin service
- All meals, snacks, tea and coffee during voyage
- Beer, house wine and soft drinks with dinner
- All shore excursions and Zodiac cruises
- Educational lectures and guiding services from expedition team
- Free access to our onboard doctor for consultations relating to sea-sickness. A standard fee of US \$60.00 (reclaimable through your travel insurance provider) applies for medical consultations not related to seasickness
- A 3-in-1 waterproof polar expedition jacket
- Complimentary use of muck boots during the voyage
- Comprehensive pre-departure information
A printed photo book produced with photos from your voyage
- Port surcharges, permits, and landing fees

EXPEDITION EXCLUSIONS

- International or domestic flights, unless specified
- Transfers not mentioned in the itinerary
- Airport arrival or departure taxes
- Passport, visa, reciprocity fees and vaccination charges
- Travel insurance or emergency evacuation charges
- Hotels and meals not included in itinerary
- Optional excursions not included in the itinerary
- Optional activity surcharges
- All items of a personal nature including but not limited to: alcoholic beverages and soft drinks (outside of dinner service), laundry services, personal clothing, medical expenses, gratuities, Wi-Fi, email or phone charges.

Note: A \$15 USD per person per day gratuity for the crew is automatically added to your onboard account. It is at your discretion if you would like to remove the tip (or increase/decrease the amount) when you settle your bill. It is not necessary to tip the expedition team members. This gratuity amount is included for suites as part of their 'Suite Benefits'.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Please refer to this itinerary as a guide only, as changes may occur due to political circumstances, and unpredictable sea and weather conditions. Flexibility is key, when joining us on our expeditions.

Day 1 **Embark the *Greg Mortimer* in Kirkenes**

Arrive in Kirkenes, Norway, where you will be met by a representative of Aurora Expeditions to commence a tour of Kirkenes prior to boarding the *Greg Mortimer* late afternoon.

The tour of Kirkenes starts with a drive to the Russian border to learn about the significant historical events that have occurred in this area. Afterwards, continue to the mining community at Bjørnevatn, discovered in the 1860s and holding the largest iron reserve in Norway. The proliferation of mines in the area were home to many people during the fighting and liberation at the end of World War II. At Mount Storfjellet, enjoy marvellous views of the area before ending your tour with a visit to the Borderland Museum, different to traditional war museums by focusing on the effects of war on people rather than exhibiting war paraphernalia. Learn about the Soviet prisoners of war, deported teachers and many other fascinating, seldom-heard stories.

Transfer to the pier for embarkation, where you'll have time to settle into your cabin before our important briefings.

Day 2 **Murmansk**

After sailing overnight into Russia, we stop in Murmansk, to undergo formalities to enter Russia. During clearance procedures, we may go on a city of Murmansk visiting the monument to the soldier of WW2 and also the first nuclear icebreaker *Lenin*.

Days 3-4 **At Sea & Novaya Zemlya**

Over the next two days at sea, enjoy informative and entertaining lectures from our expert expedition team including naturalists, historians and geologists. We will cruise along the coast of Novaya Zemlya to have our first glimpse of the tundra of the high Arctic. Novaya Zemlya was once an important nuclear research site during the cold war and today, only a few places in the north are accessible to visitors. These islands offer stunning rugged arctic landscapes - enormous extinct volcanoes, jagged cliffs and the most isolated mountain range in the Baltic Sea. Time and weather permitting, we will attempt to launch our Zodiacs to explore the Oransky Islands late on Day 4. Fingers crossed!

Just north of the northern tip of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago is Oransky, a group of several small inshore islands located within the Russian Arctic National Park established in 2009. The islands themselves are not inhabited by humans, but remnants of early hunting activity are visible. At the nearby Zhelania Cape, situated at the northeastern-most tip of the Northern Island, a manned weather station was operated as well as a military base, but both were closed in the 1990s. On Oransky Islands, Brünnich's guillemots, black-legged kittiwakes, glaucous gulls, black guillemots, Atlantic puffins and great skuas can be found breeding. You may get a chance to see a massive walrus rookery, various species of whale and the Novaya Zemlya reindeer. If we're very lucky, we may also see polar bear, and the ones found at Novaya Zemlya are considered to be a genetically unique sub-species.

Days 5-11 **Franz Josef Land**

Franz Josef Land is a stark yet beautiful world of glaciers, mosses and lichens. Approximately five million sea birds nest on the archipelago every year, with the thick-billed guillemot accounting for approximately 20%. Other seabirds such as fulmar, kittiwake, Brünnich's guillemot, black guillemot and little auk are common throughout the archipelago. On the flat tundra nest other species such as: common eider, purple sandpiper, Arctic skua, glaucous

gull, Arctic tern and snow bunting. Franz Josef Land is home to two arctic giants – the polar bear and the walrus. There is also a population of Arctic fox, which typically have their territories near seabird habitats. The waters of Franz Josef Land are visited by whales, including humpback, bowhead, narwhal, and white beluga whale. Walrus, ringed seals, bearded seals and an amazing species of mammals, choose Franz Josef Land and the water areas around it as their home.

While there are many exciting places we can choose to visit over the following week, weather, wind, and sea-ice conditions will determine our itinerary in Franz Josef Land. A sample of some of the places where we may land, hike, photograph or view spectacular wildlife and scenery include:

Bell and Mabel Island

The remains of an empty cabin built in 1880 by British explorer Benjamin Leigh Smith can be found on Bell Island. On Mabel island offers an opportunity to get close to a little auk colony as the birds nest between the rocks on the slope above the beach where the Zodiacs land.

Cape Flora - Northbrook Island

Located in an unglaciated area in the Southwest of Northbrook Island, Cape Flora is one of the most famous historical site in Franz Josef Land because it is one of the most accessible locations in the archipelago and often served as a base for polar expeditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Cape Flora features some of the most beautiful tundra in Franz Josef Land, but landings on the rocky beach, which is prone to swell from the Barents Sea can often be tricky. Cape Flora is where Benjamin Leigh Smith's vessel *Eira* was shipwrecked in 1881, after being trapped in pack ice.

Geographers bay (Prince George Land)

Prince George is the largest and longest island of the Franz Josef Archipelago. Most of the island is covered in large glaciers and ice domes, such as the Brusilov Ice Dome - the highest point of the island. A landing at Geographers Bay allows for a hike up one of the ice domes to stretch our legs and to enjoy the wonderful views over the archipelago, as Prince George Island is not fully glaciated. It's also a great spot for enjoying the typical flowers of the north Arctic tundra.

Tikhaya Bukta (Hooker Island)

Tikhaya Bay was a major base for polar expeditions, and where a team of meteorologists from the Russian Sedov station were marooned at the beginning of the Second World War. It was also the location of a meteorological station between 1929 and 1963. The remains of the old Russian station is worth visiting and after thousands of rusting barrels were found and cleared here five 5 years ago, the station now resembles a ghost town or a living museum. You will also find here the world's northernmost (Russian) post office!

Rubini Rock (Hooker Island)

The impressive basalt cliffs create the best bird cliffs in the archipelago housing more than 100,000 birds comprising of mostly Brünnich guillemot, but also kittiwake and little auks. The bird cliff lies just off Calm Bay and is perfect for Zodiac cruises. The island is a volcanic plug, the central remains of conical volcano.

Cape Tegethoff (Hall Island)

The place of the first landing in 1873 by Austro-Hungarian expeditioners Julius Von Payer and Karl Weyprecht after the *Tegethoff* sunk in 1873. Beautiful basalt rocks and bird cliff rookery of guillemot, gulls, kittiwake and little auks.

Cape Triest, Champ Island

Champ Island is famous for the incredible stone spheres (geodes), commonly called “Devils Marbles” with sizes ranging from tennis balls to boulders that are three metres in diameter! These rocks are a unique geological feature that can be found only in the Arctic regions. Keep a look out for walrus in the water or hauled out on the beach.

Sarko Passage - Newcombe sound (Nansen archipelago)

Beautifully glaciated landscape featuring an enormous glacier front with a lot of sea ice. It's one of the best spots to marvel at glaciers, ice and perhaps polar bears!

Cape Norway (Jackson Island)

The place where the famous Norwegian explorers Fritjoj Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen spent the winter of 1895-96 after returning from their attempt to reach the North Pole. We can see the remains of the stone hut built by the men including a big log that was used as a makeshift roof. A commemorative plaque provides marks this event where the men survived the winter until the following summer, when they resumed their journey southwards.

Cape Fligely (Prince Rudolf Island)

At 81° 51'N, this is the northernmost point of Eurasia, where we can cruise along the ice edge and perhaps get a glimpse to the North Pole in clear weather conditions.

Teplitz Bay (Prince Rudolf Island)

An old abandoned Russian meteorological station is located here – it was once the northernmost weather station in the world. The bay is often chock full of ice but provides a marvellous opportunity to enjoy the northernmost zodiac cruise!

Walrus Haulout at Stolichky (Stoliczka) or Apollonov Island

Walrus can be found everywhere on the sea ice in the Franz Josef archipelago. We hope to visit one of the established haul-out sites to observe them on land. Polar bears can be seen almost everywhere on, or between the islands. We may see some on land but we hope to find them on the pack ice, their natural habitat. Seeing polar bears is a highlight of a voyage to Franz Josef Land and can happen at any moment. We will change the itinerary in case we encounter one or more bears, maximising every opportunity spending time observing the king of the Arctic!

Days 12-13 At Sea

The return crossing of the Barents Sea offers good whale-watching opportunities. If you're lucky, you may encounter the elusive bowhead whale, and there are plenty of opportunities to photograph sea birds.

Day 14 Murmansk

Back in Murmansk for clearance procedures before continuing to Kirkenes.

Day 15 Kirkenes

Arrive in Kirkenes in the morning, farewell your expedition team and fellow passengers as we all continue our onward journeys, hopefully with a newfound sense of the immense power of nature. A transfer to the airport is included in the cost of the voyage.

NOTE: At the conclusion of the voyage, we do not recommend booking flights departing prior to 12.00 pm on the day of disembarkation in case there are delays.