

**VOYAGE INFORMATION**

Voyage Name	Jewels of the Arctic
Voyage Code	GRN36G
Dates	07-21 August, 2021
Duration	15 days / 14 nights
Embark	Kirkenes, Norway
Disembark	Reykjavik, Iceland
Ship	Greg Mortimer
Forms Due	07 May, 2021

**Welcome!**

Thank you for joining Aurora Expeditions on our *Jewels of the Arctic* expedition.

Discover Svalbard's northwest coast and the east coast of Greenland, a land of grand superlatives, before concluding your voyage in Iceland. Zodiac cruise among spectacular icebergs, spotting seabirds and keeping watch for walrus and polar bears on ice. Visit Ittoqqortoormiit, one of the most remote settlements on earth and perhaps take the option of kayaking or rock climbing (additional cost). This expedition ticks many boxes: hikes through the arctic tundra; a chance to spot wildlife including musk oxen, seals, whales and elusive arctic fox.

**ITINERARY OVERVIEW**

Day 1	Arrival Kirkenes. Embark the <i>Greg Mortimer</i>
Days 2-3	At Sea
Day 4	East Coast Svalbard and Hinlopen Strait
Days 5-6	Greenland Sea
Days 7-13	East Greenland
Day 14	Denmark Strait
Day 15	Disembark Reykjavik

**VOYAGE HIGHLIGHTS**

- The wildlife of the arctic – chance to encounter musk oxen and perhaps polar bears, arctic foxes or arctic hares
- Visit the world's largest national park in north east Greenland, and the world's largest fjord system, Scoresbysund
- Visit Ittoqqortoormiit, one of the world's most remote settlements

## EXPEDITION INCLUSIONS

- Arrival transfer from Kirkenes airport to the *Greg Mortimer* on day 1
- Half day tour in Kirkenes on day 1 prior to embarking Greg Mortimer
- Group transfer from ship to Keflavik airport 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
- 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, 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 unpredictable sea and weather conditions. Flexibility is key, when joining us on our expeditions.

### Day 1 Embark 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 marvelous 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.

### Days 2-3 At Sea

Over the next two days at sea, enjoy informative and entertaining lectures from our expert expedition team including naturalists and historians before reaching Svalbard's southeast coast.

### Day 4 East Coast Svalbard and Hinlopen Strait

As the *Greg Mortimer* passes between Spitsbergen and the smaller islands of Barentsøya and Edgeøya, we cross a major polar bear migration route and the beautiful fertile plains of Sundeneset. The spongy ground is richly covered with bright green mosses, a variety of delicate and colourful flowers, particularly the yellow marsh (bog) saxifrage, various mushrooms, fungi, clear bubbling streams and small tarns. Tiny (micro) flowers such as Mouse Ears grow in Spitsbergen creating faerie like mossy rock gardens. We look for polar bears hunting on pack ice and we may explore this beautiful terrain on foot, marvelling at the contrast between the colourful soft ground and the barren, rocky terrain from further north. Reindeer antlers lie scattered along the ground.

If conditions allow we will pass through the narrow Hinlopen Strait. The strait is flanked by creamy coloured slabs of rock that are rich in fossils. We may visit Alkefjellet in the Strait, where a series of one-hundred-metre-high dolerite towers are home to nearly a million nesting Brünnich's guillemots – the penguins of the north – that occupy every available nook and cranny. Elsewhere we seek out eider ducks and geese, and hope to spot walrus, Arctic fox and the beautiful ivory gulls.

### Days 5-6 Greenland Sea and Pack Ice

As we cruise west across the Greenland Sea – the main outlet of the Arctic Ocean – we may encounter whales feeding in the productive waters of the north. Sightings of fin whales are common and blue whales have been seen in more recent years. As we approach East Greenland we may encounter more pack ice where we may see seals and a variety of seabirds, including northern fulmar and migratory Brünnich's guillemots. This stretch of coastline is ripe for exploration, with its many secrets locked in place by drift ice for up to eight months each year.

The strong icy currents have isolated East Greenland from the Polar Basin, attracting large numbers of fish, seals and whales. Climatic conditions and the concentration of ice in the vicinity often create thick morning fog that vanishes

with the onset of the midday sun. Our experts will inform and entertain us with fascinating discussions on plants, animals, ice, and early explorers like Nansen, Andree and Scoresby.

Conditions permitting, there may be a chance for kayakers to launch their sea kayaks and the rest of us to cruise in the sea ice with Zodiacs. Perhaps if we have had a good crossing, we may even have the opportunity to make our first landing on the Greenland coast, weather permitting.

## Days 7-13 East Greenland

In the coming days, a host of choices are open to us, and depending on ice and weather conditions, the east coast of Greenland is ours to explore. Our experienced expedition team, who have made countless journeys to this area, will use their expertise to design our voyage from day to day. This allows us to make best use of the prevailing weather, ice conditions and wildlife opportunities. We will generally make up to two landings or Zodiac excursions per day; cruising along spectacular ice cliffs, following whales that are feeding near the surface.

Be prepared to experience ice, lots of it! East Greenland contains some of the Arctic's most impressive scenery. Deep fjords and narrow channels, flanked by sharp ice-clad peaks up to 2,000 m / 6,562 ft high. Glaciers create gigantic icebergs that drift throughout the fjord system creating breath-taking scenes. The landscape is filled with multi-coloured tundra home to musk oxen and Arctic hare. Throughout the area are ancient Thule archaeological sites, historical trappers' huts, and modern Inuit hunters' cabins. A highlight is a visit to the Inuit village of Ittoqqortoormiit, the most isolated and northernmost permanent settlement in the region, with approximately 450 inhabitants. The community boasts an excellent museum, gift shop, an abundance of Greenlandic sled dogs, and the opportunity to meet Inuit people.

Explore Scoresbysund, the largest fjord system in the world – a spectacular place that simply needs to be seen to be believed. North of Scoresbysund are, Kong Oscar and Kaizer Franz Josef fjords, two of the most significant fjord systems in all of Greenland, each one encompassing several smaller fjords and sounds. Thanks to the fertile volcanic soil mountains that protects areas from the strong winds, the area is rich in wildlife. You may spot everything from muskox and arctic foxes to mountain hares and even reindeer near the fjord. Look skyward and you could catch a glimpse of birds including glaucous gull, black-legged kittiwake, northern fulmar, common raven and common eider.

We will attempt to enter Kaiser Franz Josef Fjord, a remote and rarely visited fjord system with countless opportunities for exploration within the Northeast Greenland National Park. Cruising through Kong Oskar Fjord we will marvel at the geological beauty of the mountains. We will then head south along the coast of Liverpool Land, with our passage dependent on ice conditions. We aim to reach Scoresbysund, the world's biggest fjord and a favourite hunting ground of the local Inuit. Massive glaciers dump into this fjord, the birthplace of hundreds of spectacular Greenland icebergs.

We plan to visit the remote Inuit community of Ittoqqortoormiit (Scoresby Town) and to hike across the tundra in search of ancient graveyards and summer villages occupied 3,000 years ago by Eskimos. This area provides excellent opportunities for sea kayaking in its maze of calm, interconnecting waterways. If we are lucky we may see musk oxen, arctic hare and seals, and maybe if we are extremely lucky even a polar bear or narwhal, although due to the local hunting traditions, these sightings are often very rare.

Places we may land along the east coast include:

**Cape Humboldt** is a beautiful bay on Ymer Island. There is a good chance to take a tundra walk and see musk oxen graze. We will also keep a lookout for Arctic fox and ptarmigan. A lone trapper's hut looks over the bay and magnificent icebergs.

**Sefstrom Glacier** adorns the narrow peaked waterway in Alpefjord. Enjoy Zodiac cruising and kayaking in this pretty area, where colourful Arctic flora adorns the tundra ground.

**Ittoqqortoormiit** is Scoresbysund's colourful Inuit community of approximately 500 people. Here you can explore the village, the fascinating museum or sit in the beautiful Lutheran Church. The locals are friendly and from underneath their Arctic fox-fur jackets, the shy young children are keen to say hello and practice their English.

**Sydkap** in Scoresbysund offers good walking and delightful views across the sound. Kayakers will have good opportunities to explore the lonely beaches. We may explore the ancient gravesites on the island, or the lakes with green tunnels and giant icebergs offer hours of enjoyment for kayak and Zodiac rides.

## **Rømerfjord**

Rømer Fjord with its narrow channels and towering peaks is simply stunning, and lies roughly 167 km / 104 mi south of Scoresbysund. There are great hiking options in the fjord where flowering tundra plants, scattered bones of whales and muskox from centuries of hunting by the Inuit, and fumaroles can be found. These are areas where heated groundwater boil to the surface creating bubbling pools and mineral formations as the water reacts with the atmosphere.

## **Rode Ø**

Rode Ø Island is a glorious place for Zodiac cruising, hiking and kayaking, with its rich red Devonian sandstone geology. Discover the impressive mafic dyke that runs through the east side of Rode Ø. Glaucous gulls find perfect perches and nesting sites along the top of the basalt extrusions. Kayak along the maze of icebergs - pillars and arches, caves and peaks that look as though an artist had sculpted them.

## **Hare Fjord**

The scenery here is breathtaking. Walk across the tundra alongside a ravine or Zodiac cruise where you might find musk ox, along with flitting shore birds, seals and a variety of colours in the lush Arctic tundra. Kayakers can enjoy sublime paddling in one of the most remote fjords in the world. Nearby is the spectacular and impressive Ø Fjord, a perfect place for small ship cruising.

## **Nordvest Fjord**

If mountains rising 1,200 m / 3,937 ft straight out of the water wasn't enough, how about the fjord itself, descending to 1,500 metres? There are also countless icebergs pouring out of the Daugård-Gensen Glacier. A great place for kayaking and Zodiac cruising with plenty of gorgeous bergs while the glacier itself, seemingly small from a distance, proved to be a formidable river of ice snaking down the valley.

## **Eskimobugt**

No one can state the exact age of the neo-Eskimo site at Eskimobugt, but it may only be a few hundred years old. Subterranean winter houses designed with a tunnel that faces the sea where occupants would crawl through to the stand-up living chamber; at the opposite end is the sleeping platform. The walls were erected with carefully laid stones while the roof structure would be built from whatever material was available - driftwood, walrus bone, and available skin covering. Fire hearths were created by laying rocks in a circle with a bed of white quartzite stones. Learn from our historian about the incredible resourcefulness of the Inuit people whose men travelled formidable distances by kayak to hunt, and whose women crafted sophisticated garments from animal skins and fur – a people for whom survival in such extremes was paramount. Hiking here offers panoramic views, sightings musk ox and, occasionally Arctic hare.

## **Skipperdalen**

See some of the most striking sedimentary sandstone, shale and siltstone formations imaginable. The alternating colours and patterns in the layers of rocks defied belief, and the layers of sediment here are estimated to have taken about 4,000 years to be laid down. You can also find the remains of a simple but highly effective wooden fox trap in use by Norwegian trappers in both Greenland and Svalbard from the early 1900s to 1960s. Skipperdalen is also a marvellous place to hike and paddle in kayaks.

Other possible landing points in the area include:

- Rypefjord
- Nordenskjöld glacier & Blomsterbugten
- Alpenfjorden
- FjordFonfjord
- Bjorn Oya
- Milne Land
- Hekla Havn
- Denmark Island

## **Day 14 Denmark Strait**

In the Denmark Strait, we sail towards Iceland. Keep a lookout for whale blows and the many seabirds that trail our ship in the ever-present Arctic winds. Enjoy the time to reflect on your recent adventures, share and exchange photos, and soak in the fresh ocean air. As we near Iceland, you will find we are returning to the rest of the world as we encounter fishing vessels working the coastal waters.

## **Day 15 Disembark Reykjavik**

During the early morning we arrive into Reykjavik. Farewell your expedition team and fellow expeditioners as we all continue our onward journeys. A transfer is included into town or onwards to Keflavik airport.

**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.