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As you read this I'm unpacking my duffel bag fresh from my latest polar experience where I was joined by some loyal clients on one of the last voyages of the season to the Antarctic. We joined Oceanwide's brand new expedition vessel Plancius, out of Ushuaia to cross the Polar Circle - more about that in our next newsletter. In the meantime see inside for my encounters with whales and polar bears in the Arctic last summer.

In this issue we devote more space to our wonderful loyal clients. We've received so many evocative travel journals that we felt we simply had to share some of them with you. Nothing paints a truer picture of a magical day or conjures up a more colourful image of a special encounter in a distant corner of the world than a personal account.

After a fair amount of travelling over the past 12 months, a promising start to 2010 and with a raft of new trips, it's going to be a year of hard graft with two new brochures in the pipeline, more new areas to research and our continual quest for perfecting our service. Happy travels.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Brijnath".

Fiona Brijnath, Director

update | April 2010



ARCTURUS

THE POLAR ARM OF FAR FRONTIERS TRAVEL



## FIONA'S trip report: Arctic voyage: Aberdeen to Spitsbergen – June 2009



Photo: Rinie Van Meurs

*"Last summer I boarded a Russian former oceanographic vessel for an unusual voyage from Aberdeen through the outlying Scottish Islands to Jan Mayen and finally to Spitsbergen, at 78 degrees North in the Arctic Circle. Though not luxurious, the ship was clean and comfortable with attractive cabins, cosy bar, convivial dining room and a great open-air observation deck which enabled far-reaching views of the North Atlantic and its numerous sea birds, concentrations of whales and rugged windswept islands.*

*With a great sense of anticipation, the engines started and we slid smoothly out of harbour into the North Sea, tipping our hats to the lighthouse en route. Our first shore landing, by rigid inflatable Zodiac, was in a tranquil bay at Hoy, where glorious white sandy beaches greeted us and the mewing of nesting sea birds on the high cliffs above competed only with the sound of the crashing waves. We had a glorious three hour walk to the far side of the island to marvel at the 137m rock stack affectionately known as 'The Old Man of Hoy'.*

*Continuing north we landed at Thorshavn, the capital of Strom Island in The Faroes where we strolled about the old town – brightly painted houses of shocking yellow, cobalt blue and rust-red scattered about the harbour, with unusual peat and grass roofs of muted green. We watched the ships coming in and out and unwound to the music of halyards flapping in the wind while enjoying a chilled beer on the quay. All too soon we were off again, but, as the sun barely sets at this time of the year, we took a magical Zodiac trip close along*

*the cliffs where fulmars and puffins nesting shoulder to shoulder squawked and flapped to get the best nesting sites. When I next looked at my watch – having ventured up a picturesque sandy fjord and visited a tiny grass roofed church – it was 11.30pm!*

*Two days' sail north of the Faroes is Jan Mayen Island – an extraordinary windswept place of volcanic sandy beaches, gigantic boulders and weird rock formations dominated by the majestic 2,277m high Beerenburg Volcano. Here, 18th and 19th century European explorers mounted dangerous expeditions to claim these new and exciting territories and the whaling and hunting rights to go with them. An all-day walk found us at the remains of the 19th century Austrian hut. One could easily imagine the exhausted sailors coming ashore to set up their remote bases, relieved to make dry land after endless tough days at sea.*

*Leaving the beach, which was littered with driftwood and whale bones, we watched humpback whales feeding just off the point – one could never tire of seeing those gigantic tail fins sliding graciously into the dark waters of the Norwegian Sea.*

*Our final destination was Spitsbergen, the very essence of Arctic wilderness. I rose exceedingly early to be on deck as we slid into Hornsund, a glorious deep fjord. The reflections of the majestic snow peaks glimmered on the icy waters and the only sound was the mewing of kittiwakes and the crunching of keel against iceberg. Barely had we entered the sound when we spotted a lone polar bear enjoying an early*

*morning meal on a piece of floating ice. Nothing quite prepares one for the sheer mass and power of this creature and the penetrating stare of his coal black eyes, as he nonchalantly looked about him before easing into the water and swimming unhurriedly away. Later we made an unforgettable shore landing and strolled among glorious purple saxifrage, orange lichen and boulder-strewn mossy turf to explore the bird cliffs, frenetic with noise. Our ship had a ghostly aura as she lay quietly in the bay, snow, blue sky and thin layers of drifting mist all around".*

**We have a comprehensive brochure covering all our polar voyages in both the Arctic and Antarctic – please ask for details.**



## client report:



## Mr and Mrs George Goulding and family's visit to Oman November 2009

*"We did enjoy Oman. Scenically stunning, with the desert, the incredibly dramatic mountains of massive geological plates, the blue sky and sea, and every now and then the deep green of date palms and other trees in the wadis. And of course the architecture – with stark old forts, and fortified towns of mud brick houses blending into the rocks, with even the more modern architecture respectful of the traditional style.*

*The food was much more than passable (which was all we'd been expecting). It's also rather nice to be in a place where the overwhelming majority of people wear traditional clothes. I took some great pictures at the livestock auction in Nizwa, standing above the crowd and taking collages of their hats/turbans, and the occasional interesting face.*

*And the people. This is a place where men present themselves as just that, with a firm handshake and a very direct look in your eyes, and the women are, sadly, largely invisible to a man, i.e. me. Two exceptions: We visited a bedouin camp, where two daughters of the house (late teens/early twenties)*



*were happy to sit with us and talk with complete self confidence and comfort (apparently not unusual in bedouin society); and then in the business class departure lounge at Muscat, when I found myself sitting among five veiled women (they had joined me, not vice versa). They very kindly woke me up when they thought I was sleeping past my departure time, and then chatted happily with me.*

*I'd like to go back one day. Salalah and Musandam would be good, and the oryxes. Maybe in my next life. A wonderful experience, thanks so much – a huge success as ever".*

# NEW TRIPS

for the curious and adventurous



Photo: Ole Bernt Frøshaug/Basecamp Explorer

## Encounter Spitsbergen

Svalbard out of the ordinary

**Isfjord Radio** is situated at **Kapp Linne** framed by majestic mountains and overlooking open sea on the stunning **Nordenskold** coast of **Spitsbergen**. This newly converted radio station is charming and cosy with a fascinating history. Until a few years ago, the station was an important telecommunications connection between **Svalbard** and the rest of the world. The surrounding area has exceptional animal life and a bird sanctuary. On this new seven day expedition you will stay two nights at **Longyearbyen's** Trapper's Hotel, two nights at Isfjord Radio and two nights in expedition tents. The tents are pitched in a wilderness area surrounded by steep mountains and calving glaciers, home to seals, walrus and polar bears. Why not build this into your Arctic voyage?

» when « 18 – 24 July and 1 – 7 August 2010  
 » price « £2,550 per adult and £2,050 per child including flights



## South Georgia

Ski traverse for explorers

This voyage is for serious expeditioners. Later this year a group of up to 12 ski explorers and mountain guides will attempt to traverse **South Georgia** during an unsupported trek with skis (or snowshoes) hauling their own supplies on sledges to retrace sections of the historic Shackleton route. You can opt either for the normal nine day voyage which circumnavigates the island (including Zodiac excursions and hiking options) or the land expedition which involves a 40-50 km traverse led by the ship's expedition leader and certified ski and mountain guide **Christoph Höbenreich**. Once both expeditions have rejoined, all passengers continue on to enjoy the latter part of the South Georgia cruise itinerary. Clients who are interested in the ski expedition will need to submit applications by 31 May.

» when « 18 October – 4 November 2010  
 » price from « Call us for itinerary and prices

## In Darwin's footsteps

Fact-finding Antarctic mission

Join the comfortable 210 passenger **Cruceros Australis** expedition vessel on a voyage focusing on the explorations and findings of **Charles Darwin**. Your four day cruise from **Ushuaia** at Argentina's southern tip to **Punta Arenas** in Chile will stop at places visited by Darwin during his navigation across Southern Patagonia on **HMS Beagle**. These include **Wuluaia Bay**, **Holland Glacier** and the **Wollaston Islands** where many of his observations took place. On-board lectures will be given by Argentinean and American experts. Call us for an itinerary or to discuss options to extend your journey in Argentina or Chile.

» when « Departures 16 – 19 and 19 – 23 October 2010



## West Greenland

To boldly go...

**Dr. Lorraine Craig** is planning a recce to **West Greenland** in 2011, so if you would like to join a trip with a difference please let us know.



## Lost Cambodia

Ten nights of discovery

In late October and November 2010, **Pandaw's RV Tonle** will make just four ten night expeditions into a little visited region of **Cambodia** with the objective of reaching **Kratie** and exploring forgotten Cambodia. Highlights on the way include the great **Mekong Delta**, a day in the lively capital of **Phnom Penh** and several stops at small towns and villages to discover **Cambodian** rural life. From **Kratie** you continue by expedition boat to the dolphin sanctuary close to the **Laos** border.

» when « 10 – 20 Oct, 20 – 30 Oct, 1 – 10 Nov and 10 – 20 Nov 2010  
 » price from « £3,195 per person (voyage only)



## Classic Russia

Priceless culture in two cities

Use our fixed departure **Classic Russia** group tour as a way of seeing Russia without breaking the bank. You'll spend three nights in **Moscow** and three nights in **St Petersburg** with an overnight train journey in between. Visit **Moscow's Kremlin**, the fascinating **Armoury** museum and the **Tretyakov Gallery** and ride on the colourful metro. In **St Petersburg** admire the world's biggest art collection in the **Hermitage**, and marvel at the sumptuous **Catherine Palace**.

» when « 7 – 14 May, 30 Jul – 6 Aug, 20 – 27 Aug, 15 – 22 Oct 2010  
 » price from « £1,395 per person including flights



## Wildlife of India

Best of the national parks

The beauty of our new fixed date wildlife itinerary is that the quality of the specialist local guides and the breadth of parks visited are assured without the high costs normally associated with a private trip. Over 11 days you will enjoy numerous game drives by elephant and jeep in **Kanha**, **Pench** and **Bandhavgarh national parks**. Take a pre-tour extension to **Gir** to view India's only wild population of Asiatic lion or extend your visit to marvel at the enduringly romantic **Taj Mahal**.

» when « 26 November – 7 December 2010  
 » price « £3,495 per person including flights



## TRAVEL SNIPPETS

### Your feedback

Here is a selection of comments we have received recently from our Far Frontiers Travel and Arcturus clients about their trips.

*"It was a fascinating voyage with lasting impressions. The wildlife both on the Falklands and on Antarctica is incredibly rich. The organisation on board the ship was very good. Among the talks given by the scientific crew I enjoyed the witty talks by Robert Headland the most. The familiar atmosphere in the lodges on Sea Lion Island and on Carcass Island was very nice indeed. Last but not least I should like to thank you for the impeccable organisation on your part."*

Mr Hubert Kalf, Epic Antarctica icebreaker voyage, Nov 2009-Jan 2010

*"We loved it! The holiday was arranged at such short notice – thank you for making it so memorable and being so responsive to the things we wanted to do."*

Mr and Mrs John Willmott, India, January 2010

*"Generally we were really impressed by transfers and how smoothly all arrangements worked."*

Mr and Mrs Graham Bell, Egypt, January 2010

*"We had a very enjoyable and interesting time thanks, good guide, good services, very interesting things to see. The ethnic side (food, music etc.) was great and the sights were wonderful. The only very minor downside was that the beds at our otherwise fine hotel were harder than any I have ever experienced anywhere else I think, but we more or less cured that by asking for extra duvets and sleeping on top of some and under others. Also, the agents in Kashgar/Urumsqi/Beijing were very helpful in getting us back to Beijing in the face of bad weather, flight delays and cancellations".*

Mr and Mrs George Goulding, Long weekend in Kashgar, China, January 2010

*"One of the very best holidays we have had. In fact we are seriously talking about going back next year. The agency was excellent....The guide and the trips were more than adequate, and the rest days perfect, so that we came home much less tired than ever before. Thank you for your efforts".*

Mrs Joan Dampney travelling with Dr Joan Hinton-Dry, Oman, January 2010

*"In my imagination, the steppes of Outer Mongolia were miles and miles of flat, scrubby land with no relief. Not a bit of it!"*



### client report: Mrs Gretha Robertson's travels with Bernice Jopling in Mongolia – September 2009

*The pitted tarmac road from Ulaanbaatar became a dirt track and we bore off to the left towards brown, rolling hills. The ger (yurt) camp comprised 10-12 gers, a loo and shower room down some steps. The following day we rose in a freezing ger, log stove dead, a white-out blizzard with drifts piled up against the door, foot long icicles hanging off the loo block and visibility down to about 10 feet. It was minus 10 degrees! The horses we were meant to be riding had all run off into the hills for shelter! Instead I walked with Tumee, our guide, up the nearest hill. We climbed for about an hour to the summit with black vultures circling over the shrine of stones and flags. We walked around it three times and made a wish (a Buddhist custom), took some photographs and hurried back down into the snow bound valley and the warmth of our ger stove.*

*The following day we travelled off to find the famous (and very elusive) Przewalski or Takh horses. With four chromosomes fewer than our modern horse, these wild creatures are believed to be a completely different species). We did find some of them – with their zebra striped legs, stocky pale bodies and dark short Mohican manes and tails. Although very cold, the blue skies stretched forever over a rocky, mountainous landscape of dried grassland slopes and herds of sheep and goats. A lone herdsman cantered around them in his long green coat belted with the distinctive, wide, yellow cummerbund and felt trilby-style hat.*

*We spent a whole day cantering across this landscape, stopping to tether our horses to the lower branches of three lone larch trees whilst we sat on the hard ground to eat our packed lunch. Three of us alone on this beautiful, wild landscape. Tumee would occasionally gallop off and up the nearest hill to be seen silhouetted against the endless blue sky. The horseman would look back at me grinning as I got the hang of this new riding experience (and pretty agonizing fast canter!).*

*Our last day saw us canoeing down the river Tuul – stony islands, shallow rapids and silence bar the bubbling water over the stones; goats and sheep grazing and drinking at the edges. We were so wrapped up against the cold we could barely fit on the life jackets. I think everyone thought us*

*completely mad. Two old biddies getting into a canoe on this remote river in the middle of nowhere!*

*I wonder if this gives some idea about which I am still dreaming. A landscape that can be harsh and completely unforgiving but so, so beautiful. Nomadic peoples living hard, simple lives, happy with their freedom and a nature which they know and love. Wild horses; araig (fermented mare's milk), freshly made yoghurt, strange hard cheeses hanging inside little round felt gers that are homes to families of six to ten people and mutton stew for breakfast, lunch and supper!*

### Still time to book...

We still have space left on some of these summer groups to Russia:

#### Solovetski Islands

» when « 13 – 25 June 2010  
» price « £2,080 per person

#### Kamchakta in early summer

» when « 18 June – 1 July 2010  
» price « £3,995 per person

#### Kamchatka in late summer

» when « 27 Aug – 13 Sept 2010  
» price « £4,435 per person

#### North Atlantic Odyssey whale and seabird safari

» when « 4 – 14 June 2010,  
» price from « £2,350 per person and free pre voyage from Netherlands

It's never too early to look at planning an Arctic or Antarctic adventure. We've just had news of an additional departure on board **Plancius to The Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antarctic Peninsula** and we are offering **£700 off the normal departure price.**

» when « 2 - 23 November 2010  
» price now « £7,720 per person in triple share cabin

**Do call if you would like to join any of the above or simply need help or advice.**

The air holiday packages in this brochure are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Our ATOL number is ATOL 9270. Please see our booking conditions for more information.

