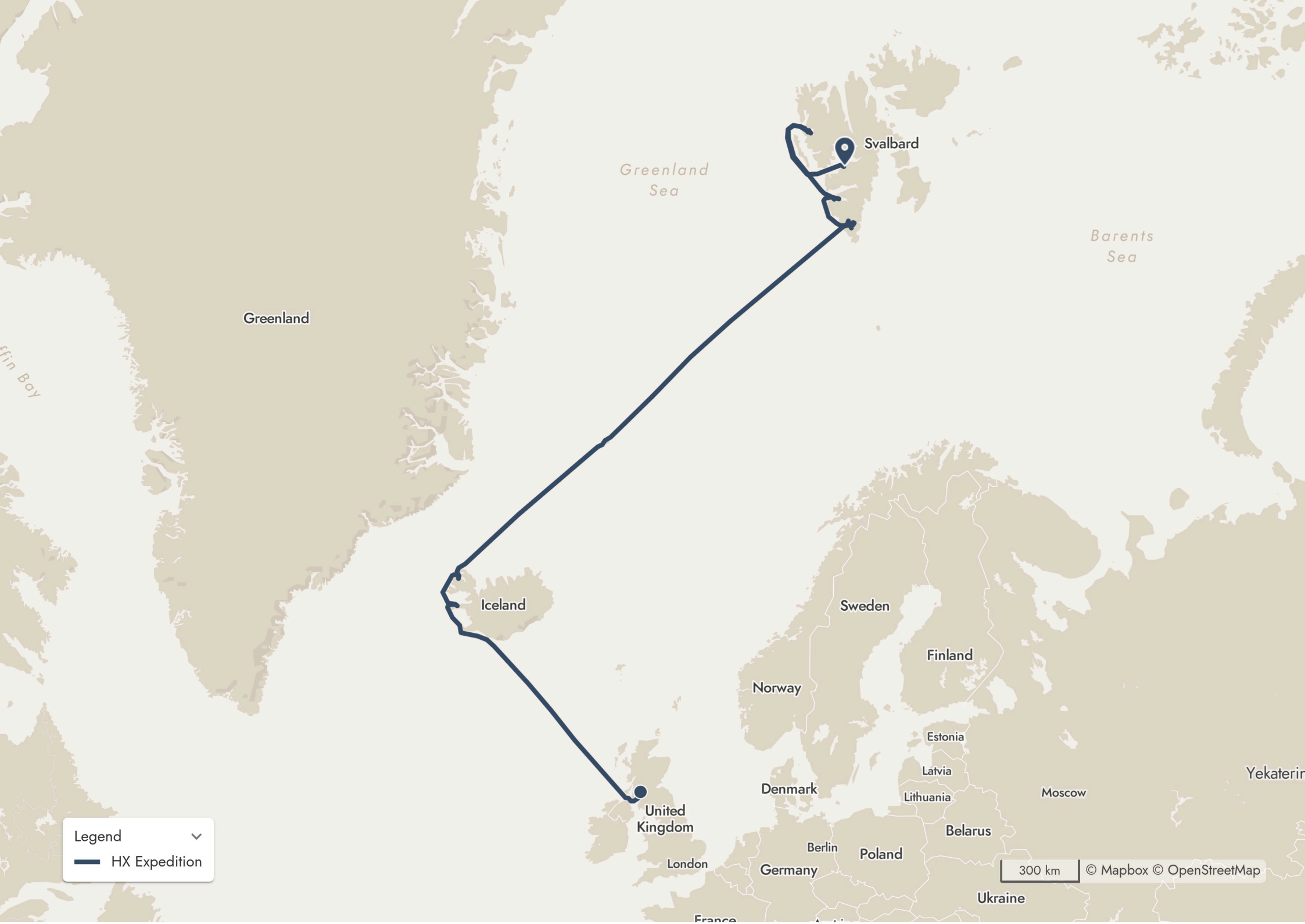




## Faroe Islands, Iceland, Spitsbergen – Island Hopping In and Around the Arctic (Northbound)

MS Spitsbergen, 28 May – 9 June 2026



Legend

— HX Expedition

300 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

## Day 1 - Embarkation in Fairlie

Guests began arriving in Fairlie throughout the afternoon, boarding MS Spitsbergen and settling into their cabins for the first time. There was time to explore the ship and take in the views of the Scottish coastline before the mandatory safety drill — an important step for all before departure. Dinner followed in the Aune restaurant, a warm first taste of life on board.

As the ship prepared to depart, guests stepped outside to witness a

memorable send-off. Local bagpipers played from the quay, their music carrying across the water in what could only be described as a distinctly Scottish farewell. Once back inside, the Expedition Leader and Hotel Manager welcomed guests formally, introducing the voyage and outlining what lay ahead in the days to come.

With the coastline slowly receding behind us, the journey north — from Iceland to Spitsbergen — had truly begun.





## Day 2 - At Sea

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The morning brought some movement beneath MS Spitsbergen as she continued north towards Iceland. Those who had found their sea legs early joined the Expedition Team on deck for the morning wildlife watch. The seabirds were indifferent to the swell — gannets, fulmars, and the first puffins of the voyage were all spotted as the team helped guests scan the horizon.

Science and Education Coordinator Charlotte introduced the onboard science programme to guests, drawing an enthusiastic response from those keen to contribute to HX's Citizen Science programme.

The relaxed pace continued into the afternoon. Historian Bernardo ran a water bottle painting session that proved far more popular than

anticipated, while Ornithologist Julia offered guidance on getting the most from binoculars before heading outside for another wildlife watch. Birds were plentiful; whales remained elusive — but there was still much ocean ahead.

As the afternoon drew to a close, Environmental Scientist Jean gave a lecture on the formation and importance of winds and ocean currents, and the swell began to ease towards evening. Dinner was followed by the traditional Captain's Welcome, during which MS Spitsbergen's officers and the Expedition Team introduced themselves in turn. With calmer conditions forecast, the ship settled into the night, inching ever closer to Iceland.





Denmark Strait

Ísafjörður

Grundarfjörður

Reykjavik

Heimaey

Iceland

At Sea

At Sea

Fairlie

Edinburgh

Aberdeen

SCOTLAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

North Sea

Legend

— HX Expedition

100 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

## Day 3 - At Sea

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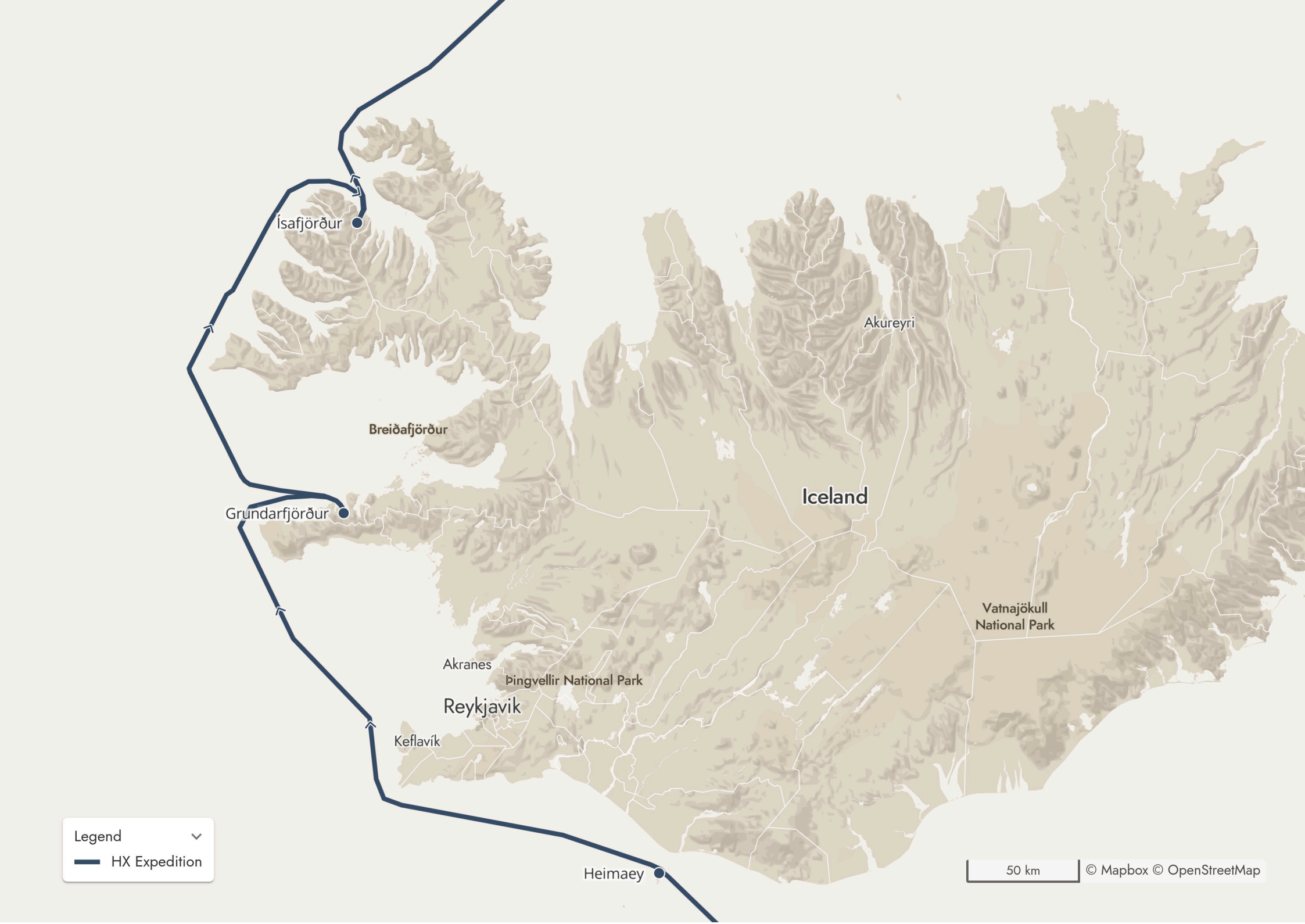
The contrast with the previous morning was immediate. The choppy swell had given way to a calmer, rolling sea, and those who had struggled the day before were quick to re-emerge. Activity Guide Marcus led morning stretching on deck while others joined the wildlife watch outside.

Before long, Marine Scientist Holly spotted long-finned pilot whales off the starboard side. Despite the word 'whale' in their name, these are large, highly social dolphins — travelling in tight-knit groups, recognisable by their bulbous black heads and large, curved dorsal fins. They would become a familiar presence in the days ahead. The afternoon brought the day's most remarkable reward: two separate sightings of unidentified beaked whale species. Members of this family can spend over an hour beneath the surface in pursuit of squid, and they are seldom seen above water. With many species unidentifiable at sea, even a brief glimpse was a genuine privilege.

Inside the ship, Photographer Oscar ran a session on getting the best from a smartphone camera, while Marine Scientist Holly gave guests an in-depth introduction to the whale and dolphin species they might encounter around Iceland. Up in the Science Centre, open microscope sessions invited guests to test their identification skills, and the hands-on citizen science projects — NASA Globe Clouds and eBird — drew willing participants now that the calmer seas made concentration easier.

By evening the ship was full of energy, as guests gathered for the first destination-based Plans for Tomorrow and learned what awaited in Heimaey. Those with energy still to spare stayed on for Ornithologist Julia's tiny talk on the Great Auk — the original 'penguin' of the North Atlantic — before the voyage eased into the night, Iceland drawing closer with every hour.





Ísafjörður

Breiðafjörður

Akureyri

Iceland

Grundarfjörður

Vatnajökull National Park

Akranes

Þingvellir National Park

Reykjavík

Keflavík

Heimaey

Legend

— HX Expedition

50 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

## Day 4 - Heimaey, Iceland

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Arriving in the afternoon gave the morning entirely over to the sea, and the conditions rewarded patience. Flat calm water and almost no wind gave the Expedition Team ideal spotting conditions on deck. It was not long before the call of 'whale' rang out across the upper decks. Several fin whales surfaced in succession, each blow rising up to eight metres — a sight that drew guests from every corner of the ship. The second largest animal on Earth had made its entrance. Long-finned pilot whales, Atlantic white-sided dolphins, and a sperm whale all followed across the course of the morning, turning what might have been a quiet transit into something remarkable.

As MS Spitsbergen neared Heimaey, a thick fog settled over the island. The question hung in the air: would it lift in time to reveal the bird cliffs? It did. The fog gave way to clear skies and bright sunshine as the island appeared, along with its neighbours Bjarnarey and Elliðaey. Fulmars glided effortlessly around the ship while common guillemots, razorbills, and puffins beat their wings in energetic contrast. Getting the expedition boats close to the cliffs with the seabirds at full display made for a memorable first half of the day.

Ashore in Heimaey, guests explored the streets with local guides, walked the lava fields, and hiked the Eldfell ridge with members of the Expedition Team. With legs stretched and the unmistakable salt-and-fish air of an Icelandic fishing town still in the lungs, guests returned to MS Spitsbergen for the sail-away and another excellent dinner.

The day was not done. Halfway through Environmental Scientist Jean's tiny talk on fjord formation, a PA announcement stopped the room: orca had been spotted directly ahead of the ship. Jackets were grabbed — some only half buckled — as guests hurried outside. Black, white, and utterly commanding, a pod of at least ten orca held the audience for over thirty minutes. One individual showed a floppy dorsal fin, a condition observed only rarely in wild orca. When they finally moved on, so did the ship — northbound, and carrying the weight of a day that had delivered far more than anyone had expected.



## Day 5 - Grundarfjörður, Iceland

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Bright blue skies and a flat calm sea greeted the morning as MS Spitsbergen sailed along the Snæfellsnes Peninsula — conditions that gave the Expedition Team every reason to be on deck early. It did not take long for the first sightings of the day to arrive. Blows and dorsal fins were spotted in the distance, and the ship moved to investigate. The whales held their position: sperm whales, scattered across the horizon, their distinctive near-90-degree blows making them unmistakable. They appeared to be resting at the surface, basking in the morning light before the deep dives that would follow. Orca were close behind, cruising past the ship in a group that included several large males and a young calf. The calf was seen playing with a piece of seaweed, a reminder that even the ocean's apex predators have their quieter moments.

As the ship made its way towards Grundarfjörður, guests still on deck were rewarded with a sighting of white-beaked dolphins just as she entered the harbour. Inside, the morning's wildlife giving way to a very different kind of performance: local Icelandic artist Andri Ívarsson took the stage with a set that wove traditional and

contemporary music together, threaded through with dry comedy. It was a genuinely entertaining introduction to Icelandic musical culture.

The afternoon was remarkable for its weather as much as its activity. Guests who chose to hike around the base of Kirkjufell mountain or walk to Kirkjufellsfoss waterfall were treated to conditions rarely so generous in the region. Expedition Team members Charlotte, Julia, and Holly led a relaxed nature walk, with harlequin ducks providing the standout wildlife moment. Scenic coach tours also ran across the peninsula, making the most of skies and visibility that gave everyone — whatever they chose to do — the best possible afternoon ashore.

Back on board in time for dinner, guests reflected on the day as the ship eased away from Grundarfjörður. Plans for Tomorrow followed in the usual fashion, before Marine Scientist Holly gave a final talk — this time not on whales, but on the centuries-long relationship between the Atlantic cod and Iceland's people. Full of the day's encounters and the evening's learning, the ship settled into the night, ready for one final day of exploration in Iceland.



## Day 6 - Ísafjörður, Iceland

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MS Spitsbergen arrived in Ísafjörður beneath a blanket of mist that lay low over the town, softening its edges and lending the harbour a quiet, almost spell-like atmosphere. Most guests spent the morning ashore, exploring this corner of the Westfjords at their own pace.

Activity Guides Carlos and Marcus led a group on the final Iceland hike of the voyage, while another group gained a direct window into Westfjords farm life with local Icelandic sheep farmers. The most popular excursion of the day was to Dynjandi waterfall — the largest in the region. The drive there was itself a reward: fog giving way to blue skies as the road wound up through the mountain passes, with harbour seals spotted along the way. By the time guests returned to the ship, the sun had reached Ísafjörður itself, leaving just enough time to browse the local shops or find a table outside for a coffee.

Back on board that afternoon, the programme resumed with purpose.

Environmental Scientist Jean gave a lecture on the geology of Iceland, while a clay sculpting session drew a creative and enthusiastic group. Although the wind picked up as MS Spitsbergen sailed away, a strong contingent joined the wildlife watch in hope of further whale sightings. The sea conditions were close to ideal, but the ocean offered no whales — a reminder, if one were needed, of how fortunate the previous days had been. Spirits remained high regardless, helped along by hot chocolate served on deck by the Food and Beverage team as the coastline of Iceland receded behind us.

Dinner was followed by Plans for Tomorrow — and with it, a significant announcement: MS Spitsbergen had now crossed the Arctic Circle. The evening closed quietly on a day that had given guests mountains, waterfalls, seals, farm life, and a latitude milestone all within the span of a few hours.



## Day 7 - At Sea

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As MS Spitsbergen pushed further north, those who ventured on deck noticed a definite chill in the air — confirmation, if any were needed, of where the ship now sat on the map. The seas were calm, though fog made wildlife spotting a challenge; the morning watch was rewarded with a brief sighting of white-beaked dolphins and a mystery breaching whale close by.

Inside, Activity Guide Marcus continued to build a loyal following for his morning stretching sessions, while the Explorer Bar settled into a gentle rhythm of knitting and conversation. Marine Scientist Holly gave a thoughtful lecture on whaling in the 21st century, and Historian Bernardo ran his much-anticipated sextant workshop, keeping hands and minds equally occupied.

The previous day had brought a milestone worth marking: MS Spitsbergen had crossed the Arctic Circle, and the occasion called for the traditional Arctic baptism from the Norse god Njörðr. A strong majority of guests rose to the challenge. The afternoon shifted to

geology and photography: Jean ran a workshop on the rock cycle, while Photographer Oscar demonstrated how to lift the quality of photographs taken on a smartphone through editing.

One of the day's most distinctive moments came in an unexpected form. A lecture on the seabirds of Jan Mayen was delivered not by the Expedition Team but by researchers who had joined MS Spitsbergen with a specific purpose — to be dropped off at Jan Mayen the following day, should conditions allow.

Jan Mayen was now on every mind, and Plans for Tomorrow confirmed that the weather and sea state were looking promising. The evening closed with a pub-style quiz hosted by Expedition Team members Marcus and Holly — general knowledge tested, voyage knowledge rewarded, friendly competition ringing through the Explorer Bar. The ship turned in at a reasonable hour, with fingers crossed for the morning.





Kvalrossbukta, Jan Mayen

Legend

— HX Expedition

20 km | © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

## Day 8 - Kvalrossbukta, Jan Mayen

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The morning began with careful attention to the windows. The sea state would determine everything. Fog was present, but the water was nearly flat calm, and when the announcement came — that a landing at Kvalrossbukta, Jan Mayen, would go ahead — the ship came quietly, disbelievably alive.

Guests followed the Expedition Team ashore beneath a light drizzle, the mist drawing a soft veil across the mountain tops above. But the setting was no less extraordinary for its grey tones. The landing area gave everyone space to stretch out and explore. Some lingered in the bay, walking amongst driftwood and the bleached whale bones of another era. High above the clifftops, little auks called from the ledges. Ornithologist Julia found a viewpoint further up the hill, offering clear sightings of fulmars, puffins, and little auks. Those with energy for more trekked further across the volcanic landscape towards the famous volcano Beerenberg, where Geologist Jean was

waiting — a small, vivid figure against a seemingly desolate terrain. Spending an entire morning on Jan Mayen is a rare thing. Very few people can claim it, and by the time the group assembled for departure, the weight of that fact had settled in quietly.

The wind and rain had begun to build as MS Spitsbergen prepared to leave. The guest researchers who had spent the crossing with us waved from shore as the ship pulled away, heading for Svalbard. Those seeking fresh air joined a wildlife watch on the outer decks — little auks and other seabirds cutting low over the turbulent surface while guests braced against the wind. Inside, the afternoon filled with clay painting, knot workshops, and lectures on Arctic geopolitics, before Plans for Tomorrow and a tiny talk from Jean on geological dating methods brought the day to a close. The landing on Jan Mayen was still sinking in for many — perhaps a night's sleep would make it feel more real.



## Day 9 - At Sea

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White was the colour of the day. Fog continued to press in on all sides as MS Spitsbergen inched north towards Svalbard, and strong winds made wildlife spotting a genuine challenge. A couple of whale blows were seen in the early morning, but for much of the day the fulmars had the sky to themselves — gliding alongside the ship through the mist in a way that gave many guests a new appreciation for these remarkable seabirds. Ornithologist Julia was ready with a lecture later in the day for those who wanted to know more.

The Expedition Leader delivered the AECO briefing, giving guests a clear picture of what to expect — and how to conduct themselves — during time ashore in Svalbard. The contrast with Iceland would be marked.

Morning stretching continued to grow in popularity, while Activity Guides Carlos and Marcus ran an interactive 'Lost at Sea' workshop

testing problem-solving under pressure. A guest Q&A session with MS Spitsbergen's officers gave an insight into what it takes to navigate and operate the ship itself. As the waves built through the afternoon, the mood on board stayed unhurried: watercolour painting sessions, quiet time in the cabins, and coffee in the Explorer Bar all found their takers.

Dinner that evening was a seafood buffet, prepared with visible care by the galley team. The waves had grown considerably by the time guests made their way to the Explorer Bar for Plans for Tomorrow. Expedition Leader Marcus outlined conditions in the morning — likely unsettled, but expected to ease once the ship entered the fjord of Hornsund. The evening closed with the traditional HX auction, with a strong turnout from guests giving back to the HX Foundation and the destinations that shape every voyage. The ship rolled through the night, and Svalbard waited just beyond the horizon.



Van Mijenfjorden  
nasjonalpark

Calypsobyen Bamsebu

Burgerbukta

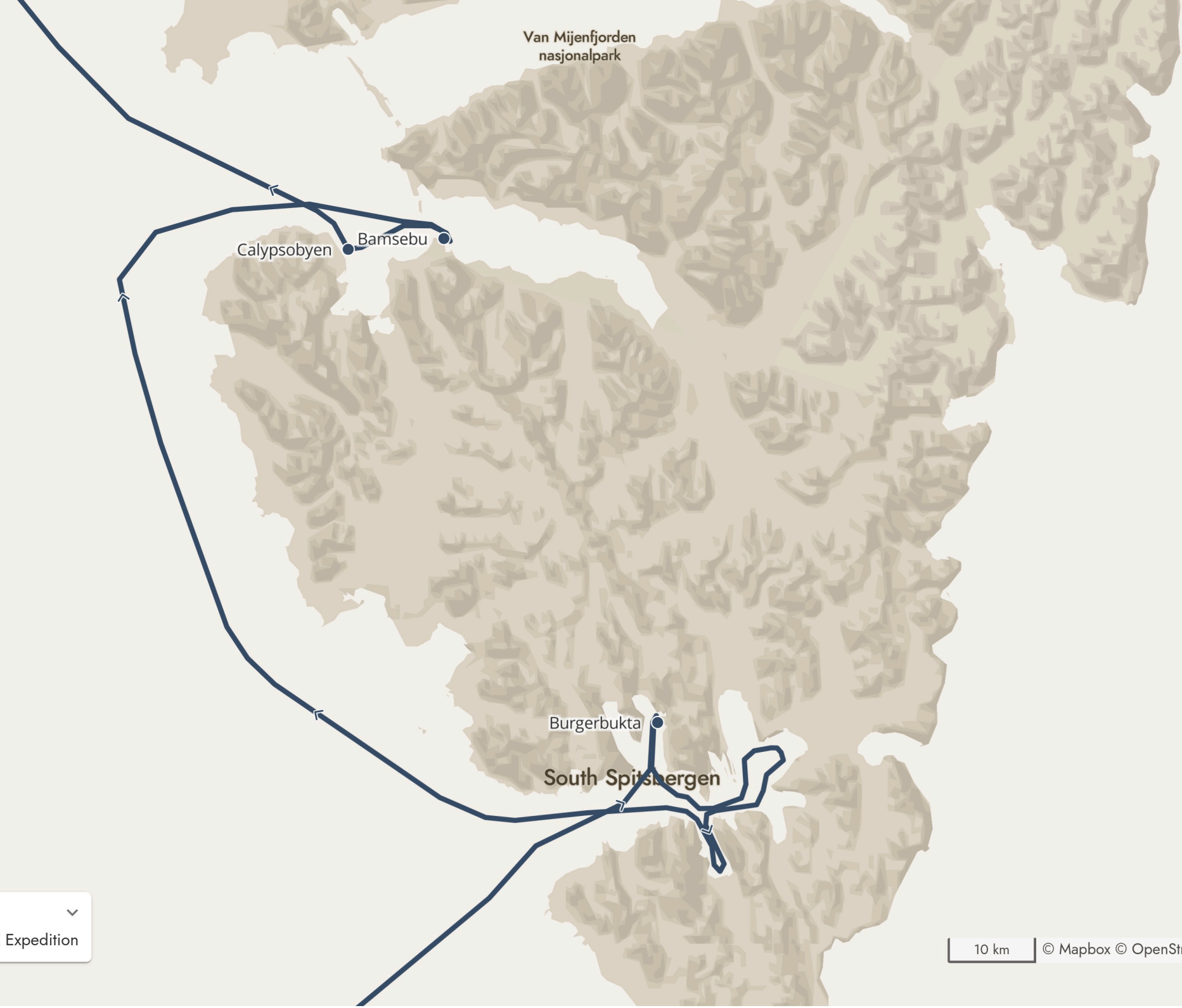
South Spitsbergen

Legend

— HX Expedition

10 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap



## Day 10 - Burgerbukta, Hornsund

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The night crossing of the southern Barents Sea had been a rough one, and the outer decks remained closed as the ship approached Svalbard. Inside, the morning found its own rhythm: knitting in the Explorer Bar, Ornithologist Julia's workshop on documenting a voyage in the style of a naturalist, and the final instalment of Geologist Jean's lecture series — this time on the geology of Svalbard itself.

By midday the motion had eased considerably as MS Spitsbergen entered Hornsund — the southernmost fjord on the island of Spitsbergen, renowned for its dramatic peaks and glaciers that press close to the water. Although the wind remained strong after sailing into Burgerbukta, the swell had dropped away, and the afternoon landing was confirmed. Kayaking and science boat activities would have to wait for calmer conditions, but a landing ashore was very much on.

The Expedition Team went ashore first to scout the site. Once the area

was cleared, guests followed into Austre Burgerbukta — the eastern arm of the bay. The mountains rose above in the mist, and the walk up to the viewpoint revealed the glacier of Kvalfangarbreen beyond: an imposing wall of blue, grey, and white ice that drew the eye and quietened conversation. The wind came and went in strong gusts, but the landscape held its own against the weather. The day's most unexpected moment was found on the beach: a set of giant paw prints, claws included, pressed deep into the sand. Polar bear. Somewhere in this terrain, a bear was moving unseen — and the knowledge of that presence, even without a sighting, felt significant.

Back on board, hot chocolate was a welcome end to the cold. MS Spitsbergen undertook scenic sailing through Hornsund as the Expedition Team and bridge kept watch for polar bears along the shoreline. None were spotted, but the landscape gave plenty in return. The ship settled into the evening after a long, physically demanding day — the first taste of Svalbard, and a good one.



## Day 11- Bamsebu, Bellsund (AM)

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The ship arrived in Bellsund to a noticeably different landscape. The sharp, jagged peaks of Hornsund had given way to softer contours and a markedly greener terrain. The reason was underfoot and overhead in equal measure: birdlife is abundant in Bellsund, and where birds gather, guano follows. And where guano falls, even the nutrient-poor Arctic soil produces vegetation. Several guests were already on deck as the ship sailed into position — the weather was significantly calmer, with almost no wind — though the sun at this latitude offers no reliable clue as to the hour. We were well above the Arctic Circle, and the sun had not set.

Once the Expedition Team had set up the landing site, guests went ashore at Bamsebu. The history of the site was immediately present:

the remains of a old hunting cabin, rowing boats, and beluga skulls scattered across the landscape, relics of a time when white whales were hunted here in numbers. The birdlife provided a counterpoint to that history. Eider ducks delivered their signature 'ooh' calls with what seemed like genuine feeling, while purple sandpipers pursued territorial disputes along the rocky shoreline in short, energetic chases. The calmer conditions also meant kayaking and science boat groups — held over from the previous day — were finally able to get on the water. A successful morning by any measure.

After a morning ashore, guests returned on board for a lecture from Historian Bernardo on the history of Svalbard, before MS Spitsbergen sailed on towards the afternoon destination: Calypsobyen.



## Day 11 - Calypsobyen, Bellsund (PM)

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The hour's sailing from Bamsebu to Calypsobyen kept the pace gentle, and there was no shortage to watch from the outer decks. Arctic terns, kittiwakes, Brünnich's guillemots, and the occasional puffin threaded across the water's surface as the ship moved west. The transit had barely begun when an announcement drew guests to the starboard rail: beluga whales. They hugged the shoreline, surfacing with barely a ripple, pale shapes just visible beneath the water before disappearing again. Certainly not as easy to read as orca. But a true Arctic species, encountered in the right place — and that made it something worth pausing for.

The skies over Calypsobyen had lifted to a vivid blue by the time the ship arrived after lunch, the mountains and glaciers framing the site with clarity. Once the Expedition Team had the landing established, guests came ashore to explore a place with a distinctly industrial past. Calypsobyen had been one of Svalbard's largest coal installations, developed by the NEC (Northern Exploration Company) — until the company discovered there was insufficient coal to justify the operation, and abandoned it within a few short years. Roaming the

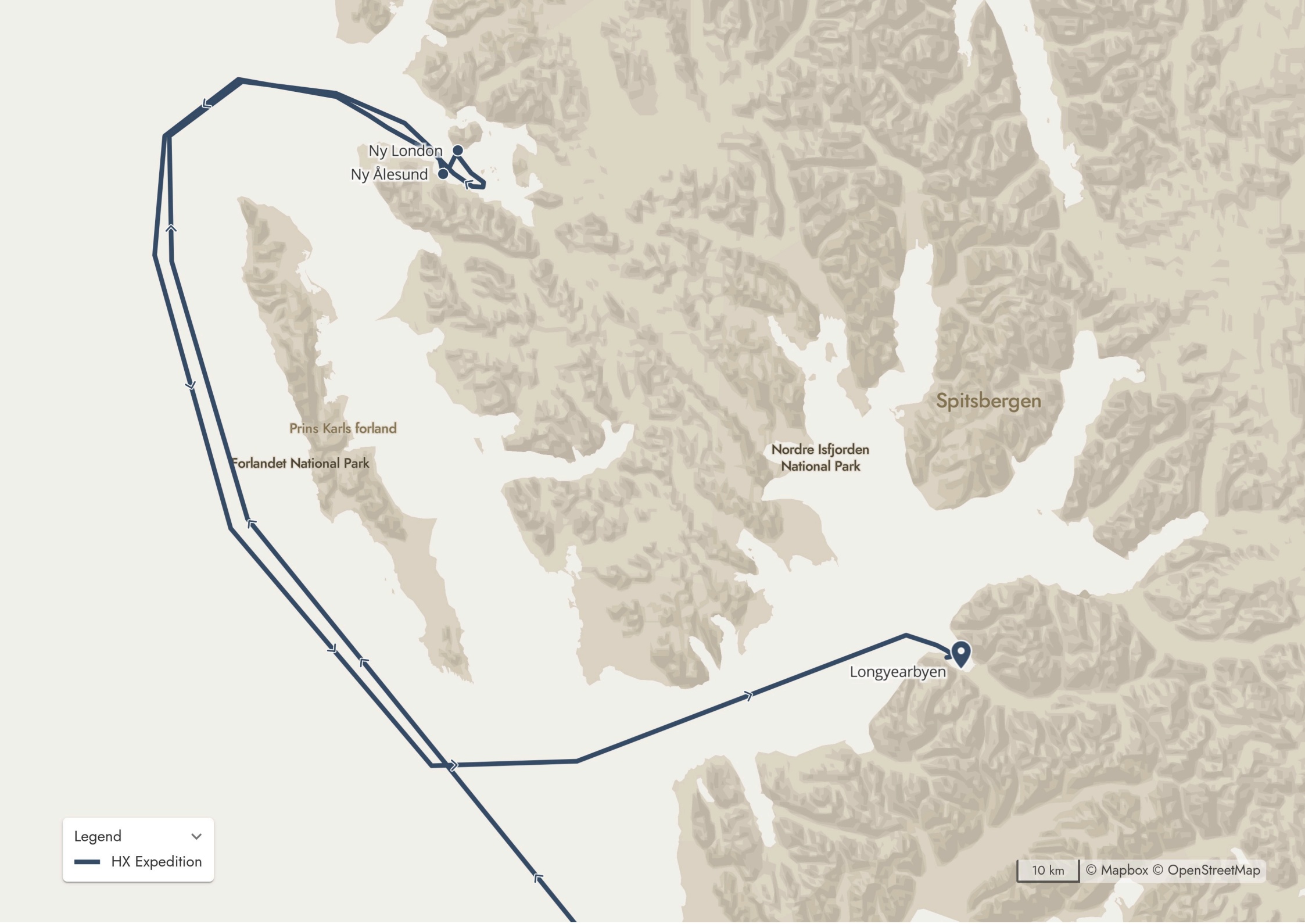
beach and up onto the plateau rewarded guests with open views across the fjord entrance. A few Arctic skuas joined the landing party for a time, perching within range of the spotting scope the team had set up ashore. The wind had increased a little, but the Arctic air was clean and the setting made up for any chill.

Two more science boat runs were completed at this site, meaning all guests who wished to take part had now been out on the water. To mark the occasion, Charlotte and Holly set up the microscopes in the Science Centre and ran their 'Ocean Drifters' workshop — presenting the full collection of plankton samples gathered across the voyage. What lives in a few drops of seawater is, it turns out, a great deal.

With the day's work done, guests headed to dinner and Plans for Tomorrow, where the destinations of Ny-Ålesund and Ny London in Kongsfjorden were confirmed for the final full day of exploration. The evening then gave way to a very different kind of programme: a cabaret and music night with the ship's crew. Receptionist Jofel drew the evening's loudest response before the rest of the crew joined in.

The night ran later than most preceding it — deservedly so.





Ny London  
Ny Ålesund

Prins Karls forland  
Forlandet National Park

Nordre Isfjorden  
National Park

Spitsbergen

Longyearbyen

Legend

— HX Expedition

## Day 12 - Ny Ålesund, Kongsfjorden (AM)

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MS Spitsbergen arrived at Ny-Ålesund in the early morning, and the gangway — rather than the expedition boats — provided access to shore. The northernmost permanent research settlement in the world presented itself under a brilliant blue sky, and guests dispersed into it at pace and with purpose.

Most joined one of the guided walks led by Expedition Team members Julia, Marcus, and Bernardo, while others chose to explore at their own pace. Several small groups of Svalbard reindeer moved through the settlement in close proximity to guests — compact animals, built lower and heavier than their mainland counterparts, shaped by generations of Arctic winters. The sun brought a warmth unusual for this latitude, and the morning stretched pleasantly.

By late morning the picnic benches outside the Ny-Ålesund post office and shop had become a focal point, with many guests writing postcards to send from the most northerly post box most of them would ever encounter.

After a morning of walking, museum visits, and browsing, guests returned on board for a recap from the Science and Education Team. The full scope of the voyage — beginning in Scotland, finishing in Svalbard — took on a different quality when laid out in sequence. The range and variety of what had been seen, learned, and experienced in such a short span was, by any honest reckoning, remarkable.



## Day 12 - Ny London, Kongsfjorden (PM)

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Calm water continued into the afternoon as MS Spitsbergen made for Ny London on the island of Blomstrandøya. Minke whales surfaced repeatedly during the sailing, visible from the outer decks and drawing guests from the Aune restaurant to the windows. The afternoon had barely begun.

For the final time on this voyage, guests waited as the Expedition Team established the landing site before heading ashore. Ny London offered a story unlike any other stop on the voyage: this was not a coal operation but a marble one. The Northern Exploration Company had been convinced the island held commercial-grade marble — and it did. The problem came when the stone was shipped south. Once exposed to warmer temperatures, it began to disintegrate. The ruins that remained were a monument to ambition, geology, and circumstance. The surrounding landscape was quietly becoming something new: flowers beginning to push through the tundra between the rocks, the Arctic season gathering itself towards summer. The mountains drew close on all sides, and the conditions continued

to improve as the afternoon went on.

The polar plunge was the final act ashore. A strong group of guests charged — or crept carefully — into the fjord, met by cheering from those watching from dry land. It was, by any measure, a fitting way to close the last landing of the voyage.

Once everyone was back on board, the Captain's Farewell followed in the bar, and the 130th Anniversary Dinner in Aune brought a level of occasion to the final evening that the galley team delivered with skill — traditional Norwegian dishes reworked with a modern sensibility. The evening closed in the Explorer Bar with the Photographers' Video Recap, produced by Oscar and Kay. Looking back across the full span of the voyage — the culture, the wildlife, the weather, and the landscapes — in the space of a single evening put the scale of what had been experienced into sharp perspective. The bar stayed open a little longer than usual.





## Day 13 - Disembarkation in Longyearbyen

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Longyearbyen in bright sunshine. The final breakfast on board, unhurried but carrying the weight of a last morning, before coaches were called and guests made their way down the gangway and into the town that would send them home.

Looking back, the voyage had taken MS Spitsbergen through rough seas, fog, and days of extraordinary calm — to Iceland, Jan Mayen, and Spitsbergen. Each of these places brought its own geology, wildlife, culture, and history, and each gave something distinct to the

days spent there. The Expedition Team had delivered that breadth through landings, lectures, wildlife watches, and the kind of open, curious engagement that turns a sea journey into something richer.

The memories made in these weeks will not fade quickly. On behalf of everyone aboard MS Spitsbergen, we hope the voyage has changed the way you see the world — and we look forward to welcoming you back on another expedition.



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