

## Daily Expedition Reports

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# Burgerbukta, Hornsund, Spitsbergen

## Jun 26, 2016 - National Geographic Explorer



Humpback at the drop off.



Arctic Polar Plunge. Photo by Rich Reid

During the night we made our way around the southern tip of Spitsbergen and began to sail north once again up the western coast of the island. By morning the ship was anchoring in Burgerbukta a fjord in Hornsund, the southernmost fjord system on the western side of Spitsbergen, with the plan to spend some time exploring the fjord through water activities.

By the end of breakfast Zodiac and kayak operations were in full swing, with two rounds of each activity offered so that guests were able to participate in both. The Zodiac cruisers enjoyed a beautiful morning on the water traveling the fjord, dwarfed in the boats by the high jagged edged mountain ridges surrounding us. Beautiful mangled ancient rocks and green sloping mountainsides offered a wonderful view of the kittiwake colonies breeding there. Getting a safe distance away from the glacier, the Zodiacs engines were cut and we sat listened to the occasional calving of the glacier and the snap and cracking of air bubbles bursting from the brash ice bits floating past. Some boats were able to catch a glimpse of a couple of bearded seals in the water as they cruised around and all of us were treated to cups of delicious (and in some cases spiked) hot chocolate by our Viking hot cocoa boat.

The kayak platform launched nearly 40 boats into the water throughout the morning so we could explore the area at our leisure. Kayaking past beautiful blue icebergs one could occasionally see them rolling in the water as their center of gravity shifted, a reminder of the volatility of the ever-changing ice here. Looking along the cliffs you could see large polished boulders the size of Volkswagens that had been deposited there by the melting glacier, many boulders home to nesting barnacle geese.

The kayak platform later served as the location of the polar plunge, where 34 brave souls jumped into the Arctic waters of Burgerbukta fjord in nothing but swimsuits. Their quick dip earned them delicious warm blueberry soup and major bragging rights.

During lunch we left the Hornsund fjord systems and headed to the edge of the continental shelf or the "drop off" where we spent the rest of the afternoon sailing as we searched the open waters for whales. We came across a small humpback whale off the bow of the ship, which breached a few times and gave us some beautiful shots of its fluke as is repeatedly surfaced and dove. Saying goodbye to the humpback we spotted large spouts far out on the horizon, and we headed in their direction hoping for some larger whales. The distant spouts belonged to half a dozen fin whales, the second largest whale. Soon it was time to leave the whales and the drop off behind and continue to sail north towards our final destination, Longyearbyen. We spent our last evening aboard enjoying some spectacular images from the trip in the guest slideshow during the captain's farewell party.

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