

## Wilderness adventures

Jon Ingleton talks with Albatros Expeditions' Hans Lagerweij about the family business and its forthcoming new arrivals

**F**ounded by Soren Rasmussen in 1986, Albatros Travel began chartering a few Greenland cruises in the 1990s – a move that led Rasmussen to investing in several expedition cruise ships, most of which were on long-term charters to other expedition companies. Albatros Expeditions was born from this experience in 2015, focusing on the Scandinavian and Chinese source markets. Nowadays the company is a renowned international player in a booming niche market.

Rasmussen opted to pursue a managed fleet business model for his company.

“Soren has an interest in Cruise Management International (CMI) and Cruise Management International Leisure (CMI Leisure) and, although they are independent companies and we are not compelled to work with them, they are a perfect fit for us,” says Hans Lagerweij, the company’s president. “We really appreciate their knowledge, expertise and experience, and we love working with them.”

For Lagerweij, the benefits of the model are clear; with the right ship management partners in place, a cruise operation can thrive. “It gives us more time and energy to focus on our core



competences: expedition programming, marketing and selling our adventures,” he explains. “CMI and CMI Leisure are experts in ship management and provide excellent hotel offerings at great value. It would have cost us a lot of energy and money to develop in-house expertise in these areas, particularly to the standard that they are able to deliver.”

Albatros Expeditions has also developed a network of partners over the past five years to extend its sales reach. “Our distribution partners, and especially our full charterers, are critical to our business,” says Lagerweij. “Outside Scandinavia we are purely business-to-business – we never compete with our partners. They trust us entirely and have an active input into the development of new products and services. Our partner cooperation goes much further than a traditional buyer-supplier relationship.”

Historically, Albatros Expeditions has operated a breed of ships synonymous with the raw expedition product that is much loved by so many. However, when newbuilds Ocean Albatros and Ocean Victory enter service in November 2021 and November 2022, the company’s offer will be transformed into a state-of-the-art experience. “Expedition cruising started with old, small and mostly Russian scientific vessels,” says Lagerweij. “They



Company president Hans Lagerweij enjoys testing out the available guest activities



New ships Ocean Albatros and Ocean Victory are designed to offer guests a luxury expedition experience

weren't known for their comfort, but these vessels delivered a true expedition feeling and atmosphere – all guests onboard became friends and everyone knew each other. Plus, it was so easy to get around.”

The company's newbuilds will significantly elevate the expedition experience. “Our new vessels have all the comforts, facilities and safety features of a newbuild ship, but will still have an authentic expedition personality,” says Lagerweij. “Ocean Victory and Ocean Albatros are only 104 metres long and very compact, which will make wayfinding easy. The compact size also means we will be able to travel further into remote areas than most other vessels. Onboard you will find affordable luxury – a four-star-plus product, without the over-the-top luxuries that are often included simply to justify a higher price point. The atmosphere will be a casual and cosy classical expedition feeling – we Scandinavians like to call it ‘hygge.’”

The new arrivals will join Ocean Atlantic, a treasured ship built in 1985 and fully renovated in 2016. Lagerweij isn't troubled by the prospect of guests making comparisons between the vessels. “Ocean Atlantic retains the charm of the original expedition vessels, but what remains consistent across our entire

fleet is our expedition focus,” he says. “We excel in delivering an unrivalled experience off the ship, with one of the best multinational expedition teams and a wide selection of activities and experiences. We aim to deliver more experience time off the ship than any other operator.”

Commenting on the company's excursions, Lagerweij says: “Our core expedition product is a mixture of zodiac

## “We excel in delivering an unrivalled experience off the ship”

cruises and landings in remote wilderness areas. Zodiac cruises give an opportunity to explore larger areas looking for wildlife and to be closer to the water. Landings give an ability to safely walk around and explore new wilderness areas under leadership of our knowledgeable and experienced expedition team.”

Later this year the company will launch a new range of excursions that will strengthen its appeal among those seeking truly unique expedition experiences. “We're introducing camping on the Greenlandic icecap or in Antarctica,” says Lagerweij.

“In Antarctica we will visit scientific bases, and in the Arctic small remote settlements. We're really seeking to deliver a full mix of experiences encompassing the landscape, wildlife and culture, both at sea and ashore.”

Passengers hankering for an original expedition experience on Ocean Victory should book up soon. “At the moment, we aim to retire Ocean Atlantic after our summer 2022 season,” says Lagerweij.

“Of course, our decision may change if we see a huge demand peak after Covid-19.

“However, our future is with the new ships – they align better with our sustainability focus and strategy. Albatros proudly received its first sustainability award back in 1995, before the industry was really concerned about the topic. Our new ships have Tier 3-compliant engines and, in conjunction with the X-bow hull and their compact design, they will produce between 50 and 80 per cent lower emissions per passenger versus traditional expedition vessels, significantly helping to advance our sustainability goals.” **C&F**