

Wendy's Top Five from the Texas A&M Arctic program – From Iceland to Greenland

My name is Wendy, I work for American Universities International Programs in Christchurch New Zealand. I've worked in travel around the world for more than 25 years and have been lucky enough to have visited all seven continents. I enjoyed a study abroad short faculty-led program to Andalusia Spain many years ago and absolutely loved the experience.

At AUIP, I manage programs in New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Antarctica and excitingly now Greenland. I travelled to Reykjavik, Iceland in July and travelled with the wonderful Albatros Expeditions to Greenland. It was an incredible opportunity and one I'll never forget. There are so many amazing experiences to be had in this spectacular part of the world that I could talk for hours! To save your ears though I just want to let you know my top 5 moments of the trip:-

1. Iceland. The Golden Circle is an immense journey through the stunning natural beauty and history of Iceland. To stand in the rift between two continents in the place where parliament sat for nearly 1000 years provides a unique perspective on time. And Guiffoss Waterfall is truly on par with Victoria Falls and Niagara Falls. Furthermore there is still the colourful, historic and cosmopolitan city of Reykjavik to explore.
2. Albatros Expeditions. The Ocean Albatros is an exceptional ship. Built only last year, she is a luxury ice-strengthened expedition ship. There is an indoor observation lounge with an outdoor deck, a presentation lounge, a library with books and games, two restaurants and did I mention the two outdoor hotubs?! It's pretty special to be able to relax in a hot tub whilst sailing through icebergs and looking out for whales. The Expedition Team come from all over the world with an array of expertise, knowledge and backgrounds. There are geologists, glaciologists, historians, oceanographers, whale experts and more. They're friendly, approachable, and their presentations on a variety of Arctic topics provides context and information.
3. Zodiac cruising around icebergs and up to glaciers. Zooming across the water, thick and slushy with ice, towards the immense terminal wall of a glacier is exhilarating. Then stopping and being silent, listening to the sound of ice calving from the glacier and the gentle bobbing of the boat on the freezing water. Dip your hand in if you're brave enough and pull out a piece of ice that could be 1000's of years old.

4. Exploring the Greenlandic settlements. The colours of the ice, the sea, the lush green land and the red, yellow, blue, green, pink and purple houses. Meeting the local people and the sled dogs. Even the smallest settlements have wonderful museums. Learn about what it was like living in these settlements in the past and the opportunities and struggles of today and tomorrow. Make sure to take some cash for the little market stalls that pop up when the boat comes in.
5. Number 5 could have been seeing whales, hiking in the unspoilt, uninhabited wilderness, visiting beautiful churches or seeing the reconstructions of Norse a Norse settlement but I think it has to be ...Polar plunge!! Really, a once in a lifetime opportunity. The exhilaration and adrenaline rush is fantastic and will keep you thrilled long after you warm up with a fluffy towel and a dip in the hot tub.