

THE ARCTIC

July 2009



In July 2009 StuVac Seminars ventured a long way north to explore the Arctic with keynote speakers Prof Paul Hodges and Linda Joy Lee. What a surreal experience to step off the plane at midnight in Norway's Longyearbyen, and find we needed sunglasses to counteract the bright Arctic sun! From this Arctic town our group boarded the R/V Akademik Ioffe. We made this Russian research vessel our home for the next 14 days as we explored Spitsbergen, the east coast of Greenland, Iceland's Westman Islands, and finished in Reykjavik, capital of Iceland.



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Our trip was filled with breath taking scenery and wildlife. We were fortunate to see 14 polar bears, and as we sailed toward an Inuit village with the impossible to pronounce name of Ittoqqortoormiit, the captain used the ship to carefully shepherd a polar bear away from the village. Our guide explained had he not the villagers would have killed it for food and fur, being entitled to do so by law. We crept along a beach to watch a colony of walrus, came across arctic fox with their pups, various whales, puffins and birds galore. Daily zodiac trips took us close to many of these creatures, colossal icebergs and dainty flowers on the tundra. The lectures were conducted in the ship's library allowing delegates to enjoy the scenery as we listened to Paul and LJ. Paul provided an excellent insight into the current spinal research, while LJ was able to complement this information seamlessly with a clinical lens. One standout moment was crossing 80° North, all of us on the deck, a glass of champagne in hand and a toast by the Captain. There was lots of dancing, mainly to keep warm. So many great memories and another "once in a lifetime" adventure with StuVac!



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