Pathways to Franklin
14 August to 23 August 2017
09 Nights / 10 Days

Overview
This voyage of exploration combines the quest for wildlife with the exploration history of the Northwest Passage. A visit to one of the largest migratory bird sanctuaries in the world, frequent sightings of seals, beluga whale and narwhal provide great interest for wildlife lovers. A highlight will be sightings of polar bears and we hope to encounter these iconic hunters of the north at a number of special locations we have discovered over the years. Frequent shore landings in the company of expert guides allow us to explore on foot, observing wildlife, Arctic flora, and points of historical interest - including a former Hudson's Bay Company outpost. All of this is set against a backdrop of epic Arctic scenery and skies that go on forever. This is an ideal introduction to small ship expedition cruising in the remote Canadian Arctic.

Day By Day Expedition Itinerary

August 14, 2017 – Edmonton (Alberta) to Resolute (Nunavut)
We depart Edmonton this morning on our special charter flight to Resolute, a remote outpost above the Arctic Circle. Located on the southern shores of Cornwallis Island, the town is named after the British ship HMS Resolute which became trapped in ice and abandoned here in 1850 while searching for the lost Franklin Expedition. A weather station and airstrip here made it a strategic outpost during the time of the Cold War. On arrival, we are transferred to the beach where our expedition team will meet us and prepare us for our zodiac ride to the ship. Onboard, we will have time to explore the ship and get to know our cabins before a welcome cocktail. We weigh anchor and depart Resolute in the early evening.

August 15, 2017 – Beechey Island and Prince Leopold Island
Beechey Island holds great historic importance in the story of the Northwest Passage. It is here that Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition spent its last 'comfortable' winter in 1845 before disappearing into the icy vastness, sparking an incredible series of search expeditions that lasted almost three decades. The mystery of what happened to Franklin was partially solved in September 2014, when a joint Parks Canada and Royal Canadian Geographic Society expedition, found the long lost Franklin shipwreck, HMS Erebus in the Victoria Strait. One Ocean Expeditions played a vital role in the search by carrying underwater search equipment on our ship as well as scientists, historians, researchers, dignitaries and sponsors of this history defining mission. A trip ashore at Beechey Island to visit the grave markers on a remote windswept beach, is a thrilling location for history buffs and for many will be the defining moment of our expedition. We return to the ship and this evening enjoy a special dinner attended by the Captain. It’s a great time to reflect on the wildlife, history and dramatic scenery of this pristine Arctic wilderness. Through the afternoon we will sail across Barrow Strait and approach the towering bird cliffs of Prince Leopold Island. This is an important Migratory Bird Sanctuary, home to thick-billed murres, black guillemots, northern fulmars and blacklegged kittiwakes. Numbering in the order of several hundred thousand birds, Prince Leopold Island is one of the most significant bird sanctuaries in the whole of the Canadian Arctic and makes for fantastic zodiac cruising. The sea ice around Prince Leopold Island is a great place for spotting ringed seals and wherever we find ringed seals - we usually find polar bears.
August 16, 2017 – Fury Beach, Somerset Island
Overnight we sail south through Prince Regent Inlet and wake up in the morning along the south-eastern shore of Somerset Island. Our goal is to get ashore at Fury Beach, named after the HMS Fury, a Royal Navy sloop used in two Arctic expeditions by Commander Edward Parry. During her second expedition, she was damaged in the ice while overwintering and was abandoned in August of 1825 on a beach on Somerset Island, now known as Fury Beach. Her stores were unloaded on the beach as a depot of supplies and the location shared around to other Royal Navy expeditions. John Ross, another Royal Navy explorer relied on these stores to save the lives of his men after he lost his ship to the ice in 1829.

August 17, 2017 – Fort Ross and Bellot Strait
Continuing to the southern end of Prince Regent Inlet, we approach the eastern end of the Bellot Strait. The historic site of Fort Ross, located at the southern end of Somerset Island, is a former Hudson’s Bay Company fur trading outpost. Fascinating archaeological sites nearby tell a story of more than a thousand years of habitation by the Inuit and their predecessors. Having explored Fort Ross, we attempt a transit through the narrows of Bellot Strait. The aim is to enter at slack tide if possible, in order to avoid a current that roars through the passage at more than seven knots during the peak flow. The mixing of waters in this strait provides an abundant food source for marine mammals and we keep our eyes peeled for harp seals, bearded seals and even polar bears. The skill of the Captain and Officers and capabilities of the ship becomes apparent during this exciting day of Arctic navigation.

August 18, 2017 Coningham Bay, Prince of Wales Island
Having emerged from Bellot Strait, we cross Franklin Strait and arrive at Coningham Bay on the shore of Prince of Wales Island. Here, in the heart of the Northwest Passage we hope to encounter one of the most remarkable wildlife sites in the Arctic. This is a known hotspot for polar bears that come here to feast on beluga whales, often caught in the rocky shallows at the entrance to the bay. It is not unusual to find the shoreline littered with whale skeletons – and very healthy looking polar bears!

August 19, 2017 – Victory Point, King William Island
Heading further south, the mystery of Sir John Franklin and his ‘lost expedition’ is beginning to unravel. Prior to the recent discovery of the HMS Erebus in September 2014, very little was known of how the Franklin Expedition spent its last months in the frozen Arctic. The vessels, abandoned in the ice of Victoria Strait are just coming to life thanks to the ongoing efforts of Parks Canada’s marine archaeological team and the recent Victoria Strait Expedition. On Victory Point a lifeboat left abandoned, bits and pieces of copper and iron, cutlery and buttons and a skeleton here and there - all tell a story of a desperate race south in search of rescue that never came. We hope to visit Victory Point as we transit Victoria Strait, travelling very near the actual location of the wreck of HMS Erebus, all the while, learning about the quest for exploration that eventually opened up the Arctic. One can only imagine the last desperate days of Franklin’s men as another frigid Arctic winter approached, supplies dwindling and health failing.

August 20, 2017 – Pasely Bay, Boothia Peninsula
Working our way north, we stop in Pasely Bay, on the Boothia Peninsula. The RCMP vessel St. Roch, during her transit of the Northwest Passage in 1942 was frozen in Pasely Bay and in February of 1942, one of the sailors onboard died. He was buried along the shores of Pasely Bay in the spring before the ship broke out of the ice and continued north through the passage. We will explore the shore of Pasely Bay, searching for wildlife and enjoying the isolated beautify of the Boothia Peninsula.

August 21, 2017 – Peel Sound
We sail through Franklin Strait and into Peel Sound, between Somerset Island and Prince of Wales Island. Peel Sound is known for its often heavy sea ice concentrations and is only open to vessel navigation for a short period each year. The ice plug in the top of Peel Sound frustrated many explorers as they tried to pass through this body of water in order to complete the Northwest Passage. This stretch of water from Victoria Strait through Franklin Strait and into Peel Sound is considered the crux of the Northwest Passage and it is now
known that Franklin sailed his two ships, the HMS Erebus and HMS Terror through Peel Sound in the summer of 1846, before becoming beset in the ice ‘5 leagues NE of [Victory Point]’.

**August 22, 2017 – Aston Bay**
Our last day of excursions before returning to Resolute Bay has us stopped at the northern end of Peel Sound and on the southern shore of Barrow Strait. Aston Bay is an arm of Peel Sound and with the heavy concentrations of ice in the area should be a hotspot for wildlife activity. We will head out into the zodiacs and possibly ashore in search of wildlife and adventure as we reflect on the exciting adventures we have experienced on this voyage.

**August 23, 2017 – Resolute, (Nunavut) to Edmonton, (Alberta)**
By morning, we are at anchor in Resolute – from where we commenced our expedition a week ago. We make our way ashore by zodiac and bid farewell to our crew. A charter flight returns us to Edmonton where our journey comes to an end.