

# innovations

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## Reliable pole-to-pole connectivity



**Special Report**  
International Cruise Ship Industry

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*'Hondius' seen off Spitsbergen, Svalbard*

## Dual high-speed Fleet Xpress solution powered 'Hondius' on her maiden voyage to the Arctic circle.

Beyond simply 'being there', one of the greatest pleasures of expedition cruising is sharing experiences and impressions with others.

For Polar cruise ship operators, the ability to deliver that enjoyment in real time via high-speed internet has moved beyond competitive offer to become part of guest expectations. Despite remote locations, guests will also expect low-cost calls via satellite by right, rather than by request.

In inaccessible places, reliable connectivity is also key to ship operations, including the remote monitoring and support of systems on board, while the crews who are routinely employed on such voyages have their own needs to stay connected with family, friends, and the online and real worlds.

In June of last year, the newly-built Oceanwide Expeditions vessel 'Hondius' undertook her maiden Arctic voyage, culminating in a call at Longyearbyen on the island of Spitsbergen, before returning to her home port of Vlissingen.

Fully meeting expectations, according to the shipowner, was a new dual Fleet Xpress solution from connectivity partners Inmarsat Maritime and Alpatron Marine, installed to meet performance requirements in Polar waters that only the Ka-band/L-band hybrid solution can achieve.

### Flagship

'Hondius' is the new five-deck flagship for one of expedition cruising's pioneering companies. Using a fleet of existing ice-strengthened passenger ships, Oceanwide developed the 'Basecamp Antarctica' brand and became the first cruise company to connect travellers with Spitsbergen in Norway's Svalbard archipelago.

The company's first purpose-built ship, 'Hondius' was delivered by Croatia's Brodosplit shipyard earlier in 2019, and was built to Polar Class 6 requirements.

With accommodation for 174 pax, the ship was finished in 'mid-century modern' décor, in line with the distinctive cosy and informal atmosphere on which Oceanwide Expeditions built its reputation. However, far from 'retro' is the connectivity package fitted on board.

Oceanwide has a long standing relationship with Alpatron and Inmarsat as solutions providers for its shipboard connectivity needs. "Because of our operations in Polar regions, we include various systems and providers but Inmarsat and the Infinity solution have always been the basis," explained Oceanwide's COO, Mark van der Hulst.

"Loyalty to the solution has been a consequence of systems and solutions reliability over time, as well as service levels. Some alternatives – such as connectivity offered via Ku-band VSAT – simply cannot reach the remote destinations served by Oceanwide's ships," van der Hulst said.

### Continuous change

As the cruise shipowner's fleet and cruise experience capabilities have evolved, so have its connectivity needs. van der Hulst said; "Communication needs are changing continuously in today's world. It's good to have a partner such as Inmarsat who is joining us on that journey. Because of our remote operating areas the standard solution is not always possible. Inmarsat and Alpatron have worked together with us to find the optimal package."

In addition, Oceanwide's three-mast passenger sailing schooner and Arctic expedition ship 'SV Rembrandt van Rijn' is using the FB500 FleetBroadband service, allowing its 33 pax and crew of 12 to take advantage of a 5GB data allowance.

Oceanwide has also already installed the Fleet Xpress high-speed maritime broadband service on board the Ice Class



*Zodiacs seen leaving 'Hondius' for a walrus spotting trip*

1A vessel 'Ortelius' and the Ice Class 1D 'Plancius', achieving what van der Hulst described as "a good and direct contact", with the package, including the Infinity smartbox.

This smartbox allows guests to control costs through pre-paid email, internet- and telephone access, while also generating an additional revenue-stream for the owner, he said.

"Fleet Xpress was the perfect solution for us with high-speed Global Xpress (GX) network availability in our Antarctic sailing region," van der Hulst added. "We know that in the high Arctic satellite comms are challenging, but our experience in the Antarctic with the other vessels is of 95% uptime at least. Sometimes we sail inside fjords and then we know a connection is not always available, but that is an accepted consequence of the areas we operate in.

"Additionally, we require stable remote access to the IT environment of the vessel

in order to keep this up-to-date and in good shape," he said.

Online monitoring possibilities have been an especially attractive capability, he stressed. However, the refurbished vessels 'Ortelius' and 'Plancius' base their connectivity requirements on having capacity for 108 pax apiece. 'Hondius' needs extended capability to match demand not only for 174 passengers, but also for the 74-strong crew serving them.

"Since the introduction of GX we have worked together with Inmarsat and Alphasat to achieve the best solution for our on board needs," van der Hulst said. "Because of the number of passengers on board 'Hondius' and the quality we want to provide, we chose the dual Fleet Xpress solution offered by Alphasat Marine, where the aggregate bandwidth available over the GX network is 16 Mbps on the (newbuilding)'Janssonius'.

## Oceanwide Expeditions

As mentioned above, Oceanwide expeditions operates three small expedition cruise ships and two passenger carrying motorised sailing ships.

In addition, last year the company ordered another vessel from Brodosplit in Croatia. The same shipyard that delivered the 'Hondius' in 2019.

The 'Janssonius' is due to commence her maiden voyage towards the end of next year. Almost identical to 'Hondius', she is being built to Polar Ice Class 6 with accommodation available for around 174 pax.

Due to the current cruise sector shutdown, the fleet is currently laid up in The Netherlands. Four out of the five vessels operated by the company are berthed close to Oceanwide's base in Vlissingen.

For example, the 1976-built, 116 pax 'Plancius' is lying in Vlissingen inner harbour, the 'Hondius' and the 1989-built 123 pax 'Ortelius' are both at Hansweert, which is further inland on the River Scheldt, while the 1922-built sailing vessel 'Rembrandt van Rijn' is lying at Sluiskil on the Ghent/Terneuzen canal.

Finally, the smaller charter sailing vessel 'Noorderlicht', built in 1910, is currently at Kampen, inland from Amsterdam.

The company said it was monitoring the Norwegian situation with regard to the timing of the re-opening of Longyearbyen airport on Spitsbergen, as well as the general lifting of restrictions by the Norwegian Government, to enable the 'Hondius' to resume her expedition voyages around the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic.

At the time of the coronavirus worldwide clampdown, 'Plancius' and 'Ortelius' were cruising in the southern hemisphere out of Ushaia and managed to disembark their passengers in Montevideo, Uruguay at the end of March, before sailing across the Atlantic back to Holland.



*'Hondius' seen at Bjornfjorden, Spitsbergen in front of the Smeerenburgreen glacier*

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