

BOAT

International

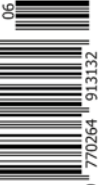
GENTLE GIANT

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THE SOUND OF SILENCE

From whales in remote Scotland to moving mountains of ice in the Arctic Circle, a voyage to the far north brought natural wonders and deep peace, *Akula's* owner tells *Sam Fortescue*

Venturing off the charts in Greenland, you don't go alone. Where there be dragons, and where the Norse believed that the ice giants roamed, you need some back-up. For the owner of *Akula* – the distinctive crimson 60-metre Rossinavi explorer with an extraordinary interior design by FM Architettura, and now for sale with Fraser – that meant preparation above all else.

“Greenland and the Arctic was always my dream,” the owner tells me from the somewhat different surroundings of the Caribbean. “The possibility to do it with my boat was a great decision. *Akula* was built with that in mind, especially on autonomy, environmental impact and strength.”

Over 28 weeks of island-hopping from Portsmouth, England, to the shores of New England, *Akula's* adventurous owner at least had plenty of time to prepare. “We started in March in the UK with amazing weather, which was strange – just three days of rain. We saw lots of

animals including puffins and whales, but it was more touristic, easy travelling.”

Akula made an early landfall off Dartmouth, where she crept in past Kingswear Castle and moored up to one of the big yellow buoys in the middle of the river. The mission was to sample a local speciality. “Rockfish is a must – their fish and chips were great!” says the owner. “A very nice lady there called everybody ‘my love!’”

Hugging the coast as far as Land's End, *Akula* then set a course for Lundy in the wide mouth of the Bristol Channel – a wind-blown scrap of rock off the North Devon coast that is famous for its seabirds. “A really lovely island – fantastic,” says the owner, a man whose taste clearly tends towards the remote.

From Bristol to Holyhead and all along the Welsh coast, local press reported gleefully on the unusual sight of the red-hulled superyacht gracing ports, harbours and bays. “Against the advice, I would say that Wales was a highlight,” says the owner. “It was wonderful – very beautiful, especially in the north, and people are very friendly. It has many of the same things as Scotland: whisky, mountains, but fewer tourists.”

Perhaps little surprise, then, that he sought sanctuary in Scotland's less populous outer islands. “Most interesting for me was the Hebrides, because there were fewer people. Also, it's more natural and easier to get about. We saw beautiful castles, drank good whisky, had some nice walking – there's even good cheese now in the UK – it's amazing! The nature was excellent and we saw lots of whales.”

Here, as everywhere, the 9.1-metre Tideman tender was key. “Our tender can beach anywhere. It has steps at the front and at the back so you can

Even with a strengthened Ice Class hull, you don't want to get too near. The 60-metre Rossinavi's whole navigation strategy was built around avoidance



From castles in Scotland to icebergs in Ittoqqortoormiit (right), the voyage sought out solitude





“THE FIRST TIME YOU SEE ICEBERGS FROM THE BOAT, IT’S REALLY FRIGHTENING – AMAZING, TOO, WITH BEAUTIFUL COLOURS”



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF AKULA; GETTY IMAGES; SAJEER MO ON UNSPLOASH

always find an old dock or some rocks where you can jump off. Some places we brought bicycles to peddle round the islands and explore. I hate a harbour – I never stay in one if I don’t have to.”

Settled, sunny weather was to be the story of the entire cruise, even as they steamed northwest towards Reykjavik. The journey took three days and nights with the owner and his wife aboard – a rarity in the yachting world, but a point of pride for these two.

“I think it’s a kind of attitude – you should have some hobbies you like to do on board. When you stay 28 weeks in one stretch, you have some days where there’s nothing to do. I like to take pictures, drone videos or study. You need to prepare your mind a little – be ready to read a book for three hours, watch a movie or keep a daily diary.”



To that end, *Akula* is equipped with a craft studio for her and a workshop for him. "I have a 3D-printing system on board and I am quite good at CAD, so I can repair parts that have broken."

He also has a cosy office from which he can check in on his business. "From 7am to roam it's always work – the evening is the same. Then we have a 30-minute meeting with the captain to plan an itinerary, where to drop the boat and so on. We have a management company, but I'm on board every day so they come to me to ask questions."

After revictualling in Reykjavik, they sailed clockwise around the island. By now it was June, so the sun set to the north but it never really got dark at night. The owner remembers the northwestern fringe of Iceland most fondly – wild Vestfirðir covering 9,400 square kilometres but home to barely 7,000 people.

"It's all national park in northwest Iceland – there are barely any roads," he says. "It is an



Greenland offered sightings of musk ox and polar bears

amazing place and I hope to go again. The east coast is less interesting from a boat, as most of the nice things are on land. It is amazing for cod fishing along the north coast, but it's not really fishing, because you put your hooks down and then you have three fish. So, we had to say nothing less than 90 centimetres!"

By late July they had completed their 1,000-nautical-mile circumnavigation and were eyeing up a weather window to make the three-day crossing to Greenland across the ice-strewn East Greenland Current. Here, remoteness took on a new meaning. They made landfall in Kulusuk, home to 241 souls and an American-



Right: the remote Westfjords was the owner's favourite stop in their Iceland circumnavigation



“WE SAW 16 POLAR BEARS, SOME OF THEM AS CLOSE AS 50 METRES AWAY. THEY’RE AMAZING ANIMALS”



Guests had to complete a polar survival course, and they always went out wearing drysuits and life jackets

Canadian early-warning radar station. Then it was north into the Arctic Circle to Ittoqqortoormiit – formerly known as Scoresby, at the mouth of a 40-mile-long sound.

“From here, we had ice because it was a very cold summer,” says the owner. “The first time you see icebergs from the boat, it’s really frightening – amazing, too, with beautiful colours. Seven-eighths of the ice is underwater, and they can be 400 metres high. It’s like a huge mountain moving fast – at two knots. You can see the big pieces with the radar, but even the smaller pieces, you don’t want to hit them because they are as strong as steel.”

This is why *Akula* was built to Ice Class. Creeping into Scoresby Sound, they nosed in around the growlers, always keeping a close eye on the ice that crowded the bays. “You need preparation if you go to this area – it’s not just looking at the chart,” says the owner. “There are no bathymetrics here – it’s really remote and there are few anchorages. You need good people with you.” To that end, his two rotational captains were fully polar coded, and the crew had all been trained in polar safety and survival. They were also supported by an ice pilot and an experienced guide from EYOS Expeditions.

Wildlife was the chief reason for coming here – that and the spectacular scenery that graduates from rocks and grass at the entrance to the sound to the full ice cap, with peaks over 2,000 metres. Their guide was said to be able to spot a polar bear from two kilometres away with binoculars. “We saw 16 polar bears – some of them as close as 50 metres,” says the owner. “We were safe watching from the tender. They’re amazing animals.”

With the summer thaw, it is possible to find land exposed by the water’s edge where you can land a tender. “You have flowers, birds – we did some picnics and walked up a mountain. First you





“WE GOT SATELLITE PHOTOS TWICE A DAY SHOWING ICE POSITIONS, BUT THE DRONE GIVES YOU UP TO THE MINUTE INFORMATION”

need to find a place where you can land in the tender, then pay attention that there is no ice moving and finally check there are no polar bears.

“When hiking, we always had to have a guide with a rifle – mainly for polar bears. All the other animals like seals and whales are scared of humans because Inuit eat them, so they tend to avoid you. We also saw musk ox grazing – they’re shy animals. And we saw blue foxes, which are really grey.”

After two weeks in the north, *Akula* tracked back south to Kulusuk to start another chapter in her adventure: hosting a research expedition from the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton. It was the focus of a year-long project funded by the owner to sample the seawater flowing out of three glacial sounds. “Meltwater dilutes the salinity of the seawater, changing how the animals behave and live – especially the plankton,” he explains.

“It was serious research – these were international scientists. I went out on the tender with them many times measuring physical, chemical and biological data at various depths. It was very cold, because you stay out for five to six hours, but fascinating.” The owner turned his



workshop over to the researchers to test and catalogue the samples that they were taking back to the UK for study and e-DNA analysis.

It was September now, and *Akula* made her way round Greenland’s flatter southern tip and up towards Nuuk, the capital. It was fun, but not the reason they had spent years preparing for high latitudes. “It’s a town and a nice fjord, but here you have cruise ships, restaurants and big populations. Some fjords were beautiful, but it’s not such a powerful environment as you find further north.”





In addition to an observation room at the bow, Akula offers guests 360-degree views from the flybridge



From Kulusuk, Greenland (top), population 241, to Manhattan (below) was a study in opposites

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF AKULA; GETTY IMAGES; ADOBE STOCK

He preferred Disko Bay, back inside the Arctic Circle, although it did present some navigational difficulties, being choked with ice. “We had to do some strange navigation. We couldn’t pass with the boat, so we took the tender instead.” Drone navigation proved itself again. “Sometimes you can use it to find a proper anchoring spot and see whether there is really ice in front of you,” the owner says. “We got satellite photos twice a day showing ice positions, which are good, but the drone gives you up-to-the-minute information.”

Light sea ice was beginning to form overnight, marooning the boat in a brittle white expanse: the time was right to quit the high latitudes. The passage to Newfoundland took five to six days, then there was a long hop on to Portland, Maine, to clear into the US. There were further brief calls along the New England coast before sliding down the East River beneath Manhattan’s famous skyline.

The bustle of the Big Apple was a different world for the owner. There was a sense of achievement from having reached the city under his own steam, but his heart was clearly in the Northern Lights, not among the Michelin stars. “For me, the most amazing impression of the trip was the silence,” he says after a moment’s consideration. “When you are walking in this nature, you arrive in a place where there is no noise at all. There are very few birds, sometimes none, no waves, no wind. You sit down on the grass and there is full silence. It’s very difficult for us in this civilised world to imagine: all you can hear is your own heart.” ■

