

BY AIRSHIP TO THE NORTH POLE

By Alan Shrimpton, images courtesy of OceanSky Cruises

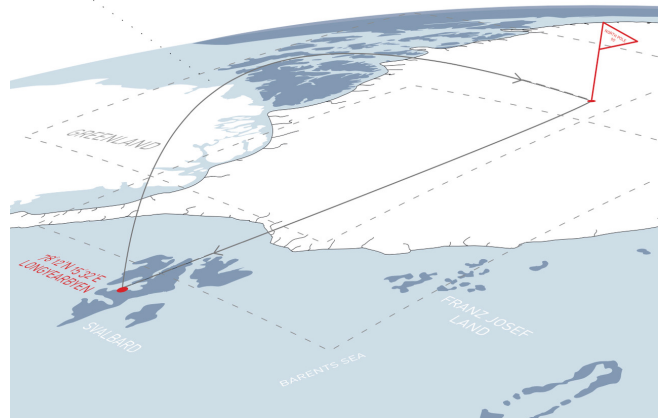
The North Pole has held a fascination for aviators since Salomon Andrée's ill-fated attempt to reach the Pole by balloon in 1897. In fact, the first successful flight over the Pole didn't happen until 1926 when Umberto Nobile, in company with famed Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, overflew the Pole on a 5 day flight from Svalbard to Alaska. Now, a new company, Ocean Sky Cruises, wants to return to the North Pole by airship, but with fare paying passengers this time.

OceanSky was founded in 2014 after many years of research and investigation in the Lighter-Than-Air sector. It started as an initiative financed by the Energy Agency and Traffic Administration of Sweden in the framework of future sustainable transport infrastructure possibilities with new technologies. OceanSky focused on European air cargo operations, where long experience from both management and operations had been accumulated, and OceanSky Cruises was created in 2018 as a specialist tour operator focussing on high-end experiential and luxury travel.

OceanSky's management and founders have substantial backgrounds in the aviation industry - creating, starting and developing several airlines; converting commercial cargo aircraft into compartment freighters, and developing new concepts. The founders have researched the modern 'lighter-than-air' industry since the '90s with long experience drawn from traffic analyses, circular economy and sustainable land development. OceanSky Aviation will be the operating airline of the group and holder of commercial certifications, staff training program approvals, necessary organisation structure and operational licenses.

The first itinerary created by OceanSky Cruises is a journey from Svalbard to the North Pole, in company with an experienced Polar Expedition Leader, and

offering a chance to disembark on the ice before returning to Svalbard.



To make this possible, OceanSky teamed up with UK-based aircraft manufacturer Hybrid Air Vehicles, and their revolutionary hybrid aircraft - the Airlander 10.



The Airlander 10 is unlike any other aircraft. It is the world's largest flying vehicle and it uses innovative technology to combine the best characteristics of fixed-wing airplanes, helicopters and static lift by helium. The combination creates a new breed of hyper-efficient aircraft with abilities to explore the Arctic in a completely new way.

It is also one of the most environmentally friendly forms of aviation with minimal infrastructure requirements, low emission engines (see separate article) and low noise signature.

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And LTA vehicles like Airlander offer another benefit for operators like OceanSky Cruises. The wide, unpressurised cabin allows space and luxury unparalleled in modern aviation. The proposed cabin layout will offer the 16 guests panoramic views, cabins with en suite shower rooms, and accommodation to rival a 5 star luxury hotel.



A crew of 7 (including 4 pilots, a steward, executive chef and flight attendant) will complete the roster for the trip.

OceanSky feels that such an aircraft gives them the possibility to reach previously unreachable destinations with spectacular nature, extraordinary wildlife or expeditions into untouched territories.

But their vision is not just about changing the concepts of luxury travel and delivering unique experiences, it's about helping to shape the future of aviation as well.

The company has a passion for lighter-than-air technology, non-fossil fuels and innovative alternatives in aviation. They are in dialogue with industry, academia, authorities and organisations, and sustainability is at the heart of their operations and strategy.

“The expedition to the North Pole is for the traveller who wants to experience the Arctic in a unique way, and at the same time contribute to the development of sustainable travel,” said Carl-Oscar Lawaczeck, chief executive and founder of OceanSky.

But, of course, the obvious question is ‘how much will it all cost’. Given that it will be a ‘one of a kind’ experience, and probably the first eco-tourism luxury sky cruise when it launches in 2023-24 as well, you know that it’s going to be expensive. If you want to know how expensive then I would encourage you to look at OceanSky’s excellent web-site which, as well as answering this particular question, does have a lot of information about the history of polar aviation, the case for airships and sustainable aviation.

You can find their web-site at:

www.oceanskycruises.com

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