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My Trip to the North Pole

Shunsuke Morimura, MUA Director

On July 15, 2014, I set out on an eleven-day oceanic journey, on an ice-breaking ship named the “50 Years of Victoria.” We started from Murmansk, a Russian arctic zone port, which is located at 68 degrees 58 minutes of north latitude and 33 degrees 05 minutes of east longitude, about 2,000 kilometers to the north of Moscow. Our destination was the North Pole.

From Day 3, the ship started to make ice-breaking sound on its way to the North Pole. The movement was so powerful and comparable to none. I heard later that some passengers joined the cruise, simply to experience the powerful scene.

Throughout the cruise, sumptuous food was offered. Menu changed each day and we could choose meat or fish. Buffet was available and so are Oden and Soba noodle. I overate myself and gained weight. Each day there was a lecture, covering a variety of attractive topics. For example, a woman talked about her adventure to reach the North Pole on ski. Others talked about white bears, whales, and the Franz Joseph islands which our ship passed. At one time we separately got on board zodiac boats and landed on two islands.

Finally we reached the North Pole at 90 degrees of north latitude. We disembarked from the ship and took meal at the point. Then there was a call for volunteers who wanted to soak themselves in the icy Arctic sea. About ten Westerners and two Japanese women, who were in their forties and the youngest among the Japanese passengers, raised their hands. I did not want to feel like a loser. Also, I had confidence about my cardiac function as I had been a marathon runners for years. Thus, I volunteered, wore swimming trunks, and jumped into the sea. Before long, I started to feel convulsion knees down and immediately got out of the water. Strange to say, I did not feel coldness for a while in my naked status. Vodka along with a commendation certificate were presented to the daredevil volunteers. Fellow passengers applauded us with standing ovation. It was a rewarding experience.

White bears in the snowy scenery was a sight to see although we could not spot any at locations close to the North Pole. In addition we could see seals, walruses and humpback whales.

Many of fellow passengers were fond of making overseas trips much more enthusiastically than myself. Indeed I almost felt like categorizing them as the maniac. They've been to different places all around the world. Among the total of 50 passengers, I was the fifth youngest. I was totally overwhelmed by the trip experiences told by senior passengers. For example, there was a passenger who had visited a total of 170 countries. There was also a passenger who plans to visit all of the 193 countries which are UN members. I found that 80% of the fellow passengers had visited the South Pole. For several passengers this was a second visit to the North Pole.

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