



STS REMOTE EXPERIENCE REVIEW · ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE

The promise was premium. The experience was a checklist.

One premium polar expedition, where the destination over-delivered and the operator did not. An anonymised sample review, read through four lenses: the promise line, the seams between teams, the emotional arc, and the commercial thread.

An anonymised sample

This is an example deliverable, not a review of any named company. It is based on a real premium polar voyage the STS founders took as paying guests. The operator, the vessel, the booking agent, the route, the dates and all names have been removed or altered. Figures are indicative.

Prepared by STS Strategy · Kevin van Grondelle and Muriël Labahn
Guest-experience diagnostics for premium remote operators

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What is in this review

A short guide first, then the one-page read, the gap, the full journey with advice, and the plan. The confidential owner-only recommendations are delivered as a separate document.

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HOW TO READ THIS REVIEW

What we judge, and how to read it

This page explains the method. It is the same for every review we run, and it contains no findings. It is here so the pages that follow read clearly.

What we judge

We run an independent guest-experience diagnostic for premium remote operators. We do not judge value for money. We judge coherence: whether the promise the brochure makes matches the experience the guest actually receives, from the first enquiry to the silence after.

The four lenses

The promise line. Does the delivered experience match the words the guest bought.

The seams between teams. Do the expedition team and the hotel team act as one host, or two operations bolted together.

The emotional arc. Where the journey lifts, and where it leaks trust.

The commercial thread. Whether every moment money appears stays congruent with the promise.

The coherence levels

- ★ **Holds up.** The promise and the delivery match.
- **Breaks in places.** It holds sometimes and fails at key moments.
- **Broken.** The gap is wide and repeated.

Priority

- 🔴 High, act now.
- 🟡 Medium, fix this season.
- 🟢 Strength to protect.

The emotional arc

The arc plots the guest's sentiment across the whole journey against a neutral line. Each journey item carries a flag: a lift, a drop, or neutral. On the arc, green marks highs the destination supplied, anthracite marks highs the operator created, terracotta marks lows the operator owned, and a neutral marker is neither.

The journey

The trip is read in five stages: before the trip, arrival and embarkation, the ship and the field, the brand line at its best, and after. Every item below carries its evidence, a short note, and specific advice, so an operator can act on it directly. The confidential owner-only recommendations are delivered as a separate document.

01 · THE ONE-PAGE READ

Executive summary

Premium was sold. A checklist was delivered.

The operator markets a worry-free, expert-led, all-suite premium expedition. The guests received a competently run but impersonal group tour, a sequence of boxes ticked rather than an experience hosted. They felt the gap from the first handoff to the silence after.

The destination over-delivered. In ten days the guests saw three polar bears, four species of whale, belugas, dozens of walrus, bearded and ringed seals, an Arctic fox and almost the full range of Arctic birds. The operator under-delivered on the experience it wrapped around that nature. When the raw place is the best thing about a premium trip, the operator is the variable to look at.

The gap is not capability or budget. One Deck-5 barbecue, styled to gala standard, and one whale encounter proved the ceiling is high. The gap is consistency, choreography and ownership. The expedition team and the hotel team never became one host, and no single person visibly looked after the guest.

Trust leaked early. Around day five, after a mishandled steak and a maitre d' who lectured the guests twice on "how a cow works", they had recalibrated from premium to fine. The rest of the trip lived under that ceiling, lifted only by moments the destination supplied.

Read through the four lenses, the promise line and the commercial thread are broken. The seams between teams and the emotional arc break in places. None of the fixes that matter most are expensive.

Coherence read

We do not judge value for money. We judge whether the promise and the delivery hold together.

● Holds up ● Breaks in places ● Broken

01 The promise line

Worry-free, expert-led, all-suite comfort vs what arrived



Broken

02 The seams between teams

Do the expedition team and the hotel team act as one host



Breaks in places

03 The emotional arc

Where the journey lifts and where it leaks trust



Breaks in places

04 The commercial thread

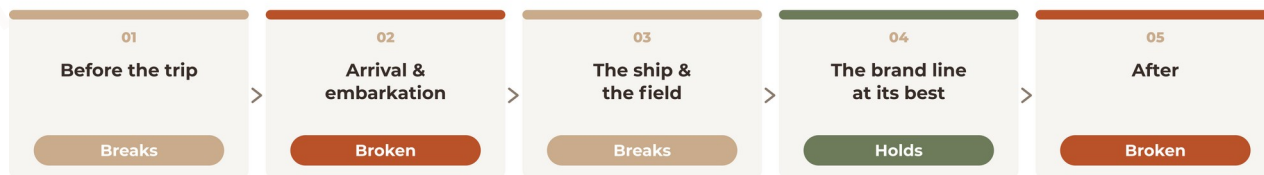
Every moment money appears, congruent with the promise



Broken

Coherence by journey stage

Where the promise held, and where it broke, stage by stage.



Nature carried the highs. The operator owned the lows.

02 · THE GAP IN ONE LOOK

Promise, nature, and what was delivered

Three views of the same gap. What the brochure promised against what the guest received, what the destination delivered against what the operator built around it, and whether the paid-for inclusions actually landed.

Promise vs delivered

The gap the guest actually felt, touchpoint by touchpoint.

THE BROCHURE PROMISED

Worry-free, all taken care of



WHAT THE GUEST RECEIVED

Clumsy handoffs, rushed shore timings, loose timekeeping

Led by an experienced expedition team



"We will see", flat leader briefings, repetitive recaps

Elegant all-suite comfort



3 to 4-star suite, dinners served in under an hour

The ultimate polar experience, 12 days



About nine real days, a half-day at the ice edge

A cherished keepsake video



A home-movie film, a branded mug, then silence

Nature over-delivered. The operator under-delivered.

The destination made the trip. The experience wrapped around it did not.

WHAT THE DESTINATION DELIVERED

Three polar bears



WHAT THE OPERATOR DELIVERED AROUND IT

Kept 300m off, distant dots, managed as risk not hope

Humpback, minke and fin whales, belugas



One great whale call, the rest left to chance

Dozens of walrus, bearded and ringed seals



Short, tightly policed time ashore

Seabird cliffs and an Arctic fox



A half-day at the ice edge, then kept a km off

Fjords, glaciers and midnight light



Dinners under an hour, a mug at the end

Promised inclusions vs delivered

On paper every inclusion was there. In practice, most arrived only partly.

INCLUSION	STATUS	NOTE
– Pre-expedition hotel night	Partial	Delivered, but counted inside the twelve days
✓ All meals, snacks, tea and coffee	Delivered	Delivered
✓ Welcome and farewell cocktails	Delivered	Both held as promised
✓ All Zodiac excursions and landings	Delivered	Delivered, roughly twice daily
– Lecture programme by the expert team	Partial	Repetitive, and several guides hard to follow
– Rubber boots for landings	Partial	Provided, but a chaotic fitting
– Airport, hotel and ship transfers	Partial	The coach handoff felt like freight
– Luggage transfer to the ship	Partial	Left on a pile, never checked off
– Pre-departure information pack	Partial	Compliance-heavy, and only after booking
✓ Branded parka to keep	Delivered	Delivered, but handed out from boxes
– Digital voyage log, photos and video	Partial	Home-movie quality, plus a promo film

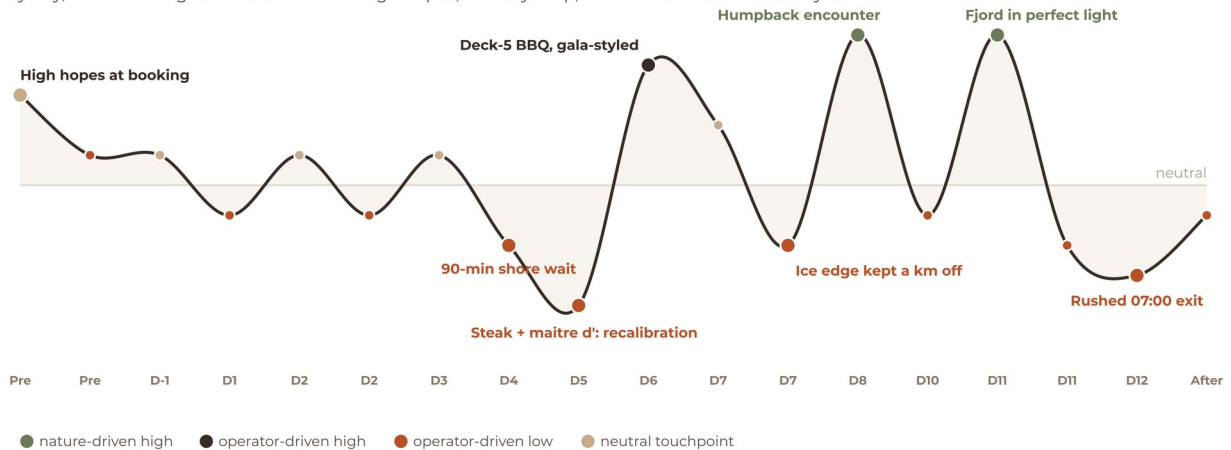
03 · THE GUEST JOURNEY

The journey, item by item

The arc below is the shape of the trip. Everything after it is the evidence underneath, in the order the guest met it, grouped into the five stages. Each item carries its evidence, a note, and the advice we would give.

The emotional arc

Day by day, from booking to the silence after. High hopes, an early drop, then a flat middle carried by the destination.



Time above and below neutral

The arc crosses the neutral line repeatedly. This is how the journey split by time.

55% above neutral

45% below neutral

The highs were tall but brief and mostly the destination's. The lows were shallower, more frequent, and the operator's to own.

BEFORE THE TRIP

▼ BEFORE YOU SAIL



Booking felt like a transaction, and the scarcity was manufactured.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Promise, Commercial

OWNER

Commercial and sales channels

EVIDENCE

Booking ran on manual email over several days, with options that expired within hours and a hand-typed bank transfer rather than a payment link. It was sold as a last-minute, last-cabin deal at roughly 40 percent off. Only aboard did the guests learn the ship had sailed with about 95 of 108 berths filled, and that others had booked later at even deeper discounts. The scarcity was a sales device.

Paid add-ons were opaque too. A kayaking pass, priced in the high hundreds of dollars, could only be booked up front, and its terms were never made clear. The guests did not realise it covered every outing rather than a single session, so they could not make a real choice. The operator sells through the travel trade, so the booking belongs to the agent, but it still wears the operator's brand.

NOTE Clearance-sale mechanics on a premium product. The discount, not the promise, closed the sale.

ADVICE Enforce booking and payment standards across every sales channel: a real payment link, honest availability, no fake-scarcity language, clear add-on terms. Better still, consider pricing the whole structure 15 to 20 percent lower so no discounting is needed at all, which widens the audience without cutting your average price.

▼ BEFORE YOU SAIL



The information that would have sold the experience arrived after booking, not before.

PRIORITY

Medium priority

LENSES

Promise, Arc

OWNER

Marketing

EVIDENCE

The pre-departure pack was thick with forms, medical declarations, biosecurity rules and insurance minimums, plus a dense destination book, but it carried almost nothing on what a day looks like, the excursion rhythm or the dining. The one confidence-builder was a thorough medical form. Crucially, none of the substance was available before booking. The guest was carried over the line by the discount, not by understanding what they were buying.

NOTE Compliance, not anticipation, and it came too late to shape the decision.

ADVICE Move the day-in-the-life, the excursion cadence and the dining story to the pre-booking stage, where they build conviction and reduce reliance on discounting. Keep the forms for after the booking.

▼ BEFORE YOU SAIL



Sold as twelve days, delivered about nine.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Promise, Commercial, Arc

OWNER

Marketing and Operations

EVIDENCE

The trip was marketed as a twelve-day expedition. Day 1 was an arrival hotel night with nothing else arranged. Embarkation was late on Day 2, around 16:00. The final morning forced a 06:00 breakfast, a 07:00 disembarkation and a mandatory town bus tour. By an honest count, the trip delivered about nine full experience-days.

NOTE *Day-count inflation quietly erodes trust in every other claim.*

ADVICE Count only the days you actually deliver, or redesign the first and last days so they earn their place in the number.

ARRIVAL AND EMBARKATION

▼ DAY 1



The first day was empty, and the welcome desk was a stranger.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise, Arc

OWNER

Ground Operations / Guest Experience

EVIDENCE

Day 1, the first of the twelve, was a hotel night in the gateway town with nothing else arranged. It was simply when most guests arrived. The pre-cruise welcome desk was a plastic tray of luggage tags in a hotel conference room, one identical letter for everyone, names ticked off a paper list. The person running it was warm and genuinely friendly, but she was not part of the ship's team and was never seen again.

NOTE *A friendly face with no continuity is a missed relationship, not a welcome.*

ADVICE Make Day 1 a real first day, a short orientation, a drink, a briefing, and staff the welcome desk with someone the guest will meet again aboard, so the relationship starts before the ship does.

▼ DAY 2



The coach to the port felt like freight.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise, Arc

OWNER

Ground Operations

EVIDENCE

On embarkation morning a coach waited outside the hotel, but no one came into the lobby to gather guests, there was no announcement, and no names were used. Guests described being "loaded like cattle" onto transport. It was never acknowledged.

NOTE *The first live, human handoff, and it felt like freight.*

ADVICE Put a named host in the lobby with the guest list. Greet by name, walk people out. It costs nothing and sets the tone for everything after.

▼ DAY 2



Luggage left on a pile, on trust.

PRIORITY

Medium priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise

OWNER

Ground Operations

EVIDENCE

Guests had to place their bags outside the hotel by 09:00 on embarkation morning so they could be taken to the ship. No one checked the luggage off, tagged it against a manifest, or acknowledged it. Bags were left on a pile and guests went to breakfast hoping for the best.

NOTE *A premium operator does not ask guests to trust a pile.*

ADVICE Scan luggage against the cabin manifest at pickup and confirm it to the guest. Thirty seconds removes a genuine anxiety.

▼ DAY 2



The welcome aboard was choreographed backwards.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Promise, Seams, Arc

OWNER

Hotel and Expedition

EVIDENCE

Sparkling wine and canapes were offered at the gangway while guests still had both hands full of luggage, so a queue formed. Then came a welcome meeting and a safety briefing, guests were not yet in lifejackets, after which everyone was sent to their cabins to fetch lifejackets and wait, roughly ten minutes, for an announcement to come out to the muster stations. The stop-start sequence felt amateurish.

NOTE *Safety is non-negotiable. The choreography around it is where the polish shows, and it was missing.*

ADVICE Sequence the arrival around the guest: take the luggage first, then offer the glass. Run the drill as one smooth flow instead of fetch-and-wait.

▼ DAY 2



The parka and boots were handed out from boxes, in the wrong order, in the heat.

PRIORITY

Medium priority

LENSES

Promise, Seams

OWNER

Hotel and Expedition

EVIDENCE

After dinner on embarkation day, in a lounge heated to at least 22 degrees, the expedition parkas were distributed from cardboard boxes stacked around the room. Guests grabbed a size, tried on a warm parka, and then, still wearing it, were fitted for heavy insulated boots. Only after both did they receive the parka patches, handed over separately. The whole thing felt like a chaotic kit issue, not a gift, and the obvious order, boots first and parka last, would have spared everyone sweating through it.

NOTE *A keepsake handed out of a cardboard box, in the heat, stops being a keepsake.*

ADVICE Fit boots first, parka last, patches already attached. Better still, size both from the medical and kit form so the parka is waiting in the suite as a proper welcome.

THE SHIP AND THE FIELD

● THROUGHOUT THE VOYAGE



An all-suite cabin that was a good hotel room, not an expedition suite.

PRIORITY

Medium priority

LENSES

Promise, Seams

OWNER

Hotel and Ship
Operations

EVIDENCE

The suite was comfortable and genuinely well stored, but generic: a shower curtain rather than a door, cool-white light, a three to four-star finish, no welcome touch. Nothing was designed for an expedition guest. There was no boot rack and no boot dryer, so wet muck boots, which stay damp even in good weather, sat in the cabin. There was no proper mudroom either, so guests washed boots at a single marina station, carried them up to their suites, and kept lifejackets with them even on hikes. The one memorable in-cabin gesture in ten days was a polar-plunge certificate left on the bed.

NOTE *The product does not express the expedition it is selling.*

ADVICE Fit the ship to the twice-daily excursion cycle: a real mudroom, and a boot rack and boot dryer in or near each cabin, because boots stay wet for days. Give housekeeping at least one or two signature in-suite moments to own.

▼ THROUGHOUT THE VOYAGE



Wildlife uncertainty was managed as risk, not shared hope.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Promise, Arc

OWNER

Expedition Leader

EVIDENCE

The expedition leader led with "we will see what we will see", set almost no expectations, and only three or four proactive sighting calls came all voyage. Polar bears may by regulation be approached no closer than 300 metres, a rule never framed in advance, so three genuine bears landed as distant dots even through binoculars. The exception was the leader's own day-by-day storm charts, the one time his knowledge really showed and the room came alive.

NOTE *The emotional engine of an expedition is managed hope, and it was switched off.*

ADVICE Frame the constraints and the odds out loud each evening, then celebrate what you find. Turn the 300-metre rule into a shared standard, not a private letdown, and bring the energy of the storm-chart briefing to everything else.

▼ **THROUGHOUT THE VOYAGE**



Strong field instincts, undercut by timings you could not trust.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise, Arc

OWNER

Expedition Team

EVIDENCE

The guiding and the scouting were genuinely good, including switching a landing to a Zodiac cruise the moment a sleeping bear was spotted. But the guest-facing timings could not be relied on: a call would say fifteen minutes and then come in five, or ten, or twenty. Shore windows ran a tight 45 to 75 minutes and were tightly policed, closer to a school trip than a premium expedition. At one congested site only about fifty of the roughly ninety-five guests could land at once, and the second group waited around ninety minutes with no notice given.

NOTE *Competence the guest cannot plan around still feels like chaos.*

ADVICE Give honest, held timings and real wait estimates up front. If a group must wait ninety minutes, say so, and offer something in the meantime. Speak to guests as capable adults, not a class to be marshalled.

▼ **DAY 7**



The signature ice-edge day was a half-day, and unexplained.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Promise, Arc

OWNER

Expedition Leader /
Marketing

EVIDENCE

The day billed as the ice edge was, in practice, a morning. After the polar plunge at lunch the ship kept moving but held about a kilometre off the ice edge for the rest of the day, a distance from which guests could see essentially nothing. No explanation was offered.

NOTE *The marquee day, half-delivered, on the day expectations were highest.*

ADVICE Protect the headline moments. If ice or weather forces a change, narrate it. A clear reason turns a letdown into an adventure.

▼ **THROUGHOUT THE VOYAGE**



Dinner was the weakest nightly touchpoint against a gourmet promise.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Promise, Arc

OWNER

Food and Beverage

EVIDENCE

Breakfast and lunch were buffets, and lunch was genuinely strong thanks to a rotating daily special station. Dinner, in the single main restaurant, was four or more courses but consistently rushed, often under an hour from sitting down to leaving, and portions swung widely between the set choices. One evening a house wine ran out partway through service and guests were made to switch wines mid-meal.

NOTE *The most frequent premium touchpoint, every evening, was the weakest.*

ADVICE Slow the evening down and hold portions consistent. Start service only with wines you know will last the night, so no guest ever changes wine mid-dinner.

▼ **DAY 5**



Service recovery failed, then lectured.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise, Arc

OWNER

Food and Beverage

EVIDENCE

A steak arrived grey inside and off in taste, and was sent back. Instead of simply replacing it, the maitre d' came to the table to explain "how a cow works" and that the chef judged the meat fine. A replacement eventually came, and then the same maitre d' returned later that evening to repeat the explanation, unprompted. This was the single lowest moment of the trip and the point of recalibration, around Day 5.

NOTE *A five-minute fix became the defining negative of the trip.*

ADVICE Train one reflex: apologise, replace within ninety seconds, never argue the product. Empower the floor to fix it without a manager's lecture.

▼ **THROUGHOUT THE VOYAGE**



No beverage craft, and service that followed the loudest table.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise,
Commercial

OWNER

Food and Beverage

EVIDENCE

Wine was decent but never paired or explained. Cocktails were on the included menu but there was no real mixology, and coffee came from a machine. The water was heavily chlorinated. Most tellingly, attention tracked the loudest, most demanding table night after night, so the calmest, highest-value guests received the least.

NOTE *When service follows volume, your best guests feel invisible.*

ADVICE Set one service standard for every table and monitor it. Add small craft signals, a nightly pairing line, a proper coffee, that cost little and read as care.

▼ **THROUGHOUT THE VOYAGE**



Two operations, one brand, and no one looked after the guest.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Seams, Promise

OWNER

Guest Experience and
Expedition Leader

EVIDENCE

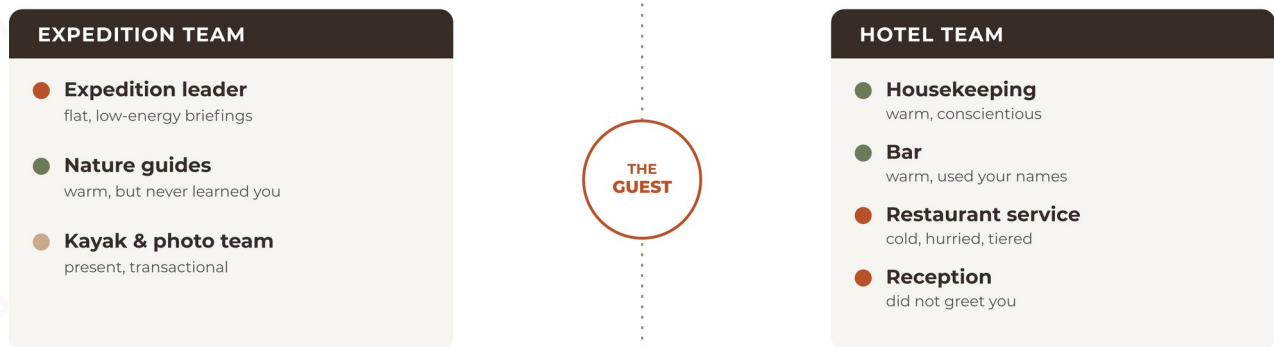
Guides and hotel read as two separate outfits. Guides ate every meal among guests but rarely learned who anyone was. Warmth varied sharply by department: guides and housekeeping warm, the bar warm and personal, restaurant service cold, and reception cold enough that staff did not greet guests in passing. Across roughly ten days, one bar-team member consistently used the guests' names, and no one else did.

NOTE *No relationship layer formed, so the trip felt administered, not hosted. This is the structural root beneath most of the other findings.*

ADVICE Add a guest-experience manager, and split the manifest into cohorts, guests 1 to 4, 5 to 8, and so on, each assigned to a named crew owner who learns those names and checks in daily. Make someone accountable for how each cohort's trip feels, not just for the logistics.

Two operations, one brand

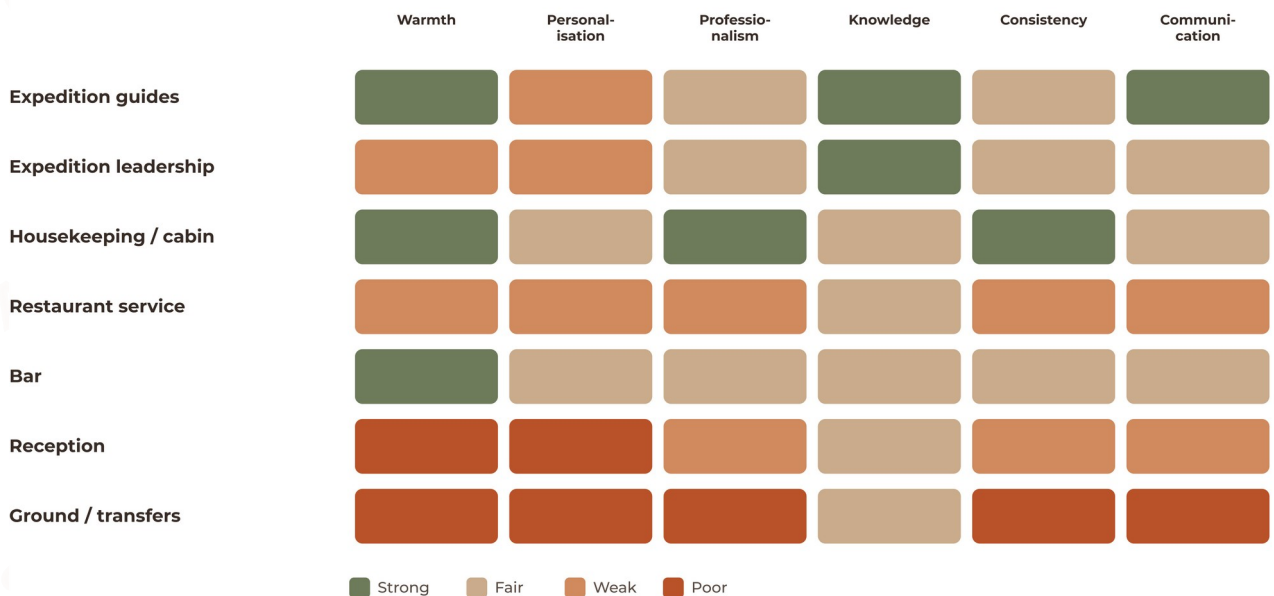
Guides and hotel ran as separate outfits. No single team looked after the guest.



No relationship layer forms. The guest falls in the seam between the two teams.

Department performance

How each team performed across six dimensions of a premium guest experience.



THE BRAND LINE AT ITS BEST

▲ DAYS 6 AND 8



When the operator chose to, it delivered five stars.

PRIORITY

Strength to protect

LENSES

Promise, Arc, Seams

OWNER

Hospitality and
Expedition leadership

EVIDENCE

Two moments proved the ceiling is high. The Deck-5 barbecue, styled to gala standard, was set with round tables, white linen, blankets over the chairs and staff actively greeting guests, a genuine five-star night. And the whale encounter landed: the Captain announced it over the intercom, then circled a mother and calf close in while guests watched from the decks. Two honest caveats belong on the record: the ship appeared to sit closer to the animals than some operators would, and the on-deck commentary overstated how rare the behaviour actually was.

NOTE *The gap is consistency and design, not capability, talent or budget.*

ADVICE Reverse-engineer these two nights into repeatable standards, and settle and publish your own wildlife-approach rules, enforced every trip, so the good moments never come at the animals' or the brand's expense.

AFTER

▼ DAY 11



The final commercial moment felt like settling a bill.

PRIORITY

High priority

LENSES

Commercial, Arc,
Promise

OWNER

Commercial / Hotel

EVIDENCE

On the evening before the last day, two envelopes appeared on the bed, oddly one each for a couple travelling together, with tipping guidance of about 22 US dollars per guest per night for the crew and 9 for the guides, and a card form to pay at reception or drop cash into a box. No crew member said a word of thanks alongside it; as the guests put it, "here is the bag, put in the money".

NOTE *The last money moment of a premium relationship, handled like a hotel checkout.*

ADVICE Reframe the tip as gratitude: one envelope per party, a handwritten crew thank-you, and a recap of a shared moment from the trip alongside it.

▼ **DAY 12**



The send-off and the take-home were an afterthought.

PRIORITY

Medium priority

LENSES

Promise, Commercial, Arc

OWNER

Marketing / Guest Experience

EVIDENCE

Disembarkation was a hard 07:00 for everyone, off the ship by 07:15 and onto a mandatory town tour, regardless of flight time, and some guests did not fly until 17:00. There was no farewell. The take-home was a twenty-six-minute home-movie-quality film shown to the whole lounge, plus a USB stick carrying a link to a photo folder and the operator's own promotional film. The photo-competition surprise reward turned out to be a branded mug. After the trip there was no survey, no thank-you and no contact of any kind.

NOTE *The prime word-of-mouth window is weak and self-serving, and the relationship ends at the gangway.*

ADVICE Stage departures around flights, not the operator's turnaround. Rebuild the keepsake into something worth sharing, and open a real post-trip relationship with a genuine thank-you and a considered follow-up.

04 · THE PLAN

The 90-day plan

The granular advice sits on every journey item. This is the owner's roll-up: the same moves, sequenced so trust is repaired first, consistency second, and structure last. The order matters more than the speed.

Window and focus	What ships
Days 0 to 30 Communication and tone Promise, Arc	A named host in the hotel lobby and at the gangway. Pre-trip substance moved to before booking. Expedition-leader reset with nightly expectation-setting and honest odds. Arrival and safety choreography fixed, boots before parka. Held, honest landing timings. Tip envelope reframed as thanks.
Days 31 to 60 Service consistency Seams, Commercial	One table-service standard, monitored, with the tiered attention rooted out. Dinner slowed and portions held; only in-stock wines opened. A payment link and honest availability enforced across sales channels. A genuine 72-hour post-trip thank-you. The mug retired.
Days 61 to 90 Structure and identity all four lenses	One named owner of the guest relationship across both teams. The ship fitted to the excursion cycle, a real mudroom. The take-home media rebuilt. The twelve-day framing and the first and last mornings redesigned. Wildlife-approach rules settled and trained.

05 · IN CLOSING

The gap is coherence, and it is fixable in a season

The operator has the raw material of an exceptional product: a destination that over-delivers, a deep expedition team, and clear proof it can reach five stars when it chooses. The problem is coherence. Premium is promised and a checklist is delivered, and because the expedition and hotel teams never became one host, no one looked after the guest.

The most valuable fixes are the cheapest: communication, tone, sequence and consistency. This is a design and ownership problem, not a budget problem, and it is fixable inside a single season.

If this is your operation

This is an illustrative sample of the STS Remote Experience Review. If you run a premium expedition, lodge or remote-experience operation and want to know where your own promise and delivery diverge, that is the work we do. When you are ready, start a conversation.

Kevin van Grondelle and Muriël Labahn

STS Strategy kevin@stsstrategy.com

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