



## **SVALBARD (SPITSBERGEN) CRUISE: POLAR BEARS AND SEABIRDS**

### **TOUR-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**



*Polar Bear, the King of the Arctic, is the most anticipated of the Arctic's charismatic megafauna.*

## TOUR OUTLINE

This Arctic wildlife and birding cruise around the Svalbard Archipelago (part of Norway) offers perhaps the best chance of seeing some of the Arctic's most iconic wildlife and birds. The cruise leaves from Longyearbyen (Svalbard's largest town and one of the most northerly settlements in the world) and returns eight days later. We often suggest a full extra day's birding (before or after the cruise) around Longyearbyen where a few particular species can be seen at closer range, such as **Rock Ptarmigan** and **Arctic Fox**. Most cruises head along the coastline of the largest island of the archipelago, Spitsbergen and when possible, a day will be spent in the pack ice.

The highlight and biggest target of any Arctic cruise is **Polar Bear** and on this trip we stand an excellent chance of seeing 'the King of the Arctic' alongside other charismatic wildlife such as **Beluga, Walrus, Bearded Seal, Arctic Fox, Reindeer** and an assortment of other seal and cetacean species, including the possibility of **Blue Whale**. Of course, it is not only the amazing mammals which attract tourists to the Arctic. On this cruise we also stand a good chance of seeing a true high-Arctic species, **Ivory Gull** (often hanging about **Polar Bear** kills). Other fantastic bird species including **King Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Rock Ptarmigan, Red Phalarope, Purple Sandpiper, Long-tailed Jaeger**, an assortment of alcid species and many others are likely. Wildlife aside, this cruise offers fantastic scenery as we head through beautiful fjords and view impressive glaciers. We invite you to join us as we take in the best that the Arctic has to offer!

## DAILY ACTIVITIES, PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS, AND TOUR PACE

On most days during the cruise, we will undertake two landings and have two zodiac cruises (zodiac boats are small inflatable boats which take around 10-12 passengers). During our day (or two) in the pack ice we will be entirely ship-based, when we spend our time looking for **Polar Bear** and **Ivory Gull**. The landings can occasionally be a bit rough (depending on sea and ice conditions) and may sometimes involve walking over slippery rocks or ice to and from the zodiac boat. If the landing looks too rough, there is always the option to stay onboard the ship, or to just join for the zodiac cruise (often through beautiful fjords) and return to the ship after the zodiac cruise.

During the landings we normally spend a couple hours wandering around the area, enjoying the wildlife and plants of the Arctic. These short walks, normally up to half a mile (one kilometer), are normally at a very gentle pace, allowing you to enjoy the wildlife and scenery at leisure. It is very important to remember that during these landings **Polar Bears** are a possibility and are a danger. However, there will always be armed guides around during these landings and the areas are always thoroughly scouted beforehand to ensure we have no encounters with **Polar Bears**. As such we must always adhere to the instructions of the guides and not wander beyond the demarcated area.

A rough breakdown of a typical cruise day is as follows: 07h30-08h30: breakfast, 09h00-11h30: landing/zodiac cruise, 12h30-13h30: lunch, 14h30-18h00: landing/zodiac cruise, 18h30: daily recap, 19h00: dinner. As mentioned above, you do not have to join the zodiac cruises or landings, should you prefer to stay on the ship.

Although the sea conditions are generally quite flat, it may, on occasion, get a little choppy out at sea and we recommend bringing sea sickness medication (consulting your doctor, beforehand), if you are prone to sea-sickness.

## SAFETY

This cruise is considered very safe and safety should not be a concern when signing up. **Polar Bear** encounters are possible during our landings, however all precautions are taken to ensure this does not ever happen. If a **Polar Bear** is seen in the area (we're hoping this happens for us) then we will not land at that site but may perhaps get closer on zodiac boats. Whenever we make a landing there will always be armed guides around who are trained in what to do should a **Polar Bear** show up!

Getting in and out of boats can, at times, be tricky. Sometimes we step off the zodiac boats onto slippery rocks or ice. There will always be a helping hand around to aid you as you climb into and out of the zodiac boats. Walking sticks may aid you on some of the trickier landings/walks. Should you prefer to skip any landings and rather stay on the ship, this is always possible.

## WEATHER/CLIMATE

Being an Arctic cruise, you should expect very cold weather conditions. However, our cruises take place in mid-summer and thus temperatures are generally not too extreme. Average temperatures in June and July (when our cruises depart) are around 36–48 °F (2–9 °C) but it will often drop below freezing. Precipitation, in the form of rain, sleet or snow is always possible and thus it is important to bring along an entirely waterproof 'outer shell' (trousers and a jacket). Any form of precipitation, or sea spray, together with a strong, biting wind can make it feel significantly colder and thus it is vital to dress adequately, especially on the zodiac cruises/landings. On some days the weather can be lovely and mild and, on these days, it is important to ensure you bring sunscreen along. The climate inside the ship is well maintained and always comfortable and so should things ever get too cold or wet out on deck, you can return to the warmth and comfort of indoors and watch wildlife from lounges etc.

## ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation onboard the cruise ship is of a high standard and is very comfortable. Depending on your preference (and budget) it is possible to book a berth in a 4-sleeper cabin, 3-sleeper cabin, 2-sleeper cabin or to have a cabin to yourself. The entire range of accommodation options has plenty of cupboard and drawer space to unpack your bag for the week and there are multiple charging points in all the cabins.

We will be visiting the Arctic during the mid-summer which means 24 hours of daylight, despite this, sleeping is not normally an issue as all cabins have blackout curtains/blinds.

## DOMESTIC FLIGHTS AND ACCOMMODATION IN LONGYEARBYEN

Once you have finalized your booking with us, we would recommend booking your domestic flight (from Oslo or Tromsø) as soon as possible, as flights get booked up very early during the busy summer season. This also applies to accommodation in Longyearbyen which also books up very early.

The cruise generally leaves late in the afternoon/evening and so it is possible to fly in on the same day as your cruise departure however we would strongly advise to arrive at least one day before

your cruise departure. This is because there seem to be routine luggage issues from flights from Oslo, with luggage sometimes only arriving the day after your flight. An extra night or two in Longyearbyen is not a bad idea, with there being plenty of wildlife and birds to see and other activities which will easily keep you entertained. On one of these days, you could join us on a guided tour around the area, targeting a few species which are not always seen as close-by on the cruise (**Rock Ptarmigan, Arctic Fox**, etc)

Upon arrival at Longyearbyen airport, you can easily take the bus which stops at all the accommodation establishments and simply pay for this by credit card once you get onboard. Be sure to let the bus driver know which accommodation you are staying at though.

## CURRENCY AND MONEY

For your time around Longyearbyen (before or after the cruises) it is possible to use Norwegian Krone (NOK), however everybody accepts and prefers to use credit cards. If you will only be on Svalbard (and not on the Norwegian mainland) it is actually suggested to not bother organizing cash, as all establishments (from taxi drivers, to vendors to restaurants) accept credit card, with some establishments not accepting cash at all! Longyearbyen is essentially a cashless society, with no ATMs existing on the archipelago.

While onboard the cruise ship, any extra expenses will be added to your bill which is to be settled at the end of the cruise, either by credit card, or cash (US dollars or euros). Credit card is again the preferred method of payment here. In fact, the only thing you would exclusively need cash for would be for gratuities.

## ELECTRICITY

In Norway (including Svalbard) the power plugs and sockets are of Type F. The standard voltage is 230 volts (V), and the standard frequency is 50 hertz (Hz). Further details and photos of this plug can be found [here](#).

Adaptors and voltage converters are likely to be needed for some visitors from overseas (e.g. if you are from the United States) — please be cautious with certain appliances that utilize different frequencies. You can use your electric appliances in Norway, if the standard voltage in your country is in between 220–240 V (such as the UK, Europe, Australia, and most of Asia and Africa). If the standard voltage in your country is in the range of 100–127 V (as is in the USA, Canada, and most South American countries), you will need a voltage converter in Norway, but please visit [this website](#) for specific details.

## COMMUNICATION

In Longyearbyen, it is possible to buy a local SIM card which can be used around town, while on the ship cellphone/mobile connection is very limited and should not be relied upon. It is possible to buy data for Wi-Fi onboard the ship however the data packages are generally very expensive and we would suggest simply going offline for the week. For those who need to stay connected you can buy these data packages once onboard. Some ships offer small complimentary data packages.

## MEALS

The food onboard is of an excellent quality, with a wide array of options to suite everyone's requirements or taste. Breakfasts and lunches are generally a buffet with many options available, with dinners generally being a la carte, with meat, seafood and vegetarian options all available. Water and juice are provided free of charge with meals however any soft drinks or alcoholic beverages will be for your own account. The tap water onboard the ship is safe to drink and so we would recommend bringing along a water bottle which can be refilled, to take with you on landings and zodiac cruises.

## WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING AND OTHER ITEMS

If you plan to join any of the landings or zodiac cruises (highly recommended) it is mandatory to bring along a waterproof 'outer shell' which essentially means you must bring along waterproof trousers and a waterproof top (a jacket/poncho). With temperatures potentially getting below freezing (with the added effect of wind chill), it is important to bring along adequate clothing, with many clothing layers being the name of the game in the Arctic.

For those people who are a little unsteady on their feet, a walking/hiking pole will be a good idea.

Before our first landing, we will all be provided with strong, warm and waterproof Muck boots which are to be worn for all zodiac cruises and landings. The boots are supplied in a variety of sizes onboard and you are sure to be able to find a size that fits you well. For normal life onboard the ship, a comfortable pair of sneakers/trainers will be just fine. Sandals or slaps are not recommended.

Although most wildlife and birds are very approachable and are often unphased by the presence of humans, which means you can get close to most wildlife, a telescope is recommended. Some animals, such as **Polar Bears**, are not allowed to be approached by large ships (beyond a certain buffer zone) and so a telescope will help here. Similarly, some of the seals in the pack ice are often only seen at distance and so a telescope will help aid identification. Our guide will ensure a telescope is taken along, for those who do not have a telescope or do not want to bring one along.