



**ARCTIC MAMMAL AND BIRDING CRUISE: SVALBARD  
(SPITSBERGEN) - POLAR BEARS AND SEABIRDS**

**13 - 22 JULY 2024**



*Polar Bear, the 'King of the Arctic' occurs throughout the Svalbard Archipelago however is most readily encountered in the pack ice in the north.*

This Arctic birding and mammal cruise around Svalbard allows you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be acquainted with special birds and mammals of the High Arctic. The list of likely species (both birds and mammals) is a rather short one, however it is quality over quantity here, as these specials are mostly only possible in the High Arctic. Another highly exciting element of Arctic birding is that you get to enjoy several widespread species in their fine breeding colors – a breeding plumaged **Red Phalarope** takes some beating! We invite you to join us on this exciting cruise as we explore the Svalbard Archipelago and enjoy finding some truly iconic Arctic wildlife.

You arrive in the world's northernmost town, historic Longyearbyen (previously known as "Long Year City"), deep within the Arctic Circle, and we have time to explore this small city of about 2,000 human inhabitants. We usually spend some time birding around Longyearbyen, where several species are more easily observed (than on the cruise) and often make for good photographic subjects. We then depart on our cruise for the northern parts of the beautiful, remote Svalbard Archipelago (previously known as Spitsbergen).

While one of our main targets on the cruise will be **Polar Bear** (and other High Arctic mammals), our guide is first and foremost a birding guide, so we will certainly be constantly watching for all the special birds. Some of our bird targets include **Ivory Gull** in the pack ice in the far north, with **Rock Ptarmigan** often found on our landings, and we will also try for all the sea ducks and the many other desirables. The scenery in the 'land of the midnight sun' is truly spectacular, with the many glaciers, fjords, jagged peaks, and myriads of small islands constantly taking your breath away!



*Rock Ptarmigan, here a male in its winter plumage, can be confiding around Longyearbyen.*

While on this ten-day Arctic cruise we will aim to circumnavigate the Svalbard Archipelago in a clockwise direction, although the final itinerary is based on sea ice and weather conditions. We will generally partake in a couple landings and/or zodiac cruises (in small inflatable boats) a day which ensures we can get closer to the wildlife and birds, and often results in many fantastic photographic opportunities.

### Itinerary (10 days/9 nights)

#### Day 1. Birding Longyearbyen, then cruise ship departs

We suggest arriving in Longyearbyen, the capital of Svalbard, Norway, the world's northernmost city, the day before the cruise departs, in case of any flight delays. Before the early evening departure (or the previous evening, if you arrive the day before our ship departs) we will explore this old mining town in search of **Brant** and **Barnacle Geese**, **King** and **Common Eiders**, **Red** and **Red-necked Phalaropes**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Parasitic Jaeger**, **Rock Ptarmigan**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Snow Bunting**, and **Arctic Fox** which are often seen scavenging at the base of seabird cliffs. Although we should see most of the above on the actual Svalbard cruise, we often get better and more prolonged views, with improved photographic opportunities, on our Longyearbyen day tours. Please see the 'Costs' section to find out about additional costs for a Longyearbyen day tour prior to the cruise.



*Red Phalaropes, such as this gorgeous female, are regular around Longyearbyen.*



Upon setting sail out of Isfjorden, the second-longest fjord in the Svalbard Archipelago, we may see our first **Northern Fulmar**, **Red-throated Loon**, and **Common Minke Whale**, or perhaps we will get very lucky with an early sighting of the angelic **Beluga Whale**! Our voyage will be on board a 300–350-foot polar vessel which accommodates up to 110 passengers.

## Day 2. Visiting Krossfjorden

Along the northern coast of west Svalbard we will cruise alongside beautiful glaciers. In this area of Svalbard, **Polar Bear** is sometimes seen, in addition to **Bearded** and **Harbour Seals**. The shoreline cliffs at 14 Julibukta are home to colonies of seabirds, including **Thick-billed Murre** (Brünnich's Guillemot), **Atlantic Puffin**, and **Black Guillemot**. High up above, masses of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** breed, with **Arctic Foxes** often prowling the lower slopes for fallen eggs and chicks. Lush vegetation flourishes in areas protected from the weather and on our landing, we may find some of the Arctic's flowering plants here.



*Atlantic Puffin breed on the low sea cliffs in Krossfjorden.*

In the afternoon, we hope to visit Ny Ålesund, the most northerly settlement on Earth, once a mining town and now a research base. The area often has breeding **Arctic Terns** around, as well as **Great Skua**, and **Red-throated Loons**. For those who enjoy Arctic exploration history, it is possible to visit the anchoring mast for airships, used by the Arctic explorers Amundsen and Nobile. While cruising Krossfjorden it is always keeping an eye out for attractive **Long-tailed Jaegers**, as some of the archipelago's few known breeding pairs are found nearby. **Common Eiders** occur along the coastline here and these attractive sea ducks are likely to feature on most days of the cruise.

### Day 3. Wildlife of Liefdefjorden

Weather dependent, we will sail along the three-mile-long face of Monaco Glacier, heading into Liefdefjorden. These waters harbor a favorite food source for **Black-legged Kittiwake**, offering spectacular views of thousands of birds. **Polar Bear** also frequents the glacier, sometimes providing good photo opportunities. The rare **Sabine's Gull** will also be on our radar today (and tomorrow) as we will be relatively close to one of their breeding islands at Moffen Island.



*King Eider can often be seen alongside the more widespread Common Eider.*

### Days 4 - 5. Seven Islands and pack ice

Seven Islands will likely be the most northerly point we visit on this Arctic cruise. This area likely represents our best chance of finding our most important mammalian target, **Polar Bear**, and we will ensure we have our scopes out on deck scanning for bears. The pack ice is also the best area to find our most important avian target, this being **Ivory Gull**, which is a delight to observe. There are usually good numbers of alcids around in this area too, with **Black Guillemot**, **Thick-billed Murre**, and **Little Auk** constantly giving flyby views. There will hopefully also be good numbers of seals on the pack ice in the north, with **Bearded**, **Harp**, and **Ringed Seals** being the most likely candidates.

We will likely also visit Sorgfjord where we visit a haul-out of massive **Walruses** and enjoy a walk in the Arctic tundra which often produces **Rock Ptarmigan** and shorebirds, such as **Purple Sandpiper**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Dunlin**, or **Sanderling** – all looking dapper in their breeding colors.



*Ivory Gull will be our primary avian target in the High Arctic.*

### Day 6. Through the Hinlopen Strait

Navigating through the Hinlopen Strait will prove to be rich in Arctic wildlife. Today we will have opportunities to see thousands of **Thick-billed Murres** alongside some impressive Arctic wildlife such as **Polar Bear**, **Ringed** and **Bearded Seals**, and if we are lucky **Blue Whale** – the largest animal known to have ever existed. In our zodiacs we will cruise through the sea ice floes of Lomfjordshalvøya and will visit a huge colony of **Thick-billed Murres** at the cliffs of Alkefjellet. We will also attempt to land at Torrelneset on the island of Nordaustlandet, where **Pink-footed Goose**, (Svalbard) **Reindeer** (the smallest subspecies of Reindeer), and **Walrus** may be seen.

### Day 7. Highlights of Barentsøya

Today we have further chances at finding **Polar Bear** with landings on the island of Barentsøya (named after the Dutch explorer, Willem Barentz, who discovered Svalbard) sometimes having to be cancelled as there are bears in the area. If this should happen, we hope to enjoy the bears from zodiac boats! On our landing, likely at Kapp Lee, we will aim to visit another **Walrus** haul-out and perhaps enjoy a hike across the tundra where we will hopefully enjoy breeding shorebirds (such as **Purple Sandpiper**), **Snow Buntings**, and perhaps **Arctic Foxes**.

### Day 8. Cruising southern Svalbard

Today we round the southern tip of the Svalbard Archipelago and continue our way northwest where we will visit the fjords in the Hornsund area. Here, we can enjoy the jagged peaks of Hornsundtind and Bautaen. While continuing to search for **Polar Bear**, we will hope for a glimpse



of the rare and elusive **Bowhead Whale**. As we cruise alongside the continental shelf we will pass through the foraging waters of **Fin Whales** and have decent chances of spotting **Common Minke Whale**.



*Walrus are usually encountered on this cruise.*



*Arctic Fox is another charismatic mammal we should see on this Arctic cruise.*

### Day 9. Exploring Bellsund

On our final full day of the cruise we will likely find ourselves in Bellsund, the largest fjord system of the Svalbard Archipelago. Due to the warm ocean currents in the area, the vegetation is relatively lush and appears quite different to the vegetation seen previously on the cruise. There should be good numbers of **Snow Buntings** around as well as many breeding **Common Ringed Plovers** and **Purple Sandpipers** which are always a pleasure to see in their breeding colors. We will also be sure to keep an eye out for **Red-throated Loons** in the ponds and **Long-tailed Jaeger** which are occasionally seen here. While cruising the near to shallower waters we will ensure we keep an eye out for pods of feeding **Beluga Whales** which despite being heavily hunted many decades back, still occur in good numbers around Svalbard.



*Red-throated Loons occur on ponds and lakes throughout the Svalbard Archipelago.*

### Day 10. Disembarkation at Longyearbyen

We will come ashore in Longyearbyen on this last day of our journey for flights south to Oslo and from there to our home destinations.

*PLEASE NOTE: A typical itinerary to the northern Svalbard Archipelago is illustrated above. This itinerary is for guidance only. Depending on local ice and weather conditions, the availability of landing sites, and opportunities to see wildlife, the program may vary. The expedition leader on board will determine the final itinerary. Flexibility is paramount for expedition cruises. Average cruising speed for the vessel is 10.5 knots.*



<b>Duration:</b>	10 days
<b>Limit:</b>	The group sizes of cruises are a function of the capacity of the ship, so our usual small group size policy cannot apply here.
<b>Date:</b>	13 – 22 July 2024
<b>Start:</b>	Longyearbyen, Norway
<b>End:</b>	Longyearbyen, Norway
<b>Longyearbyen day tour:</b>	\$270 per person (2-8 pax)
<b>Cruise price per person:</b>	Quadruple porthole – sharing US\$5,400 Triple porthole – sharing US\$6,550 Twin porthole – sharing US\$7,700, single US\$13,090 Twin window – sharing US\$8,300, single US\$14,110 Twin deluxe window – sharing US\$9,000, single US\$15,300 Superior (double bed) – sharing US\$10,000, single US\$17,000

All cabins contain private shower and toilet, flat screen TV, telephone and internet connections, hair dryer, and ample storage space.

**Price includes:**

All meals throughout the voyage aboard the ship, including snacks, coffee, and tea  
All shore excursions and activities throughout the voyage by Zodiac  
Program of lectures by noted naturalists and leadership by experienced expedition staff  
Free use of rubber boots and snowshoes  
Transfers and baggage handling between the airport, hotels and ship (only for those passengers on the group flights to and from Longyearbyen)  
All miscellaneous service taxes and port charges throughout the program  
Comprehensive pre-departure material

**Price excludes:**

Any airfare, whether on scheduled or charter flights  
Pre- and post-tour land arrangements  
Passport and visa expenses  
Government arrival and departure taxes  
Meals ashore  
Baggage, cancellation, and personal insurance (which is mandatory)  
Excess baggage charges and all items of a personal nature, such as laundry, bar, beverage charges, and telecommunication charges  
The customary gratuity at the end of the voyage for stewards and other service personnel aboard (guidelines will be provided)