



Svalbard & Polar Ice Edge

Best of Svalbard

29 Jun - 10 Jul 2021

12 days

Embarkation: Longyearbyen (Spitsbergen)

Disembarkation: Longyearbyen (Spitsbergen)

M/v Sea Spirit

Activities:



Itinerary



Day 1: Arrival in Longyearbyen, Svalbard (hotel night)

Welcome to Longyearbyen, the administrative center of Svalbard and starting point of our Arctic expedition! At the Longyearbyen airport, you will be greeted by our staff and transferred to a quality hotel, which has been arranged by us and is included in the price of the itinerary. You will then be free to explore the charming, walkable town center.

We recommend starting your discovery of this fascinating Norwegian High Arctic territory at the excellent Svalbard Museum, where you can also purchase hard-to-find polar books and maps. Afterward, you can enjoy an excellent dinner at one of Longyearbyen's many delightful restaurants. If you are still awake at midnight, you will notice the sun has not set. In fact, the sun will not set for the entire duration of our time in Svalbard.



Day 2: Welcome Aboard!

After breakfast at your hotel, the morning is yours to enjoy Longyearbyen. Take in the views of icy fjords and glaciated mountains surrounding this historic former coal-mining town. Take advantage of shopping for souvenirs or some last-minute necessities such as cold-weather gear. Just remember, you will soon receive your very own parka to keep and waterproof boots to borrow on board the ship. For lunch, Longyearbyen offers quick and easy meal options including the most northerly pizzas and kebabs in the world.

In the afternoon, you will be transferred to the pier where we will warmly welcome you aboard the deluxe expedition vessel M/V Sea Spirit. Get settled in your spacious suite and explore the ship that will be your comfortable home during the extraordinary adventure to come. After getting

underway, a full schedule of events kicks off with informative briefings and introductions from your expedition staff. After the first of many delicious dinners on board, step out onto the open decks to admire the gorgeous scenery in 24-hour daylight as we pass through the wildlife-rich waters of Isfjorden.



Day 3-11: Svalbard and Polar Ice Edge

During our expedition we hope to experience the many facets of this incredible High Arctic territory. Our exact schedule and route will be shaped by weather and ice. At the peak of the summer season, we expect ice conditions to be favorable for a circumnavigation, so we will make an attempt to go around Spitsbergen, the largest island of the Svalbard archipelago. We also expect there will be enough sea ice around to support ice-dependent animals such as polar bears and walrus. The pristine nature places of Spitsbergen are protected by a system of national parks, and we will try to visit some of them during the voyage. Below you may find what to expect from each of these places.

South Spitsbergen National Park is a vast region of varied landscapes including polar deserts and impassible mountain ranges. The centerpiece of this park is Hornsund, a picture-perfect fjord where countless mighty glaciers cascade from soaring mountaintops into icy inlets. The park also includes the southern shores of Bellsund, a picturesque bay where we find the remains of historical whaling operations, including wooden boats, cabins, and thousands of whale bones—a scene from the distant past, literally frozen in time. Throughout the park, there is always a high probability of wildlife sightings. There are also plenty of possibilities for world-class hiking through wild polar landscapes with fascinating geology. Wildflowers will be at their peak during this time.

Southeast Svalbard Nature Reserve is truly a pristine and rarely visited wilderness containing hundreds of uninhabited islands. On the large islands of Edgeøya and Barentsøya, broad tundra valleys support the territory's densest population of endemic Svalbard reindeer. The valleys are also important breeding areas for ground-nesting

birds such as geese, eiders and sandpipers. Arctic foxes prowl the vast landscape, seeking to provide food for their young cubs, who are just now emerging from their dens. Shallow, murky seas are ideal feeding grounds for walrus, which can be seen resting in large numbers on gently sloping beaches. Historical sites throughout the islands provide glimpses into the region's bygone era of trapping and hunting.

During this voyage, we expect to encounter significant sea ice concentrations in the enormous Northwest Svalbard Nature Reserve. In this remote and isolated region, ice can persist very late into the summer, giving it a truly polar character. This reserve covers the rugged northwestern parts of Spitsbergen and the entirety of Nordaustlandet, the second largest island in Svalbard. Here we find the massive Austfonna ice cap, part of which meets the sea along the 45-kilometer ice cliff known as Bråsvellbreen—one of the great wonders of the Arctic world. The polar desert environment supports little in the way of vegetation but hosts prodigious numbers of seabirds at breeding sites such as the spectacular sea cliffs of Alkefjellet. The probability of encountering polar bears and walrus in this icy wilderness is very high.

At this time of year, we expect to find the edge of the polar pack ice not too far from Nordaustlandet. We hope to sail along this dynamic boundary between solid sea ice and open ocean. Here we have an unparalleled opportunity to witness the dramatic interplay between polar bears and seals. We will take the ship as close as safely possible to the jumbled and constantly shifting ice floes in the hope of observing polar bears in their preferred habitat.

Northwest Spitsbergen National Park is the crown jewel of Svalbard's scenic wonders. Here we find deep fjords flanked by serrated mountain ranges and immense tidewater glaciers calving icebergs into turquoise waters. The skies are filled with millions of murre, guillemots and little auks, whose eggs are just now hatching at countless breeding colonies located on small islands, mountainsides and sea cliffs within the park. This is also a great time to encounter marine mammals, including beluga whales and various Arctic seals. Set among this incredible scenery and wildlife activity, we also find evidence of Svalbard's earliest sealers and whalers.

Human habitation along our route can be found at Ny Ålesund, a former mining town and airship base that is now home to an international community of Arctic researchers. This is one of the world's most northerly settlements where we find a museum, gift shop and post office.

The ambitious Svalbard and Polar Ice Edge route offers a comprehensive view of the Arctic's many faces. Every day offers something new and exciting. We will not miss a single opportunity to encounter amazing Arctic wildlife, to witness incredible polar scenery, and to walk in the footsteps of historic expeditions that came before.

Day 12: Disembarkation in Longyearbyen, Svalbard

After filling up with one last buffet breakfast on board, we bid you farewell in Longyearbyen. We provide transfers to the airport or to the town center in case you plan to stay longer in Svalbard. By this time, you may already be making plans for your next amazing trip with us into the polar worlds!

