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## **Spitsbergen Encounter**

**Longyearbyen, Svalbard to Longyearbyen, Svalbard**

**9 Nights/10 Days (Kayaking)**

**June 13 - June 22, 2016**

**July 14 - July 23, 2016**

### **OVERVIEW**

Spitsbergen and the Svalbard archipelago offer a tremendous wildlife and birdlife experience, as well as a fascinating lesson in glaciology. First used as a whaling base in the 17th and 18th centuries, they are now celebrated as a breeding ground for many seabirds, along with marine mammals and the elusive polar bear. Our expedition ship is the renowned *Akademik Sergey Vavilov*, perfectly suited for remote exploration. Throughout our journey we enjoy a comprehensive series of presentations which provide an excellent background to our expedition.

Our voyage commences in Longyearbyen, the principal community of this frosty Norwegian territory. On our 9-night voyage we sail out of Isfjorden and turn south, before heading west and around to the northwest coast of Spitsbergen. We will search for beluga whales near Bourbonhamna and photograph industrial exploration history near Recherche Fjord. Sailing north along the west coast of Spitsbergen, we reach Krossfjorden, home to numerous bird colonies as well as bearded and ringed seals. Nearby is the town of Ny Ålesund, the world's most northerly community. Our voyage continues to Phippsøya, where, at 81° north, we have our best chance to see polar bear. Heading south, we stop at Monaco Glacier and Liefdefjorden – another great spot for bears – and at Prins Karls Forland we hope to see a walrus haul out before arriving back into Longyearbyen.

### **DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY**

#### **Day 1 – Longyearbyen, Svalbard**

Today we embark our expedition ship, the *Akademik Sergey Vavilov* in Longyearbyen and as we throw the lines, we sail out of Adventfjorden and into Isfjorden during the early evening. With almost 24 hours of daylight at this time of the year, we enjoy the views from the outer decks of the ship as we depart. We meet our expedition team during an introductory briefing and then enjoy a welcome dinner in the ship's comfortable dining room.

#### **Day 2 – Bourbonhamna**

Beluga whales are frequently seen as they transit the narrow sound near Bourbonhamna. Adults are pure white and the younger calves a mottled grey color. It is estimated there are approximately five to ten thousand belugas in the Svalbard population. The beluga has no dorsal fin, a diagnostic feature of whale species that live in the high Arctic such as the narwhal and bowhead. Since a dorsal fin could be damaged when the animal surfaces in areas with ice, it has been postulated the lack of dorsal fin is an adaptation to living in waters that are frequently

covered by ice. We search for belugas from the ship and when zodiac cruising. On our shore excursion, an old hunting cabin and other artifacts are points of interest during our scenic hike to Ingebrigstenbukta. However, it is the massive piles of beluga whalebones that catch everybody's attention. The bones and all artifacts are protected by the Svalbard Government and cannot be removed. While wandering amongst these relics we hope to catch a glimpse of dozens of reindeer that inhabit the area.

### **Day 3 – Krossfjorden**

The shores of Krossfjorden are home to numerous bird colonies and a variety of different species. We anchor off one small harbor and cruise in the zodiacs along the bird cliffs near the 14th of July Glacier. As we cruise the dark waters, we are always on the lookout for bearded and ringed seals, both species known to frequent this fjord.

### **Day 4 – Liefdefjorden and Monacobreen**

No trip along the north coast of Spitsbergen would be complete without a visit to Monacobreen (Monaco Glacier). A wide glacier face at the head of the fjord makes for spectacular kayaking and zodiac cruising. The coastal plain near the mouth of Liefdefjorden offers superb hiking and is often a great place to spot polar bears that come here to hunt for ringed seals or feed on nutrient rich bird's eggs.

### **Day 5 – Phippsøya – Northernmost Point**

At 81° north latitude, Phippsøya is just 540 nautical miles from the North Pole. Our ice strengthened expedition ship allows us to approach the edge of the pack ice in safety and comfort. Because of its proximity to the permanent Arctic ice pack, Phippsøya offers the potential for great polar bear viewing. In recent seasons we have enjoyed excellent encounters with polar bear in this area. Be sure to get up to the ship's bridge and take a picture of the GPS showing your latitude or, better yet, take your own handheld GPS with you and mark in the waypoint as we are so close to the North Pole!

### **Days 6 & 7 – Hinlopen Strait Strait and Nordaustlandet**

From the ice edge we turn south into the main strait separating Svalbard's two main islands: Spitsbergen and Nordaustlandet. In Hinlopen Strait the bird cliffs at Alkefjellet are home to more than a hundred thousand breeding Brunnich's guillemots, as well as thousands of kittiwakes and black guillemots. It is a spectacular site and a challenging one for our zodiacs as the tidal currents roar through Hinlopen Strait. Nearby Murchison Fjord is a wonderful place to kayak or cruise as we navigate the waterways between the islands. There are some excellent hiking routes here which take us up to high points affording staggering views and further opportunities to encounter Arctic wildlife.

### **Day 8 – Fuglesangen and Smeerenburg**

As your zodiac approaches the shore of Fuglesangenøya, it becomes apparent there are thousands of birds nesting on this island. Home to a large dovekie colony, the formation of the island allows for excellent viewing without impacting upon the perimeter of the colony. Just a few miles from Fuglesangen is the old whaling station of Smeerenburg, literally translated as Blubber Town. As we hike the shoreline of this former whaling station, we learn about the importance of whaling in the discovery and exploration of the Svalbard archipelago. The blubber ovens stand as a reminder to this harsh industry in an equally harsh environment.

### **Day 9 – Poole Pynten, Prins Karls Forland**

The sight and sound of a walrus haul out spells Arctic like nothing else can. We visit this well-known walrus colony on Prince Charles Island and hope to see these odd looking animals ashore. Approaching from downwind can often confirm that walrus are ashore, as the smell of a walrus haul out is quite 'unique'! Tonight we celebrate our journey with a special dinner attended by the ship's Captain. It's a great time to reflect on a wonderful voyage in this wild and remote place.

## **Day 10 – Longyearbyen**

Arriving back into Longyearbyen this morning, we disembark after breakfast and say farewell to our expedition team and fellow passengers. A transfer into town is provided for those choosing to stay a few days. If you are departing today, we have a few hours this morning to explore the town, before transferring to the airport for your onward flight to Tromsø or Oslo.

**Please Note** - Specific sites visited will depend on ice and weather conditions experienced and the itinerary will be updated throughout the voyage in order to take advantage of favourable conditions.