SPITSBERGEN WILDLIFE CRUISE

Seeing a polar bear in its natural habitat is one of the natural world's most remarkable sightings. For photographers, capturing images of polar bears can be the fulfilment of a long held ambition and Spitsbergen is the perfect setting for such an endeavour. The wild and dramatic landscape of Spitsbergen provides the perfect backdrop for photographing polar bears. While polar bears are the poster boys of the Arctic, Spitsbergen is no one-trick pony. Take zodiac safaris and drift alongside towering glaciers stretching up to seven kilometres wide and eighty metres high; visit expansive cliffs that provide sanctuary to colonies of birds too numerous to count; photograph large herds of walrus on land and in the sea and sit patiently for the perfect moment to photograph exquisite ivory gulls on drift ice.

Days spent exploring Spitsbergen's untamed landscapes are made all the more poignant by the knowledge that the Arctic and its resident wildlife are overshadowed by the threats associated with climate change. There will be lectures on board that address this issue and you can be sure that our voyage will adhere to strict guidelines of sustainability and be conducted in a manner that is sympathetic to the environment and the wildlife.

Flights
Return flights from London are available for £810 return.

Kayaking
Kayaking is available for £565

WHAT IS INCLUDED
All excursions and landings
All zodiac cruises and landings
Loan of wellington boots, expedition jacket & over trousers
Post voyage photographic expedition log
Services of expedition staff onboard
Voyage on a full board basis

ITINERARY

Day 1: Longyearbyen embarkation
Embark your expedition ship, Akademik Sergey Vavilov in Longyearbyen and sail through Adventfjorden and into Isfjorden then out into the Greenland Sea. So begins your Arctic cruise, 24 hours of daylight and hopefully some great photographic opportunities and memories.

Day 2: Bourbonhamna
Arrive at Bourbonhamna, known for the beluga whales that transit the narrow sound. Head out in zodiacs for the first time in search of belugas. Adult belugas are pure white and the younger calves a mottled grey colour. 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 - and it has been postulated the lack of dorsal fin is an adaptation to living in waters that are frequently covered by ice. At Bourbonhamna hike to Ingebrigstenbukta stopping to view the old hunting cabin and other artefacts along with piles of beluga whalebones, a reminder of Svalbard's hunting past. It is also a great place to see reindeer.

Day 3: Storfjorden
Coming around the most southerly point of Spitsbergen, push into the broad expanse of Storfjorden. Exploring Dolerittneset near Kapp Lee, the lush vegetation of this region is remarkable given the latitude - 70° North. This area has a large scattering of reindeer antlers, however, it is the plethora of ancient whalebones that makes the excursion so memorable. Some 400 years ago, whales were hunted almost to extinction in the waters surrounding Svalbard. Now nature has turned the decaying old bones into items of beauty. Time and the elements have altered their original shape and sculpted them into works of art. They are covered in blankets of green mosses and grasses, spattered with blotches of black and orange lichen, and framed with purple saxifrage, yellow cinquefoil and white sandwort flowers. They are fascinating photographic subjects. Now, even after death, the noble whale supports life by robustly protecting the delicate flora from the harsh winds and providing nutrients to ensure their survival.

Day 4: Hornsund
Returning to the west coast, explore the glacier-filled bay leading into Hornsund. The entire archipelago of Svalbard is a lesson in glaciology and our on-board guides will explain the formation of this fantastic landscape during hikes and zodiac excursions. Hornsund is home to the Polish Polar research station and a good place to see reindeer and arctic foxes.

Day 5: 14th July Glacier and Krossfjorden
The rocky shores of Krossfjorden are home to numerous bird colonies and a range of species. The ship will anchor in a protected harbour, launch the zodiacs and cruise along the bird cliffs near the 14th of July Glacier. Bearded and ringed seals are known to frequent the waters here and we watch out for them in the dark waters of the fjord. Lilliehook Glacier, at the northwestern head of Krossfjorden, is an incredible sight. The glacier face stretches just over four miles and has a height of around 80 metres - viewed from the zodiac cruise you come to appreciate the enormous scale of your surroundings.
colonies of birds and often large flocks of kittiwakes and ivory gulls can be seen diving at the front of the glacier when chunks calve off stirring up the nutrients in the water. Polar Bears can often be seen patrolling here because of the number of seals on ice.

Day 6: Krossfjorden and Smeerenburgfjorden
Sailing out of Krossfjorden and Kongsfjorden, you may be fortunate enough to see the historic airship anchor pylon near the scientific community of Ny Ålesund. This remote outpost earned its place in aviation pioneering history as a starting point for North Pole aviation exploration. Notable pioneer aviators including Zeppelin, Amundsen, Ellsworth, Byrd and Nobile all passed through Ny Ålesund. Nearby, Smeerenburgfjorden has a four hundred year history of whaling and is a favorite spot as we round the northwestern tip of Spitsbergen. A wander along the beach looking at the blubber cookers, or an hour behind a tripod shooting landscapes on your camera might be on the schedule, all the while looking for wildlife that can appear anywhere in Svalbard.

Day 7: Exploration of the Ice Edge
Continue north and east up into the ice, hoping to cross the 80° north parallel. Approaching the ice-edge the ship slows down and all hands are either on the bridge or out on the outer decks scanning for wildlife. Bearded seals, ringed seals and walrus may be found hauled out on the edges of the ice. Harp seals swim in herds of 10 to 20 through the open water channels in the ice. A buttery coloured lump miles away on the ice metamorphoses into a polar bear as we slowly work our way through the ice toward it. The Vavilov is perfectly designed for near silent approach and the Captain takes great pride in bringing you in as close as possible to the wildlife without disturbing it for some great photographic opportunities.

Day 8: Phippsoya
At 81° degrees north latitude, Phippsoya - one of the Seven Islands - is only 540 nautical miles from the North Pole. Because of its proximity to the permanent pack ice, Phippsoya offers the potential for great polar bear viewings. Be sure to get up to the bridge and take a picture of the ship’s GPS showing this incredibly high polar latitude near the top of the world. Trivia: The archipelago of seven islands is the northernmost land in Svalbard. Named in 1780s by an English sailing party. The smallest and least significant island being named Nelsonøya, after the lowly midshipman, who was promoted over the years to the rank and title of Vice Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson.

Day 9: Nordaustlandet and Hinlopen Strait
From the ice edge, 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. The huge basalt cliffs and skies are thick with birds as they hurl themselves off the rockface. Polar bears are common in the Hinlopen area and there are a few different walrus haulouts nearby Murchison Fjord is a wonderful place to kayak or cruise as the ship navigates the waterways between the islands. There are some excellent hiking routes here up to high points with spectacular views and further opportunities to encounter Arctic wildlife.

Leifdefjorden
Enter Leifdefjorden and slowly cruise towards the Monaco Glacier. This vast sweep of ice more than four miles wide
provides a fabulous backdrop for a zodiac cruise. Ice caves and tumbling seracs are an impressive sight as are the thousands of black-legged kittiwakes feeding on the upwelling of rich nutrients found near the sub-glacial outflow. A morning of cruising in the ice is best followed by a hike on the tundra. Red phalaropes, purple sandpipers and vibrant tundra provide plenty of viewing and photography opportunities. The geology is fascinating and it is a great chance to see reindeer and arctic foxes.

**Day 11: Alkehornet**

Alkehornet, at the mouth of Isfjord, offers breath-taking views and an incredible tundra walk. Arctic fox can often be seen here, as well as reindeer. Towering above the site is a horn-shaped mount covered in guillemots and kittiwakes. This evening, celebrate the 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 12: Longyearbyen disembarkation**

Arrive back into Longyearbyen this morning and disembark after breakfast. Transfer back into town with a chance to visit the museums and buy a few last-minute souvenirs before transferring to the airport for your flights. Polar Exploration exploration can be unpredictable. Specific sites visited will depend on prevailing weather and ice conditions at the time of sailing. The above itinerary should be read as a 'guide only' and may change. The ship’s captain in conjunction with the expedition leader continually review the sailing plan throughout the voyage, making adjustments to the itinerary along the way to take advantage of optimal weather and ice conditions or to maximise encounters with wildlife.
Scandinavian built for the Russian Academy of Science, this ship was designed to travel quietly, during hydro-acoustic research. The ship is exceptionally stable, yet maneuverable. External stabilizers and a built-in trimming system provide exceptional stability.

Features on the ship include:
- Dining Room
- Gift Shop
- Fitness & Fitness Room
- Wellness Centre
- Infirmary
- Library
- Lounge
- Mud Room
- Presentation Room
- Multimedia Room
- Top Deck
- Observatory
- Sauna and Polar Salt Water Plunge Pool

Following a day of excursions, a sauna with complimentary aromatic oils can be a wonderful way to unwind. Located on Deck 5, the sauna and adjacent plunge pool is open each afternoon and evening. The sauna seats approximately six people and the plunge pool can be filled with polar water on demand or for special events. There is a change room with towels and a shower room between the sauna and the plunge pool.

Elevator
A lift (or elevator) services Deck 1 through 5, allowing access to and from the presentation room on Deck 1. The bridge and bar/lounge on Deck 6 are not accessible by lift. Access to the zodiacs is by way of gangway stairs from the main deck (Deck 3).

_Akademik Sergey Vavilov_ has an ice-strengthened hull and a cruising speed in open water of 14.5 knots.

Cabins: All cabins have exterior views. Cabins have either shared, semi-private or private facilities.
INSIDE YOUR SHIP