

# CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF SPITSBERGEN 11Days

## 8 - 18 July & 18 – 28 July 2010

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### KAYAK EXPEDITION NOTES AND ITINERARY

*“Never have I seen a landscape of more savage beauty, or nature in wilder confusion, than here – a landscape of sharp peaks, ice and snow.”*

The First Crossing of Greenland by Fridtjof Nansen (on sighting land).

#### SEA KAYAKING

The Arctic summer, with 24 hours of daylight, provides paddlers with the best in remote and scenic kayaking. We offer three sea kayak adventures in the Arctic, working in conjunction with Aurora Expeditions and based on our mother ship, the Polar Pioneer. These notes detail our Spitsbergen voyage which offers great wildlife viewing, stunning scenery and kayaking through protected and often ice choked fjords.

We intend to use the ship as a comfortable floating base camp, paddling at every opportunity and returning for the comfort of meals and our cosy cabins. Zodiacs will be available for extended shore excursions for those who do not wish to paddle on any given day.

We hope to paddle one to two times a day, (except when at sea), spending as much time on the water as possible. Landing ashore by kayak, we can stretch our legs and enjoy walks on the lush tundra amongst the summer flowers. Most paddles range from two and a half to four hours. We aim to have at least one extended paddle where we will be away from the ship for most of the day and generally meet the ship at a different location. The flexibility of kayaking with a small private group ensures our own unique experiences, the quiet dip of your paddle perfectly suited to our awe-inspiring surroundings.

Kayakers should be of an intermediate standard and have paddled before on outings up to 12 km in length. You do not have to be an expert or know how to roll but should have an adventurous spirit and recognise that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. This is cold water kayaking and should not be your first paddling experience. For additional experience, rent a kayak locally before leaving home and seek out a local operator for some paddling tuition. We try to have our first familiarisation paddle start from shore and after that, launch directly from the ship. However, you should be comfortable on Day 1 to paddle in some swell and wind if we encounter it. DO practice paddling in a variety of conditions prior to the trip. Generally the water surface ranges from glassy calm to a small wind chop.

***We'd be happy to talk to you about your level of experience and may be able to advise you how to obtain the necessary skills before your trip.***

***Please Note: Along with your voyage booking form we require all participants to complete our “Sea Kayak Booking and Experience Form” and return it to us immediately to secure your spot in the sea kayak group.***

#### EXPEDITION NOTES

Our journey is a ship-based, full circumnavigation of Spitsbergen and its off-lying islands (dependent on ice conditions), taking us within 600 nautical miles of the North Pole. The official Norwegian name for this archipelago including Bear Island and Jan Mayen is Svalbard. With its population of 3500 in five settlements, Spitsbergen is still virtually an unspoilt wilderness. The east coast is influenced by a cold sea current from Siberia and the resulting lower temperatures mean that even in summer frequent pack ice can make access difficult. In contrast, the west coast is warmed by the Gulf Stream and can be reached by sea in summertime.

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For four months in spring and summer, the sun never sets. Winter, on the other hand, is long and dark – but for the stars, moonlight and northern lights. Overall Spitsbergen enjoys a very dry climate, although the skies are frequently overcast. Fog and storms can develop suddenly, especially in the mountains. The prevailing winds are from the north or west. Almost everywhere the subsoil is frozen to a depth of up to 400m – permafrost. In summer when the topsoil thaws, the water is unable to drain and the ground becomes boggy.

Due to the warming influence of the Gulf Stream, there is an amazing variety of flora: in addition to the typical tundra vegetation of mosses and lichens, there are also fungi, seven species of fern and 164 flowering plants that somehow survive in the great expanses of tundra. This polar wonderland is the breeding home for walrus, polar bear, reindeer and millions upon millions of migratory land and sea birds. Several whale species are found in the waters surrounding Spitsbergen. The land is a bewitching combination of towering mountains in the west and fossil-rich polar desert in the east. Almost everywhere we visit there is the chance of seeing polar bears, as Spitsbergen supports one of the world's densest populations of these magnificent animals.

These notes will give you a brief idea of what you may experience on this voyage. Our emphasis is on wildlife encounters, exploring the harsh and stunning environments, visiting remote communities and sites of historical interest. We stress that this is an expedition-style cruise, meaning our actual program will vary according to the weather we encounter, local opportunities and spontaneous wildlife viewing opportunities. No two voyages are the same; there is always an element of the unexpected.

## ITINERARY

### Day 1 - Embark Longyearbyen

Today we will have time to explore the remote village of Longyearbyen, 'capital' of Spitsbergen. In the afternoon we board our ship, *Polar Pioneer*, and commence our circumnavigation. Cruising out of the beautiful Isfjorden, we'll be escorted by gliding fulmars and perhaps the occasional puffin. A favourite pastime on board is to stand at the stern watching for seabirds, including graceful ivory gulls, kittiwakes, little auks and guillemots. They will rise and fall skillfully, using the air currents created by the ship to gain momentum.

The sea kayakers will attend a briefing to distribute dry suits, pogies (paddling mitts for your hands), lifejackets, and dry bags.

### Days 2 - 3 – Northwest coast

We cruise northwards along the west coast of Spitsbergen, stopping at intriguing places like Kongsfjorden or Magdallenefjorden. We spend long periods kayaking along the coastline or walking on the lush tundra amongst the summer flowers. We experience local history at the 350-year-old remains of Dutch whaling settlements Smeerenberg (blubber town) on Amsterdamoya and the 100-year-old relics of the famous Swedish explorer Andree, who set out from Danskoya in an unsuccessful attempt to fly a balloon to the North Pole.

### Days 4 - 5 – Northern flanks of Spitsbergen

As we work our way along the north coast we explore new places such as Woodfjorden and Leifdefjorden in search of the mighty polar bear. We can enjoy magnificent views of sweeping glaciers winding their way into the sea, paddle amongst jostling ice floes, walk in the mountains among the reindeer, visit trapper huts of yesteryear - all the while remaining on the alert for wandering polar bears. We come face-to-face with the formidable pack ice of the Arctic Ocean and keep our eyes peeled for bobbing walrus feeding on clams or hauled out on the beach in wallows.



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## **Days 6 - 8 - Along the east coast of Spitsbergen**

Along the east coast of Spitsbergen we enter a different world - a polar desert. If ice conditions allow we will pass south through the narrow Hinlopen Strait. The strait is flanked by creamy coloured slabs of rock that are rich in fossils, which we can discover for ourselves when we go ashore. We visit Alkafjellet where a series of one hundred metre high dolerite towers are home to millions of Brunnich's guillemots - the penguins of the north - that occupy every available nook and cranny. Elsewhere we seek out Eider ducks and geese and hope to spot Arctic fox and beautiful ivory gulls. As *Polar Pioneer* passes between Spitsbergen and the smaller Barentsoya and Edgeoya we cross the main polar bear migration routes and the beautiful fertile plain of Sundeneset. The spongy ground is richly covered with bright green mosses, a variety of delicate and colourful flowers, particularly the yellow marsh (bog) saxifrage, various mushrooms, clear bubbling streams and small tarns. We explore this beautiful terrain by kayak and on foot, marvelling at the contrast between the colourful soft ground and the barren, rocky terrain from further north. Reindeer antlers lie scattered along the ground. We round South Cape, Spitsbergen's most southerly point, before continuing our journey northwards.

## **Days 9 - 10 – Southwest Spitsbergen**

In spring, polar bears travel this way on ice floes transported by strong east-west currents. We may visit Stormbukta (Stormy Bay) where calcareous rocks create a landscape of rounded hills and bizarre cliffs. The rocks were formed about 500 million years ago when shallow seas covered the land. Hornsund, 23km long and 8 -10 km wide, is the southernmost of the large fjords on Spitsbergen's west. Towers of rock pierce the clouds, lush green slopes run down to the sea and crumbling glaciers surround us. It is a beautiful place. Bellsund, which we may visit on the west coast of Spitsbergen, is divided into two large fjords. The northernmost - Van Mijenfjorden - is separated from the main fjord by a long narrow island, Akseloya, which extends almost across the fjord. There are many different paddling options available to us in this area.

## **Day 11 – Disembark Longyearbyen**

During the early morning we cruise back into Isfjorden before docking in Longyearbyen.

*For me, everyday life in the Arctic is filled with peaceful serenity, the magnificent grandeur of the scenery and an almost sacred atmosphere."*

Quiet days in the Arctic by Magnus Elander

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF SPITSBERGEN**

- Narrow sheltered waterways and fjords.
- Spectacular mountains rising directly out of the sea.
- Historic sites.
- The most wildlife-rich part of the Arctic - polar bears, walrus, seals, reindeer and sea birds.
- Great variety of terrain over short distances.
- Sea ice and active glaciers.
- 24 hours of sunshine.
- Above the Arctic Circle— only 600 miles from the North Pole.



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## **THIS VOYAGE INCLUDES**

- Group transfers to and from the ship.
- Ship's accommodation. All public areas are open to all passengers.
- All meals on board ship.
- All shore excursions from the ship including Zodiacs.
- Lectures, videos, slide and film shows and guide services.
- Port taxes and port charges imposed by government authorities.
- Pre-departure information and briefing.
- Medical services. There is a resident doctor and well equipped clinic on board.
- The trip price comprises the voyage cost plus a surcharge for the kayaking option. This surcharge covers use of a drysuit, all your paddling and kayak equipment, and the services of a professional sea kayak guide.
- Sightseeing tour in Longyearbyen.

## **THIS VOYAGE DOES NOT INCLUDE**

- Air transport to and from the ship.
- Excess baggage on any air flights.
- Visa, passport and vaccination charges and airport departure taxes.
- Hotels and meals not included in cruise itinerary.
- Tips on board for crew and service personnel
- Optional excursions not included in cruise itinerary.
- Laundry, postage, personal clothing, medical expenses, personal travel insurance and items of a personal nature such as bar charges, wine and phone calls.
- Emergency evacuation charges.

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Amended AB 2/11/09



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### SHIP DETAILS

#### **Polar Pioneer**

*Polar Pioneer* was built in Finland in 1985 as an ice-strengthened research vessel. In 2001 she was refurbished in St Petersburg to provide comfortable accommodation for 54 passengers.

**Polar Pioneer is not a luxury ship, she is homely and strong**, built to be a working vessel and refitted to a comfortable passenger standard. The accommodation is simple yet comfortable and the meals are wholesome and simple. The mood on board is definitely casual. A favourite pastime on board is to stand on the deck or in the bridge, watching for wildlife and absorbing the dramatic scenery. A small fleet of Zodiacs, (rubber inflatable boats), with outboard motors enable us to travel from ship to shore.

Length - 71.6 metres, Beam - 12.8 metres, Draft - 4.5 metres, Displacement - 2140 tonnes, Cruise speed - 10-12 knots, Powered by - 2 x 1560 HP diesel engines, Chef – European, Australian or New Zealand, Captain & Crew – Russian.

General Facilities:- Bar/lounge/library area, Sauna, Laundry Service, Medical Clinic staffed by a doctor, Dining area, TV/Video (NTSC & PAL systems), Lecture room.

There are five classes of cabins on board the Polar Pioneer

- **Triple Cabins** have two lower bunks and one upper bunk, porthole, wash basin, desk, storage. Shower and toilet facilities located conveniently just outside the cabins.
- **Twin Share Cabins** have two lower bunks, porthole, wash basin, desk, storage. Shower and toilet facilities located conveniently just outside the cabins.
- **Twin Private Cabins** have two lower berths, two have upper & lower berths. All cabins have private bathroom (shower and toilet), window, desk, ample storage.
- **Mini-Suites** have one double bed and one fold down couch in separate sleeping areas, private bathroom, (shower & toilet), windows, desk, sitting area, refrigerator, TV and video facilities, electric jug. Two only.
- The **Captain's Suite** features a double bed in separate sleeping area, private bathroom (shower & toilet) forward and port windows, desk, large lounge and table area, refrigerator, TV and video facilities, electric jug. One only.

