

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 “Jewels of the Arctic” trip, exploring the stunning coasts of Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland.

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

This voyage offers wonderful opportunities for tundra and sometimes glacier walking, exploring fjords by kayak, ship and Zodiac, viewing dramatic landscapes and Arctic wildlife.

The island of Spitsbergen, where we begin our voyage, lies half way between northern Norway and the North Pole, with a population of 3500 residents in five settlements.

Greenland is the world's largest island, almost totally covered by the second largest icecap on earth and boasts the world's largest national park. Its east coast is sparsely settled by small communities of Inuit hunters who eke out a living in one of the harshest environments on earth.

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Iceland, where we disembark, is one of the world's youngest islands. Forged by fire and honed by ice, it is a geological treasure trove. Reykjavik, the capital, is a clean, sophisticated and progressive city. Venturing further afield provides a glimpse of life in times gone by - quaint fishing villages, turf houses and sturdy Icelandic ponies.

North of the Arctic Circle is the land of the midnight sun. At Longyearbyen in Spitsbergen the sun doesn't set for four months of summer. In winter it is dark except for starlight, moonlight and the elegant curtains of the northern lights.

The warming influence of the Gulf Stream around Spitsbergen creates an environment where a prolific variety of tundra vegetation (mosses and lichens, fungi, species of ferns and many flowering plants) thrive on the sharp contrasts in temperature of the High Arctic.

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 have time to explore the bustling village of Longyearbyen, 'capital' of Spitsbergen. In the afternoon we board our ship, *Polar Pioneer*, and cruise out of the beautiful Isfjorden, escorted by gliding fulmars, and perhaps the occasional puffin. 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 of Spitsbergen

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 the Dutch whaling settlement at Smeerenberg (blubber town) on Amsterdamoya and at the century-old relics from Swedish explorer Andree, who set out from Danskoya in an unsuccessful attempt to fly a balloon to the North Pole.

Along Spitsbergen's north coast we may explore 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.

This is a beautiful place where we can stretch our legs as well as paddle, before heading on a southwesterly course towards the East Greenland pack ice belt and the world's largest Island.

Day 4 – At sea

As we cruise southwest across the Greenland Sea - the main outlet of the Arctic Ocean - we may encounter pack ice. The strong icy currents have isolated East Greenland from the rest of the world for millennia. These currents carry nutrients from the Polar Basin, attracting large numbers of fish, seals and whales. Climatic conditions and the concentration of ice in the vicinity often create thick morning fog that vanishes with the onset of the midday sun.

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Day 5 – Approaching East Greenland

As we approach East Greenland we will seek out pack ice where we may see seals and a variety of seabirds, including Ivory Gulls and migratory Brunnichs Guillemots. Conditions permitting, there will be a good chance to launch our sea kayaks today. We may also land on the Greenland coast. This stretch of coastline is ripe for exploration, with its many secrets locked in place by drift ice for up to eight months each year.

Days 6-11 Kaiser Franz Josef Fjord & Scoresby Sund

We will attempt to enter Kaiser Franz Josef Fjord, a remote and rarely visited fjord system with countless opportunities for exploration. We will then head south along the coast of Liverpool Land, with our passage dependent on ice conditions. We aim to reach Scoresby Sund, the world's biggest fjord and a favourite hunting ground of the local Inuit. Massive glaciers dump into this fjord, the birthplace of the famous big Greenland icebergs.

We hope to visit remote Inuit communities like the unpronounceable Ittoqqortoormiit (Scoresby Town) and to hike across the tundra in search of ancient graveyards or summer villages occupied 3000 years ago by Eskimos. This area provides excellent opportunities for sea kayaking in its maze of calm, interconnecting waterways.

If we are lucky we may see musk oxen and seals, and maybe even polar bears or narwhal, although due to the relentless pursuit of the local hunters, these sightings are very rare.

Places we may visit in Kaiser Franz Josef Fjord and Scoresby Sund include:

Cape Humboldt – Ymer Island

One of the many possibilities on Ymer Island is Cap Humboldt, where a lone trappers' hut built on an ancient beach looks out across a magnificent bay dotted with huge icebergs. Water-worn birch logs washed up on pebbly beaches and a steep hillside behind the hut offer walking opportunities and the possibility of seeing Musk oxen grazing on the hardy foliage. Keep a lookout for Arctic fox, snowy owls and ptarmigan.

Sefstrom Glacier – Alpefjord

A narrow waterway between peaks of up to 2200 metres, it is surrounded by serrated brown mountains with hanging glaciers clinging like limpets to stony gullies.

The snout of the Sefstrom Glacier juts out almost blocking Alpefjord, but allowing Zodiac access and the opportunity to walk on the glacier. Clumps of Arctic flora in its late summer glory are visible as we cruise along the coast.

Ittoqqortoormiit – Scoresby Sund

A colourful Inuit community of about 1500 residents, the majority of whom still depend largely on hunting. Explore the village and meet parents pushing latest model prams with cute round faced babies peeping out from Arctic fox fur jackets. Avoid speedy 4-wheel motor cycles that hurtle along rough dirt roads, listen to the crescendo of howling emerging from lines of huskies secured to chains. Visit the modern Supermarket or sit spellbound in the beautiful Lutheran Church serenaded by the local organist.

Sydkap – Scoresby Sund

A small promontory jutting out from Scoresby Land offering good walking and delightful views across the sound. There are great opportunities for kayaking past lonely beaches where 3000-year-old gravesites can be visited on shore. Nests of grounded giant bergs the size of 10 story buildings with green tunnels and aquamarine lakes offer hours of endless enjoyment for kayakers and Zodiacers alike.

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Some other possible landing places are Rypefjord, O Fjord, Fonfjord Bjorn Oya, Milne Land and Hekla Havn on Danmark Island.

Day 12 - Kund Rasmussen Land

We will sail south along the Blossville Coast of Knud Rasmussen Land where our explorations will depend on the weather and ice conditions. The only sign of human habitation is tiny trappers' huts perched on empty beaches or lonely promontories. We will marvel at the complex geology of the oldest island in the world where we will see acres of gravel beaches, dumped by ice-age glaciers and intriguing flat-topped mesas striated with layers of ancient deposits rising dramatically between massive glaciers.

We may visit Romer Fjord, a small fjord scattered with ice debris and surrounded by tall black mountain peaks. Waterfalls stream off the steep sides and there may be an opportunity to visit natural hot springs.

There are virtually no charts for some of the bays and fjords along this stretch of coast. So who knows where our adventures will take us and what we will discover? This evening we will head out into the Denmark Strait.

Day 13 – At Sea

We will be at sea all day, cruising across Denmark Strait towards Iceland.

Day 14 – Disembark Keflavik, Iceland

Today we will arrive at Keflavik, the main port of Iceland. As our journey draws to an end, we will have time to reflect on the amazing experiences we have shared, before we bid each other farewell.

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 “JEWELS OF THE ARCTIC” SPITSBERGEN, GREENLAND & ICELAND

- Spectacular scenery
- The largest Island in the world (Greenland), and world's largest National Park (NE Greenland)
- Historic sites & Inuit culture
- Wildlife opportunities - polar bears, walrus, seals, fox, reindeer, musk ox and sea birds.
- Great variety of terrain over short distances
- Sea ice, active glaciers and icebergs
- 24 hours of sunshine (Spitsbergen)
- Above the Arctic Circle
- Rumbling volcanoes, rugged lava fields, hot springs, cascading waterfalls - Iceland's landscape is unique.



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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.
- Medical services. There is a resident doctor and well equipped clinic on board.
- Port taxes and port charges imposed by government authorities.
- Pre-departure information and briefing.
- 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 ship cruise itinerary.
- Tips on board for crew and service personnel.
- Optional excursions not included in ship 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.

SOUTHERN SEA VENTURES

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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.

