Spitsbergen—Jewel of the Arctic
Polar Bears & Wildlife of the High Arctic Floe Edge

No other expedition voyage in the world is dedicated to spending as much time traveling amidst the pristine arctic ice floes in search of polar bears and other wildlife photography opportunities as our Spitsbergen—Jewel of the Arctic photo cruise! This is a unique and absolutely incredible chance to visit the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard and its largest island, Spitsbergen—the most spectacularly photogenic arctic destination on Earth—on a cruise that is totally dedicated to the interests of wildlife and nature photographers.

The Svalbard Archipelago comprises four large mountainous islands and hundreds of smaller ones. We depart from the island of Spitsbergen at Longyearbyen—the world’s most northerly town, positioned more than 10 degrees north of the Arctic Circle. Using satellite imagery we head toward the largest expanses of pack ice and experience the stark and photogenic beauty of Spitsbergen’s glaciated and snowcapped mountain coastline on our way. The location of the ice depends on recent wind and ocean current conditions. Drifting pack ice frequently crowds the shore, or may be found as a free-floating ice field, miles from the islands. Here at the floe edge—where the ice meets the open water—it is common to find numerous polar bears, occasionally with their cubs, hunting for seals and walruses. The Norwegian Polar Institute has estimated that there are more than 2,000 polar bears in the Svalbard region—a relatively high number for such a small geographic area. Virtually every trip we’ve ever operated
has seen and photographed bears and their seal kills at very close range. Before the inception of our cruises, these remarkable images of bears and their prey were very rare.

Spitsbergen is also home to some of the largest concentrations of seabirds in the North Atlantic, including immense and accessible colonies of dovekies (little auks), black-legged kittiwakes, thick-billed murres (Brünnich’s guillemot) and northern fulmars. Bearded seals and walruses are additional highlights of the voyage. We use the ship to approach the seals and, conditions permitting, launch our Zodiacs to approach walruses snoozing on the pack ice—we’re often able to get so close that we can photograph them with a wide-angle lens! As if that is not enough, while cruising along the pack ice we see ivory gulls, parasitic jaegers, puffins, ringed and harp seals, and possibly a whale or two.

Though much of our photography will be done from the ship—photographing wildlife on the ice—we make sure to spend time shooting enormous calving glaciers and other stunning icy landscapes from the shore as well. This voyage provides photographers with dramatic imagery of tangible changing climate conditions in the High Arctic. Because the pack ice is dynamic, all of our photographic opportunities, landings and Zodiac cruising depend on the constantly changing navigation conditions between island passages—and every day brings a new adventure. Flexibility is paramount in this type of expedition cruising!

Because our cruise begins and ends in Longyearbyen, there are no lengthy travel days at sea. We photograph every day of the 10-night voyage, so there is virtually no wasted “at sea” time. Our ship uses inflatable Zodiacs to take us ashore and also allow us to cruise among the ice floes in search of bears, walruses, seals and beautiful scenery. Become a member of our congenial group of photo travelers on an unforgettable cruise to the premier destination in the world for photographing polar bears in their sparkling icy realm—one of the most remote, vulnerable and uniquely beautiful locations on Earth.

Check out the trip report from our previous Spitsbergen photo tour

Tour Itinerary

Day 1 (Jun 14)
Arrive Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen’s largest community. Board the Freya in the afternoon. (D on board ship)

Days 2–10
The next nine days are dedicated to exploring the enigmatic and legendary Svalbard Archipelago and its
icy environs. Our exact day-to-day itinerary remains flexible, depending on local ice conditions. We spend our days in search of polar bears and other fantastic wildlife, plus ice-altered landscapes. The ship offers a wonderful platform to use long lenses from a tripod or hand-held lenses utilizing stabilization features.

Possible subjects include towering glaciers and sea ice in many forms—including startling documentation of the effects of global warming—as well as walruses amidst the ice floes, bearded and ringed seals, and several species of whales. But the main feature of our trip is our search across the pack ice for the very icon of the arctic—the polar bear—in spectacular photogenic situations that can surpass any place else on Earth! Birdlife, including throngs of wheeling seabirds, barnacle and pink-footed geese, arctic terns and red-throated loons, offers wonderful additional photo possibilities. Because we have chartered the entire ship, we control every aspect of the itinerary, and we have a remarkable amount of time available for photography during the High Arctic’s 24 hours of daylight.

(BLD)

Day 11 (Jun 24)
We disembark the ship in Longyearbyen in the morning. Fly to Oslo and continue home. (Breakfast on board ship, Lunch and Dinner on your own)

View Freya's deck plan

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Rate Schedule

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<tr>
<th>CABIN TYPE</th>
<th>RATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Twin</strong>: Twin cabin on Boat Deck, two lower berths, private bathroom</td>
<td>$12,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Plus Twin</strong>: Twin cabin on Main Deck, two lower berths, private bathroom</td>
<td>$12,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Superior Twin</strong>: Twin cabin on Main Deck, double bed, private bathroom</td>
<td>$13,450</td>
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As with all Joseph Van Os Photo Safaris, the Spitsbergen Pack Ice Voyage was planned and carried out with a very high degree of professionalism. The wildlife and scenic images I captured, especially of the polar bears, made this Arctic adventure an experience of a lifetime.

—D. Wisler

Joseph Van Os tours are, in my opinion, the best—I have been on six and also on other tours, none of which compare to the Van Os tours. Everything is always done to help the photographer obtain the best images and the support given by the tour leaders is unsurpassable.

—M. Gore