

SPITSBERGEN: LAND OF THE ICE BEARS
AN EXPLORATION OF NORWAY'S
SVALBARD ARCHIPELAGO
ABOARD THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER
JULY 6-16, 2012

SOUTHERN NORWAY PRE-TRIP
JUNE 30 – JULY 7, 2012

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The Svalbard archipelago, including the island of Spitsbergen, is a region of breathtaking landscapes and seascapes. Graced by immense glaciers, sheets of pack-ice, snow encrusted mountains, steep-sided fjords, and flower-festooned tundra, Spitsbergen is one of the planet's most spectacular places. Separated from the North Pole by a mere 600 miles of frozen ocean, this is the true High Arctic: a land of extreme contrasts gripped by ice for over eight months of the year and by darkness for over four, yet bathed in endless light and exploding with life during the precious summer months.

Spitsbergen encompasses the highest proportion of national parks and nature reserves of any equivalent land mass on earth. Renowned for its abundance of stunning arctic scenery and a remarkable flora and fauna, this remote corner of the world draws visitors in ever-increasing numbers. Among the many attractions of a trip here, it is the opportunity to see the mighty polar bear that garners the greatest interest among visitors, and Spitsbergen is perhaps the best place in the world to see this magnificent animal.

The timing of our voyage is such that we anticipate multiple encounters with this evocative creature. It is estimated that approximately 3,000 polar bears live around Svalbard, and our last expedition (2010) recorded an astonishing 25 of the white bears! No matter how many you see, however, there is no better way to experience this impressive animal than in its own icy realm, wandering over an ice floe amid a crazy-quilt paving of pack-ice stretching to the horizon. Add to this image the opportunity to encounter some of the farthest north's other most enigmatic and seldom-seen wildlife and you have the necessary ingredients for the ultimate arctic adventure. Among other species we'll seek are the bizarre Walrus (In 2010 we saw several hundred on several occasions at very close quarters from our Zodiacs), the lovely Ivory Gull (we saw as many as 15), blizzards of Dovekies, and the dainty arctic fox.

Other wildlife possibilities include nesting waterfowl, such as Brant, Pink-footed and Barnacle geese, Common and King eiders, and Long-tailed Duck; shorebirds, such as Red Phalarope and Purple Sandpiper; Great Skua; Long-tailed, Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers; Glaucous Gull; Atlantic Puffin; Black Guillemot; Rock Ptarmigan; and Snow Bunting; in addition to the distinctive "Svalbard" reindeer. At sea we will pay a great deal of attention to marine mammals as we cruise

the boundary of the northern ice cap. Sightings of bearded and ringed seals are likely, along with possibilities of seeing beluga whales. During our 2010 expedition, we were treated to exceptionally close views of blue and fin whales!

All of this wildlife appears against a canvas of glaciers, sea-ice, towering mountains, and tundra ablaze with beautiful arctic wildflowers that includes such jewels as Svalbard poppy, purple saxifrage, moss campion, mountain avens, and arctic buttercups. Beyond natural history, this trip promises a look at the region's fascinating human history as well, principally that revolving around arctic exploration and the whaling industry.

For this voyage, VENT has reserved an allotment on the 148-passenger National Geographic Explorer, an exceptionally comfortable and fully stabilized ice-class expedition ship. Our goal is to see as much of Spitsbergen as possible, but we emphasize that our route will ultimately depend on sea-ice conditions. We will also maximize our efforts to go ashore wherever we can. Landings are carried out using Zodiacs, essential components of any expedition as they allow for landings in all types of conditions and in locations that are unsuitable for larger vessels. We will also make a number of Zodiac excursions at sea away from the ship in order to bring us closer to glaciers, colonies of breeding seabirds, and other impressive aggregations of wildlife.

It is important to emphasize that one travels to Spitsbergen for the experience of what is truly an arctic sojourn. The emphasis is thus on quality rather than simply tallying a big list of sightings. The species diversity this far north is characteristically limited, so one should be motivated primarily by the idea of experiencing a spectacular part of the High Arctic and its natural history.

For those concerned about bad weather, the summer is typically a time of fairly mild and calm conditions, clear and bright skies, and 24 hours of daylight. Because we will mainly stay close to shore throughout the trip, there is much less chance of experiencing rough seas than on other ship-based programs.

Our Norway Pre-trip offers a marvelous pre-cruise option for participants interested in experiencing more of Norway's birdlife and scenic grandeur. We will explore from Oslo to the Bergen area of the southwest, birding and sightseeing amid the majestic fjords, forests, mountains, and lakes that give the country its scenic renown. We'll seek an exciting assortment of northern European birds, many of which are among the most sought-after on the continent. The possibilities are many and include opportunities for seeing such special birds as Arctic Loon, Gyrfalcon, Eurasian Dotterel, Purple Sandpiper, White-backed and Black woodpeckers, and Eurasian Bullfinch.

July 6-7, Days 1-2: International flight from USA to Oslo, Norway. You should plan your flights to arrive Oslo Airport (OSL), Norway's main airport on Day 2 between 8-10:00 AM. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by your local ground agent and as a group transferred to our hotel where you can relax in the privacy of your hotel room. There will be a sightseeing tour this afternoon which highlights the famed Vigeland sculptures set in nearby park and a visit to the Polar Ship Fram Museum to see the famed ship used by legendary polar explorers Nansen and Amundsen. Dinner is on your own this evening. Participants arriving on other flights may either take a taxi to the hotel or arrange a private transfer through our office at an additional charge.

NIGHT (Day 2): Continental Hotel, Oslo

July 8, Day 3: Fly from Oslo to Longyearbyen; embark Explorer. This morning we depart Oslo on our private charter flight to Longyearbyen, on West Spitsbergen, the administrative capital of the Svalbard

archipelago. Longyearbyen is a former coal mining town and the most northerly settlement in the world with a population over 1,000. Upon arrival, we will transfer to the *National Geographic Explorer* sailing out of the port village of Isfjorden in the early evening.

NIGHT: Aboard *National Geographic Explorer*

July 9-14, Days 4-9: Cruising Spitsbergen. Spitsbergen presents a remarkable destination where the major attraction of a voyage here is as much about geography as it is about wildlife. Here you can venture closer to the North Pole with greater ease than anywhere else on the planet. Longyearbyen is itself located far north of the Arctic Circle. Aboard our cruise ship our objective is to reach far up the western and eastern sides of the main island, and perhaps land on East Spitsbergen as well. Our route will take us northwards to the edge of northern ice cap, where we'll likely reach 80° north latitude. At this latitude we'll be only 600-700 miles short of the North Pole! Compare this with other northern-most destinations where VENT travels—Barrow, Alaska and Churchill, Canada—and you'll find those locations are located 750 and 1,500 miles, respectively, south of the latitude where Spitsbergen sits. In the Antarctic, no cruise ships ever go south of the equivalent latitude within the Antarctic Circle, so this will truly be the closest any of us are ever likely to get to either Pole.

PLEASE NOTE: Because this program operates at such high latitude, our itinerary will be entirely dictated by local weather and sea-ice conditions. As these conditions can vary greatly from year to year, we will not know until embarkation what we can do and where we can go. The captain and crew will do all they can within the bounds of safety to complete the stated itinerary, but if sea-ice conditions are so heavy as to prevent us from reaching as far north as planned, we will resort to a program that focuses on more accessible parts of southern or eastern Spitsbergen.

Spitsbergen possesses many outstanding sites for natural history viewing. Among the places we could visit on the cruise route are:

Krossfjorden and Ny Ålesund – Situated north of Longyearbyen along the west coast of Spitsbergen, Krossfjorden offers a scenic fjord dominated by the 14th of July Glacier. A primary activity of our time here is a Zodiac cruise along the sculpted front of the mighty glacier. On the green slopes near the glacier, a variety of colorful flowers bloom and large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Thick-billed Murres nest on the nearby cliffs. There is also a good chance here of seeing arctic foxes, which patrol the bases of the cliffs for chicks fallen from the nests above. Bearded seals can also sometimes be found in this fjord. In the afternoon we may sail to Ny Ålesund, the world's most northerly settlement. Once a coal mining village—served by the world's most northerly railway, which can still be seen—Ny Ålesund is now an international research village. Close to the village is a breeding ground for Barnacle Geese, Pink-footed Geese, and Arctic Terns. Visitors interested in the history of arctic exploration will want to walk to the anchoring mast used by Amundsen and Nobile in the airship *Norge* in 1926, and Nobile in the airship *Italia* in 1928, before their respective flights to the North Pole.

Liefdefjorden and Andøya – Near the mouth of Liefdefjorden, a dramatic fjord on the island's north coast home to seals, polar bears, and the impressive Monaco Glacier, we may go ashore for a walk on the tundra island of Andøya. Many Common Eiders and Pink-footed Geese nest here, and with luck the rare and handsome King Eider may also be seen. Sailing into Liefdefjorden, we will cruise near the face of the glacier. The waters lapping at the glacier's face are a favorite feeding spot for thousands of Black-legged Kittiwakes while polar bears are occasionally seen on the glacier.

Hinlopen Strait, Augustabukta, and Torrelneset – Running between Spitsbergen and Nordaustlandet, the narrow waterway of Hinlopen Strait is home to arctic specialty species such as bearded and ringed seals, polar bears, and Ivory Gulls. Among possible activities, we may explore the bird cliffs of Alkefjellet, which support thousands of nesting Thick-billed Murres. On the east side of Hinlopen Strait, we may land at Augustabukta on Nordaustlandet, home to the special Spitsbergen race of reindeer, along with breeding Pink-footed Geese, Ivory Gulls, and walrus. Near Torrelneset, we may explore the polar desert of Nordaustlandet, next to the world's

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third largest ice cap, which meets the sea nearby. We may also walk a segment of beautiful coastline covered in smooth rocks sculpted by the surf over thousands of years, with more walrus sightings possible along the way.

East Spitsbergen (Barentsøya and Edgeøya) – The islands of Barentsøya and Edgeøya mark the eastern side of the Svalbard archipelago. We might spend time making landings and Zodiac cruising at both islands. In Freemansundet we plan to land at Sundneset on the island of Barentsøya to visit an old trapper's hut and then venture out onto the tundra to search for Spitsbergen reindeer and Barnacle Geese. Later, we will cruise south to Diskobukta on the west side of Edgeøya. After a Zodiac cruise through the shallow bay, we will land on a beach littered with whale bones and tree trunks, biological artefacts that have drifted here from Siberia. We'll also climb to the rim of a narrow gully which is inhabited by thousands of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Black Guillemots, along with Glaucous Gulls. During the breeding season, the bases of the cliffs are patrolled by arctic foxes and polar bears, especially females with young cubs, searching for young birds that have fallen from the nesting ledges.

Southern Spitsbergen – The scenery of Southern Spitsbergen is some of the finest in the archipelago. We'll start a day quietly cruising the side fjords of the spectacular Hornsund area of southern West Spitsbergen, enjoying the scenery of towering, snow-veiled mountain peaks. Mount Hornsundtind rises to 1,431 meters while Mount Bautaen demonstrates why early Dutch explorers gave the name “Spitsbergen”—pointed mountains—to the island. Underscoring the dramatic qualities of southern Spitsbergen, this area is also home to 14 magnificent glaciers. This area also provides very good chances of encountering seals and polar bears.

July 15, Day 10: Return to Longyearbyen. We return to port at Longyearbyen this morning and disembark. There will be time to explore the town before we transfer to the airport for the return flight to Oslo. The parish church and Polar Museum are the primary attractions of Longyearbyen and are well worth visiting. Upon arrival in Oslo, we'll transfer to our airport hotel for a farewell dinner and overnight.

NIGHT: Radisson SAS Airport Hotel, Oslo

July 16, Day 11: International flight from Oslo to USA. Participants may depart from Oslo (airport code OSL) for the United States at any time today. Please note that no transfers are needed since the Radisson SAS Airport Hotel in Oslo is located onsite at the airport.

SOUTHERN NORWAY PRE-TRIP

This pre-trip to southern Norway beautifully compliments our expedition to Spitsbergen. Participants will explore a variety of habitats and landscapes and witness exhilarating fjord and mountain scenery. Truly, this is one of the most beautiful places on earth. The middle summer is a good time to search for birds in Norway and we expect to encounter a satisfying assortment of species.

Southern Norway offers an enticing mix of gorgeous landscapes and scenery, woodlands and marshes, interesting history, and an impressive suite of southern Norwegian birds. Some of the species we may encounter include Arctic Loon, Greater Scaup, Black Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Temminck's Stint, Eurasian Dotterel, Red-necked Phalarope, Horned Lark, and Lapland Longspur—all on their breeding grounds and in their finest dress. With a little luck we may also find the magnificent Gyrfalcon; several woodpeckers, including the handsome White-backed Woodpecker and the impressive Black Woodpecker; European Pied and Spotted flycatchers; and several thrushes and finches including Eurasian Bullfinch.

At this time of the Norwegian summer, all the breeding birds are nesting and most can still be found around their territories. This should be a good time to find Eurasian Dotterel, Purple Sandpiper, Dunlin, and Horned Lark as well as several other attractive species. At this point in the summer, we have a reasonable chance of accessing the central parts of Hardangervidaa National Park, as the snow has mostly disappeared, thus enabling us to search for key birds in places we might otherwise not reach.

June 30-July 1, Days 1-2: International flight from USA to Oslo, Norway. You should plan your flights to arrive Oslo Airport (OSL), Norway's main airport on Day 2 between 8-10:00 AM. After retrieving your bags, please watch for a representative of our local operator who will be holding a sign with your name or the word VENT. For the remainder of the day you can relax in the privacy of your hotel room or explore the city on your own. We will gather in the hotel lobby tonight at 6:00 p.m. for a group welcome and orientation, followed by dinner.

Please note that Oslo is a beautiful European city, containing a rich assortment of architectural, cultural, and natural attractions. Participants may wish to spend time here before the cruise experiencing the city's top sites. Organized city tours are readily available for those interested in seeing the highlights, while individual explorers will also discover a fine array of restaurants, boutiques, and other attractions. Among the city's top destinations are Tryvannstårnet, a hilltop tower that offers spectacular perspectives of Oslofjord; Huk Beach; Akershus Slott, a palace dating from the 14th century; 17th-century Domkirke and its amazing, five-story organ; Det Norske Kongehus (Slottet), residence of the Norwegian King; the famed Vigeland sculptures; and a good variety of museums, including the Polar Ship Fram Museum where the famed vessel used by legendary polar explorers Nansen and Amundsen rests.

NIGHT (Day 2): Continental Hotel, Oslo

July 2, Day 3: Depart Oslo; nature reserve at Nordre Øyeren; transfer to Horten. We will depart the hotel after breakfast this morning and drive north and eastwards toward the nature reserve at Nordre Øyeren. Øyeren is a lake in the Glomma river watershed, southeast of Lillestrøm. The ninth largest lake in Norway, it has a surface area of 84.7 km², is 71 meters deep and lies at 101 meters above sea level. We will explore both sides of the reserve: the farmland and wetland habitats to the east and the mixed woodlands at Fet on the west side. Such a rich mix of habitats should be productive for a wonderfully rich assortment of waterfowl, shorebirds and landbirds. Among the many species we may encounter are Mute Swan (naturally occurring here), Greylag Goose, Common Goldeneye, Great Cormorant, Osprey, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank, Green Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common Tern, Wood Pigeon, Common Swift, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Common House Martin, European Robin, Whinchat, Fieldfare, Marsh Warbler, Garden Warbler, Marsh Tit, European Goldfinch, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting.

From Nordre Øyeren we will drive to the township of Horten. This trip will offer our first taste of southern Norway, with glimpses of the vast Oslofjord available along the way. Naturally we will stop for birds and sights of interest along the way. At this time of the year, the countryside will likely be lush and green, garnished with wildflowers, butterflies, and trees in full leaf.

NIGHT: Best Western Horten Hotel, Horten

July 3, Day 4: Drive to Stavern via Lake Borre and Ilen. We will start the day with an exploration of Lake Borre. Here we will wander through mature woodlands along the lake, bordered by the Horten Golf Club on one side and farmland on the other. This mixed habitat should produce an ample collection of interesting birds including Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, Common Quail, Great-crested Grebe, Gray Heron, Eurasian Marsh-Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Water Rail, Common Ringed Plover, Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank, Great Black-backed Gull, Stock Dove, Common Cuckoo, Tawny Owl, Long-eared Owl,

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Black Woodpecker, Western Yellow Wagtail, Thrush Nightingale, Song Thrush, Icterine Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Eurasian Nuthatch, Eurasian Treecreeper, and Rook.

En route to Stavern we will visit Ilen. This is a tidal area where a river's outflow forms sandbanks that can be seen at low tide. The combination of freshwater and saltwater makes for the perfect brackish habitat. This should be a very interesting area, and if time permits, we will walk out to the observation tower that will give us good views over the area. Here we may encounter a variety of birds such as Common Shelduck, Common Pochard, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Common Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Wood Sandpiper, White Wagtail, Eurasian Reed-Warbler, Eurasian Blue Tit, Eurasian Jackdaw, Common Chaffinch, and Linnet.

Stavern has been a harbor, probably since ancient times, and an important naval base since 1677. A small Norwegian town, it is located in the municipality of Larvik, south of the city of Larvik in Vestfold. It currently supports a population of 3,000 inhabitants. During the summer, the population increases to around 30,000-40,000 people and has become a beloved site for artists and craftsmen. Today, the town is well known in southern Norway for its many exhibitions and art galleries. Stavern is the site of the Norwegian national memorial to fallen sailors of World War I and World War II as well as a statue of the 18th century naval hero Peder Tordenskjold. We anticipate arriving in Stavern during the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Hotel Wassilioff, Stavern

July 4, Day 5: Mølen to Kongsberg. From Stavern we will make our way to Mølen, a geologically unique region of Norway formed by the movement of glaciers. This area possesses one of the most interesting collections of Iron Age burial mounds in Scandinavia. Mølen is also well-covered by local birders, with both a banding group and a social group who actively sea-watch out over the Skagerrak (a straight of water running between Norway and the southwest coast of Sweden). If we are lucky, the banding group may be working while we are there, giving us the chance to see some birds literally in the hand. We will also spend some time sea watching, where wind conditions hopefully will be in our favor. Birds we'll watch for are those species more closely associated with salt or brackish water including Red-throated Loon, Greater Scaup, White-winged Scoter, and Manx Shearwater, while the sandy bays could hold such shorebirds as Red Knot, Dunlin, Ruff, Common Redshank, and Common Greenshank. Raptors regularly frequent the area as well, and we'll watch for Eurasian Marsh-Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, and Eurasian Hobby. The woodlands and *gorse* habitat provide food and shelter for a host of landbird species such as Eurasian Wryneck, Eurasian Green and Gray-faced (formerly Gray-headed) woodpeckers, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Dunnock (also known as Hedge Accentor), Sedge Warbler, Barred Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Common Crossbill, and Hawfinch.

We will head inland from Mølen, following the winding valley towards Kongsberg. There will be ample opportunities for roadside stops to check for birds or photograph the scenic landscapes.

NIGHT: Park Hotel Drammen, Drammen

July 5, Day 6: Transfer to Geilo via Lake Fiskum. We will spend the morning birding around Lake Fiskum, where we will search for any species we may have previously overlooked or which require better views. From Lake Fiskum we will continue on to the township of Geilo. Along the way we will stop for a short woodland walk at Skurdalen. Here we may see such highly desirable species as Hazel Grouse, Black Woodpecker, Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, and Siberian Jay.

After checking in at our hotel at Geilo, we will visit the attractive lakes of Budalen, where we will search for the very handsome Arctic Loon, in addition to Common Crane, Red-necked Phalarope, and Bluethroat.

NIGHT: Høyfjellshotell Hotel, Bardøla

July 6, Day 7: Geilo to Hardangervidda National Park to Voeringsfoss. From Geilo we will climb into the mountains and the Hardangervidda National Park. Some of the mountain lakes may hold summer plumaged Arctic and Red-throated loons; and while Red-necked Phalarope, Northern Harrier, and Common Crane are seen here regularly, it won't be before we turn off the main road and follow the road into Lake Tinnhøl that we will be in the main birding area. Here we will check the lake for such species as Greater Scaup and Black and White-winged scoters. Common Ringed Plover breeds in the area as do Temminck's Stint, Dunlin, Purple Sandpiper, and Eurasian Golden-Plover, all of which will still be present and in their gorgeous full summer plumage. We should also be alert to the presence of the dapper Eurasian Dotterel. Passerines here include Bluethroat (the male is always a sight to remember!) and several other species such as Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting, that all add to the charisma of the area.

The expanse of the "vidda" is breathtaking, and even more so if a Gyrfalcon or a Long-tailed Jaeger roams by. Other birds of prey include Merlin and Eurasian Kestrel, and, if lemming numbers are good, there should also be a few Rough-legged Hawks around. The next stop will be Isdalen. This is an interesting area with both wetland and farmland habitat. Here we could find such species as "Blue-headed Wagtail", a subspecies of Western Yellow Wagtail. Willow Grouse can sometimes be found in the lowland scrub while Ring Ouzel breeds in higher areas. Before we depart the area via a descent down a winding mountain pass, we will stop at Vøringsfossen, one of Norway's famous waterfalls for a photo shoot.

NIGHT: Quality Hotel and Resort, Vøringsfossen, Hardanger Norway

July 7, Day 8: Voeringsfoss to Bergen; return to Oslo. After breakfast we will make our last birding outing—a delightful walk through a riverine woodland. With a smidgeon of luck, we will find a pair of Europe's rarest woodpecker—the White-backed Woodpecker, in addition to other woodland birds. In the grassy glades, fine assortments of wildflowers support several butterfly species. If we are lucky we may also see a Golden Eagle or Peregrine Falcon.

From Eidfjord we will continue to the ferry at Kinservik and cross the mighty Hardangerfjord (one of Norway's most spectacular fjords) before arriving in lovely Bergen. Early this evening we will take a short commercial flight (45-minutes) from Bergen to Oslo. Upon arrival, we will transfer to a nearby hotel. Dinner is on your own this evening, either at the airport in Bergen or in Oslo. Our southern Norway extension concludes this evening with our arrival at the hotel in Oslo for the start of the cruise.

TOUR SIZE: The *National Geographic Explorer* holds 148 guests, of which **20** spaces have been reserved for VENT travelers. The Norway Pre-trip will be limited to **14** participants.

TOUR LEADERS: **Victor Emanuel** and **Barry Lyon** will lead the cruise; the Norway Pre-trip will be led by **Brian Gibbons** and a local leader.

Victor Emanuel started birding in Texas 63 years ago at the age of eight. His travels have taken him to all the continents, with his areas of concentration being Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. He is the founder and compiler for 50 years of the record-breaking Freeport Christmas Bird Count, and served a term as president of the Texas Ornithological Society. Birds and natural history have been a major focus throughout his life. He derives great pleasure from seeing and hearing birds, and sharing with others these avian sights and sounds, both the common ones and the more unusual ones. He initiated the first birding camps for young people, and considers that one of his greatest achievements. Victor holds a B.A. in zoology and botany from the University of Texas and an M.A. in government from Harvard. In 1993, he was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Excellence in Birding Award, given by the Houston Audubon Society in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to careful observation, education, and addition to the body of avian knowledge. In 2004, he received the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association, and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Victor is on the board of directors for the American Bird Conservancy.

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Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood where he grew up in southern California. Through his early years his developing interest in the study and observation of nature was furthered by summertime camping trips to southern Arizona and road trips with his family throughout the American West. He attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps while in high school, which would ultimately pave the way for his future involvement with VENT. While in college, Barry studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson. In 1995 he joined the VENT team as a tour leader and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him throughout the United States and Canada and to Central America, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, Antarctica, and the Galapagos Islands. He relocated to Austin in 2004 and joined our office staff as an assistant to company president Victor Emanuel. Although Barry's responsibilities have changed, he continues to lead a limited number of tours and still enjoys sharing his enthusiasm for nature with others.

Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Nearly 20 years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. For many years Brian's field research has involved banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, and the Himalayas in Nepal. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. Brian leads tours in Mexico and the United States.

Included in the cruise package:

- Accommodations as stated in the itinerary: 2 nights at Oslo area hotel (days 2 & 10); 7 nights aboard ship (days 3-9)
- Meals from dinner on day 2 through dinner on day 10, including non-alcoholic beverages
- Land transfer from airport to hotel on day 2* and to and from group flights on days 3 and 10
- All shore excursions and sightseeing as stated in the itinerary
- Entrance fees
- Use of kayaks
- Taxes and service charges
- Services of *National Geographic Explorer* staff, ship physician, and VENT leaders and local guides
- Gratuities (except to ship's staff and crew, Expedition Leader, Lecturers, and VENT leaders)

***Please note that this service is included only for passengers arriving in Oslo on July 7 at the designated times. VENT can arrange transportation for anyone arriving in Oslo on another date, but an added charge applies.**

Not included in your cruise package:

- International air transportation from your home to Oslo, Norway and return
- Charter flights Oslo/Longyearbyen/Oslo¹
- Passport or visa fees
- Hotel accommodations prior to July 7 or after July 16
- Meals prior to Breakfast on July 8 or after Dinner on day 10, including alcoholic beverages
- Land transfers except arrival in Oslo on day 2 and to and from domestic charter flights on days 3 and 10
- Laundry, postage, telephone calls, internet usage, or other items of a personal nature

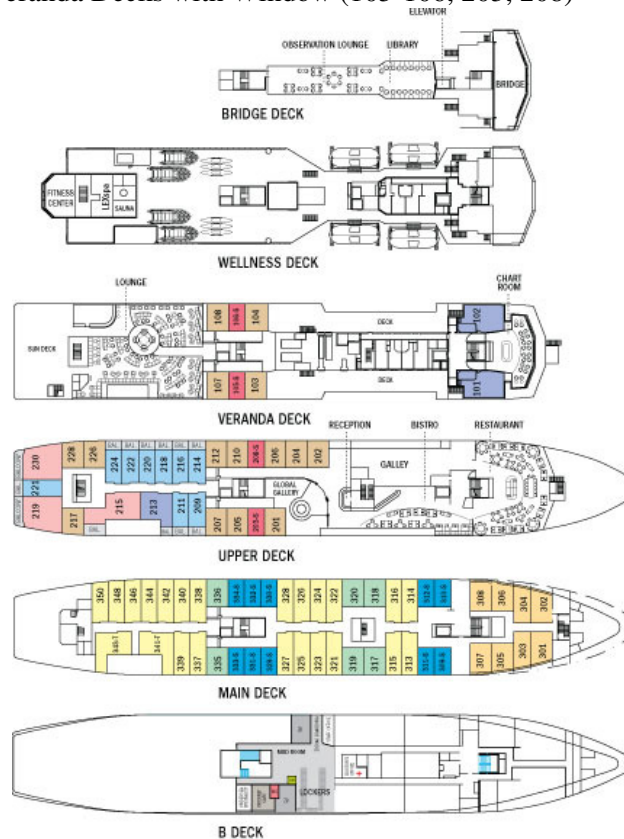
¹ The price for the internal flights will be added to your final invoice and will be approximately \$725.

- Travel insurance, including medical evacuation insurance^
- Fuel or exchange rate surcharges
- Excess baggage charges
- International or domestic airport departure taxes (if applicable)
- Gratuities to the staff and crew of *National Geographic Explorer*, Expedition Leader, Lecturers, or VENT leaders

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: SPITSBERGEN, LAND OF THE ICE BEARS CRUISE

Prices quoted are per person based on double occupancy. All staterooms are outside cabins with two lower beds and private facilities. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. Single occupancy cabins are available in Categories 2 and 3 only. If you wish to share accommodations, arrangements can be made at the double occupancy rate in Categories 2 and 3 only. You will be charged the single price if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

Category 1	Main Deck with one or two Portholes (Cabins 301-308)	\$ 8,240
Category 2	Main Deck with Window (317-320, 335-336)	\$ 8,790
Category 3	Main Deck with Window (313-316, 321-328, 337-340, 342, 244, 346, 348, 350)	\$ 9,120
Category 4	Upper and Veranda Decks with Window (103-104, 107-108, 201-202, 204-207, 210, 212, 217, 226, 228)	\$ 9,670
Category 5	Upper Deck with Balcony (209, 211, 214, 216, 218, 220-222, 224)	\$11,430
Category 6	Veranda Deck-Suite (101-102); Upper Deck-Suite with Balcony (213)	\$13,330
Category 7	Upper Deck-Suite with Balcony (215, 219, 230)	\$15,230
Single Cabins:		
Category 2	Main Deck with Window (309-312, 329-334)	\$10,980
Category 3	Upper and Veranda Decks with Window (105-106, 203, 208)	\$11,400



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The fee for the Southern Norway pre-trip is **\$5195** in double occupancy from Oslo, Norway. This includes all meals from dinner on July 1 through lunch on July 7, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, flight from Bergen to Oslo, park entrance fees, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. It does not include airfare from your home to Oslo and return, transfers as mentioned in the itinerary, airport departure taxes, passport and visa fees (if applicable), alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement fee for the Southern Norway pre-trip is **\$350**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodation, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION: To register please contact the VENT office. The deposit for the cruise is **\$1500** per person and an additional **\$500** per person for the Southern Norway pre-trip. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit(s) and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit(s) must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment is due 120 days prior to the departure date.

The Spitsbergen cruise is designed for persons in reasonably good health. By forwarding the expedition deposit, you certify that you do not have a physical condition or disability which would create a hazard to you or other passengers. VENT reserves the right to decline to accept or retain you or other passengers should your health, actions, or general deportment impede the operations of the expedition or the rights, welfare, or enjoyment of other passengers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: All cancellations, for any reason, must be received in writing.

CRUISE: Cancellations received before March 8, 2012 will be assessed a cancellation fee of \$500; cancellations received after March 9 but before April 7, 2012 will be assessed a cancellation fee of \$1,500; cancellations received after April 8 and before May 7, 2012 will be assessed a cancellation fee of 35% of your cruise fee; cancellations received after May 8, 2012 (within 59 days) receive no refund. Any refunds will be reduced by applicable airline cancellation penalties. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing. We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance and/or travel insurance to protect yourself.

Number of Days Prior to Expedition Start

120 or more days
119-90 days
89-60 days
59-0 days

Per Person Cancellation Fee

\$500
Deposit
35% of trip cost
No refund

Because of the agility required for cruises on board an expeditionary vessel, travelers with disabilities, heart and/or respiratory problems, or other significant physical limitations or conditions are advised not to participate in expeditionary cruises. Please be advised that medical conditions that are discovered at any time during or prior to boarding and which, in the sole and reviewable opinion of the Captain, may jeopardize the health or safety of the Passenger or any other individual, will be grounds to deny the Passenger permission to board the ship at the point of embarkation, and/or to require the Passenger to leave the ship and terminate his or her continued participation in the cruise. By forwarding the deposit for this cruise, the Passenger certifies that he or she is in good physical health and capable of performing normal activities on this expedition.

CANCELLATION POLICY: SOUTHERN NORWAY PRE-TRIP

Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$500 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy also applies to transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$500.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this voyage. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of brochure printing. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office.

We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT: Travel insurance which covers you for emergency medical evacuation/repatriation is required for participation in this program. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of VENT. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to assist you in making air arrangements. Airline tickets carry restrictions due to the airfare used. You may find that your ticket cannot be reissued or exchanged for another air carrier or routing. Cancellation penalties and change fees may be assessed for any changes to the ticket. These charges are solely your responsibility. First and business class travel may be available on some flights. **All**

requests for travel assistance or extra arrangements must be received no later than 60 days prior to departure date. Requests made within 60 days cannot be guaranteed.

CONDITIONS:

The Program – This is a ship-based adventure that provides exposure to the remarkable wildlife and scenery of the Svalbard Archipelago. Most of our activities are ship-based, meaning sightseeing and sea watching from the ship's viewing decks, in addition to attending natural history presentations by ship staff. Away from the vessel, we will also make as many shore landings and Zodiac cruises as possible. These activities enable us to approach the wildlife and experience Spitsbergen's natural features more intimately.

This expedition is a general natural history trip, of which birding is an important, but not the only component. The far north is not known for a high diversity of species, but rather for natural history spectacles, such as the abundance of mega-fauna including walruses and polar bears, and colonies of nesting seabirds. Those expecting a large species list should strongly consider these points before registering.

The Ship – The *National Geographic Explorer* is a state-of-the-art 1A ice-class expedition ship accommodating 148 guests in 81 outside cabins. It is fully stabilized, enabling it to navigate remote passages and remain steady under challenging sea conditions. All cabins have windows or portholes onto the ocean, some with balconies. Each cabin is stylishly decorated and well appointed to keep you comfortable throughout the voyage. Each cabin has private facilities and climate controls. *Explorer* has two lounges, a Main Lounge and a glass-enclosed Observation Lounge for viewing the natural surroundings. Other public areas include a library, fitness center, and a wellness spa. For added convenience, a business center provides internet access. An Open Bridge policy allows guests to learn about navigation and visit the Captain and his officers.

Technical Information:

- **Built:** 1982 (remodelled 2008)
- **Length:** 356 feet
- **Flag:** Bahamas

Dining - The window-lined dining room comfortably seats all passengers at leisurely single seatings for all meals, with tables unassigned. The chefs can prepare food according to special dietary needs, provided the ship receives sufficient notification. Please advise of any special needs at the time of registration.

Zodiac Landing Craft – Expedition cruise ships carry fleets of Zodiac landing craft. Developed as a means for gaining access to places where larger vessels cannot go, Zodiacs are employed to bring greater intimacy to your travel experience. Each craft is constructed of high performance plastimer fabrics and outfitted with a powerful motor, and designed to withstand the challenging conditions of the harsh Arctic environment. During your cruise you'll make numerous excursions to shallow bays and landings on isolated beaches, coming face-to-face with an assortment of wildlife. Each craft holds as many as 10 passengers. Although flat-bottom design allows for direct on-shore landings, passengers will need to walk through shallow surf on some occasions.

While on Land – Walking on land is generally not difficult, yet it is important to pay close attention to footing and terrain. The diversity of topography in the Arctic guarantees that you'll experience a variety of conditions, from soft sand, to coarse gravel, to stepping around large boulders. Walks to alcid rookeries frequently involve treks of varying length through shallow snow and ice. Most walking is over fairly even ground, but tall grasses and mosses may be slick from recent rain.

While at Sea - While cruising at sea you'll have options to join your leaders on the viewing decks for sea watching, or remain below decks and relax in the library, the passenger lounge, or your stateroom. The sea is generally at its calmest during the time of our visit and especially so as we will spend a large part of our time within inshore waters nevertheless rough conditions may develop at any time.

Internet service - All Lindblad Expeditions vessels feature satellite internet access available through the purchase of pre-paid access cards. Guests can go online using:

- Onboard “Guest Internet Kiosks”
- Designated “Wireless Access Areas” including each lounge
- Network connections in guest cabins onboard *National Geographic Explorer*.

There are three pricing options available:

- Gold Card - 250 minutes for \$100.00 (\$0.40 per minute)
- Silver Card - 100 minutes for \$55.00 (\$0.55 per minute)
- White Card - 30 minutes for \$22.50 (\$0.75 per minute)

Cards are used in the same way as most calling cards, by entering a username and scratching off the silver strip on back of the card to determine the PIN. Cards are valid onboard select Lindblad Expeditions vessels for one year after initial activation. Minutes can be used anytime throughout the voyage. They do not have to be used in a single session. Pre-paid internet cards may be used interchangeably for access on a personal laptop and at the internet kiosks.

Please note that when our vessels are operating at high northern or southern latitudes, or in deep fjords, satellite internet access may not be possible. We recommend visiting [www.expeditions.com/staying connected](http://www.expeditions.com/staying_connected) for additional information on technology requirements, FAQs, etc.

Phone/Fax - All Lindblad Expeditions vessels feature satellite telephone access and fax access. Telephone numbers for contacting the vessel are provided in your final documents. Additional information on making phone calls or sending/receiving faxes can be found once you’re onboard in your cabin Guest Directory.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The weather in Norway/Spitsbergen in summer can range anywhere from warm (75°F) and dry, to cool or cold (low 30°F to low 50s°F) and raining. Since this cruise operates during the arctic summer, we can, on balance, expect beautiful sunny days; however, conditions can change without warning in these higher latitudes, and overcast skies, poor visibility, and precipitation do occur. **Please be advised that while cruising at sea, a steady wind-chill can dramatically affect even moderate temperatures.**

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and airline to find out specific weight restrictions. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, essential toiletries, medications, a change of clothing, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

CLOTHING

CRUISE: The choice of clothing for cold climates is a personal matter that partly depends on your individual experience with cold conditions. For your comfort and safety, avoid getting wet (whether from perspiration, precipitation, unsuitable boots, or sea spray). Bring wind and waterproof outer layers. Beware of tight clothing that leaves no room for trapped air, which is an excellent insulator. Wool, silk and some of the synthetic fibers like polar fleece retain heat better than cotton. The secret to keeping warm is the “layer principle.” It is better to have several light layers of clothing than one heavy layer. This also gives you flexibility in your clothing so you can take off a layer if you are too warm or put another layer on if you are cold. The most important layer is the outer waterproof and windproof shell because even a light wind of 6 kph (about 4 mph) can carry away eight times more body heat than still air. The so-called “wind chill factor” measures the increase in cooling power of moving air, whether it’s wind that is blowing or you who are moving rapidly and, in effect, creating a wind against yourself. A common complaint is “it’s not the cold, it’s the wind,” but an equally common polar maxim is “there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing!”

Tips for staying comfortable and warm in cold weather

- Avoid overdressing to reduce perspiration
- Wear water repellent outer garments that will keep you dry on the outside and still “breathe” enough so that moisture from your body can escape.
- Body heat is most likely to be lost from parts that have a lot of surface area in comparison to total mass - namely, the hands and feet. Keep them warm and dry. For hands, mittens are better than gloves.
- Another polar maxim is “if you have cold feet, put a hat on!” If the rest of your body is covered, as much as 90% of the heat you lose can come from your head, so be sure to wear a cap, beanie or balaclava. These items can be pulled down to protect your ears, forehead, neck and chin. The neck also needs protection with a woollen or synthetic scarf, which can be wrapped around the face when travelling against the wind.
- Dress in comfortable, loose layers. For anyone out in the cold, it is far better to wear layers of relatively light, loose clothing than one thick, heavy item. Between each layer there is a film of trapped air which, when heated by your body, acts as an excellent insulator. Keep from overheating.
- Wool and silk are superior to cotton because they can trap warm air. Synthetic fabrics that spring back into shape after compression are also good. When damp or wet, polyester down is a better insulator than goose or duck down. Polar fleece is popular and recommended.

Arctic expeditions are generally casual affairs, so comfortable and practical clothing is recommended while on board the ship and ashore, and for daytime and evening wear. For the Captain’s Welcome and Farewell dinners, Smart-Casual attire is appropriate. For women this includes casual dresses or slacks/blouses ensembles; for men, khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. Men may choose to wear a sports jacket for such occasions. A list of essential items includes:

- **Waterproof & Windproof Jacket – REQUIRED** A well-fitting jacket with attached hood that can be worn over your under layers with reasonable comfort. It is most important that this garment is thoroughly waterproof. Gore-Tex or sailing gear is ideal although it is possible to find cheaper waterproof gear. The waterproof jacket is the most important layer of clothing. There is nothing worse than wind on wet clothes in cool temperatures.
- **Waterproof Rain-pants – REQUIRED** for protection against precipitation, ocean spray in Zodiac landing craft and wet landings. Your rain-pants should fit comfortably over your regular pants. Some types feature a zipper on the outside of the lower pant-leg, enabling you to pull your pants on and off without removing shoes or boots. Gore-Tex and similar fabrics are both waterproof and “breathable”.
- **Warm, waterproof gloves and mittens – REQUIRED** for almost every circumstance. Keeping your hands warm and dry is important. Thin polypropylene gloves can be worn underneath warm mittens. Thus, you can take off the mittens to operate your camera and binoculars and still have some protection from the cold. It’s a good idea to bring an extra pair of wool mittens to wear if your other pair gets wet (or lost).
- **Warm Socks** – Sturdy, tall wool socks worn over a thin pair of silk, polypropylene or cotton/wool socks should provide enough insulation for your feet. It is important to bring several pairs of dry socks as they will inevitably get wet during through the duration of the voyage. Pack accordingly.
- **Regular Pants** – Ski pants are suitable if you have them; otherwise, bring any sturdy trousers that can be layered between your long underwear and rain over-trousers. Denim, cotton, corduroy, or wool pants are acceptable in dry conditions, such as when birding from the ship’s decks; and for evening recaps, social hours, and dinners.
- **Hats, scarves and gaiters – REQUIRED.** You will need a cotton, knit, or wool pull down cap at the least, while a warm scarf or gaiter come in handy when exposed in windy conditions.
- **Long Underwear - STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.** Silk or other lightweight material polypropylene is sufficient for most people. Those who are easily chilled might consider a heavier material, such as wool.
- **T-shirts (long- and short-sleeved) –** Simple cotton shirts for wearing under warmer outerwear.

- **Turtlenecks and flannels** – More warm weather clothing for wearing under parkas, fleeces, and sweaters.
- **Warm Sweaters or Polar fleece** – Offers excellent insulation against cold temperatures.

Packing for shore excursions:

When packing, don't weigh yourself down with too many clothes or too much gear. Select informal, practical attire for your trip that can be worn in layers.

FOOTWEAR: IT IS MANDATORY that you bring a pair of pull-on rubber, waterproof, **knee-high boots** with strong rubber-ridged, nonskid soles that fit comfortably. With wet landings, you will be stepping from the zodiac into icy water that may be up to 10" deep. You should expect to walk over icy, uneven ground between the shore and the various nesting colonies you'll visit. Do not bring heavy, "clunky" boots or boots with poor traction, as you need the right footwear that will keep you warm, yet agile. Make sure that your boots fit comfortably over thicker socks as well. Boots with waffle soles like those on a hiking boot or running shoe tend to give the best footing. Avoid imitation 'rubber boots' made from PVC. These are unyielding and more prone to slipping. Ideal boots are "Wellies" or "Viking" boots: other brands of rubber boots can be purchased from work clothing stores, surplus stores, farm co-op stores, garden supply centers, outdoor stores and marine supply houses. Sailing boots that are sold at marine stores have good non-skid soles that are good for slick ship decks and wet rocks, but they lack traction on snow, ice or mud. The all-around traction soles are good for ice and snow but are not as slip resistant on slick decks or rocks.

Remember that you will be wearing these boots a lot. So they must be comfortable for extended wear and walking. The boots should not be too tight or too sloppy. If they are too tight you will get cold feet. If they are too loose you can, within reason, add an insole or extra socks to take up the space. For maximum warmth, wear loose-fitting boots and two pairs of socks. Rubber boots generally come in whole sizes and many brands are unisex. Be sure to get the best fit no matter what size they are.

Some places to find boots with these specifications include Cabela's, Muck Boot Company, REI, L.L. Bean, Defender Industries, and Rocky Boots. A boot we highly recommend is the ***Arctic model knee-length boot made by the Muck Boot Company.***

Your boots are among the most important items you will need. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or need further advice.

When on board the ship, comfortable walking shoes, or deck shoes are sufficient.

SOUTHERN NORWAY PRE-TRIP: Bring light summer wear, but be prepared for cooler, wetter weather with a sweater, warmer outdoor coat, and rainwear. Strong walking boots will be needed, though walking distances need not necessarily be that great. Dress will be casual throughout.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is provided by the ship staff for an extra charge. Check with the staff upon embarkation for procedures and turnaround time.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your arctic expedition:

- **Backpack** - A waterproof nylon backpack, rucksack, or similar bag with shoulder straps, for carrying your camera and other gear during shore excursions. Be sure to choose one with shoulder straps so that your hands are free. It is very important that you have some means of keeping your camera dry. We have occasionally had disappointed people whose camera has been splashed in a Zodiac. Such a pack should be good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all landings and excursions
- **Ziploc bags** – Excellent for keeping small items or any items of value dry; bring several different sizes

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- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection** - Good quality sunglasses. Note that the glare from the water and surrounding snow/ice can be quite penetrating, even when the sky is overcast.
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, film, memory cards, and extra batteries** - From experience, it is advisable to bring an extra camera in case of malfunction or accident. Cameras have been dropped in the water and it is a disappointed photographer who can't take pictures. Bring ample film, flash-card space, and camera batteries. You will likely take more pictures than you anticipate.
- **Collapsible walking stick**
- **Tissue packs/handy-wipes**
- **Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7 x 35, 8 x 42, 10 x 40, or 10 x 42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7 x 35 or 8 x 42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes - Since most wildlife viewing will take place on a moving ship or zodiac, or among the birds and animals at often very close range, you do not need to bring a spotting scope. Your tour leaders will have one available for group use on the occasions where it is necessary to have one. However, if you wish to bring one please feel free to do so.

PASSPORTS AND DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS

A valid passport is required for entry into Norway. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If your passport is not valid for at least six months after your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit www.state.gov/travel/ for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

On board ship, it is customary for the purser to hold all passports for clearance with Customs and Immigration authorities. Your passport will be collected prior to or upon embarkation, and returned upon disembarkation.

VISAS

Visas are not required for U.S. citizens for entry into Norway. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. citizens may vary; please check with the consulates or embassies of Belgium and Norway.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Spitsbergen includes most necessary expenses, including all meals aboard the ship. You will want to bring enough cash to cover such extra expenses as taxi rides, gifts, laundry, gratuities, and meals on your own before and after the cruise, and personal items. Cash and credit cards

are recommended for meeting expenses during the cruise. Small denominations of cash are best as the places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills or travelers checks. In Longyearbyen change is returned in local currency. The standard currency on board the *National Geographic Explorer* is the US dollar. Other currencies may be accepted at the discretion of the hotel manager at prevailing rates. Shipboard accounts can be paid with most major credit cards. Visa, Mastercard, and EUROcard are accepted.

Should you extend your vacation in either Oslo or Longyearbyen beyond what is offered in the cruise program, you'll want to consider obtaining local currency. Norwegian Kroner can be obtained at major hotels, banks, airports, and railway stations. Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Diners Club are widely accepted. ATMs are readily available. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The unit of currency in Norway is the krone (plural: kroner), which translates as "crown," written officially as NOK. Price tags are seldom marked this way, but instead read "Kr" followed by the amount, such as Kr 10 or 10 Kr. One krone is divided into 100 ore, and coins of 50 ore, 1, 5, 10, and 20 kroner are in circulation. Bills are issued in denominations of 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1,000 kroner.

As of August 1, 2011 the conversion rate is: 1 US dollar = 5.41379 Kr (NOK); 1 Kr (NOK) = 0.184742
You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: *National Geographic Explorer* has both 110-volt outlets (standard U.S.) as well as 220-volt outlets (standard European) in each cabin.

LANGUAGE: English is the primary language spoken on board *Explorer* and throughout our tour; Norwegian is the primary language of Norway.

TIME: Norway is six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST),

MEDICAL SERVICES: A qualified physician is in attendance on *Explorer*, but must be made aware of any potential medical problems that might arise because of any medical condition, disability, or illness of any passenger on board. **Please return your medical information form in a timely manner.** The doctor is available 24 hours a day in case of emergency. The ship's pharmacy has a limited supply of general medicines and seasickness medications. In case of emergency, the ship is equipped with excellent radio and marine and satellite telephone facilities, and is never more than a few miles from shore so that aid in an emergency can be called.

No sophisticated medical facilities are available in Spitsbergen. Passengers who are not fit for this cruise, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, heart or immune deficiencies, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join. A serious health emergency in the Arctic may result in an air evacuation, which will come at considerable expense to you. **Comprehensive optional insurance, including coverage for medical evacuation (REQUIRED), is available through your trip cancellation policy, if purchased through VENT. Please consult your insurance agent or existing policy, if in effect, for the terms and limitations of your existing coverage. Please refer to the section on Trip Cancellation Insurance.**

HEALTH: As of this writing (August 2011), no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into Norway; however, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases, including:

- The so-called **Routine Vaccinations** (if you are not up-to-date), which are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine; diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine; and poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers who have received a primary series with either inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) or oral polio vaccine (OPV); they should receive another dose of IPV before departure).
- **Hepatitis A** or Immune Globulin (IG)

- **Hepatitis B**

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the expedition safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Motion Sickness – Although we expect mild sea conditions, passengers should be prepared for the possibility of challenging sea conditions in the unlikely event we experience a summer storm. *Explorer* may carry a limited supply of anti-motion sickness medication for general availability to passengers, but we recommend that you consult your physician on an appropriate medication.

Sun Exposure – The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes). Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books. There is also a fairly extensive library of relevant books on board the ship.

The Arctic is a region widely written about. A great many books and magazine articles have been written over the past century addressing its magnificent wildlife and rich human history. Although a person could research the topic indefinitely, the following list highlights some of the best material available about the Arctic, and Spitsbergen in particular.

BIRDS:

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ, 1999. This is the most recent of a huge range of field-guides available on European birds. It includes more up to date details on identification and better illustrations than other guides and has received excellent/rave reviews. Highly recommended!

Jonsson, Lars. *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1992. Excellent illustrations and comprehensive. Available in a 1996 paperback edition. Christopher Helm in UK.

MAMMALS:

Shirihai, Hadoram and Brett Jarrett. *Whales, Dolphins and Other Marine Mammals of the World*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2006. This is the latest, and one of the very best, field guides available for identifying the world's marine mammal species. High quality range maps, photographs, and species descriptions make this guide indispensable on a polar expedition.

Macdonald, David and Priscilla Barrett. *Collins Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins Press, 2005. Note that this field guide is now published through Princeton University Press.

GEOLOGY:

Geology of Svalbard. Norsk Polarinstitutt. ISBN 9788276662375

WILDFLOWERS:

Gjærevoll, Olav & Olaf I. Rønning: *Flowers of Svalbard*. Tapir Publishers, Trondheim, 1999.

NATURAL HISTORY:

Sale, R. *A Complete Guide to Arctic Wildlife*. Christopher Helm and imprint of A&C Black. London, UK, 2006.
A beautifully constructed book offering species accounts, with photographs, maps, and illustrations, of all the “birds and marine mammals of the Arctic and the Northern Oceans.” Highly recommended.
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