EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Realm of the Polar Bear - M/S Expedition (ACS 2014)

POLAR

TOUR DURATION **8** DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Relaxed
Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Comfortable
Tour Code: ACS

Tour Highlights - Realm of the Polar Bear - M/S Expedition

- ✓ Search for polar bears - the King of the Arctic is often seen patrolling the ice in search of food
- ✓ See an intoxicating mix of wildlife - walruses, Arctic foxes, seals and sea birds
- ✓ Discover deep fjords, ice-blue glaciers & sculpted icebergs
- ✓ Travel with expert naturalist guides, who will explain all about the wonders of the Arctic
- ✓ Regular Zodiac landings to explore the rugged shorelines

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	7 nights Comfortable Boat
Included Meals:	7 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 7 dinners
Start Point:	Join tour: Longyearbyen
End Point:	Tour ends: Longyearbyen
Transport:	Zodiac, MS Expedition
Countries:	Spitsbergen, Norway

Realm of the Polar Bear - M/S Expedition

Arctic Wilderness
Starting in Longyearbyen, we leave civilisation behind. Our aim is to sail to the remote polar regions in order to experience the arctic wilderness, drift ice, flora and fauna. Our final itinerary is dependant on weather and ice conditions, which have to be assessed during the voyage. The Gulf Stream has allowed the island's 400 km long western coastline to become incredibly rich in animal and plant life, while the remote east is forever under the grips of the arctic winter environment. Some years it is possible to sail through the Hinlopen Strait to attempt a circumnavigation of the archipelago, while other years there is a great deal of ice, which makes it harder to navigate around.

There are departures in July, August and September. We recommend the early tours for those who are keen to see large ice floes and the richest bird life. For those who would rather travel further east, we recommend a tour later in the season. Our specialist guides will ensure we get the most out of the experience, as well as recounting tales of Svalbard's exciting polar explorative heritage - traces of this rich history can be found on several excursions when we go ashore.

The Realm of the Polar Bear
The further north that we sail, the more ice we will meet, and this ice will gradually build up into large ice floes with seals resting on them. This is polar bear country, where the bears hunt for food, here is your best chance of seeing the 'King of the Arctic' in his natural habitat. In Spring there are large ice floes and the richest bird life.

Wildlife

Polar Bears

Ship Description

MS Expedition
At a nimble 105 metres (345 ft) in length, with a capacity to hold 132 guests, the M/S Expedition is an ideal vessel to ply polar waters. The M/S Expedition is large enough to provide stability, speed, spacious cabins and ample public space. Yet she is small enough to manoeuvre in remote areas and get you close to the action. Ship stabilizers ensure a smooth ride in rough waters, such as the infamous Drake Passage, allowing you to enjoy more of your time at sea. A fleet of ten zodiacs allows passengers to get out and actively explore the remote shores of our destinations. The M/S Expedition is a speedy vessel. A top speed of 16 knots means you'll spend less time getting from A to B, and more time to explore your surroundings.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Comfortable

Hand-picked and chosen for their character, location or local importance, these properties have excellent facilities and a higher level of comfort and service. They provide the perfect wind down after an active day.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Relaxed

Easy paced tours with plenty of time to relax and absorb the sights and immerse yourself in the local surroundings.

Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

DAY 1 Embark at Longyearbyen

Longyearbyen is the largest settlement on the archipelago of Svalbard, with a population of about 2,060 people and about as many snowmobiles. Located in the Advent Fjord at the entrance of the Advent Valley, this community has an infrastructure fit for a much larger city. Within the islands, there are four inhabited settlements and some scientific stations. All settlements are found on the west coast, the part of Spitsbergen with the mildest climate due to the warm Gulf Current. Longyearbyen is located at 78°13N 15°33E and has an arctic tundra climate. Due to its location far north of the polar circle, it is polar night from mid-October to mid-February and polar day from mid-April to mid-August. The settlement was founded in 1906 by John Munroe Longyear, main owner of the Arctic Coal Company of Boston. 'Byen' is Norwegian for 'the city'. Longyearbyen was destroyed by the Germans in 1943 and rebuilt after World War II, with the old foundations still visible in some places. Until the early 1990s the coal mining industry was the major employer in Longyearbyen and daily life revolved only around the mining business. Today, the community offers a full range of activities and facilities. There is a bank, post office, hospital, cafes, pubs and restaurants and several tourists shops.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 2 Around Spitsbergen

Each day will be planned to take advantage of local ice and weather conditions. Distances are relatively short in the archipelago and as there are no ocean crossings, so the seas are normally calm. Svalbard is one of the few places on the planet that offers such a wealth and diversity of natural and cultural history sites. During the next six days we will visit ice covered seas, fjords with breathtaking mountain scenery and glaciers flowing into the sea around us. We will spend time steaming through the ice in search of polar bears, hunting for seals. Ivory gulls will be a highlight for keen birders, while we keep a constant lookout for walrus hauled out on ice floes or on sandy beaches. Krossfjord, Konigsfjord, Monaco Glacier, Edgeoya, Hornsund and Bellsund, are just a few of the places that we may visit, depending on ice and weather. We hope to cruise in zodiacs along the ice edge, viewing seals, walrus or polar bears and in fjords with glaciers spilling down to the sea. We'll enjoy spectacular seabird cliffs from the edge of a Zodiac, as well as walks on shore, enjoying the arctic flora and fauna. Being in the land of the polar bear, your expedition staff will carry rifles and flare guns on shore for your protection. We take on an expedition spirit by not having a set itinerary and are free to take advantage of the best that Svalbard has to offer.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 3 Around Spitsbergen

Whilst people are initially drawn to this region for polar bears, Spitsbergen also has a prolific birdlife on offer. Enjoy the spectacular bird cliffs, filled with thousands of murres (guillemots), as well as kittiwakes and glaucous gulls and soak up the sound of these chirping, feathered creatures. A little auk colony will also be on our agenda.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 4 Around Spitsbergen

The Svalbard region is a land of history: from whaling to reaching for the pole, to trapping, coal mining and war. There is some evidence of the whaling industry on some of the landings and the on-board lectures, will give you a bit more insight into the history of this region.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 5 Around Spitsbergen

We will spend time in Zodiacs, cruising around the iceflows and may encounter some lounging walrus, with their young. There will be more landings, with different options for walks to suit all members of the group. The walks are normally divided into slow, medium and fast paced groups and depending on whether you want to take photographs near the beachfront, or hike up to the highest point, you can vary which option you choose each day.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 6 Around Spitsbergen

Catch a glimpse of an arctic fox, roaming on the tundra. We also hope to see Svalbard's unique subspecies of reindeer. They are much smaller than their southern relatives, but still carry impressive antlers.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 7 Around Spitsbergen

After our last full day of adventure, soaking up the sights of the Arctic wilderness, we will anchor off Longyearbyen in the evening and enjoy our final night aboard the ship, recounting tales of our week-long adventure.

Overnight: **Comfortable Boat**

DAY 8 Disembark at Longyearbyen

We arrive in Longyearbyen in the early morning for disembarkation.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches,7 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Cabins

Prices are based on the use of outward facing, category one cabins on the lower deck. Category one cabins are triple or quad share. They are comfortable with a private toilet and shower, and porthole. The MS Expedition has a number of different cabin categories, all outside facing and with two beds (apart from suites which have queen size beds). Some have larger windows. We can also offer single occupancy, subject to availability. Call us for details on the cabin choice to fit your requirements.

Ship Dining

Onboard our expedition ship you'll find a diversity of gourmet international cuisines prepared and catered by professional chefs; all meals are included in the price of your expedition. Dining is casual, tables are unassigned and the dining room is capable of seating the entire passenger compliment at one time. There is always a selection of different meals available, and vegetarians will find plenty of options. Special dietary requirements can be accommodated with advance notice; please advise us at time of confirmation. Coffee, tea and water are all provided free of charge. All other beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, are not included and can be purchased in the dining room, pub or in the lounge.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Kayaking is offered as an optional extra (subject to availability) on all Arctic voyages aboard the M/S Expedition (except Norwegian Fjords and Polar Bears - ELN). We use twin kayaks. Each time you go kayaking you will forgo a trip in the Zodiac inflatable boats. Kayaking costs £429 per person. This optional extra is only available if you book it prior to your departure and you must book it directly with the ship's operator. Space is limited – so book as soon as possible to secure your place!

Tipping - Local Crew

Tipping is of considerable significance to the people who will take care of you during your travels. It is an expression of satisfaction. The suggested amount is USD $10 - 15 per person per day spent on board. Of course, tipping is a personal choice and the suggested amount is set only as a guideline. The money is collected by the Hotel Manager at the end of the voyage and distributed among the crew and Expedition Staff. The Officers choose not to participate in the tipping pool.

Foreign Exchange

Spitsbergen

Norway

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in Myre and at Oslo and Evenes Airports.

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are generally accepted at many hotels and optional excursions may be paid for by credit card.

Travellers Cheques: Not recommended.

Local Currency: Norwegian Krona

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Take Norwegian Krona with you

Where to Exchange: Recommend you buy some Norwegian Krona before departing the UK (or whist in transit in Oslo).

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

For passengers making their own travel arrangements, please ensure you join the group as described on day one of the tour itinerary. If you are considering purchasing your own airline tickets, you can book these through any travel agent, directly with an airline or through an online flight consolidator. In all cases, we would be happy to arrange transfers to and from the joining point of your tour if required.

Joining Tour Abroad

Clients booked on **'Land Only'** arrangements should make their own way to the joining point. Please refer to separate **'Joining Instructions'** for time and place of rendezvous with tour leader

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining **any** of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable.

If you require travel insurance for your tour, Explore Worldwide is an appointed representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services authority. Our travel insurance policy is specially tailored to the needs of the adventure traveller and will cover you for any included activity on any Explore trip. You can either purchase this at the time of booking or call us on 0844 499 0903 after you have booked.

Visa Information

Norway: Entry visas NOT required by UK, AUS, NZ, USA, CAN Citizens. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Spitsbergen

Norway

The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour

Climate

Spitsbergen

Norway

Seasonal Climate Despite the northern latitudes the climate in Norway is not extreme, due to the affects of the North Atlantic Drift. Between May and September is the best time to visit this region, with summer temperatures reaching the high teens and rain a regular feature year round along the coast. North of the Arctic Circle the sun does not set between the middle of May and the end of July, so you can expect to encounter the midnight sun during this period.

Clothing

Parkas
This will be provided by the ship operator. Please register your size with us before travel and we will arrange for your parka to be available in your cabin on arrival.

Gloves
Keeping your hands warm and dry can be a challenge. Thin polypropylene gloves can be worn underneath warm outergloves. This allows you some protection from the cold when removing your gloves to operate your camera etc. We strongly recommend that you bring more than one pair of gloves, in case one gets wet (or lost).
Hat/Cap
Warm, woollen hat/cap to protect your ears, as well as a scarf, neck gaiter or other face protection, such as a balaclava.
Trousers
Water-resistant trousers of coated nylon or, even better, Gore-Tex® are essential for your comfort. They can be worn over your regular clothes to keep you warm and dry. We suggest that you purchase trousers a few sizes larger than you normally wear as you will be wearing them over other clothing. Gore-Tex® or similar fabrics are excellent for keeping out wind and water without trapping excess heat. Rain gear and Gore-Tex® products can be found in any outdoor sport clothing store. In addition to your waterproof trousers, warm ski pants are suggested if you have them. Warm trousers such as jeans, corduroys etc are also good.
Socks
Warm wool socks worn over a thin pair of silk, polypropylene socks should provide enough warmth and insulation for your feet. Bring several pairs of socks, since you will inevitably get your feet wet.
Outer Clothing Woollen, knit or cotton sweaters/tops, polar fleece tops (medium weight), several cotton turtlenecks and T-shirts for layering on and off the ship.
Underclothing
Thermal underwear is highly recommended as it will keep you warm without adding bulk. Most polar travellers prefer a lightweight version.

Equipment

Sunglasses and sun cream
Personal toiletries
A refilllable water bottle
Books/reading material
Camera and memory cards (and something to protect the camera when out in the elements)
Seasickness remedy
Walking poles
Personal First Aid

Footwear

Complimentary, used waterproof boots will be supplied onboard. However, guests might want to bring their own if they are the following sizes due to the limited quantities onboard:
- men's UK size 12 & 13 1/2
- women's UK size below three & seven and above

Guests must bring their own if they are:
- men's UK size six 1/2 or smaller
- men's UK size 13 1/2 or larger
- women's UK size two or smaller
- women's UK size nine 1/2 or larger

These are rubber, waterproof boots that are just below your knees with a strong, ridged non-skid sole.
You usually have to step from the Zodiac into icy water up to 30 cm high on most landings. Do not bring heavy, cumbersome boots that make it difficult to walk or boots with metal cleats as they cannot be used for landings. For maximum warmth, wear loose-fitting boots and two pairs of socks. Try out your boots before the voyage.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Food

The prices for meals and drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive. The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Spitsbergen

Norway

Lunch £: 12.00

Dinner £: 32.00

Drink

Spitsbergen

Norway

Bottle of Beer £: 7.00

Water £: 1.4

Country details

Spitsbergen

Norway

Population: 5,000,000

Size of Country: 385,252 sq km

Major Language: Norwegian

Religion: Lutheranism

Time Difference to GMT: +1

Electric Supply & Plugs

Spitsbergen

Norway

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: The Sunshine Orphanage (which cares for abandoned children in

Luxor, Egypt), Education for All (sponsoring children through their secondary education in Morocco), The Hope Foundation (helping an Indian Village to recover from the 2004 Tsunami) and the Mufindi Orphanage, which support AIDS orphans in Tanzania.

We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation, Travel Operators for Tigers (helping save the Bengal Tiger from extinction) and Friends for Conservation. We have also adopted a beautiful Sri Lankan Elephant called 'Serendip'.

We are delighted to have received a Five Star sustainable tourism status from the Association of Independent Tour Operators in recognition of our on-going commitment to sustainable tourism.

Cool Earth

Explore are delighted to support Cool Earth to reduce carbon emissions through preventing the illegal deforestation of the South America rainforest. One of the top sources of global carbon emissions, rainforest deforestation equivalent to the USA's annual emissions, it also destroys flora and fauna, sometimes to the point of extinction. It also degrades the lives and communities of the 350 million residents of the rainforest.

Cool Earth prevents the deforestation through its support of local communities as forest guardians and by focussing on areas in immediate danger of deforestation. It has so far protected over 350,000 acres of rainforest, with each acre saving an emission of 260 tons of CO2, as well as protecting rare animals and plants. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year. In addition to mitigating emissions, when you travel with Explore, you are helping to protect the source of 20% of the world's fresh water and oxygen, as well as the livelihoods of the 1.6 billion people who are reliant on the rainforest. www.coolearth.org

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2013 and 31st December 2014.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2014 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2014. 2015/16 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2015.

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