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The Arctic Anti-Cruise

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Michael S. Nolan

Lindblad Expeditions Arctic Svalbard Cruise

Today's luxury cruises, even to Alaska, are the stuff of mockery, gluttony, and clichés. But **Lindblad Expeditions'** cruises to Arctic **Svalbard**, 350 miles from Norway's Northern Cape, to see wildlife, including polar bears, in their natural habitats, are about as different from the average conception of a cruise-vacation as possible. For starters, the boat is a fully stabilized ice-class science-expedition ship – with 81 cabins, small in comparison to one of those floating Cunard resorts – and lacking, among other things, in Broadway-style theaters or casinos (although it does offer a wellness center, doctor, and massage services). Its accommodations are tasteful and comfortable but not over-the-top luxurious; the food is excellent, healthy, and local; and it carries kayaks and Zodiacs, which you use to get into the chilly water in order to spot the bears and walrus frolicking along the icy fjords. Cruisers cannot forget the sight, both sad and exhilarating, of seeing glacial ice slide off itself into the sea with a booming crash. And in the greener areas along this tour, you may see reindeer running through wildflowered hills.

Thankfully, a **National Geographic** photographer resides on board to help you learn how to shoot nature properly, so that you don't have to steal stock photos from the Lindblad website when it's time to update your Facebook page. What's more, Lindblad provides guest speakers, including scientists, filmmakers, hosts of **NatGeo 'Wild' shows**, and polar boat captains to flood you with information as you experience it firsthand.

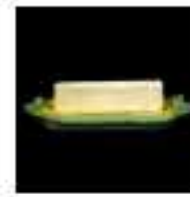
These are obviously summer tours (it would be too cold to visit this area in the winter), but there are still rooms left for this season, and you can already book for a year from now. We highly recommend you act fast because these ships are small, and the trip is wildly popular. The specific "ice-bear" trip is an 11-day affair including a long pre-flight to Norway before you even get to fly up to the port of call on Svalbard, but it's worth it, even if you do have to buy some extra water-repellent clothes. After all, environmental science suggests you may not be able to see some of these remarkable creatures much longer, whereas the Love Boats of the Caribbean will likely never disappear.

More Information: 11-day 'Land of the Ice Bears' trip starts at \$8,650. Visit expeditions.com for booking.

– Adam Baer

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