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# THIS WAS SVALBARD 2018

Author: Billy Herman

## About the tour

Tour	Photography- and nature tour to Svalbard
When	3 July 2018 - 16 July 2018
Number of travelers	12

Guide



David 'Billy' Herman &  
Yves Adams

**This is not going to be your average trip report. It's sometimes hard to put into words what a journey or unique atmosphere has been like. But then one of the participants gives a farewell speech to make u fall in awe. The words of traveler Johan Verbanck form the perfect summary of a fantastic trip.**

**We are therefore delighted to publish the speech that Johan gave on our chartered boat 'Origo' during the last evening, spiced with photos of Johan and tour guide Billy Herman. Travel with us and enjoy!**



*The fur of polar bears always wears this yellowish hue...*

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*Dear friends,*

It is almost impossible to put into words all the impressions we experienced together during this fantastic expedition to Svalbard and much further (up to the ice fields at 82 degrees North!) But when I close my eyes ... I do see some obvious highlights:

*Endless snow-covered mountains and countless glaciers that are entwined in an eternal, impressive embrace.*

*We all remember the postcard view of the glaciers on the 'Magdalena fjords' with in the foreground 10 pairs of walrus tusks with a blubbery beast of more than one tonne attached to each pair of teeth.*

*Kilometers and kilometers of clouds hanging between the mountains and adding a 'flou artistique' to our many landscape photos.*

*We admired the beautiful reflections in the sea water of countless beautiful glaciers (one was 160 km long) and the azure blue sky.*

*That moment when we, as an accomplished Sherlock Holmes', searched the horizon with our binoculars, just above the water surface and we suddenly noticed a geyser-like water fountain: it was a blue whale ... a huge 200-tonnes ocean creature.*

*The panoramas from the deck of our ship Origo at 2 o'clock at night: giant breeding cliffs with more than 60,000 pairs of Brünnich's guillemot guillemots and thousands of black-legged kittiwakes were quite impressive ... just like the chicks of the glaucous gull, who looked at us from their nests in a narrow cavern about halfway through an almost vertical rock wall rising out of the ice water.*

*The very close encounter that some participants had on day 2 with the indescribable beauty of a group of beluga whales. Very fast, but no less elegant, swimming less than 30 meters from the coastline where we stood. It filled us with emotion and enthusiasm.*

*More than once we were amazed by the sound of that gigantic creaking ice mass echoing from the depths of glaciers during their slow journey to the sea mouth.*

*For minutes we were the privileged witnessing a family of arctic foxes with playful puppies in their pristine environment.*

*Only minutes later our memory cards registered a group of Svalbard reindeers, including some handsome, completely white young animals.*

*Our countless encounters with polar bears were fantastic. Neither of us had dared to dream in advance that we would see 35 (!) Different polar bears during our trip. Some we will never forget:*

- *the polar bear mother who slowly came closer with her two boys on the ice pack, straight to the stern of our Origo;*
- *that one male with the seal carcass on the pack ice, flanked by an elegant, elusive ivory gull.*

*Our tour group consisted mainly of 'birders', which drove the Starling team to show us some 'specials', such as:*

- *the delicately colored **king eider** males next to the Origo, with their unique, colorful collar;*
- *the male **snow bunting** looking for seeds on top of the purple flowers of a compass plant;*
- *the magnificent **red-throated diver** who offered a fish to his young at the nest;*
- *the clown-like colored pelvis of **Atlantic puffins**, fraternally side by side on their nest cliff.*

*How beautiful the tundra flowers were only became clear to us when we sat on our knees or flat on our stomach to photograph them, preferably with a wide angle lens.*

*Equally appealing were the diligent and nervous escadrons of little auks that bombed through the sky at enormous speeds. The old Russian mining village, Pyramiden, left a big impression on us. In 1998 the clock on the wall of the primary school stopped ticking at a quarter to five. Since then the time seems frozen in the ghost town. Children's drawings from the late nineties hang on the walls of the school. In the day care center there have been untouched jars and children's shoes next to the beds for two decades. Outside, huge steel structures, used in the last century for the mining works, brave the arctic storms. Millions of salt molecules and microcrystals adorn the iron skeletons, while Lenin's statue watches over his private arctic "Champs Elysées." When we closed our eyes on the edge of the empty Olympic Soviet swimming pool, we could almost make a virtual dive into history.*



*I am sure I forgot to mention many essential things that we saw of the impressive nature of Svalbard. All these things will slowly become clear in the coming months, while we will decide on our computer which photos will survive the selection. Fortunately photography is also: freezing and saving time.*

THANK YOU!

Johan Verbanck

### 3 success factors for this 'trip of a lifetime'

Apart from the unbelievable beauty of nature on Svalbard, I want to emphasize that this expedition could never have been such a 'super trip' without 3 essential factors:

1. **Our dedicated and very competent tour guides:** Yves, Billy and Sarah. We want to thank you very much for all the minute preparations, for the flexibility in planning day (and night) trips, depending on constantly changing wind and weather conditions. It felt like a privilege to be in your company in the car, on the boat, in the zodiacs and on foot ... flanked by a 'gun man' and 'gun woman'. It ensured that we could fully concentrate on admiring and photographing the nature of Svalbard, without worrying about possible polar bears behind every corner or boulder.
2. This wonderful trip would never have been the same without the **exceptional captain Lennert** and his team. Every member of the team was equally important to make the sometimes windy trip in pool water possible. We will never forget Christian, the cook, who served us a delicious breakfast, main course and a range of starters and desserts day after day.
3. The third success factor, that is you, **fellow travelers**, who managed to live together on a relatively small surface on the Origo, with great respect for everyone. Together we made numerous excursions in the zodiacs and on foot, we shared emotions and experienced and photographed the nature of Svalbard together.

















