

Text sample: Boat trip to Pyramiden

& Guiding with the *Langøysund* and *Billefjord*, Polar Charter with the *Polargirl* and Arctic Explorer AS with the high-speed boat MV *Aurora Explorer* (see 3.3 *Tour operators*). You can book at the tourist information office (www.visitsvalbard.com/).

As these boat trips are very popular, I will now describe the tours to Pyramiden and Barentsburg (the routes may be done in reverse order). Additionally, there are sometimes shorter evening tours to a glacier in Borebukta. See also the regional sections in chapter 6 for more background on the areas visited (6.1.6 *Eastern Dickson Land*, 6.1.10 *Ymerbukta*, 6.1.2 *Grønfford, Barentsburg*).

Boat trip to Pyramiden

The trip will start with the pick-up from your hotel at about 8:30 a.m. and the bus ride down to the harbour (1), where the boat is alongside Bykaia or the floating pier next to it (Flytekaia). The boat will leave as soon as everybody is on board, so it is good to come a bit earlier rather than later if you make your own way to the harbour. Soon after departure, the guide will welcome the guests and give a short introduction and some safety information.

The course is set northwards around Revneset (2), staying more or less near the coast, so you have good opportunities to enjoy the scenery. If you are interested in geology, then you will quickly not only see the layers in the rock, but also some minor faults at Forkastningsfjellet (3), hence the name: Forkastning is Norwegian for "fault." The captain will keep the boat reasonably close to the southern coast of Sassenfjord, where you will most likely see some distant reindeer on the tundra, until we reach Diabasodden (4), a cliff of diabas rock with a medium-sized seabird colony. Brünnich's guillemots and, in lesser numbers, puffins and Black guillemots breed on the cliffs. You will not get close-up views and photos of the individual birds here, but will be rewarded with a good overall impression of an arctic seabird cliff and, if you are fast and lucky, you may get a shot of a puffin flying near the boat.

The next leg is an open-water crossing of nearly ten kilometres across Sassenfjord (5). Depending on the weather, this area will either stick in your memory as a place of seasickness or one of great scenic beauty. The view of the mountain Templet (6) is especially impressive. But with strong east-westerly winds, Sassenfjord often turns out to be a natural wind tunnel, making the passage rather uncomfortable in such conditions. But it is likely to be calm again as soon as we pass the little islands of Gåsøyane (7), some small islets of basaltic rocks where a lot of geese and ducks breed in the early summer, marking the entrance to Billefjord. Surrounded with some quite majestic and characteristic mountains, this is one of Spitsbergen's most scenic fjords.

We then pass Gipshuken (8) with its impressive geological structures and colours. The colourful layers are rich in limestone and gypsym, and date back into the Carboniferous and Permian eras, much older than those south of Sassenfjord. We have a while to enjoy variations on this lovely and interesting scenery until we round Kapp Napier (9), where a little assembly of huts catches the eye. This miniature settlement

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is Brucebyen, built by the Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate which was searching for coal in the area in 1919-20.

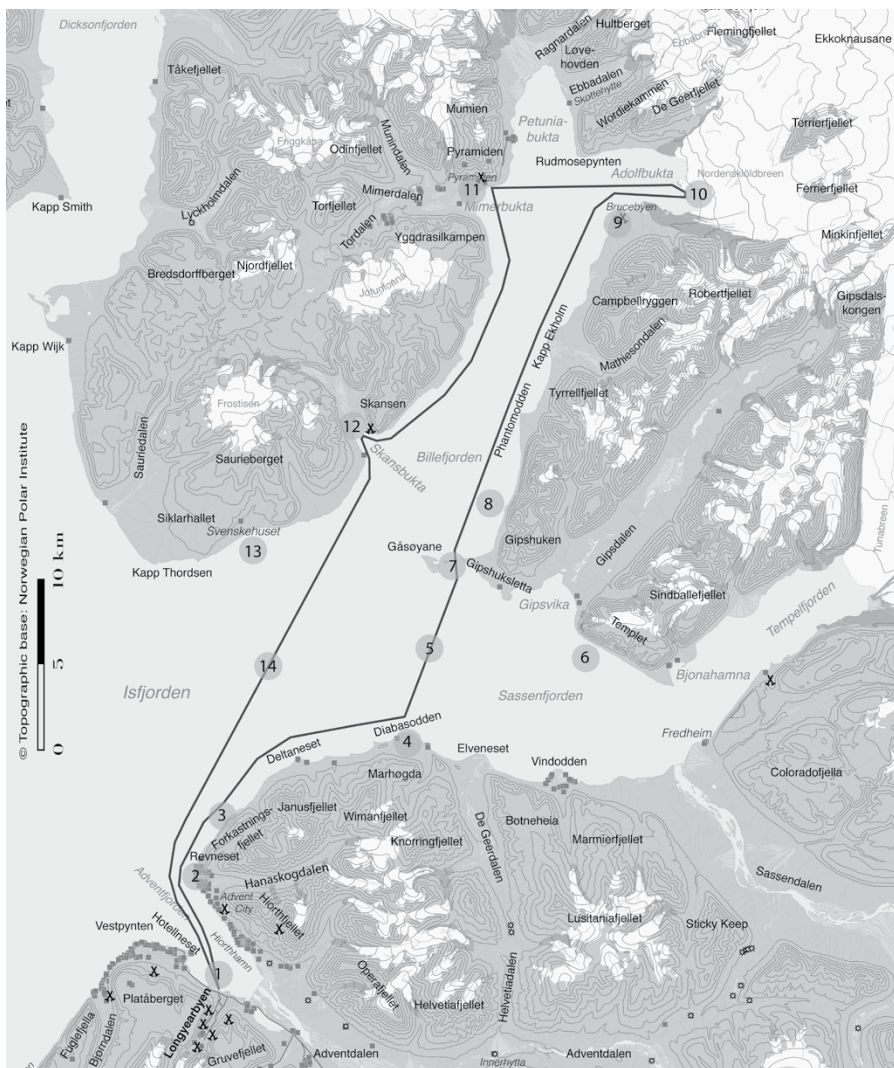
Surrounded by scenic mountains on both sides, we now enter the smaller bay of Adolfbukta, named after the famous Swedish polar explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld. The mighty glacier **Nordenskiöldbreen** (10) at the head of the bay is now the firm focus of everybody's attention. The glacier front forms an impressive ice cliff, about three kilometres wide, interrupted by some small islands and rocky outcrops. Behind the calving front, the glacier ascends in several crevassed steps to altitudes of more than 1,000 m, where it joins the 600 km² large ice cap Lomonossovfonna that constantly feeds Nordenskiöldbreen with ice. The ice cap is not visible from sea level, but it is nevertheless an impressive scenic spectacle! The captain will manoeuvre the ship to a position near the glacier and stop there for a couple of minutes. Maybe the crew will pick up a piece of glacier ice from the water to serve whisky on the rocks. Nordenskiöldbreen is retreating over the years and, as more and more rocky features become visible at the foot of the ice cliff, it is unfortunately possible the glacier will lose its impressive calving front over time. The rocks that appear under the ice, are well over a billion years old; they are among the very oldest in Svalbard.

Meanwhile, the crew will have prepared lunch (often a BBQ) on the back deck, which is sheltered from the wind, so it is a good time to eat now while the ship is cruising across the fjord to Pyramiden (11), which will take about half an hour. Once alongside, the group will be welcomed by a local Russian guide who will take over at this point to offer a guided walk of 1.5-2 hours. You have to be prepared for Polar bears within the abandoned settlement, so individual excursions are not allowed unless you have your own weapon (which, by the way, you have to leave with the crew while on board). Transport from the harbour to the actual settlement is usually done by bus. During the tour in downtown Pyramiden, the guide will give you some information and tell you stories from the time when Pyramiden was still an active mining settlement (up to 1998). In the old city centre, you will probably have the opportunity to visit the old culture house, and possibly the indoor swimming pool and canteen. The old buildings with noisy Kittiwakes which breed on window ledges and the Lenin statue are among the most popular photo stops and, if you are lucky, you may see an Arctic fox roaming between the houses – if there were only more time to absorb all of these fleeting impressions! Yet there is still a bit of time left to visit the bar in Hotel Tulipan ("Tulip Hotel") and the souvenir shop, before you have to get back to the boat – probably by bus. Soon the boat is on its way again, steaming south through Billefjord, keeping closer to the western shore this time, so you get a different perspective of the same mountains you saw in the late morning.

The final brief stop is the scenic bay Skansbukta (12), where remains of an early 20th century gypsium mine can still be seen at the foot of the impressive Skansen mountain. The captain will reduce speed a little, but it is a brief turn-around, so you have to be quick to get some views and photos. That is, unless the boat stops completely to pick up a group of hikers and kayakers looking forward to civilization while some of the



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passengers are, not without a slight touch of envy, trying to imagine what these guys may have seen and done in the last couple of days.

The day will have been a long one by this time and most guests will be getting a bit tired, paying more attention to the various offerings of the little bar than to Svenskehuset (13), an old house which is becoming visible in the distance, a famous place due to a tragic wintering in 1872-73. Another crossing of Sassenfjord is coming up now, a bit further west this time (14), before the ship turns into Adventfjord, going alongside at around 7 p.m. The bus is already waiting to drive the passengers back to their hotels.