



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A passenger departs Svalbard Airport, which was one of a few Norwegian airports to see a drop in travelers between 2009 and 2010. The global recession and interruption of flights due to a volcano eruption in Iceland are among the factors cited for the decline.

Air travel drops 28.3%

Decline at Svalbard by far the largest of airports open for all of 2010; hotel guests also down

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

The number of passengers flying to and from Svalbard declined 28.3 percent in 2010 compared to 2009, the largest by far at fully functional airports during a year when traffic was up nationally, according to travel officials.

Guests at hotels and other accommoda-

tions also appear certain to show a decline, with about 75,000 as of Nov. 30, 2010, compared with 82,307 for all of 2009, according to Statistics Norway. That follows an 11.2 percent drop between 2008 and 2009.

Svalbard's decline in airport traffic was the largest in Norway except for a 49.6 percent drop at Sandane Airport, which was closed for six months to expand the runway's security zones, according to Avinor. About 126,000 people traveled to and from Svalbard Airport in 2010.

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Wanting wrecked ship out

Study finds Russian vessel at Bjørnøya a major environmental hazard; governor seeks removal

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A Russian ship that ran aground on the coast of Bjørnøya in May of 2009 is a serious environmental hazard and should be removed, according to Svalbard Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø.

Elevated levels of lead, copper, chrome and other metallic elements are in samples of water near the *Petrozavodsk*, according to a study ordered by the Norwegian Coastal Administration. Furthermore, tides, weather and other factors are making rapid degradation likely, which could result in "an acute pollution situation."

"The wreck is in a nature reserve with a traffic ban, which is the highest form of protection we have in Norway," Ingerø and Guri Tveito, head of environmental conservation, wrote in a letter Thursday to the NCA.

"In light of this and the actual risk of harm to the environment and people, we recommend that you first remove possible sources of pollutants from the wreck and then the wreck. We are aware that this is an expensive operation."

Proposed alternatives to dismantle the ship or tow it to another area present a larger risk to

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Bringing the notes, not the names

Polarjazz trying forte instead of fame to lure listeners to festival

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Booking a "big-name" pop artist to lure people to a jazz festival has long been the bane of purists. This year's Polarjazz is designed with them in mind.

"We have a lot of interesting artists," said Lasse Hansen, the festival's director. "We are very eager to see if people want to be at the festival for the festival, or they just go for the names."

Single- and multiple-day tickets went on sale this week for the world's northernmost

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NORDNORSK JAZZSENTER

This Svalbard image is part of a collection by photographer and video artist Werner Anderson used by composer Brynjar Rasmussen for "Arctic Mood," which will be performed Feb. 5.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.



LNS SPITSBERGEN

A new Volvo L-90F wheel loader that arrived recently in Longyearbyen will be used by LNS Spitsbergen to maintain city streets during the winter.

Briefly

Late agreement prevents strike by LNS employees

A strike by about 90 LNS Spitsbergen employees was averted today when a pay raise agreement was reached six hours before the scheduled negotiating deadline, according to the mediator of the talks.

The agreement allocates eight million more for base salaries, about a 4.2 percent increase, according to a statement by Norway's state mediator. Workers rejected a 3.2 percent increase offer before Christmas.

The sides also agreed to form a working group to study the company's payroll, since a discrepancy in wages is a sore point for some employees. Also, employees will receive a bonus for reaching goals aimed at reducing property damage.

LNS Spitsbergen provides infrastructure support services for settlements and Store Norske's mining operations.

Mediation talks began Monday morning in Oslo and concluded at about 6 p.m. today. Employees must vote to approve the new contract by Feb. 7.

Veterinarian to offer local services Jan. 25-28

Vaccinations and other animal services will be offered when by a veterinarian visiting Svalbard from Jan. 25 to 28, according to the Svalbard governor's office.

The services will be provided at the governor's Sjøgarasjen facility. Those wishing to schedule an appointment should contact Harald Os at 1976 901 618.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

The people have spoken and it appears we're only partially clueless in our list of the top 10 news stories for Svalbard in 2010. An online *Svalbardposten* poll with 542 votes as this is written shows 52 percent rank the Store Norske corruption scandal the biggest story (first on our list), 20 percent the faulty food grinders fiasco (fourth), 14 percent the polar bear attacking the kayaker (second), five percent the new Kulturhuset (third) and eight percent choosing "other" (we missed that one completely) ... British royalty groupies might want to keep an eye on Prince Harry's travel plans for March, as he "would love to join the expedition" of disabled military veterans scheduled to attempt a four-week skiing expedition to the North Pole. The 26-year-old prince, who is third in line to the throne, is training to be an army Apache helicopter pilot and his participation in expedition depends on

his training schedule ... Speaking of watching the Pole, NORAD's Santa-tracking program logged a record number of phone calls and e-mails on Christmas Eve. Volunteers answered more than 80,000 phone calls and more than 7,000 e-mails on Santa's whereabouts, and NORAD's website had nearly 15.5 million unique visitors. That's a few too many for us to bother asking if the words "Mine 2B" were part of any inquiry ... This photo of a polar bear approaching a ship is among *National Geographic's* top 10 photos of 2010, according to a reader poll. It was third on the list, but didn't have a chance against a diver in Thailand whose head was perfectly blocked by a fish, making many readers think it was a freakish hybrid/mermaid/something.





KYSTVERKET

The wrecked Petrozavodsk remains grounded on the southwest side of Bjørnøya, where elevated levels of metals have been detected in nearby waters and rapid additional degradation is likely, according to a study. The ship ran aground in May of 2009 due to crew negligence.

Moving, leaving ship both have risks

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the environment than leaving it, according to the study by Norconsult, an engineering consulting firm near Oslo.

Removing the ship is also "a potential hazard and challenging," but "the governor's input is tied to our role as the pollution and natural resource management authority, and responsibility for (search and rescue) operations in the area," the letter by Ingerø and Tveito states. "The practical and safety aspect of a possible removal of the wreck is not specifically considered by us."

The wreck is located in a protected nature reserve with a seabird nesting population that reaches 500,000 annually. The letter states removal should be done with minimal disturbance to the birds.

The largest nesting area of the reserve is closed to human activity from April 1 to Aug. 31, but the wreck makes it more likely people may try to walk there, the letter adds.

"Moreover, there is a security risk if someone seeks out wreck."

The Petrozavodsk was carrying 700 tons of diesel when it drifted off course and ran

aground May 11, 2009. The captain was sentenced to 18 days in prison for drinking alcohol on duty and the first mate 40 days for falling asleep while on watch.

A diesel spill from the vessel spread for several kilometers, but environmental damage from the light fuel was assessed as minimal. But efforts simply to reach the ship after the spill, much less remove it, were hampered by the rough coastline and harsh climate.

Officials hoped to remove the wreckage last summer, but their worst-case scenario was realized when the vessel broke in two during the winter. That resulted in further delays and the consideration of alternatives to removal.

NCA officials initially demanded the ship's owners remove the wreck, but now say Norway will likely get stuck with the bill because of the company's inability to pay.

The incident also prompted a review of emergency readiness in the area, since there was no ship identification system close enough to detect when the vessel veered astray.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.



KYSTVERKET

The decaying interior of the Petrozavodsk contains numerous varieties of pollutants, a study notes.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Fox with rabies attacks dogs at Hopen; 1st case since 1999

A fox that attacked four dogs at the Hopen Meteorological Station last Tuesday had rabies, according to the National Veterinary Institute in Oslo. The fox was killed by the dogs in a fight, with at least one of the canines bitten in return. The dogs are vaccinated against rabies, but officials took blood samples from the animals today before deciding their fate. More than 20 animals have been diagnosed with rabies in Svalbard since 1980, but this is the first case since 1999. The disease is transmittable to humans and other mammals.

Christmas and alcohol rate high in polls, paint doesn't

Svalbardposten readers were most interested in telling how often they have celebrated Christmas in Svalbard and least interested in the new colors for Lompensenteret, according to the online polls of 2010. A total of 732 people voted in the Christmas poll, with 17 percent stating they have spent ten or more Christmases in the archipelago, 14 percent five to ten times, 32 percent one to five times and 36 percent have never spent the holiday here. Alcohol was also a popular topic, with a majority thinking Svalbard should have its own beer, the airport should be licensed to serve alcohol and Kulturhuset should not. Between 636 and 717 people responded to those questions. Only 275 people responded to the Lompensenteret question, with 51 percent disapproving of the new paint applied last summer.

Reindeer hunters face ban for not reporting after season

Reindeer hunters failing to submit reports to the Svalbard governor's office after this year's season will not be allowed to hunt next year. There has been a lack of reporting in recent years and a failure to enforce consequences lessens the motivation to do so, said Espen Stokke, the governor's conservation advisor. He said the reports are important for scholars and others who study management of the species.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Fair. E winds to 18 km/h. High -21C (-31C wind chill), low -25C (-29C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. N winds to 7 km/h. High -29C (-29C wind chill), low -31C (-31C wind chill).	Snow. S winds at 11 km/h. High -21C (-27C wind chill), low -29C (-36C wind chill).	Snow clearing late. E winds at 11 km/h. High -26C (-33C wind chill), low -28C (-38C wind chill).
Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00	Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00	Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00	Sunrise: 0:00 Sunset 0:00
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -24C (-30C), -26C (-36C), light 0:00h; Monday, snow -15C (-23C), -20C (-31C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, snow, -11C (-18C), -16C (-24C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, occasional snow, -14C (-22C), -18C (-25C), light 0:00h.			
Data provided by yr.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A diner fills a plate with traditional Norwegian holiday fare during a Christmas Eve buffet at the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel. A relatively large number of guests stayed at the hotel for the holiday week compared to past years, but the total number of guests in Svalbard accommodations declined in 2010.

Volcano, recession hurt tourism

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"We will suffer more from (economic) depression than other destinations," said Morten Ulsnes, the airport's ground operations manager. "It is very expensive to come here and very expensive to stay here as a tourist."

Ash clouds from an erupting volcano in Iceland that disrupted numerous flights during the spring expedition season also were a likely factor, Ulsnes said. The eruptions caused the largest non-wartime cancellation of flights worldwide in history, mostly in Europe. Relatively few flights were cancelled in Svalbard, but numerous groups and individuals cancelled trips.

The only other major airports with decline were the domestic and international facilities in Kristiansand, which combined for a 0.7 percent drop. Declines at a few regional airports ranged from two to 5.4 percent.

Ulsnes said Svalbard Airport started to see a small increase in traffic during the fall, "so we are hoping for a better year in 2011."

Polarjazz to feature premier of 'Arctic Mood'

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jazz festival, scheduled from Feb. 2 to 6. The 150 multi-day passes should be available longer than last year, when they were quickly snapped up by people wanting to see Norwegian rock titan Sivert Høyem.

This year's lineup still features acclaimed talent in a multitude of genres, with trump player Solveig Slettahjell, acid jazz band Beady Belle, vocal sextet Pust, klezmer orchestra Klezmofobia and Cuban funk band Interactivo among the artists scheduled. Returning musicians include Lyriaka, Stian Carstensen and Cowabunga with Susanne Hansen.

The festival will also feature the world premier of "Arctic Mood," with video and photographs of Svalbard set to music composed by

More than 40 million passengers traveled to and from airports operated by Avinor in 2010, an increase of slightly more than four percent.

A second straight year of declining local hotel stays is a virtual certainty since this year's total as of November are more than 7,000 short of 2009. That total was exceeded during five months of peak tourist season, but only 1,786 stays were registered in November.

The monthly totals also reveal the impact the volcanic eruptions. Guest stays rose from 8,647 in March to 10,514 in April, then dropped to 4,290 in May. Totals then rose to 10,366 in June, 11,508 in July and 11,218 in August.

Foreigners accounted for 45 percent of hotel guests in July, but only 15 percent in November. Academic and professional guests represented 70 percent of September's stays, but only 19 percent in May.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Brynjar Rasmussen of the Christianssand String Swing Ensemble. It also features narrations by actor Bjørn Sundquist of people's experiences in the Arctic. The show is scheduled at 6 p.m. Saturday at Kulturhuset.

Most of the other concerts will remain at the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel, with a few free performances at Lompensenteret, Svalbardbutikken and the Kulturhuset cafe. There will also be the traditional open-mike Vorspiel to open the festival at 9 p.m. Feb. at the Radisson.

Tickets can be purchased at Kulturhuset or online at the festival's website, polarjazz.no, which also features the schedule and detailed artist profiles.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

Jan. 12

6 p.m.: Movie: "Jackass" (3D), U.S. comedy/documentary, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Fritt Vilt III," Norwegian horror film, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 15

2 p.m.: Presentation by Aino Grib about staging the "Mellom Linjene" literary exhibition during KunstPause Svalbard 2010. Longyearbyen Library.

Jan. 16

6 p.m.: Movie: "Le Herisson," French drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Red," U.S. action, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Jan 18 and 20

8 p.m.: Svalbard Seminar, presented by the Norwegian Polar Institute. Møysalen, UNIS.

Jan. 21

8 p.m.: Movie: "Get Low," Polish/German/U.S. comedy/drama. Norwegian premier. Kulturhuset.

Jan. 22

2 p.m.: Per Kyrre Reymert discusses his novel "I Polarnattens Favn," a Svalbard action/thriller about Øvre Richter Frich in 1912. Longyearbyen Library.

5 p.m.: Spitsbergen Up and Down race. For more information contact spitsbergenupanddown@gmail.com.

Jan. 23

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Tourist," U.S. drama/thriller, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Gazas tårer" ("Gaza's Tears"), Norwegian documentary, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Jan 25 and 27

8 p.m.: Svalbard Seminar. UNIS.

Jan. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Trolljegeren," Norwegian mockumentary, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

What's online

icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Study: Sea level to rise 4 meters by 3000*
- *Australia makes first seed vault deposit*
- *Studded tires may cause toxic air pollution*
- *'Lunatics' to run marathon in Antarctica*