



COURTESY OF VISIT SVALBARD

Cheap, available and even nicer than this: Standard rooms at the Barensburg hotel, shown here, are booked during the days surrounding the March 20 eclipse, but five upgraded suites are still available for 1,200 kroner a night. A major renovation of the hotel was completed last year.

Eclipse on a whim - cheap

Fly for 599 kroner, stay in a hotel suite for 1,200 kroner? Intriguing options available at last minute

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Believe it or not, it's still possible to fly from Oslo to Longyearbyen to experience next Friday's solar eclipse for 599 kroner. And stay in a suite at a very nice hotel for 1,200 kroner a night.

Yes, there are a couple of caveats.

The flight on Norwegian Air departs at 9:50 a.m. and arrives at 12:45 p.m. So while

technically you'll be in Svalbard the day of the eclipse and can revel with the masses, you'll end up being mostly in the dark during the flight.

On the other hand, with the long-term forecast predicting cloudy skies in Longyearbyen, a seat on a plane might offer the best viewing option, even if the blockage of the sun is only near-total instead of total.

Five hotel suites are available at the recently refurbished Barentsburg Hotel in the Russian mining settlement about 60 kilometers from Longyearbyen, said Katerina Zwonckova, a tourism official for Trust Arktikugol, the

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Whew! Strike ends

Norwegian Air pilots return to work a week before masses begin arriving for solar eclipse

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Everybody can now just start worrying about whether the sky will be clear.

An 11-day strike by Norwegian Air pilots ended Tuesday night as the two sides agreed on a contract that guarantees the pilots' jobs through October of 2017. The strike, which grounded virtually all of the discount airline's flights in Scandinavia, affected an estimate 150,000 to 200,000 passengers.

"I am extremely sorry for the problems caused to our passengers," Norwegian CEO Bjørn Kjos said during a press conference Tuesday in Oslo.

A press release from the airline notes flights will resume Wednesday, but "it will take some time before our operations are back to normal as many of Norwegian's aircraft and staff are not positioned for (Wednesday's) traffic."

The airline cancelled flights to and from Longyearbyen last Wednesday and Friday,

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Sun picks wrong 'eclipse' day

Solfestuka celebration left in the shade as sunlight fails to shine during tribute to giant gas ball

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Left out of the light, revelers resorted to a "(s)he's naked under those clothes" attitude on what's supposed to be one of Svalbard's brightest days each year.

"The sun is up there somewhere," said Henrik Rasmussen, one of the two emcees at Sunday's ceremony intended to welcome the

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Karina Halgunset tells a sun story Sunday at Skjæringa as locals watch for the first sunlight to shine upon Longyearbyen in four months.

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.

So starved he's paper-thin



ASHLEY COOPER / GLOBAL POPULATION SPEAK OUT

A polar bear that starved to death in western Spitsbergen due to a lack of sea ice where the animals hunt prey is among the Svalbard photos in the new book "Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot," available free in e-book format at tinyurl.com/nmgsae5. The book depicts the worldwide impacts of humans, with an emphasis on the issue of overpopulation. A recent study shows "even if there's a worldwide pandemic that kills 2 billion people, the planet's population looks to be roughly 8.5 billion people by 2100," according to the book's website. Hardcover copies of the book are also available for \$50 (U.S.), but publisher Global Population Speak Out is accepting requests for free copies from entities engaged in awareness campaigns.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Think the eclipse is going to draw a massive crowd? Maybe you haven't noticed, but **"more than 5,000 troops and 400 vehicles drawn from the every branch of the Norwegian armed forces are being used in a military exercise...in the northernmost part of Norway," the largest such exercise in 50 years,** according to *International Business Times*. Apparently if you lined up all the submarines, surface vessels and air force jets on a road they'd stretch out for six kilometers. All this is happening while our Russian neighbors are being a bit reckless. The good news the troops are scheduled to bugger out on March 18, the same day the bulk of the eclipse crowd starts arriving in Longyearbyen. Oh, except for one thing: the "northernmost" point in Norway is western Finnmark. OK, we can kinda-sorta understand someone saying Mehahn if they're too lazy to glance at a map for more than two seconds or do a simple fact search, but WTF??? ... Meanwhile, among the peaceful items in the news is



NORWEGIAN ARMED FORCES

Exactly like the tourist ATVs: Spitsbergen Travel just keeps their automatic weapons well hidden beneath the reindeer jerky and beer.

Svalbard Church (or maybe not so much given its priest but we'll get to that shortly). It gets a hat tip from the website Quartz in an article titled "Praying At The Ends Of The Earth" (at tinyurl.com/n38cjc99), although some of the facts are again a bit dodgy. It notes Longyearbyen is "a settlement of more than 1,000 people" (technically true, but the layoffs at Store Norske weren't *that* bad) and **describes the church as "not unlike a nursery-rhyme barn, save for the steeple. And the taxidermied polar bear occupying a corner of the rec room."** (OK, we'll give them that one) ... As for Priest Leif Magne Helgesen, who's appeared fully naked in print at least twice (including his own book), most locals know he got back recently from **spending three months in the West Bank and helping Palestinians and protesting Israel**. He and Longyearbyen School Headmaster Anne Søvold Vikanes, who also joined a visiting group organized by Norwegian Church Aid, will discuss their experience at 7 p.m. March 17 at UNIS.



COURTESY OF VISIT SVALBARD

Baptized in a barn. Of course, that should be considered a great honor for those of faith.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen and her stage twin (we'll let you figure out which is which), top, take a selfie during the conclusion of a variety show satirizing the past year's events Saturday at Huset. At bottom right, the Svalbard Irish Dance Ensemble approaches a crowd gathered on the ski hill across from Longyearbyen School for a variety of activities Saturday afternoon. At bottom left, the sun fails to emerge from behind the clouds during Sunday's ceremony at Skjæringa.

This hidden sun not so fun

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first of sunlight to shine on Longyearbyen in four months.

The sun briefly peeked over the mountains south of town at 12:50 p.m., but clouds cast a veil between it and the few hundred folks gathered at the old hospital steps at Skjæringa on the final day of the eight-day Solfestuka festival. The shady end to the festival means the sun has made two appearances in *Icepeople's* seven-year history.

"I wonder what those odds say for the total eclipse," said Kim Holmén, international director of the Norwegian Polar Institute. (For the record, the long-term forecast is for cloudy skies, although some say predictions more than five days out are basically a coin flip.)

The sun's shyness didn't keep other events during the weekend from shinning.

Another huge crowd gathered Saturday afternoon on the ski hill across from Longyear-

byen School, participating in activities ranging from sledding to watching the Svalbard Irish Dance Ensemble. Another type of darkness-into-light transformation took place Friday and Saturday nights at Huset with the annual variety show satirizing the past year's events.

Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen was the topic of multiple skits/songs, including a riff on her unflinching (and desperate?) cheerful Pollyannaish projections that Longyearbyen's future is sunny despite the devastating crisis at Store Norske.

The fiery issue of future mining was also fodder for old-school longtimer Anne Lise Sandvik and soon-to-be-son-in-law Espen Rotevatn, who also happens to be head of the local Green Party. But despite their constant fights, they could link arm-in-arm and agree Baby, There's Coal Outside."

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Three men rescued after 30 hours in a glacier snow pit

Three Swedish men in their 30s were rescued Wednesday (March 11) after spending 30 hours in a snow pit on Königsbergreen when their snowmobiles malfunctioned, according to The Governor of Svalbard. "First they had problems with one snowmobile, but continued on two to Agardh, and slept in a hunting and fishing cabin," said Police Chief Lt. Sidsel Svarstad. But the other two snowmobiles broke down the next day, forcing them to dig a shelter. A search was initiated when the men failed to return to Longyearbyen on schedule, with an observer in a rescue helicopter discovering them by chance by spotting a red flash through a break in the clouds. The men were transported to Longyearbyen Hospital, but apparently suffered no serious harm.

Snow crab catch half that of 2014; more ships likely cause

Catches of snow crabs at Smutthullet are down about 50 percent since 2014, apparently due to a large increase in the number of ships in the area, according to the Norwegian Coast Guard and the Directorate of Fisheries. Dozens of vessels were observed during a recent Coast Guard inspection, with the vessels registered in Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Norway. Between 5,000 and 10,000 crab pots were deployed in the sea. The directorate reports daily catches in the 62,400-square-kilometer area southeast of Svalbard area are between two and five tons. However, scientists have reported snow crabs are increasingly migrating northward and westward.

Man breaks ribs, rescued by helo after snowmobile crash

A man who broke his ribs and may have suffered additional injuries in a snowmobile accident a few kilometers south of Longyearbyen on Friday evening was rescued by helicopter and flown to Tromsø for treatment, according to The Governor of Svalbard. The accident in Fardalen occurred at about 5:30 p.m. while he was riding with a group, said Christian Svarstad, a police chief lieutenant for the governor.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. Variable winds to 39 km/h. High -8C (-12C wind chill), low -8C (-19C wind chill).	Snow. Variable winds to 35 km/h. High -6C (-11C wind chill), low -9C (-18C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds to 39 km/h. High -6C (-11C wind chill), low -8C (-15C wind chill).	Snow. Variable winds to 22 km/h. High -8C (-13C wind chill), low -9C (-16C wind chill).
Sunrise: 6:59a, sunset: 5:15p	Sunrise: 6:51a, sunset: 5:23p	Sunrise: 6:43a, sunset: 5:30p	Sunrise: 6:35a, sunset: 5:37p
Extended forecast: Sunday, snow, 0C (-13C), -8C (-16C), light 11:17h; Monday, cloudy, -3C (-12C), -7C (-13C), light 11:32h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -8C (-14C), -10C (-16C), light 11:48h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -11C (-16C), -12C (-18C), light 12:03h			
Data provided by storm.no			

The screenshot shows the Norwegian Air website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Fly', 'Hotell', 'Leiebil', 'Fly+Hotell', 'Hus & leiligheter', 'Reisemål', 'nMagazine', 'Nyttig på reisen', 'Er flyet i rute', 'Kundeservice', and 'Om Norwegian'. Below this is a search bar with 'Norge (Norsk)' selected. The main heading is 'Fly til Longyearbyen-Svalbard fra Oslo-Alle flyplasser tur/retur'. There are filters for 'Fly fra' (Oslo-Alle flyplasser (OSLAL)), 'Fly til' (Longyearbyen-Svalbard (LY)), 'Utreise' (20. mar 2015), 'Retur' (28. mar 2015), 'Vokane' (1), 'Barn (2-11)' (0), and 'Valuta' (NOK). A table shows flight options for Friday, 20. mar 2015. The table has columns for 'Avgang', 'Ankomst', 'Detaljer', and 'Alle priser i NOK' (LowFare, LowFare+, Flex). The first row shows a flight from Oslo-Gardermoen at 09:50 to Longyearbyen-Svalbard at 12:45, with a direct flight and a 2h 55m duration. Prices are 599, 749, and 1449 NOK. There are also sections for 'MINE REISEVALG' and 'BETINGELSER'.

NORWEGIAN AIR

Best seat in the house? Taking a flight that arrives nearly an hour after the eclipse is over might seem pointless, but with cloudy skies forecast in Longyearbyen you might get the better experience.

Late eclipse bargains available

PROCRASTINATE, from page 1

Russian state-owned company responsible for oversight of the settlement.

While Spitsbergen Travel recently charged 20,000 kroner a night for some hotel rooms in Longyearbyen that became available due to a group cancellation, Zwonckova said Trust Arktikugol is charging its standard rates for accommodations in Barentsburg and Pyramiden during the eclipse.

"First and foremost we are a new player on the market," she said. "The eclipse is a splendid opportunity to show we can offer something of interest."

The company also offers transfers by snowmobile from Longyearbyen, including a guide and cold-weather gear, Zwonckova said. The normal rate is 1,800 kroner, but she said the price will be higher during the eclipse.

The company's hostel in Barentsburg and hotel in Pyramiden are fully booked, she said.

Booking inquiries can be made via travel@arcticugol.ru and more information about the hotel and tourist offerings in the settlement is available at www.goarctica.ru

(the site is in Russian, so viewers will have to cut-and-paste text into Google Translate or something similar).

Visitors not wanting to celebrate the eclipse in a semi Soviet-era village can still find numerous private homes, apartments, cabins and individual rooms available at websites such as airbnb.com.

Rental rates have fluctuated greatly during the months leading up to the eclipse, with average rates of about 10,000 kroner per night several months ago to twice that a couple months later. Prices have generally declined since then, but range widely from about 2,500 kroner to 25,000 kroner a night for a private residence.

(Full disclosure: Our editor is among those trying to rent his apartment at airbnb and social media websites, so while mentioning this option could be seen as an advertising pitch he's also possibly screwing himself by highlighting the cheap hotel suites in Barentsburg.)

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

Norwegian Air strike ends after 11 days

WALKOUT, from page 1

causing problems for passengers and tour operators due to a lack of available space on Scandinavian Airlines during what is the peak time of the year for airline travel to Svalbard.

"We have about 30 guests stranded," said John-Einar Lockert, administrative director of Svalbard Adventure Group, which operates two hotels in Longyearbyen, on Monday. In addition, he said about 20 to 25 guests were unable to fly to Longyearbyen on Friday.

Esquil Solber, sales director for Spitsbergen Travel, told *Svalbardposten* "a maximum of 10 to 15" guests were stranded in Longyearbyen due to Friday's cancellation, but 180 incoming passengers – half of whom were likely tourists – were stranded in Oslo.

The airline resumed flights between the mainland and Svalbard on Monday, although Norwegian officials did not respond to inquiries about whether service would continue if the strike dragged on.

Torill Meistad, a Levanger resident whose husband works as a plumber in Longyearbyen, said she found out her flight to the archipelago last Wednesday was cancelled when she arrived at the airport in Oslo.

"I came by train from Trondheim," she said. "The wi-fi wasn't working."

The airline handled the situation well despite facing many stressed and angry would-be passengers, Meistad said.

"They were calm," she said. "There were extra people coming to help. We were given chairs to sit in. The situation was fair enough."

Meistad said she stayed with friends in Oslo until she was able to fly on Scandinavian Airlines on Sunday. Despite missing the majority of her planned week-long stay in Svalbard, said she sympathizes with the pilots because "the working conditions are getting more and more rough."

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

What's up

March 9-24

"The Stormy Sun and the Northern Lights," free course open to the public. Participants register at first class at 6:15 p.m. March 9. UNIS.

March 10

7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Community Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7:30 p.m.: Concert by pianist Leif Ove Andsnes and baritone vocalist Matthias Goerne, featuring "Schwanengesang" by Franz Schubert. Kulturhuset.

March 11

6 p.m.: Movie: "Amazonia," British/U.S. adventure/family, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 15

5 p.m.: Movie: "Cinderella," U.S. drama/adventure dubbed in Norwegian, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "The Theory of Everything," British drama/biography, all ages. Kulturhuset.

March 16

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

March 17

7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Photo Club annual meeting. Kapp Wijk, UNIS.

7 p.m.: Discussion about visit to the Middle East to assist Palestinians in occupied territories by Priest Leif Magne Helgesen and Longyearbyen School Headmaster Anne Søvold Vikanes. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Community meeting to discuss Longyearbyen Community Council's proposed land-use plan. UNIS.

March 18

6 p.m.: Movie: "Cinderella," U.S. drama/adventure w/ Norwegian subtitles, all ages. Kulturhuset.

March 19

7 p.m.: Solar Eclipse Warm-up w/ talks and tips from space experts. UNIS.

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:

- *Arctic coal mining in Russia hit by crisis*
- *The lucrative plot to destroy the Arctic*
- *Florida gov't bans term 'climate change'*
- *Alaska forced to import snow for Iditarod*