



# Land sale? Yikes!

*Huge tract near Longyearbyen offered to foreigners; China may try to get mining, Arctic foothold*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

A 217-square-kilometer swath of coal-rich land near Longyearbyen is for sale, raising concerns among everyone from local residents to the national government about a potentially hostile buyer such as China moving into the

neighborhood.

The Austre Adventfjord property across the fjord from Longyearbyen, one of only two privately owned tracts in Svalbard, is being sold to the highest bidder, *Verdens Gang* reported Tuesday.

The owners have not publicly specified a minimum expected bid, but the land contains an estimated 20 million tons of coal, worth nearly 10 billion kroner and enough to sustain mining in Svalbard for 20 years given current prices

See **AUSTRE**, page 4



WIKICOMMONS

The Austre Adventfjord estate for sale, including Operafjellet, contains about 20 million tons of coal.

# Coming in first and last

*Jens Stoltenberg making final May Day speech and debut at ski marathon in Svalbard this week*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

It's not easy for a novice to stand out in what's expected to be a record Svalbard Skimaratton crowd of more than 700 people Saturday, including a six-time World Cup champion who dominated last year's race. But rookie racer and

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Mayuri Morimoto uses a hand fan to dry just-washed rice to prevent it from sticking at Sushi Kita, where she works a sushi chef. Morimoto, who is severely hearing impaired, communicates with customers using a mix of speech, handwritten notes and translated phrases on a cell phone.

# Deaf defying

*Allow a disability to silence a passion for Arctic adventure? Mayuri Morimoto won't hear of it*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

Mayuri Morimoto is one of most exceptionally rare persons on Earth, being among four people currently sharing the distinction of being the world's northernmost sushi chef.

By the way, she's also Longyearbyen's only deaf resident – perhaps ever.

That might not seem like an afterthought in an extreme Arctic setting that requires resi-

dents to be self-dependent. But the 25-year-old from Fukuoka, Japan, isn't hearing any notions about her disability silencing her adventures. She's explored the world independently for years, including two visits to Svalbard that inspired her to look for work here last summer.

"Living abroad was a dream since I was a child," Morimoto wrote on a slip of paper, one of several ways she communicates with others. "And I am happy to live in Norway. It is surrounded by great nature. Svalbard is the most beautiful island in the world."

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## Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

### Editor

Mark Sabbatini

### Principal of principles

Kristan Hutchison

### Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

### Accomplice

Jeff Newsom

### Mailing address

*Icepeople*

Vei 210 -2- 13

Longyearbyen, Svalbard

9170

Norway

### Telephone

Norway: +47 41 51 46 38

U.S. +1 (970) 673-4472

### E-mail

marksabbatini@yahoo.com

### Web site

www.icepeople.net

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## Corrections policy

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.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, right, talks with Einar and Laila Buø outside of Svalbard Church this week after laying flowers at the memorial for their son, Johannes, 14, who was killed in the July 22, 2011, mass shooting at Utøya. Stoltenberg is also delivering May Day and climate speeches, and participating in the Svalbard Skimaraton during his last visit here as Norway's Labor Party leader.

## Ski marathon attracts even more champs

### LABOR, from page 1

Jens Stoltenberg is the marquee name this year as the former Prime Minister will attempt the 42-kilometer course as part of a series of landmark events during multiday visit to Svalbard this week.

Stoltenberg, who remains Norway's Labor Party leader, will deliver his final May Day speech in that role during the celebration in Longyearbyen on Thursday, since he will become the Secretary General of NATO later this year. He is also scheduled to give a speech Friday afternoon at The University Centre in Sval-

bard in his role as the United Nation's special envoy for climate.

For those focusing on the competitive aspect of Saturday's race, the challenge will be even greater this year as defending champion Eldar Rønning is bringing two women, Therese Johaug and Celine Brun Lie, ranked as national champions. On the plus side, snow conditions are expected to be far better than the scant cover that delayed and forced the relocation of the starting line last year.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## Icesheet

### Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Ahhh...the height of spring in one of the world's most pristine environments, when **the thoughts of local residents turn to agony due to not getting an unpaid job as a garbage collector.** The governor's office conducted its annual trash lottery this week, drawing 22 names from 151 entries for the privilege of spending four days collecting debris along the coast of northern Spitsbergen (two slots were also auctioned off last fall, with both receiving five-figure bids). At first glance, it appears the biggest move down the career ladder is being made by Øyvind Snibsøer, head of Svalbard's Labor Party, although we confess to not running background checks on all the names. For those whose names weren't drawn, maybe it's



SYSSELMANNEN

**A place where everyone is Oscar:** Somehow the governor has brainwashed hundreds of local residents into loving a life of trash.

some consolation a record 155 cubic meters of netting, rusting metal, plastic and other debris presenting a risk to wildlife was collected last year, so the governor's taskmasters may be highly motivated to push this year's waste warriors even harder this year ... Even better, there's a dream summer job that actually pays money still available, although we suspect the competition may be even more fierce thanks to some international news coverage. **Basecamp Spitsbergen is looking for a host at its cabin at the front of Nordenskiöld, about 65 kilometers by sea from Longyearbyen.** There's no electricity or cell phone coverage, so "it is an advantage if you are not prone to cowardice," the ad notes.



KARIN BEATE / NØSTERUD

**Sissies stay away:** If being here alone fills you with dread, that's truly a wasted opportunity.



Mayuri Morimoto guides a wheeled dogsled across Adventdalen, exalts in an enlightening moment atop a plateau and takes a break during a snowmobile trip to Barentsburg. The Japanese native said she has traveled alone to numerous other countries and is not worried about her hearing disability posing an additional risk in the harsh Arctic environment. Photos courtesy of Mayuri Morimoto.

## Rice, not deafness, handicaps chef

**SOUND, from page 1**

Morimoto deafness, which she's had since birth, isn't total. She can hear some sounds and words with the help of two hearing aids she wears, and can communicate nearly normally in Japanese since she speaks and can read lips in her native language. But communicating in Svalbard presents difficulties beyond the foreign languages, due to area-specific problems such as obtaining batteries and using the hearing aids in bad weather.

"I would not hear if the wind is strong," she wrote in an e-mail. "I must focus on the eye and the ear. But I feel the sign."

When asked if she worries about disability adding to the dangers everyone faces from polar bears, glacier crevasses and other hazards, she typed a few words in Japanese on her cell phone that translate in English to "No. Push. Forward. Aggressiveness." She then crossed both fingers and made a praying hands gesture before writing on her notepad "I have luck."

Morimoto also explained she is usually with one or more friends who, according to her cell phone translation, are full of "Goodness. Kindness. Favor. Hospitality."

She started working as the lunch sushi chef at Sushi Kita in Lompensenteret last August, the first time she's had such a job. When asked about her favorite part of the job, she wrote down "service" before speaking the word "happy."

As for the challenges of being a proper sushi chef in the Arctic, Morimoto explained with hand gestures and her phone some are huge, especially working with rice from European Union countries that vary in quality and the extreme precision of food preparation.

Taiichi Fox, the restaurant's owner, wrote in an e-mail interview he hired Morimoto "because of her passion towards work and passion towards living in Longyearbyen."

"She was a great assistant to the chef and she's been a great member of the team," he added. "I just don't see her disability as (a) disability or problem as long as she can perform the work with her passion. I found out she's good at learning new things and she learned a lot while staying in Longyearbyen."

Others with hearing disabilities have made extended visits to Longyearbyen, including a man who recently spent a term The University Centre in Svalbard with the assistance of a counselor. But several longtime residents, some of whom have lived in the city for decades, said they are unaware of any other deaf people living and working independently here.

Morimoto said she plans to stay until June before returning to her boyfriend who is living in Germany. But she's hardly through adventuring, hoping to travel to Africa, South America and Antarctica in the future.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### 37 applicants receive 10M kr. in environmental grants

Half of the 74 applicants will receive a total of 10 million kroner from the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund in the first of two grant periods this year, with the remainder of a record \$16 million kroner in total allocations to be decided in the fall. Some of the largest grants approved by the fund's board include 1.7 million kroner to Trust Arktikugol for construction of a recycling facility in Barentsburg, 800,000 kroner to Svalbard Turn for outdoor recreational activities, 600,000 kroner to the Norwegian Institute for Air Research to monitor particulate matter emissions from ships and 400,000 kroner to the Longyearbyen Hundeklubb for an expansion of dog kennel facilities. Dogs also benefitted from some of the smaller grants, including 40,000 kroner to Green Dog Svalbard to locally produce dog food and 30,000 kroner to Svalbard Husky for a children's dogsledding program.

### Green Party endorses halt of all coal mining in Svalbard

Seeking an end to all coal mining in Svalbard was approved by Norway's Green Party at its national convention during the past weekend. The resolution notes Store Norske has received millions of kroner in operational support for its mines, which are in violation of Norway's environmental ambitions. "To liquidate Norwegian coal mining will send a powerful signal to the world that Norway is serious about its restructuring of the energy sector, and it could inspire other countries to follow suit," the resolution states.

### High moods as new hanger, helicopter officially debut

The official debut of a new hanger and second full-size rescue helicopter Tuesday at Svalbard Airport is being hailed as a major improvement in operational readiness, especially after both aircraft were used simultaneously when multiple rescues were necessary during the Easter holiday. "In many cases we have flown out in fairly rough weather without backup," said Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø. A second helicopter required eight hours to reach Svalbard before the new Super Puma was obtained.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mostly clear. E winds to 25 km/h. High -7C (-12C wind chill), low -10C (-15C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. E winds to 22 km/h. High -8C (-13C wind chill), low -11C (-16C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. E winds to 25 km/h. High -8C (-13C wind chill), low -10C (-16C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds to 11 km/h. High -7C (-11C wind chill), low -10C (-14C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight

**Extended forecast:** Sunday, p. cloudy, -4C (-7C), -7C (-11C), light 24:00h; Monday, cloudy, -3C (-7C), -5C (-10C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, rain/snow, 1C (-3C), -3C (-9C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, 0C (-4C), -2C (-5C), light 24:00h

Data provided by storm.no

## Bridge over troublesome water



Longyearbyen youths, at top, perform a hip-hop dance routine moments after the reopening of the Museumsveien bridge at midday Tuesday. At bottom left, Terrence Mzisa and Kabelo Diale play a duet from their homeland of South Africa during the ceremony. At bottom right, Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen, with the assistance of Kristoffer Albrigtsen, cuts the ribbon to officially reopen the bridge that was closed last summer due to foundation damage caused by runoff. The new bridge is narrower, with only one vehicle lane. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.

## Land sale offers 'permanent foothold'

### AUSTRE, from page 1

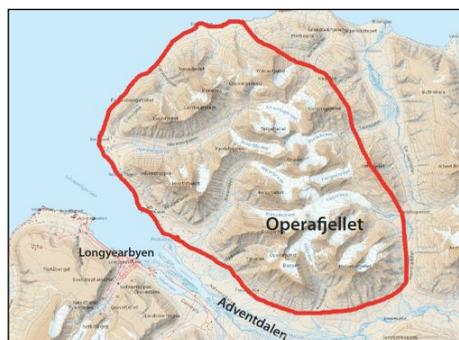
and technology. But there's no guarantee the new owner will be able to fully reap those riches since Norway's government would have to find projects comply with the Svalbard Treaty and Svalbard Environmental Protection Act.

A Bergen-based family including industrialist Henning Horn and his two sisters is selling the property after a joint agreement with Store Norske to mine the area collapsed. The sale's announcement immediately triggered an avalanche of ominous articles in Norwegian newspapers as well as extensive international coverage, including optimistic front-page articles in China which is by far the most-often mentioned potential buyer by international experts.

"China has expressed an interest in the resources and shipping lanes of the Arctic," said Willy Østreng, president of the Norwegian Scientific Academy for Polar Research, told *Verdens Gang*. "This land would provide a permanent foothold."

China does not control land in the Arctic, but Chinese academics have described the country as a "near-Arctic" state and the government's interest in the North Pole region is growing. The Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration has operated the Arctic Yellow River research station in Ny-Ålesund since 2004.

The country's relation with Norway has been icy at times in recent years. Disputes have ranged from the awarding of a Nobel prize to a Chinese anti-government activist to accusations China's military hacked into the Svalbard Satellite Station and interfered with U.S. environ-



### NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

The 217-square-kilometer Austre Adventfjord property, enclosed in red, represents 0.35 percent of Svalbard's total land mass.

ment-monitoring satellites. But Norway, in an effort to boost relations, agreed to support China's entry into the Arctic Council as an observer member last year.

Østreng emphasized bidders could come from other countries and he expects widespread interest in the large plot.

"It is extremely rare that land goes on sale in Svalbard," he said. "This is much more than an economic transaction – it also affects regional security."

Another worrisome potential purchaser is Russia, which has decades of Svalbard mining experience and believes Norway is exceeding its sovereign authority under the Svalbard Treaty when dealing with foreigners.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## What's up

### April 30

6 p.m.: "South Africa" song, dance and rhythm performance by Longyearbyen students and instructors from South Africa. Kulturhuset.

### May 1

5-8:30 p.m.: May Day celebration w/ former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. Activities include a Mass at Svalbard Church at 5 p.m.; a procession to Kulturhuset at 5:40 p.m. with laying of flowers at the church's July 22 memorial, Skjæringa and Gruvebusen; and a ceremony at Kulturhuset at 7 p.m.

### May 3

10 a.m.: Svalbard Skimarathon. Timed full-length race begins at 10 a.m. Recreational full- and half-length races begin at 11 a.m. Begins at Mine 6. Full details and registration at <http://svalbardturn.no>.

### May 4

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

1-3 p.m.: Children's ski festival. Skimarathon staging area in Todalen. Free bus from Svalbardbuktiken at 12:15 p.m.

5 p.m.: Movie: "Ta Meg Med," Norwegian musical, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Venus In Fur," French drama, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

### May 5

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

### May 6

1 p.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newntoppen room.

2 p.m.: Technical Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newntoppen room.

3 p.m.: Youth Development and Culture Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newntoppen room.

### May 7

6 p.m.: Movie: "Walesa – Håpets Mann," Polish biography/drama, 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:

- \$900B Arctic oil deal off due to Ukraine?
- Putin OKs arming of Arctic oil facilities
- Greenpeace 'escorts' Russian oil ship
- Faulty 1922 article wows climate skeptics