



The good: Hotel stays show some of rising after recession, volcano affect past two years

The bad: Increase unevenly distributed; new facilities may negate higher guest numbers

The ugly: Travelers being thwarted by flaws at new booking website, limited flights

Tourism slump ending?

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

The two-year-tourism slump may finally be ending.

Or not.

And the amount of air in the ball, so to speak, seems to be limiting how much rebound is possible.

The number of overnight stays rose eight percent in March at Longyearbyen's hotels and other lodges compared to last year, according to Statistics Norway. That reverses what were generally seen as poor totals in 2009 and 2010, plus drops during the first two months of 2011.

"Even the last quarter of last year was much better than the previous year, so I think the numbers have stabilized somewhat," said

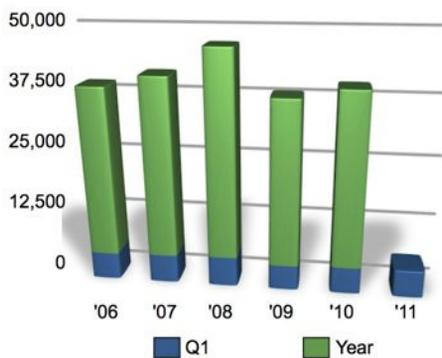
See **RECOVERY**, page 4



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A construction crew works this week on the roof of the UNIS Guest House, which is scheduled for completion in August. It will provide 52 units of visitor housing, generally for researchers and others needing accommodation for activities involving The University Centre in Svalbard.

Guest arrivals in Longyearbyen



Travelers' reviews still raves

Negative comments a rarity, even in fickle world of online chatters

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

"Overrated." "Not much to do." "Tacky."

While such postings are common from tourists visiting New York's Times Square, London's Trafalgar Square and Disney parks

everywhere, it's incredibly rare to find amateur and professional reviewers saying such things about Svalbard.

The area is usually featured annually as part of the "world's-best" list from one or

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Seeking out Svalbard's soot senders

Scientists, unmanned planes map melt from others' black carbon

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

Most people come to Svalbard to savor the pristine environment. Then there's a small international group looking for black yucky stuff.

Soot from industry pollution, forest fires and other sources is being sought out in Ny-Ålesund by small unmanned planes and a team of snow-digging scientists from Norway, Russia, Germany, Italy and the United States. The seven-week project, scheduled to end Monday, is mapping snow and ice melt

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NORTHERN RESEARCH INSTITUTE TROMSØ
Researchers dig in the snow near Ny-Ålesund as they set up equipment to monitor how black carbon affects snow and ice melt in the area.

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.

Lottery prize: Collect garbage for no pay



HALVARD R. PEDERSEN / SYSSELMANNEN

Winners of last year's annual "trash lottery" collect garbage on the north coast of Spitsbergen. Entries for the 12th annual beach cleanup are now being accepted by the Svalbard governor's office until June 1. Two groups of 12 people are scheduled to be selected, one working July 19 to 22, the second from July 22 to 26 (first and second preferences can be specified). Transportation is aboard the *Nordsyssel* one way and by helicopter the other. Applicants must be Svalbard residents at least 18 years old and in good physical shape. New applicants are given an advantage, but previous participants may apply. Entries can be submitted at www.sysselmannen.no/hoved.aspx?m=44267&amid=2612393.

Briefly

Norwegian Constitution Day honors old and new

It's a day of honoring past accomplishments and cherishing those who will achieve someday, and of feasting on unhealthy foods and getting lots of exercise to burn them off.

Svalbard's traditional celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day, known as *Syttende Mai*, features the usual midday open-to-all parade through the streets of Longyearbyen, plus an evening of performances where two major award are presented to residents for their contributions to the community.

There will also be an afternoon of food and children's activities, and an exhibit opening and music performance at Galleri Svalbard.

Morning activities: 7 a.m.: Firing of the salute; 8 a.m.: Wreath laying and flag raising at Huset, followed by procession to Skjæringa by the Longyerbyen Big Band; 10 a.m.: Holiday liturgy at Svalbard Church; 11 a.m.: Gather at church for train procession through town ending at Skjæringa.

Afternoon/evening activities: Noon: Salute at Skjæringa monument; 12:10 p.m.: Bus departs for Svalbardhallen; 12:15: Family events at Svalbardhallen; 4 p.m.: Opening of exhibit "Persona" by Tor Kvarv and musical performance by Kristian Bruun at Galleri Svalbard; 7 p.m.: Festival performances at Huset, and presentation of Typhus statuette and Youth Culture Scholarship; 7 p.m.: Ungdomsklubb open for youths.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Kudos to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault for being one of three pinnacles of Norwegian architecture deemed worthy of a stamp this year. But does anyone else think it's a bit strange they're part of the "tourist stamp" collection, seeing as how the world's largest seed bank isn't actually open to tourists? Even the number of "distinguished visitors" allowed into the vault has been sharply reduced to minimize the disruption to the frigid controlled environment. Which may be part of the reason the outside world gets a lot of (mostly) fictional tales about the "doomsday vault" being occupied by zombies and Evil Genius Scientists (BTW, end of the world is May 21, says the latest group of doomcriers). Sure, that artistic light display on the roof is nice, but the other two places get-



ting stamps this year are actual tourist facilities: Preikestolen's pristine mountain lodge and a gorgeous contemporary church in

Borgund that's been converted to a visitors' center ... Since we've spent the past couple of weeks musing about the possibility of Yusuf "More Dangerous than bin Laden" al-Qaradawi coming here to study Islamic prayer times for polar regions, here's another refugee from the world of terror

with intriguing possibilities: Galyna Kolotnytska, a "voluptuous blonde" who was Muammar Gaddafi's nurse, is in Oslo applying for political asylum, according to BBC News. Given Svalbard's dire need for better health care, it seems reasonable to assume someone the Libyan leader "relies heavily" upon is pretty good at her job and might be an asset if she can't get a mainland visa and seeks refuge here.



NORTHERN RESEARCH INSTITUTE TROMSØ

A "Cryo-sled" with monitoring equipment awaits duty near Ny-Ålesund in early April as a team of researchers prepares sites to help determine what parts of the world soot pollutants are carried from.

Project seeks the sources of soot

CARBON, from page 1

caused by black carbon from sources outside Svalbard carried by wind and precipitation.

It is part of a larger effort to use the drones to study things such as climate and environmental impacts, potential commercial activity and hazards, and water reserve levels.

Studies show Svalbard has experienced longer warm seasons and more melting in recent decades in part because of black carbon, which absorbs light energy and thus increases temperatures. Those working on this spring's project in Ny-Ålesund say black carbon has different chemical tracers which, along with

airflow models, can help determine the best places to reduce soot emissions by determining where they are coming from.

The unmanned planes from the Northern Research Institute Tromsø use spectrometers to send light down to the surface and measure the amount of reflection. The changing size of particles during the melting season can also be measured, as can meteorological data such as temperature, humidity and air pressure.

The field project's blog is at <http://niflheim.nilu.no/vauuav>.

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

Prices aside, reviewers warm to Svalbard

FEEDBACK, from page 1

more benchmark publications, with the New York Times' "14 new cruises for 2011" being the most recent example earlier this year.

But chatters in online travel forums, who are notoriously fickle about sometimes bizarre expectations, also are remarkable consistent with their praise when it comes to the Norwegian Arctic.

"WOW, ULTRA COOL PLACE TO

STOP," is the all-caps summary by a Manchester resident posting as "kerrjs" at TripAdvisor.com, in a review of Basecamp Spitsbergen lodge, which shares the honors with Spitsbergen Hotel as the site's highest-rated accommodations in Longyearbyen.

Complaints are predicable: high prices and limits on walking around due to polar bears.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS



Svalbardposten is Norway's best local newspaper of 2010

Svalbardposten was unanimously selected the best local newspaper of 2010 by the National Association of Local Newspapers, which presented the award during its annual meeting Saturday in Oslo. The jury, in choosing Svalbardposten above 50 other entries, stated it "grabs a hold of the news that concerns the entire community in an exemplary way. Proper use of sources, reliable priorities and committed editorials contribute hugely." Svalbardposten has won the award several times during its 63-year history, most recently for 2000, with an honorable mention for 2007.

Basecamp Spitsbergen gets 500,000-kroner tourism grant

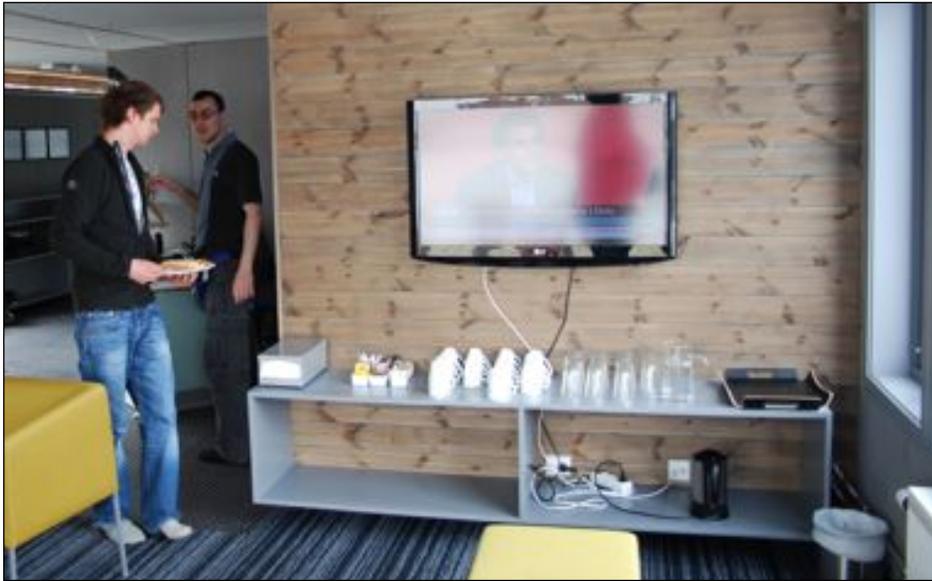
A 500,000-kroner grant that will be used to market Svalbard tourism in Russia and China has been awarded to Basecamp Spitsbergen. The grant was presented today during a conference aboard the Color Fantasy, voyaging between Oslo and Kiel, focusing on "Outstanding Opportunities for Norwegian Tourism." It recognizes Basecamp as offering the most innovative travel project emphasizing international markets. The company offers a variety of expeditions and lodging, including winter stays aboard the Noorderlicht when it is frozen in the ice of Tempelfjorden.

107 snowmobile drivers pass sobriety checks on Saturday

A sobriety check of 107 snowmobile riders early Saturday afternoon resulted in no instances of intoxication, according to the Svalbard governor's office. The checks took place on the plain below Svalbard Snøscooterutleie.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

| Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|--|--|--|
| Sunny. Variable winds to 7 km/h. High -4C (-4C wind chill), low -10C (-10C wind chill). | Cloudy. Calm winds. High -2C (-2C wind chill), low -6C (-6C wind chill). | Cloudy. W winds to 7 km/h. High -2C (-6C wind chill), low -4 (-4C wind chill). | Cloudy. Variable winds to 7 km/h. High -2C (-5C wind chill), low -3C (-3C wind chill). |
| Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light | Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light | Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light | Sunrise/sunset: 24-hour light |
| Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -5C (-8C), -6C (-11C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -5C (-8C), -7C (-11C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -4C (-7C), -7C (-11C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -4C (-7C), -6C (-10C), light 24:00h. | | | |
| Data provided by yr.no | | | |



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Olav Andreassen, left, a receptionist at the newly opened Svalbard Hotel, puts out snacks in the lobby this week for arriving guests while discussing cleaning work with Shohrat Iljasov, an employee of a company hired for the task. The hotel has been mostly full since opening in March.

More visitors, but problems remain

RECOVERY, from page 1

Constance Andersen, general manager of Svalbard Reiseliv, the area's official tourism bureau.

The 9,300 overnight stays in March represent a 12 percent increase in the Norwegian market and 10 percent in foreign travelers. Nationwide, overnight stays rose nine percent, with Norwegian and foreign markets increasing 10 percent and four percent, respectively.

Leisure and recreational travelers in Longyearbyen increased 15 percent in March compared to a year ago and accounted for 55 percent of all overnight stays. Conferences and other work-related guests rose one percent compared to last year.

The number of guest arrivals in Longyearbyen – which differs from the number of nights they stayed in hotels – hit a peak of 41,307 in 2008 due largely to events related to the International Polar Year. The total dropped to 33,199 in 2009 due to the global recession and 34,752 in 2010 as eruptions from a volcano in Iceland disrupted flights throughout Europe.

This year one of the biggest problems is hitting mostly small operators, as a new central reservation system at Svalbard Reiseliv's revamped website is failing to work properly.

"The new booking system is proving to be a scandal," Jørn Dybdahl, manager of Spitsbergen Outdoor Activities, told *Svalbardposten* last week. "The smaller the company, the greater the damage. My bookings have fallen by 95 percent."

Lise Brox, booking and sales manager, for Basecamp Spitsbergen, said lodging and tour bookings at her company have been affected, but offering other methods of making online reservations has limited the damage.

"Everything is about how many channels you have," she said. "I have different channels so it's not a total catastrophe."

Andersen said changes to the site should be complete within a couple of days that, among things, will reclassify bookings into categories that are easier for consumers to find.

Also proving troublesome at the moment is a limited number of flights from the mainland that are filled to capacity.

Scandinavian Airlines, the sole carrier serving the area, reduces flights between the peak March/April and summer seasons. Andersen said the airline sets its schedule a year in advance and, after two off years, can't quickly adapt to a rebound in the market.

Even with a fuller schedule, the potential number of SAS flights still limits the extent to which overnight visitor totals can grow, she added.

"As long as there is one airline coming up here nothing will change," she said.

There's an increasing number of beds for those who do arrive, including Svalbard Hotel that opened in March in the center of town. It's part of the recently formed lodging/tour operation Svalbard Booking, which includes budget apartments at Svalbard Lodge.

Also scheduled to be completed in August is the UNIS Guest House, which will feature 52 apartment-like units intended mostly for researchers, seminar participants and others needing temporary lodging for activities at The University Centre in Svalbard.

The new rooms means other hotels may not see more guests, even if the number of overnight visitors is rising. But Sveinung Toppe, guide manager for Spitsbergen Travel, said he doesn't expect a significant impact at his company's facilities, which include the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel and Spitsbergen Hotel.

"Most people agree that even though it's a bit scary, but competition is good," he said, "Customers have more choices."

Toppe also doesn't think his company's rates will be affected by newcomers' lower rates, which are significant at Svalbard Lodge in particular.

"It's a different kind of hotel than others – they find their own prices," he said.

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

What's up

May 11

8 p.m.: Movie: "Essential Killing," Norwegian/Polish thriller/crime, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 12

9 a.m.: Board of Growing Enterprises Authority meeting, Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

3 p.m.: Board of City Operation Authority meeting, Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

May 15

8 p.m.: Movie: "Umeå4Ever," Norwegian comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 16

8 p.m.: Spitsbergen Up and Down Chinese downhill event. First person down by any non-motorized means wins. Starts at top of Trollsteinen.

May 17

Norwegian Constitution Day. Traditional events include laying of memorial wreaths, parade through streets of Longyearbyen, and presenting of annual Typhus and youth scholarship awards. See details and full schedule on page 2.

May 19

7:30 p.m.: Presentation by author Per Petterson on his recent novels. Admission 100 kr. Longyearbyen Library.

May 21

11 a.m.: Cultural exchange to Barentsburg, with show by Longyearbyen artists at 6:30 p.m. Residents of Barentsburg will visit and perform in Longyearbyen on June 4.

May 22

6 p.m.: Movie: "Arthur 3 and the Two Worlds," French animated family/adventure, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Honey," Turkish/German drama, all ages. Kulturhuset.

May 24

7 p.m.: Local Board meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

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:

- *Oil drilling starts in north Barents Sea*
- *Climate helps bring diabetes to Inuit*
- *Arctic search-and-rescue treaty vague*
- *Duck amok in center of Longyearbyen*