



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Workers with Scandinavian Airlines gather during a layover at Kroa, which currently ranks as Longyearbyen's best restaurant, according to recent participants at travel review websites.

Who's best, who's worst?

Kroa, Basecamp among leaders from travelers at review sites

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Eat at Kroa, sleep at Basecamp Trapper's Hotel and tour Pyramiden. And, um, check out Svalbard Villmarksenter if you're into amusement parks.

That's roughly the collective opinion of recent visitors to Svalbard, according to various travel review websites. But the battle for supremacy is about as stable as a glacier calving during a heat wave, with narrow scoring differences and varying picks at some sites.

Also, while any list with winners means naming losers, the latter can take comfort from still receiving generally positive scores.

So while Classic Pizza ranks lowest among the seven Longyearbyen restaurants reviewed at TripAdvisor, it earned an average score of 3.3 out of five stars. A trio of reviews from the past year generally praise the food and late-night hours, but one criticized some employees as "very tight-lipped and not shining straight on hospitality."

Conversely, Kroa earns a four-star rating from 31 reviewers at the site generally praising the food and rustic setting. But there's still naysayers such as one claiming their table was ignored for 15 minutes and the restaurant "forgot half our orders."

See RATINGS, page 3

Barely any dens for bears

Females in five Kongsøya dens, down from 25 in 2009 and 50 in 1980; observers blame lack of ice

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A lack of sea ice is resulting in a surprising and alarming drop in female polar bears in dens on Kongsøya, according to researchers participating in long-term observations on the island.

Only five dens with females were observed by researchers this spring, compared to 25 in 2009 and 50 in 1980, according to a report released this week by the Norwegian Polar Institute.

"The reason for this decline is most likely the lack of sea ice in the south of the Arctic Ocean and down to Kongsøya during late autumn and winter," notes a summary by researchers Øystein Overrein and Jon Aars. "Good ice conditions are necessary for pregnant polar bears to be able to get to these areas."

The number of dens has risen and fallen significantly in past years due to varying ice conditions, but the severity of this year's drop is surprising and alarming, they add. It is possible, however, the mothers are in dens in other Svalbard locations.

Females generally go ashore to find dens in October and November, but sea ice didn't form at Kongsøya until December, the study notes. Also, the thaw of the ice this spring came early.

See HIBERNATE, page 4

1,000 twisted sounds of Svalbard



COURTESY OF EFTERKLANG

A member of the Danish band Efterklang captures the sound of running along the aging plank walkways in the ghost town of Pyramiden.

Danish rock band runs, crawls and spins around Pyramiden to capture material for new album

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

To really experience this video you shouldn't watch it, at least not the first time through. Instead, just listen and try to figure out what the hell is making those sounds.

More than 1,000 of them were captured by members of the Danish rock/chamber band Efterklang during a nine-day visit to

See CAPTURE, page 4

Inside

A contest of intoxicating proportions
Page 2

Headlines from Svalbardposten

- City relying on backup power plant this week
- Tourists risk lives trying to enter Mine 2B
- Family sees old mailbox 32 years after moving

Page 3

Weather forecast

Page 3

Events calendar

Page 4

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

Editor

Mark Sabbatini

Staff writer/photographer

Karla Paz

Copy editor

Kristan Hutchison

Psychiatrist

Irene Gallion

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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Submitting material

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Chillin' – and chilly – under the midnight sun



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

The Keystone State Boychoir, at top, performs during the summer solstice beach party Saturday at the Svalbard Sailing Club. The choir staged multiple shows in Longyearbyen and Barentsburg during a four-day visit as part of a tour of Norway to pay tribute to youths involved in the island camp at Utøya where 69 people were fatally shot last July. A young partygoer, lower right, shields his eyes from the smoke and embers of a giant bonfire during the annual beach gathering. At bottom right, youths armed with sticks from the fire try to engage a flock of nearby birds.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

There's always going to be plenty of Stupid Tourist Questions every year, although we tend to be sparring and anonymous with them since we're guilty of an endless range of idiotic inquiries (including recently asking what time zone we're in so we'd know when the Euro 2012 matches are on TV). But we'll toss out one from the Svalbard Museum, since the situation is odd in multiple ways. The museum is now selling small fossil samples starting at around 30 or 40 kroner, which seems strange since you can buy them at a fraction of that from kids at the local equivalent of a lemonade stand on busy tourist days (and c'mon, how can you deny them spending money), or pick them up for free at abandoned stands in front of places like the Spitsbergen Hotel. Still, a museum visitor was interested, but being a careful consumer felt compelled to ask "on a scale from one to ten, how real would you say these are?" Um, like pregnancy, we figured those little rock chips with leaf imprints are a binary thing – they're real or they're not. And, as a museum worker helpfully explained, it'd cost far more to make fake fossils than just pick up



The "champaign glass" on Operafjellet shows little visible sign of the stem "breaking" since the contest to guess the date began a week ago.

the real ones laying around everywhere ... Time again for one of the more intoxicating pleasures from The Paper That Can Actually Hold Its Liquor. The annual contest to guess when the stem will break on the snow "champaign glass" on Operafjellet is underway, with the first two people guessing the correct date receiving an inscribed brandy glass. The stem broke on July 23 last year, July 18 in 2010, and July 28 in 2008 and 2009. Send your guesses to stetten@svalbardposten.no and be sure to include your name. Better yet, use ours so we have a better chance of winning.



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A rustic lobby with free snacks and drinks greets visitors at Basecamp Trapper's Hotel, which barely nudges five other Longyearbyen spots for lodging among reviewers at one travel website.

Few real 'losers' in travel reviews

RATINGS, from page 1

The site's rankings, in order, were Kroa, Svalbar, Huset, Fruene, Brasseri Nansen, Mary Ann's Polarriggen and Classic Pizza. There is an eighth-ranked Svalbard eatery, if anyone is savvy enough to figure out what parallel universe "Chili Chicken" of Ny-Ålesund exists in.

Hotel rankings at the site, in order, are Basecamp Trapper's Hotel, Svalbard Hotel, Spitsbergen Hotel, Radisson Blu Polar Hotel, and Spitsbergen Guesthouse. Listed last, apparently due to a lack of reviews is Haugen Pensjonat Svalbard.

Basecamp's average score of 4.5 stars is hardly a decisive triumph since the remaining five scored lodges all earn four stars. Travelers do take note of what makes Basecamp different than a typical hotel.

"You got the feeling of a real trapper's lodge," the most recent review notes. "The room was small and simple and authentic, but it had everything you needed, and after a day of action packed adventures into the ice fields it was warm and comforting to return to ... The only slight let down was the breakfast, very plain and simple."

Those surfing the Web for Svalbard travel reviews might struggle finding other sites since TripAdvisor appears to have stacked things so few alternatives show up among dozens of top

Google hits. Among the alternatives are Lonely Planet, Expedia, Virtual Tourist and TravBuddy, although the most recent entries for some places can be a couple of years old.

Consistency can be found in the assessments. Kroa, for instance, gets kudos in a Lonely Planet review because "service is cheerful and mains verge on the gargantuan." Also, Spitsbergen Hotel and the Radisson top the hotel ratings, with Spitsbergen Guesthouse the lowest among scored entries.

There's virtually no Svalbard presence at the mega-review site Yelp, not necessarily a bad thing given its reputation for excessive shills and trolls among reviewers, plus accusations of extorting businesses by charging to bury negative comments. Evidence of cluelessness can be seen, however, in several short review-free listings of local entities such as Svalbard Villmarksenter, Spitsbergen Travel and a handful of individual persons categorized as "amusement parks." Plus listings for restaurants such as "Classic Pizza Sam" and "Steak-ers Svalbard."

Reviews of cruises are abundant – and nearly entirely positive – at sites like Cruise-Critic, but different to summarize since there's no tally averaging ratings.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

City getting electricity from backup power plant this week

Longyearbyen's power plant is using its reserve facility to provide electricity this week to test a system that has not always worked as it should. The switchover occurred at 7 p.m. Sunday, and workers "have found lots of small mistakes and replaced several parts," said Knut Flå, head of energy operations for Bydrift, the city's infrastructure agency. A failure would mean a citywide blackout, but Flå said facilities such as the hospital, airport, governor's office and many private entities have generators in a longer-term worst-case scenario. "We also have some mobile units," Flå said. "But I do not believe we will come into that situation."

Store Norske: Tourists risk lives trying to enter Mine 2B

Tourists trying to enter the opening of the abandoned Mine 2B during the weekend were stopped by a Store Norske employee who spotted them, but the incident concerns company officials who say the visitors were risking their lives at the site. "We work constantly to ensure the mine is closed off, but there may be gaps that make it possible to get into," said Einar Fjerdingsøy, a safety official for the company. "Among other things there is a risk of suffocation due to lack of ventilation and a continuous oxidation process that uses up oxygen. There is also a risk of explosion due to high methane content. If someone goes in and uses an ignition source it could trigger an explosion." Landslides, possibly triggered by weather, are also a potential danger.

32 years after moving, family finds mailbox still in place

The Belden family lived in Longyearbyen from 1975 to 1980 and, when they returned in March on a holiday trip, discovered their mailbox is still hanging. "It was very strange ... it was like seeing a character of myself here," said Ragnhild Belden, whose father, Sigfred, worked as a mine mechanic. "Maybe the neighbors have long wondered who Belden is and why there's never any mail." Because mailboxes are private property, postal officials can't remove abandoned ones.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 22 km/h. High 3C (-2C wind chill), low 1C (-1C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. W winds to 25 km/h. High 3C (-2C wind chill), low 1C (-4C wind chill).	Cloudy. E winds to 7 km/h. High 1C (-1C wind chill), low 0C (-2C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 7 km/h. High 1C (-1C wind chill), low 0C (-1C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, 1C (-1C), 0C (-2C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, 2C (-1C), 0C (-1C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, 2C (0C), 1C (-2C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, 2C (2C), 1C (-1C), light 24:00h			
Data provided by yr.no			



NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

Polar bear cubs are spotted with their mother in a den on Kongsøya during a survey earlier this year by scientists tracking the number of inhabited sites, which are significantly lower than past years.

Fewer dens puts polar bears at risk

HIBERNATE, from page 1

"When we arrived the island was free of ice reaching land around the western part of Kongsøya," the summary states. "Walrus, for example, were swimming up to the shore. The lack of sea ice had consequences for the few bears that were on the island as they were forced to make a living off the land or wander eastward in the hope that it there was an ice bridge to the Arctic Ocean."

"The fact that several large males were patrolling along the (land) was a risk for females with young cubs. The large males do not hesitate to kill the cubs to a bear in heat so they can mate."

At Bogen, historically the island's best denning area, observers found only one den compared to 20 in 1979. Other prospective nesting spots were abandoned when they arrived March 22 and, by the time they departed April 17, all bears except one mother and her cubs had left the western part of Kongsøya.

Leaving dens for open waters poses significant risks for the bears, since mothers need the pack ice to get far enough out to sea to hunt prey such as seals.

"After six to seven months of hibernation nutritious food is necessary for the females to produce milk for their young while building up their own body reserves," the report notes.

The researchers also report "remarkably high activity of Arctic foxes," tens of thousands of birds by mid-April and "incredibly



NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

A researcher examines a Kongsøya polar bear den, which were nearly all vacated by mid-April.

fertile" conditions in many places.

The polar bear den count, while not historically conducted annually, is now part of Norway's MOSJ environmental monitoring of Svalbard and Jan Mayen.

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

Band gets 1,000 Svalbard sounds for album

CAPTURE, from page 1

Svalbard, which will be featured on their new album *Piramida*, scheduled for release in September. A video showing how they captured those sounds was posted this week at their website, www.efterklang.net, along with one featuring their premier performance with the Sydney Symphony in Australia of a song from the album.

"Our destination was the abandoned Russian settlement (Pyramiden)," notes a narrative

at the website regarding the August 2011 visit. "It was left overnight in 1998 and today stands as a ghost town still full of relics from its past including the world northernmost grand piano."

The band has announced tour plans for Europe this fall and North America in 2013, but but Svalbard – or any place in Norway – is not among the listed destinations.

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

What's up

June 28

7 p.m.: Debut of painting and graphics exhibit by Kari Finborud, Kristian Finborud og Tormod Ropstad. Galleri Svalbard.

July 1

Q2 meter reading due.

July 1 - Aug. 5

Movie theater at Kulturhuset closed for renovations.

Aug. 12

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Amazing Spider-Man" (3D), U.S. action/thriller, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 15

Deadline for master plan for water supply.

Aug. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Madagascar 3," U.S. animated/family film dubbed in Norwegian, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 28

6-8 p.m.: Activity fair. Demonstrations and signups for Longyearbyen's recreational clubs. Svalbardhallen.

Aug. 31

6 p.m.: Movie: "Til Ungdommen," Norwegian documentary about youth activism in the summer of 2011, premier screening, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

Sept. 2

6 p.m.: Movie: "Til Ungdommen," Norwegian documentary about youth activism in the summer of 2011, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

Sept. 9

6 p.m.: Movie: "Brave" (3D), U.S. fantasy, no age limit determined. Kulturhuset.

Sept. 15

7:30 p.m.: Performance by the Norwegian National Ballet Company. 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:

- *Strike hits Norway's Arctic oil drilling*
- *Climate scientists terrorized by skeptics*
- *North Carolina outlaws dire climate data*
- *Arctic squirrels key to Alzheimer's cure?*