



# Tourism up, spending isn't

*Visitors increase in 2010 despite volcano disruptions, but some businesses continue struggling*

Travelers to Svalbard increased slightly during the first six months compared to a year ago despite volcano eruptions in Iceland that severely disrupted air traffic this spring.

But some businesses say income from tourists is still less than last year's recession-hit totals.

A total of 17,181 visitors arrived as of June 30, compared to 16,837 during the first half of 2009, according to Svalbard Tourism, the archipelago's official tourism agency. Hotel night stays, available through April, also show a slight increase.

"We have a large increase in conferences compared with last year, and so far a small decrease in the number of cruise guests and individuals," wrote Hilde Strom of Spitsbergen Travel, the area's largest commercial agency, in an e-mail interview. "It seems to have been a good 2010 compared to 2009."

That isn't the case at her shop, said Birgit Brekken, who moved to Longyearbyen as a nurse more than 30 years ago and now works at Ra Bi's Bua boutique. She said she was surprised spending last year was relatively strong considering the recession, but this year's income is significantly down.

"It was so new last year people did not feel it or believe," she said.

Brekken said she's already putting merchandise on sale, despite tourism season still at its peak, in an effort to lure shoppers. But she expects things will eventually improve.

"It is just like being a fisherman," she said. "Things are looser now, but we have such high hopes for tomorrow."

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Cruise ship visitors examine fossils being sold by local youths in the center of Longyearbyen. A slight increase in tourists so far this year isn't necessarily resulting in more income for businesses, with some resorting to early sales to attract shoppers.

## Paddling through tough times

*Kayak tour operator says Svalbard still 'gold' despite recession*

Gilles Reboisson says his fellow countrymen expect at least one good French meal during kayak expeditions in the remote wilds of the Arctic. That means porting a lot of groceries from home, but at least guides are spared the challenge of baking.

"The bread here is quite good for French people," he said.

Reboisson, whose duties for Svalbard Nature range from marketing to guiding tours,

said this is a tough year with the company's five Svalbard employees down from nine a few years ago. But he said "Svalbard is gold" compared to other Arctic tours offered by his company in locations such as Greenland.

"For me it's the base in the Arctic because there is a lot of animals, glaciers and we can do a lot of kayaking because the weather is good," he said.

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## Solving a polar bear's mysterious death

*Scientist faces charges after shooting animal trying to enter cabin*

Authorities investigating the shooting of a polar bear left to die during a several-day period in Hornsund have determined it was trying to get into a cabin used by Polish researchers, one of whom fired what he thought was a warning shot at the animal.

The man faces a possible jail sentence for shooting the bear, the skin of which is expected to be sold for charity.

The 11-year-old adult male bear was discovered by officials July 19, with few clues about who killed it, according to Per Andreassen of the Svalbard governor's office. They learned this week the bear repeatedly

**Breaking news:** Polar bear attacks two kayakers, injuring one, on north side of Nordaustlandet. **Page 3.**

tried July 8 to enter the cabin at Hyttevika.

"They fired a shot that was meant to be a warning shot, but which subsequently proved to have hit the bear," Andreassen told NRK. "This was an event during the day where they had tried to scare the bear many times, and then expressed a little relief that they had scared it."

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

### Editor

Mark Sabbatini

### 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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## 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.



A researcher at The University Centre in Svalbard examines algae from the underside of a chunk of the sea ice at Rijpfjorden. A new study indicates the ongoing decline in Arctic ice cover algae will significantly disrupt the region's marine ecosystem. Photo by Janne Søreide/UNIS.

## Vanishing ice threatens ecosystem

### *Sea algae serving as the basis for Arctic marine life disappears as warming reduces ice cover*

Shrinking sea ice coverage in the Arctic also means its undersides and surrounding waters contain less algae, the basis for all life in the ecosystem, according to researchers at The University Centre In Svalbard.

Changes in the underwater light climate due to reduced ice coverage will change the current algal bloom regime with unknown consequences for the vulnerable Arctic marine ecosystem, according to a summary of the study published by UNIS.

Ice algae grow within and on the underside

of the sea ice, while phytoplankton grow in open waters, according to the study. These algae produce omega-3 fatty acids, with key marine species fine-tuning their reproduction and growth to the two algal blooms.

The researchers followed the development of sea ice and algae at Rijpfjorden in 2007 as part of CLEOPATRA, a Norwegian International Polar Year project. Studies are now focusing on the effect on secondary species, with future work examining longer periods of the ice's development. The scientists also want to study the biological processes during the polar night, which is largely unknown.

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

## Briefly

### Eclipse also dims local temperatures, economy

A total solar eclipse on Aug. 1, 2008, affected Svalbard's economy and weather as well as daylight, according to a new study by an associate professor at The University Centre In Svalbard.

The eclipse, reaching a maximum of 93 percent coverage in Longyearbyen, caused temperature decreases of up to 1.5 degrees Celsius during the 48-hour period surrounding the event, according to the paper by Anna Sjöblom published in *Meteorology and Atmospheric Physics*. The eclipse also resulted in three days of fog that grounded all air travel to and from Svalbard.

Sjöblom's study is the first of an eclipse so far north. She said it offered a rare opportunity to observe the effects of a sudden decrease in solar radiation after several months of continu-

ous light during the polar summer.

Another eclipse – this time total in Longyearbyen – will occur March 20, 2015. Unni Myklevoll, tourism manager for Svalbard Tourism, said that one is expected to be a boon for the local economy, with people already booking reservations.

### Airship museum seeking new home for next year

Spitsbergen Airship Museum is looking for a new location because electricity prices make heating the current facility too expensive, according to *Svalbardposten*.

The museum opened in late 2008 across from Svalbard Church in an old building that used to be a barn. The museum's managers said they are ending their lease after this summer and plan to reopen next year, but do not have a specific location yet.



A polar bear shot by a scientist in Hornsund awaits removal by officials earlier this week. Researchers say the bear attacked their cabin. Photo by Svein Olav Grini/Svalbard governor's office.

## Man unaware 'warning' shot hit bear

### MYSTERY, from page 1

"So far, investigations have revealed that they didn't realize they'd hit the bear. After what turned out to be the fatal shot, it ran off and swam out to sea before it swung into the shore and climbed up the slope. They saw the bear moving normally."

Officials initially assumed the bear, which had a broken thigh bone, was shot the same day they discovered it, but further study indicated it was wounded up to 14 days earlier.

The 285-kilogram bear was first observed shortly after it was born in 2000, according to *Svalbardposten*. It was observed three more times between 2001 and 2005.

## Polar bear attacks two kayakers; one hurt

*Victim dragged 40 meters from tent before companion kills bear; man's injuries not life threatening*

Two Norwegians attempting the first circumnavigation of Svalbard by kayak were attacked in their camp by a polar bear, who dragged one man about 40 meters before his companion shot and killed the animal.

"There is no doubt that the one youth rescued his comrade's life," said Svalbard Lt. Gov. Lars Fause in an interview with NRK. He said the incident is clearly one of self defense.

Sebastian Plur Nilssen, 23, and Ludvig Fjeld, 22, began their trip July 5. Officials were alerted to the attack on north side of Nordaustlandet about noon Thursday (July 29, reflect-

Polar bears have been protected in Norway since 1973. Up to 25,000 live in the Arctic worldwide, with an estimated 3,000 in Svalbard and the Barents Sea region.

Andreassen told NRK the last illegal killing of a polar bear he knows about occurred six years ago. Penalties can include fines and up to a year in prison, with a sentence of up to three years in particularly aggravating circumstances. The scientist involved in this month's shooting is being investigated as a suspect, but no charges have been filed yet.

The skin of the polar bear is likely to be sold during next year's telethon on NRK, with proceeds going to humanitarian aid.

ing a delayed press time).

Nilssen sustained extensive wounds to his upper body, face and neck, according to NRK. He was scheduled to be operated on Thursday night at the University Hospital of Northern Norway, but his injuries are not considered life threatening.

The 300-kilogram bear broke into the tent while the kayakers were sleeping, dragging Nilssen across the beach by his upper body. Fjeld responded by firing several shots, killing the animal. Rescuers from the governor's office evacuated the kayakers by helicopter.

An English translation of the kayakers' trip prior to the attack is available at [icepeople.net](http://icepeople.net).

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

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### Wrecked *Petrozavodsk* won't be removed this year

The wrecked *Petrozavodsk* will not be removed from the coast of Bjørnøya this year and scientists are assessing the impact if the ship is left at the site permanently. "We want to know what substances are on the ship," said Rune Bergstrøm, a section chief with the Norwegian Coast Guard, noting the analysis will include the vessel's paint and other materials. He said sinking the ship by breaking it up, possibly after towing it out to sea, is not possible because it would cause excessive environmental damage. The cost of removing the wreck is also high, with a salvage company estimate last year of US\$15 million. The ship ran around due to crew negligence last spring, spilling fuel in a protected bird sanctuary. The vessel was subsequently emptied of remaining fuel and other chemicals, as well as items such as life rafts. Officials hope to have recommendations for the ship by September.

### An unusually early break of the snow 'champaign glass'

A break in the snow "champaign glass" on Operafjellet occurred 10 days earlier than last year and 2008. A total of 77 people participated in *Svalbardposten's* annual contest to guess the break date, which was July 18. Nine predicted the correct date, with earliest entries selected as the winners. Silje Christensen sent her prediction July 3 and Gunn Solberg Olsen on July 5. Both will receive an inscribed brandy glass.



### First load of Svea coal ships out during shortened season

The first shipload of coal from Svea is on its way to the Netherlands aboard the *Legiony Polskie*, the first of 30 ships that will transport 72,500 tons of coal. Shipping typically begins July 1, but this year's transport started July 22 and will continue through November to save labor costs due to lower demand, according to Store Norske.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

### Wednesday

Partly cloudy. W winds at 2 km/h. High 7C (7C wind chill), low 5C (5C wind chill).

### Thursday

Fair and partly cloudy. W winds at 4 km/h. High 5C (5C wind chill), low 4C (4C wind chill).

### Friday

Cloudy with rain possible. SW winds at 4 km/h. High 4C (4C wind chill), low 2C (2C wind chill).

### Saturday

Cloudy and cool. NW winds at 2 km/h. High 2C (2C wind chill), low 1C (1C wind chill).

**Extended forecast:** Sunday, cloudy, 2C (2C), 1C (1C); Monday, cloudy, 2C (2C), 1C (1C); Tuesday, cloudy, 2C (2C), 1C (1C); Wednesday, cloudy, 2C (2C), 0C (0C).

Data provided by yr.no



Kayakers paddle past an iceberg north of Longyearbyen this month during an expedition with the French tour company Svalbard Nature. The company has fewer employees and tours this year due to the recession, but still sees strong year-round potential for the area. Photo by Gilles Reboisson.

## Tour firms face turbulent waters

### KAYAKERS, from page 1

The toughest challenge among his many duties these days is collecting and making payments, Reboisson said.

"With the economic conditions it's hardest to get money from customers quickly," he said. That's complicated by the fact nervous vendors want their money for services faster.

Another setback this year is the company can't offer its longest trips, to the northern tip of Spitsbergen because the *Polar Star* passenger vessel isn't in operation, which normally transports kayaks back to Longyearbyen.

"We lost a lot of money," Reboisson said.

Still, most of the effort is still about getting customers to appreciate the Arctic environment despite elements and expectations that don't al-

ways make it easy.

"We have to show them sea kayaking is possible," he said, as well as "no shower for 10 to 12 days is possible for everybody."

Retirees and young affluent workers are the company's most common clients, Reboisson said. He said the former tend to be more appreciative and accepting of the wild, while some of the latter are more focused on the goal of conquest during an expedition – and comfort.

"They don't understand how difficult things are," he said. "They ask us for good weather."

About 200 people participate in summer trips, with fewer than 100 making winter ski and other excursions, Reboisson said.

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

## More winter tourists may boost recovery

### VISITORS, from page 1

Arriving visitors increased 18 percent in February and 7 percent in June compared to a year ago. But they declined 6 percent in April and 5 percent in May, when ash from Icelandic volcano eruptions resulted in the largest air traffic disruption in European history.

Hundreds of travelers were unable to transit between Svalbard and the mainland, with many more canceling trips due to fears of future eruptions. Local travel company officials cite it as a factor in the ongoing economic struggle, but not necessarily a major one.

"Yes, especially one weekend we were affected by the ash cloud, but for most groups, this was about booking their events to new dates," Strom wrote.

The average Svalbard tourist spent about 4,500 kroner on activities and goods in 2008, not including transportation and lodging, said Unni Myklevoll, tourism manager for Svalbard Tourism. She said a new survey is being conducted this summer and "probably it will be about the same."

"When tourists come here they are prepared

to spend money because coming here is cheaper," she said.

Most travelers to Svalbard are from the mainland, with the most foreigners coming from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, France and Denmark, in that order. Myklevoll said she expects the ratio of Norwegians to decline during the remainder of this summer.

"Norwegians will go abroad," she said. "They will not come here due to the weather on the mainland. They want to go somewhere where it is warm."

Svalbard Tourism, on the other hand, is increasing its promotion of winter tourism as part of its effort to revive the industry. She said so far many guests seem receptive to visiting during the historically slow dark months.

"Many of the guests are saying they will come back next year in the winter," she said.

The Norwegian government has declared year-round tourism employment among its goals for making Svalbard a more stable family community, Myklevoll said.

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

## What's up

### Aug. 1

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The A Team," U.S. action/adventure, ages 15 and up. Huset.

### Aug. 8

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Cash," Swedish action/drama, ages 15 and up. Huset.

### Aug. 14

Svalbard's National Day celebration.

Details to be published at [www.svalbardkirke.no](http://www.svalbardkirke.no).

### Aug. 15

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Twilight Saga - Eclipse," U.S. fantasy/romance/thriller, ages 11 and up. Huset.

### Aug. 22

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Operasjon Froskeegg," Norwegian family film, all ages. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "She's Out Of My League," U.S. comedy/romance, all ages. Huset.

### Aug. 29

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

### Sept. 1

6 p.m.: Activity fair featuring local recreation clubs. Svalbardhallen.

### Sept. 5

6 p.m.: Movie: "Shrek – Happily Ever After," U.S. animated film with Norwegian subtitles, no age limit. Huset.

### Sept. 6

5 p.m.: Svalbard Turn's 80th anniversary celebration. Sports competitions, gymnastics exhibition and other events. Svalbardhallen.

### Sept. 7

10 a.m.: Administration Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 1, Tundra 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:

- *World simmers in hottest year ever*
- *Barentsburg gets new research vessel*
- *BP chief out 100 days after Gulf spill*
- *Woolly mammoth hunts altered climate*