



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A procession of kids enters Longyearbyen Library as part of the traditional St. Lucy's Day celebration Dec. 13. The day of feasting and lights honors a woman hailed as the patron saint of the blind.

HoPpy holidays

Festivities last well past Christmas with new film fest, queen's visit

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

In other parts of the world where they have shopping malls the size of towns the Christmas frenzy begins around August. Lacking those here, Svalbard inhabitants settle for pacing the calendar with festivities and events stretching well beyond Dec. 25.

Things will be even more frenetic than

Whiteout Christmas: Major snowstorms hit Svalbard during week before holiday
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usual during the coming weeks, as a new film festival and a visit by Queen Sonja during the annual Polarjazz festival are scheduled.

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'Horrible year' for mining

Store Norske posts record loss of 260 million kroner due to long shutdown at Svea, low prices

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Last year Store Norske was feeling the pain of an awful corruption scandal. This year things have simply been awful.

The mining company expects to post a loss of 260 million kroner this year, a record since production began at Svea 12 years ago, due primarily to a five-month shutdown at the site because of operational problems.

"2012 will be a horrible year," said Per Andersson, Store Norske's administrative director, in an interview with *Svalbardposten*. "Had it not been that the company hedged against currency fluctuations, the deficit would have been at 360 million."

The company was also plagued by low coal prices and numerous worker injuries due to accidents. Furthermore, although work began on a new mine at Lunckefjell, which Store Norske hailed as vital due to declining coal production elsewhere in Svalbard, it is now being called a "marginal project" as the price slump is expected to continue.

The outlook sharply contrasts the "good
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The higher cost of living high

Prices in Svalbard rise at one of fastest rates of past decade due to electricity, rent, transportation

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It's costing a lot more to charge that cell phone these days, but at least its cheaper to call someone and bitch about it.

The Consumer Price Index for Svalbard rose by 4.4 percent between September of 2011 and 2012, the largest overall increase since

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LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTYRE

Keeping the lights on is one of the most rapidly increasing expenses for Longyearbyen residents.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

All this scenery and all I got was a rock



ENDRE FØR GJERMUNDSEN / UNIS

A geologist collects a rock sample at Munken in August as part of ICEBOUND, a multiyear project intended to use the samples to reveal information about the ice thickness and melt rate after Svalbard's last maximum glaciation. An NRK film crew accompanied the researchers during the most recent expedition and is broadcasting the footage this week as part of an episode of "En Naturlig Helaften," an annual documentary featuring various nature projects throughout Norway. The show can be watched online at <http://tv.nrk.no/serie/ut-i-naturen/dvna60001212/18-12-2012>.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Not to be sacrilegious at this time of year, but the gods are reminding us they have a dark sense of humor as **the electricity in Longyearbyen, which never flickered during the Dec. 7 power plant fire and the blizzards this week, went out more times than we bothered to count during a perfectly quaint afternoon last Friday.** A notice from Bydrift mentioned something about steam, turbines and a boiler, and something getting overloaded resulting in an automatic shutdown. Also, the frequency of outages as the mains recovered kept the reserve facility, which served us so well during the fire, from going online ... Something we didn't bother mentioning in our fire coverage, since it was never a remote possibility, is in the absolute worst-case scenario of an extended outage during winter it might be necessary to evacuate the city. That task might get a bit tougher if the dark thoughts of a U.S. scientist become reality. **A ban on all large commercial jet flights above the Arctic Circle is being proposed by Mark Jacobson, a professor of civil engineering at Stanford University in California, who says black soot from commercial jets attracts heat from the sun.** More than 50,000 planes fly through the Arctic Circle every year, which he claims may be a major cause of Arctic melting. Yeah, rerouting flights would make them longer, but Jacobson argues the environmental impact would still be less. He is, however, bright enough realize his idea is unlikely since airlines probably aren't going to warm to longer and vastly more expensive flights ... Then again, the road to Svalbard from the mainland is also fraught with peril and, no, this isn't the

beginning of a bad joke involving seabed driving. **A Caterpillar dump truck on its way here from Finland last week made it through a tunnel near Tromsø with only one centimeter to spare, according to Nordlys.** While police and others were present in large numbers to keep the situation from bring anything more than a tight scrape, the transport crew checked "well in advance to make sure it would (go)," Johan Strefferud, the driver, told the newspaper. "We measured the distance to all the fans in the tunnel. When we had come so far, we would not destroy the last part of the road" ... Of course, all this fretting about power, planes and passages won't mean much if the Mayan Apocalypse happens Friday (although we'll note scholars are saying the Mayan calendar didn't predict anything except the stupidity of doomsday preppers). **We thought the build-up to the end of the world would be a great moment for our Doomsday Vault, but...there's virtually nothing.** A single photo that's part of an obscure newspaper's 88-picture slideshow. The only other mention of the seed vault at all is some IT blogger in Norway doing an ordinary overview of the facility's purpose and the lunatic conspiracy theories about it being some corporate plot to take over the world ... Finally, for guys looking to sow their seeds in the biblical sense, **a tour company is planning to offer "the world's most outrageous stag trip" next spring with a "Last Night of Freedom" expedition to the North Pole for £14,999,** according to *The Telegraph* of London. The company promises caviar, champagne, thermal clothing and expert guides, but any mention of strippers is somehow absent.



STORE NORSKE

Miners at Svea participate in an emergency drill this fall where a landslide severely injures three workers. A high number of accidents at the mine this year, which Store Norske Administrative Director Per Andersson called "totally unacceptable," resulted in a brief shutdown for safety training.

Store Norske suffers record loss

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season" the company said it had this fall by earning 700 million kroner from 1.25 million tons of coal shipped from Svea to European buyers. But an influx of cheap coal from countries such as Columbia resulted in low prices of 85 to 95 dollars a ton and Store Norske was further hurt by complaints about some shipments having too high a humidity content due to a long storage period.

The company halted production at Svea from April to September due to malfunctions of equipment processing coal with a high stone content. Per-employee production, which declined from 12,854 tons in 2003 to 3,922 tons in 2011, is expected to fall more this year as a re-

sult, according to *Svalbardposten*.

Work was also halted this fall, if only briefly, for safety training following several work-related injuries that raised concerns among employees and government officials.

"The situation is totally unacceptable," Andersson said at a recent meeting of more than 60 employees.

The Lunckefjell mine, scheduled to begin operating next year, is seen as extending production in Svalbard for about four years. But Andersson said it's now not likely to significantly boost the company's struggling financial situation.

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

Power, rent causes big inflation spike

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2008, according to Statistics Norway. A major increase by the city in electricity rates and new owners of some apartments charging higher rents were among the factors cited.

"In particular, prices for group housing, fuel and power, and transport contributed to the increase," the agency stated in a report, noting those categories rose 12.7 percent. "On the other

hand, the prices of telecommunications services, and clothing and footwear" declined.

The price index for Svalbard was 128.3, compared to the baseline of 100 established in 2001, with increases in nearly all years since of about one and two percent. Prices, however, are still 12.7 percent below the mainland average.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Departing Barentsburg leader hopeful after difficult reign

Aleksander Antipov, who departed Barentsburg this week after a record eight years as Russian Consul General, said the mentality of residents and government officials has improved compared to past times of which he was highly critical, but struggles remain in getting the community to reach its potential. Antipov, 65, who served from 2001 to 2006 and from 2009 until his retirement, said his first term was plagued with serious problems, including two men killed in separate fights in 2004, but today's workers are different. "The people are younger and do not abuse alcohol as the older miners did," he said. He also had harsh words at times for Trust Arktikugol, the state-owned company that oversees the struggling mining community, saying politicians are often reluctant to invest in projects such as a mine at Colesbukta that could boost poor-quality coal production. But Antipov said that has changed somewhat with infrastructure upgrades during the past few years.

Business, tour leaders seek new entity for cruise ships

Business owners and tour operators are hoping to establish a joint organization focusing on cruise ship tourism, saying the number of visitors has grown so large that informally working together is no longer enough. More than 36,000 passengers arrived in Longyearbyen this year, a 50 percent increase from the previous year. Participants agreed at a meeting this week to form a committee to study a suitable model for the new organization.

Roberts fined 10K for altering e-mail to make illegal flight

Film producer Jason Roberts has been fined 10,000 kroner for forging an e-mail that allowed him to lease a helicopter to transport equipment from Longyearbyen to Edgeøya this spring. The original e-mail from Airlift declared the 800-kilogram load too big for a single trip, but possible with multiple flights. Roberts deleted the latter part in obtaining permission from the Civil Aviation Authority to use a larger Russian helicopter stationed in Barentsburg.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

| Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|---|---|
| Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 42 km/h. High -11C (-18C wind chill), low -16C (-22C wind chill). 24-hour darkness | Snow. SE winds to 42 km/h. High -2C (-8C wind chill), low -15C (-20C wind chill). 24-hour darkness | Snow. S winds to 70 km/h. High -1C (-9C wind chill), low -8C (-18C wind chill). 24-hour darkness | Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 73 km/h. High -6C (-16C wind chill), low -14C (-20C wind chill). 24-hour darkness |
| Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, -14C (-21C), -15C (-21C), light 0:00h; Monday, cloudy, -13C (-20C), -16C (-23C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -13C (-19C), -15C (-21C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -15C (-21C), -16C (-21C), light 0:00h | | | |
| Data provided by storm.no | | | |



LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTYRE

An LNSS bulldozer clears heavy snow from roads during a storm Friday (Dec. 21) featuring winds exceeding 70 km/h in some locations, forcing the cancellation of packed flights to and from Tromsø.

Dreaming of a too-white Christmas

Heavy snow and winds clog roads and cancel flights; clearer weather forecast for Christmas

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Tell you what: Send Bing Crosby out into a -10C whiteout blizzard with 70 km/h winds to dig his car out of a meter-deep snow drift and see what lyrics to "White Christmas" result.

A blizzard dumping heavy snow, made worse by drifts from high winds, snarled streets throughout Longyearbyen and forced SAS to cancel its flights to and from Tromsø on Friday (Dec. 21, reflecting an amended publication date). The storm is expected to pass by late Friday night, with mostly clear and cold weather

forecast through Christmas.

"LNS Spitsbergen is out with more machines than they are required to have by contract," a bulletin issued by the city Friday notes. "In this connection, we hope everyone can assist with parking cars, snowmobiles and other equipment so that they don't stand in the way of the big snow machines."

Winds of up to 70 km/h were recorded at Svalbard Airport. Gusts were even stronger at the SvatSat facility, where the 95 km/h readings are classified as a major storm.

The forecast by Storm.no as of midday Friday is for clear skies and temperatures of minus 14 to minus 20 Celsius through Dec. 26.

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

Holidays keep on giving after Dec. 25

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Traditional Christmas events will also stretch past Dec. 25 into January, beginning with a holiday concert at 6 p.m. Dec. 27 by accordionist Øyvind Aspenes Røbak and violinist Kaja Skatvedt at Svalbard Church. The church will also host a family "Christmas tree" party at 5 p.m. Dec. 28, which Priest Leif Magne Helgesen said is common in Norway.

"This is the last day with the Christmas tree," he said. "After that we take it outside, where it will dry out very quickly."

Helgesen is also making the traditional visits to conduct Mass in other parts of Svalbard, with post-holiday stops scheduled Dec. 27 in Ny-Ålesund and Jan. 6 in Barentsburg (in observance of the Russian Orthodox Church's celebration of Christmas on Jan. 7).

The post-holiday letdown will be brief, as a new film festival timed to coincide with the Tromsø International Film Festival is scheduled Jan. 17-20. The Longyearbyen event is an attempt to improve on the inaugural CinemArctic festival in October of 2011, which was plagued with organizational mishaps and disastrous at-

tendance.

"We took the criticism to us from the last one, that people want more TIFF profile, said Martha Otte, chairperson for the Tromsø and Longyearbyen festivals, in an interview with *Svalbardposten*.

Among other tie-ins, the opening film at both events will be Hisham Zaman's "Før Snøen Faller" ("Before the Snow Falls"), Otte said.

The end of January will also see new life breathed into an event as Queen Sonja, after debuting her Svalbard photo exhibit "Tre Reiser - Tre Landskap" at Galleri Svalbard, will preside over the opening of Polarjazz that night.

Tickets for the festival went on sale this week, but until Jan. 7 are only available online at Polarjazz.no, after which they can be purchased at the Kulturhuset cafe. Although Svalbard's governor issued a warning for press and other visitors to buy tickets quickly due to expected demand, festival chairman Lasse Hansen said he believes passes will not sell out before they are available at the cafe.

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

What's up

Dec. 19

6 p.m.: Movie: "Reisen til Julestjernen," Norwegian family/adventure, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 20

8:30 a.m.: Christmas Mass for primary school students. Svalbard Church.
10 a.m.: Christmas service for secondary school students. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 22

1 p.m.: Movie: "Lotte Ja Kuukivi Saladus," Estonian children's animated film dubbed in Norwegian, no age limit specified. Sneak preview screening. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 23

No Mass at Svalbard Church due to Christmas services.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Reisen til Julestjernen," Norwegian family/adventure, all ages. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 24

2 and 4 p.m.: Christmas Eve Mass. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 25

Noon: Christmas Mass. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 26

6 p.m.: Movie: "Life of Pi" (3D), U.S. drama/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 27

6 p.m.: Christmas concert with Øyvind Aspenes Røbak and Kaja Skatvedt. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 28

5 p.m.: Family Christmas tree party. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 30

6 p.m.: Movie: "Life of Pi" (3D), U.S. drama/adventure, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8:30 p.m.: Movie: "Amour," French/Austrian 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:

- Watch largest iceberg break ever filmed
- WWII Arctic Convey finally gets medals
- \$2,600/kg. truffles wilting due to warming
- Santa's 5,000-ton icebreaking sled