



Curbing cruise impacts

Industry-backed study says ships minimizing marine impact; air pollution issues a minor subject

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

The cruise industry doesn't like a ban on its ships using heavy oil while in Svalbard, but it's proving useful in arguing its vessels are having a minimal environmental impact in the region's waters.

An industry-backed study of four cruise voyages in 2010 commends the practices and awareness of employees and passengers, and states the heavy oil ban means the damage from a spill or other mishap will be greatly reduced.

It also acknowledges the possibility of new species being introduced to Svalbard through discharges of ballast water and landings, and states preventative measures should be emphasized since the area is increasingly vulnerable due to climate change.

But the study only briefly addresses climate-related emissions such as carbon dioxide and black carbon, which were a primary concern of a government study published last year. That study says the main reasons for a rise in such pollutants between 2000 and 2007 were "coal-based energy production and ship traffic, especially the tourist cruise traffic."

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

The Polargospel children's choir performs on the steps of Longyearbyen's old hospital during a celebration today welcoming the alleged return of sunlight after nearly four months.

The sun's back – really, it is...

Snow means no rays for sixth year in a row, but festival goes on

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

When the sun is doing a nice job of warming the Earth, it sometimes triggers a process known as cyclogenesis. This tends to force water molecules into the chillier upper atmosphere, where the moisture likes to asset its presence through the formation of clouds and snow.

So, in a way, the sun's presence has been highly visible during the week Longyearbyen celebrates the golden orb's return.

But in another, more accurate, way, the sun shafted the town for the sixth straight year.

A few hundred people standing around the steps of the old hospital today got a measurable coating of snow during a 30-minute ceremony supposedly welcoming the first sunlight in nearly four months. But they couldn't see even halfway to the horizon in Nybyen where the sun was supposed to emerge, much less get a glimpse of its rays.

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A quintet of snowscooters approaches an ensemble of local and visiting musicians performing "Scootersymfonien" today in the center of Longyearbyen.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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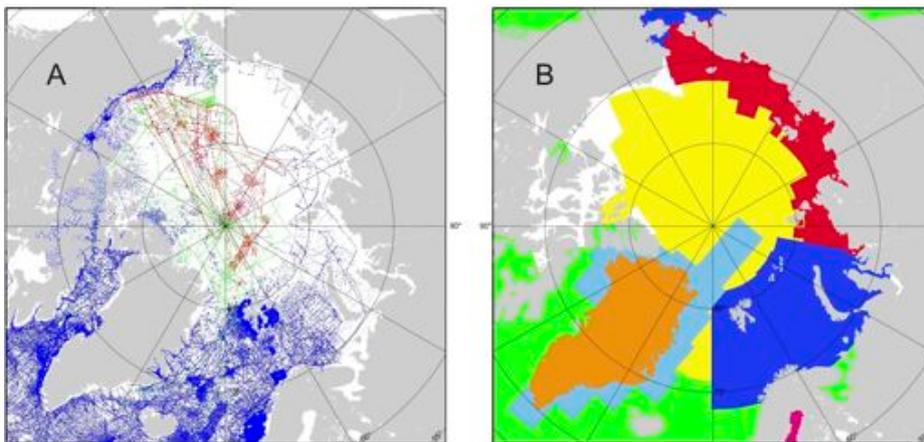
Corrections policy

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.

The Arctic, now in award-winning colors



IBCAO

These online maps of the Arctic – the left showing nuclear submarine deployments, the right showing which nations have charted specific areas – are part of a database earning an adjunct professor at The University Centre in Svalbard the 2011 International Arctic Science Committee medal for making "exceptional and sustained contributions to the understanding of the Arctic." Martin Jakobsson, who has an adjunct position in marine geology at UNIS, received the medal because "he represents a new generation of Arctic scientist for which multinational and cross-disciplinary science comes naturally," according to an IASC statement. "His view that data should be open and accessible for research, is part of his success as illustrated by the wide use of the IBCAO digital bathymetric map of the Arctic Ocean. This beautiful map has been used in several thousand publications in areas such as oceanography, tectonics and palaeo-climate and is fundamental for understanding the Arctic." The maps, user guides and other information are available at www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/bathymetry/arctic.

Briefly

Decline in hotel stays continues in early 2011

The number of people staying in Longyearbyen hotels and other guest accommodations declined 19 percent in January compared to a year ago, including a 47 percent drop in foreign visitors, according to Statistics Norway.

Stays by Norwegians, representing 77 percent of total visitors, dropped four percent during the same time period.

Only nine percent of the beds and 16 percent of the rooms were occupied in January, according to the agency. The number of total visitors was 1,231, down from 1,522 in 2010.

Leisure travelers accounted for 59 percent of guest nights, a nine percent drop from 2010, while conference and other business travel dropped 31 percent.

Hotel stays dropped 11.2 percent between 2008 and 2009, with a roughly similar decline in 2010. Air travel in 2010 was down 28.3 percent compared to 2009.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Russians aiming nukes at the seed vault, a conspiracy linking it with a "Planet X," wondering if seeds for illegal drugs are/will be stored there. It's usually an amusing read, but we didn't have much reason to look at the Wikipedia entry for the seed vault until its third anniversary last month (we use it to find links to organizations and news coverage, NOT to quote from as a source). But it seems the page has undergone a thorough cleansing to remove negative and, um, controversial content. Lots of it is junk science and crackpot conspiracies (or so we might say if we weren't impartial journalists), but it seems a few of the concerns about GMOs and traditional farming might have been left in to keep it from looking like a propaganda push. The most recent mini edit war, coming a few days after the anniversary, was about the inclusion of a link to Wiki-Leaks. We did a search of the (pick one)

heroic/treasonous site and there's no mention of Svalbard or seed vaults, so no idea where that connection sprouted from ... Seems Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard is the definition of "meaninglessness," at least according to David Wright, a research fellow of the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute. He's concerned about China's increasing claim to the Arctic and says that nation wants to pillage the resources of Canada's Arctic and the Northwest Passage by getting countries to back Svalbard-like rule for the area. He notes in a column for *The Vancouver Sun* that China has a beachhead (OK, research station) here, with no real oversight of their comings and goings. Call us flunkeys of our toothless leaders, but we're guessing the Russians who've been hit with a bunch of fines and criminal penalties for environmental and other violations during the past few years would love it if anarchy really was the law of the land.



GUTTORM N. CHRISTENSEN / AKVAPLAN-NIVA

Red cones mark a path for passengers during a cruise ship shore tour in 2010. Some operators use the cones to reduce the visitors' impact on the environment.

Ban on heavy oil limits accident risk

IMPACT, from page 1

The industry study, initiated by the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, is intended to focus on areas not covered by previous reports, wrote Anita Evensenet, project leader for Akvaplan-niva, the company hired to conduct the research, in the paper's preface.

Researchers visiting four cruise ships interviewed officers, expedition teams and tourists about environmental awareness and practices on board and during excursions.

"The main impression was that it was a very high environmental awareness both among the ship's personnel, the expedition teams and the tourists," the study concludes. "Most ship officers were well up to date on prevailing laws and regulations on Svalbard and had focus on eco-friendly operation."

The lighters fuels ships now used in Svalbard have a viscosity and density classification of two, compared to heavy oil that has the maximum classification of six. The industry has strenuously objected to such limits in both Arctic and Antarctic regions, saying the higher costs may force them to reduce or eliminate voyages, but the Svalbard study also notes "this has reduced the risk of occurrence of major negative consequences."

"It is believed that around 70 to 80 percent of all (light fuels) will evaporate within 24 hours after release into sea," the study notes.

The largest immediate risk to the marine environment is a large oil spill, the study adds. But it also finds "the risk of accidents that result in the discharge of oil is relatively low, and that the risk is expected to decline significantly in coming years as a result of improved sea maps and technology."

Stein Pedersen, tourism advisor for Svalbard's governor, said he has read only the summary of the industry report, but "I think it's relatively good" and has no questions about specific findings there. He said the governor is not currently seeking more regulations and has a good working relationship with the industry.

"The governor's opinion of all the tourism conducted in Svalbard is it is within the regulations the government has in place already," Pedersen said.

The Norwegian government's concerns about air emissions are addressed in a study by two pollution agencies and The University Centre in Svalbard. The industry, in its findings, argues "the numbers used for fuel use in emission calculations are too high ... (but) there is no doubt about the fact that ship traffic is an important contributor to air emissions on Svalbard."

The industry study is at www.ssf.npolar.no/documents/Cruisetourism_2011.pdf.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Store Norske, in surprise, to take over LNS operations

A decision resulting in Store Norske taking over LNS Spitsbergen comes as a surprise to the latter company's management and employees, according to *Dagens Næringsliv*. Store Norske Administrative Director Bjørn Arnestad said the company does not have the confidence in Leonhard Nilsen & Sønner, the parent company of LNS Spitsbergen, to continue long-term cooperation. The decision is due to audits made public last year showing Store Norske paid far above market value for contracts with three companies including LNS. LNS and its subsequently ousted senior management, plus former Store Norske Administrative Director Robert Hermansen, are among those facing criminal charges in the matter. LNS Spitsbergen has provided support services such as transporting coal for Store Norske for many years, and last week's announcement resulted in an emergency meeting of LNS employees in Longyearbyen and Svea. Odd-Gunnar Brøto Braathen, a representative of the employees, said there is "turmoil and uncertainty," but Arnestad has stated he has confidence in LNS workers and the decision to take over operations won't necessarily result in the loss of their jobs.

Family may have to pay for rescue during ill-advised trip

A father and his two sons, who were rescued in a 13-hour operation after ignoring advice not to take a Feb. 26 snowscooter trip from Barentsburg to Longyearbyen, may be forced to pay for the response. Officials estimate the rescue cost 100,000 kroner and the Ministry of Justice may decide to seek reimbursement if they determine the family from Sweden acted with gross negligence. The family got stuck and radioed for help, and several rescue attempts by helicopter and ship were thwarted due to harsh weather before officials finally reached the scene.

Dog attacks, injures reindeer

A loose dog attacked and injured at least one reindeer near Mine 6 on Friday. The owner, not a kennel operator, was cited by officials for negligence.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Snow. ENE winds to 36 km/h. High -8C (-17C wind chill), low -10C (-19C wind chill).	Some snow. NE winds to 22 km/h. High -11C (-20C wind chill), low -14C (-24C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NE winds to 22 km/h. High -16C (-26C wind chill), low -21C (-30C wind chill).	Fair. NE winds at 11 km/h. High -22C (-28C wind chill), low -23C (-31C wind chill).
Sunrise: 7:21a Sunset 4:58p	Sunrise: 7:13a Sunset 5:05p	Sunrise: 7:05a Sunset 5:13p	Sunrise: 6:57a Sunset 5:20p
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -20C (-26C), -22C (-28C), light 10:38h; Monday, p. cloudy, -20C (-26C), -23C (-29C), light 10:54h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, -23C (-31C), -24C (-32C), light 11:09h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -22C (-30C), -24C (-32C), light 11:24h.			
Data provided by yr.no			



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

The Lerkekvarteret string quartet performs at Galleri Svalbard during Sunday's official opening of Solfestuka. The week-long festival celebrating the sun's return continues through Saturday.

Events, weather kick up a storm

DAYLIGHT, from page 1

"Believe it or not, the sun is back," said Anne Ellingsen, director of the city's youth program services, at the ceremony.

She told the crowd the sun also seemed hopelessly blocked by clouds the first time she attended the ceremony in 2002, but there was a sudden opening and narrow ray of light.

"Maybe it's a miracle today, so pay attention," she said.

It didn't happen.

The last time the sun appeared during what's supposed to be the definite moment of Longyearbyen's week-long Solfestuka celebration was 2005. Roger Zahl, the city's cultural advisor, tried blotting out that dark mark by telling NRK "it tends to come – perhaps the very next day."

Still, the weather was an improvement over the whiteouts and severe blizzards that halted a majority of planes carrying mail and fresh groceries in recent days, although such storms are expected to return in force through next week. There was even a partial clearing of the sky during the afternoon, so those on the outskirts of town away from the shield of the mountains did indeed get a real glimpse of sun.

The eye-of-the-storm calm didn't last long, but the real blustering held off long enough for a different kind of tempest to thunder across the polar landscape.

An overture of synthesized strings transformed into a pops ensemble, joined subsequently by a chorus of voices, the ringing of a line of young percussionists alongside a pipeline and – at the prompting of a signal pistol – the roar of a snowmobile quintet.

Local and visiting musicians gathered at the pipeline across from Longyearbyen's main shopping center to perform the 50-minute "Scootersymfonien," composed and conducted by Roy Waade, the city's headmaster of arts a decade ago. A reviewer might declare it somewhat short of "Rite of Spring" in musical quality, but then again the only uproar came from the snowscooter engines – and not as strongly

Solfestuka schedule

March 10

- 10:15 a.m.: Sun-themed activities for children ages 1-3. Longyearbyen Library.
- 10:15 a.m.: Outdoor sun-themed activities for children ages 3-6. Hill at rear of Radisson Blu Polar Hotel.
- 5 p.m.: Youth talent show. Kulturhuset.
- 8:30 p.m.: "Moonlight Serenade" concert by MiNensemblet (Musikk i Nordland) and the Army band. Kulturhuset.

March 11

- 6 p.m.: Solfest party for junior students. Ungdomsklubb.
- 7:30 p.m.: Variety show "Coal Age and Uproar," spoofing events of the past year. Huset.
- 9 p.m.: Solfest party for senior students. Ungdomsklubb.

March 12

- 1 p.m.: "Take A Chance" sled contest. Hiorthhamn.
- 7:30 p.m.: "Coal Age and Uproar." Huset.
- 10 p.m.: Hellbillies concert. Huset. **Sold out.**
- Midnight: Solfest party. Both floors of Huset.

as its creator would have liked.

"I feel the music was OK (considering) we had a short time to prepare," Waade said. "I wanted more power from the scooters."

"It's hard to be a sound engineer with the weather."

Waade led the premier performance of the symphony in 2004, returning this year at the request of local Solfestuka organizers. He said nearly all of the suite was rewritten for this year's concert.

"I have more lyrics this time," he said. "Last time I didn't have complete sentences. Now I have descriptions of what it's like to be on a scooter trip."

There were also more rhythm changes for the scooter engines, although Waade also simplified some of the drivers' routines.

"The percussion of the pipeline is the same because the idea is it's a special beat of Longyearbyen," he said.

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

What's up

March 9

8 p.m.: Movie: "127 Hours," U.S. drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 13

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Toy Story 3" (3D), U.S. animated/family, ages 7 and up. Winner of two Oscars including best animated film. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The King's Speech," U.S./British drama, all ages. Winner of four Oscars including best picture. Kulturhuset.

March 15

Official opening of "Trash People" art exhibit in Adventfjorden. Project features 500 "people" made of trash in the last stop of a 15-year global tour. Will remain on display through March 20.

March 16

8 p.m.: Movie: "Burlesque," U.S. musical/drama/romance, all ages. Kulturhuset.

March 19

11:30 a.m.: Cake lottery by candidates for Svalbard Church confirmation. Proceeds go to Norwegian Church Relief. Svalbardbutikken.

March 20

11 a.m.: Family Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Karate Kid," U.S. action, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

8:30 p.m.: Movie: "Sykt Lykkelig," Norwegian comedy, ages 11 and up. Winner of the jury's Grand Prize at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Kulturhuset.

March 21

10:15 a.m.: Environmental and Economic Committee meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

March 22

7 p.m.: Discussion featuring Anne Lise Sandvik. Coffee money proceeds go to NCF. Svalbard Church.

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:

- *Melting ice sheets largest sea rise factor*
- *Sámi herders change to help habitat*
- *The far north as seen with youth lenses*
- *Hibernating bears help sick humans?*