



Briefly

Inflation hits Svalbard harder than mainland

Svalbard prices rose 8.2 percent between 2006 and 2008, compared to 5.3 percent for mainland Norway, according to a report released Monday by Statistics Norway.

The increase reverses a trend since 2001 of mainland prices rising faster than Svalbard's.

Transportation, nearly 25 percent of total Svalbard spending, increased 12.6 percent due to higher fares and fuel prices, compared to 7.5 percent on the mainland. Housing, about 15 percent of spending, rose 13.2 percent, including a 22.1 percent increase in electricity and heating.

Food prices rose 8.4 percent and non-alcoholic beverages nearly 20 percent. But there's considerable variation as dairy, sweets, soft drinks and juice rose at higher rates while items like coffee remained steady and fresh produce dropped 3 percent.

Also declining were telecommunications services by 2.5 percent and audio/visual equipment by 10.6 percent, while a 2.6 percent increase in clothes prices was less than the average for mainland Norway.

Ski marathon Saturday

The 16th annual Svalbard Skimarathon, the world's northernmost cross-country ski race, is Saturday beginning at Mine 6.

Non-competitive skiers will start the full 42-km course at 10 a.m., competitive skiers at 11 a.m. and non-competitive half-marathoners at 11:15 a.m.

A preparatory gathering is scheduled at 6 p.m. Friday at Svalbard Hall and ski waxing – not available at the race – will be offered during the evening at the Sysselmannsgarasjen facility.

Full information on the above items is available at www.icepeople.net.



Tourists on a taxi sightseeing tour Sunday stop just outside of the settlements of Longyearbyen at a popular picture site featuring a sign warning about polar bears.

Slower, more strenuous tourism season forecast

Guides seeing changes in guest expectations as well as economics

The North Pole is melting and Svalbard ranks as a top-10 travel destination this year, but there's still going to be a rare decline in tourists this year and operators are having to work harder to please them.

Visitors to Svalbard, which increased from 12,482 in 1995 to 41,152 in 2008, are expected to drop for the first time in four years due to the global economic recession, according to government and tourism agency officials. But the mere drop in numbers doesn't tell the whole story, said Tove Eliassen, tourism manager for Svalbard Reiseliv.

"There will be a reduction, but 2008 was

Going to extremes: Novel promotions try to lure tourists to polar destinations

Page 3

an exceptional year," she said. "There was an 8 percent jump then from 2007, which was a big leap compared to the jump the years before."

Some businesses are seeing a drop in income and a likelihood of hiring fewer employees during the next year or two. Svalbard does have some things in its favor, however, including a Norwegian economy not

See **TOURISM**, page 4

Making changes to stay the same

Long-term policy plan sees challenges keeping Svalbard pristine

Norway's government likes what Svalbard has become, but has serious concerns about where it may be going.

Those conclusions are in a long-term policy outline for the archipelago released Friday. The 121-page "white paper" states coal mining should continue and will likely remain the region's dominant economic base for some time, but the growth of tourism, education and research are helping ensure long-term economic and social development.

"Svalbard policy is successful, with a broad political consensus over time," the report states (translation of the document and statements by officials in this article are by computer, with editing for clarity by *Icepeople*). "In the last decade Longyearbyen has become a modern family society and they have managed to preserve the unique wilderness nature."

Issues such as global warming and

See **POLICY**, page 2

Inside

Headlines from Svalbardposten

- Russians fined for illegal nature area flights
- Twice as many rescues so far this year
- Weekend of incidents keeps officials busy

Page 3

Weather forecast

Page 3

Events calendar

Page 4

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

Noway: +47 41 51 46 38
U.S. +1 (970) 344-4559

E-mail

icepeople@yahoo.com

Web site

www.icepeople.net

Icepeople is published weekly (or thereabouts) on Tuesdays (or thereabouts), with printed copies available free on a limited basis in Longyearbyen. Additional printed copies are available locally and by mail upon request. Charges are on an "at cost" basis.

Copyright stuff

Original contents of this publication can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes free of charge if *Icepeople* is credited as the source. The original writers, photographers and other contributors retain their rights to all published works.

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.

100 years old and still full of hot air



Two hot air balloons drift near Longyearbyen on April 17 as part of a promotion by the Norwegian Air Sports Federation to celebrate the organization's 100th anniversary. The organization also set up a large inflatable dome tent in the center of town for three days, where it gave away 5,000 pieces of cake, and gave commemorative presentations at the Svalbard Museum and Spitsbergen Airship Museum. Photo by Poa Ekeblad/Norges Luftsportforbund.

Report: Continue mining, diversification

POLICY, from page 1

resource development present significant challenges to maintaining Svalbard's pristine environment, according to the report. While those issues will require constant attention and action, overall governing objectives outlined in white papers issued in 1985-86 and 1999-2000 "provide sufficient flexibility and robustness, both in terms of trade-offs of different considerations and in relation to development in general on the archipelago."

The overall goals in the government's Svalbard policy are:

- Consistent and firm enforcement of sovereignty.
- Correct enactment of the Svalbard Treaty.
- Preservation of peace and stability in the area.
- Preservation of the area's unique wilderness.
- Maintenance of the Norwegian society in the archipelago.

"The government sees the northern areas (of Norway) as their most important strategic priority area," said Knut Storberget, Norway's justice minister, in a prepared statement. He added, "Svalbard has unique qualities that the government feels a responsibility to take care of."

Norwegians officials considered and rejected changing Svalbard's sovereignty policy allowing other nationalities to visit and work openly. They also rejected limiting the number of residents allowed.

The biggest news for local officials is a recommendation mining operations continue, within tight environmental limits and using existing infrastructure as much as possible. The report estimates Longyearbyen's population, now about 2,000, would decrease

40 percent without mining.

"The most pleasure that we have is a final clarification of continued coal operations, which has been the most important issue for us," said Longyearbyen Mayor Kjell Mork in an interview with the NTB news agency. "If the government had come to the opposite conclusion, it would raze a well-functioning society."

At the same time, the report notes coal is a non-renewable resource and subject to variables such as price fluctuations. Also, the lifespan of current coal plants is expected to last only until 2020, necessitating new facilities for coal, diesel, oil or natural gas. It supports plans by Longyearbyen officials to study the area's long-term power supply, as well as efforts to continue diversifying the economic base.

"Unforeseen events can have major consequences for business," the report states. "In light of this opinion, the government should work to facilitate research, education and tourism in a way that will ensure a robust basis for the town of Longyearbyen."

A key factor in economic activity is how global warming affects the region, since Arctic temperatures are expected to increase at twice the worldwide average.

"This could lead to major changes in the physical environmental conditions, and have serious consequences for species and ecosystems on Svalbard," the report states. "Projected reductions in sea ice expansion will also affect the environment in that vulnerable areas are easily accessible to traffic and other activities."

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story and an English translation of the policy report.



A tour group in the parking lot of Svalbardbutikken packs for a multi-day excursion on Svalbard. Officials said longer trips are losing popularity to non-motorized outings booked on short notice.

Arctic promotions go extreme

Novel strategies seek to lure tourists to polar areas during tough economic times

Feeling guilty you can afford an expensive vacation in a recession? Help save life in the Arctic.

Tired of feeling guilty? Shoot it.

Tour operators are relying on unusual themes to lure people reluctant to take vacations while money is scarce. Even though polar tourism has grown so much strict limits are now being enacted, plenty of extra incentives are showing up in brochures.

Those traveling to Svalbard can alleviate their guilt with a 12-day "biodiversity" voyage from Silversea Cruises starting from Longyearbyen on July 24. "Up to" 30 percent of fares goes to a foundation developing policies to limit the fleet's carbon footprint and provide science educators onboard.

A similar offering at the other end of the world is a two-week Philanthropic Journeys cruise to Antarctica by Abercrombie & Kent where travelers see penguin colonies, visit a working scientific station and help deliver equipment designed to measure the impact of global warming in the region.

Those tired of rants about climate change and saving the planet are flocking in growing numbers to the Canadian Arctic, where a minimum of 225,000 NOK buys a two-week polar bear hunting expedition. It's an activity that may not be possible soon, as U.S.-led surveys indicate the world's polar bear population may decline by two-thirds by 2050.

Another vanishing opportunity is standing at the North Pole since scientists predict most of the summer ice cover may vanish within 30 years. An article headlined "Tourism heats up at the North Pole" in the travel publication eTurboNews declares "while the worldwide travel industry is experiencing a slowdown, one destination has never been busier - the North Pole."

"With the centennial this year of the Robert F. Peary discovery of the North Pole, combined with the fear that global warming may soon change the Arctic regions forever, it's a very busy year for us," Rick Sweitzer, founder of The Northwest Passage Polar-Explorers, told the publication.

Still, these are turbulent times for operators, both in terms of visitor numbers and governing policies.

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

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Russian company fined for illegal nature area flights

The Russian mining company Trust Arktikugol was fined 50,000 NOK by a court in Nord-Troms on Tuesday for making helicopter flights in 2007 to a protected Svalbard nature area without permission from Norwegian authorities. The case was heard by the court last month.

Weekend of incidents keeps rescuers, police occupied

A woman who broke her arm while snowscootering and several incidents of trouble kept Longyearbyen officials busy this weekend. Among the incidents were a man walking on potentially dangerous sea ice near the airport, multiple illegal high-tracking scooter marks in the Endalen area, two scooter drivers who failed alcohol-level checks and a scooter that caught fire on Fritham.

Twice as many rescues so far

Two Spanish skiers with frostbite were rescued last Thursday from the 1,200-meter Trebrepasset plateau, the 38th mission this year, officials said. There have been twice as many rescues in 2009 compared to this time last year, but officials do not know if weather or an increase in expeditions is the cause.

UNIS student rescued from avalanche; danger still high

A 20-year-old man was caught in an avalanche on Longyear Glacier on Monday while he and three other University Centre In Svalbard students were descending on foot from Nordenskiöldfjellet, rescue officials said. He remained on top of the slide and was uninjured, but the students were evacuated due to the effects of the cold. They were not wearing transmitters and did not have digging equipment. Avalanche danger is expected to remain high for the rest of the season.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly sunny. NNE winds at 6 km/h. High -11C (-11C wind chill), low -17C (-26C wind chill).	Sun and some clouds. WNW winds at 14 km/h. High -10C (-12C wind chill), low -14C (-14C wind chill).	Sun, then clouds. WNW winds at 8 km/h. High -11C (-11C wind chill), low -15C (-17C wind chill).	Mixed sun and clouds, NW winds at 11 km/h. High -12C (-14C wind chill), low -15C (-17C wind chill).

Extended forecast: Sunday, sun then light snow, -11C (-11C), -13C (-14C); Monday, partly cloudy -11C (-11C), -11C (-18C); Tuesday, occasional flurries and windy, -5C (-16C), -7C (-15C); Wednesday, snow and wind, -3C (-11C), -7C (-16C).

Data provided by AccuWeather.com



Signe Mørk, manager of Skinboden Arctic Products, rings up a pair of sealskin slippers at her shop April 16. Tourism is expected to decline in Svalbard this year due to the global economic recession, but she said sales haven't dropped so far.

Visitors seeking 'expedition lite'

TOURISM, from page 1

expected to be as affected by the recession as other countries. There's also a strong longer-term forecast for visitor growth in the world's polar regions, to the extent that 28 countries agreed this month to enact tough new restrictions on the number and size of tours to Antarctica.

"It will be a tough year," Eliassen said. "It won't be as hard for us as other destinations."

Lonely Planet lists Svalbard as one of its top 10 places to visit in 2009, stating "craggy peaks, dark fjords, glaciers and purest white snow...the 'Cold Coast' is Norway enhanced: colder, purer, more sparsely populated, more expensive – and a cool 1,000km nearer to the North Pole. It's the only place in Europe where polar bears roam."

That recommendation may be good for Svalbard tour operators, but they are also having to adjust to new visitor mentalities. Individual travelers are increasingly coming compared to groups and they are favoring spontaneous bookings for what Eliassen calls "expedition lite" trips.



Visitors prepare for a moonlight dogsledding tour during the past winter. Tourism officials say expanding tourism during the dark season is a way the industry can continue to grow responsibly. Photo by Kate Lutz.

"Twelve years ago when I came here people had booked their hotels and activities a year in advance," she said. "Now they do it in two days. What that does is make logistics and guiding difficult."

The interest in shorter excursions appears to be coming from a younger generation of travelers who believe "it's OK to buy your help," Eliassen said.

"It seems they want to rough it, but they don't really want to rough it," she said. "They can stand a night in a tent, but 'don't give me a week.'"

At the same, they're not opting out of more strenuous and environmentally friendly activities such as dog sledding and skiing. Stein Tore Pedersen, tourism advisor for the Svalbard's governor's office, stated in an e-mail interview that the general trend is "an increase in all segments" – 2009 cancellations aside – but "the good news is that the non-motorized options are increasing more than the motorized options."

Stig Halvorsen, manager of Sportscenteret Svalbard, said independent-minded travelers are also spending less money to explore.

"They're not taking the tours," he said. "They are going more on their own."

There hasn't been much change in sales at his store this year, Halvorsen said, since outdoor gear remains a necessity regardless of how people are getting out.

Eliassen and Pedersen said they do not have specific predictions for visitor numbers in 2009. But Eliassen said it's possible the dropoff may be largest during peak months when residents of other countries make up a larger percentage of tourists.

"What happens this summer is going to be very interesting because it is an international market," she said. "Europeans may be feeling more pessimistic than Norwegians."

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

What's up

April 22

7 p.m.: Concert: Singer Eva Dons, pianist Morten Reppesgård and bassist Jan Olav Renvåg perform a musical interpretation of poetry by Herbjørg Wassmos. Huset. Tickets 200 NOK adults, 100 NOK youths/students/seniors.

6 p.m.: Movie: "Monsters Vs. Aliens," Norwegian premier. The film is not in 3D. Huset.

April 23

2 p.m.: Meeting, board for culture and leisure enterprise. Næringsbygget 3.

7 p.m.: Meal and book presentation. Ten people discuss "the book I'll never forget." Soup, wine and other drinks will be served. Longyearbyen library. Admission 100 NOK

April 24

9 a.m.: Meeting, board of enterprise growth, Næringsbygget 1.

6 p.m.: Preparatory gathering for Svalbard ski marathon. Information, sales and other activities. Svalbard Hall. Also, waxing services – not available at the race – will be offered during the evening at the Sysselmansgarasjen facility.

April 25

10 a.m.: Svalbard ski marathon. Race will start in three stages until 11:15 a.m.

April 26

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie, "Hundehotellet," U.S. comedy with Norwegian title. Huset.

8 p.m.: Movie, "Klassen," French drama. Huset.

April 27

10:15 a.m.: Meeting, environmental and industrial board, Næringsbygget 3.

On the horizon

A scarcity of help: When moods go south, those suffering often must go there as well.

Arctic whirlwind: A northern Norwegian is taking North America by storm. Details and a review of her latest work.

In the next issue of Icepeople on May 5