Visiting Svalbard?

Svalbard has a unique attraction for people from all over the world. We would like residents and visitors – both current and future – to be able to experience Svalbard’s almost untouched nature. By experiencing the arctic nature first hand, we gain a fresh understanding of what «wilderness» truly means. And through the remains of human activities from earlier times we gain knowledge of lives lived at the extreme edge of what is humanly possible.

Yet, special measures taken in the field to ease access and to inform visitors may themselves distort the undisturbed picture most have come to see. We wish to let the nature and cultural monuments remain in their natural state with as few marked trails, guide posts, and information signs as possible. This places greater demands on local guides, but gives visitors a more profound experience and greater satisfaction with their trip.

Excessive traffic causes wear and tear on flora, landscape, and cultural monuments, and it disturbs wildlife. It also reduces the value of the experiences of visitors to come. Irresponsible behaviour is an insult to the past and a theft from the future. Regulation of tourism in Svalbard is necessary, as much for the sake of visitors as for the environment.

The Norwegian parliament – Stortinget – has determined that Svalbard is to be among the best managed wilderness areas in the world. Specific tourism regulations apply in Svalbard. It is important that you acquaint yourselves with these and other regulations. This brochure provides an introduction to the most important regulations.

When in Longyearbyen, please pay a visit to the local tourist information centre, Svalbard Reiseliv. Here you will receive advice and assistance. If you are planning a trip to areas where it is mandatory to notify the Governor’s Office, this must be done beforehand.

Yet again a world is born
– year after year such a miracle
Hans Engebretsen

Purple Mountain Saxifrage (Saxifraga oppositifolia)
The Arctic desert
Much of Svalbard receives very little precipitation, and is therefore described as “arctic desert”. The climate here is mild compared with other regions at the same latitude. The annual mean temperature is -4 °C, with an average of +6 °C in July and -16 °C in January. There are large climatic differences between the various regions of the archipelago. It is warmest and wettest on the west coast of Spitsbergen, the largest of the islands. Factors contributing to the relatively high temperatures include the predominant mild southern breezes, and the Gulf Stream which all year moves warm seawater up along the western coast. Unfortunately, this transport of air and seawater from the south also brings Svalbard pollution, including mercury and PCBs, from Europe, America, and Asia.

Fascinating geology
Svalbard has a unique geology. Here, ancient rock formations are easily seen in the characteristic stripes and layers of the mountains. The rich deposits of coal – fossilized plants – reveal that millions of years ago Svalbard was found far to the south. Intact fossils of tropical leaves, flowers and sea animals, which are several hundred million years old, are still commonly found in Svalbard.

Svalbard - one of the last wilderness areas in Europe
Towards the very top of the Northern Hemisphere lies the Svalbard archipelago. It is the most accessible high arctic area in the world. Two thirds of the archipelago are permanently covered by ice and snow.

This treaty states that Norway shall ensure the preservation and, if necessary, re-constitution of the flora and fauna on the archipelago. The main objective of the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act of 15th June 2001, with accompanying regulations, is to preserve Svalbard’s vulnerable natural environment and many valuable cultural monuments.

Svalbard is one of the last remaining areas of unspoiled wilderness in Europe. There are large areas of almost untouched nature in Svalbard. The protected land areas cover more than 40 000 km², or about the size of Denmark. The Fourteenth-of-July Glacier by Krossfjord, pictured here, is in the Northwest Spitsbergen national park.

Many places are relatively green and lush, such as here on Edge Island.

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roads connecting the settlements.
The fauna and flora that has adapted to the demanding arctic conditions is surprisingly rich. But arctic nature is also vulnerable. Even minor damage can become permanent, and regrowth is a slow process.

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During most of spring and all through summer, the sun never sets. One’s perception of time is sure to be influenced by the continuous sunlight. Winter, on the other hand, is long and dark. Longyearbyen has “mid-day darkness” from 14. Nov. to 29. Jan.
**Travelling in Svalbard**

In addition to the environmental legislation, Svalbard also has special tourism regulations intended to protect the natural environment, the cultural monuments and the safety of those travelling in the archipelago. It is important to familiarise oneself with the current regulations when travelling in Svalbard.

Most visitors join tours organised by experienced tour operators with special knowledge of Svalbard. Tour operators are responsible for the safety of their travellers and for their compliance with current regulations, which are intended to ensure that also future generations will have access to the unique cultural monuments and vulnerable natural environment. If you use their services you will be insured against expenses incurred by search and rescue missions in the event of an accident. Longyearbyen has several tour operators who offer a range of travel and other arrangements.

**Notification requirements**

Travel to many parts of Svalbard requires notification to the Governor’s Office. All tour operators, whether based in Longyearbyen or elsewhere, must provide advance notification concerning their planned activities in Svalbard. In addition they must have a special search and rescue insurance, regardless of which areas they intend to operate in. Individuals who choose not to use the services of a tour operator must notify the Governor’s Office if travelling outside the defined “excursion area”. This applies to travel both on land and sea, (see map p. 22 & 23). Notification is done on a special form. It is wise to contact the Governor’s Office well in advance of your trip. Persons planning to travel on their own outside the “excursion area” must purchase an individual search and rescue insurance. The Governor determines the amount of insurance coverage required, and in special cases can forbid particularly risky or environmentally unfriendly travel plans. A distress beacon must be taken on the trip.

**Cruising Svalbard**

Cruise ships and other tourist vessels must notify the Governor of their planned sailings and landings well before each season. Following each cruise, they must report the location and number of persons ashore for each landing, to enable the Governor to follow the development of cruise tourism. The Governor’s Office monitors and inspects cruise ships, organised tours, and individual travellers all through the tourist season, which traditionally lasts from March to September.

The Governor can intervene in travel arrangements which can harm or disrupt nature, damage cultural remains, or which entail significant danger to human life or health.

**Relevant laws and regulations**

- The Act relating to the protection of the environment in Svalbard, 2001 (Svalbard Environmental Protection Act)
- Regulations relating to off-road motor traffic and the use of aircraft for tourism purposes in Svalbard, 2002 (Motor Traffic Regulations)
- Regulations relating to camping activities in Svalbard, 2001 (Camping Regulations)
- Regulations relating to harvesting of the fauna on Svalbard ptarmigan and Svalbard reindeer in Svalbard, 2003 (Harvesting Regulations)
- Regulations relating to local control of the hunting of Svalbard ptarmigan and Svalbard reindeer in Svalbard, 2003 (Harvesting Regulations)
- Regulations relating to environmentally hazardous substances, waste, and waste water and waste fees in Svalbard, 2002 (Pollution Regulations)
- Regulations for the various protected areas in Svalbard (see chapter “Svalbard’s protected areas”)
- Regulations relating to tourism and other travel in Svalbard, 1991 (Tourist Regulations)
Vehicles and the arctic tundra

The soils of Svalbard are extremely fragile. Permafrost, thin vegetation cover, and slow regrowth make the tundra particularly vulnerable to physical impacts. Tracks from vehicles driven off-road on bare ground often become permanent.

Refuse and pollutants decompose slowly in the Arctic due to the constant low temperatures. It won’t help to bury your refuse and hope it will disappear. The polar bear or arctic fox will retrieve it, or the action of the permafrost will lift it up to the surface. Trash, such as broken glass and tin cans, is unsightly and may injure birds and wildlife. The Svalbard reindeer can tangle its antlers in wire or rope left behind at a campsite. Each year several cases are reported in which these stately animals have died slow, painful deaths due to such obstructions.

Keep Svalbard clean and unspoiled!

You are welcome to the Arctic – as long as you leave no signs of having been here!

All refuse must be taken back to the settlements where disposal facilities are available.

It is forbidden to dump garbage, oil, toxic materials, or other objects in the sea.

Svalbard has its own population of reindeer. They are found on most of the islands. Antlers caught in wire are a sad sign of our human presence. Several reindeer meet a slow death in this way every year.

Along Svalbard’s coast you may discover objects which appear to be refuse. However, it is possible that these are remains from the activities of earlier times. It is a criminal offence to damage or remove items from such sites. Reminders of the present, on the other hand, are not to be left behind! Think carefully before building a campfire, so that no scars are left in the terrain. Remove all signs of your campsite when finished, and do not build trail markers or leave a “signature” in stones, driftwood or otherwise. “Tagging” and graffiti is punishable by law.

Arctic vegetation is vulnerable to physical impacts. The soil can also be damaged permanently if we are not careful when on the tundra. The purple mountain saxifrage (Saxifraga oppositifolia) is one of the most common flowering plants in Svalbard.

They can even grow with time, due to frost, thawing and erosion, resulting in large trenches. We must therefore prevent such damage in the first place. Be extremely careful when travelling on thawed ground, and avoid damaging the vegetation or the surface of the soil.

In winter one may drive snow-scooters on frozen and snow-covered ground. For individual visitors this is limited to areas without mandatory notification of travel plans. When driving snow-scooters off-road, one must always be particularly careful to avoid damaging the terrain, disturbing the wildlife, or reducing the wilderness experience for others.

All driving on thawed ground is prohibited!

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Flora and fauna

The animals and plants of Svalbard have adapted to the harsh arctic environment. During the short, hectic summer these islands explode in bountiful animal and bird life, and they bloom with a sparse, but beautiful flora.

Birds

As in other high arctic areas, Svalbard has few bird and mammal species in comparison with more temperate climates. Although the number of species is limited, the numbers of individuals of certain species can be high. Most obvious are the seabirds on the great bird cliffs. The Brünnich's guillemot nests several places in colonies numbering over 100,000 pairs. Here we witness the special arctic connection between life in the sea and on land. Organic material from the sea is brought on land as food to the nesting colonies. The bird droppings become nutrients for plants, making the nearby vegetation green and lush. This in turn benefits grazing animals on land, such as geese and reindeer.

The little auk is the most numerous of all bird species in Svalbard, with an estimated population of over 1 million pairs. It nests in colonies in rocky slopes and cliffs all over the islands, but is particularly abundant along the western coast of Spitsbergen. In Longyeardalen, above the landmark building «Huset», you can observe flocks of little auk, with their characteristic swift swirling wingbeat, flying to and from the nesting sites. The intense cackling of thousands of birds blends to a constant hum, and sometimes to a roar.

Traditional birds of prey, such as eagles and hawks, are not found in Svalbard, aside from the occasional visiting snowy owl or gyrfalcon. This is mainly due to the lack of a native population of rodents. The bird of prey role is taken over by the majestic glaucous gull, as well as the skuas.

The Svalbard reindeer is unique to the archipelago. It is not afraid to graze within the settlements.

The Brünnich's guillemot breeds in large colonies, sometimes with thousands of birds. Several of the breeding colonies in Svalbard are protected as bird sanctuaries. Trespassing is strictly prohibited in the bird sanctuaries during the tourist season.

Land mammals

Only three species of land mammals are found in Svalbard: the Svalbard reindeer, the arctic fox and the introduced sibling voe. The polar bear, since it spends most of its life on the drift ice, is considered a marine mammal.

The robust, short-legged Svalbard reindeer is a unique subspecies of reindeer, which is not found anywhere else. In 1925, when Norway assumed sovereignty over Svalbard, the Svalbard reindeer was nearly extinct due to intense hunting. It was protected at that time, and has slowly but surely increased in numbers. Today, there are in excess of 10,000 reindeer spread throughout the archipelago. A restricted hunt by residents is permitted in areas close to the main settlements.

The small arctic fox is exceptionally well adapted to the arctic environment. The insulating effect of its winter fur is the highest measured for any mammal. The foxes wander over vast areas, both on land and far out on the sea-ice in search of food. A fox from Svalbard was observed as far afield as Novaja Zemlya!

Marine mammals

Certain of the marine mammals are the true «character species» of the Arctic, and have strongly influenced human activities in these regions. Species such as the bowhead whale, walrus, and polar bear are found at the core of Svalbard’s human history. Three hundred years of ruthless exploitation left the populations of these species decimated. Both the bowhead whale and the walrus were found at the core of Svalbard's human history. Three hundred years of ruthless exploitation left the populations of these species decimated. Both the bowhead whale and the walrus were soon considered
extinct at Svalbard. Following their being granted protected status, both the polar bear and the walrus are once again typical species in Svalbard. They are good examples of international environmental management schemes that have worked. The bowhead whale has never re-established in these waters. Beluga and minke whales, however, are fairly common sights.

The two most common seals are the ringed seal and the bearded seal. Along the west coast of Spitsbergen we also find the world’s northernmost population of harbour seal.

**Arctic char**
The only freshwater fish in the archipelago is the Arctic char. This northernmost member of the salmon family is native to the lakes and waterways throughout the islands. Both stationary (living strictly in fresh water) and anadromous (migrating to the sea in summer) populations are found here. Char weighing several kilos have been registered in even the most northerly watercourses of Svalbard.

**Flora**
Svalbard’s mild climate (considering the latitude) contributes to the archipelago’s rich flora. Approx. 170 species are described in the literature. There are no forests, or even bushes, in Svalbard. The only woody plants are small willows and the dwarf birch, which in Svalbard towers a few centimetres above the ground. Svalbard’s flora may at first appear to be modest and grey, but if you bend down and look closely you will discover intricate, beautiful flowers in many shapes and colours. Flower picking is not allowed in Svalbard.

**Threats**
Animals and plants have adapted to a life at the borderline of the possible in a tough Arctic environment, and disturbances and irresponsible behaviour from people can easily have serious consequences. It is, for example, prohibited to drive snow-scooters after polar bears and reindeer. Similarly it is against the law to land on islets and skerries where there are breeding eider ducks and geese. Even when we think we are being careful, our behaviour can lead to the loss of many chicks and eggs.

*Disturbing animals and birds unnecessarily is prohibited!*

A serious threat to the Svalbard environment is the long-range transport of large amounts of pollutants. Wind and ocean currents carry with them man-made toxins in larger amounts than we realised a few years ago. These substances enter and accumulate in the food chains in the Arctic, and are particularly serious for the species at the top of the food chains. They are stored in the fat of animals and decompose slowly. They are particularly serious for species at the top of the food chains, such as the polar bear, arctic fox, and glaucous gull. PCB levels measured in polar bears from Svalbard are dangerously high — so high that it is feared they will result in reduced fertility and increased mortality.

**Hunting, trapping and freshwater fishing**
Svalbard’s fauna is managed to maintain the natural size of populations in their original habitats. Animal populations are not to be affected by human intervention such as hunting or fishing. All birds and mammals of Svalbard, and the Arctic char, are protected unless otherwise stated. Limited hunting of 6 bird species is allowed. Reindeer hunting, arctic fox trapping and fishing with nets is only allowed for residents. Anyone wishing to hunt or fish must obtain a hunting/fishing licence from the Governor.
Wilderness expeditions in Svalbard

Svalbard provides a wealth of possibilities for you to enjoy the great outdoors. Trips to Svalbard’s wilderness areas, however, are challenging, not at least with regard to the tough climate.

The weather can be extremely unstable, and wind, fog and blowing snow can lead to a sudden loss of direction. High snowdrifts and wind hollows often form in the terrain. Both on skiing and snow-scooter trips whirling snow and “white-outs” can quickly make orientation difficult. These are real dangers, and have led to a number of accidents, such as driving off and getting lost.

Large areas of Svalbard are covered by glaciers which have numerous, deep crevices. It is not advisable either to drive with snow-scooters or walk on skis without local guides.

Camping in Svalbard

The regulations relating to camping activities in Svalbard are intended to regulate camping and campsites to prevent any damage to the natural environment and cultural heritage, as well as to focus attention on safety with regard to polar bears, and the general public’s experience of wilderness and local culture.

- Avoid damage to the vegetation
- Keep a minimum distance of 100 m from luxury cabins and cultural heritage
- Clear up campsites and fireplaces after use so that no traces are visible
- There must be suitable equipment in the campsite to scare off and drive away polar bears
- The campsite should be secured with, for example, trip-wires with flares
- Food, rubbish and the latrine should be kept at some distance from the tents

Rabies

Rabies has been detected in Svalbard. There are therefore regulations concerning bringing household pets to and from Svalbard. Some animals, such as the arctic fox, are potential carriers of rabies. Never touch living or dead wild animals. Inform the Governor’s Office if you see animals that are aggressive or otherwise behave unusually. Sibling voles are the intermediate host for the tapeworm Echinococcus multilocularis. People can become seriously ill if they get infected by the parasite’s eggs. It is recommended to boil drinking water, particularly in the area around Grumant. Mushrooms should be parboiled.

The polar bear

The polar bear is a protected animal. An estimated 2,500 bears are found in the Svalbard area. An adult bear is about 2.5 metres long and can weigh several hundred kilos. A polar bear can be an extremely dangerous animal! Keep a distance – for yourself and the bear.

The polar bear is one of the largest predators in the world. For many years the polar bear population in the Svalbard area was threatened due to excessive hunting. However, following its protection in 1973, the population seems to be increasing.

It is illegal to entice, follow or in other active ways seek out polar bears so that they are disturbed or dangerous situations can develop for humans or bears.

Following on snow-scooters after polar bears is an example of illegal and extremely irresponsible behaviour, and will be severely punished. Bears get quickly overheated and can die of stress.

Most polar bears are in the eastern parts of Svalbard where humans seldom visit. Nevertheless, when in Svalbard you must be prepared to meet polar bears whenever and wherever. Polar bears can be extremely dangerous. Think through and plan your responses in advance, in case of an encounter with a threatening polar bear.

Be well prepared before setting out on a trip:

- Always carry a weapon when travelling outside the settlements. But remember; it is forbidden to carry a loaded weapon within the settlements.
- Learn how to use your weapon before setting out on your trip.
- Always stay alert and keep to areas with a clear view of your surroundings.
- You should not venture out of the settlements on your own if you are not experienced in handling guns.

Our best advice is to join organised tours with local tour operators, or to hire your own local guide. The guide is responsible for your safety and is required to be properly armed at all times.

If you see a polar bear, the following is important:

- Do not move closer. Retreat calmly and quietly.
- If the bear sees you and begins to approach, and you can not get to safety, shout, make noise and fire a warning shot.
- If the bear is so near and threatening that you must shoot, then shoot to kill.
- You have the right to defend yourself, but remember that all encounters with polar bears involving the use of firearms will be investigated.

You should therefore always seek advice from and travel with experienced persons who are familiar with Svalbard’s wilderness.

The Nordsjøfjell Peak above Longyearbyen.

Edge Island. If planning to travel on your own, you must be fit, and trained in wilderness survival under arctic conditions.

You should therefore always seek advice from and travel with experienced persons who are familiar with Svalbard’s wilderness.

The Governor’s Office if you see any potential carrier of rabies.

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Walrus bones from a slaughter site on the island Moffen. The seasonal nature of historical activities in Svalbard has resulted in quite a unique historical development. People here have only to a limited extent been able to obtain knowledge and rely on experience from previous generations concerning the harsh conditions for survival. This is one reason why Svalbard’s history is replete with tragic events — and why the most commonly found cultural monuments are human graves. The history of Svalbard is often portrayed as a series of distinct eras, each of which is linked to the exploitation of specific resources, but with few binding links between the eras.

International whaling was conducted from around the year 1600 throughout the entire 1700s. It was fuelled by high prices for whale oil, baleen (fronds from the mouth of large whales), and walrus tusks. Mainly Dutch, British and German expeditions participated in the whaling, which was organised by companies of great national importance. At the peak of activity more than 300 vessels were active. In the late 1600s the Dutch alone engaged 150-250 vessels, which annually took between 750 and 1250 whales. The great bowhead whale, initially the most attractive booty, was ultimately eradicated from these waters. Walrus resting-sites were also quickly turned into stinking slaughter places, where hundreds of skinned carcasses slowly rotted.

There are many traces of the whaling era along Svalbard’s shores, particularly from the early days when there were land based whaling stations. About 50 whaling stations have been registered in Svalbard. The sites include house foundations, blubber boilers, bone remnants from whale and walrus, and human graves. But the lack of the bowhead whale is a “cultural remnant” we wish we had avoided.

Relevant images:
- Remains of blubber boilers in Smeerenburg on the northwest coast of Spitsbergen. Charred whale oil mixed with gravel (“blubber cement”) outlines where the large pots stood in which oil was extracted from blubber. The blubber cement foundations deteriorate quickly under the shoes of enthusiastic, but reckless visitors.
- Russian graves from the 1700s at the trappers’ station by Trygghamna (Safe Harbour) at the entrance of the Isfjord. Many graves have been opened and plundered, but the scope of such disgusting souvenir hunts has luckily diminished.
- A cabin from the early Norwegian winter trapping, by the bay Skansbukta in the Billefjord. The hunting and trapping was intensified as the Russians reduced their activities around 1850, and it was based on the same products. By the end of the 19th century it was common for these hunters to stay for the winter. The hunters had a fixed annual cycle; Foxes and bears were hunted during winter when the fur is best, and seals were hunted during spring, at the same time as the bear and fox skins were prepared for summer sale. Bird hunting and the gathering of eggs and down took place in summer, while reindeer and ptarmigans were prey in the autumn. The hunters spread their activity over large areas and used a network of hunting cabins.
Though much of what was taken was for personal use, the hunters had to sell furs, down and reindeer meat to purchase provisions from the mainland: flour, raisins, salt, kerosene, tobacco, tools, weapons, ammunition, a new stove or a boat, and perhaps a simple luxury item or two. It is said that the trapper Georg Bjønnes bought a year’s supply of old newspapers, so that every morning he could fetch a “new”, exactly one year old, paper!

At the most, there were fifty hunters during winter. This had a very negative impact on wildlife populations. The cocked gun-box was key in this development; when a bear placed its head inside the box to take the bait, a lethal shot was released. The efficiency of this method went far beyond the production capacity and was thus disastrous for the polar bear population. The trapper Henri Rudi killed more than 750 polar bears, 115 of them in his record year.

Scientific expeditions have been important in Svalbard’s history since the mid-1800s. After Barentsz in 1596, the landscapes and waters, sailing routes and hunting resources were charted. But it was not until about 1850 that a series of carefully planned expeditions began with the specific intent of gathering and classifying scientific information from this outermost region of the known world. This information was a “commodity” of limited use in this icy wilderness, but it was to have great importance in academic circles in Europe. The results have been a key to understanding such subjects as ocean currents, geological history, the exact shape of our planet, animal and plant adaptations, the northern lights, glaciers, and global climate issues.

The expeditions often had a dual purpose. On the surface, they focused on scientific objectives, but the leaders, participants and sponsors of these expeditions were just as often motivated by concerns of national and personal prestige. The Arctic provided rich opportunities for public attention. There were many possibilities for heroism and grand deeds, which became national symbols and meant personal status at the homecoming — even if one had perished in the attempt.

Mining operations in Svalbard date from around 1900 and were based on new scientific findings and favourable prices for raw materials in the newly industrialised Europe. The coal deposits were of primary interest, but there were also short-lived operations to extract phosphorus, gold, zinc, lead, copper, gypsum and marble. Svalbard was still a no-mans-land, and these beginnings were quite chaotic. Many lost huge sums of money on grand but shaky industrial ventures. Investments and shipping of equipment, labour, supplies, and construction were all more costly up here. Often bankruptcy was looming even before the dust was wiped from the treasures concealed in the rock. Today, empty buildings with broken windows crumble as nature slowly inches its way back to reclaim the land. We find overgrown roads, twisted rails, motionless machines, derailed cars, rusty boilers, gir-wheels, barrels, wheelbarrows, and bolts and scrap iron in all shapes and sizes. Such places are rich in impressions, but quiet if not for the howling wind. No hammering or shouting, no squeaking of tow-cables, or sounds from dump-cars being emptied. Many of the sites of early industrial ventures emerge today as a sort of fairy tale world, a land of Sleeping Beauty where the final workday came to a halt — and continues to slumber.
Protected cultural remains

The Svalbard Environmental Protection Act states that all traces of human activity from 1945 or earlier are protected.

This includes all types of buildings and ruins, installations and hunting facilities, skeletal remains at slaughtering sites, graves, crosses and inscriptions and — not to forget — loose artefacts such as remains of traps, bones, tools, ammunition and cartridge cases, pieces of pottery and glass, bits of chains and cables, soles of shoes, barrel hoops, and oven rings. All these, and anything else of age one may come across while travelling in Svalbard, must be left alone. While it is true that thinking of the consequences, excited visitors step on the fragile remains at the heap of stones seen in the background. Until 1996 there was also a stone swastika on the beach, which someone collected into the heap of stones seen in the background. Tourists left their business card by painting the name of their boat and date of their visit on a boulder at Virgohamna, an important site with many cultural remains. It is strictly prohibited to come too close or to go ashore on Moffen Island, which is a nature reserve. Tourists proudly showed off this picture of themselves after breaking these rules, and the Governor’s Office investigated the case. The visit to the island cost them NOK 45,000.

The destruction or removal of fixed or loose cultural artefacts is punishable, and will result in substantial fines. The parliament (Storting) has decided that Svalbard shall be one of the best-managed wilderness areas in the world. The extremely vulnerable nature and the Arctic wildlife have marginal living conditions, and a strict management of the natural environment is therefore absolutely necessary. A rich variety of cultural monuments are valuable witnesses from earlier activities under difficult conditions, and it is extremely important that we preserve this cultural heritage also for the future.

Fragile treasures

The cultural remains are well preserved in the cold, dry climate. The soil is thin, leaving even the oldest remnants exposed. Svalbard’s cultural sites offer fascinating meetings with the past. But those seeking such meetings can easily destroy what they came to visit. Not thinking of the consequences, excited visitors step on the fragile blubber stoves, move stones on old graves, and bend or break old equipment. Some even bring protected objects with them. A button or dulled knife blade, now lying just outside the old hunting station, is robbed of its value if removed from this context. Tens of thousands of people yearly visit Svalbard’s cultural remains. Such petty theft drains the islands of their heritage and is, of course, strictly forbidden.

Vulnerable cultural remains. Chermside Island on Nordaustlandet. Rounded stones on the beach spell out key names in the history of expeditions in Svalbard: RAN H PALME – JADERIN — 1898, the name of a Swedish ship, its captain and the leader of the expedition that proved that the Earth is flatter at the poles. On the same beach are the names of Russian isolanders used in the search for the airship «Italia» in 1928. Until 1956 there was also a stone swastika on the beach, which someone collected into the heap of stones seen in the background.

The extremely vulnerable cultural sites in Svalbard are protected cultural remains. Such sites include relics from the Russian hunters, Swedish ship, its captain and the leader of the expedition that proved that the Earth is flatter at the poles. On the same beach are the names of Russian isolanders used in the search for the airship «Italia» in 1928. Until 1956 there was also a stone swastika on the beach, which someone collected into the heap of stones seen in the background.

Crimes against the environment

The unique arctic environment demands that strict requirements be placed on those who visit. Familiarise yourself with the rules so you do not unwittingly become an environmental criminal in Svalbard.

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Tourists left their business card by painting the name of their boat and date of their visit on a boulder at Virgohamna, an important site with many cultural remains. It is strictly prohibited to come too close or to go ashore on Moffen Island, which is a nature reserve. Tourists proudly showed off this picture of themselves after breaking these rules, and the Governor’s Office investigated the case. The visit to the island cost them NOK 45,000.

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A group of tourists opened a whaler’s grave from the 1600s on the island Ytre Norsbygda, where 185 people are buried. This extreme lack of respect resulted in an investigation and a fine of NOK 40,000 for the group. They had not thought over that disturbing an old grave is as bad as doing the same to a new one.

Study the environmental regulations for Svalbard. Several cases in which tourists have been investigated and fined for unsound behaviour reveal that visitors are often ignorant of their responsibilities when on these special islands. You are responsible for learning the rules, including those applying to the use of motorised vehicles, cultural remains and animal life. It is up to you to seek information when in doubt.

The Governor places high priority on the investigation of alleged crimes against the environment. Substantial fines are imposed for transgressions against regulations concerning nature and cultural remains. All baggage is inspected by customs authorities in Tromsø, and the authorities have on several occasions discovered smuggling attempts involving both cultural objects and protected animal species.
Svalbard, the northernmost part of Norway, lies between latitudes 74° and 81° N and longitudes 10° and 35° E.

**Restrictions**

- **Kong Karls Land** – entrance prohibition, includes a zone extending 500 m out of shoreline.
- **Moffen** – entrance prohibition, includes a zone extending 300 m out of shoreline.
- **Bird reserves** – entrance prohibition 15 May – 15 August, includes a zone extending 300 m out of shoreline.
- **Bjørnøya south** – entrance prohibition 1 April – 31 August, includes a zone extending 1 nautical mile out of shoreline for vessels larger than 40 feet.
- **Bjørnøya north** – entrance prohibition 15 June – 31 August.
- **Virgohamna** – entrance prohibition, includes a zone extending 300 m out of shoreline. The Governor can grant exemption to enter.

Map by Cartographica as, based on data from the Norwegian Polar Research Institute.
Svalbard’s protected areas

The protected areas in Svalbard have been established in order to preserve the archipelago’s character and beauty so that also future generations will be able to experience the unique polar nature.

In 1973 the large protected areas in more-distant parts of Svalbard were established. These are dominated by ice, snow and barren areas. In 2003 areas were protected in the most productive part of Svalbard, on Nordenskiöld Land and around Isfjorden.

Large parts of Svalbard – c. 65% – are protected areas. The land area comprises c. 40 000 km² – an area the size of Denmark.

The map on p. 22 and 23 shows Svalbard’s protected areas.

Most of these lie in areas with mandatory notification of any travel plans, and you may therefore not go there without notifying the Governor.

With the exception of some areas where access is prohibited, access to and passage in the protected areas is permitted on skis, on foot and by boat.

Visitors are only permitted to drive snow-scooters in the protected areas which lie within the area where mandatory notification of travel does not apply (apart from the scooter-free areas).

The national parks
are larger untouched, or for the most part untouched, areas with a value for research and the opportunities to experience Svalbard’s natural and cultural heritage. No activity which may have a lasting effect on the landscape or natural environment may be started here.

North-West Spitsbergen national park
1973 – 3 560 km². The area has a magnificent alpine landscape and numerous seabird colonies. Several whaling stations (e.g. Smeerenburg) and cemeteries from the 17th century are to be found here, as well as the remains of several famous expeditions, such as S.A. Andrée’s attempt to reach the North Pole by hydrogen balloon in 1897 (Virgohamna).

South Spitsbergen national park
1973 – 5 300 km². This national park has a varied Arctic landscape. The bird life is rich, with several seabird colonies and important breeding sites for eider ducks and barnacle geese. In Hornsund Poland has a permanently-manned research station.

Nordenskiöld Land national park
2003 – 1 182 km². Svalbard’s largest uninterrupted areas of rich vegetation are found here. Reindalen has extensive wetland areas that are important bird areas, particularly Stormyra. This also applies to the Nordenskiöld Land coast, which in addition has large seabird colonies in Ingeborgfjellet.

The walrus is once again numerous in Svalbard, but it is still a protected species. It has traditional resting places in the protected areas, but sometimes walrus can be seen in the drift ice close to the settlements. It is prohibited to disturb the walrus unnecessarily.

The Fourteenth-of-July Glacier in Northwest Spitsbergen National Park. The protected areas hold particularly valuable examples of our cultural heritage. The Norwegian government has decided that strict environmental regulations are to apply here. These large areas are available to you if you are on foot, skis, dog sled, or boat, but motorised vehicles on land are not permitted.

Visitors are only permitted to drive snow-scooters in the protected areas which lie within the area where mandatory notification of travel does not apply (apart from the scooter-free areas).

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**Sassen-Bünsow Land national park**

2003 – 1 157 km². The area has extensive vegetation-covered areas, wetlands which are important bird biotopes, and seabird colonies. Tempelfjorden is an important area for ringed seal. The Temple is a characteristic landscape feature. Fredheim was the main station for the famous trapper Hilmar Neis.

**Northern Isfjorden national park**

2003 – 2 050 km². Here there are extensive areas with rich vegetation consisting of a variety of species. The large flat coastal areas (Bohemannflya, Erdmannflya and Dauvmannsbyra) are important biotopes for wading birds, geese and ducks. The area has several large seabird colonies.

**The nature reserves**

are untouched or almost untouched areas. Activity which can have an effect on the landscape or natural environment may not be started here. The regulations are stricter in the nature reserves than in the national parks.

**North-East Svalbard nature reserve**

1973 – 6 380 km². There is a large population of Svalbard reindeer in the area. Polar bears are also numerous, particularly in winter. The nature reserve has a number of resting sites for walrus and important breeding sites for several bird species, including brent geese.

**Moffen nature reserve**

1983 – 16 km². This small, gravel island is a very important resting place for walrus and an important breeding area for birds. The protected area includes the island and a sea zone extending 300 m from land or skerries. From 15th May to 15th September all traffic on and around Moffen is prohibited. This includes access by sea and flying below 500 m a.s.l.

**Ossian Sars**

2003 – 11 km². The area has rich vegetation, with several rare plant species. Access on foot in the area is allowed, but not camping.

**Hopen nature reserve**

2003 – 46 km². The island is a very important denning, migration and feeding area for polar bears and also has large bird colonies.

**Bjønnga nature reserve**

2003 – 177 km². The south of the island has a magnificent landscape with a cliff coast and large seabird colonies (birdcliffs). The island is an important resting area for migrating birds to/from the rest of Svalbard. There are many lakes with Arctic char. From 1st April to 31st August inclusive access is prohibited in some areas of the southern part of the island. This also applies on the sea to a distance of 1 n.m. for boats larger than 40'. From 15th June to 31st August inclusive access is also prohibited in an area in the north-east of the island (Laksvatnet/Kalven/Lomvatnet).

**Bird reserves**

1973. There are 15 bird reserves in Svalbard. Almost all lie on skerries and small islands along the west coast of Spitsbergen. Their objective is to protect the most important breeding sites for eider ducks, barnacle geese and brent geese. These species choose breeding sites on islets and skerries that are not surrounded by ice in summer, and are thus inaccessible to foxes. There are few such sites in Svalbard, and the concentration of nesting birds can therefore be great.

All access to the bird reserves is prohibited from 15th May to 15th August.

Access to these islands is therefore prohibited all year. This applies to all access to the islands and within minimum 500 m off the coast and from skerries, and to air traffic below 500 m.

**Geotope protected areas**

are areas for the protection of important or distinctive geological occurrences.

**Festningen geotope protected area**

2003 – 14 km². In the famous Festningen profile a geological succession can be seen which was deposited over several hundred million years (Carboniferous/Tertiary). Fossil tracks of dinosaurs can also be seen here.

More information:

www.sysselmannen.svalbard.no

Magdalenefjorden in Nordwest-Spitsbergen national park.

**Sørvågen**

is one of the most important breeding areas for polar bears in Svalbard.

**Kong Karls Land** is one of the largest glaciers in Svalbard. The nature reserve has extensive vegetation-consisting of a variety of species. The large flat coastal areas (Bohemannflya, Erdmannflya and Dauvmannsbyra) are important biotopes for wading birds, geese and ducks. The area has several large seabird colonies.

The regulations are stricter in the nature reserves than in the national parks.

**Arctic fox**

The hunting period is limited to two weeks in June/July. The hunting period is from 15th May to 15th September. There are very few such sites in Svalbard, and the concentration of nesting birds can therefore be great.

All access to the bird reserves is prohibited from 15th May to 15th August.

This includes traffic both on land and on the sea within a 300 m zone from land or skerry.

**The nature reserves**

are untouched or almost untouched areas. Activity which can have an effect on the landscape or natural environment may not be started here. The regulations are stricter in the nature reserves than in the national parks.

**The nature reserve**

has a magnificent landscape, including the largest glaciers in Svalbard. The nature reserve has important breeding localities for seabirds and geese, resting places for walrus and polar bear living areas.

**Kong Karls Land** is one of the most important breeding areas for polar bears in Svalbard.

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