



Strike stops flyers

Walkout by pilots at Norwegian Air casts pall over Svalbard due to peak tourist season, eclipse

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A pilots' strike at Norwegian Air that resulted in the cancellation of nearly all Scandinavian flights this Wednesday, affecting about 35,000 people, could have major consequences for Svalbard beginning Friday.

The discount airline's resumption of flights between Oslo and Longyearbyen in March of 2013 is widely credited for a large rise in visitors, beginning with a 25 percent increase during its first month. The strike is occurring at the beginning of what are Svalbard's two busiest months of the year for overnight tourism – and this year is an exceptional case due to the March 20 total solar eclipse that is expected to bring what will be by far a record number of people to the archipelago.

The next Norwegian flight to Longyearbyen is scheduled Friday, with flights on Mon-

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Local residents who may or may not still have heads will be exhibited on stage Friday and Saturday nights so the town can learn if it's basically kicked the bucket, to use an English idiom since the Norwegian one in the title of the performance makes absolutely no sense in English ("coal hen").

DECAPTIVATING!

Will Svalbard's coal miners suffer the fate of chicken under the axe? We don't bloody know

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

If you're a hen, is it better to run around with your head chopped off or jump off a cliff without wings?

That question, since details about pretty much everything else absolutely cannot be revealed upon penalty of massive shame, may or may not be answered during the annual theater performance spoofing the past year's local

events Friday and Saturday night at Huset. The performances are part of a packed weekend of events during the annual eight-day Solfestuka festival welcoming the return of the sun to Longyearbyen after four months.

This year's show has a title that translates in English to "Wow – A New Coal Age! (Or Is It Going The Way Of The Coal Hen?)" While there is no actual English equivalent for the Norwegian idiom used, it basically refers to a hen under the axe.

As for the coal reference – well let's just say mining hasn't been a humorous topic in Svalbard during the past year. But that doesn't

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Bear joins Lance research team

Curious creature damages instruments set up near research vessel frozen into the sea ice

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Now that they're finally back on solid ice, that other great natural menace in Svalbard is giving the Lance crew a hassle.

A polar bear vandalized equipment set up near the research ship that is frozen into the sea ice north of Spitsbegern, according to an entry this week in the expedition's official

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JEAN-CHARLES GALLET / NPI

Researchers inspect equipment on sea ice near the Lance research vessel that damaged this week by a polar bear that has been observed in the area during the past few days.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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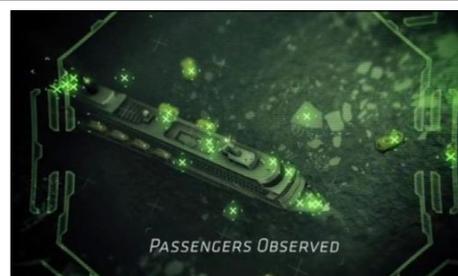
Corrections policy

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.

My heart will go on infrared



COURTESY OF SARNOR

A giant cruise ship lowers lifeboats after striking an iceberg in icy waters in a special-effects-filled film targeted at Svalbard audiences that bears absolutely no resemblance to "Titanic." No, really, other than the boat and iceberg thing, "Arctic Mayday," subtitled "A Future Scenario For Search and Rescue in the High North," follows the fate of the *Arctic Viking* after it begins sinking in northeast Spitsbergen. Unlike "Titanic," the film by SARNOR (acronym for the latter part of the title, for those needing subtitles) envisions a sufficient number of rugged covered lifeboats that can be picked up by helicopter and dropped on land or an ice floe. All passengers would be fitted with signal-transmitting wristbands, lower left, so swimmers could be detected by radar, lower right. A multitude of responding agencies would also be able to rapid-build medical facilities and other shelters. But, like "Titanic," the film also requires some suspension of belief. Winter cruises under the northern lights northeast Svalbard aren't exactly a thing. Also, the English narration notes "the film describes an ideal operation so it could be implemented if all resources are at the right time." But local rescuers – in only two helicopters – would be the first to arrive after 90 minutes (less than an hour before the *Titanic* sank in real life). Also, the film notes full-scale operations could rescue 150 people every 15 minutes – not ideal for those in the water. The film can be seen at vimeo.com/121125997.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Ooooo...a Longyearbyen politician got ensnared in a "wide stance" scandal this week, which means folks like us get to write biting headlines and commenters get to rage at length about whether the media or the politician is the villain (OK, how many of you raised your hand for both?). It seems **our esteemed Mayor Christin Kristoffersen parked her black Mercedes in the traffic lane at the entrance to Svalbard Airport, causing snarls for other vehicles trying to get through for about half an hour**, according to The Local Paper of Reciprocity. Like a certain "family values" politician who got caught intimately encroaching on a cop occupying the adjacent restroom stall, Kristoffersen's hijinks were particularly ill-timed. The paper ran an article two weeks ago about how taxi drivers and others are furious at people – presumably tourists – parking in such a manner. Still, that didn't keep a lot of com-



ANONYMOUS

Government bloat: If you're a politician parking illegally, it's best not to have one of the most unique vehicles in town.

menters on the newspaper's Facebook page from taking her side. "Does the local news have nothing better to do than hang out the mayor? Pull yourself together!" Others took the "public figure" and "newsworthy issue" side. Kristoffersen, who certainly would have no reason to mislead us, claims "everybody seems to be on my side" (yeah, she apologized as well, but that's less fun to point out).

Ship out of luck



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Novelyn Martinez, an employee at the Mix kiosk, restocks empty candy bins after the arrival of a cargo ship in Longyearbyen on Monday, one week later than scheduled due to mechanical problems. The delay left many store shelves empty, although Svalbardbutikken officials have stated during previous shortages their warehouse has enough goods to last for a few months, even if variety might be lacking. Fresh goods and other items also arrive nearly daily by air.

It's a show; we can't reveal more

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mean the performers won't find a way to inject some.

The absurdly long title is essentially the result of a political compromise, said Kristin Furu Grotting, a member of the Longyearbyen Community Council who also happens to be among those who will be on stage.

"We couldn't decide which one to use, it was a 50-50 split, so we combined them," she said.

Like a hen, just being on stage makes a person vulnerable, said Kari Renate Nilsen, a Vega resident who is spending a week in town to direct the performances.

"It's almost like they're jumping off a cliff without security and hoping they'll get wings before they land," she said.

Nilsen, who directs a variety of professional and community performances nationwide, said a show with eccentric themes like coal hens means the actors have to be bigger than life.

"I get them to act more dramatic, more gestures," she said. "Every actor has an instrument, which is their body, and shapes characters."

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

Solfestuka schedule

Friday

6 p.m.: Solfest carnival for juniors. Longyearbyen Youth Club.

7:30 p.m.: Performance "Wow - A New Coal Age," spoofing the year's past events. Huset.

9 p.m.: Solfest carnival for juniors. Longyearbyen Youth Club.

10 p.m.: Live music at Huset.

Saturday

2 p.m.: Outdoor sun activities including sledding, skiing and live performances. Skiing hill across from Longyearbyen School.

4 p.m.: Cafe hosted by local cultural students. Kulturhuset cafe.

7:30 p.m.: Performance "Wow - A New Coal Age," spoofing the year's past events. Huset.

10 p.m.: Concert by D.D.E. Kulturhuset. Free bus from Huset will be available.

10 p.m.: Solfest party on two floors. Huset.

Sunday

11 a.m.: Family Mass w/ performance by Polargospel. Svalbard Church.

12:30 p.m.: Ceremony welcoming the return of the sun. Old hospital steps at Skjæringa.

1 p.m.: Solfest social. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: "Soltoner" concert featuring local trumpet/piano duo and a vocal quartet. Svalbard Church.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM

SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

High reindeer fatality rate feared due to harsh winter

An icy winter has researchers fearing there will be "mass deaths" of reindeer and possibly other animals this year. The ice is making traditional grazing areas impenetrable, forcing animals to higher and more mountainous terrain, with The Governor of Svalbard receiving numerous reports of animals injured or killed by falls as a result. Eigil Movil, the governor's nature advisor, said officials have euthanized two injured reindeer in recent days. Last year's reindeer census set a record with nearly 1,500 individuals and Norwegian Polar Institute officials suggest that may contribute to a high fatality count this year.

Galleri Svalbard may replace library at Lompensenteret

Relocating Galleri Svalbard and the city government's information center into the space in Lompensenteret now occupied by the Longyearbyen Library is being evaluated by local officials. Jan Martin Berg, the gallery's manager, said the relocation would be more convenient for visitors than the current site in Nybyen two kilometers from the town center. The idea was suggested during a Longyearbyen Community Council strategic conference last summer. No formal details exist, the council is expected to begin discussing the matter this month. Elin Anita Olsrud, the library's manager, said she is amenable to relocating due to the high rent at Lompensenteret, and that a new site might offer more visibility.

Digital subscribers account for Svalbardposten rise in '14

Svalbardposten ended 2014 with 2,636 subscribers, an increase from 2,561 in 2013, but a nationwide change in calculations that factors in digital subscribers means the figures aren't directly comparable. But Editor Eirik Palm said the numbers, especially an 18.2 percent increase in registered web users and a 3.6 percent jump in hits to 2.37 million, are encouraging. "We also see that more and more people are choosing digital solutions, whether through a purely digital subscription, a total product with both online and on paper, or day passes," he said.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. NW winds to 11 km/h. High -3C (-7C wind chill), low -5C (-10C wind chill).	Cloudy. NW winds to 15 km/h. High -4C (-8C wind chill), low -6C (-12C wind chill).	Rain/snow. Variable winds to 25 km/h. High 2C (-4C wind chill), low -6C (-11C wind chill).	Rain/snow. Variable winds to 25 km/h. High -2C (-4C wind chill), low -3C (-8C wind chill).
Sunrise: 7:57a, sunset: 4:21p	Sunrise: 7:48a, sunset: 4:29p	Sunrise: 7:40a, sunset: 4:37p	Sunrise: 7:31a, sunset: 4:45p
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -2C (-7C), -6C (-10C), light 9:29h; Monday, p. cloudy, -6C (-10C), -10C (-18C), light 9:45h; Tuesday, cloudy, -9C (-15C), -10C (-18C), light 10:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -8C (-15C), -10C (-15C), light 10:16h			

Data provided by storm.no



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

A Norwegian Air jet lands at Svalbard Airport in March of 2013, the airline's first month of flights to and from the mainland since dropping service five years earlier. A 25 percent increase in visitors that month was credited largely to the budget airline, but some tour operators say many of the budget-minded passengers are ill-equipped and ill-informed about Svalbard's wildlife and extreme climate.

Union expects short strike

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days, Wednesdays and Fridays during the following weeks.

Norwegian Air, in a press statement, said "we will do everything we can to protect our passengers the best possible way," including SMS updates about specific flights to all passengers with registered mobile phone numbers. The airline also plans to bring in planes and staff to provide service for some European routes.

Calls to Norwegian Air officials about whether contingency plans will be considered for exceptional circumstance such as the eclipse were not returned by presstime.

The strike by the Norwegian Pilot Union, occurring after three months of unsuccessful negotiations with management, centers around concerns working conditions in Norway, Denmark and Sweden will deteriorate as the airlines pushes to trim costs. Norwegian reported its first annual loss in eight years in 2014 due to an aggressive expansion plan emphasizing long-haul flights.

Einar Lundereng, a spokesman for the pilots' union, told *Adresseavisen* "the pilots are prepared to strike as long as they need to," but

"I do not think this will take a long time."

"We have a strike fund which means that we can hold out for quite a while," he said. "But we do not think this will take long. It is expensive to let the planes be grounded. We think there will be a solution in a matter of days."

Norwegian resumed service to Svalbard five years after dropping flights it had started only a year earlier. It was the second time in a short span the discount airline abandoned service to the archipelago after a year, raising questions about the company's long-term commitment to Svalbard.

The airline's original plan in 2013 was to offer flights during peak tourism months, but strong booking figures resulted in the company providing year-round service.

Local business owners have generally said they are pleased with the additional visitors since tourism is seen as vital to the economy due to coal mining's descent into crisis. But some tour operators and government officials have expressed concerns many of the budget-minded passengers arrive without proper gear," she wrote.

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

Polar bear catches research fever

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blog (tinyurl.com/o43f7hg).

Lana Cohen, a researcher conducting atmospheric observations during the Norwegian Polar Institute project, noted the animal has been spotted near the ship during the past few days. But a day after researchers spent considerable time setting up an instrument on the ice, it became obvious more than humans were monitoring it.

"We were looking at an instrument, mounted on an arm that was supposed to be parallel to the ground, but which was now dipping down towards the snow at a perilous an-

gle," she wrote.

But while some expedition participants "were starting to make vows of vengeance (only mostly joking)," the bear was only guilty of what the researchers are doing.

"I envisioned the bear wondering what the heck is all this stuff and what is it doing here?" Cohen wrote.

The *Lance*, which is spending six months studying the sea ice "from cradle to grave," was forced to relocate last week after being pushed southward out of the ice.

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

What's up

March 1-8

Solfestuka festival celebrating the return of the sun to Longyearbyen. Schedule on page 3 and at solfestuka.no.

March 8

5 p.m.: Movie: "Amazonia," British/U.S. adventure/family, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Foxcatcher," U.S. drama, ages 14 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 9-24

"The Stormy Sun and the Northern Lights," free course open to the public. Participants register at first class at 6:15 p.m. March 9. UNIS.

March 9

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

March 10

7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Community Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7:30 p.m.: Concert by pianist Leif Ove Andsnes and baritone vocalist Matthias Goerne, featuring "Schwanengesang" by Franz Schubert. Kulturhuset.

March 11

6 p.m.: Movie: "Amazonia," British/U.S. adventure/family, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

March 15

5 p.m.: Movie: "Cinderella," U.S. drama/adventure dubbed in Norwegian, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "The Theory of Everything," British drama/biography, all ages. Kulturhuset.

March 16

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

March 17

7 p.m.: Longyearbyen Photo Club annual meeting. Kapp Wijk, UNIS.

7 p.m.: Discussion about visit to the Middle East to assist Palestinians in occupied territories by Priest Leif Magne Helgesen and Longyearbyen School

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:

- *Another minimum maximum for sea ice*
- *Climate change likely factor in Syrian war*
- *China's ambitious year in the Arctic*
- *Mars had more water than Arctic Ocean*