



A van, top right, barely visible through a blizzard, approaches the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in this scene from the documentary "Climate Of Change," focusing on environmental preservation efforts by individuals. The seed vault scenes in the film, which received positive reviews from critics during screenings at the Tribeca Film Festival last month, are called "particularly ethereal."

## Svalbard: Still strange

*Doomsday remains the theme in literary and lowbrow films, books*

"Comatose seeds are wrapped in stone," a woman's subdued voice recites above sparse eerie music, pausing between phrases. "It is the Garden of Eden...numbered and tagged and vacuum packed."

"A doomsday allotment, just in case...the work and the sign of a civilization stashing provisions and holding its breath."

Such is the impression of Svalbard made on attendees at the Tribeca Film Festival, where "Climate of Change" screened last month. The 85-minute documentary, focusing on small-scale environmental preservation efforts in sometimes unusual locations worldwide, received generally favorable reviews from critics who agreed the Svalbard portion

**Hauntingly familiar:** Watch a two-minute excerpt of the Svalbard portion of "Climate of Change" and other previews from the film free at [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net).

lived up to its "particularly ethereal" billing.

Those working at and with the Svalbard Global Seed Vault tend to cringe at its "doomsday" label in popular media, but it's clearly here to stay as a new collection of movies, books and other entertainment continues focusing on the ominous aspect of the two-year-old facility.

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## Fewer living in Svalbard

*Population declines 3.3 percent during 2009; Russians drop the most, Thais still main foreigners*

Given everything else that declined in 2009, the population of Svalbard might as well be a part of it.

There were 2,481 residents in the archipelago as of January 1, 2010, 84 fewer than a year ago, according to Statistics Norway. The decline includes 33 residents in Norwegian settlements, which now have a population of 2,052, and 50 in the Russian community of Barentsburg, which now has half the occupants as it did seven years ago.

"Svalbard has a high level of in- and out-migration, markedly influencing the size of the population," a summary by the agency notes. Barentsburg's population, however, has been in steady decline due to the loss of mining and other industries.

Men represent 57 percent of residents in Norwegian settlements, but women make up

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### Foreign residents in Svalbard 2010

	All men women		
Thailand	96	33	63
Sweden	53	28	25
Russia	29	13	16
Germany	24	18	6
Denmark	14	7	7
Croatia	11	7	4
Philippines	9	-	9

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## Look, but don't touch the bears

*Fewer tourist encounters with animals, but better precautions possible, UNIS researcher says*

Confrontations between polar bears and humans in Svalbard are declining, and fewer visitors are heading into the wilds uninformed. But better education of tourists is still needed as some groups are exposing themselves to danger more than others.

Those findings are part of a master's thesis by Margrete Keyser for The University Centre In Svalbard. Her work, which is continuing as part of a database of encounters being compiled

by Norwegian and U.S. researchers, found tourists going on group snowmobile expeditions during the spring of 2009 had varying levels of interest in seeing polar bears. Those traveling to remote parts of northern Spitsbergen or to the eastern coast, people ages 55 to 66, and visitors most interested in photography were more likely to seek out the animals.

"Oddly, tourists with a certificate of completed apprenticeship as education seemed more exposed to end up in an encounter," she wrote in a summary of her thesis. "This seemed to be caused by an insecurity regarding

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## Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.



Thai women, who by far are the most numerous group for foreign residents living in Svalbard, serve cuisine from their native country during a fundraiser at The University Centre In Svalbard.

## Svalbard residents come and go fast

### POPULATION, from page 1

the majority of foreign nationals in those communities. A total of 18 percent of all women are foreign nationals, compared to 13 percent of men.

Thailand continues to be the dominant foreign group with 96 residents, followed by Sweden with 53 and Russia with 29. Forty percent of the foreign women and 22 per cent of the

foreign men come from Thailand.

"Until the mid-1990s, only a few Thai women, married to Norwegian men, had settled in Svalbard," wrote An-Magritt Jensen, a professor in sociology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, in an analysis of Svalbard's Thai population last year.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## Briefly

### Blues Bonanza features trio of bands Saturday

Blues are traditionally a dark season favorite in Svalbard, but a one-night marathon of concerts is being offered Saturday as the lengthy polar summer settles in.

The trio of performances are scheduled at 9:30 p.m. Saturday at Svarbar. Admission is 150 kroner.

The three bands are Blåmyra, a Longyearbyen bluegrass sextet; Akaustisk Soda, a decade-old bluegrass/alternative group from Bergen featuring banjo player Rino Silden; and Moving Day, a new Oslo group that claims to take "inspiration from the old-time music revival in New York in the early '60s."

### Barents snow crabs may total 100 million by 2016

Snow crabs, first caught in Norway in 1996, may turn into a feast for some commercial fishermen as officials estimate there are now 40 million crabs in the Barents Sea and the population could reach 100 million in five years.

The species have a lot of offspring, few enemies and a good supply of food, Russian scientists told *Finnmark* this week. Commercial fishing of the Russian waters off Finnmark is now being considered, but Jan Sundet, one of

the researchers, said it is too early to do the same in Norwegian portions of the Barents Sea.

Some researchers have raised concerns crab populations may threaten cod stocks. But Sundet said there is considerable interest among fishermen since it is a major source of income for Canada and Alaska, "so even if the price is only about half of what it is for king crabs, snow crabs generate plenty of revenue."

### NPI: Vessel feud threat to Norway's polar status

Norway may have settled a 40-year-old battle with Russia over the Arctic, but can't resolve an internal battle about funding a research ship for the same area, according to the head of the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Jan-Gunnar Winther told *Aftenposten* last week Norway will lose its status as a "polar nation" unless an agreement is reached. Efforts to build a new vessel have been ongoing since 2001, with institute officials saying their current fleet is outdated and soon won't be capable of field work.

A vessel will cost about 1.1 billion kroner and take at least four years to build. The Ministry for the Environment is in a dispute with the ministry in charge of fishing and coastal issues about which agency will play a lead role in managing the maritime environment.



A polar bear observed by several people roams Adventdalen before police chase it from the area April 26. It was one of three bears spotted near Longyearbyen within a couple of days. Photo by Per Andreassen of the Svalbard governor's office.

## Study: Tourist safety training can improve

**BEARS, from page 1**

what are good security routines."

Svalbard tourists, who constantly call seeing a polar bear one of their primary goals, are besieged with information from the time they arrive, including the ever-present warning not to wander beyond the Longyearbyen city limits unless somebody is carrying a rifle. Keyser, in an e-mail interview, said her concerns aren't about an awareness of polar bears as much as providing complete information about dealing with them.

"Of course they know that we have polar bears," she wrote. "It's a matter of teaching them how to behave to avoid the encounter in the first place, how to behave when there is a polar bear close and how to act to scare it off if the situation escalates into a problem."

"One example might be that we have many tourists coming to rent rifles...but they don't know that they also should bring a signal pistol, which is the most important device we use to scare the bear off. Many seem to think that as long as they have a rifle with them they are safe. I think 'OK, maybe they are safe but what about the bear?' Without means and knowledge to scare it off they might have to kill a bear that maybe didn't need to get shot in the first place."

Placing informative films hotel lobbies and at the airport, and attaching brochures to e-mails confirming bookings are among Keyser's recommendations for improving self-education possibilities. Better regulations and safety

training by professionals should also be implemented, since some travelers are less likely to study material on their own.

A lack of experience is also a concern with some researchers, since an increasing number of projects means they are experiencing an increase in encounters during recent years while those of tourists are in decline, Keyser noted.

"A differentiation in the registrations between resident researchers and visiting researchers would help to analyze the situation even better," she wrote in her thesis summary. "It is likely to believe that a high proportion of the researchers that got involved in a confrontation with a polar bear were non-resident researchers and presumably not very experienced."

Between 1987 and June of 2009 there were 74 encounters between humans and polar bears, she stated, noting to total is from the Svalbard governor's office. Police cases accounted for 23 – so they're not considered surprise or self-defense encounters – personnel at research stations for 27, tourists for 15, trappers for seven and local residents for four.

Police responded to three sightings of polar bears near Longyearbyen at the end of April, but Keyser said she doesn't know if a sometimes mild winter that resulted in poor snow cover will affect the number of animals near settlements since their location cannot be easily predicted.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### Tour company hopes to set up tent camp near Mine 3

Tundra Events is hoping to place a large Sami-style camping tent outside Mine 3, but will need permission from Store Norske to do so. The tour company is asking Longyearbyen officials to approve three tent sites for this summer, with the other locations being near Mine 7 and where the fiber optic cable disappears into a fjord near Svalbard Airport. Dag Ivar Brekke, vice administrative director of Store Norske, said there is a 50-meter safety zone for abandoned mines and open fires are not permitted. Tundra Events Arne O. Bergdal calls the site attractive and notes a mining museum is planned there, "but if it becomes difficult we will look at the other two options."

### Delay of food grinders leads to extension of deadline

The deadline for installing food grinders in all Longyearbyen residents has been extended since they are now scheduled to arrive May 31 instead of the original date of May 3. Officials had approved a July 1 deadline for installation of the devices, but the new target date is "not absolute," said Brynjulv Øverby, head of Bydrift. He said summer holidays can affect when many people are at home, which is more of a problem for individual residences than apartments and similar complexes. Compliance inspections by the Svalbard governor's office are likely to take place in the fall.

### May Day celebration called off for first time in 85 years

The traditional May Day memorial ceremony was bypassed in Longyearbyen for the first time in 85 years due to the reorganization of a trade union responsible for the event. Provisional representatives are scheduled to elect board members to Longyearbyen Arbeiderforenings this fall, and the realization there was no planning for the May 1 event was a bit sudden, said Ottar Svensen, the interim leader. Traditional events include a procession through town and speeches at the Skjæringa memorial. A memorial ceremony did take place in the evening at Svalbard Church.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly sunny. WSW winds at 4 km/h. High -6C (-6C wind chill), low -3C (-4C wind chill).	Cloudy with snow late. SW winds at 14 km/h. High 2C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-8C wind chill).	Varying snow up to 23 cm. ESE winds at 22 km/h. High 0C (-7C wind chill), low -2C (-8C wind chill).	Snow up to 15 cm. E winds at 12 km/h. High -1C (-6C wind chill), low -10C (-12C wind chill).
<b>Extended forecast:</b> Sunday, cloudy and cold, -8C (-10C), -11C (-12C); Monday, some sun, -8C (-8C), -9C (-10C); Tuesday, cold and partly cloudy, -8C (-12C), -11C (-17C); Wednesday, periods of snow, -7C (-10C), -8C (-17C).			
Data provided by <a href="http://AccuWeather.com">AccuWeather.com</a>			



Brian K. Vaughan, a tv/movie/fiction writer who made a monkey a co-star of the post-Apocalyptic *Y: The Last Man* comic book series, is turning his doomsday focus on Svalbard for "The Vault," a movie about a thief trying to save mankind by breaking into the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

## End of the world remains fertile ground

### DOOM, from page 1

The pace isn't likely to slow in the near future, especially with some predicting the arrival of Judgement Day during Christmas of 2012.

The novel "Solar" by British author Ian McEwan, a climate change satire whose tragic-comedy peaks in Spitsbergen, has seen an abundance of page 1 features in the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* and other major literary publications. Being pitched to movie studios now is "The Vault" by Brian K. Vaughan, a writer of the "Lost" television show and *Y: The Last Man* comic series, described "as a cross between "Ocean's 11" and "2012"/"Children of Men."

"When a terrifying plague destroys crops and causes starvation on a global scale, the world's greatest thief must break into the extremist-controlled Doomsday Vault to steal the one seed that could prevent the extinction of the human race," a synopsis notes.

Apocalyptic portrayals of the isolated Norwegian archipelago are nothing new, and range from scholarly to silly to sci-fi. The highbrow road is taken by "Climate of Change," where U.S. director Brian Hill uses two British artists – actress Tilda Swinton narrating poems by Simon Armitage – to present characters such as a 13-year-old member of a youth environmental group in India and a renaissance man teaching citizens to cook with solar power in Africa.

"Simon had the idea very early on to write something comparing the global seed vault to a kind of giant potting shed," Hill said in an interview published in the movie's press kit. The director's crew on the island was severely limited, consisting of two assistants and his 13-year-old son who was on school holiday.

Minimalist or not, the seed vault portion of the documentary was among the most frequently mentioned by Tribeca festival critics.

"Rather than being used to introduce us to interview subjects or even present statistics, the narration adds beauty to the already incredible landscapes," wrote Eric Eisenberg in a review for *Cinema Blend*. "One poem in particular, written about an underground seed storage facility in Svalbard, Norway, is haunting as we move from snowy streets to tomb below, known to some as the Doomsday Vault, where

4.5 million duplicates of seeds are stored."

Another sober examination of issues related to the vault is "Seed Warriors," a Swiss documentary also premiering earlier this year. Promotional materials also take a "world in peril" slant and focus on the efforts of individuals, such as a Kenyan scientist trying to deposit unique native seeds at the vault while they still exist.

"Our protagonists come from a range of disciplines but they all face innumerable hurdles – bureaucracy, a lack of money and resources, the absence of political will," a synopsis notes. "These unlikely heroes have all made considerable sacrifices and have proved resilient in the face of adversity."

It's safe to assume a more downmarket approach will be featured in "The Vault."

Details are sketchy, including who might buy it and when it might be released. But Vaughan's extensive resume of eclectic includes another post-global plague story in *Y: The Last Man*, summarized by Wikipedia as "about the only man to survive the apparent simultaneous death of every male mammal (barring the same man's pet monkey) on Earth."

Still, the article notes "among other important ideas, the story deals extensively and objectively about gender issues and technological and scientific advancement taking the place of the so-called 'natural order of things.'"

Strange Svalbard science isn't limited to the seed vault in the mind of writers and directors. "Solar" plays with shifting climate change moralities inspired by a Spitsbergen snowmobile expedition. Another adult novel, "Dark Matter" by bestselling children's author Michelle Paver, will feature another frozen misadventure when it is published in October.

The plot, set in 1937, focuses on a group of young Englishmen on a Spitsbergen mission of scientific discovery, only to find something sinister lurking in the snow.

"I've always loved ghost stories and for the past decade, I've had 'Dark Matter' at the back of my mind," Paver told *The Bookseller* in an interview. "'Dark Matter' is my attempt to capture the beauty and menace of the Arctic, in a ghost story that will scare the hell out of you."

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## What's up

### May 6

2 p.m.: Board of cultural and leisure meeting. Næringsbygget, Tundra room.

Board of City Operation Authority meeting. Time not specified. Næringsbygget, Smutthullet room.

### May 7

9 p.m.: Board of growing enterprises meeting. Næringsbygget, Tundra room.

### May 9

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

### May 11

7 p.m.: Meeting of the local board. Lompensenteret, Mediateket.

### May 12

7 p.m.: Presentation by filmmaker and author Jan Anders Diesen on Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition. Radisson.

### May 14

4 p.m.: Svalbard Camp registration begins. Outdoor camp in August for youths 13-18 is limited to 40 participants. Fee 800 kroner. Register by sending name, year or birth and mobile telephone number to [campsvalbard@lokalstyre.no](mailto:campsvalbard@lokalstyre.no).

### May 16

11 a.m.: Liturgy. Svalbard Church.

### May 17

7 a.m. - 10 p.m.: Traditional celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day.

### May 18

7 p.m.: Brainstorming session for new cultural center. Næringsbygget, Smutthullet room.

### May 22

11 a.m.: Cultural exchange in Barentsburg. Longyearbyen clubs showcase their talents for their Russian counterparts. Ship for first 35 participants departs at 11 a.m., others will depart by helicopter at 1:30 p.m. Show starts at 6:30 p.m.

## 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:

- *Drilling fallout continues after oil disaster*
- *Why Norway's offshore drilling is safer*
- *New N. Norway youth council elected*
- *Hungry polar bears learn rock climbing*