



NORWAY

THE CLIMATE HEATS UP

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23-year-old Sabrina is a German arctic guide. She has lived on Svalbard for four years.

How the war in Ukraine upsets the northernmost lands of the planet

On the very edges of the map, between the 74th and 81st parallels, is a place that is both rugged and magical. Where daily life touches on the metaphysical: the Svalbard islands at the far north of Norway are the world's northernmost inhabited area.

The archipelago, whose name is ancient Norwegian for "cold coast", is 60% covered by year-round ice. The tracks of the islands' few roads are altered almost daily by the extreme atmospheric conditions. The 2600 or so human inhabitants are heavily outnumbered by the polar bear population, so no one ventures beyond the town unarmed.

Longyearbyen is the main settlement, where 80 % of the population lives. Fifty different nationalities are represented, but no one was born here and no one can be buried here either. In fact, the law prohibits childbirth (the only healthcare structure is poorly equipped and women are sent to the mainland three weeks before their due dates) while, due to the layer of permafrost, the natural conditions mean that it is impossible to dig a grave to bury a coffin.

Norwegians, Ukrainians and Russians have been used to living side by side for decades in this extreme context where isolation strengthens relations between people and makes nationality irrelevant. But the balance has been compromised by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is undermining old personal and professional relationships, cultural interaction, even sports.

The Svalbard tourist board has called for a boycott of Russian state-owned enterprises in the Barentsburg mining settlement, while the Russian consul general, widely considered a moderate, recently provoked bitter controversy after accusing the Norwegian media of primarily spreading fake news in their coverage of the conflict in Ukraine.



Svalbard, the Nordmannsfonna glacier, on the east coast of Spitsbergen, during the winter.



Jan is 33 years old and comes from the Czech Republic. He has been in Svalbard for two years and works as a guide at Greendog Svalbard, a tour operator with more than 300 sled huskies. Before, he used to work in an office but on a trip to Canada he discovered a passion for huskies and decided to change profession and move to Northern Europe. Today he is very happy with his new life.



Svalbard Kirke, the world's northernmost church. Longyearbyen is home to 2300 people of 50 different nationalities. Due to this cultural diversity, the local church is open to everyone, even at night, as are the doors of many local people's homes. Inside, are areas for reading, an internet connection, a fireplace and even a kitchen.



The cemetery in Svalbard, with the graves of miners who died from Spanish flu in 1918. In Longyearbyen women are not allowed to give birth: pregnant women are sent to the mainland three weeks before their due date because the only hospital is a small poorly equipped emergency ward. It is also forbidden to bury bodies here: the permafrost (a layer of permanent ice on the ground) conserves all bacteria. Ashes are permitted to be scattered following cremation, the nearest crematorium is in Tromsø, 1000km away.



63-year-old Torunn is a deacon at the Lutheran church in Longyearbyen. Torunn manages the church together with the priest and two other deacons.



The Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, over Longyearbyen. This phenomenon can be seen only during the winter and when the sky is completely dark.



Longyearbyen, the parade to celebrate the national holiday of 17 May, the date on which, in 1814, the Norwegian Constitution was signed in Eidvold to confirm the country's independence. Young and old parade through the streets in traditional costume.



Svalbard, aboard an icebreaker a fire is being prepared to cook whale and reindeer meat, which is high in calories and ideal for providing the right amount of energy during expeditions.



Svalbard, the Eiscat Radar. The radar antennas follow the movement of the Earth and the sun but can also be moved manually if necessary. At the base of each antenna, near the motor, is a workstation where an engineer can operate the system.



Wiggo, a taxi driver and storyteller, is Norwegian and has been in Svalbard for 10 years. Knowledgeable about the history of Longyearbyen, he offers guided tours to visitors, accompanying them to the significant places around the island in his black Fiat Ducato Maxi taxi.



A historical photograph of Longyearbyen taken by Barbara's mother in 1955. Her most famous photo is hung in almost every bar in the town. Today Barbara makes a living from photography, Fine Art prints and graphics. The photo archive with images taken by her mother is stored in the Svalbard Museum and is a precious testimony of local history.



Svalbard, ice on the shore during the summer.



Svalbard, Glitch, a Greenland husky. This breed prefer life as a pack and are very similar to wolves. As sled dogs they need daily training to keep their muscles agile. They prefer seal meat.



Melissa, Longyearbyen's seamstress, comes from Germany. On the right is Martina, an Italian friend: she too lives in the village and helps out with the work. Melissa's workplace is situated inside the Svalbard Gallery, an art gallery that provides spaces for young artists that are inspired by the islands.



Ksat Svallsat Satellite Station NASA, portaloos. The radar stations are situated outside the town on the top of a mountain. The structures are not equipped with running water and only have the bare essentials: a small kitchen and the occasional bed in the case that blizzards force the engineers to stay inside.



Longyearbyen. A wild reindeer passes undisturbed along the streets of the town. Frequently reindeers crossing the roads cause traffic.



Timon and Petty on the Foxfonna glacier during an evening stroll. Timon is German, he has lived in Svalbard for 6 years. He works in the brewery and is a freelance guide during his free time. He loves this place but feels that it is not suitable for everyone. He firmly believes that man must respect the laws of nature and the landscape he inhabits.



Svalbard, a reindeer horn. Reindeer at the end of their reproductive cycle tend to lose their horns, which grow back again quickly for the following cycle. Often when the snow begins to melt, the remains of last season's reindeer horns can be found.



Svalbard, Aiko, Siberian Husky, is driven by car to the place where he will do his daily running training.



Svalbard, a group on an expedition on the Trollsteinen Mountain enjoy a lunch break in the snow. When the taking a break outside of the town it's fundamental to sit in a circle in order to keep a lookout for bears.



Stephen from Sweden has lived in Svalbard for 7 years. On his arm is a tattoo of the map of the island. This tattoo is quite popular because many young people passing through end up falling in love with place and wish to commemorate their adventure with a tattoo. There aren't any tattooists on the island but a young Norwegian woman visits every two months and customers need to book well in advance.



The Kjell Henriksen Observatory takes its name from the scientist and former professor at the university of Tromso. The observatory is used entirely by undergraduates, PHD students and professors from UNIS, the University of Svalbard for the study of the Aurora Borealis. Beneath each glass bubble is a workstation equipped with a mechanism to record the skies.



Mirko, 32, is an arctic guide from Italy. He has lived in Svalbard for 7 years. His life is very rewarding because his job allows him to share the excitement of the visitors he shows around. Now and again he feels the draw of his home and once a year he returns to Italy to “regather a year’s worth of emotions”.



Baretz Hus, the home of Willeim Baretz, who is credited with having discovered Svalbard. In 1596 he reached the island of Spitsbergen and the Barents Sea is named after him. Historically Svalbard represented a land of plenty, with its mineral resources, such as coal, and numerous opportunities for hunting bears, whales, walruses and seals. At the Baretz Hus, in fact, can be found various remnants of old bear traps.



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