

Planning your research

Research in Svalbard requires extensive planning. Challenges to fieldwork include strict environmental regulations, polar bears, crevasses, extreme weather, and poor communications coverage.

Passport required, but no visa

Svalbard is Norwegian territory, but is outside Schengen. Thus there is no need for a visa to visit or travel within Svalbard (including the Russian settlement). However, all non-Norwegian citizens must show their passports when leaving mainland Norway en route to Svalbard and on returning from the archipelago.

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Safety issues

Challenges to fieldwork include polar bears, unstable sea ice, glacier crevasses, avalanche, drifting icebergs, extreme weather and climate, poor communications coverage and scarce infrastructure. The Governor of Svalbard updates different guides and field logs on its webpages that will be helpful in your fieldwork planning.

Minimise risks through

- Risk analysis
- Training and experience
- Personal safety equipment
- Spare parts
- Redundancy
- Communication routines
- Adjusting transport routes and means according to the conditions
- Adjusting your plans to avoid dangerous situations
- Planning what to do in case of an accident

The Governor's brochure [Safety in Svalbard](#) is a good place to start.

Safety courses and firearms training

The [University Centre in Svalbard](#) offers customised safety training courses.

[The Norwegian Polar Institute](#) requires that personnel working on projects affiliated with the Institute attend a safety course.

Most of the research institutes in Ny-Ålesund provide advice about safety and arrange shooting practice. Kings Bay AS can also be of assistance concerning safety issues.

Emergency services

The Governor of Svalbard is in charge of all rescue operations in the archipelago.

Phone number for emergencies: 112

Note that satellite phones (Iridium and Inmarsat) do not support the emergency number (112). Instead you must phone the officer on call at the Governor's office +47 79 02 12 22.

Search and Rescue (SAR) operations will be initiated if emergency beacons are triggered. SAR personnel prefer to have your position given in geographical coordinates (e.g. XX° xx.xxx' N, XX° xx.xxx' E). They also need to know what geodetic datum you use (e.g. ED50 or WGS84). Emergency beacons can be rented from [several firms](#).

Polar bears

Polar bears can be encountered anywhere in the archipelago at any time of year. They are dangerous animals and you must take precautions. [Read more about polar bears on the Norwegian Polar Institute](#).

To protect yourself against an attacking polar bear you must be familiar with use of firearms. Flare guns and emergency signal flare pens are sometimes adequate to scare bears away. You are advised to attend one of the courses listed above.

Safe handling of firearms is YOUR responsibility.

Glaciers

Many of Svalbard's glaciers are of the surge type. During a surge, the glacier's flow rate suddenly increases, which leads to crevassing in the surface. After two to ten years, the glacier slows again and enters a quiescent period that will last for decades or even centuries. Glaciers with little crevassing can suddenly start to surge and new crevasses can open up. Keep this in mind when travelling over glaciers.

Calving glaciers are spectacular but dangerous. Maintain a safe distance when boating near tidewater glaciers.

Avalanches

Avalanche beacons can save lives by helping rescue personnel quickly locate people who have been buried. However, huge forces are released during an avalanche. Beacons can be purchased in Longyearbyen.

Biological risks

Rabies is occasionally present in Svalbard, and has been diagnosed in arctic foxes, seals and reindeer. Dead animals must not be touched. Avoid animals that are unusually friendly or aggressive, or appear ill, and report your observations to the Governor's Office.

One stage in the life cycle of the tapeworm **Echinococcus multilocularis** has been found in sibling voles in Grumant. The parasite also infects dogs and foxes, whose excrement can contain parasite eggs. Humans can suffer severe liver damage if they become infected. Boil all water taken from streams around the settlements before drinking it.

Communication

Svalbard is connected to the telephone network on the Norwegian mainland via fibre optic cable. Payphones that accept phone cards are also available in the settlements. The Norwegian country code +47 is also used in Svalbard.

Standard ISDN- and analogue telephone lines are operated by the Norwegian telecommunication company Telenor. Costs for phone calls are based on Norwegian rates.

Mobile phones

GSM phones can be used in:

- Longyearbyen
- Barentsburg
- Svea

Important notice! In Ny-Ålesund Research Station there are restrictions on the use of radio frequencies (RF) in the frequency range 2-32 GHz in the geographical area within a 20 km radius from Ny-Ålesund. This involves (among others) the use of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth from both personal and scientific equipment. This frequency range is protected by law due to scientific activity. [Restrictions on the use of radio transmitters | Ny-Ålesund Research Station](#).

Internet

Institutions involved in research and education in Longyearbyen and Ny-Ålesund have access to internet communication with broadband capability.

Satellite phones

The **Iridium** system is commonly used in Svalbard, and phones are available for rent. **Inmarsat** can be used, but is not recommended owing to the system's limited range at high latitudes.

Radio communications

HF and VHF equipment can be rented from the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Logistics

Successful fieldwork requires good planning and logistics. Svalbard offers comprehensive logistics services, but be sure to book well in advance.

Transportation

There are no roads between the settlements. Small aircraft fly regularly from Longyearbyen to Ny-Ålesund. The other settlements can be reached by boat, helicopter or snowmobile.

Air travel: Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) and Norwegian fly regular scheduled flights to Longyearbyen from Oslo and Tromsø. Note that Oslo and Tromsø are inside the Schengen Area (as opposed to the Svalbard islands), which means that travellers from outside the Schengen Area may need a visa for transiting mainland Norway (both ways) even if a visa is not required for staying in Svalbard. All passengers must present their passports before boarding a flight to Svalbard.

Cargo shipping: Bring Cargo is the sole provider of regular sea freight between the mainland (Tromsø) and ports in Svalbard (Longyearbyen, Ny-Ålesund and Svea).

General logistics: Both the Norwegian Polar Institute and the University Center in Svalbard (UNIS) offer logistics services to researchers.

Accommodation: Longyearbyen features a number of hotels, see [Visit Svalbard](#) for overview and booking. The Visit Svalbard booking portal can also be used to find accommodation in Barentsburg and the deserted Pyramiden settlement in Billefjorden.

For accommodation in Ny-Ålesund, contact [Kings Bay AS](#). Researchers must be affiliated with one of the permanent institutes to conduct research in the Ny-Ålesund area. If you do not have an affiliation to one of the institutes, contact the Norwegian Polar Institute's Sverdrup Building. A RIS-ID is required.

For accommodation in Hornsund, contact the The Stanislaw Siedlecki Polar Institute in Hornsund. A RiS-ID is required.

Inside Longyearbyen: A shuttle bus runs between Svalbard Airport Longyear and the hotels as well as the Svalbard Science Center in Longyearbyen in connection with arrivals and departures. Taxis are also available outside the terminal building after arrivals.

Taxis, busses and rental cars can be found in Longyearbyen, see Visiting Svalbard's [overview](#). For cargo services inside Longyearbyen, contact [Pole Position Logistics](#).

Field equipment and provisions: General field equipment, such as rifles (require a license or permit from the Governor of Svalbard), flare guns, satellite phones and Personal Locator Beacons (PLB), may be rented from local stores in Longyearbyen. Svalbardbutikken (Coop) in Longyearbyen is a well-provisioned grocery store.

Accommodations

In Svalbard you may stay at anything from top quality hotels to camping sites. Sometimes the demand for accommodations is great, so you are advised to book well in advance.

Longyearbyen

Accommodations in Longyearbyen range from campsites, apartments and guesthouses to high quality hotels with full conference facilities.

Ny-Ålesund

Kings Bay offers lodging of various standards. All meals - usually four a day - are served at the dining hall (Messa) inside the Kings Bay Service Centre. Kings Bay's kitchen keeps a very good international standard. Please note that there is no grocery shop in Ny-Ålesund and all food is provided by Kings Bay AS. Kings Bay Services (phone +47 79 02 72 00, e-mail booking@kingsbay.no)

Hornsund

+881 631 444 070 (Iridium) or +871 326 100 720 (Inmarsat)

Field equipment and provisions

Longyearbyen

General field equipment can be rented from the following places in Longyearbyen:

- Norwegian Polar Institute
- [The University Centre in Svalbard](#)
- [Pole Position Spitsbergen](#) - Arctic Logistics

Please note that when renting rifles, you need to have a Norwegian Firearms Certificate, European Weapon Passport or other documentation proving that the person is authorised or permitted to carry a firearm in his or her home country. Persons who do not have a firearm certificate, must apply to the Governor of Svalbard for the right to rent a firearm.

Ny-Ålesund

In Ny-Ålesund, all food is provided by [Kings Bay AS](#) which offers full board facilities in addition to food supplies. There is no grocery store in Ny-Ålesund.

Please note that Ny-Ålesund is a radio silent area and all use of wireless equipment is prohibited, including mobile phones and wireless equipment in laptops.