

NORWEGIAN ARCHIPELAGO MAKES A RADICAL DECISION TO PRESERVE ITS NATURE



The Norwegian government aims to safeguard one of the largest wild areas in Europe in the face of global warming. The fragile Arctic environment, characterized by stunning fjords and glaciers, is exceptional.

Svalbard, the Norwegian archipelago located about 1,300 kilometers from the North Pole, is one of the northernmost inhabited lands worldwide, with a year-round population of around 3,000 people. However, the number of visitors tends to increase significantly, up to 140,000 annually (before COVID-19), all lured by the spectacular landscapes, polar bears, and midnight sun.

Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago, is experiencing the severe effects of global warming.

The temperature has risen by more than 5°C in some areas over the last twenty years, which is more noticeable than in other parts of the world. The glaciers are melting at an alarming rate, and avalanches are becoming more frequent. The primary locality of Longyearbyen has earned the nickname "the city that heats up the fastest on Earth." These changes are so rapid that the local fauna and flora cannot adapt, and scientists are concerned about their survival. The Norwegian government has taken drastic measures to control tourism in the area to address the situation.

The objective of the new rules is to protect one of the largest wild areas in Europe. These rules are effective from January 1, 2025, and stricter controls will be imposed on visitors and their activities. Ships sailing in protected areas, which cover around 65% of the archipelago and almost 90% of territorial waters, cannot accommodate more than 200 passengers. Drones are also prohibited in these areas to prevent disruption of wildlife, and so will the landing of groups of tourists, except at 43 specific sites.

Effective March 1, snowmobiles and other tracked vehicles are prohibited from use in Svalbard except for accessing cabins. In addition, vessel traffic will be regulated during the bird breeding season, which lasts from April to August. Boats within 500 meters of the bird cliffs need to maintain speeds below 5 km/h. Furthermore, traffic should be limited near walrus sites. The purpose of these regulations is to encourage and support sustainable tourism in Svalbard. Complying with these new measures will pose a significant challenge for travel agencies and cruise companies.

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