

# NORTHERN STAR

BY RACHEL GUYAH

**Perched high above the Arctic Circle** on Spitsbergen island lies the polar village of Longyearbyen. At a latitude of 78° North, it's the world's northernmost town, inhabited by approximately 2,000 residents from 50 countries. The landscape is dominated by tundra, bare mountains and dramatic light variations.

Life in Longyearbyen is filled with extremes. Here is where the sun sets in early autumn—then hibernates below the horizon all winter long. Fast forward to summer, and the sun lingers high in the sky for months at a stretch. But despite the omnipresence of the midnight sun, temperatures remain in the 40s and only the top meter of the earth manages to thaw.

Travelers willing to pack their wool and head north are in for a beautiful surprise. Longyearbyen is a vibrant community teeming with adventure, history, and of course, plenty of *hygge*. Glide through the snow behind a team of huskies as the northern lights dance above, then watch reindeer roam past your window as you refuel with a moose burger and beer brewed from ancient glacial water. There's something for everyone in this high arctic haven.



LEFT TO RIGHT: GM PHOTO IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, M. TIMOTHY O'KEEFE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, SEVERIN SADIJINA | GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK, ROWAN ROMEYN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



## EXPLORE THE ARCTIC WILDERNESS

Whether your idea of adventure is mellow or wild, you can enjoy the beauty of the high arctic wilderness. Bold travelers can hike along glaciers, summit snow-capped mountains, or strap on a helmet and headlamp and venture deep into ice caves (some tours combine several of these).

Dogsledding is popular in Longyearbyen, and for good reason: Gliding across miles of snow behind a team of huskies—where the only noise is the soft sound of their paws sinking into fresh powder—is a wonderful way to experience the landscape. Both leisurely half-day trips and multi-day excursions are available.

Shutterbugs should pack a camera and book a wildlife photo safari with an experienced nature photographer—where you'll get an opportunity to (hopefully) snap photos of white arctic foxes, reindeer and migratory birds.

Snowmobiles are abundant in and around town, and are a fun way to cover the tundra's territory. Never driven one before? No worries—easy half-day tours over flat terrain are available.

If you visit in the summer, make the most of the midnight sun by heading out to sea on a cruise ship, boat or kayak. Enjoy a quiet evening paddle along the fjord or book a walrus- and whale-watching cruise that glides along the glacial coast.



### Svalbard Tour Operators

**Green Dog**  
greendog.no

**See & Explore**  
seeandexplore.no

**Poli Arctici**  
poliarctici.com

**Svalbard Husky**  
svalbardhusky.no

**Svalbard Adventures**  
svalbardadventures.com

**Better Moments**  
bettermoments.no

## CHASE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

There is one big, brilliant perk to enduring months of total darkness: the chance to spot the northern lights at any time of day. In fact, Longyearbyen is the only inhabited place in the world to see this fascinating phenomenon during the day. Spotting the streaks of emerald, pink and violet as they ripple across the sky is truly a treat—a must for anyone visiting the village. The best time to view the lights is between late September and mid-March in the evening or early morning. For an extra exciting way to chase the northern lights, book an outdoor dogsledding or snowshoeing tour.



### Tips for spotting the northern lights

- Visit between late September and mid-March
- Prime viewing time is after dinner (6 p.m. to midnight) or early morning (4 to 8 a.m.)
- Watch for clear skies
- Avoid a full moon, if possible
- Download mobile apps like Aurora Now and My Aurora Forecast, which give auroral forecast updates



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ROWAN ROMEVN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, ADRIAN WOJCIK / EYEEM / GETTY IMAGES, ROWAN ROMEVN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO  
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## DISCOVER LONGYEARBYEN'S MINING HISTORY

Longyearbyen was founded in 1906 after an American businessman, John Munro Longyear, established the Arctic Coal Company, later bought by Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani. For decades, coal was mined from the mountains and dominated town life. While only one mine remains open today, there are many ways to dig deeper into the town's mining roots.

**Svalbard Museum** offers visitors a journey through different historical periods on the archipelago, including an exhibit on geology and

mining. **Coal Mine 3** closed in 1996, but you can strap on a headlamp and helmet and crawl back in time with an organized tour of this low-drifted mine. **Gallery Svalbard** has a collection of payment coupons—"money" custom-printed by mining companies for use by workers in Svalbard. For a relaxed and affordable place to stay, check out the **Coal Miners' Cabins** at the upper part of Longyear valley. The former two-story barracks have been converted into cozy rooms that sleep up to four people.





KNUT ASERUD / SVALBARD BRYGGERI

### VISIT THE WORLD'S NORTHERNMOST CRAFT BREWERY

At **Svalbard Bryggeri**, you can sip a stout, pale ale or IPA enriched with arctic minerals and ancient glacial water thanks to the perseverance and passion of founders Robert and Anne Grete Johansen. More than 10 years ago, the pair had an ambitious dream to create the world's northernmost craft brewery. The problem? It was illegal to brew beer anywhere on the archipelago—thanks to a nearly 90-year-old law that banned beer to discourage heavy drinking among miners.

But Anne and Robert (a former miner himself) fought for years to repeal the law. A new law took effect in the summer of 2014. A year later, the first beers hit the shelves. Svalbard Bryggeri offers a variety of beers, from light and crisp to bold and bitter. Tip: Try the Dark Season—a brown ale with hints of caramel and fruit, and named after Longyearbyen's annual Dark Season Blues Festival.

### Getting There

Despite its remote location and rugged terrain, Longyearbyen is surprisingly easy to access—thanks to Svalbard Airport (LYR), which opened in 1975. You can book direct flights year-round from Oslo (3 hours) and Tromsø (90 minutes). Both Norwegian Air and Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) offer service to Longyearbyen. Taxis, airport shuttles and car rentals are available as well.



ARTEM ALEXANDROVICH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

### WHERE TO EAT



AGURTANE CONCILLON / HURTIGRUTEN

#### Restaurant Nansen

After a day of snowmobiling, warm up in this casual Arctic-Asian fusion restaurant located in the Radisson Blu Polar Hotel Spitsbergen. Make sure to grab a table by one of the windows for stunning views of the surrounding mountains and fjords.



TERJE BJORNSEN

#### Huset Restaurant

This is the ultimate spot in Svalbard for Arctic fine dining. Menus are tailored to the seasons and feature locally-sourced ingredients. Local hunters and trappers provide Huset with the meat and seafood. Stop in for a seven-course meal or choose items a la carte. And don't forget the wine! The wine cellar is one of the largest in Scandinavia, with more than 15,000 bottles.



COURTESY GRUVELAGERET

#### Gruvelageret

Located in a converted wooden mining warehouse right beneath a glacier, Gruvelageret offers one of the most unusual dining experiences in Svalbard. Nosh on a four-course seasonal menu—think mushroom ravioli, cod ceviche, arctic char with king crab sauce, and cheesecake—after a day of adventures.