

Information from the Governor of Svalbard regarding winter cruising and breaking ice

Background

In accordance with Regulations relating to tourism, field operations and other travel in Svalbard, tour operators in Svalbard are required to notify the Governor, in advance, of all projected programs and to report about activities.

The Governor may require that changes are made to field operations or travel programs and set specific requirements for the field operations or travel program, including marketing, means of transport and equipment, if this is necessary in order to ensure that the program, by itself or together with another activity, is in compliance with the objectives of the Regulations. These requirements may come in addition to laws and regulations that regulate vessel traffic.

Guidance on winter cruising and ice breaking

The Governor of Svalbard has provided tour operators with guidance when it comes to winter cruising and ice breaking in spring. Below is an excerpt from the response sent by the Governor of Svalbard to tour operators that had sent in a notification of planned vessel-based activities scheduled to take place before May 1, 2018.

Please note that this information was sent out in 2018 and new guidance on this topic may be issued by the Governor of Svalbard.

“According to the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act (chapter II, section 5), any person who is staying in or operates an undertaking in Svalbard shall show due consideration and exercise the caution required to avoid unnecessary damage or disturbance to the natural environment or cultural heritage. This will have consequences for your activity in particularly areas and fjords covered with sea ice in March and April when the fauna is particularly vulnerable. Please pay attention to the Governor’s requirement to your notification regarding breaking ice

[...]

Breaking ice (winter cruise): Due to the consideration of vulnerable wildlife, the Governor of Svalbard requires that the ship (name) it is not breaking any ice or sail in close pack ice within the fjords in connection with the travel plan. Please contact us with any questions regarding this matter.”

Special note on small boat activities

In the response sent by the Governor of Svalbard to tour operators that had sent in a notification of planned vessel-based activities scheduled to take place before May 1, 2018, the Governor also wrote the following:

“Activities in small boats are regulated by the Regulations of 24 November 2009 No. 1400 on the operation of vessels carrying 12 passengers or less, etc. The Governor demands in addition the use of a rescue suit suited for winter conditions at Svalbard for all persons in rubber boats/zodiacs during the cruise together with an emergency camp.”

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Please note that these provisions apply to vessel-based activities scheduled to take place before May 1.