

# GUIDELINES

FOR VISITORS TO THE ARCTIC

ENVIRONMENT  
SAFETY  
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Association of  
Arctic Expedition Cruise  
Operators **AECO!** 



Photo: Iovgreenland  
Cover: Hapag-Lloyd

# Welcome to the Arctic

Dear arctic guest. The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) is an international organization for cruise operators. Our organization's main objective is to ensure that expedition cruises and tourism in the Arctic are carried out with the utmost consideration for the fragile, natural environment, local cultures and cultural remains, while ensuring safe tour operations at sea and on land.



Photo: Spitsbergen Travel

## Our responsibilities

Tourism and cruise activities in the Arctic operate within a comprehensive framework of international and national laws and regulations to ensure safety and preservation of the environment, with which AECO members of course are obligated to comply. Nevertheless, there is a need for operators to take responsibility for their activities and actions both within and beyond formal laws and regulations. AECO has developed a comprehensive set of guidelines for expedition cruise operations in the Arctic. The AECO guidelines are endorsed by the operators for the organization of respectful, environmentally friendly and safe expedition cruising.

## Your responsibilities

From our comprehensive set of guidelines we have picked out a few basic rules that we ask you to read carefully and act in accordance with. We invite you to spend some time reading about necessary safety precautions and we also ask you to note the cultural and social consideration we would like you to take.

If you would like to read AECO's full set of guidelines for Arctic operations, ask your expedition leader for a copy or visit our website at [www.aeco.no](http://www.aeco.no).

Have a wonderful Arctic journey!

Photo: ilovegreenland





Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

# Basic principles

## 1. Leave no lasting signs of your visit

Leave no lasting signs of your visit means that you of course must not leave any litter behind, including small items such as cigarette butts. Do not engrave on rocks or buildings and do not build cairns, rearrange stones or in any other way leave visible signs of your visit. In addition we also ask you to watch where you set foot in order to protect the flora and vegetation and avoid path-making. Avoid stepping on flowers or plant beds if at all possible.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

## 2. Do not pick flowers

In some parts of the Arctic flora is protected by law, in others not. But AECO regards all flora as protected and asks you to not pick flowers or other plants.

## 3. Do not take anything with you

We encourage you to leave the Arctic as it is. Cultural remains are protected. In addition we ask you to leave stones, bones, antlers, driftwood and other items where they are.

## 4. Do not disturb animals and birds

AECO regards all fauna in the Arctic as protected and will avoid disturbing animals and birds as far as possible. If close to animals and nesting birds, avoid making loud noises and keep conversation low and calm. AECO controls maximum group sizes when making landings and excursions and also minimum distances to various wildlife. You will be instructed by your leader. Please help us preserve the wildlife by following the instructions.



Photos: Jørn Henriksen



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp



Photo: Jørn Henriksen



Photo: Jørn Henriksen



Photo: ilovegreenland



Photo: Jørn Henriksen

## 5. Leave cultural remains alone

Cultural remains are protected by law and a zone of 100 meters around the remains is also considered a protected zone. Watch where you are walking and standing. Walk around and not in between objects. Do not take anything with you and do not attempt to touch or rearrange objects.

## 6. Take the polar bear danger seriously

Polar bears are potentially dangerous animals, but also vulnerable. It is of the utmost importance that you follow your guide's instructions. Important rules for behaviour in polar bear areas are listed below.

## 7. Respect local culture and local people

When visiting local communities, please remember that you are a guest. Respect people and local cultures. AECO will make every effort to make sure that our visits to local communities have positive and not negative impact. See more information below.

## 8. Be safe

Travel in Arctic areas may involve various risks. Rule number one is that you must always pay attention to and follow the instructions given by your expedition leader or guide. Never stray from your group. Some special considerations are mentioned below.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

# Safety

## Polar bears and firearm safety

In areas with polar bears, the bears can be encountered anywhere, anytime. Although polar bears normally will try to avoid encounters with humans, they are potentially extremely dangerous to humans. But polar bears are also vulnerable. We will make every effort to ensure both your and the animal's safety and therefore the following rules are non-negotiable:

Staff members will be carrying firearms and other bear deterrents in areas where polar bears could be encountered. The staff is trained in firearm handling. But firearms can be dangerous. Do not make any attempt to touch or hold firearms.



Photo: Jørn Henriksen

## Polar bears

- Never stray from your group and the leaders carrying equipment to protect you
- If you catch sight of polar bears, stay calm and immediately inform your guide
- Never approach a bear if you catch sight of it
- Never leave food anywhere in an attempt to lure polar bears
- Follow your leaders instruction



Photos: ilovegreenland

## Arctic dogs

In many Arctic towns and settlements there will be a significant number of Arctic dogs. They are working dogs and not pet animals. They can be dangerous to strangers, therefore:

- Never approach or attempt to pet Arctic dogs without permission and supervision from the dog owner/handler.
- Never feed Arctic dogs without permission and supervision from the dog owner/handler.



Photo: Gian-Rico Willy/Hurtigruten



## Rabies

Rabies has been detected in Arctic regions. Some animals, such as the arctic fox, arctic dogs and arctic wolves are potential carriers of rabies.

- Never touch live or dead wild animals.

Top left, top right, middle: Jørn Henriksen  
Bottom: ilovegreenland

## Tender boats/small boat excursions

- Be sure to always have your life vests on properly.
- One passenger enters and leaves the boat at a time.
- Use the sailors grip when embarking and disembarking the boat.
- Take a seat at the designated place.
- Always remain seated. There should never be more than one passenger standing at a time while embarking or disembarking.
- Secure equipment and belongings to avoid losing items overboard.



# Cultural and social interaction

Do not expect to find everything as it is at home – you have left home to find things different



Photos except dancer: ilovegreenland  
Dancer: Spitsbergen Travel



Photos: 1st and 2nd from left: Spitsbergen Travel  
All other: ilovegreenland

## Sustainable tourism in Arctic regions

With some exceptions, the Arctic is characterized by huge wilderness areas and small remote towns and settlements, often with Inuit population. Inuit is a general term for the group of culturally similar indigenous people. Few small towns and settlements in the Arctic have road accessibility and contact with the outside world may be limited for greater parts of the year. Larger parts of the Arctic regions are therefore different from more populated and industrialized areas of the world. For a small and sometimes isolated town or settlement in the Arctic, the call of a cruiseship is often a welcome

and happy event. Locals may find both ships and their passengers interesting. But tourism in Arctic regions is growing rapidly. Anyone involved needs to be cognizant to the economic, social and cultural impact the growing tourism may have on local communities. Responsibility for respectable interaction and local benefits also rests with the tour operators and visiting guests.



Photo: Gian-Rico Willy/Hurtigruten

- Respect local cultures.
- Work against prejudiced attitudes.
- Respect privacy; keep a good distance from private houses and never glance or photograph through private windows.
- Talk to and not about people you meet.
- Do not visit graveyards or other areas of religious or cultural significance without permission.

- Ask before you photograph – a hesitation means NO.
- Cairns may be signposts – do not alter them.
- Never barter or import banned substances to a community.
- You are encouraged to buy local souvenirs and products, but be aware of the legalities of importing/transporting purchases into other countries e.g. CITES – Convention of 3 March 1973 on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora/ The Washington Convention, [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

Photos: ilovegreenland





Photo: Sandra Walser/Hurtigruten



Photo: ilovegreenland



Photo: Marsel van Oosten/Hurtigruten



Photo: Marsel van Oosten/Hurtigruten

### Cultural understanding

Tourism is a great way of learning about, promoting and creating tolerance between people of different backgrounds and cultures. When visiting foreign countries and cultures, guests may find things very different from home. It is important not to judge other cultures based on one's own sense of reality, norms and values, but try to understand that cultures are qualitatively different.

# Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO)

## Responsible, environmentally-friendly and safe cruise tourism in the Arctic

AECO is an international association of Arctic cruise operators dedicated to manage responsible, environmentally-friendly and safe cruise operations in the Arctic. Members of AECO strive to set the highest possible tourism operating standards and educate visitors about the Arctic. AECO-members are obligated to operate in accordance with national and international laws and regulations and have in addition agreed to follow an

extensive set of guidelines, both general operational guidelines as well as site specific guidelines. AECO's "Guidelines for visitors to the Arctic" are part of AECO's efforts to safeguard the vulnerable natural environment, local cultures, cultural remains, as well ensuring safe operations at sea and on land.

AECO initiates and supports other measures with the same objectives, and have undertaken studies, research and programs aiming at minimizing unwanted impacts from Arctic tourism. AECO also advocates for the interests of our members and visitors' future access to Arctic areas e.g. by participating in regulatory and policy development processes with national and local authorities. AECO cooperates with local and national governments, authorities, tourism agencies, researchers, NGOs - and with related interest-groups such as International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and Cruise Liners International Association (CLIA).

Arctic cruise operators, tour operators, port agents, travel agencies and others connected to Arctic cruise operations who support the objectives of AECO and agree to follow our guidelines, are welcome as members of AECO.

**Back cover top:** ilovegreenland

**Back cover bottom, from l. to r.:** Nina Helland, Spitsbergen Travel, ilovegreenland, Jørn Henriksen, Jørn Henriksen



Thank you for helping us conduct respectful,  
environmentally-friendly and safe tourism in the Arctic.



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# What Tourists Should Consider When Visiting the Canadian Arctic

The Canadian Arctic is attracting more tourists than ever before. Arctic tourism experts Jackie Dawson and Margaret Johnston offer suggestions on making the most of a visit to these remote communities and fragile ecosystems.



The beach in July in Pond Inlet, Nunavut. *Flickr/Mike Beauregard, CC BY 2.0*

**The Canadian Arctic**, where harsh weather and sub-zero temperatures dominate for much of the year, has remained off the list of popular tourism destinations for decades. But not anymore. The beauty of the region has captured popular imagination, and now more tourists want to visit.

As a result, the Canadian Arctic has gone from being off the beaten path to very much on it. As Arctic researchers, we have visited numerous communities and spoken with scores of Northerners who regularly interact with tourists in their homeland. Learning from their voices, we have put together a list of five things to consider when visiting Canada's Arctic in order to make the most of your trip – with the least ecological and cultural disruption – to this unique and beautiful region.

## **1. Learn about the Arctic before you go and while you are there.**

There is much in the Canadian Arctic that will leave you in awe, so take the opportunity to learn as much as you can in preparation and during your visit. The Canadian Arctic experiences some of the harshest weather conditions for habitation on Earth. Climate change has only increased the challenge of living in the region as warming temperatures and melting sea ice have caused extreme environmental instability. Despite these challenges, Inuit in the region have lived successfully and innovatively in this environment for thousands of years, developing practices and technologies to adapt to the landscape.

Seek knowledge of the region's environment, history and culture to make your trip even more rewarding. In particular, understand that great care is needed to preserve the land, water and air of the sensitive northern environment. You will not find signs warning you not to touch artifacts or to avoid trampling endangered vegetation that are typical in other tourist destinations. The region has remained natural and largely pristine because it has not had a lot of tourist use.

Hunting and gathering are still an important part of life for many residents of the North and these activities take priority. You may see signs of successful outings, such as fish drying or women working on hides; these could be opportunities to learn about local culture. Also, remember that dog teams are used for hunting and travel. So while you may see a dog team around town, they are working dogs, not pets, and they should not be touched or provoked in any way.

If you are lucky enough to be invited to have a conversation with Inuit elders, to try some traditional food, or to experience a cultural performance, you will enhance your appreciation for the residents of this remarkable land. You may even find yourself becoming an ambassador and advocate for the North.

## **2. Understand that the Northern definition of city, town or community may differ than yours.**

The sense of community in the Arctic is strong and may be quite different from what you are used to. In many parts of the world, it's fine to wander around new places with your curiosity to guide you. In the Arctic, where many communities have only several hundred residents, a large number of visitors can be intrusive and distracting.

Look for information and welcoming guides, and talk to local residents about your interest in learning about their community. Always ask for permission before taking a picture of someone or their children. Don't assume that it is OK to photograph homes or to go

wherever you wish.

If in doubt, ask at the local hamlet office to find out where it is acceptable to wander. Or think about the words of an Inuit carver we spoke to: "The front door to your home is probably red and wooden and has a brass or brushed nickel door handle and lock. The front door to our house, to the home of our entire community, is in front of you when you step off the airplane or the ship you arrived here on. Our entire community is our home, and you should treat it as if you were inside our living room."

### **3. Patience will be a necessary part of your Arctic trip.**

Whatever kind of traveling you do, for work or pleasure, you need to be prepared for delays and changes in your schedule, and to budget for the unexpected. For example, fog is common in the late summer and fall and can leave you stuck in a community if the plane cannot depart or land. Instead of feeling frustrated, plan for it, and embrace it. Because this experience is common, the airlines and hotels know how to handle your delay, find you accommodation and rebook your flights. Rather than worry about what you are missing, take a deep breath and enjoy your "bonus" days.

### **4. Visitor spending is an important part of the local economy.**

The remote Arctic economy offers less opportunity for market-based jobs and employment. Visitor spending is important to the livelihoods of many Arctic residents who rely on the tourism industry as part of their income. Some industries, such as cruise tourism, have a big impact on Arctic communities but offer limited benefits unless tourists spend money on arts, crafts or other goods in the communities.

You may find products and services to be expensive in the region compared to what you see in chain stores or at southern tourist sites. Be generous and give proper value for locally made arts and handicrafts. Many items on offer are made from bone, stone or leather (such as sealskin or other furs), so know the rules about bringing wildlife products back home.

### **5. Be prepared to be amazed!**

The Arctic has some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. Remote and in many areas almost untouched, the sweeping tundra, towering icebergs and spectacular wildlife will all touch you in ways that you can't anticipate. Be amazed, but leave the region as pristine as you found it. The Arctic has much to offer if you travel to it with an open mind. With the right mind-set, you can embrace cultural differences, as well as similarities, and

gain a new appreciation for this remote and beautiful land and its resilient people. Enjoy your visit to the North! It will be the trip of a lifetime.

*The views expressed in this article belong to the authors and may not reflect those of Arctic Deeply.*

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