

GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS TO THE ARCTIC



Association of
Arctic Expedition Cruise
Operators

AECO 



Photo: Spharøgen Travel – Jan Henriksen

Dear arctic guest

The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) is an international organization for expedition 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.

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

**Have a wonderful
Arctic journey!**

BASIC PRINCIPLES



Photo: Schibergren Travel – Jan Henriksen

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.

2. 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.



Photo: Schibergren Travel – Jan Henriksen



Photo: AECO – Frigga Mathiesen

3. 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.



Photo: Schibergren Travel – Jan Henriksen

4. 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.



Photo: Svalbardexpedition

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.



Photo: Svalbardexpedition - Jan Henningsen

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.



Photo: Svalbardexpedition - Finn T. Bergsjø

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.



Photo: Greenland Bureau - Lars Reinertsen

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: Shutterstock.com - Jan Henniken

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:

- **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 LEADER'S INSTRUCTION**

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: Ota Radio



Photos: Oiva Rehn

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.



Photos: Greenland Tourism - Filippa Barbara

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.



Photos: Shishangren Travel - Nina Shaly

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.



Photos: Greenland Tourism – Just Henrik Møller

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



Photos: Greenland Tourism

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.



Photos: Spitsbergen Travel – Tom H. Bergsma

For a small and sometimes isolated town or settlement in the Arctic, the call of a cruise ship 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: Greenland Tourism

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.



Photo: Greenland Tourism



Photo: Spitsbergen Travel – Poul L. Bergsbo



Photo: Spitsbergen Travel – Jørn Henriksen



Photo: Greenland Tourism – Lars Benneis

- 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



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

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