



Svalbard



Background Norse explorers may have first discovered the Svalbard archipelago in the 12th century. The islands served as an international whaling base during the 17th and 18th centuries. Norway's sovereignty was internationally recognized by treaty in 1920, and five years later Norway officially took over the territory. Coal mining started in the 20th century, and a Norwegian company and a Russian company are still in operation today. Travel between the settlements is accomplished with snowmobiles, aircraft, and boats.

Capital name: Longyearbyen

Government type non-self-governing territory of Norway

Area total : 62,045 sq km
land: 62,045 sq km
water: 0 sq km

Climate arctic, tempered by warm North Atlantic Current; cool summers, cold winters; North Atlantic Current flows along west and north coasts of Spitsbergen, keeping water open and navigable most of the year

Natural resources coal, iron ore, copper, zinc, phosphate, wildlife, fish

Population total: 2,556 (2025 est.)

Population growth rate -0.03% (2019 est.)

Ethnic groups Norwegian 61.1%, foreign population 38.9% (consists primarily of Russians, Thais, Swedes, Filipinos, and Ukrainians) (2021 est.)

Languages Norwegian, Russian

Executive branch chief of state: King HARALD V of Norway (since 17 January 1991)
head of government: Governor Lars FAUSE (since 24 June 2021)

Legislative branch note: the Council acts much like a Norwegian municipality, with responsibility for infrastructure and utilities (including power, land-use and community planning, education, and child welfare); however, the state provides healthcare services

Economic overview high-income Norwegian island economy; major coal mining, tourism, and research sectors; recently established northernmost brewery; key whaling and fishing base; home to the Global Seed Vault