

Guidelines

- for Visitors to the Arctic

Environment
Safety
Cultural and Social Interaction

Welcome to the Arctic

Dear Arctic guest,

The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) is an international organization representing cruise operators.

Our primary objective is to ensure that expedition cruises and tourism in the Arctic are conducted with the utmost consideration for the fragile natural environment, local cultures, and cultural heritage, while also ensuring safe tour operations both at sea and on land.



Photo: Spitzbergen 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 environmental preservation, with which AECO members are, of course, 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. To this end, AECO has developed a comprehensive set of guidelines for expedition cruise operations in the Arctic.

The AECO guidelines are endorsed by operators for the organization of respectful, environmentally friendly, and safe expedition cruising.

Your Responsibilities

From our comprehensive set of guidelines, we have highlighted a few basic rules that we ask you to read carefully and follow. We invite you to take some time to review the necessary safety precautions, and we also ask you to be mindful of the cultural and social considerations we encourage you to respect.

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

Have a wonderful Arctic journey!

Photo: ilovegreenland



Basic Principles

1. Leave No Lasting Signs of Your Visit

Leave no lasting signs of your visit” means that you must, of course, not leave any litter behind, including small items such as cigarette butts.

Do not engrave rocks or buildings, and do not build cairns, rear-range stones, or leave any other visible signs of your visit.

In addition, we ask that you be mindful of where you step to protect the flora and vegetation and avoid creating paths. Please avoid stepping on flowers or plant beds whenever possible.



Photo: AECO

2. Do Not Pick Flowers

In some parts of the Arctic, flora is protected by law; in others, it is not. However, AECO regards all flora as protected and asks that you refrain from picking flowers or other plants.

3. Do Not Take Anything with You

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



4. Do Not Disturb Animals or Birds

AECO regards all fauna in the Arctic as protected and strives to avoid disturbing animals and birds whenever possible.

When near animals or nesting birds, avoid making loud noises and keep conversations quiet and calm. AECO regulates maximum group sizes during landings and excursions, as well as minimum distances from various wildlife. Your leader will provide instructions. Please help us preserve wildlife by following the guidelines.



Photos: Jørn Henriksen

5. Leave Cultural Remains Alone

Cultural remains are protected by law, and a 100-meter zone around them is also considered a protected area. Be mindful of where you walk and stand. Walk around, not between, objects.

Do not take anything with you, and do not touch or rearrange objects.

6. Take Polar Bear Danger Seriously

Polar bears are potentially dangerous animals, but they are also vulnerable. It is crucial that you follow your guide's instructions.

Important rules for behavior in polar bear areas are listed under the Safety section below.

Photo: Jørn Henriksen





Photo: Marsel van Oosten/Hurtigruten

7. Respect Local Culture and Local People

When visiting local communities, please remember that you are a guest. Respect the people and their cultures. AECO will make every effort to ensure that our visits to local communities have a positive, rather than negative, impact.

8. Be Safe

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





Safety

Polar Bears and Firearm Safety

In areas with polar bears, these animals can be encountered anywhere and at any time. Although polar bears typically try to avoid humans, they can be extremely dangerous. However, they are also vulnerable. We will make every effort to ensure both your safety and the safety of the animals, and therefore, the following rules are non-negotiable:

Staff members will carry firearms and other bear deterrents in areas where polar bears may be encountered. The staff is trained in firearm handling; however, firearms can be dangerous. Do not attempt to touch or handle firearms.

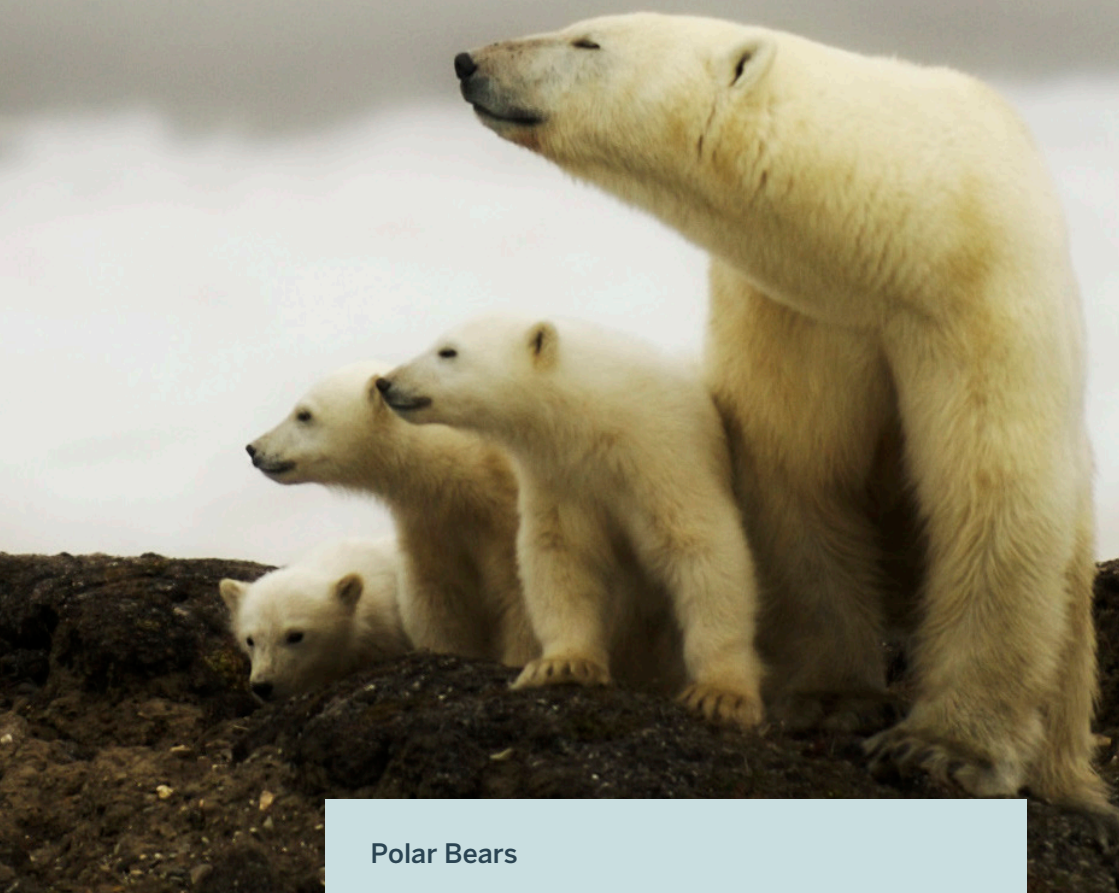


Photo: Jørn Henriksen

Polar Bears

- Never stray from your group or the leaders carrying equipment to protect you.
- If you spot a polar bear, stay calm and immediately inform your guide.
- Never approach a bear if you see one.
- Do not leave food anywhere in an attempt to lure polar bears.
- Always follow your leader's instructions.



Photo: ilovegreenland

Arctic Dogs

In many Arctic towns and settlements, there will be a significant number of Arctic dogs. These are working dogs, not pets, and 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.

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.

Tender Boats/Small Boat Excursions

- Always wear your life vest properly.
- Only one passenger should enter or leave the boat at a time
- Use the sailor's grip when embarking and disembarking the boat.
- Take a seat in the designated area.
- Always remain seated. No more than one passenger should be standing at a time while embarking or disembarking.
- Secure your equipment and belongings to prevent items from being lost overboard.

Photo: Gian-Rico Willy/Hurtigruten



Do **not** expect things to be the same as **at home** – you left home to **experience** something **different**.



Cultural and Social Interaction

With some exceptions, the Arctic is characterized by vast wilderness areas and small, remote towns and settlements, often with Inuit populations. “Inuit” is a general term for a group of culturally similar indigenous peoples.

Few towns and settlements in the Arctic are accessible by road, and contact with the outside world may be limited for much of the year. As a result, many parts of the Arctic are quite different from more populated and industrialized regions. For a small and sometimes isolated town or settlement in the Arctic, the arrival of a cruise ship is often a welcome and joyous event.

Locals may find both the ships and their passengers interesting. However, tourism in Arctic regions is growing rapidly, and those involved need to be mindful of the economic, social, and cultural impacts that this growing tourism may have on local communities. Responsibility for respectful interaction and local benefits also rests with tour operators and visiting guests.

- Respect local cultures.
- Work to combat prejudiced attitudes.
- Respect privacy: keep a good distance from private houses and never glance into or photograph through private windows.
- Speak to, not about, the people you meet.
- Do not visit graveyards or other areas of religious or cultural significance without permission.
- Always ask before photographing someone—if there is any hesitation, the answer is no.
- Cairns may serve as signposts—do not alter them.
- Never barter or bring banned substances into a community.
- You are encouraged to buy local souvenirs and products, but be aware of the legalities of importing or transporting purchases into other countries (e.g., CITES—Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, The Washington Convention, www.cites.org).

Cultural understanding

Tourism is an excellent way to learn about, promote, and foster tolerance between people of different backgrounds and cultures. When visiting foreign countries and cultures, guests may encounter things that are very different from what they are used to at home. It is important not to judge other cultures based on one's own norms and values, but rather to strive to understand that cultures are inherently different.



Photo: Spitzbergen Travel



Photos: ilovegreenland



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 committed to managing responsible, environmentally friendly, and safe cruise operations in the Arctic.

AECO members strive to uphold the highest tourism standards and educate visitors about the Arctic. Members are required to operate in compliance with national and international laws and regulations and have also agreed to follow a comprehensive set of guidelines.

“Guidelines for Visitors to the Arctic” are part of AECO’s efforts to protect the fragile natural environment, local cultures, cultural heritage, and to ensure safe operations both at sea and on land.

AECO initiates and supports measures with these objectives and has undertaken studies, research, and projects aimed at minimizing the negative impacts of Arctic tourism.



Photo: AECO

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

AECO also advocates for the interests of its members and ensures future access to Arctic areas for visitors by participating in regulatory and policy development processes with national and local authorities. AECO collaborates with local and national governments, authorities, tourism agencies, researchers, NGOs, and related interest groups such as the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).

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