



GUIDELINES

A MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR
ARCTIC TOURISM

September 2020

Association of
Arctic Expedition Cruise
Operators **AECO** 

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1. Who is AECO?

The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) was founded in 2003 and has since become an important organization representing the concerns and views of expedition cruise operators organizing cruises in the Arctic. AECO is dedicated to managing responsible, environmentally friendly, and safe tourism in the Arctic and strive to set the highest possible operating standards. One of the fundamental pillars of AECO's work is the comprehensive set of guidelines that have been developed and produced continuously since the founding of the organization. The guidelines are multifold and diverse. Operational Guidelines, general and specific Wildlife Guidelines, Vegetation Guidelines, Cultural Remains Guidelines, Biosecurity Guidelines, general and specific Community Specific Guidelines, and Site Specific Guidelines. In addition, a series of more technical guidelines such as, Clean Seas Guidelines and Yacht Guidelines. AECO has also developed a template for Community Specific Guidelines for use by local communities that wish to inform visitors about local conditions. Community Specific Guidelines are taking a hold as Arctic Communities embrace the AECO template for Community Guidelines resulting in guidelines for an increasing number of towns and settlements throughout the Arctic.

The association's geographical range is considered to encompass the Arctic area north of 60 degrees north latitude. The core areas are Svalbard, Jan Mayen, Greenland, Arctic Canada (Nunavut and Northwest Territories), the Russian Arctic National Park and Iceland.

2. AECO Guidelines – purpose and status

Members of AECO have an obligation to follow all existing guidelines AECO has produced or endorsed. Their implementation is to ensure AECO's Statement of Purpose: "AECO is dedicated to managing responsible, environmentally friendly, and safe tourism in the Arctic". Each of the AECO developed field guidelines are carefully designed with external expertise be it independent biologists or archaeologists taking current scientific knowledge into account during development. AECO's Site Specific Guidelines for Svalbard have been reviewed by the Governor of Svalbard and are currently accepted as documentation where site guidelines are part of the requirement (figure 1, p.) in the application process to conduct operations in the archipelago. Adjustment of e.g. Polar Bear Guidelines as response to advice from the Governor of Svalbard has also occurred ensuring that they reflect the current interpretation of regulations.

3. AECO Guideline overview

3.1 AECO Operational Guidelines

AECO Operational Guidelines have been developed by the membership in cooperation with the Governor of Svalbard and the Norwegian Polar Institute. It details membership obligations in all phases of operations. This includes safety topics such as firearms and polar bears, small boat operations, and cultural and social interactions.

Please see <https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2019-operational-guidelines-final.pdf>

3.2 AECO Visitors Guidelines

The general collection of AECO Guidelines are mainly aimed at operators, and field staff. The AECO Visitors Guidelines consists of a selection of key points from these AECO Guidelines providing a concise version of the most important issues. AECO Visitors Guidelines were developed with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund.

3.2.1 AECO Animated Visitors Guidelines

In 2014 AECO developed an animated version of the AECO Visitors Guidelines. This animation is widely used on AECO members vessels to illustrate the basic code of conduct on shore. It is available in English language with subtitles in 14 languages.

Please see:

<https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/visitor-guidelines/>

3.3 AECO Wildlife Guidelines

To ensure compliance with local regulations and best practice for protecting wildlife, a comprehensive set of wildlife guidelines have been developed by AECO. These have been produced by the AECO Guidelines Committee in collaboration with established experts within each species and reviewed by the Governor of

Svalbard. AECO Wildlife Guidelines were developed with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund.

3.3.1 Species Specific AECO Guidelines:

Polar Bear

(<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AECO-wildlife-polarbear-p5.pdf>)

Walrus

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/AECO-wildlife-walrus-fa.pdf>

Seals

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AECO-wildlife-seals-final-1.pdf>

Reindeer

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AECO-wildlife-reindeer-p4-1.pdf>

Arctic Fox

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AECO-wildlife-arcticfox-final-1.pdf>

Birds in the Arctic

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AECO-wildlife-birds-p3-1.pdf>

Cetaceans

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AECO-wildlife-cetaceans-p3-1.pdf>

3.4 AECO Vegetation Guidelines

In 2018 AECO started the process of developing vegetation guidelines. In collaboration with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) and Norges Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet (NTNU). The guidelines were developed to help guides and naturalists better understand the vegetation around them and hence improve the dissemination of this topic. AECO Vegetation Guidelines were developed with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund. Please see:

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/aeco-vegetation-guidelines-v2019-1.pdf>

3.5 AECO Cultural Remains Guidelines

Along with the AECO Vegetation Guidelines AECO started the development of Cultural Remains Guidelines. This work was conducted in cooperation with archaeologist Per Kyrre Reymert who has extensive experience from the field in Svalbard. The guidelines enable a greater understanding and a tool for better preservation of cultural remains throughout the Arctic. The AECO Cultural Remains Guidelines were developed with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund. Please see <https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/aeco-cultural-remains-guidelines-v2019vs2.pdf>

3.6 AECO Biosecurity Guidelines

Based on research conducted by the University of Northern Norway and the University of Svalbard, and inspired by the comprehensive work on biosecurity done in Antarctica by AECO's sister organization the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), AECO has developed a set of biosecurity guidelines. The effect of climate change enhances the chance that tourism will unintentionally import alien species that may find a foothold in a warmer climate. Researchers, local inhabitants, and tourism industry alike can be at risk to distribute alien plant life to remote places in the Arctic that otherwise would not get there by natural means. Please see

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/AECO-Biosecurity-Guidelines.pdf>

The AECO Biosecurity Guidelines have later been incorporated in an informal video "Stop Arctic Aliens" which is publicly available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oghk2GRI5i8>). The video is produced by NINA, The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Nordic Council of Ministers, Sysselmannen Svalbard, Norwegian Environment Agency, Visit Svalbard, Hurtigruten Svalbard, and AECO.

3.7 AECO Community Guidelines

As tourism grows in the Arctic, AECO understand the need to aid local communities to improve the experience for both locals and visitors alike. This has resulted in the development of AECO Community Guidelines. AECO Community Specific Guidelines were funded by Nordisk Atlantsamarbejde (NORA) and developed in cooperation with Visit Greenland, Visit Svalbard, Northern Norway Tourist Board, and Cruise Iceland.

3.7.1 Community Guidelines – The Northerners, Peoples and Cultures Shaped by Nature
Please see:

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018-Community-Guidelines.pdf>

3.7.2 Guidelines for development of Community Specific Guidelines

As part of the Community guidelines project AECO has developed a Template for Developing Community Specific Guidelines. The template is can be used by communities to develop their own specific visitors' guidelines. AECO has contributed to AECO Community Specific Guidelines in many places in the Arctic participating in local workshops with local stakeholders and partners. It has been important for AECO to ensure local ownership of the community specific guidelines but to offer and help with process, layout, and design if invited to. Please see template:

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2017-Community-Specific-development-guidelines-1.pdf>

Community specific guidelines can be implemented as mandatory for AECO's members if approved by AECO's Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting has approved several community specific guidelines.

3.7.3 Community Specific Guidelines Svalbard, Norway

Longyearbyen

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-02-11-LONGYEARBYEN-Community-Specific-Guidelines-AECO-layout.pdf>

Ny Ålesund

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Ny-Alesund-Community-Guidelines.pdf>

3.7.4 Community Specific Guidelines Greenland

Ittoqqortoormiit

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AECO-Community-Guidelines-Ittoqqortoormiit.pdf>

Tasiilaq

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AECO-Community-Guidelines-Tasiilaq.pdf>

Nuuk

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AECO-Community-Guidelines-Nuuk-1.pdf>

Paamiut

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AECO-Community-Guidelines-Paamiut.pdf>

Sisimiut

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/AECO-CommunityGuidelines-Sisimut-190410.pdf>

3.7.5 Community Specific Guidelines Canada

Pond Inlet, Nunavut

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pond-inlet.pdf>

Griese Fiord, Nunavut

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/grise-fiord.pdf>

3.7.6 Community Specific Guidelines Iceland

Seyðisfjörður

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Sey%C3%B0isfj%C3%B6r%C3%B0ur-Community-Specific-Guidelines.pdf>

3.7.7 Plans for new community specific guidelines

Community Guidelines are now being discussed locally in many settlements across the Arctic. The following settlements have local community guidelines in the pipeline:

Maniitsoq, Greenland

Kangerlussuaq, Greenland

Reykjavik, Iceland

Cooperation between Government of Nunavut and AECO (Cruise Ready) will result in additional Canadian Community Guidelines from 2021.

3.8 Yacht Guidelines

AECO's Operational Guidelines are designed primarily for use by commercial operators. However, several AECO members are operators of smaller yachts or facilitators for private yachts visiting the Arctic. In 2018 AECO held a workshop with participation of AECO yacht operators to develop a set of guidelines specifically targeting yachts. AECO Yacht Guidelines were developed with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund. Please see:

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-AECO-Arctic-Yacht-Guidelines.pdf>

3.9 AECO Clean Seas Guidelines

Marine plastic litter in the Arctic has been an issue of concern for many members of AECO. In 2018, AECO decided to step up the industries efforts to by launching its Clean Seas project which aims to cut back on single-use items on board Arctic expedition cruise vessels, enhance clean-up efforts and educate visitors about marine litter. AECO has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Environment Program. Within the goal of educating visitors to the Arctic, AECO launched Clean Seas Guidelines to inform visitors how they can reduce their single-use waste footprint before traveling (e.g. what to pack), when traveling, and efforts to continue at home.

AECO's Clean Seas project has been made possible with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund, The Norwegian Environmental Directorate, The Norwegian Retailer's Environment Fund, AECO members Ship to Shore and Cheesemans' Ecological Safaris.

Please see

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-AECO-Clean-Seas-Guidelines-for-Visitors.pdf>

3.9.1 Clean Up Svalbard Guidelines

Almost 20 years ago, an expedition cruise company saw an opportunity to help clean up marine debris around Svalbard during voyages. The operator approached the Governor of Svalbard who offered logistical support to handle the waste. This was the beginning of the Clean Up Svalbard campaign; since then, more AECO members and local organizations got involved and the Governor of Svalbard organizes dedicated cleanup trips for locals twice a year while other local associations hold additional events.

In addition, in 2018 and 2019, the waste that was cleaned from beaches in Svalbard were analyzed by researchers to determine the origin and composition and distribution on marine litter.

AECO's Clean Up Svalbard project has been made possible with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund, The Norwegian Environmental Directorate

Please see

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AECO-Cleanup-Guidelines-2018.pdf>

3.9.2 Clean Up Iceland Guidelines

AECO is looking to expand its Clean Seas project into other geographic regions and is turning its attention to Iceland. AECO is collaborating with local stakeholder in Iceland to launch a Clean Up Iceland project. This project was originally scheduled to start in 2020, however, due to the coronavirus pandemic it is now expected to start in 2021. New Clean Up Iceland Guidelines will be developed in 2021 which outline how to properly conduct cleanups in Iceland.

3.10 AECO Site Specific Guidelines

AECO site specific guidelines are tools for safeguarding the environment, cultural remains, and other site qualities, and to manage visitors' behavior within geographically defined area. Management plans are often covering larger areas whereas possible impact from tourism may be much better defined as specific sites are visited within a given area. In addition to confirming the vulnerability of an area and conveying this information in an easy to understand way, the site specific guidelines can be used to enhance the general knowledge of the area.

The process of completing a site specific guideline involves several steps with input from end users, professional expertise, and local authorities alike. AECO's site specific guidelines have been developed in close cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of Nature Research, who also has developed a vulnerability assessment methodology, which is part of the development process. Other experts such as archaeologists, botanists, biologists, mariners, expedition leaders and local authorities, have also been involved in the process.

Developing Site specific guidelines requires funding to cover costs various costs, including to conducting vulnerability analysis and site inspections. Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund has given significant financial support to AECO's site specific guidelines.

3.10.1 AECO Site Specific Guidelines Svalbard

AECO started developing site specific guidelines in 2010 and the first nine AECO Site Specific Guidelines for sites in Svalbard were launched in 2011. Along with the rest of the AECO Guidelines, they are a fundamental part of the structure of the organization and its goal to conduct responsible, environmentally friendly, and safe tourism in the Arctic. In 2012 the work began on eleven additional AECO Site Specific Guidelines which were added to the portfolio in 2013. The AECO Site Specific Guidelines were developed with financial support from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund.

The AECO Site Specific Guidelines are not publicly available. Fourteen sites in Svalbard require prior submission of site specific guidelines to get permission to land. AECO Site Specific Guidelines include twelve of these sites (figure 1). Hence AECO consider these as a member resource and therefore intellectual properties. For further details on the development of site specific guidelines, please see the AECO report "Developing Site Specific Guidelines".

AECO's Site Specific Guidelines for Svalbard

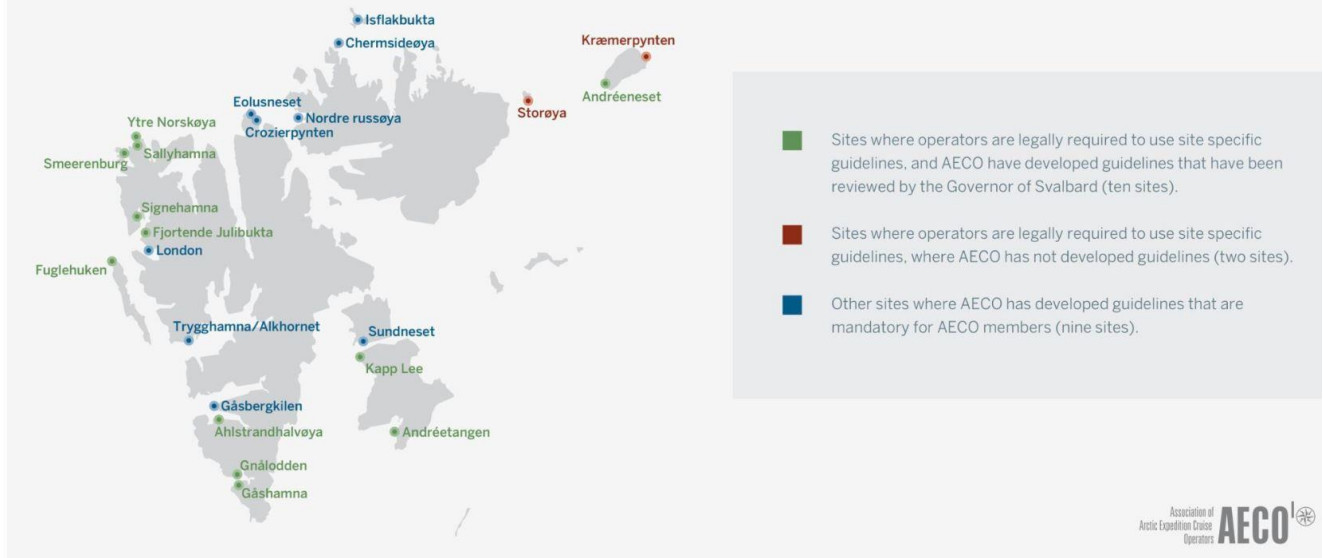


Figure 1. The Illustration shows the available AECO Site Specific Guidelines for Svalbard and highlighted sites where it is legally required to submit Site Specific Guidelines to be permitted to land.

3.10.2 Site specific guidelines Franz Josef Land, Russia

In 2014 National Park Russian Arctic started developing site guidelines specific to Franz Joseph Land. Site specific guidelines for five sites were developed and consequently approved by AECO members to be included in the overall collection of AECO Site Specific Guidelines.



Figure 2. The AECO Site Specific Guidelines for Franz Joseph Land represents sites distributed throughout the archipelago.

3.11 AECO Guidelines for Development of Site Specific Guidelines

Like with Community Specific Guidelines, others than AECO may decide to develop such guidelines. For AECO to implement site specific guidelines as mandatory for AECO members, the association needs to be involved in the process. AECO believes that the quality of such guidelines can be ensured if one follows the step-by-step process that forms the bases for AECO's site specific guidelines in Svalbard. In order to share this process with others interested, AECO has developed Guidelines for development of site specific guidelines which summarizes the process and gives example of inclusions. AECO's layout is AECO's ownership but through cooperation with AECO can be shared.

Link to AECO Guidelines for development of site specific guidelines:

<https://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-09-18-aeco-site-specific-guidelines-template-ver-1-0.pdf>

3.12 Plans for Research Station Specific Guidelines

AECO is a partner in the EU project INTERACT. INTERACT is a circum-arctic network of 85 terrestrial field bases in all Arctic countries and adjacent high alpine and forested areas that together annually hosts over 5000 scientists.¹ INTERACT is building capacity for identifying, understanding, predicting and responding to diverse environmental changes throughout the wide environmental and land-use envelopes of the Arctic. AECO's role in this project is to: a) enhance education of tour operators and tourists on the Arctic environment, its ecosystems, and peoples to generate greater awareness of the sensitivity of the Arctic to disturbance, b) value the unique environment, and c) ensure sustainable tourism.

Within this framework AECO is charged with spearheading the development of station-specific guidelines for tourists visiting INTERACT Field Stations:

- 1) Identify stations that have tourism and are interested in developing station-specific guidelines
- 2) Pilot project with a few select stations
- 3) Develop a template for the Station-specific Guidelines
- 4) Make template available to stations within the INTERACT project for them to be able to develop their own station-specific guidelines

The project is ongoing and AECO is to deliver the above by the second half of 2022.

4. Conclusion

The AECO set of guidelines has proven to be a fundamental part of AECO members' operations in the Arctic. It enables operating members to adhere to AECO's objectives but also to follow local legislation, local wishes, and best practice operations in the sensitive Arctic environment. AECO is proactively working towards developing guidelines which aid in the preservation of nature and cultural remains, as well as the mutual understanding and respect among local Arctic peoples and visitors from all over the world.

¹ Information on the field sites can be found here: <https://eu-interact.org/field-sites/>