

# Arctic's cruise industry in limbo, amid coronavirus pandemic

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The fate of the Arctic's cruise industry is in the hands of the world's governments, warned the head of an organization that represents the majority of expedition cruise operators in the northern polar regions, who said absent help, "there will be no industry in the future."

"It's a capital intensive industry and the ability to survive is limited," said Frigg Jørgensen, executive director of the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, on Tuesday during a virtual Wilson Center panel.

Cruise ship tourism in the Arctic has seen massive [growth](#) in the last couple of years, fueled by the [rise of cruise "expeditions"](#) that offer the chance to see [melting ice caps](#) and rare species of wildlife.

Jørgensen said the next few months will be crucial to the industry's existence, including how much local governments work to revitalize the industry, along with the looming threat of a potential second coronavirus wave.

"If the governments in the Arctic regions are closing, based on the risk of new waves only, then there is a risk that there will be no industry in the future," she added.

She said Norway, [an increasingly attractive destination for cruises](#), has already started to work with the industry, and AECO is "in constant dialogue" with the Norwegian government about developing industry standards and coming up with solutions to mitigate risks. Her organization also is speaking with Greenland and Iceland's governments.

Another popular spot for these Arctic cruises is in northern Canada, where AECO is especially concerned because Canada has [further extended its border-crossing limits](#), effectively closing off the tourism industry.

"Canada may be looking at a step-by-step process to reopen, and that may take two years. For that reason, we're very concerned about their area, and also that about Alaska," she said — considering that Canada acts as an "important" gateway for activity in Alaska.

She said some companies will stay afloat while others may buckle, no matter what, as the pandemic's economic effects continue to deepen.

"There will be individual differences, and for some, we're maybe reaching a turning point quite soon. For others it might depend on what happens in the fall and a potential wave could be the tipping point," she said.