



The World's Northernmost Cities

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It is time for another geography lesson. Football is in full swing and most places in the U.S. are feeling a chill in the air. Well, the cities we are going to discuss know what freezing cold snowy weather is really like. The following is a list of the world's ten northernmost cities or towns with a permanent population of over 500. The list is arranged in order of latitude (most North) and estimated population is provided along with some other interesting facts and pictures.

1) Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway

- Latitude: 78°13'N
- Population: 2,075



The Svalbard Islands (part of Norway) have only one town with more than a handful of people and that town is Longyearbyen - The World's Northernmost Town. Here are 12 facts that I bet you never knew about Longyearbyen. Come to think about it, most of you are probably like me and have never heard of the place.

Longyearbyen was founded by an American. An American, John Longyear, started the Arctic Coal Company and set up a mining operation for around 500 people in 1906. The settlement was known as Longyear City. Today it is Longyearbyen, meaning Longyear City in Norwegian.

All buildings in Longyearbyen are built on stilts. The ground in Svalbard is permafrost, which means the soil is permanently frozen year-round. In Longyearbyen the permafrost ranges from 10 to 40 meters deep, with an active layer that melts each summer as the temperatures rise above freezing. The stilts, or piles, keep the building away from the active layer to prevent flooding and sinking!

It's customary to take your shoes off. It's a local custom to take your shoes off indoors and you'll see a sign kindly asking you to do so in most homes and establishments. Hey, this town is like Hawaii! This also extends to the hotel, the Svalbard Museum, the church, and the tourist information office. But don't worry, slippers are provided to keep your feet from getting cold.

Check your gun at the door! More than 3,000 polar bears live on and around Svalbard; they are curious and sometimes hungry after not eating for months at a time. It is required to carry and know how to use a high-powered rifle anytime you leave the settlement. While it is a usual sight to see everyone casually walking about town with a rifle slung over their shoulder, guns are not allowed inside any building.



Skis? Check! High-powered Rifle? Check!

Snow scooters are the preferred mode of transportation. There are no roads outside of the town of Longyearbyen. Snowmobiles, called snow scooters in Svalbard, are crucial for transportation in the long winter months. They are so crucial, in fact, that there are 4,000 snow scooters for Longyearbyen's 2,000 residents.

The sun does not rise for 4 months! The sun sets each year for the very last time on October 25th and it will not rise above the horizon again for about four months. The sun officially returns to Longyearbyen on March 8th, when it is finally high enough above the horizon to illuminate the steps of the old hospital. Solfestuka is a week-long celebration to welcome the return of the sun and the entire town gathers on the steps of the old hospital at precisely 12:15 to await its arrival – shortly after this the party begins.

Home to the world's northernmost gourmet restaurant. The historic Huset is the world's northernmost gourmet restaurant and boasts one of Europe's largest wine cellars with more than 20,000 bottles. The tasting menu is a great way to indulge in Arctic fare.

Speaking of northernmost things... The world's northernmost church, ATM, post office, museum, commercial airport and university are all located in Longyearbyen!

The streets have no names. The streets of Longyearbyen do not have names; they simply go by numbers. Of course, Longyearbyen doesn't have very many streets.

You can't have a cat as a pet. You won't find cat food at the local co-op. Svalbard is home to abundant Arctic bird populations and cats pose a problem for the bird life. So Svalbard has prohibited them. Dogs are okay, however.

Reindeer wander through town. The Svalbard reindeer have no natural predators and so are very docile animals. They wander right through town and aren't generally bothered by people being nearby.

It's illegal to die. Yes, you read the right! Death is forbidden. Longyearbyen only has a small graveyard that stopped accepting new burials over 70 years ago. Why? Because the bodies never decompose. Scientists found that bodies are perfectly preserved because of the permafrost. So if you're going to die, go do it somewhere else. It's the law!

2) Qaanaaq, Greenland

- Latitude: 77°29'N
- Population: 655

Qaanaaq in northern Greenland is one of the world's northernmost civilian settlements, topped only by the Norwegian town of Longyearbyen and a few military bases. Getting there can be a challenge, as permits are required for use of the nearby

Thule Airbase, that is under U.S. control. The town of Qaanaaq was formed in 1953 after the expansion of the American air base. The residents of Thule, Pituffik and Dundas were relocated 100 miles north to Qaanaaq. Geographically, Qaanaaq is located very close to the North American continent – It is only about 20 miles from Canada. It is likely that the area around Qaanaaq served as an immigration route onto Greenland for thousands of years. The most recent group of immigrants arrived 130 years ago, from Baffin Island. The inhabitants of Qaanaaq speak Kalaallisut and Danish and many also speak the Inuktitun language.



The Qaanaaq Settlement



Dog sledding is popular in Greenland



3) Upernavik, Greenland

- Latitude: 72°47'N
- Population: 1,180

The town of Upernavik in western Greenland is situated on a small island in Baffin Bay, about 100 miles north of Nordost Bay. It was founded by the Danes as a whaling and sealing base in 1772. During the 20th century, fisheries expanded and halibut fishing and processing became a major contributor to the economy. The town also serves as a municipal administrative center for the region. In 1824, the Kingittorsuaq Runestone was found outside the town. It bears runic characters left by Norsemen, probably from the late 13th century. The runic characters list the names of three Norsemen and mention the construction of a rock cairn nearby. This is the furthest north that any Norse artifacts have been found and marks the northern known limit of Viking exploration. Qaarsorsuaq Island to the south is known for its huge, vertical bird cliffs. Upernavik Fjord, a 30-mile long inlet of Baffin Bay, extends southeast to the inland ice cap where it connects to the Upernavik Glacier.



Town of Upernavik



Upernavik Glacier

4) Khatanga, Russia

- Latitude: 71°58'N
- Population: 3,450

Khatanga is a rural locality in Taymyrsky Dolgano-Nenetsky District of Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russia, located on the Khatanga River on the Taymyr Peninsula. It is one of the northernmost inhabited localities in Russia. Its elevation is 98 feet above sea level. Khatanga has a subarctic climate with short, mild summers and bitterly cold winters (December through March) where the average temperature is -35 degrees. The name Khatanga means "large water" in the local Evenki language. The locality is known to have existed since the 17th century. It is served by the Khatanga Airport.

Khatanga is sometimes visited by Western sightseers touring the surrounding natural wilderness in Siberia. Khatanga has a hotel, a natural history museum, and weather reporting stations. Khatanga is relatively close to the Popigai crater, an asteroid crater and geological formation located in northern Siberia. The crater has been noted since September 2012 as a potential source of a significant new global supply of industrial diamonds.



Khatanga, Russia



Tiksi, Russia

5) Tiksi, Russia

- Latitude: 71°39'N
- Population: 5,100

Tiksi is an urban-type settlement and the administrative center of Bulunsky District in the Sakha Republic, Russia, located on the shore of the Buor-Khaya Gulf of the Laptev Sea, southeast of the delta of the Lena River. During the Cold War, Tiksi saw military construction projects at Tiksi North and Tiksi West airfields. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Tiksi's population has declined markedly and many of its apartment blocks have been abandoned. Despite its rapid population decline, it remains the most northerly settlement with a population of over 5,000. Tiksi serves as one of the principal ports for accessing the Laptev Sea. It is served by the Tiksi Airport – Mostly helicopter flights from the city of Yakutsk. The Lena River is navigable during the summer months.

6) Belushya Guba, Russia

- Latitude: 71°33'N
- Population: 2,000

Belushya Guba is a permanent work settlement and the administrative center of Novaya Zemlya District of Arkhangelsk Oblast, Russia, located on the Gusinaya Zemlya peninsula of the Yuzhny Island of the Novaya Zemlya Arctic Archipelago. A large proportion of its population is made up of military personnel associated with the nuclear test sites located on the island. The whole Novaya Zemlya archipelago, including Belushya Guba, is an area of restricted access and a special permit is needed to visit the archipelago.



Belushya Guba, Russia



Belushya Guba is located in a deep bay with the same name, within an area that is influenced by warm ocean currents. The natural conditions allow year-round sailing of all types and classes of vessels with minimal cost for icebreaking support. The bay is well protected from high surf and drifting ice. The temperature in Belushya Guba ranges from 10 °F in the winter months to 50 °F in the summer months.

7) Barrow, Alaska, United States

- Latitude: 71°18'N
- Population: 4,500

Barrow is the northernmost city in the United States and is just 1,300 miles south of the North Pole and 320 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The small city of 4,500 is built on permafrost that is up to 1,300 feet deep in places and experiences super cold and windy winters. The sun sets at the end of November and doesn't reappear until the end of January. Even during the summer, things stay cool. The temperature doesn't break out of freezing until June and even then only barely does — the average high for July (the warmest month) is only 40 degrees F. Because Barrow's climate is cold and dry, it is classified as a polar climate. Winter weather can be extremely dangerous because of the combination of cold and wind.



Welcome to Barrow – Top of the World



Barrow Airport and City



Barrow Milepost



Barrow has the lowest average temperatures of all cities in Alaska. I didn't think it could get any colder than the 44 below zero in Fairbanks, Alaska when I was there in December 2010. Barrow is the economic hub of the North Slope and many of its residents work in the energy industry. The city is reachable only by aircraft or by sea. In 1995, Barrow became the largest city in Alaska to ban sales and/or possession of alcoholic beverages. There are no bars in Barrow!!



Barrow Alaska Images

8) Honningsvåg, Norway

- Latitude: 70°58'N
- Population: 2,400



Honningsvåg is located in Nordkapp Municipality in Finnmark county. Honningsvåg is situated on a bay on the southeastern side of the large island of Magerøya, while the famous North Cape and its visitors center is on the northern side of the island. Honningsvåg is a port of call for cruise ships, especially in the summer months. The ice-free ocean (southwestern part of the Barents Sea) provides rich fisheries. Even at 71°N, many private gardens in Honningsvåg have trees, although rarely more than 10-13 feet tall.



9) Uummannaq, Greenland

- Latitude: 70°58'N
- Population: 1,300

Uummannaq is a town in the Qaasuitsup municipality, in northwestern Greenland. Founded in 1763 as Ūmañak, the town is a hunting and fishing base, with a canning factory and a marble quarry. The island is also home to the Uummannaq Mountain, rising very sharply to the height of 3,840 feet. Climbing it requires excellent mountain climbing skills.



Uummannaq Mountain



Uummannaq Town

Air Greenland operates helicopter services to Qaarsut Airport from the Uummannaq Heliport. The neighboring villages in the Uummannaq area are served by district cargo helicopters. In summer months, Royal Arctic Line operates its 'bygdeservice' with sailings by small ships to its neighboring villages.

10) Hammerfest, Norway

- Latitude: 70°39'N
- Population: 9,265

Hammerfest municipality encompasses parts of three large islands: Kvaløya, Sørøya, and Seiland. Other small islands such as Lille Kamøya and Kamøya are also located here. Most of the municipality does not have a road connection with the rest of Norway. Only Kvaløya island is connected via the Kvalsund Bridge. Seiland National Park is partially located in the municipality. Seilandsjøkelen is a large glacier in the park. The Nordefjorden is a fjord that is part of the park. The mountains Komagaksla and Seilandstuva are some of the largest mountains in the municipality.



Pictures of Hammerfest at dusk and during the day

Hammerfest claims to be the northernmost city in the world, although the title is disputed by Honningsvåg, Norway. The validity of the claim depends upon one's definition of a city; although Hammerfest is further south than Honningsvåg, it has a population over 5,000, which is required by Norwegian law to achieve city status (law from 1997).

The town has an ice-free harbor, including the nearby island of Melkøya which is home to a natural gas processing station. It processes gas from the Snøhvit gas field in the Barents Sea. The "midnight sun" is above the horizon from 15 May to 31 July, and the period with continuous daylight lasts a bit longer. Polar night, on the other hand, lasts from 23 November to 19 January.

Northernmost Large Cities

The Northern Hemisphere is known for having more land than the Southern Hemisphere. However, much of that land is undeveloped and the areas that are developed into large cities and towns are clustered in lower latitudes in places like the United States and central Europe. The largest city with the highest latitude is Helsinki, Finland. It is located at a latitude of 60°10'15"N and it has a metropolitan population of over one million people.



Helsinki, Finland



Norilsk, Siberia, Russia



Reykjavík, Iceland

Located in Siberia, Russia, Norilsk is the world's northernmost city with a population of more than 100,000, and it's not just one of the coldest cities of the world—it's also one of the filthiest. Nickel ore smelting has transformed the landscape into one of the ten most polluted places on Earth. Norilsk is an industrial city in Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russia, located above the Arctic Circle, east of the Yenisei River and south of the western Taymyr Peninsula. It has a permanent population of 175,000. With temporary inhabitants included, its population reaches 220,000.

Reykjavík, Iceland is the world's northernmost capital city with a latitude just under the Arctic Circle at 64°08'N. Reykjavík is also a large city with a population of 120,000.

Large cities like Helsinki, Norilsk, and Reykjavík are rare in the far north. There are however, many small towns and cities that are located very far north in the harsh climates of the Arctic Circle above 66.5°N latitude – as we have found out in this article.

What else have we learned in this article?

There are several towns and cities claiming to be the most northernmost. I'm sticking with my list – towns or cities with 500 or more people. Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway with 2,075 people is the most northern.

There seems to be some confusion as to the definition of a town and a city. The required population varies in different countries but here is the general consensus from around the world:

Hamlet – A small settlement or community with under 100 people.

Village - A small community with 100 or more but less than 500 people.

Town - A community with 500 or more but less than 5000 people.

City - A community with 5,000 or more people.

How many people does it take to become a city in the United States?

The U.S. Census Bureau requires a minimum population of 2,500 people to classify an area as urban rather than rural. An urban area with a population of 50,000 or more qualifies as a metropolitan area.

What country has the most northernmost towns/cities (from my list)?

Well, it is a three-way tie. Norway, Greenland, and Russia each have three and the United States has one.

If you had a choose one of these 10 northernmost towns/cities to live in for one year, which one would you pick?

Well, it is surely not Barrow, Alaska even though this is the only town/city on the list where English is the primary language. Why? Drinking beer is against the law! Yes, Barrow banned sales and/or possession of all alcoholic beverages including beer and wine. There are no bars in Barrow!!

Anywhere in northern Russia is out of consideration – See reasons below.

Greenland is too isolated so that leaves the three towns/cities in Norway.

Longyearbyen is located on an island and is too far north and is too isolated.

Both Hammerfest and Honningsvåg would be good but I'm going to pick Hammerfest because it is a bigger town with a little warmer weather.



The most popular Norwegian beer is Ringnes

The beer in Norway is great!! Below are 10 Norwegian beer toasts that gives us some bits of wisdom we should all live by:

- #10: Do not sell the hide until you have shot the bear.**
- #9: A small grass tuft can topple a big cart load.**
- #8: Carve your good words in stone, the bad in snow.**
- #7: Behind the clouds, the sky is always blue.**
- #6: No one can help someone who will not help themselves.**
- #5: There is hope as long as your fishing line is in the water.**
- #4: Do not report the weather while standing in a garage.**
- #3: An empty head gets the easiest sleep.**
- #2: No such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.**
- #1: More cooks make a bigger mess.**

Which of these 10 northernmost towns/cities would you least like to spent a year?

Look at those pictures again of the towns in north Russia. People live in depressing drab colored apartment buildings. The people in the streets look like the walking dead. Nobody in north Russia seems to be happy. If I had to pick the worst city to live in, it would be Khatanga because it is the coldest.

After doing the research for this article, I feel even more blessed to be living in the beautiful warm state of Hawaii.