

New SEES.nl expedition to Spitsbergen in July

Spitsbergen revisited! From 13 to 22 July 2022, a large group of researchers will embark on an expedition to the pristine island of Edgeøya, on the east side of the Spitsbergen archipelago. As in 2015, the name for the second scientific voyage to this island is SEES.nl. On 26 February 2022, all scientific participants came together to prepare for the expedition, which covers many scientific disciplines. The common thread among them is the rapid warming up of the polar regions.

SEES.nl is the acronym for Netherlands Scientific Expedition Edgeøa Svalbard (the latter word being the Norwegian name for Spitsbergen). In the polar areas, global warming is happening up to four times faster than elsewhere in the world. NWO is therefore funding an expedition to Spitsbergen to map these changes in an area scarcely touched by people. SEES.nl will collect data on site and compare it with data from 2015. During the ten-day expedition, various interest groups will be together on a single ship: mainly researchers, policymakers, politicians and the media. With this diverse group, we will be able to gain a good understanding of changes in the area and emphasise the importance of the polar regions. Finally, the expedition will serve to strengthen international collaboration within Dutch polar research, especially with Norway. The Netherlands also holds an observer seat in the Arctic Council, and on-site scientific research is possible due to this status.

Scientific meeting 26 February

Researchers participating in the SEES.nl expedition each have their own project, allocated across nine wide-ranging themes, from biodiversity, ice research and archaeology to wildlife tourism and pollution. Most of the participants in the expedition were selected by a committee appointed by NWO. During the meeting held in Groningen, the participating researchers presented their research projects to facilitate optimal collaboration within the themes.

Organisation

The organisation of the SEES expedition is in the hands of the Arctic Centre of the University of Groningen. Maarten Loonen is in charge of the scientific aspects, Annette Scheepstra of the coordination and Frits Steenhuisen of logistics. Loonen is associate professor of Arctic archaeology. For many years, he has worked each summer at the [Dutch Polar Station](#) in Ny Ålesund, Spitsbergen, where he is the manager. NWO is funding the expedition through the [Netherlands Polar Programme](#), in which five Dutch government ministries participate. SEES.nl is travelling with the research vessel Ortelius, owned by [OceanWide Expeditions](#).

Participants

Besides the crew, a total of 110 people will be aboard the Ortelius. These include 50 researchers from several Dutch universities and research institutions, 10 of whom are from Norway. Fifty paying tourists are also joining the expedition so that citizen science can take place. In addition, several spots have been allocated to policymakers and representatives from the press. Various media will follow the expedition, including Dutch news broadcaster NOS.

Background

The Netherlands has a long-standing presence on Spitsbergen, which began with the discovery of the archipelago by Dutch explorer Willem Barentsz in 1596. In the 1970s, there was a small Dutch research station on Edgeøa. In 1977, an expedition went to this island, and in 2015, the first SEES.nl expedition took place. This follow-up expedition was originally planned for August 2020 but had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The large-scale international expedition to the North Pole region in 2020/2021, [Mosaic](#), did take place and the Netherlands participated in that too.

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