

HELLO OSLO

Hello Svalbard

Master Degree Course
Tourism Development Strategies (TDS)
Excursion October 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The annual field trip forms a core element of the Master's programme Tourism Development Strategies (TDS) at the University of Applied Sciences Stralsund.

Taking place at the very beginning of the first semester, it offers an intense and immersive start into the programme, combining academic foundations with experiential learning and early group bonding. Designed to link theory and practice from the outset, the excursion provides students with the opportunity to encounter real-world tourism contexts, reflect on sustainable development challenges, and engage with professional stakeholders in the field.



This year the journey led the group to Norway and the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard—one of the world's most climate-sensitive regions and an exceptional case study for sustainable tourism management.

After an initial day in Oslo that allowed students to familiarise themselves with the city and its cultural atmosphere, the group travelled further north to Svalbard. Here, sustainability became an immediate, tangible reality: visible in the landscape, embedded in local governance structures, and expressed through the everyday practices of residents, researchers, and tourism actors.

Throughout the stay, we explored how tourism is managed in an environment defined by extreme seasonality, environmental vulnerability, geopolitical complexity, and limited infrastructure. Expert meetings, guided activities and on-site impressions highlighted how safety, environmental protection, heritage preservation, and economic development must be carefully balanced in such a unique destination.

Returning to Oslo for the final part of the trip, we gained additional insights into sustainability-oriented urban initiatives and cross-sectoral collaboration within Norway's capital. By observing, engaging, and reflecting on these diverse contexts, we developed a deeper understanding of responsible tourism in practice—strengthening both our academic perspectives and our personal connection to the field.

This brochure documents these experiences and impressions, marking the beginning of an inspiring TDS learning journey.

First Day of our Excursion

Our first day began in Stralsund, where we took the train to Berlin to catch our flight to Oslo. Even though it was still early morning, everyone was already full of excitement.

Once we met the rest of the group in Berlin, we immediately felt a great sense of team spirit and the atmosphere quickly became lively and positive. Despite some technical problems at the airport, we managed to reach our gate on time, and our journey started off smoothly.

When we arrived at Oslo Airport, our tour guide Thilo joined us and immediately brought great energy to the group. Arriving in Oslo felt exciting and a bit surreal. After several weeks of preparation at the beginning of the semester, we were finally setting off on the excursion which for us was one of the absolute highlights of our study program that we had all been looking forward to.

One of the first highlights was definitely the cinnamon buns we had after arriving, or maybe the Oktoberfest pretzels? The whole city seemed to be celebrating Oktoberfest, which really surprised us and felt almost a bit out of place in Norway.

After checking into our hotel, we met Emily, who guided us on a **walking tour through the city**. She herself had only recently moved to Oslo, but she knew a lot about Scandinavian culture and daily life. She told us about the strong sauna culture, and the rising cost of living in the city and the construction of the Opera House. As she guided us past the Opera House, she shared how proud the Norwegians are that such a major project was finished under budget. Very impressive we must admit!



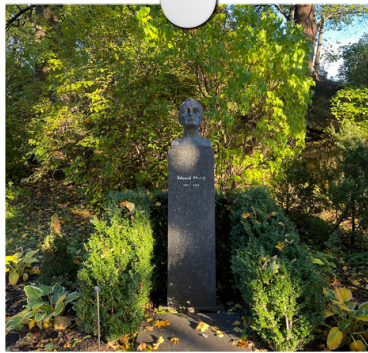
WALKING TOUR

The walk took us through charming old streets to a cemetery where the famous Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, known for *The Scream*, is buried. The cemetery felt more like a peaceful park than we had imagined, offering the group a moment to slow down and reflect not only on the things we had already discovered about Oslo but also on what we hoped to experience during the rest of the trip.

We also passed the Royal Palace and Oslo City Hall (Oslo rådhus) which is the building where the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded. Standing there made us realize just how rich in culture and history Oslo truly is.

The walking tour gave us a great first impression of Norway's capital as a whole. Emily also shared useful tips for what to explore in our free time. From an old swimming hall that has been turned into a modern food court to a small shopping street full of local stores. No matter your interests, Oslo has something to offer.

We ended the evening together over pizza, tired but happy. Looking back, the first day felt like the perfect start to our trip. Full of new impressions, interesting conversations, and a sense that this journey would bring us closer together as a group.



VIEWING OSLO



Day 2 of the Excursion

Our journey began early in the morning in Oslo, but any fatigue was quickly forgotten as we approached Longyearbyen. The flight over Svalbard's ice-covered landscape was absolutely breathtaking and offered us an unforgettable first glimpse of the majestic Arctic. After landing, a bus took us to our apartments.

As time was short and our 1st appointment was imminent, we briefly left our luggage in the hotel's storage room before heading straight to the office of **the Sysselmesteren (Governor of Svalbard)**.

Upon arrival, we were immediately introduced to a local custom: removing one's shoes before entering a building. This gesture reflects not only respect but also practicality in such a harsh environment.

The atmosphere was instantly open and welcoming. Roy, our host from the Sysselmesteren's office, gave a very engaging presentation that provided deep insight into the complexities of life, nature, and governance in Svalbard.



His talk focused passionately on the protection of the unique Arctic flora and fauna. Roy explained the strict yet necessary regulations that have been implemented to preserve this fragile ecosystem. We gained valuable insights into camping regulations, the essential distances that must be maintained from animals such as polar bears and other wildlife, and how these measures shape both tourism and local life. His profound expertise and strong commitment to environmental protection offered us the perfect foundation for understanding how tourism development and nature conservation must go hand in hand in Spitsbergen.

After the inspiring and informative exchange with Roy and the many questions that were answered, we were all quite hungry. We headed to the supermarket to stock up on groceries.

The day ended in a cozy and sociable way as we cooked together in our apartments and reflected on the first powerful impressions of this fascinating place.



MEETING WITH
GOVERNOR OF SVALBARD



Day 3 of the Excursion

In the morning, we departed by bus for the mine directly after breakfast. During the drive, we passed the **Svalbard Global Seed Vault**. This site, which appears quite futuristic from the outside, functions as a kind of Noah's Ark for agricultural crops and serves as a global backup facility for the diversity of important plant species and varieties. It is located deep inside a mountain within the permafrost, providing ideal and secure storage conditions.

After approximately ten minutes, we arrived at the **historic Mine No. 3**. Through the engaging presentation given by our guide, we learned about the significant role that mining has played in the history of Svalbard. In fact, Svalbard is populated only because of its extensive coal deposits, which developed over millions of years.

Since the closure of the last active mine, Svalbard's economic foundation has shifted from mining toward tourism. Mine No. 3 is the only mine that remains accessible to visitors, although many of them are associated with various stories and myths. For example, fossils of the prehistoric mammal Pantodont, estimated to be over 100 million years old, were discovered in Mine No. 7, providing insights into the geographical movement of Svalbard over geological timescales. One well known myth associated with the mines of Svalbard is that Santa Claus lives in Mine 2b. This legend has been maintained to the extent that children can write a wish letter to Santa every year on December 1 and place it in a mailbox located at the mine. Some of these letters are published in a local Svalbard newspaper.

Following the presentation, we changed into the traditional miners' work clothing, known as the 'Lumpen', and put on helmets equipped with lamps before beginning the guided tour inside the mine. During the tour, we had the opportunity to take small pieces of coal as souvenirs. Those who wanted to, could also gain a very practical impression of a miner's working conditions by crawling through a short and extremely narrow passage inside the mine. This activity is definitely not recommended for anyone with claustrophobia. The combination of the informative presentation about the mines and their stories and myths, together with the impressive exploration of the mine interior, made this appointment a unique experience for us.

Shortly after returning to our accommodation in Svalbard, we continued on to **Spitzbergen Reisen**, with whom we had planned a glacier hike. We began the rather long walk towards the glacier. Along the way, we experienced the distinctive and harsh natural environment of Svalbard, where it was necessary to attach spikes to our shoes at certain points in order to safely cross icy paths.

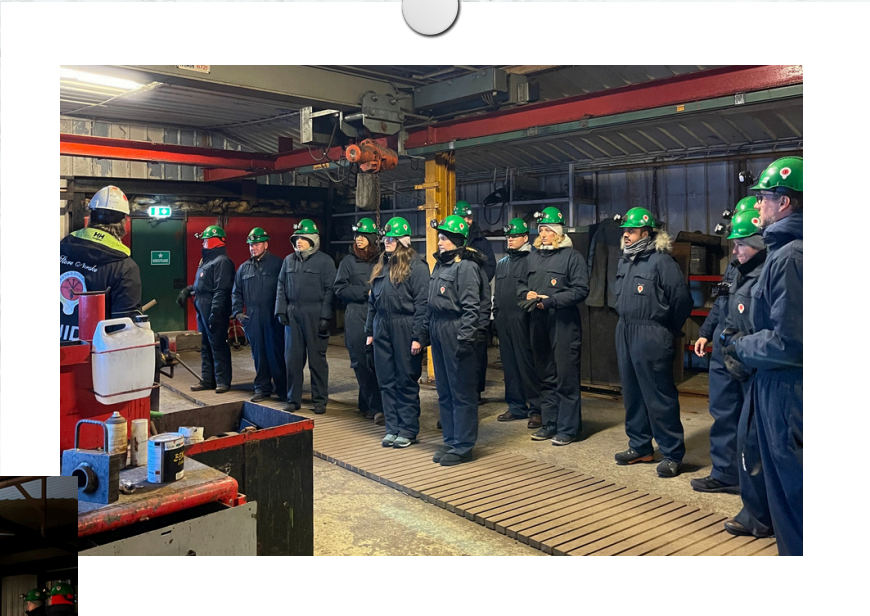
Walking on the glacier itself was also only possible with spikes attached. Upon reaching the furthest point of our hike, our group was offered a short break with coffee, hot chocolate, and snacks before starting the way back, we were happy to spend the whole afternoon discovering the glacier.

Overall, it was a very long and intense day. Nevertheless, both activities provided us with experiences that can be found in only very few places in the world.

We would like to thank our guide at the mine and our guides from Spitzbergen Reisen during the hike for making these experiences possible. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Spitzbergen Reisen for the enjoyable online meeting and for taking the time to share their values and dedication to sustainability with us, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding on this topic.



GLACIER HIKE

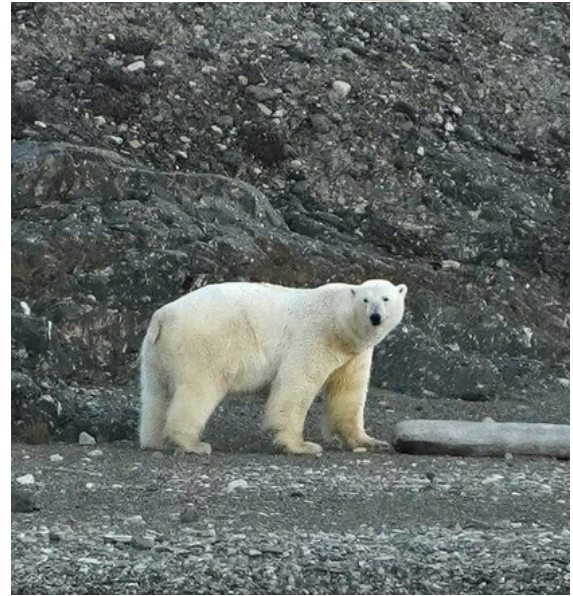


Day 4 of the Excursion

Our tour with the MS Bard, a hybrid ship with a capacity for 150 passengers, began with a view of a blue-pink horizon above the barren landscape cut through by the Isfjord. The captain of the 4-year-old ship jokingly pointed out the option that the ladies could throw their husbands into the water and get new ones at the bar.

We passed the first reindeer near Svenskehuset, which was used by explorer Adolf Nordenskjöld. Svenskehuset, the oldest standing building in the Arctic, was built in 1872 on Svalbard as a supply station for Swedish expeditions. In the winter of 1872-73, 17 stranded Norwegian sealers sought shelter there and all died, long thought to be from scurvy but later proven to be caused by lead poisoning. Today the house stands as a protected historical site and a memorial to the tragedy.

Later, we saw some arctic foxes scurrying along the beach. Our tour continued with a view of an abandoned gypsum mine and an impressive shipwreck as we entered Billefjord. Overtaken by the Russian ship Pyramida, the only other ship that day, we caught sight of the Russian mining colony Pyramiden, which takes its name from the pyramid-shaped mountain range at the foot of which it is located.



POLAR BEAR

Russia increasingly regards Svalbard as a strategic grey-zone asset in the Arctic and contests aspects of Norway's sovereignty and use of the archipelago. Since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war the relationship deteriorated.

On the way to the Nordenskiöldbreen glacier, we saw the highlight of the trip: a lone polar bear wandering along the beach, unimpressed by us, before finally diving into the fjord. Just how unlikely it is to encounter the king of the Arctic and how much luck it takes to do so becomes clear when you consider that only about 300 polar bears live on the Svalbard archipelago, which is as large as Ireland.

The glacier alone would have been very impressive, but on this sunny day, one highlight followed another as a group of white-nosed dolphins swam around us for minutes and the tourists constantly rushed from one side of the ship to the other. This tour was a very special experience, even for the locals.

The night offered us yet another highlight with beautiful northern lights dancing across the sky.





POLAR FOX



Day 5 of the Excursion

In the morning we visited the **University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS)** – the world's northern most university. As is tradition, we took off our shoes at the entrance before starting our tour.

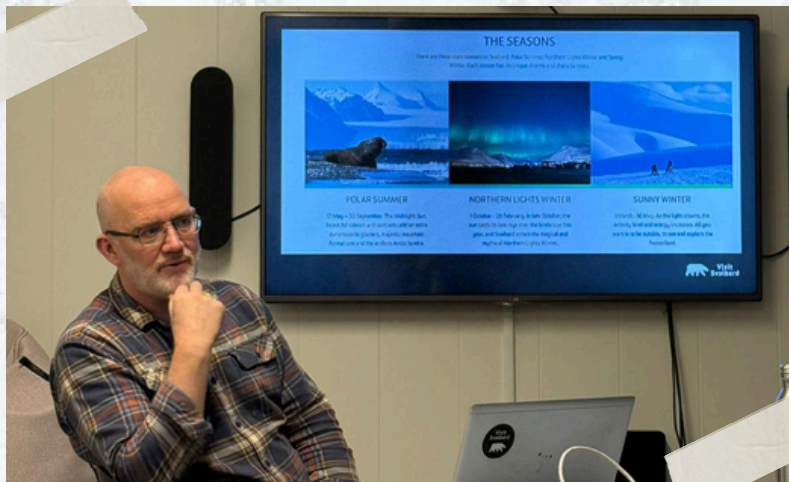
We learned about the Arctic Nature Guide Programme, a one-year course run by UiT (Tromsø) in cooperation with UNIS infrastructure, combining academic studies and fieldwork. For applying to the programme you already need a lot of outdoor experience. Around 50% of students are international, and the program trains guides to work professionally in Arctic tourism.

As the professor put it: "Nature is the biggest classroom in the world — especially here in the Arctic." Students take part in glacier trips and an "exam expedition," skiing across the fjord with friends — an experience described as a festival on snow.

In the afternoon, we met with **Visit Svalbard's** CEO Ronny, who has lived here since 2012. Tourism started in 1992 and became crucial after mining declined around 2014–2015. Jobs in tourism have doubled since then. Svalbard is now Norway's biggest cruise destination, with three types of tourism:

- **Large cruise ships** (likely to be reduced soon),
- **Expedition ships** (50–200 guests), and
- **Local excursions** like snowmobile and boat trips.

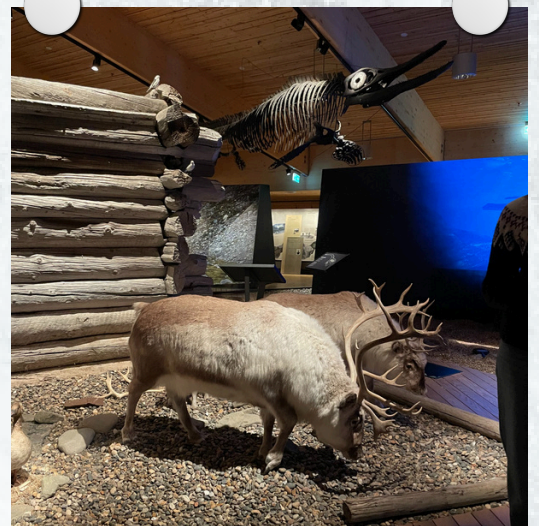
All cruise tours must use certified Arctic Nature Guides. Tourism follows strict sustainability rules, aiming to make Longyearbyen a great place to live — with cafés, restaurants, festivals, and a vibrant local culture.



During our lunch break, we explored Longyearbyen, visited the cozy Husky Café and had the opportunity to cuddle with the Huskeys. After that we had a guided tour with Anne through **the Svalbard Museum**, opened in 2006.

We learned that Svalbard was discovered in 1596 by Dutch explorer Willem Barentsz, who found it by accident while searching for a route to India. "Spitzbergen" means sharp mountains in Dutch, while "Svalbard" means cool coast in Norwegian. Whaling dominated from 1600–1800 the area, today it is illegal to hunt the most species and also the reindeer are protected since 1925. Locals are only allowed to hunt one per year.

The following morning we flew back to Oslo enjoyed a free afternoon exploring the city on our own.



Day 6 of the Excursion: Part 1

Our final day was packed with expert meetings, we started our morning with the appointment with **Oslo Kommune, the climate agency.**

Our visit highlighted a powerful model for sustainable urban development, driven by the core goal to improve life for inhabitants and "make the people stay."

The most crucial innovation is the Climate Budget. This mechanism integrates climate goals into the city's financial budget, assigning mandatory responsibility and requiring triple annual reporting from all departments, ensuring the goal of eliminating 95% of direct emissions is an operating mandate, not just an aspiration.

The city achieved 90% electric cars and a fully electric public transport system by making sustainability convenient and cheap, investing heavily in charging infrastructure. Crucially, its Liveability Strategy involved removing parking spaces and replacing them with cafés, playgrounds, and green spaces. This transformation, which reduced noise and increased public space, is how the city meets its goal of being attractive to citizens. Furthermore, Oslo used its public procurement power to mandate zero-emission construction vehicles (electric diggers), actively driving green technology innovation.

From a touristic perspective, Oslo offers **three key lessons:**

- 1.**The city proves that prioritizing a **high quality of life for inhabitants** is the most effective path to becoming a sustainable and desirable tourist destination.
- 2.**The Climate Budget forces **cross-departmental action**, making climate goals the operating mandate for the entire city.
- 3.**Public buy-in was secured by **communicating the immediate, positive co-benefits** (less noise, better air) **to secure public support for disruptive measures.** Oslo also addresses challenges like heavy rain through natural adaptation and manages 68% forest as a key carbon asset.

The city addresses indirect emissions by promoting sharing initiatives and, notably, by requiring all municipal institutions to serve only vegetarian food.



STRALSUND UNIVERSITY VISITING OSLO KOMMUNE

Day 6 of the Excursion: Part 2

After our first appointment at Oslo Kommune, we continued to the **German-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce (AHK Norway)**, where we were warmly welcomed by Mrs. Niehusmann and two interns. During our visit, we gained valuable insights into the Chamber's work in strengthening bilateral relations between Germany and Norway, promoting sustainability, and facilitating business matchmaking between companies from both countries.

Tourism emerged as a particularly important economic sector. Norway is sometimes viewed as a "climate change winner," as winters remain cold while summers are becoming warmer. This is a development that opens opportunities for year-round tourism. The concept of "coolcation," where travelers seek out cooler destinations, was also discussed as a growing trend.



However, we also learned about the challenges of cruise tourism. With 1.5 million guests and 328 port entries in Bergen alone last year, cruise ships can sometimes overwhelm smaller coastal towns. Hurtigruten, for example, remains especially popular among German tourists.

The discussion also touched on Norway's salmon farming industry. The sector deeply rooted in Norwegian society and a major export success. Yet, sustainability concerns have prompted efforts to move fish farming operations away from fjords and toward deep-water facilities, reflecting the country's commitment to balancing economic strength with environmental responsibility.

Following this informative presentation, we started our journey across Oslo for our next appointment with Haman Travel.

Day 6 of the Excursion: Part 3



Our meeting with **HAMAN Travel**, a long-standing B2B incoming tour operator for the Nordics, providing key insights into managing destination growth and sustainability. Operating with the strength of being "locals that know the area," HAMAN builds tailor-made tours using deep expertise and values like Cooperation and Engagement.

The company is addressing sustainability proactively, confirmed by its Travelife Partner Status. For HAMAN, a truly sustainable tour is defined by having almost 80% of service providers certified sustainable, a metric they use to secure partnerships and offer authentic, high-quality travel experiences.

The biggest market driver is the "Coolcation" trend: warmer summers elsewhere are driving visitors to the Nordic regions seeking comfort, fresh air, and mindful travel. While this is beneficial, it creates intense overtourism challenges, particularly in spots like Lofoten (traffic/camping issues) and Tromsø (supplier saturation and price wars). The Icelandic tourism fallout demonstrated the risks of unmanaged growth: cost inflation, local pushback, and strained infrastructure.

To mitigate this, the industry is focused on policy measures (zoning, quotas), infrastructure investment (like the Vachin behavioral guidelines), and economic levers (off-season marketing to manage seasonality).

For HAMAN, the strategic takeaways are clear: sustainability is a competitive edge. They should leverage their 80% certified supplier rule as a primary marketing focus. We suggested promoting "Slow Travel" tours (like their Nordland Railway product) to disperse crowds and encourage longer stays in less-visited communities. Furthermore, expanding their pre-booked signature collections to target shoulder seasons will help smooth out the heavy peak summer demand. Scandinavian tourism over the next 15 years will demand operators evolve into co-managers of the destination, using data and policy alignment to preserve the nature and quality of life that first attracted the "Coolcation" travelers.

We also participated in an interactive activity of brainstorming about some sustainable practices that we are aware of in our country of origin and some implementations that we can suggest for HAMAN travel to start a discussion all together about the most relevant topics.

Day 6 of the Excursion: Part 4

The last appointment of the day was with Teresa Beste, an alumni from the HOST who works currently as a Financial Manager for a small Football club. **KFUM-Kameratene (Kåffa)**, is a community-oriented football club based in the Ekeberg area of Oslo. Founded in 1939 and rooted in the values of the YMCA, the club has developed a strong identity built on inclusion, youth development and long-term engagement in sport. Its home ground, the KFUM Arena, is located within the Ekeberg sports park, an open plateau overlooking the city that serves as one of Oslo's central hubs for grassroots sports. The stadium has a capacity of about 3.000 spectators. Currently there are plans for building a new modern Stadium.

Over the years, the club has expanded from a small Christian youth organisation into a broad football community with numerous teams across all age groups, ranging from children's football to senior and recreational levels. KFUM places significant emphasis on creating a supportive environment that encourages lifelong participation, a philosophy expressed in its motto "a club for life." Although the club is widely recognised for its grassroots and social profile, it has also achieved notable sporting success.

A major milestone came when KFUM earned promotion to the Norwegian top division, the Eliteserien, for the 2024 season, where it performed impressively for a newcomer. This combination of athletic ambition and social responsibility has made KFUM-Kameratene a respected institution within Oslo's sporting landscape.

Thanks to Teresa we gained valuable insights in sustainable sportrelated-tourism aspects in Norway.



STRALSUND STUDENTS AT
THE FOOTBALL CLUB (KÅFFA)

Learning Outcomes

Our field trip to Oslo and Svalbard allowed us to experience sustainable tourism not as an abstract concept, but as a living reality shaped by climate, people, policy, and place.

From the first day onwards, we were encouraged to observe, question, and connect what we had learned in class with the environments and encounters unfolding around us. In Oslo, our initial impressions of the city provided a sense of cultural orientation before we travelled north. Only after returning from Svalbard did we fully understand how Norway's sustainability ambitions relate to the realities we had witnessed in the Arctic.

Engaging with representatives from Oslo Kommune, the Chamber of Commerce, and KFUM-kameratene later in the trip helped us reflect on the differences between urban strategies and the challenges faced in remote, climate-vulnerable destinations.

Svalbard itself became the most powerful learning environment. Being in the world's fastest-warming region confronted us immediately with the urgency of climate change. During our meetings with Sysselmesteren, Visit Svalbard, UNIS, and Haman Travel, we gained insights into how tourism is organised in a place where safety, environmental protection, geopolitical tensions, and community well-being constantly intersect. Hearing from local stakeholders, researchers, and guides helped us understand the balance between welcoming visitors and preserving the fragile Arctic ecosystem.

Many of our most meaningful learning moments came through experience: walking through former mining areas, listening to stories of Svalbard's transformation, standing on glacier ice, and sensing how quickly conditions can shift.

These moments connected theory and reality in ways the classroom never could. They also reminded us how tourism professionals must act responsibly in environments that cannot afford mistakes.

As a group, we grew closer through shared challenges, early mornings, changing weather, and the emotional impact of the landscapes around us. Discussing our impressions sometimes in structured reflection sessions, sometimes during evening conversations helped us see how differently each of us had experienced the same moments. This strengthened our communication skills, our cultural awareness, and our ability to reflect critically on our own perspectives.

Being in Svalbard broadened our horizons not only academically but also personally. Many of us felt a shift in our perception of time, a heightened awareness of nature's fragility, and a deeper appreciation for the responsibilities that come with shaping tourism's future. The field trip left us with new knowledge, lasting experiences, and the motivation to engage more thoughtfully and creatively with the challenges of sustainable tourism.



Student Testimonials



FELICITAS

We returned from our TDS excursion with numerous meetings in Oslo and Svalbard, which allowed us to gain exciting and insightful perspectives on sustainable tourism. Also the nature was so stunning and unique!



CARINA

The trip to Oslo and Spitsbergen marked a fantastic beginning to our Master's, strengthening our group bond and connecting us with fascinating tourism professionals. Blessed with rare natural wonders, we witnessed the northern lights, a polar bear, polar foxes, and reindeer.



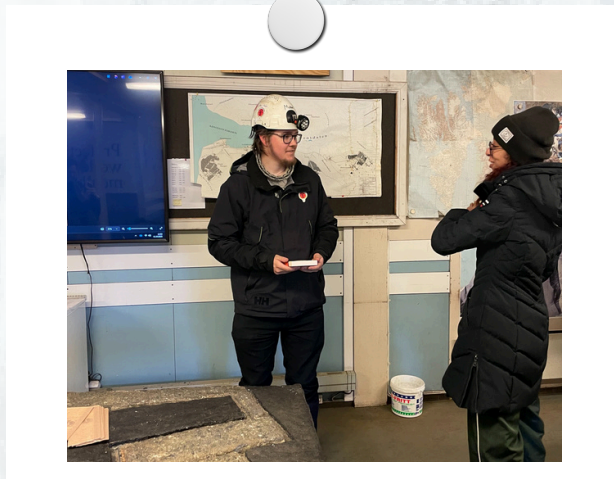
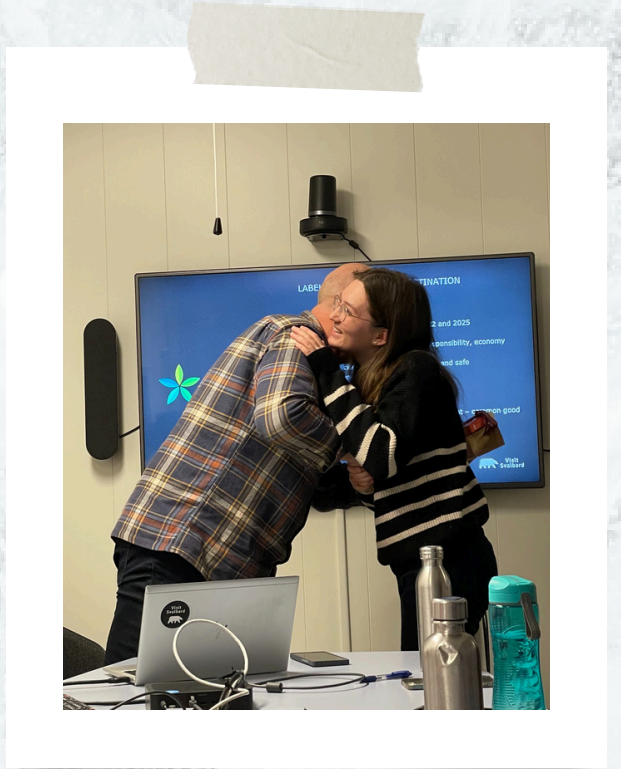
IHSANE

The excursion to Svalbard and Oslo, Norway was a truly enriching experience. It offered a unique opportunity to combine knowledge with leisure, allowing us to learn while exploring some of the most remarkable landscapes and cultures. Beyond the educational value, the journey helped us create unforgettable memories that will stay with us for a lifetime.

During our academic excursion, I perceived a strong sense of time slowing down, influenced by the surrounding natural beauty and the distinctive Arctic light cycle. This experience fostered a profound detachment from the urban world and a renewed connection with nature and with myself, rarely encountered in my life.



SIMONE









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- All contents are contributed and designed by the students of the the master degree course Tourism Development Strategies (TDS).
- In addition, the homepage (www.hochschule-stralsund.de/tds) provides more information about the programme and excursions.



Tourismmaster_stralsund



<http://www.hochschule-stralsund.de/tds/>



Hochschule Stralsund

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