THE LIVING WORLD
Svalbard

read

quiz

The Big Picture

ecosystems — *rainforests*

The Living World

*cold environments** — or — *hot deserts*

Location

About

Svalbard is an archipelago (a large group of islands) located in northern Europe, halfway between Norway and the North Pole. It is one of the world's northernmost inhabited areas and is administered by Norway. It has a permanent population of 2700, of which 2300 live in Longyearbyen, the administrative centre of the islands.

Opportunities

Mineral resources – Svalbard has a significant amount of coal and coal mining is the main economic activity on the islands, once employing over 300 people.

Energy – A coal-fired power station meets Svalbard's energy needs. This and the need to fly frequently results in Svalbard residents having Europe's highest carbon footprint.

Tourism – Svalbard is a popular tourist destination and is visited regularly by cruise ships. Some 70,000 tourists visited in 2011, of which 30,000 arrived on cruise ships.

Fishing – The Barents Sea that surrounds Svalbard is home to some of the best fishing grounds in the world. Fishing is controlled, which means it is sustainable.

Challenges

Buildings and infrastructure – Permafrost is difficult to build on. Roads are constructed on gravel beds so the permafrost does not thaw. Raised, insulated utility pipes protect services.

Inaccessibility – Svalbard is a very remote region, relying on transport such as planes and ships for access. Locals rely on snowmobiles and 4x4s in the winter.

Temperature – Winter temperatures can drop below -30°C in Svalbard. This, along with limited sunlight in the winter, makes working outside very challenging. In the winter the sea freezes and roads become very dangerous.

Key Terms

Ecotourism – Travel that conserves the environment and benefits locals.

Inaccessibility – Very difficult to travel or impossible to travel to or reach.

Infrastructure – Basic equipment and structures for a location to function.

Non-renewable energy – Energy from sources that will run out e.g. oil.

Permafrost – Land that is permanently frozen.

Sparsely populated – Few people live in an area.