

Editorial

Tourism in the Antarctic

Tourism to Antarctica has developed considerably since the pioneering efforts of Lars-Eric Linblad and the first polar expedition ship the *Linblad Explorer*. His concept was ecotourism, linking adventure and education, whilst protecting the sites visited. His prescription of mixing landings with expert lectures has proved an enduring and acceptable model for many of the present Antarctic tourists. Of course, there has been some diversification with airborne tourists flying in to Patriot Hills, small parties (especially of mountaineers) landing on the coast and inland to pioneer new climbs, as well as those determined to prove themselves by recreating previous expedition journeys of Shackleton, Scott and others. And there still are those who see the Antarctic as a playground in which to achieve some sort of entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

The number of tourists has also grown and, despite the setback caused by the 2008 financial crisis, the recovery to earlier maxima is well underway. The International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) provides details of the numbers of ships and tourists involved, their nationalities and the locations used, so the changes in the industry are well documented. The response by the Antarctic Treaty Parties has been to recognise tourism as a legitimate use of the continent, to agree Codes of Conduct for visitors and to develop Site Management Plans for those areas most heavily visited. The work of the NGO Oceanites under Ron Naveen has been important in providing some independent monitoring of the impacts of tourism on selected sites. A key element of the present collaborative management is the use of the IAATO Ship Scheduler to ensure that site usage is shared across all ships and the illusion of the Antarctic wilderness is maintained.

There has also been a change in the deployment of expedition vessels so that, whilst the backbone may still be the polar cruises, many of the ships are now being routinely used for adventure expeditions in others areas like the Amazon, the Indian and Pacific Ocean islands, and Micronesia. In addition, the active season has now lengthened starting as early as mid-October and concluding in early April.

A more recent development has been the increase in adventure options being provided by some companies. Now you can kayak with sea ice, scuba dive, walk up glaciers, ski to the South Pole, fly by helicopter to see emperor penguins, camp on shore and soon you will be able to use miniature submarines to venture beneath the Southern Ocean. The demand seems insatiable for both the Arctic and Antarctic and the response by the companies has been to order a huge number of new expedition ships, both as replacements for existing ones and as new opportunities for expansion. With 17 new expedition ships already planned to come into service within the next three years and a projected expansion to over 70 globally by 2021 there would seem to be a potential problem for the present ship management model in Antarctica. In addition, there must be concerns about an increase in berth capacity of 50% with its implications for increased site impacts.

One important response here has been the agreement in 2017 between IAATO and SCAR to develop a science-based conservation plan for the most visited area of Antarctica - the Antarctic Peninsula. The details of this have yet to be seen but presumably more sites need to be brought into regular use as the present sites will not be able to take a large increase in footfall without damage. This major increase in ship numbers threatens to upturn what has been a very successful and well managed regime. How do IAATO plan to cope with this and what initiatives might be needed from Treaty Parties?

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