A Sustainable (individual-) Tourism Concept for Antarctica

Project

Duration

Dec 2010 - May 2011

On behalf of the German Federal Environment Agency Ecologic Institute conducted a study on the impacts of individual tourism in Antarctica. The report "A Sustainable Tourism Concept for Antarctica" sheds light on possible approaches to tourism management and develops a set of recommendations for a sustainable tourism concept in Antarctica.

Over the past years, the considerable increase and diversification of tourism activities in Antarctica has become an issue of growing concern. While the majority of tourists in Antarctica travel on ships that hold large numbers of passengers, an increased number of travelers decide to visit the white continent as individual tourists, i.e. in smaller groups. The demand for activity-based tourism has been increasing, and new activities such as snowboarding, climbing, kayaking or scuba diving are starting to attract the attention of more and more visitors.

The study takes a closer look at the development of Antarctic tourism in the past decades, focusing on sea-based and land-based individual tourism. It further analyses the legal framework in place to regulate human activities in Antarctica, which is currently rather fragmented with respect to tourism activities and the self regulation measures developed by the Antarctic tourism industry.

To investigate the impacts of individual tourism and the challenges connected to it, Ecologic Institute conducted a survey of scientific literature and international political proposals. In addition, a series of interviews was conducted with key experts and stakeholders from 9 different countries, representing academia, government, NGOs and the tourism industry to help shed light on gaps in the current management of tourism in Antarctica and their potential solutions.

Finally, a series of policy options and recommendations was drawn up in order to address the existing gaps and advance tourism management in Antarctica, such as:

- Development of a comprehensive tourism framework based on a clear vision for Antarctic tourism in the upcoming decades
- Use of the precautionary approach as guiding principle in the development of this framework
- Implementation of proactive initiatives based on different scenarios of possible future development and commercialization of individual tourism
• Introduction of the concept of wilderness values as a basis when creating regulations, e.g., with respect to restrictions on certain developments such as land-based facilities and types of transport, inter alia.
• Consideration of tourism as a separate concern in an additional Annex of the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty.
• Research and monitoring as the basis for reasonable decision-making, taking cumulative impacts into account.
• Proactive use of zoning as part of a coherent environmental management system together with other management tools
• Control of access to sites, and of the type of tourism activities permitted
• Discussion on caps on the number of tourists
• Keeping tourism ship-based to prevent land-based facilities
• Introduction of an accreditation and training scheme for tourism operators to create high average environmental standards
• Establishment of an observer scheme onboard tourist vessels
• Incorporation of port state control at gateway marinas to check if journeys are authorized and well prepared
• Integration of cumulative impacts in Environmental Impact Assessments
• Improvement of effective communication of requirements and regulations to individual tourists through focused outreach at strategic locations
• Organization of education and training courses for individual tourists before their departure to the Antarctica

The results of the study served as the basis for a paper presented by the German Delegation to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), which took place in Buenos Aires in June 2011 (the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM XXXIV), Buenos Aires (ARG), 20 June – 1st July 2011 in conjunction with the 14th meeting of the Antarctic Treaty’s Committee for Environmental Protection, CEP XXXIV).

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