

Managing Tourism in Antarctica – A Framework for the Future.

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Abstract

Antarctic tourism has been the subject of significant debate in recent years, not only within the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) but also in the wider community. A relatively recent but now well-established industry, tourism in Antarctica is characterised by high regional growth rates and the potential for significant impacts on the environments where it occurs.

This thesis addresses the research question 'Is the current regulatory system for managing tourism in Antarctica adequate to protect the Antarctic environment?'

It examines the general theories of management of tourism and recreation in protected and wilderness areas. The importance of the relationship between site values, tourism activities, impacts and management responses is highlighted. It is noted that contemporary protected area managers inevitably put in place robust and binding legislation, site-specific management plans, and management interventions to manage wilderness areas. The tourism management framework for Antarctica is presented, in both its historical and contemporary contexts. The historical and current size and nature of the Antarctic tourist industry is analysed and presented, along with an in-depth examination of the values and attributes of the sites where that activity occurs. The actual and potential impacts of tourism in general and of the current levels of tourism in Antarctica are then discussed.

A discussion regarding the adequacy of the current ATS tourism management regime is presented. The system is found to be inadequate across a range of critical factors. The current system is characterised as reactive, legally uncertain, technically-focussed and almost totally lacking in strategic approach. Adequate protection of the sites where tourism occurs is not certain.

A range of improvements to the management of tourism in Antarctica is presented. Chief amongst these are the development of strategic policy for the sites subject to tourism, the development of management plans for key tourist sites, and the use of specific intervention tools at sites to achieve management planning objectives.