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**XXVI ANTARCTIC TREATY**  
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**XXVI TRAITÉ SUR L'ANTARCTIQUE**  
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## Adventure Tourism in Antarctica

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## ATCM XXVI Agenda Item 10

# Adventure Tourism in Antarctica

### Introduction

Tourism was not discussed when the Antarctic Treaty was negotiated in 1959. The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, concluded in 1991, set out rules that apply to any impact on the Antarctic Environment.

In recent year concerns have been raised about the increase in Adventure Tourism to Antarctica. Currently there is no definition for "Adventure Tourism". Though it may be deemed to be the more extreme side of adventure travel. Remembering however, that when the first Linblad vessel arrived in Antarctica in the 60's with the first cruise ship passengers, this journey in itself would have been thought of as extreme and most certainly Adventure Tourism.

### Recent trends in Antarctic Tourism

Since the formation of IAATO there is now reliable recording of individuals, groups and companies traveling to Antarctica. Member companies are required to provide information on all activities within Antarctica on an annual basis. Additionally IAATO has been extremely pro active in securing as much information as possible on the non-IAATO members and their plans for current seasons. This allows IAATO to follow the trends in Antarctic tourism and the diversity of new and unusual activities.

While recent reports show optional pursuits such as kayaking, camping and climbing may now be available on selected voyages there is as yet no indication that these new ventures have had any detrimental impact on the Antarctic environment. It is these undertakings that are being branded "Adventure Tourism". There are currently two options for participating in such activities through IAATO members. Either through cruise companies or with one of the land based companies. In addition in recent years we have seen an increase in expedition supported by National Operators and a selection of individuals and groups with no support or back up.

### Ship base Adventure Tourism

Over the last 5 years activities available aboard and from a cruise vessel have expanded and been developed to accomodate new and active travelers. Of those participating in these ventures, the majority tends to be small numbers of passengers, traveling with reputable companies who have experience in a particular sport or the appropriate and qualified staff to facilitate.

All additional tours operated by IAATO members are assessed in advance for safety, have secured the required permits and compliances and in the event of an accident or emergency are covered by the company's insurance policies.

It should be noted that the number of passengers participating in these Adventure programs account for less than 0.5% of all tourists traveling to Antarctica. The number is relatively small and to date there is no documentation to suggest there is any adverse impact on the environment by or from these programs.

### **Land Based Adventure Tourism**

It might be suggested that “Adventure Tourism” is the only activity available by the land-based companies. Living in a tent at minus 15°C for 2 weeks to reach a destination on the polar plateau will for most people be considered extreme and adventurous.

However, one of the IAATO member companies has been operating and taking tourists to this extreme environment for 16 consecutive seasons. They believe that with the lessons they have drawn over their years of operation that they are in a position to offer safe and responsible tourism to the interior of Antarctica. They consider themselves self sufficient without reliance on any of the National Operators or their equipment though work closely with many of the National Operators throughout the Antarctic season.

### **Other forms of Adventure Tourism**

We have seen a significant increase in support from National Operators for expeditions traveling to, from and across the Antarctic. They range from being a government-sponsored expedition to a National Operator offering access or exit of the continent to a National team. Detailed information on these groups and their journeys has not always been available to IAATO.

More recently there have been a sporadic number of private expeditions wishing to reach/cross/visit Antarctica without any support, back up or insurance. As is documented there appears to be no evidence to suggest these groups have any detrimental effect on the Antarctic environment. The greater concern is the effect an emergency, accident or incident may have on tour companies or National Operators. As was recorded last year when a helicopter heading for Antarctica crash landed in the ocean and 2 National Operators were called to assist and evacuate the group. Or when a Government sponsored group had an incident in the interior and one of the IAATO member companies was asked to recover and return the passengers to Chile.

These groups are cause for greater concern as there is no way of knowing where they are going, what they are doing, if they have all the necessary permit and insurance and if their experience is appropriate for an Antarctic Journey.

### **How to minimize the risk**

Within IAATO, member companies recognize the risk of operating in such a remote and hostile environment. In order to minimize that risk all passengers are “screened” before acceptance. They are sent materials explaining the journey they will undertake. All are asked to complete a medical form pertinent to the type of tour they have

selected the activity level involved. Experienced staff are contracted for all journeys and as much information on the destination as possible is given to staff and clients.

For those few passengers who have elected to participate in one of the more adventurous programs we select additional and activity specific experts to join the staff, such as experienced mountaineers, qualified divers and kayak instructors.

We know where all our clients are at all times when in the Antarctic and we accept that we are responsible for those passengers we take to the Antarctic.

Due to the extent of the activities offered IAATO land based member will not accept a client for an expedition until they are able to confirm the following and other more detailed information;

- That they have secure appropriate insurance in the event of an emergency or accident,
- They have completed (asked required) an EIA for the journey they will undertake,
- That they have been in contact with their government departments and have been granted national permits,
- How much food they are carrying and what is the calorific value of each meal,
- What their experience in traveling in the polar region might be and it is enough for the journey they will undertake,
- Detailed information on their route, communications equipment, emergency equipment and camping gear,
- Plan B if they have gear or technical problems
- A maximum of 48 hours without communications with the team and an aircraft will be sent to pick them up.

**Risk assessments across IAATO companies includes;**

- Knowing our destination and sharing new information with the other IAATO members on a regular and during the season on a daily basis,
- Understanding the fragility of the continent and our efforts to keep any impact to a minimum,
- The selection of the best equipment for the voyages or land based operations,
- Employing the most experienced crews,
- Securing the appropriate insurance to cover passengers, staff and the environment,
- Qualification of the appropriate staff for standard journeys and specific activities,
- Determining if the clients are best suited to the programs they have selected,
- Knowing our passengers and their expectations,
- Taking responsibility that the clients we take to Antarctica,

**Summary**

We believe that there is a place in Antarctica for Adventure Tourism. It may be the modern adaptation of the journeys we have offered for almost 40 years. We need

however to ensure that it is responsible tourism and is governed by the same criteria and parameters applied to all current tourists and National Operators traveling to Antarctica.

They must secure all the required permits, show appropriate insurance cover for emergency and environmental situations, back up for search and rescue for the duration of their time in Antarctica and an access and exit plan. We must agree that those parties taking them to Antarctica are responsible for them until their return from Antarctica. There needs to be a penalty for those choosing to ignore these requirements.

Antarctic will not care whether a person paying to be there or being paid to be there creates the damage. We must work together on an level playing field for the betterment of Antarctica