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## **Adventure Tourism: Activities undertaken by IAATO Members**



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## *Information Paper Submitted by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO)*

### **Introduction**

As outlined in ATCM XXXVII SP09 *ATCM Multi-Year Strategic Work Plan: Summary of the ATCM discussions on land-based and adventure tourism* both land-based tourism and adventure tourism have been a subject for discussion in ATCMs. Following the desire by Parties to focus discussions these topics at the ATCM XXXVII Tourism Working Group discussions, IAATO considered it potentially helpful to offer definitions and provide a general overview of these activities as reported by IAATO Members. This paper aims to summarise both adventure activities and land-based tourism, within defined parameters, and give an overview of any perceptible trends during the last 10 seasons.

### **What is adventure tourism and land-based tourism?**

Adventure tourism can be quite difficult to define as it depends to a large extent on interpretation, localised conditions and skills of participants. For the purposes of this paper, adventure tourism can be defined as:

*Adventure tourism involves activities where there is a perceived (and possibly actual) risk, which potentially requires specialized skills and physical exertion.*

Using that definition arguably there are some activities which are undertaken in all sectors of the Antarctic tourism industry which could be perceived as adventurous whether land-based or vessel-based.

As clarified in ATCM XXXII IP101 *Land-based Tourism Facilities* and ATCM XXXI IP 84 *Land-Based Tourism and the Development of Land-Based Tourism Infrastructure in Antarctica: An IAATO Perspective* IAATO uses the following definitions for land-based tourism:

*“Land-based tourism” is any activity that requires passengers and field staff to be on land for more than 36 hours (excluding emergencies) and that necessitates sufficient equipment for sustained support – for example food, shelter and safety equipment.*

The intention of this definition is to exclude short-term organized overnight stays that are sometimes operated as a shore excursion of a normal ship cruise. It does, however, include any groups that are put ashore to camp, climb or undertake other activities that require more than one night ashore.

This definition of “land-based tourism” also excludes the brief use of national program facilities such as wharves, jetties and runways, wherein the underlying characteristics of the tourism activity are not defined by those facilities. (For example, those operators that use the prepared gravel runway at Teniente Rodolfo Marsh (SCRM), King George Island, for the exchange of passengers on their cruise vessels.) In all of these cases, the facilities have been constructed by a national program operator for the servicing or support of their station research activities. IAATO Members only use these facilities with the prior agreement of the relevant station for visitation dates and arrangements, and only in a way that the station’s normal logistic and scientific activities are not compromised.

### **Adventure Activities taking place from vessel-based tourism**

Adventure activities are not the exclusive purview of land-based operations. Some vessel-based operators also offer activities that could be perceived as being adventure tourism.

The following activities have been recorded in Post Visit Reports (PVRs) for the past 10 years. These activities were analysed from the perspective of the number of participants. Those in bold with an asterisk are considered in this paper as being potentially adventurous activities, though inevitably the level of ‘adventure’ varies on a case-by-case basis.

- Ship Cruising
- Small Boat Landing
- Small Boat Cruising
- **Kayaking \***
- **Extended Walk \***
- Station Visit
- **Scuba Diving\***
- Science Support
- **Camping\***
- Remote Underwater Vehicle
- Anchoring Only
- **Ice Walk\***
- Helicopter landing
- Other (not specified)
- **Skiing\***
- Aircraft Landing
- Aircraft Flight
- Helicopter Flight
- **Climbing\***
- **Snowboarding\***

It should be noted that PVR data relies heavily on the accuracy of the reporting and processing, and, while there is considerable effort to ensure the data is consistent, there are some weaknesses. For example, there is a further category “Other” that refers to any activity that is not defined in the PVR and may include activities such as swimming, snowshoeing, filming, use of overhead drones, and even the polar plunge. As far as possible the activity list on the PVRs is updated when submitted by operators, however, one-off activities, e.g. kite surfing or the use of submersibles, are usually entered under the “other” category and do not easily show up in the data.

#### Activities in the Antarctic by category

Figure 3 indicates the principal activities taking place in Antarctica by tourists during the past 10 years, each event recorded by participant (i.e. one passenger may have participated in several different activities, on multiple occasions, during a trip).

The activities with the highest participation levels are those involved in traditional (non-adventurous) activities such as:

- Ship cruising (by cruise-only vessels): These vessels carry more than 500 passengers. Passengers do not go ashore but remain on the ship while they look at the surrounding area and scenic channels that they are sailing through;
- Small boat landing is the term used for landing passengers on the beach with small rubber boats (typically Zodiacs) and allowing passengers to be guided for short distances and periods ashore;
- Small boat cruising is where passengers are taken on short (1-2 hour) tours in the boats. They do not alight from the boats during this time; and finally
- Visits to Antarctic stations.

Figure 4 indicates the level of participation in adventure tourism as a percentage of the overall visitor activity. Effectively, adventure activities form a tiny part of the overall tourism activities in the Antarctic, with the most popular activity being extended walks encompassing between 3-4% of the total activity in shipborne tourism and kayaking averaging between 1-2% of adventure tourism activities.

The complete set of data is presented in Appendix A, for ease of reference.

Figure 3: Number of visitor activity events per year

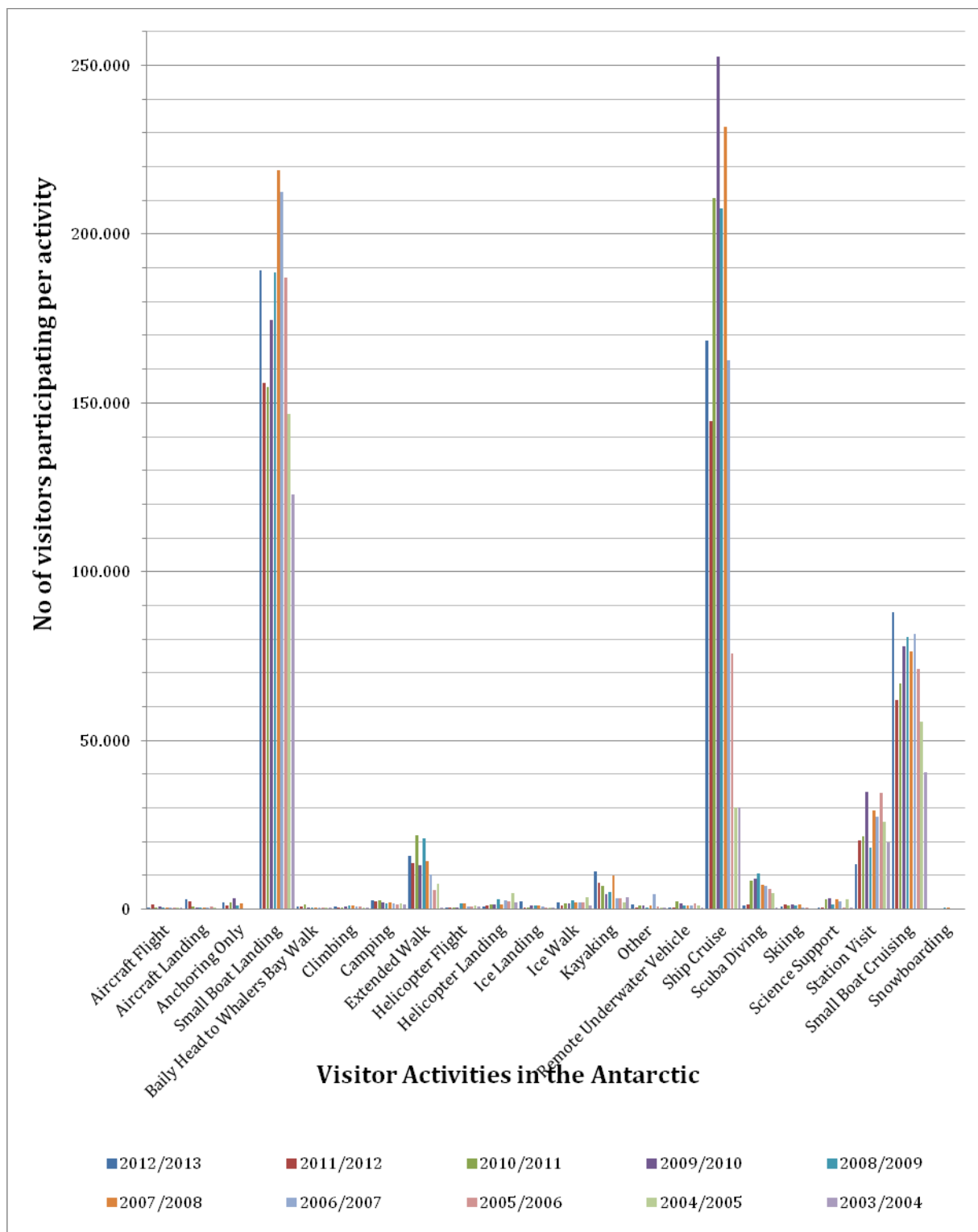
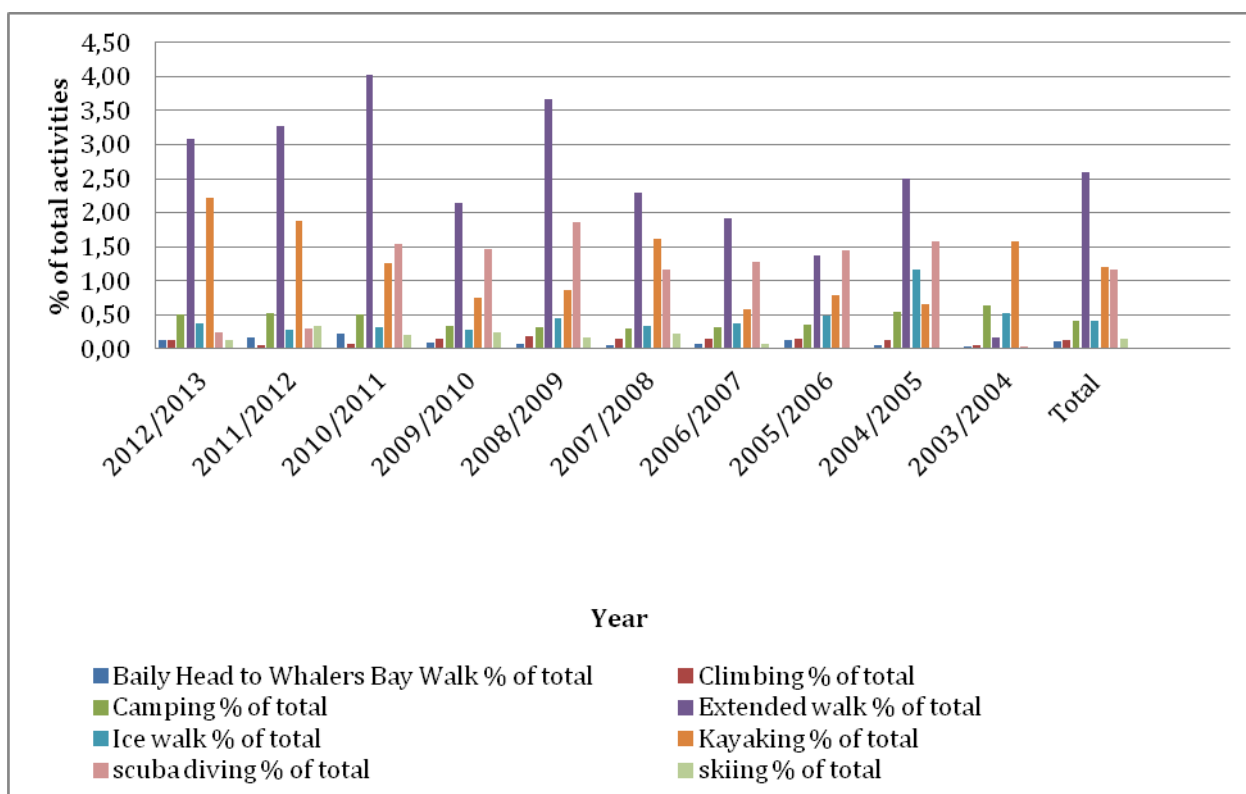


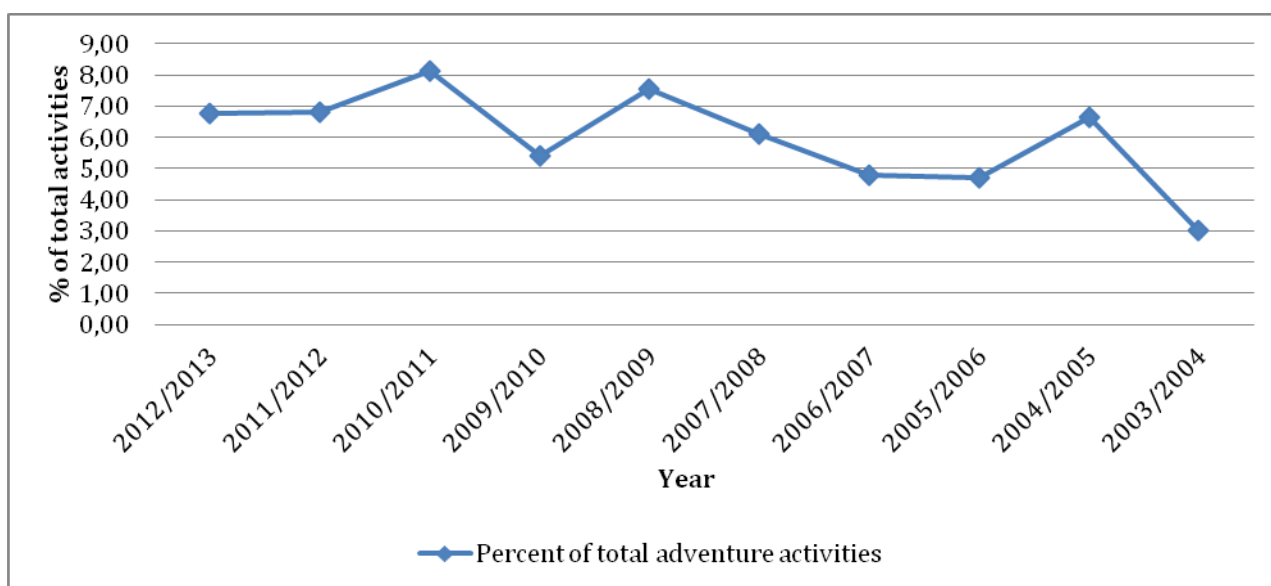
Fig 4: The percentage of the total number of visitors, per adventure activity per season



**Trends in Antarctic Adventure Activities**

Figure 5 looks at adventure activities (those starred items above) as a percentage of total activities on an annual basis since 2003. There has been only a very slight increase over the past 10 years regarding the level of adventure activities taking place. The major adventure activities are extended walks, which includes walks greater than 1km from the landing site. The category for extended walks does not differentiate between shorter walks over easy terrain and hikes which may take many hours and cover terrain that is potentially dangerous, e.g. crevasses.

Figure 5: Adventure activities as a percentage of total activities on an annual basis since 2003



This data confirms that potentially adventurous activities are a tiny percentage of activities taking place in the Antarctic.

Overall, it is important to note that there have been very few incidents in Antarctic tourism resulting from these types of adventure activities.

### **IAATO Members' Land-Based Activities**

Land-based activities are recorded slightly differently within the IAATO database because the current PVR form does not readily record these types of activities.

IAATO Members' land-based activities fall into two distinct categories:

- Deep-field activities –staff and clients are flown by intercontinental aircraft into Antarctica to land on a blue-ice runway at a logistic hub where their Antarctic expedition or experience commences;
- Multi-night shore-based coastal activities where a vessel, usually a yacht, is used to access offshore islands or the mainland of Antarctica, before disembarking for their expedition or experience.

#### **Deep Field Activities:**

There are currently three IAATO members operating significant land-based activities, of which two are the key logistic providers: Adventure Network International/Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions (ALE) and The Antarctic Company (TAC). A third company, White Desert (WDL) uses TAC for flight and logistic support.

All three companies rely on non-IAATO contractors to provide air or land transport and SAR within Antarctica. Kenn Borek Air Ltd (Canada) is the primary air operator for ski aircraft activities (De Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otters and Basler Turbo 67). Arctic Trucks Int. (Iceland) has been contracted by all three companies from time to time to provide overland vehicle transport.

ALE, which was a founding member of IAATO, currently carries the majority (70%) of travellers into the interior. TAC and WDL have been IAATO members since 2009 and 2010 respectively and between them are responsible for the remaining 30% of travellers to the interior.

Both ALE's and TAC's operations are entirely supported by air; each season both companies charter aircraft suitable for intercontinental flights, typically Ilyushin IL-76 aircraft. ALE's main operational camp is at Union Glacier, Heritage Range, Ellsworth Mountains where planes arriving from Punta Arenas, Chile, land on a Chilean-certified blue-ice runway. Prior to 2011, ALE's main camp was at Patriot Hills. National Antarctic Programs also use the Union Glacier runway, skiway and camp facilities, and during the 2013-14 season, Chile established a station near to the ALE camp. ALE's programs are operated within the general area of the Ellsworth Mountains including Vinson Massif, the sector to the South Pole, the Filchner–Ronne Ice Shelf including Berkner Island, and occasionally the coast of Coats Land, the Ross Ice Shelf and the route from Ross Island to the South Pole.

TAC operates out of Cape Town, South Africa, transporting clients, staff and guides to Novo Runway, an operation shared with Antarctic Logistics Centre International (ALCI). The blue-ice runway, near Novolazarevskaya Station, Queen Maud Land, is maintained by the Russian Antarctic Expedition (RAE) who also maintain a few aerodrome buildings. The majority of the Aerodrome buildings are owned and operated by ALCI, under contract to the Dronning Maud Land Air Network (DROMLAN), to provide logistic support to several National Antarctic Programs. The runway is certified annually by the Russian Civil Aviation Authority, with Russia providing permits for both ALCI's and RAE's operations.

TAC personnel work at the Aerodrome along with those from RAE and ALCI. TAC and WDL clients passing through the Aerodrome use the ALCI mess tent. If clients require an overnight stay to wait for an onward flight, TAC uses their own tents and equipment but uses ALCI's messing and toileting facilities.

TAC annually assists WDL with setting up the latter's main operational camp, Whichaway Camp, located a few kilometres from Novolazarevskaya Station. TAC is also responsible for seasonal waste management. WDL guides are responsible for the day-to-day running of the camp, food provisioning and client activities. Like Union Camp, operated by ALE, Whichaway Camp is dismantled at the end of each season. TAC/WDL programs also operate to the South Pole, within the Eckstroem Ice Shelf area and the Ulvetanna, Fensriskjefte, Jorkulkirkja and Wohlthat Massif regions.

ALE, TAC and WDL seek authorization for activities involving their respective programs through their relevant national authority (USA, South Africa and the UK respectively). If they are acting as contractors by providing services to other organizations, then the organizer submits Advance Notification and an environmental impact assessment to their own national authority.

### **Multi-night shore-based coastal activities**

Other land-based activities by IAATO Members are primarily field camps providing a base for climbing or ski mountaineering trips in the Antarctic Peninsula area. These are supported mainly by yachts and occasionally by ships, and are, typically, of short duration (< one week). The location of these activities is subject to suitable landing and camp areas and access to mountain peaks.

Short-term climbing, ski-mountaineering and camping expeditions on the Antarctic Peninsula have no requirement for any facilities ashore, such as caches, permanent facilities, etc. Some expeditions may take advantage of the runway at Teniente Rodolfo Marsh (SCRM), King George Island, for access.

### **Adventure activities undertaken from land-based operations**

Within their general area of operations, the deep field operators support several standard programs including:

- Overland vehicle and ski expeditions, of various durations, to the geographic South Pole;
- Flights to the South Pole;
- Ascents of Antarctica's highest mountain, Vinson Massif;
- Ascents of Antarctica's highest volcano, Mount Sidley;
- Ski/mountaineering/climbing expeditions within various mountain regions;
- Expeditions to view emperor penguin colonies;
- Marathons;
- Non-technical programs based from the main operational camp with day excursions/overnight stays to sights of interest (day trekking, short overnight camping stays, etc.).

Comparatively, multi-night shore based coastal activities also support ski/mountaineering/climbing expeditions.

### **Levels of Participation**

The numbers involved in both coastal and deep field land-based tourism are modest in comparison to other forms of tourism. Deep field activities account for the highest number but even these rarely exceed 400 persons per annum.

Figure 1 provides a breakdown of total number of persons carried by IAATO Members on deep field operations since 2003.



Figure 1: Number of clients carried by IAATO Member Deep Field Operators 2003-2013.

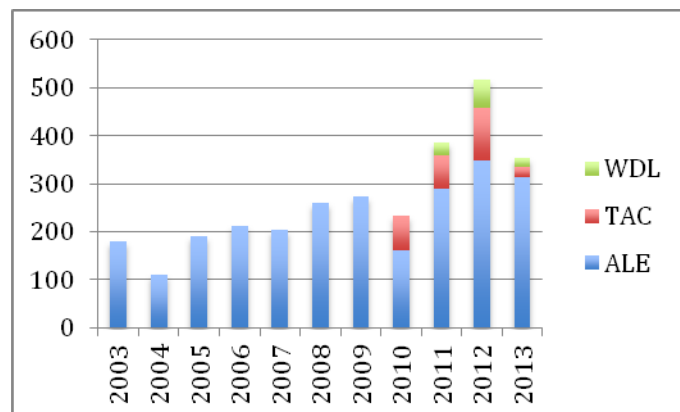
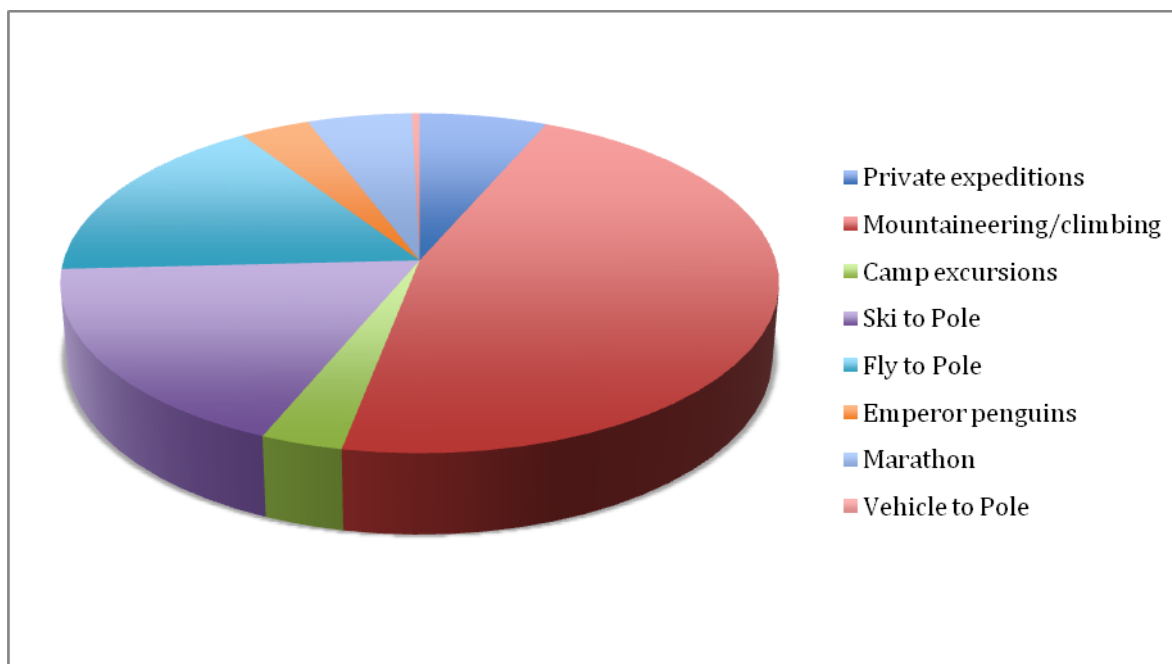


Figure 2 illustrates the participation level by activity amongst deep field operations. By far the most popular activity is mountaineering. It should be noted that some participants will undertake multiple activities during one trip (e.g. a visit South Pole and also to an emperor penguin colony).

Figure 2: Proportional level of participation in activities supported by deep field operators



For multi-night coastal activities, the numbers are even more modest: IAATO estimates – on the basis of annually generated camping statistics – that approximately 30-35 persons are engaged on multi-day camping expeditions each season. It should be noted however that traditionally the PVRs have not differentiated in recording of short-term organized overnight stays and those expeditions that camp, climb or undertake other activities on land that require more than one night ashore.

### Conclusions

- Adventure tourism, in particular, can be difficult to define and is open to interpretation.
- In assessing adventure tourism activities, broad analysis of information held in the PVR database indicates that the vast majority of activities are still the traditional forms of Antarctic tourism (e.g.

ship cruising, small boat landings, small boat cruising, etc.) and the identified adventure tourism activities only make up a very small percentage of the experiences that are being undertaken.

- Additionally, there is no discernible trend to indicate a proportional increase in such activities within the last 10 seasons compared to overall travellers.
- Participation in land-based tourism – both deep field and multi-night shore based coastal activities - is very modest compared to vessel-based tourism but deep field operations occur over a wider area. However, private expeditions, particularly those which are not ‘routine’ tend to be high profile, and can generate considerable media interest, even though the numbers involved are very low.
- One-off activities, which may include an adventure element, can be hard to discern in the current reporting system of PVRs and so detailed information on the scope of these events may not be readily available. This is a shortcoming of the current reporting mechanisms. Within its remit, IAATO will endeavour to address this issue to allow for more detailed reporting.

## Appendix A

Table 1: Total figures of tourism-related activities in the Antarctic per season

Year	Aircraft Flight	Aircraft Landing	Anchoring Only	Small Boat Landing	Bally Head to Whalers Bay Walk	Climbing	Camping	Extended Walk	Helicopter Flight	Helicopter Landing	Ice Landing	Ice Walk	Kayaking	Other	Remote Underwater Vehicle	Ship Cruise	Scuba Diving	Skiing	Science Support	Station Visit	Small Boat Cruising	Snowboarding
2012/2013	106	2 805	1 930	189 386	639	640	2 565	15 610	291	668	2 400	1 842	11 185	1 444	125	168 518	1 183	611	113	13 250	88 030	
2011/2012	1 267	2 265	916	156 018	657	223	2 206	13 681	153	929	584	1 199	7 872	442	50	144 464	1 246	1 401	4	20 343	61 889	
2010/2011	564	715	2 053	154 618	1 210	359	2 730	21 749	377	1 316	346	1 734	6 776	1 102	2 341	210 612	8 308	1 041	2 973	21 536	66 840	
2009/2010	825	468	3 212	174 653	584	868	2 029	13 020	542	1 261	1 020	1 680	4 555	1 156	1 566	252 782	8 863	1 451	3 217	34 730	77 942	
2008/2009	591	591	1 024	188 665	379	989	1 786	20 813	1 764	2 862	1 059	2 488	4 905	448	941	207 625	10 523	912	1 467	18 232	80 584	8
2007/2008	554	543	1 708	218 856	292	911	1 823	14 214	1 778	1 296	1 024	2 035	10 024	958	925	231 823	7 159	1 343	2 994	29 208	76 335	111
2006/2007	296	296		212541	413	789	1736	10352	622	2685	648	1972	3160	4564	1028	162775	6878	361	2374	27358	81600	
2005/2006	196	640		187144	525	606	1445	5579	664	2270	525	2012	3185	675	1572	75604	5869	8	127	34296	71267	
2004/2005	254	589		146798	175	390	1623	7482	1144	4844	480	3484	1960	220	1076	30131	4746		2960	25986	55600	
2003/2004	9			122 858	62	116	1 414	374	657	2 070	89	1 162	3 511	447	23	30 026	89		12	19 725	40 522	
Total	4 662	8 912	10 843	1 751 537	4 936	5 891	19 357	122 874	7 992	20 201	8 175	19 608	57 133	11 456	9 647	1 514 360	54 864	7 128	16 241	244 664	700 609	119

