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Antarctic Tourism — A Resource for Science

(Agenda item 12)
(Submitted by IAATO)

Antarctic Tourism — a Resource For Science

IAATO draws the attention of the Meeting and Parties to tourism as a resource for science. Among IAATO's objectives, is cooperation with national Antarctic programs, including support of logistics and research. A summary of collaboration during the 1996-1997 season is presented in the IAATO Report (XXIATCM/IP108).

IAATO welcomes proposals from accredited researchers with national Antarctic programs and nongovernmental organizations to support science, logistics and conservation in the Antarctic. Itineraries, operators and vessels are substantially similar from year to year, which facilitates long term planning.

Proposals can be made to individual operators or through the IAATO Secretariat:

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OFFER OF SUPPORT AS A RESOURCE FOR SCIENCE

A. Regular Transport Service to the Antarctic Peninsula

1. With more than 100 departures on 15 vessels, commercially-organized tourism provides a regular and cost-effective transport service for researchers and personnel, mostly from South America to the South Shetland Islands and western side of the Antarctic Peninsula.
2. Over 100 researchers have been carried annually over the past several seasons. A modest standard per diem of \$50 U.S. is charged to cover costs.

B. Cargo and Resupply Capability

1. A number of vessels — especially the converted Russian oceanographic research vessels — have the expertise, cranes and cargo space to contribute to resupply efforts and other needs for transport of cargo at substantial savings.
2. Vessels have carried cargo to Vernadsky Station and retrograded debris from Arctowski and Bellingshausen Stations in recent years.
3. These vessels are sometimes available for charter to science programs before or after the regular tourist season, obviating the need to pay for a charter from a distant port.

C. Ships of Opportunity for Research

1. Much science can be conducted by researchers traveling aboard tour vessels, including observational data on seabirds, seals, whales and oceanography, brief population censuses ashore and site surveys.
2. IAATO particularly welcomes proposals from researchers engaged in studies of the potential impacts of tourism activities and those who are collecting data on the reference state of visitor sites. Over the past three years, researchers with the Antarctic Site Inventory have used tour vessels as a productive transportation platform.
3. Experienced naturalist staff, many trained as researchers, can collect data following standard protocols at no cost to national Antarctic programs and Antarctic organizations. IAATO members are particularly interested in contributing to CCAMLR surveys of beached marine debris. Members have contributed navigational intelligence to the International Hydrographic Office in the past year and reported on whale and seabird sightings and transects.

D. Polar Logistics

1. Founding IAATO-member Adventure Network International is developing an initiative for the cost-effective support of science and logistics in Queen Maud Land. Polar Logistics plans a regular air service from Cape Town to this underserved sector of the Antarctic.
2. Adventure Network International provides occasional air service to King George Island for Treaty Parties.
3. ANI has also supported research at its seasonal base camp in Patriot Hills in the Ellsworth Mountains. The company has specifically solicited proposals to the Canadian research community for the full support of a researcher next season.

II. ANTARCTIC TOURISM — AN OVERVIEW

Scope, frequency and intensity

- A. Commercially organized tours have visited Antarctica every year from 1966, carrying a total of more than 75,000 people to date. The overwhelming majority (+/- 90 %) of tourism is ship-based — and the actual time spent ashore is less than 1 % than that of scientific and support personnel. In the 35-year history of regular Antarctic tourism, tour operators have established no permanent infrastructure.
- B. Visits are concentrated at ice-free coastal zones in the South Shetland Islands and Antarctic Peninsula over the five-month period from November to March. Landings via inflatable boat are of short duration (+/- 3 hours), of moderate intensity (<100 people), and of variable frequency.
- C. Some 100 commercially-organized voyages, the great majority departing from Ushuaia, are scheduled each year by IAATO members — a regular transport service from South America to the South Shetland Islands and Antarctic Peninsula. (ATTACHMENT A)
- D. Some 150 sites have been visited by tour vessels in the region, many regularly. About 20 sites receive more than 100 visits per season. (ATTACHMENT B)

III. ANTARCTIC TOURISM — IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION

Purpose and Value

1. *Political support* — tourism builds a constituency of informed ambassadors for the conservation of Antarctica and of national Antarctic science programs.
2. *Logistical Support* — tour vessels provide regular transport of personnel and supplies.

3. ***Scientific Support*** — tour vessels carry scientists engaged in research. Examples of useful research that can be conducted aboard tour vessels include seabird transects, photographic identification of whales, beach litter surveys, collection of meteorological data, and breeding censuses.
4. ***Intellectual Support*** — experienced tour operators provide detailed information on landing sites, access routes, features and other data necessary to create rational management plans.

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