

Antarctica: Tourism Curbed for the Best Interest of Global Environment

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Antarctic tourism is mainly ship-based and managed on a day-to-day basis by the industry using guidelines for behaviour designed specifically for tourist sites. Regulation comes primarily from international shipping law. There are increasing concerns about climate change, maritime transport accidents and growing tourist numbers, prompting calls for stricter governance to manage growth and risk. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties collaborate with expert organisations to govern tourism, but there are still regulatory lacunae that need attention. Initiatives such as a ban on heavier fuel oils in the Antarctic Treaty area and the imposition of a mandatory shipping code will slowly fill that gap. However, a new suggestion is offered here to tighten regulation even further: the adoption of sponsoring states for tourism operators from among Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. This scheme will introduce a strict element of environmental liability for tourist activities, with greater enforceability. It is useful to gauge the relative importance of different values that are placed on Antarctica, to advance the communication of Antarctic science as well as to facilitate decisions regarding the management of human activity, in particular, surrounding climate change. This study investigates the values ascribed to Antarctica by its researchers concerning those held by the general public. We surveyed 10 Antarctic researchers who have been in Antarctica and then compared our findings with the compiled results of previously published studies that investigated public perceptions about the importance of Antarctica. We found that its researchers most frequently valued: the Antarctic's role as a component of the Earth's climate system, its role as a science laboratory for the benefit of humanity, its role as a pristine wilderness, and as an environment for wildlife. Fewer researchers placed value on its role as a key part of the history of human exploration, as a tourist destination, or as a source of mineral resources. In general, there was congruence between researchers and the public in the values they ascribed to Antarctica, and in particular, both acknowledged its value as a critical component of Earth's climate system. Our study suggests that the intrinsic values of Antarctica's wilderness and wildlife, above and beyond its instrumental values to science, tourism and future mineral extraction, is a solid working frame for future science communication based on shared values, whereas the public expectation of Antarctica is upon its serene view and pristine environment, per se.

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