Contents

EDITORIAL Preserving the beloved places 3
IN BRIEF 4
IVALU GULDAGER Balancing sharing with caring 6
DAVID REID A double edged trip 10
LEE FOOTE Benefits of consumptive tourism 12
LUCASIE ARRAGUTAINAQ Stop playing with our food 13
ILJA LEO LANG Cruise control 14
KARL VATVIK Ecotourism at 78° north 15
JACKIE DAWSON and MARGARET JOHNSTON Marine tourism – lost opportunities and mounting risks 17
RODNEY RUSS Let’s go back to the beginning 20
TRISHA BERGMANN and STEPHANIE ALTMAN Filling regulatory gaps in responsible shipping 21
PAME Cool rules – regulating shipborne tourism 23
THE PICTURE 24

ARCTIC TOURISM: BOON OR BUST?

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Publisher:
WWF Global Arctic Programme
8th floor, 275 Slater St., Ottawa, ON, Canada K1P 5H9.
Tel: +1 613-232-8706
Fax: +1 613-232-4181
Internet: www.panda.org/arctic
ISSN 2073-980X = The Circle
Date of publication:

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Design and production:
Film & Form/Ketill Berger,
ketill.berger@filmform.no

Printed by St. Joseph Communications

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COVER: Dog sledding team.
Photo: Tommy Simonsen.

ABOVE: Watching icebergs, Qeqertarsuapq (Disko Island) Greenland
Photo: Julia Riddlington.
Preserving the beloved places

I'M OFTEN ASKED by WWF colleagues whether we should encourage travel to some of the world’s most iconic, but very often fragile places such as the Arctic.

It’s an important question to debate among ourselves and with the world. Travel leaves footprints, not the least of which are the greenhouse gas emissions from air travel. The idea that wild places like the Arctic would be better off if we discouraged people from visiting them must be taken seriously.

But there is conservation value in allowing tourist access to Arctic wilderness and wildlife. In fact, it is imperative to a successful conservation strategy, as witnessed by protected gems such as Greenland’s Illulisat Icefjord, added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2004. Contributor Ivalu Guldager addresses the need to balance tourism with preservation, protection and respect for local communities.

But who defines reasonable access? When does it become exploitative or damaging? Ilya Leo Lang speaks for the Expedition Cruise industry in arguing for collaboration between Indigenous populations, industry, government, conservationists and visitors. Maybe it’s time to dial it back, as long-time tour operator Rodney Russ urges. If you’re on a ship boasting spas and cabarets, is the dialogue about conservation or boosting revenues?

Researchers and scientists underscore that stricter environmental regulations are needed because of the huge gaps in ecological protection. But eco-tour leader David Reid says it’s difficult to deliver a consistent product when each polar country has different rules, regulations, permits and laws. “As an industry we have to be aware that what we touch, we change,” he writes.

When I ask colleagues what sparked their interest in conservation, invariably their response – and mine too – is inspirational travel: the time our family piled into the station wagon to see national parks; hiking with my uncle to fly-fish at his favorite trout stream; field trips to collect plant specimens; post-college shoestring travels abroad. Memories like this were the common, formative experience I recently shared with fellow travelers as we watched polar bears pacing the snow, waiting for Hudson Bay to freeze so they could venture out on the ice and catch their first meal since spring. Looking into the eyes of one of these magnificent threatened animals was thrilling in the moment, but it was also energizing as we returned home to continue our work helping to conserve the world’s wildlife and its nurturing environment.

The crucial balance between tourism and resource protection in the Arctic and other sensitive environments depends in large part in recognizing conservation is inextricably linked to education and sustainable economic benefits for local communities. I agree intelligent, sensitively-conducted tourism to and around protected areas is a powerful, long-term alternative to short-term destructive and exploitative forms of development. Tourism is one of the tools in WWF’s Global Arctic Programme conservation toolbox. We brought together communities, tour operators and outfitters, tourism associations, governments, scientists and local conservation groups to create and advance the first Arctic-specific tourism principles and codes of conduct.

One of the wisest observations about travel I know comes from the great writer Jan Morris. “If you love someplace hotly enough, consciously, with care,” she wrote, “it becomes yours by symbiosis, irrevocably.” There’s a lot packed into that statement. The responsibility and stewardship, the care, that comes from resonating with a place, its environment, its people. The need to combine passion for a place with consciousness of its reality and needs. But in the end, we know it’s hard to conduct a love affair from a distance. We have to go to meet the beloved place. ○

Jim Sano is WWF US Vice President for Travel, Tourism and Conservation
**New guidelines minimize spread of non-native species**

**THE ASSOCIATION** of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators has published a new biosecurity guideline to minimize the risk of introducing non-native species to the polar region.

Seeds, insects and micro-organisms typically spread via sea currents, wind, drift-wood, migrating birds and other natural means. Research from the University of Tromsø indicates these natural processes occur only occasionally. It says non-native species are far more likely to be transported by human activities such as visitors to the Arctic. Researchers also found the introduction of non-native species represents one of the main threats to biodiversity globally due to the potential for serious negative impacts to the natural environment.

The biosecurity guideline offers practical advice to Arctic travelers such as “examine and clean clothes, footwear, and bags thoroughly before leaving home” and “if you notice organic matter on boots, clothing or gear, make sure to clean it off”. The guidelines are mandatory for all AECO members.

**Ocean acidification likely to undermine Arctic food web**

**A SCIENTIFIC TEAM** working with the Catlin Arctic Survey has published results from its investigation into the effects of ocean acidification on some key species near the bottom of the Arctic food web. Tiny shrimp-like creatures called copepods provide a vast amount of the energy input to the Arctic marine food web, feeding fish, seals, whales and polar bears. The team took samples of the tiny animals through holes drilled in the Arctic ice ten kilometres off Ellef Ringnes Island in the Canadian High Arctic. Dr. Ceri Lewis says, “Our study found that some marine animals may not be able to survive the impact of ocean acidification, particularly the early-life stages. This unique insight into how marine life will respond to future changes in the oceans has implications that
Defusing polar bear attacks

SVALBARD, NORWAY, is one of the most accessible places in the world for polar bear tourism. But that accessibility can come with a price if encounters between people and bears turn fatal.

Pepper spray – an urban tool for self defence – could also make one of the world’s most remote destinations safer for polar bears and people.

Currently, people venturing into polar bear territory on Svalbard are limited mainly to flares as a deterrent, and firearms for self-defense at close range. If an approaching polar bear is not frightened off by noise or flares, it will likely be shot. A recent study found that in some circumstances, pepper spray can be a safe and highly effective alternative to killing the bear. Expanding the range of deterrent tools to include the non-lethal spray could keep both polar bears and people safer, while conditioning the bears to avoid humans in the future.


Thinning permafrost may trigger catastrophic climate change

RAPID THAWING of the Arctic could trigger a catastrophic “economic time-bomb” that would cost trillions of dollars and undermine the global financial system according to a group of economists and polar scientists. The Guardian Weekly reports that governments and industry have expected widespread Arctic warming in the past 20 years to be an economic boon, allowing the exploitation of new gas and oilfields and enable faster shipping routes between Europe and Asia. Researchers now say a single giant “pulse” of methane released by thawing permafrost beneath the Siberian sea “could come with a $60 trillion global price tag.” Their paper is published in the journal Nature.
Balancing sharing with caring

Ilulissat Icefjord is located near the city of Ilulissat in northwestern Greenland, 250 km north of the Arctic Circle. Today Ilulissat is a modern society. In recent years the city experienced a substantial population increase to approximately 5000 people making it the third largest city in Greenland. It is a centre of administration, education, fishing, and tourism. IVALU GULDAGER writes about the need to protect a natural phenomenon like the icefjord while welcoming an influx of visitors.

IN 2004, ILULISSAT ICEFJORD was added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) World Heritage List which “includes 962 properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which the World Heritage Committee considers having outstanding universal value.” The list includes sites such as the Grand Canyon, the Egyptian Pyramids, and the Great Wall of China.

Upon visiting Ilulissat Icefjord, one
cannot reasonably argue against its inclusion on this prestigious list. Not only is it a unique site of pristine natural beauty, it is also a glaciological paradise as the most researched and most productive glacier in the world. Scientists and researchers have been collecting data from the area for over 150 years.

The Icefjord is also Greenland’s biggest tourist magnet attracting approximately 35,000 tourists per year and the city of Ilulissat’s main attraction with the majority of tourist activities somehow related to the Icefjord. The most common activity is simply sightseeing the Icefjord on foot.
Unless you take a guided tour this is completely free of charge.

The Ilulissat Icefjord Office is making a great effort to protect the area and the tourists visiting the Icefjord. It is a delicate balance since signage and development in this world heritage destination does have a visual impact and alters the original appearance of the site. But it also helps to inform people about the need to preserve the area – particularly the delicate arctic vegetation – from so much wear and tear caused by the many tourists sightseeing the area. For this purpose the Icefjord Office had a wooden boardwalk installed in the most frequently-visited sections. This helps protect the vegetation and the tourists who could trip over rocks or slip in muddy areas.

Because Ilulissat Icefjord is a protected UNESCO World Heritage Site, some rules and legislation are required and necessary. The legislation is aimed at preserving the area while lessening the impact on the residents’ daily living and traditional use of the area for things like hunting, berry picking and routine outdoor activities. But regarding the physical grounds of the protected area, some contradicting interests are in play. The protected areas are close to the outskirts of Ilulissat, and have a stunning scenic beauty. Therefore some parties are keen to build houses and tourist facilities in the protected area. This is one of the few “controversial” parts of the Icefjord’s status as a protected area.

The Ilulissat Icefjord Office recently produced a guide (www.kangia.gl) to the Icefjord which is available in Greenlandic, English, German and Danish. The aim is to educate the visitors about both the history and safety regulations concerning the Icefjord so that they will get the most out of their visit while having as little negative impact as possible on this treasured world heritage site.
Taking care of the Icefjord

The World Heritage Area Ilulissat Icefjord has more visitors than any other area in Greenland. The vast majority go to see a relatively small part of the World Heritage Area. This requires a focus on responsible behaviour while visiting the area.

- Do not litter – not even toilet paper. Everything needs to be returned to the city, since decomposition of biodegradable matter is extremely slow in the Arctic Region.
- Use the marked trails, as far as possible.
- Respect the archaeological areas.
- Do not walk on ruins or graves, and stay on the walking bridge in Sermermiut.
- Show consideration to the other visitors – especially those whose walking might be impeded.
- Ask permission before you photograph people.
- If you go for a walk or ski in the dog sledge tracks, you should constantly be aware of passing dog sledges. When dog sledges pass by, you should keep considerable distance from the tracks.
- The Arctic landscape is vulnerable. Do not pick flowers or destroy the plants in the area in any other way.
- Respect the fact that your pilot or guide keeps a safe distance from the mountains and animals. The safety distance from icebergs should be a minimum of ten times the height of the iceberg above the water level.
- Use your common sense and do not put your life at risk – if in doubt, turn back.
- In order to follow up on any problems, Ilulissat Icefjord Office would like to hear from you in case you experience irresponsible behaviour in the World Heritage Area.

Consider the Environment when You Travel

The World Heritage Area Ilulissat Icefjord is often used as an example of the consequences of global warming. We recommend that you use the least intrusive type of transport when you visit the World Heritage Area, and that you consider the possibility of using the various airlines’ offers of CO₂ neutralizing your trips to and from Greenland.
A double edged trip

People are drawn to the Arctic because it represents a piece of our planet that is sparsely populated and relatively untouched. Now it’s also easy to get to. Visiting the modern Arctic no longer requires an expedition. Today, tourists can drive, fly, ski, travel by luxury cruise ship or bus and even bike there if they wish to. DAVID REID says visitors and tour organizers need to consider the impact they have on the place they’ve come to experience.

As an industry we have to be aware that what we touch, we change. Given the vast area encompassed by the Arctic, it is difficult to create a consistent quality of the product we deliver. Each polar country has different rules, regulations, permits and laws. There are good operators and there are bad. In most cases, the operators decide which communities to visit and how these tours will be scheduled, designed and run. In the best scenarios, communities invite the operators to set up the tours and great effort is made to involve residents in the planning and organising of events and activities. Economic benefit is maximised and the tour is conducted with respect and understanding. In the worst cases, communities are not consulted and are treated with indifference, disrespect and arrogance.

Do small coastal villages like it when their population is immediately doubled by the fleeting visit of a cruise ship? That’s a conversation worth having. There are obvious economic benefits: local guiding and interpretive jobs for a few hours; the selling of locally produced arts and crafts; and cultural performances. Each village has the power, freedom and ability to say no, but it’s a difficult balancing act. It’s hard to see how such villages can remain the same following these visits, if in fact they want to stay the same.

Many tourists visit the Arctic to see and experience the incredible, diverse wildlife there – the “big five” – polar bears, bowhead whales, narwhals, belugas and walrus. The relationship Indigenous peoples have with these animals is very different from someone just looking for a souvenir snapshot. The former have a great understanding, appreciation and respect for these animals which are usually also a vital food source.

Harassing wildlife is illegal. While such practices are not commonplace or widespread, they do occur.

One extreme example of this is attaching fishing line to a baby seal’s flipper so that the polar bear being filmed will stand a better chance of catching it. Fishing line is difficult to see and isn’t easily picked up by cameras.

Polar bears have also been pushed by guides on snowmobiles towards tourists safe and sound in their camp. This is extremely stressful for the bears who are at risk of overheating from the unnecessary exertion and warmer spring temperatures. Polar bears are naturally curious and very intelligent. Those two factors alone will sometimes get the bear injured or sometimes killed by an inexperienced operator.

In many instances, and for the most part, tour operators are self-regulated. We all have to appreciate just how fortunate we are to work and operate in such a unique and precious environment. It is essential that we instil in our guests that same sense of gratitude and appreciation.

Regardless of where we are from and why we travel to or within the Arctic, we are all responsible for ensuring laws are respected and enforced. We are guests in the land that is home to people and animals, and we should act accordingly.
Knowing and showing

Tourism can be destructive, bringing global influences to remote cultures. But it can also reinforce cultures. ÅGE HAMMEKEN is a hunter and guide in Ittoqqortoormiit, the most isolated community in Greenland. He began guiding tourists in 2003 through Nanu Travel, a small locally-owned tourist office and outfitter. He spoke with Nanu Travel’s Nanna Anike Nikolajsen about tourism in his home town.

“I COME FROM A HUNTER FAMILY, so I started learning my hunting skills as a child,” Åge says. “I remember being on a dog sled as a baby and I probably learned to drive a dog sled at age seven.” By the age of 12, he had his own team of dogs and at 17 became a full time hunter. Now 25 years old, Åge Hammeken has 18 years of high Arctic wilderness dog driving experience.

“As a hunter you have some months where there is plenty of walrus, seal, polar bear or narwhal to hunt. In the other months it can be difficult,” he says. The reality is that it is getting harder and harder for young families to live off the proceeds of hunting. In Ittoqqortoormiit, the meat has almost been exclusively for local consumption but in the past there were opportunities to sell by-products such as skins to Europe. With changing laws and consumer attitudes, the markets for these by-products have disappeared, leaving traditional hunters with meat in their stomachs but little opportunity to earn cash to buy modern necessities like electricity and toilet paper.

One way hunters can supplement their income is to work as guides using their sled dogs in winter and boats in summer.

“If I couldn’t be a tourist guide I probably couldn’t be a full time hunter at all,” Åge says. “Tourism helps me to continue hunting like my ancestors.” Employment opportunities in remote towns like Ittoqqortoormiit are limited so even a small number of tourists creates jobs and has a positive economic impact on the community. When hiring local dog drivers, tourists are also helping to save the sled dog population which has dropped by 70 per cent in Ittoqqortoormiit over the past 10 years.

For hunters like Åge, dog sledding is not a show put on for tourists. It is a part of their identity and their cultural heritage. His expertise has been acquired since childhood, and isn’t something that can be gleaned from Google maps or other modern technologies.

“I learned these skills from my family. I can see when there is a storm coming up even though the weather is sunny and calm at present. I know Liverpool Land, Jameson Land and the Scoresby Sound fjord system,” he says. “Maybe that’s why people like going with me, because even though they are in the wilderness they are travelling with someone who grew up here and knows how to handle Arctic storms and polar bears, for example.”

For tourists, the opportunity to travel with local hunters with traditional skills is not just a novelty or an interesting story to tell when they return home. It is also a safe way to experience the Arctic wilderness.

While Arctic tourism may have increased globally, few tourists visit Ittoqqortoormiit even though it is a stunningly rugged location with people rich in resiliency and friendliness. Åge urges southerners, “please come and see our beautiful nature and wild animals.” He says there is value in the showing and that without the economic support of tourism, the traditional skills and the sled dogs that go along with life in the untameable Arctic hang in the balance.
Benefits of consumptive tourism

Consumptive tourism is any activity where resources are extracted from the environment in ways that may or may not be renewable. It is typically applied to sport hunting or fishing, although berry picking, rock collecting and flower pressing are all examples of consumptive or extractive tourism. But as LEE FOOTE explains, consumptive tourism is not all bad.

ALL FORMS OF OUTDOOR TOURISM come with costs attached. “Non-consumptive” tourism such as animal viewing, hiking and photography in protected areas can cause vehicle collisions or human encounters that lead to animals being destroyed – a result akin to a hunter killing an animal for home consumption. In many ways, gold panning is more permanent than a hunter or fisherman sustainably harvesting something that replenishes itself annually. Politically, one of the difficulties with sport hunting is the public optics. It is easy to criticize trophy hunters or sport hunters. Their numbers are low and they are mostly from upper income brackets, which invites the implication that they are elitists. Conversely, it is very difficult from a political correctness stance to criticize Indigenous hunting. However, if one does a more careful and dispassionate inspection of the repercussions of tourist hunts, the benefits to sustainable livelihoods (guides and communities) often outweigh any slight negative consequences. For instance a few hundred bull caribou killed by sport hunters/tourists each year would likely have a lower ecological impact than a subsistence harvest that includes cows and calves.

LEE FOOTE is a resource ecologist and Professor of Conservation Biology at the University of Alberta, Canada.

Angling in Sisimiut, Greenland, Arctic char.
Stop playing with our food

FOR CENTURIES, Inuit have managed wildlife with respect and feelings, not by numbers.

We have a lot respect towards all wildlife, big or small. We kill with respect, too. Our primary goal is to make sure they don’t suffer and so we kill any animal that we catch right away.

We see sport fishermen on TV, laughing while reeling in fish, trying to make the fish jump in the air, taking their time to land it so they can talk about the fish. When they do finally land the fish, they remove the hook with a tool. The mouth of the fish is wounded but it is still alive, so they return the fish to the water. This is what the non-Inuit call “catch and release.” But how long will it take for the wound to heal? Will the fish be able to eat with a wounded mouth, or will the wound get infected? Will the fish survive or is this type of sport fishing what we Inuit call “playing with your food”?

In the name of research, whales have been poked to make a hole so half inch bolts can be attached to them to carry transmitters on their backs. Is this showing respect to the whale? Would a person want to be treated this way?

Hunting is not a sport for Inuit. It is a way of life. A hunter is thinking about providing food for his family and his community. That’s why there is no word in Inuktitut for overharvesting. We have never needed one. We only take what we need to survive.

IT IS EASY TO CRITICIZE TROPHY HUNTERS OR SPORT HUNTERS

of culturally appropriate activities such as extended dog sledding, tracking, mentoring young Inuit hunters, monitoring habitat changes, monitoring bear behavior and ecology, hide preparation, meat processing and cultural exchange between northerners and southerners.

Laws restricting Inuit and sport hunting largely stem from Canada’s Federal Government and others far-removed and insulated from harsh northern realities. The term “cultural imperialism” is sometimes used to describe such outside rule-making that unravels lifestyles that have persisted for centuries. Inuit experience a clear nutritional and economic hardship when heavy-handed hunting regulations separate them from their ancestor’s legacy of wild-harvested food, clothing materials and a profound attachment to their environment. Telling Inuit hunters to adjust traditional hunting and use of bowhead whale, caribou, waterfowl, walrus and polar bears is akin to telling southerners to put restrictions on eating pigs, cattle, chickens and fish.
Cruise control

Is sustainable, safe and responsible Arctic cruise tourism possible? ILJA LEO LANG says yes, but that it will require the industry to cooperate and focus efforts on protecting the environment, safety at sea, and respecting local cultures and cultural artifacts.

THE NORWEGIAN, GREENLANDIC and Canadian governments have all made tourism a target for commercial development in the Arctic. At the same time the subject of Arctic cruise tourism is receiving more media attention than ever, although it is not always accurate.

The media often report that there is a ‘dramatic growth’ or ‘boom’ in Arctic cruise tourism. In fact, in Greenland the numbers of cruise passengers have been relatively stable for the past five years at about 25,000 to 30,000 passengers annually. In Canada this number has been decreasing since a peak in 2008 to less than 3,000 cruise passengers per year. In Svalbard there has been a recent rise in passenger numbers although not because of an increase in vessels as there are fewer cruise ships arriving in Svalbard, but because of a few, very large vessels going to Svalbard primarily to visit Longyearbyen.

The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) is an international organization for the expedition cruise industry, dedicated to responsible, environmentally friendly and safe tourism in the Arctic. It has a comprehensive set of guidelines for operators in the Arctic who have a history of employing practices and procedures that are substantially more protective of the environment, local cultures and cultural remains than is required by regulations. At AECO’s annual meeting and general assembly, members coordinate and implement innovative technologies and measures to reduce the environmental impact of cruising. These measures – which are all industry standards that go beyond legal legislation – have been made mandatory by AECO’s members.

AECO members have also been at the forefront in educating tourists on how to behave in Arctic communities and in the development of sound cultural standards for cruise operations in the Arctic. AECO members work with passengers in order to ensure their impact on local communities is positive. AECO visitors are asked to contribute to local communities by purchasing certified crafts and souvenirs, not to pick flowers, take stones or build cairns and to ask the locals before taking photos. AECO Executive Director Frigg Jørgensen says, “basic measures in regard to providing passengers and guests with a correct code of conduct are vital for success in small communities.”

For AECO, tourism, communication, and research go hand in hand. One example of this is AECO’s involvement with the Clean-Up Svalbard Campaign in which cruise tourists contributed to cleaning tons of sea-transported garbage from beaches around the archipelago. Another example is the ongoing collaboration between AECO and researchers at numerous universities. AECO recently completed a biosecurity guideline for passengers with measures about the cleaning of clothes and washing of boots in order to prevent seeds and microorganisms from spreading throughout the Arctic.

Many individuals, governments, private companies and organizations share the common goal of making sure the Arctic is used in a sustainable way. All want to protect and preserve this pristine area for the future. Not only is sustainable Arctic cruise tourism possible, it is a necessity. It is vital that as many sectors as possible come together and cooperate in implementing innovative measures and technologies to reduce the environmental impact of all activities in the Arctic. Arctic cruise tourism can be a driver for this.

Read more about AECO’s guidelines for Arctic operations at: http://www.aeco.no/guidelines

ILJA LEO LANG is a project manager with the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators

NOT ONLY IS SUSTAINABLE ARCTIC CRUISE TOURISM POSSIBLE, IT IS A NECESSITY

14 The Circle 1.2014
Ecotourism at 78° north

Ecotourism actively contributes to nature and culture conservation, is aware of its effects on the environment and always practices a precautionary attitude. It is run as sustainably as possible, constantly balancing ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations. It offers memorable experiences and creates meeting places that give employees and guests insight into local culture, community and environment. But KARL VÅTVIK says the increase in Arctic tourism threatens these principles.

WHEN I CAME TO SVALBARD in 1973 we only had to go 5 to 10 km outside the community to be in the wilderness. In 2013, we have to go 100 km to get the same experience and not because tourists demand it. Snowmobile excursions to nearby areas very soon become boring for the guides. When it’s boring for them they assume it’s boring for their guests so they go further afield, making forays into new areas and after some years the nearby wilderness is lost. We easily forget that the visitors are already in the wilderness when they arrive.

Simply going outside of the community away from the lights of civilisation can be an exciting experience for most people. Svalbard, where we live and work, has an environmental law specifically aimed at protecting the pristine conditions in
the high Arctic, The Svalbard Environmental Act. Since April 2007, visitors must also pay 150 Norwegian krone to the Svalbard environmental protection fund.

However, this law isn’t very effective if the authorities aren’t aware of their responsibility to enforce it. The law specifically promotes eco-friendly transport and activities, but when that guideline isn’t upheld, the result is increased motorized transportation that makes the most money in the shortest time possible. Visitors don’t even ask for this, but they are given activities using motor vehicles because it’s the easiest way to entertain them and very lucrative for the tour operator. The authorities have forbidden tourism using helicopters and other aircraft, so these restrictions work in the air, but so far not too well on the ground.

Because of this lack of support from the authorities, ecotourism companies have very limited opportunities to succeed and grow strong enough to compete with the motorized tourism industry that has bigger resources. If the ecotourism industry is going to succeed, the legislators, law enforcers and other authorities have to give preferences and incentives to eco-friendly activities.

Governments have to make laws and guidelines to guide tourism to areas that can withstand the wear from increased human traffic and in a way that won’t harm the environment. The big travel agencies have to be aware of their responsibilities and undertake activities that may not initially be as profitable, but which in the long term will make tourism sustainable.

We have seen what happens when some tour operators opt to make as much money as possible in the shortest time possible with little regard for the environment.

For several years, WWF partnered with operators, communities and governments to develop core ideas on how Arctic tourism could respect conservation and communities. These guidelines are one of the results of that work.

1. Make Tourism and Conservation Compatible Like any other use of the environment, tourism should be compatible with and a part of international, national, regional, and local conservation plans.

2. Support the Preservation of Wilderness and Biodiversity Vast areas of wilderness without roads or other traces of development are a unique characteristic of the Arctic. These areas are both environmentally valuable and one of the main reasons why tourists come to the Arctic.

3. Use Natural Resources in Sustainable Way Conservation and the use of natural resources in a sustainable way are essential to the long-term health of the environment. Undeveloped areas in the Arctic are a non-renewable resource - once developed, it is impossible to return them to their original state.

4. Minimise Consumption, Waste and Pollution Reducing pollution and consumption also reduces environmental damage. This improves the tourism experience, and reduces the high cost of cleaning up the environment.

5. Respect Local Cultures Tourism should not change the lifestyles of peoples and communities unless they want it to do so.

6. Respect Historic and Scientific Sites Archaeological, historic, prehistoric and scientific sites and remains are important to local heritage and to science. Disturbing them diminishes their value and is often illegal.

7. Arctic Communities Should Benefit from Tourism Local involvement in the planning of tourism helps to ensure that tourism addresses environmental and cultural concerns. This should maximise benefits and minimise damage to communities. It should also enhance the quality of the tourism experience.

8. Trained Staff Are the Key to Responsible Tourism Staff education and training should integrate environmental, cultural, social, and legal issues. This type of training increases the quality of tourism. Staff should be role models for tourists.

9. Make Your Trip an Opportunity to Learn About the Arctic When tourists learn about communities and the environment, tourism provides the most benefits for all concerned and does the least damage. Knowledge and a positive experience enable tourists to act as ambassadors for Arctic environmental protection.

10. Follow Safety Rules The Arctic can be a treacherous environment and everyone involved in Arctic tourism needs to exercise caution and follow safety rules and practices. Failure to do so can result in serious injury and costly rescue or medical intervention that burdens communities.
Marine tourism in Arctic Canada - lost opportunities and mounting risks

Expedition cruise ships and smaller pleasure craft vessels such as private yachts are showing up in increasing numbers throughout the Arctic. In Canada’s far north, commercial cruise ship itineraries have more than doubled since 2005 while the number of yachts and other small vessels has increased by over 400 per cent. The ships may bring an influx of tourist dollars and other benefits to Arctic communities, but Canadian researchers Jackie Dawson & Margaret Johnston say the benefits are limited, and may be outweighed by the negative impacts of cruise tourism.

Smaller vessels were rarely seen in Canadian Arctic waters a decade ago and seldom attempted travel through a now popular route along the fabled Northwest Passage. The expansion in marine tourism activities is in large part due to climate change and the resulting increase in maritime access due to a decrease in sea ice extent and thickness. Other factors include the greater availability of ice-strengthened vessels, a global demand for remote ‘last-frontier’ tourism experiences, the unique and iconic landscapes and wildlife on offer, and a growing base of retired baby boomers with the means and propensity for travel.

The emergence of a more stable Arctic cruise economy has created a sense of excitement among local residents, who believe the industry could bring income and opportunities to showcase local culture and traditions. Despite this excitement, there is also recognition that cruise tourists and the industry itself can present significant difficulties for communities, the environment, and the region. Some stakeholders feel it’s just a matter of time before we have a major human or environmental disaster in Arctic Canada while others say we are promoting economic development but...
not preparing for its consequences.

The reality is that the cruise sector brings limited financial benefits to the region. Most expenditures are made on the ship itself or during transportation to the embarkation port and not within local communities. Simultaneously, the risks of travel in the region remain high and have increased since the widespread improvements in access to the region. This is partly because multi-year ice that in the past manifested as large ice islands that were easy to see and navigate around is now more broken causing an increase in icebergs, creating more hazardous navigational conditions than seen previously. The year to year variability in ice extent adds to the unpredictability of conditions. In addition, the region remains poorly charted and search and rescue response times reflect the vast distances involved. Further, the potential environmental repercussions of an incident in the region are significantly higher because the ecosystem is sensitive and biodiversity is limited compared to the south. As one stakeholder stated, “the worst possible Arctic shipping disaster I can imagine right now would be the sinking of a cruise ship.”

Despite concerns around tourism vessel management, regulatory and monitoring attention is focused on the larger economic ships used, for example, in cargo transfer resource exploitation. However, marine tourism vessels are the fastest growing maritime vessel type in the Canadian Arctic and pose important operational challenges that should encourage greater attention from policy makers and regulators in considering how to best support and monitor the sector. Tourism vessels do not travel on a direct route through an area to a destination; rather the purpose is to view landscapes at close range, often landing passengers at sites so that they may experience the Arctic first-hand. This involves accessing shore locations, seeking wildlife and ice, venturing into new, different or challenging and sometimes uncharted waters, and interacting with local people. These specific characteristics and requirements of tourism shipping set it apart from industrial shipping in ways that have significance for governance and that present challenges to sustainability. In addition, the Canadian government should be increasingly concerned about the costs of search and rescue operations that will undoubtedly rise with the increasing number of tourists venturing into Arctic waters.

There is a significant need for improved policy, regulation as well as industry support if the Canadian Arctic is to benefit from the potential opportunities cruise tourism has for the region and if risks are to be mitigated to an acceptable level. Numerous practical strategies have been identified at community, territorial and federal levels that have the potential to support efforts underway at these various scales.

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to develop and manage tourism. For example, codes of conduct for visitors to remote Inuit communities and for viewing unique Arctic wildlife should be developed, as should a set of site guidelines for sensitive shore locations and at places rich in cultural heritage. Both of these management strategies (i.e. codes of conduct & site guidelines) are commonly used to regulate tourism in other Arctic regions but are noticeably absent in Arctic Canada. In addition, communities need to do a better job coordinating the content in cultural performances offered so that visitors experience a range of Inuit traditions and not just a repeat at every stop. Communities and regional tourism authorities would benefit from more advanced notice of ship itineraries and better communication in general so they have time to prepare for visitors. And finally the industry itself could be better supported through a more streamlined permitting procedure and the development of operational guidelines that outline a single point of regulatory contact.

More information on the concerns about cruise ship activity and possible strategies to manage the sector are available at www.espg.ca and www.arctictourismandclimate.lakeheadu.ca/
Let’s go back to the beginning

The term “Expedition Cruising” has become synonymous with “responsible travel”—small groups, high educational content, low impact, and the stated goal of creating ambassadors for conservation. Its origins are deeply rooted in those ideals and some of the individuals who formed the original companies and promoted this type of cruising were, and still are, passionate conservationists. But Rodney Russ says it is delusional to assume every company advertising “Expedition Cruises” embodies and practises conservation values.

The Expedition Cruise industry is dynamic and evolving and has often been a market leader pushing travel and geographical boundaries. Cost and lack of suitable vessels initially kept the industry small. That changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990’s when many of its purpose-built expedition vessels became available for commercial enterprise. Expedition companies no longer needed large amounts of capital to operate as they could charter (or subcharter) these vessels. New itineraries proliferated, many of them based around an individual’s passion for and knowledge of a specific area or region. Often these itineraries aimed to raise awareness of an ecological problem and support for a conservation cause.

Like most things, ships have “best before” dates. The Soviet vessels are not going to last forever, nor are the individuals who inspired, pioneered and usually led these new itineraries. The fledgling industry spawned and encouraged the next generation of guides and leaders who are no less knowledgeable and passionate, but the new generation of “expedition” ships – of which there is an increasing number – are considerably larger and carry two or even three times the number of passengers of the original expedition vessels. These vessels are way beyond the budgets of individuals. The design and promotion of itineraries has moved from the kitchen table to the board room where talk is more about profit and loss than conservation. There has also been a subtle change in marketing; in an attempt to attract customers (expedition members!), companies are promoting the attributes of their various vessels such as spas, cabarets and concerts more than the destinations. These changes in the expedition industry have not gone unnoticed by government agencies whose responsibility it is to manage these regions. Genuine concerns have been raised over the impact of the increasing number of vessels and people. One response – Spitsbergen for example – has been to simply close areas to tourism. Companies are blaming governments and conservation agencies, while governments and conservation agencies are blaming the industry. Sadly, it is conservation that loses out.

It is time for a re-evaluation. The “Expedition Cruise” industry needs to accept that it has evolved into something quite different from those early ventures. It is now doubtful that the majority of companies advertising this style of travel are delivering, or are even capable of delivering, the conservation and advocacy outcomes the industry was founded on. Many of the vessels...
Filling regulatory gaps in responsible shipping

While the Arctic Council looks at guidelines for tourism, another international organization is looking at rules for all Arctic shipping. Trisha Bergmann and Stephanie Altman outline the expected impact of these new rules, and the gaps in ecological protection they are expected to leave.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the United Nations agency charged with shipping safety and preventing pollution from ships. Because of the increasing volume of ship traffic in the Arctic and the need to provide protection to ships, their crew and the Arctic and Antarctic environment, the IMO is developing a comprehensive Polar Code to regulate shipping around the poles.

Once completed, this International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters will govern all aspects of Arctic shipping including safety, crewing, navigation, communications, voyage planning, and environmental protection. It will have binding force through amendments to existing IMO Conventions, including the International Conventions for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), and on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

The draft Code includes several key regulations intended to protect and preserve polar marine ecosystems from the impacts of international shipping. These include: a ban on the discharge of oily wastes and noxious liquid substances with certain exceptions; heightened regulations for the discharge of garbage and sewage; and enhanced voyage planning that considers local ecology and wildlife. Under current regulations, the discharge of oily wastes and noxious liquid substances is banned in the Antarctic and permitted under certain conditions in the Arctic. The Polar Code will extend these crucial protections to the Arctic by banning the discharge of oil and oily mixtures and noxious liquid substances, with certain exceptions. However, it is likely these provisions will not enter into effect until adequate port reception facilities are provided. Additional measures, including enhanced planning and increased crew training, will serve to decrease the likelihood of an accidental spill of these types of waste. Given the lack of response infrastructure and resources for cleanup and mitigation of accidental spills, a spill in Arctic waters could be devastating to the fragile ecosystem.

Governments and conservation agencies, on the other hand, need to recognise that there is value in allowing people to see and experience Arctic wilderness and wildlife. Controlled access is imperative to a successful conservation strategy. Conservation grows out of the community’s desire to see the environment protected and preserved. Successful politicians and managers listen and respond to local, national and international communities. They don’t impose conservation values; they empower and support communities to make them happen.

The answer does not lie with governments exercising their powers to close areas and restrict access or with the industry pretending that all the companies advertising “Expedition Cruises” are capable of delivering tangible conservation outcomes. The answer lies, I believe, in developing meaningful long-term partnerships between “Expedition Cruise” operators who genuinely promote and practise conservation values and the relevant government agencies to create win/win situations. Tourism has contributed much to the conservation of the Arctic region and it still can, even more than in the past if managed well. It will take people with vision and courage. Value judgements will have to be made, criticisms will be levelled and allegations made, but to do anything less will significantly reduce the opportunity to protect the region for future generations to enjoy.

A SPILL IN ARCTIC WATERS COULD BE DEVASTATING
As currently drafted, the Polar Code will include enhanced regulations prohibiting the discharge of sewage from ships onto or near large ice masses or in ice-covered waters. Coastal areas and the ice edge include fragile ecosystems that could easily become unbalanced by organic ship waste. Additionally, the frigid conditions in the Arctic hinder the ecosystem’s ability to break down and process organic matter. Therefore, certain ship classes will be required to install approved sewage treatment systems onboard. Although there is a global ban on the discharge of garbage generated by ships into the sea, there are several exceptions that allow the discharge of food wastes, cargo residues, animal carcasses, and certain cleaning agents. Similar to regulations for sewage, the Polar Code will prohibit dumping garbage onto or near ice or ice-covered waters to protect important, coastal environments. Comparable restrictions are already in place in the Antarctic; the Polar Code simply extends them to the Arctic. Similarly the Code will extend the Antarctic ban on the discharge of animal carcasses to the Arctic.

Current IMO voluntary guidelines assist mariners with appropriate voyage planning including recommendations for operating in remote areas and minimizing ship strikes with cetaceans. The Polar Code will provide more specific guidance regarding the expected environmental conditions along ships’ anticipated routes, proximity of search and rescue capabilities, availability of waste reception facilities, and key ecological areas that are important for marine mammals and local, Indigenous communities.

Developing the IMO Polar Code has been useful in illuminating the protections needed to ensure polar shipping is appropriately managed to increase maritime safety while limiting pollution and degradation of the Arctic and Antarctic. The proposed environmental provisions, however, are a modest step towards providing these necessary protections. The myriad exemptions, exceptions, and implementation delays anticipated in the environmental sections of the Code weaken its efficacy. Discussions are still underway at the IMO to consider regulations to address the effects of black carbon emissions from international shipping on the Arctic, the use or carriage of heavy grade fuel oils in the Arctic, underwater noise, and ballast water. It is unknown whether State parties to IMO Conventions will act in a timely fashion or allow for any regulations to address these or other important issues threatening the environmental landscape of the Arctic. Still other issues, such as the regulation of grey water discharges have not yet been considered at the IMO—globally or in polar waters. It is critically important that substantive discussions on these and other topics continue within the international community. Collaborative research programs and open sharing of data and products will pave the way to the most effective, appropriate regulations for outstanding issues that are critical to preserving the fragile polar marine environments from international shipping.

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The views expressed are theirs, and do not necessarily reflect those of NOAA, the Dept. of Commerce, or any other US Government agency.
Cool rules – regulating shipborne tourism

Changing environmental conditions, advances in transport technology and infrastructure, and a growing market demand for ‘remote destination’ travel are contributing to a rapid growth in tourism across the Arctic. Tourism in this region has become an increasingly significant industry for visitor and resident alike, providing the potential for a range of educational and economic benefits. If it is not properly managed, the industry can also import a range of unintentional adverse impacts on environments, cultures and communities. Representatives of an Arctic Council working group bring us up to date on its effort to regulate the industry.

ONE OF SIX ARCTIC COUNCIL working groups, the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) has long recognized the complexity of issues that face the Arctic as tourists are drawn to the region in growing numbers. Of particular importance to PAME is Arctic shipborne tourism – tourism activities facilitated by or related to vessel operations and the primary method of mass tourism in the Arctic. Depending upon the nature of the operation – large open water cruise ships, smaller expedition-style vessels, or personal yachts and pleasure craft – and its location, this activity can result in a variety of positive and negative impacts on surrounding environments and local communities.

Some regulatory measures, such as equipment, crewing, and operational elements of shipborne tourism fall within the responsibility of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the specialized UN agency overseeing ship safety, security, and pollution prevention. Polar Code negotiations are well underway within the IMO (including chapters on safety and environmental measures for certain vessels operating within Polar Regions).

The IMO measures are not going to cover all aspects of cruise tourism in the Arctic, so PAME plays an important role in providing supportive and complementary shipping information, analyses, and initiatives that reflect its uniquely Arctic perspective. The working group periodically reviews, analyzes, and responds to perceived gaps in the management of Arctic tourism, specifically shipborne tourism, and publishes these findings in various projects and reports. For example, the Arctic Council recently undertook a multi-year Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) to assess the conditions, impacts, and requirements of Arctic shipping.

In the 2009 AMSA Report, PAME recommended that cruise ship operators develop, implement, and share best practices for operating in remote and cold conditions. PAME continues to engage the cruise ship industry and industry associations and reports these efforts to the Arctic Council through information papers and biennial AMSA Implementation Progress Reports.

More recently, PAME completed the Arctic Ocean Review on strengthening governance and improving integrated approaches to the management of activities in the Arctic marine environment. The 2013 Review included a recommendation, approved by Arctic Ministers, encouraging Arctic Council member governments to explore the development of voluntary guidelines for sustainable tourism and acknowledging the specific role of the cruise industry and its potential impacts on Arctic peoples, ecosystems, and the environment.

PAME is now committed to exploring the development of a stand-alone sustainable tourism initiative. This initiative will represent the first in a suite of efforts across the Arctic Council to address sustainable Arctic tourism. The outcomes and recommendations contained within this PAME initiative are intended to provide the necessary guidance to a range of Arctic stakeholders on means to strengthen and promote sustainable tourism across the circumpolar Arctic.
Doomed expedition

“The Eagle” after landing on the ice in Spitsbergen, July 14, 1897.

IN 1897 Salomon August Andrée attempted to reach the North Pole by hydrogen balloon from Svalbard via Russia or Canada. All three expedition members perished in the ill-prepared attempt. Andrée ignored evidence that the drag-rope steering method he had invented was ineffective, and the implicit danger in having the balloon delivered to Svalbard from the Paris manufacturer untested and leaking more than expected.