

FLOURISHING TOURISM THREATENS ANTARCTIC SERIOUSLY



According to a New Zealand academic, tourism business that attracts scores of interested tourists to Antarctic every year needs to be under scanner and subjected to stringent regulations to protect the ecology and wild life of the continent.

According to Daniela Liggett, Social Scientist, University of Canterbury, the volume of visitors to the Antarctic had steadily gone up in recent times, spelling serious trouble for the continent. Some of her observations are as under, which call for immediate corrective measures by concerned authorities.

- After commercial tourism to the Antarctic gained momentum in the mid-1960s, hardly 500 tourists every year had toured the continent.
- During the period 2007-2008, an amazing number of 46,265 tourists visited the Antarctic, but the number dwindled to 26,519 during the last season, mainly on account of economic setback world-wide and an embargo on heavy fuel usage in the Antarctic Treaty area, resulting in cruise tourism becoming costlier for operators.
- Tourism would be given importance; however, it is also vital that it is conducted with sincerity with an eye on environmental safety.
- Another danger was that big ships that are not ice-resistant, might encounter serious trouble in Antarctic waters. There could be major collisions against ice or rocks in inadequately mapped Antarctic waters and in case of any mishap, the rescue mission is not yet fully equipped to save crew and passengers totaling more than 500 or 1000, at any given time.
- Studies have revealed that frequent flights over penguin colonies or meddling with them have resulted in their health problems like escalated anxiety and heart rate. Penguins would not be disturbed or troubled if the visitors strictly followed a code of conduct and maintained a safe distance of 5 meters from them. They need to make conscientious efforts towards preserving and protecting the penguins and the wild life living in the continent and spread the message to other visitors too.
- At the same time, we must remember the influence of changing weather conditions and our various activities on the Antarctic flora.
- Tourism led to other environmental changes too. Release of hydraulic fluid from ship propellers as also engine shafts are causing pollution, strong winds carrying plastic bags and tiny bits of clothing are scattering them everywhere, with noise and air pollution wreaking additional damage.
- The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) has no control over those operators who do not fall in their ambit, hence the concerned policy makers would need to arrive at an understanding with the operators to draw up a workable, intelligent and dogmatic plan of action.
- Though Antarctic tourism has thrown open so many concerns, it has its flip side too. The tourism

has created good awareness about the continent among many visitors and has exhorted them to work towards preserving the continent.

- Tour operators have, whenever possible, helped the scientists by offering free travel to Antarctica or have transported their paraphernalia. They, along with the tourists, could effectively play the role of observers, by keeping an eye on the various activities of scientists and other travelers to the Antarctic.

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