EXPERTS WARN AGAINST TOURISM IN ANTARCTICA

Tourism, a type of globalization, has been expanding for almost two centuries and now reaching even the last uninhabited areas, such as Antarctica. However, this comes with risks as this frozen land requires preservation. During the 2022-2023 season, over 100,000 tourists are expected to visit Antarctica, ten times more than twenty years ago. Antarctica is governed by the Washington Treaty (1959), which prohibits economic activity but allows international scientific bases. Most tourism in Antarctica is through cruises aboard expedition ships departing from Punta Arenas, Chile, or Ushuaia, Argentina. There is also an increasing number of air trips, including flights over the continent or to its periphery. Last season, a significant development was landing large aircraft from Cape Town, South Africa, allowing passengers to explore Antarctica for a few hours or days in purpose-built camps.

Tons of CO_2

Tourists to Antarctica mainly come from wealthy northern hemisphere countries, causing significant greenhouse gas emissions from their travels. A round trip from Paris to Ushuaia emits 4.5 tons of CO_2, compared to 3.2 tons for a Paris-Tokyo trip. The boat crossing adds to this carbon footprint. Despite recent efforts by cruise ships to reduce waste and avoid burning heavy fuel oil, the environmental impact of tourism remains a concern. It raises questions about how to prevent the introduction of new species and the contribution of cruise passengers to the acceleration of ice melt in the areas they visit. Recent studies have shown the presence of excessive soot particles, or "carbon black," which darken surfaces and increase the absorption of solar energy, leading to more thawing during the austral summer.

Unavoidable accidents

As the number of tourists visiting Antarctica increases, there is a higher likelihood of accidents and pollution, including the possibility of oil spills. Although the impact of these flows is currently low on a global level, redirecting them to minimize harm is possible for companies. However, limiting its effects will become problematic as tourism in Antarctica grows. In 1991, the Madrid Protocol established a fifty-year moratorium on exploiting underground resources and reserved the continent for scientific research. Similarly, implementing a thirty-year moratorium on tourism as soon as possible would allow future generations to appreciate its potential while promoting responsibility towards the Earth and future generations. This could be a significant objective for a future COP on climate change and biodiversity, marking a new era of responsible tourism.

Cruises at 60,000 euros

Antarctica tours are only offered in the wealthiest countries. Depending on the cabin type and company, a twelve-day cruise can cost between 8,000 and 60,000 euros, not including the flight between Europe and South America. A minimum of 13,000 euros for a three-hour stay with a daytime return flight is required. Staying for a few days in a purpose-built camp can cost between 40,000 and 90,000 euros, including flights, depending on the duration and nature of the program. Tourism is responsible for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, so it is time to prioritize the many

places already available for tourism in the ecumene (the inhabited part of the Earth) and adopt sustainable tourism practices. This requires awareness among tourists, businesses, and governments and concrete actions.

Antarctica should be saved

It is essential to distinguish between tourism and scientific research and to prevent cruise and tour companies from taking on the role of environmental protectors in Antarctica. Therefore, the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators, a powerful organization of tour operators, should be tasked with enforcing the Madrid Protocol's guidelines.

Date: 2023-05-23

Article link: https://www.tourism-review.com/tourism-in-antarctica-should-be-limited-news13182