

# Norwegian cruise tourism in **Antarctica**

Some of the most vast and least disturbed natural areas remaining in the world are found in Antarctica. Cruise tourism in Antarctica has increased dramatically during recent years. Norwegian cruise operators currently have a 20 % share of the market.



MS Nordnorge anchored at Neko Harbour.

Map: Shaded areas show the main area for Norwegian tour operators.





Guided tour for passengers from MS *Polar Star*, Spigot Peak, Antarctic Peninsula.

Over the last decade tourism in Antarctica has skyrocketed, becoming the biggest human activity on the continent. Although the Antarctic Treaty (1959) includes some guidelines relating to tourism, most regulations come from the travel business itself through guidelines prepared by the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), established in 1991. Through these guidelines, IAATO has made a significant contribution toward rendering tourism in Antarctica environmentally sound.

In addition to cruise ship tourism, expedition-based or extreme (sports) tourism has started to grow. This includes climbing and ski expeditions to sites on the continent, even to the South Pole. Currently only a few tens of people travel to Antarctica for such expeditions, but the number is increasing.

Today two Norwegian cruise operators work in Antarctica – Hurtigruten Group ASA, with the ship MS *Fram*, and Polar Star Expeditions, with MV *Polar Star*. The *Fram* carry up to 250 passengers, and the *Polar Star* has a capacity of 100 passengers. The ships take tourists to areas of unique natural beauty and cultural-historical significance, mostly in the South Shetland Islands and north and north-western parts of the Antarctic Peninsula. Some cruises include visits to South Georgia and the Falkland Islands.

Experiencing wildlife is an important goal for tourists in

Antarctica. As a result, the most visited areas are also the most vulnerable. Tourism may have a detrimental effect on wildlife, as well as vegetation and cultural remains. Incidents like groundings and shipwrecks have lately shown that Antarctica is a demanding area for cruise tourism and that strict regulations must be implemented by the operators.

The Norwegian Polar Institute is the executive authority for environmental management in the Norwegian areas of Antarctica, in accordance with the Norwegian Environmental Regulations for Antarctica. Under the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty, the Norwegian Polar Institute authorizes Norwegian tour operators in Antarctica and carries out inspections of their activities. So far, Norwegian tour operators are working to the satisfaction of the inspectors, yet there is potential for improvement.

Norway strives to be a pioneer in environmental issues in Antarctica. It is important to secure high standards for tourism in the region and to ensure that it is carried out within an environmentally responsible framework. The Norwegian Polar Institute's experience in Svalbard is valuable in this context. Many tour operators work in both the Arctic and Antarctic.

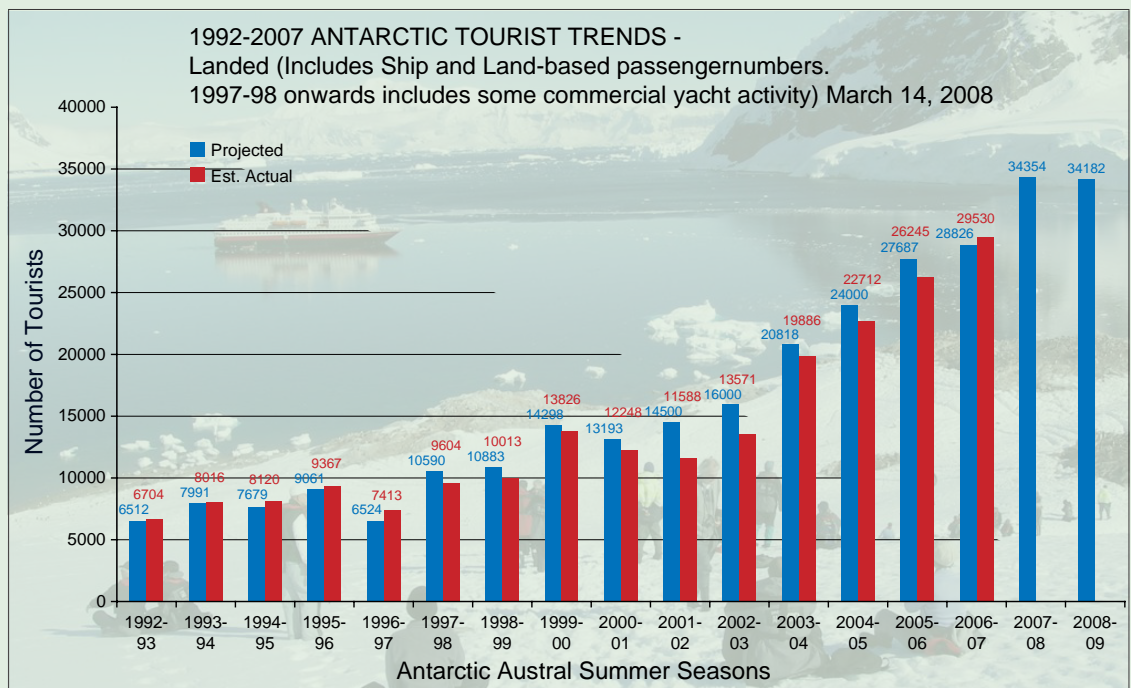
More measures to regulate tourism are slated to pass through the Antarctic Treaty system. These measures include Site Visitor Guidelines for 18 of the most visited sites, limiting landings to vessels with capacities of 500 or fewer passengers, a limit on one ship per site at a time and a maximum of 100 passengers landing at a site at one time, and at least one guide per 20 passengers during landings.

Challenges ahead:

- To increase our knowledge of the effects of today's tourism and to better understand how much tourism the environment can withstand.
- To develop safety and preparedness standards for cruise ships and extreme tourism expeditions.
- To establish land-based tourist facilities.
- To prepare for how climate change may affect tourism, for example, reduced ice cover and less drifting ice may make more areas accessible to landings.

Number of tourists travelling with Norwegian tour operators			
Season	MS Polar Star	The Coastal Express	Total
2001-2002	676	0	676
2002-2003	654	1747	2401
2003-2004	460	2329	2789
2004-2005	762	2730	3492
2005-2006	686	3570	4256
2006-2007	852	4073	4925
2007-2008	903	5467	6370

Tourists travelling with Norwegian tour operators (Source: IAATO statistics).



1992-2007 development in tourism in Antarctica (Source: IAATO statistics).