

# Free essay on arctic tourism

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## **Introduction**

Tourism is comparatively recent development in the Far North. In the last 15 years, the numbers of tourists have been increasing to experience the spectacular wildlife, landscapes and pursue the unique settings of Arctic. In the year 2000, the Arctic tourist count has reached above 1.5 million, with the northern Fennoscandia drawing around 70% of them. The Arctic cruise ship traffic has increased from 50 ships in the year 2004 to around 250 in 2007, most of them in Greenland and Nunavut (Canada). Most of the tourists travel to Arctic during the summers, when they can enjoy and pursue greater suite of outdoors. Even the northern winters embodies the austere beauty, that gets accentuated with the snow related sports and aurora borealis magic. For the international travellers, nature based activities remain the focus of tourists regardless of the season. Tourists can enjoy ship cruises, eco-tours, self-guided tours that can be enjoyed in small groups that seek environment learning, conserving nature and interacting with the locals. The regional destinations cover all the natural environments of Arctic that includes the North Pole (Russian Geographic Society).

## **History of Arctic Tourism**

Since 1800s, Arctic has been attracting tourists with the early tourists being hunters, anglers, adventurers and mountaineers attracted to its exotic wildlife species, remote regions and abundant fisheries. During the mid 1800s, pioneering travellers started to publish journals that ended-up becoming popular guide for future tourists. Since the mid 1800s, mass tourism has thrived in the Arctic when railroads and steamships expanded

the transportation network giving access to many destinations in the Arctic. Tourism entrepreneurs started to form partnerships with the steamship and railroad companies, thus pioneering the tourism industry.

During the last two centuries, advancement in technology has contributed to the growth of tourism in the Arctic. Presently, advanced ship technology along with the much improved navigational aids and marine charts allow cruise ships to travel easily. Tracked vehicles, Diesel locomotives and four wheel drives have further opened the vast regions in the Arctic for tourists. Above all this, Air transport has increased the access to many areas of Arctic. Collectively, with improved transport technology the number tourists, seasonal and geographic reach of the Arctic has increased exponentially from the 1800s (Grid Arendal).

## **Growth and Sustainability of Arctic Tourism**

With Northwest Passage becoming ice-free in the summers, Nunavut area of Canada has seen dramatic increase in the tourist arrival from sea route. In 1984, the first cruise ship crossed the Northwest Passage successfully. It was not until the 1990s when ships started to pass across the Northwest Passage. In 2000s, sailing of private yachts became quite popular in the Northwest Passage. According to data from the Environment Canada, the Northwest Passage has become largely ice-free during the summer in the past 5 years. (CBC News).

Alain A. Grenier from the Université du Québec à Montréal, who has travelled to the Arctic many times and completed a trip across the Canadian Arctic said, “ If we are going to have tourism, we are going to sacrifice part of the environment” (Learn). The biggest threats to the sustainability of the Arctic

include the damages from the increase in shipping routes and resource attraction. Grenier mentioned that with the warming of region, the increased tourism might have an unpleasant effect unless there is a long-term plan. The sustainability of Arctic region for tourism depends upon the social, environmental and economic factors. Grenier states about sustainability that, “ If we wait until we have thousands of tourists going up there, it’s going to be too late” (Learn).

## **Impact of Arctic Tourism**

### Environmental Impact

Serious concerns have risen over time with Arctic tourism over the degradation of environment, through the extra pressure placed on wildlife, lands, water and other natural resources. Most tourists want to view the areas of richness and great beauty like marine mammal haul outs, bird colonies and caribou aggregations. Since there are limited places that are accessible, making the traffic is concentrated. Tourist arrival increases the volume of airplane traffic and ships in the Arctic region. Apart from the impact on climate by the water traffic and long distance air, increase in ship traffic leads to increased risk to accidents and grounding. The results of these can be oil spillage and some other environment hazards. Also, helicopters that get used for recreational purposes create noise and produces variety of sound that disturbs seabirds and other animals. Helicopters also causes panic flights that can lead to egg loss of Arctic birds. Activities of recreation like fishing and boating can cause disturbances to the flora and fauna of the Arctic regions. The positive impact of the Arctic tourism, if done properly, is the educational value attached with it. The Arctic

tourists get fascinated with the wilderness, sheer beauty and the natural phenomena attached with the polar environment (Grid Arendal).

## **Economic Impact**

With growing private and public resource commitments for tourism promotion and development demonstrates strong intentions for strengthening economic role of tourism in the Arctic. Arctic people seeking economic security consider tourism as positive source for economic stability improvement. From the perspective of locals, reliance in predictable tourist arrival offers a stable economic outlook over exhausting limited natural resources for meeting the bust and boom needs of the world market. Arctic community generally appreciates the economic advantages that result from the angling, hunting and nature tourism market as the expenditures done by tourists remain within the community. Tourists employ local pilots, guides by chartering boats, outfitters, suppliers and crews. They also use local hotels, transport and consume food from local eateries. Costs of responding to the environmental hazards are part of budgets for all Arctic countries, but this might be insufficient. Oil spillage and recovery, hazardous waste disposal and material handling and storage represent substantial costs. Availability of trained personnel, specialized equipment and essential supplies might end up being insufficient when the need arises. Many of the hotel tour and transport corporations that conduct tourism in the Arctic region are based out of the region. Thus, the money spent by the arctic tourists is bound to escape the region as the corporations are non-resident (Grid Arendal).

## **Social Impact**

Regarding the negative impacts of increase in tourism in the Arctic region, there is serious concern among the people from the region and industry. Social values, norms and differentiated ways are subject to the impact of polar tourism. Social impact on the Arctic region with the arrival of tourists is the overwhelming of the social norms of the Arctic communities in the tourist season. The community institutions like religious, civic and educational organizations experience the alerted functions and roles when tourists arrive in their town. On the basis of the community and its attitude, this might end up being a major disruption but great number of tourists in comparison to the local population ends up exerting a dominant presence. Arctic tourism and its social impact can get mitigated through the terms and conditions of the collaborative agreements between the local community and the tour operators. Local cost can get offset by the special fees and tax revenues. With expansion of tourist seasons there are greater efficiencies and economies of scale resulting from the extended infrastructure use (Grid Arendal).

## **Types of Arctic Tourism**

Arctic region is getting explored more frequently by tourists, in recent years some Russian travellers have started to discover the far north. Tourists are attracted to the uniqueness of the Arctic through the opportunity to see the mysterious and amazing land, watch the birds and animals living in the north and learning about unique culture of the indigenous society and its tradition and way of life. Some of the popular forms of Tourism that attract the people from different countries to the Arctic are expedition tourism, ethnographic

tourism, extreme tourism, sports tourism, educational tourism, event tourism, historical tourism, boating tourism, fishing, hunting and Environmental tourism.

## **Expedition Tourism**

Arctic expedition cruises have ice-class vessels and ice-breakers that have all conveniences required for travelling in the iced region of Arctic. Some popular routes of expedition trips enable tourists to see seals, walruses and whales. Tourists can also visit the picturesque bays having bird colonies; they can also see polar bears walking on ice. Additionally, these cruises also include educational and historical programs conducted by some experienced explorers and scientists.

## **Ethnographic Tourism**

This kind of tourism has become increasingly popular in the Arctic region. With the participation of indigenous locals of the Arctic, tourists can view how these locals have been living in the same manner for the past centuries. People who love exotic lifestyle of these locals there are programs that includes, home stays with the locals and getting to know firsthand about their lifestyle and way of life.

## **Event Tourism**

Another popular form of tourism in Arctic is Event Tourism which is spreading rapidly. Tourist participation in the national celebrations such as the ' Day of the Reindeer' is becoming a popular form of tourism. In the tundra region, reindeer is a symbol for meaning of life as it provides the locals cloth, food and warmth. This event is held in large scale and end up being quite lively.

## **Eco-tourism**

Ecological tourism has great prospects of development in the Arctic region as trails have been created in many protected areas. One such example of eco-tourism is the Autonomous region of Khanty-Mansiysk that is a promising tourism sector. This region has 8 natural monuments, 11 nature reserves, 4 natural parks and 2 reserves.

## **Historical and Educational Tourism**

In the Russian Federation, development of the educational and historical is treated as very important issue. Every region has cultural and historic monuments, in addition to many centres and museums. The wooden church of Assumption (1674) is one such attraction in the Murmansk region in the Kola Peninsula, in the Varzuga village made without a single nail it.

## **Hunting and Fishing Tourism**

The Yamal peninsula has great prospects for the fishing tourism, this region is considered as fishing area for ages. There are around 60, 000 lakes, streams and rivers that have around 70% of the very valuable whitefish species. The River Ob also has muskun, broad whitefish and white salmon. The Cape of Kazym at the bank of Zazhimchar River is renowned for hunting polar wolf, fox, waterfowl, moose, brown bear and hares.

## **Sports and Boating Tourism**

The Autonomous region of Khanty-Mansiysk has great prospects for boating tourism development due to its water resources that includes Irtysh and Ob rivers and their 12 tributaries and around 30, 000 other rivers (Arctic Info).



## **Problems of Arctic Tourism**

In the Arctic deserts some tourists might misbehave with the sustainability of the area even without wanting to. Example vegetation cover can be trampled down with the absence of deliberately constructed footways on the Arctic islands. This is due to the inadequate infrastructure in the Arctic region that gets affected by the actions of tourists. Expedition tourism can cause excursion to the bird colonies that are located at the coastal cliffs, as helicopter noise and sounds can be dangerous to the young birds and nestlings. With insufficient knowledge of the tour guides about the arctic environment, tourist on motorboats can cause stress to the animals nearby. Tour guides working in the Arctic region mostly have no special training or certification; they do not even follow a Code of Conduct for the Arctic coasts. Finally, inadequate transport can cause environmental deterioration especially with the use of the caterpillar tractors that trample over the vegetation (Sustainable Tourism).

## **Conclusion**

The ever increasing tourism in the Arctic promises to better accustom increasing numbers of international tourists to the wonders of the region and deliver higher revenues to the Arctic and local economies in the coming years. In the same time, increase in the development of tourism-related and infrastructural waste and pollution among other adverse effects are already causing substantial social and environmental impacts. The Arctic council, the SATA (Sustainable Arctic Tourism Association) and conservation groups are already urging that the tourism industry and the government need to work together for insuring that activities of tourism take into account the

feebleness of native cultures and Arctic ecosystems. Polar tourism took time to take-off, but now it is becoming popular and growing rapidly. The industry is expanding in terms of tour operators, tourists, geographic scope, diverse recreational pursuits and seasons of use.

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