



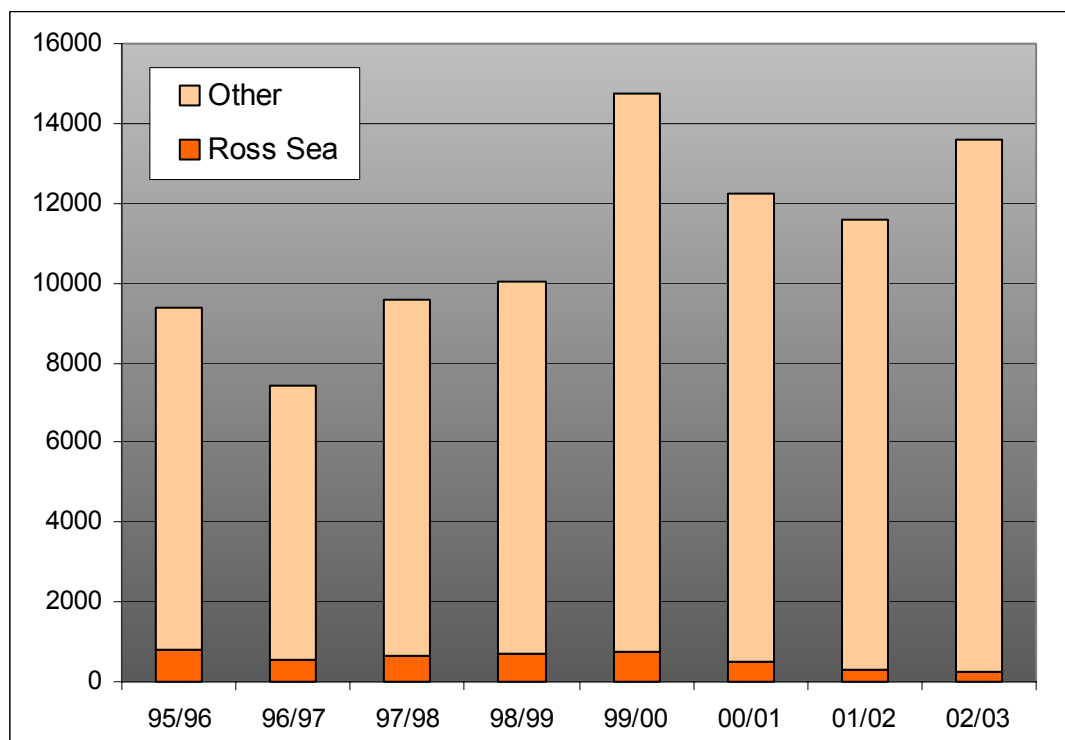
## ANTARCTICA NEW ZEALAND INFORMATION SHEET

# TOURISM IN ANTARCTICA

There is no doubt Antarctica is an incredible tourist destination. It is a magnificent and largely uninhabited wilderness with majestic mountains, glaciers, icebergs and abundant wildlife. Its remoteness, inaccessibility and severe climate add an element of adventure to a visit to Antarctica.

Visitor numbers have increased rapidly over the last few decades. In 2002/2003, 13,571 tourists visited Antarctica, compared with only 6,000 ten years ago (IAATO). Only 5% of these tourists have visited the Ross Sea region of Antarctica, where New Zealand's national programme activity is focussed. The majority of tours are to the Antarctic Peninsula region, close to South America.

Tours are organised by private companies and people from all over the world make the journey to see the icy continent. The majority of tourists come from the USA, followed by Germany, Britain and Australia (IAATO).



**Figure 1: Ross Sea and other Antarctic Tourism**

Data source: IAATO. Note 2002/03 figures include airborne tourism.

The trend of increasing visitor numbers has led the Antarctic Treaty countries to establish guidelines and regulations to minimise the impact of these visitors on this remarkable environment.

## Flights to Antarctica

Tourists began to visit Antarctica by air in the 1950s when flights over the Antarctic Peninsula were made. In the 1960s commercial flights landed at McMurdo Sound and the South Pole.

Regular overflights ran between 1977 and 1980, with over 11,000 people taking the trip from Australia and New Zealand. At a meeting in 1979 Antarctic Treaty Nations expressed concern at the danger of flying in the turbulent Antarctic atmosphere where there was a lack of radio beacons, meteorological stations and emergency services. Later that year, 257 people were killed when one of these overflights struck Mt Erebus in poor visibility. Overflights were resumed in 1994 by an Australian airline.

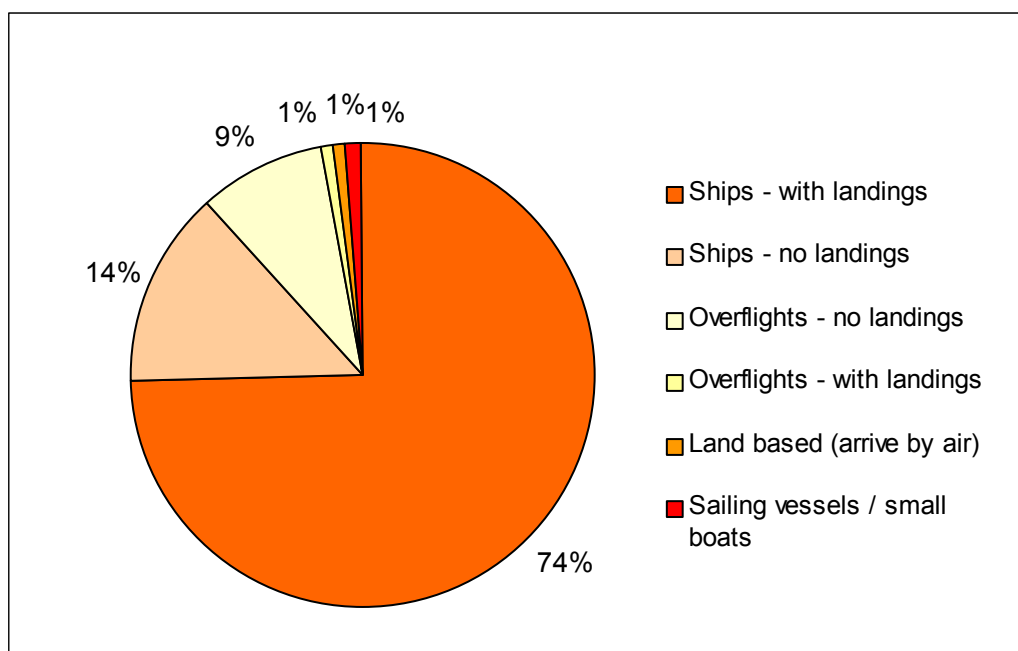
Other companies have also begun to make flights over the continent and to the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula from South America. There are also businesses, which arrange flights for private climbing expeditions and trips to the South Pole. In 2002/2003, over 1,500 tourists flew over Antarctica without landing, and 300 made aircraft landings (IAATO).

## Ship-Borne Tourists

Ship visits by tourists also began in the 1950s with an Argentinean vessel, which took 100 passengers to the Antarctic Peninsula. In 1968 a chartered ship visited the Ross Sea with 24 people.

Since then, cruise ships have regularly visited the Antarctic Peninsula, operating from Argentina and Chile. It is one of the most popular areas to visit because of its proximity to South America, its warmer climate, abundant wildlife and many research stations, which are visited by some tours.

Several cruise ships now also operate in the Ross Sea area, operating from Bluff, Lyttelton or Hobart as well as from South America. In recent seasons, about 500 people have taken these trips, which last from two to four weeks. Landings are made in zodiacs (small inflatable rubber boats) at locations such as Cape Adare, Possession Island, Scott Base, McMurdo and Terra Nova Bay Stations, Cape Evans and Cape Royds. Helicopter trips are regularly made from one of the ships for over flights and to visit locations such as Taylor Valley in the McMurdo Dry Valleys.



**Figure 2: Types of Antarctic Tourism, 2002/2003**

Data source: IAATO

The vast majority of tourism is conducted by ship. A small number of yachts also visit Antarctica each year, some with fee-paying passengers. There are currently no permanent land-based facilities constructed for tourism.

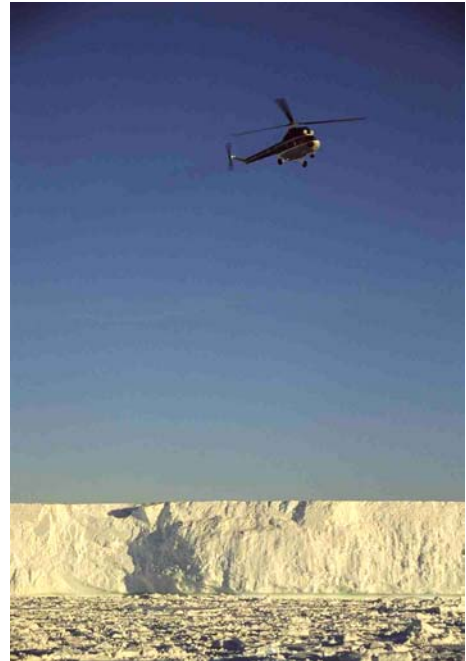
## Impact of Tourism

Although remoteness and lack of development make Antarctica a difficult and expensive place to visit, there is no shortage of people wanting to make the trip - tourist numbers now exceed the number of scientists and support staff who work there, and are increasing steadily. However, the length of time spent ashore is much less than by programme personnel. Although visits are usually short, they are concentrated into a small number of landing sites, creating potential for cumulative impacts in the long term.

Some consider tourists an environmental pressure Antarctica could do without. Others note that the tourists are generally well informed and concerned about the Antarctic environment and usually become very good advocates for the protection of Antarctica when they return home.

Poorly managed visitors of any kind (whether paying tourists or national programme personnel) can cause damage to slow growing moss beds, disturb wildlife and take historic items or geological souvenirs. Rubbish and wastes from ships have also been a problem, as have unplanned visits to scientific bases.

Visits are becoming much better regulated, and impact has reduced in some areas. Nevertheless, with any operation, accidents can occur with major consequences for the environment, such as the oil spill after the grounding of the tourist and supply ship *Bahai Paraíso* on the Antarctic Peninsula.



Helicopter over-flight off Adare Peninsula

## Regulations

The Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty applies the same requirements to any type of activity, including tourism. Under the Protocol, organisers of Antarctic activities are required to complete an environmental impact assessment (EIA). The EIA describes the activities of the operator and helps to identify and reduce possible impacts of the tourists on the environment. Environmental monitoring is being used at some sites in the Antarctic Peninsula area to detect environmental changes caused by visitors.



Tour group visiting Terra Nova Bay Station

In 1994 the Treaty countries made further recommendations on tourism and non-government activities. This "Guidance for Visitors to the Antarctic" is intended to help visitors become aware of their responsibilities under the Treaty and Protocol. The document concerns the protection of Antarctic wildlife and protected areas, the respecting of scientific research, personal safety and impact on

the environment. Guidelines have also been written for the organisers of tourist and private ventures — these require prior notification of the trip to the organiser's national authority (e.g. Antarctica New Zealand), assessment of potential environmental impacts, the ability to cope with environmental emergencies such as oil spills, self-sufficiency, the proper disposal of wastes and respect for the Antarctic environment and research activities. The guidelines outline detailed procedures to be followed during the planning of the trip, when in the Antarctic Treaty area and on completion of the trip.

Individual countries have also introduced measures to minimise effects of tourists. Chile requires all captains of ships that go to Antarctica to attend a month-long school in Antarctic navigation. New Zealand sends a government representative on all ships visiting the Ross Dependency to supervise visits to the historic huts and Scott Base and to observe how well the provisions of the treaty and protocol are adhered to.

## **IAATO**

Tourist operators in Antarctica have organised an association (the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators) to promote safety and environmental responsibility amongst cruise operators. Their objectives include working within the Antarctic Treaty System and other international agreements such as MARPOL and SOLAS and fostering cooperation between private-sector travel and the international scientific community in the Antarctic. A very significant IAATO policy is that itineraries should be planned in such a way that no more than 100 people are ashore at a time at any one site.

IAATO drafted the documents which formed the basis of "Guidance for Visitors to the Antarctic", Antarctic Treaty Recommendation XVIII-I. Since 1991 when IAATO was established, its membership has grown from seven operators to more than 40. The members meet annually and have added further guidance for operators, such as the Marine Wildlife Watching Guidelines in 2003. IAATO members carry the majority of tourists to Antarctica.

## **Further Reading**

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International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators website, [www.iaato.org](http://www.iaato.org)