Managing Cruising and Tourism in the Arctic

In the Arctic Region, the potential for tourism to cause environmental damage is huge; and the frameworks and guidelines to prevent it are still being established.

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Summary

The Arctic is a new frontier of tourism. Once considered the world's largest and best-preserved natural environment, it is home to a fragile ecology and wildlife. The retreat of sea ice has opened it up for development, including for tourism to destinations like Greenland, Svalbard and Northern Russia.

A rise in visitors number presents evident risks to the pristine polar environment. Increased public awareness of these destinations, combined with easier transportation and accommodation options have lowered the barrier to entry, and the number of tourists is predicted to mushroom.

Tourism is not the only threat, nor the most damaging. Indeed, it may bring some collateral benefits, if properly managed, by providing alternative livelihood strategies for local communities threatened by climate change and depleting fish stocks. Tourism could help support traditional economies and help to fund the maintenance, protection and monitoring of the wilderness and protected areas. It may also contribute to raising awareness about the endangered Arctic.

The value and interest of the case study

Readers of this case study will get an insight on the complex issues surrounding tourism in the Arctic, helping them understand how different organizations are working to ensure that biodiversity and environmental needs are taken into account.

As the sea ice melts, the race is on, involving governments, NGOs and international business, to establish viable partnerships and sustainable agreements, hopefully to guarantee a responsible management of the impacts in terms of biodiversity, of the indigenous population, and of degradation of the landscape.

Growth of Tourism

The Arctic is the northern-most region of the planet Earth. Nations with land within the Arctic region include Alaska (US), Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia and Sweden.

The geographic range of the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) is defined, for example, as the area north of 60° latitude. Their core areas of operation are Svalbard, Jan Mayen, Greenland, Arctic Canada, the Russian Arctic National Park and Iceland.
Tourism is just one component of the incursion of human activity in the Arctic. Of greater potential harm is the drive to exploit natural resources, in the form of extensions to fishing grounds and in the name of prospection for oil and other minerals. In addition, with the retreat of the ice, human settlement can expand, putting at risk the fragile biodiversity of the Arctic region as a whole.

Arctic expedition cruising has long been popular and the Northern Passage (the route connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific) was first crossed by sea in 1906. For the next 70 or 80 years, the majority of Arctic voyages involved research vessels, but the cruising industry has since been making inroads, offering consumer experiences in comfort. The melting sea ice allows for larger cruise ships and the building, in parallel, of roads and airports have contributed to tourism activities in the region over the last twenty years.

Some Arctic destinations, such as Alaska, see more than 2 million tourists per year. In Finland and Norway, tourism is migrating further and further north. Finnish Lapland received three million visitors in 2019, many of them from Japan and China. Northern Lights holidays are becoming a standard product in northern Scandinavia, providing employment for many thousands.

The most dramatic rise has been in Arctic cruise tourism. Some passenger statistics include:

- Iceland saw 7,952 cruise passengers in 1990. By 2016, the total was over a quarter of a million yearly.
- In Canada, the number increased from around 1,000 in 2005 to 2,880 in 2014. In Greenland, it grew from 16,446 to 20,070.
- In Svalbard (Norway), the number went from 34,760 to 47,673 in the same period.

The number of tourists is predicted to continue to increase. Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Sergei Galkin, for example, indicated in mid-2019 that the number of tourists could increase by up to three times as a consequence of a new government bill permitting the development of cruise travel in the Arctic.

The Arctic region has experienced ever-greater media attention as a result of increased use of social media. These diagrams show the overall footprint of tourism in the media measured from Flickr data since 2004. The footprint of summer tourism quadrupled and winter tourism increased by over 600% between 2006 and 2016.

In this complex and fragile environment with biodiversity, environmental assets and indigenous population needs at stake, agreement on basic rules has become essential to for sustainable tourism development. A number of key organizational bodies such as the Arctic Council, AECO, the WWF etc. are playing a key role in setting guidelines and building frameworks to guide the tourism industry and educate visitors towards a more responsible enjoyment of this irreplaceable natural environment.
Nature and Wildlife

The Arctic is one of the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world, with many large fisheries and huge populations of migratory birds that come to the Arctic in the summer to breed.

Arctic wildlife have special adaptations that enable them to survive in their icy and changeable environment. Migratory birds use the Arctic to feed, nest and raise their young. Many of these birds migrate to and from all 50 states and across six continents.

The Arctic Ocean is home to an amazing array of wildlife, including endangered species such as bowhead whales, polar bears and ringed seals. Organizations, such as AECO have developed wildlife guidelines to advise visitors on how to experience it without disturbing the region’s wildlife (see https://www.aeco.no/wildlife-guidelines/).

Protected areas

The first protected areas in the Arctic date back to the beginning of the 20th Century and were established in Sweden and Alaska. The number of protected areas within the Arctic Council’s Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) cooperation area has almost doubled since 1980. The Arctic protected areas have been ‘established in strategically important and representative areas, helping to maintain crucial ecological features, e.g. caribou migration and calving areas, shorebird and waterfowl staging and nesting sites, seabird colonies, and critical components of marine mammal habitats’.

In 2016, 20.2% of the Arctic’s terrestrial area and 4.7% of the Arctic’s marine area were protected. It includes areas such as nature reserves, wilderness areas, national parks, natural monuments or features, habitat/species management areas, protected landscapes/seascapes, protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources. Within the CAFF boundary there are 92 areas recognized under global international conventions, including:

- 12 World Heritage sites, and
- 80 Ramsar sites (wetland site designated to be of international importance).

National parks

The US was the first Arctic Nation to establish a national park, with the creation of the Gate to the Arctic National Park in 1980 in Alaska, followed by Canada with the establishment of national parks in Nunavut (Quttinirpaaq in 1988, Aulavik in 1992 and Sirmilik National Park in 2001). In 2009, Russia followed their footsteps and created
the Russkaya Arktika (Russian Arctic) National Park, which aims to ‘preserve the biodiversity and integrity of the territory, foster science and research efforts, and provide a framework for Arctic tourism’.

**In the US (Alaska)**

The 19.6-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is home to more than 200 bird species, which migrate to the refuge to breed in the summer. As many as 300,000 snow geese visit the coastal plain each fall to feed on the tundra. Each spring, a 130,000-member porcupine caribou herd migrates more than 1,400 miles (2,200 kilometres) across Canada and Alaska to calve in the refuge’s coastal plain.

The 23-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA) provides critical habitat for migratory waterfowl: Canada geese, tundra swans, white-fronted geese, pintail ducks and brant are among the hundreds of species of migratory birds that nest, feed and moult in the NPRA each year. The reserve is also home to grizzly bears, polar bears, caribou, wolves and wolverines, as well as beluga whales, bowhead whales, walruses and several species of seals. The Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd, numbering about 67,000 animals, is a primary source of subsistence for thousands of Alaska Native residents.

The stated mission of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is to ‘preserve unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values; to conserve caribou herds, polar bears, grizzly bears, muskox, Dall sheep, wolves, wolverines, snow geese, peregrine falcons, other migratory birds, Dolly Varden and grayling; to provide opportunities for subsistence uses; and to ensure necessary water quantity and quality.’

Other protected areas (in other countries) include North East Greenland UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve (the largest in the world, covering 97.2 million ha); the Arctic Pacific Lakes Park in Canada, the Bolshoy Arkichesky/Great Arctic in Russia Federation etc.

**Shipping and Cruises**

When shipping in the Arctic was primarily for administrative or scientific purposes, the impact on local communities, on wildlife habitat and in terms of pollution was limited. We are now seeing shipping on a very different scale and this increase is one of the greatest threats to the Arctic environment.

Much of the shipping is for commercial or industrial purposes, but leisure cruising has a significant share. In 2016, the cruise liner Serenity sailed over the Northwest Passage. In addition to 600 crew members, the 13-storey ship carried 900 guests, dining in luxury, with views over the ice from their private verandas. Quark Expeditions offers trips to the North Pole, the last stretch via hot air balloon.

By 2016, a quarter of a million cruise passengers were visiting Iceland yearly. The Russian Arctic saw a 20 percent rise in visitors in 2019, with Chinese tourists accounting for the largest group. The cruising industry was already shifting toward ever bigger ships to accommodate rising demand and make cruises more profitable.

The increasing traffic and size of the vessels raises the chance of a catastrophe such as an oil spill or a sewage leak that would cause serious environmental damage. ‘It is a matter of time, not a matter of if,’ says Jackie Dawson, an associate professor of geography, environment and geomatics at the University of Ottawa. ‘We will see some sort of disaster related to climate change and increased human activity in the Arctic.’

**The Polar Code**

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) introduced a Polar Code in 2016 aimed at ensuring that tour operators were prepared for the remoteness and extreme weather of the Arctic. It also prohibits vessels from discarding food waste and sewage.

The IMO, a United Nations specialized agency, is tasked with coordinating shipping regulations. Its mission statement is: ‘... to promote safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping through cooperation. This will be accomplished by adopting the highest practicable standards of maritime safety and security, efficiency of navigation and prevention and control of pollution from ships …’

The Polar Code sets additional standards for construction, manning, training, equipment, voyage planning, pollution and communications for commercial ships in polar waters. A particular concern is to reduce the risk of accident in the sensitive and remote polar regions. Over and above the mandatory provisions, the Polar Code includes non-binding recommendations for both safety and environmental protection.

The Polar Code qualifies as ‘generally accepted international rules and standards’ for environmental protection under Article 211 of the United Nations Law of the Sea (LOSCL). This means that member States are responsible for enforcement of the Code and coastal States may demand compliance with its terms.
Limiting factors

The problem, according to AECO is that it is very difficult to ensure compliance or impose sanctions either on individual operators or on contravening states.

AECO represents the concerns and views of Arctic expedition cruise operators. As the name implies, the Association would like to keep Arctic navigation to the level of ‘expedition’, i.e. to avoid commoditizing it. It works to encourage safe, environmentally friendly tourism in the Arctic and lobbies to set the highest possible operating standards.

AECO’s objectives also include ‘to ensure that expedition cruises and tourism in the Arctic are carried out with the utmost consideration for the vulnerable, natural environment, local cultures and cultural remains; as well as the challenging safety hazards at sea and on land; and to interact with and maintain an open dialogue with non-governmental organizations interested in the Arctic; and to educate all interested groups and people about the Arctic and its unique environment, culture and natural history’.

At a symposium on Tourism and Biodiversity organized in Helsinki in 2018, AECO representatives rang an alarm bell, demonstrating that tourism is effectively out of control in some of the most sensitive area of the arctic.

‘If a cruise ship offloads passengers on a site of nesting birds, a thousand miles from the nearest major port; or if it dumps its waste in the sea, there is no authority close by that can record the incidents or take any significant action. The compliance is voluntary or not at all.’

AECO’s initiatives include cutting back on single-use plastics on Arctic expedition cruise vessels. This includes assessing the amount of single-use items that are currently in use on board and researching more sustainable alternatives and solutions. In general, AECO works to educate cruise staff, passengers and the general public on what can be done to prevent marine plastic pollution, seeking direct engagement with the public – for example, by encouraging cruise passengers’ involvement in beach clean-ups.

Clean Up Svalbard, a coastal clean-up project organized by the Governor of Svalbard in collaboration with AECO, is another example. Its goals include building up knowledge and statistics on coastal garbage, and on initiatives to manage and dispose of it.

Tourism Operators

Tourism in the Arctic is dominated by big cruise operators. Melting sea ice has opened up routes for larger ships carrying a lot of fuel and posing a danger for the environment and wildlife. Some cruise companies are addressing the problem, operating hybrid polar expedition ships with reduced fuel consumption and emissions. Norway’s Hurtigruten, for example, has launched the Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen, hybrid ships that cut fuel consumption and emissions by around 20%. The French company Ponant is building an icebreaker vessel which will be the world’s first hybrid cruise ship powered by liquid natural gas (LNG).

At a local level, many of the smaller tourism are innovating in the way they develop new tourism experiences, in particular for new forms of adventure tourism. In Greenland, tourism operators and community stakeholders are collaborating to integrate cultural heritage and local knowledge into local tourism products.

The References section of this case study includes a list of key tourism operators active in the Arctic, cruise operators and articles related to the Arctic cruise industry.

The cruise operators

The number of cruise itineraries in the Arctic has boomed in the last 20 years. In Arctic Canada alone, it is estimated that the number of cruise itineraries has more than doubled between 2005 and 2013. Within cruise operators, there is a wide range of styles and approaches (with some overlap between them in some cases):

- **Major operators**, offering sailings with varied ship size and for different budget/markets:
  - Big ship cruise lines that offer a few Arctic sailings but not always every year. These include Cunard, P&O Cruises, Princess Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Aida, Costa, MSC Cruises, Holland America Line.
  - Midsize ships sailing the region can range from the value end of the market (with operators such as Cruise & Maritime Voyages, Fred Olsen Cruises) to upmarket lines like Seabourn.
  - Other lines offering Arctic sailings either occasionally or regularly include operators such as Saga Cruises, Crystal Cruises, Azamara, Oceania Cruises and Viking Ocean Cruises.
• **High end luxury cruises** offered by Silversea, Hapag-Lloyd, Ponant and Abercrombie & Kent, for example.

• **Cruises promoted as ‘expeditions/exploration’** rather than comfort or luxury. Expedition ships have ice-strengthened hulls and are especially suited to the conditions and able to sail further north than more mainstream cruises. They tend to emphasize adventure, wilderness, education and personal experience. This group includes operators such as G Adventures, Quark Expeditions, Lindblad Expeditions etc.

For greater authenticity, there are also the **vessels that provide a regular service to the public** along the coastlines and between islands, such as Hurtigruten that has been linking the ports of Norway for over 125 years or the Arctic Umiaq Line in Greenland, both of them offering a chance to travel as the locals do.

The overview above describes the cruise landscape prior to the Covid-19 crisis. We may well be seeing significant changes over the coming years.

### Trekking and adventure tourism

As we have seen, a number of tourism operators, many of them based locally or working with local managers, are committed to supporting sustainable practices, offering eco-friendly trekking and adventure holidays focusing on taking people in smaller groups led by local guides.

These operators aim to support the indigenous economies. Community support and collaboration is the basis of their business model including hiring locally, purchasing and procuring food, goods and materials whenever possible. An example is the operator Arctic Kingdom which embraces those values and strongly supports social responsibility.

Some operators are very aware of the impact of their operations on the environment. Arctic Holiday operates hybrid-electric ships to explore Arctic Norway, so as to reduce noise and pollution and therefore its impact on the environment and wildlife. The hybrid engines are used on their newly Silent Whale Watching Cruise, enabling the boat to get close to humpback and minke whales without disturbing them. They also use underwater drones and hydrophones to capture life under water.

Oceanwide Expeditions employs green technology such as LED lighting, steam heat, biodegradable paints and lubricants, and flexible power management systems that keep fuel consumption and CO2 levels low. They also take part in beach clean-up, including with groups of tourists volunteering during their cruise holidays, and help scientists monitor plastics and microplastics.

### Community Engagement

AECO’s Community Engagement Program ([https://www.aeco.no/community-engagement/](https://www.aeco.no/community-engagement/)) is an innovative and collaborative program that engages with communities, stakeholders, visitors and tourist operators across the Arctic. The purpose of the program is to ensure that expedition cruise tourism in the Arctic is carried out in partnership and dialogue with local stakeholders. Among other things, they have developed series of guidelines:

- **Community guidelines** ([https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/community-guidelines/](https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/community-guidelines/)) – these guidelines provide travellers with useful dos and don’ts when visiting Arctic Communities. AECO has provided template for development of community specific guidelines to be used as a tool by Arctic communities.

- **Visitor guidelines** ([https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/visitor-guidelines/](https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/visitor-guidelines/)) – PDF and video guidelines highlighting visitors’ key responsibilities as visitor to ensure safety and preservation of the environment. The guidelines focus on the basic principles, safety, and cultural and social interaction. The pdf visitor guidelines are available in English, Norwegian and German, while the videos are available to AECO members with subtitles in 14 languages.

- **Operational guidelines** for tour operators ([https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/operational-guidelines/](https://www.aeco.no/guidelines/operational-guidelines/)) – mandatory guidelines for tour operators that are members of AECO, reflecting new regulations and conditions.

- **Other guidelines** – Yacht Guidelines; Clean Seas Guidelines; Vegetation Guidelines; Cultural Remains Guidelines; Wildlife Guidelines; Biosecurity Guidelines; Site Guidelines.

### Indigenous people

Many travel destinations around the world can be vulnerable to exploitation by foreign companies, with indigenous community losing out on the economic opportunities. Pre-emptive legislation can be a means to protect their interest and codify framework for inclusion. The Navajo National Law, for example, states that tour operators and guide services must be approved by the Navajo Nation.
The Arctic Council prepared a ‘framework to empower people and communities to work together for a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable region’. Six Indigenous people’s organizations are Permanent Participants at the Arctic Council alongside Arctic states to ensure ‘Indigenous voices are heard and reflected in Arctic Council deliberations and decisions’.

For Rauno Posio, Project Leader at Visit Arctic Europe ‘… the indigenous groups could use their own tradition and history to develop services for visitors in a way that communicates their pride in their roots. This would improve not only their financial but also social wellbeing. But the indigenous peoples must decide and plan these services for themselves’.

Examples from a research project in Greenland, ‘Tourism Development in Greenland – Identification and Inspiration’, illustrates how the development of tourism is linked to societal challenges in the field of cultural heritage, within education and in the area of entrepreneurship. It shows how collaboration is central to connect local knowledge and experience to the development of tourism product.

There are people who travel from all over the world and want to do workshops on how to build a Greenlandic kayak. The interest in building Greenlandic kayaks is so high […] we can use this interest in building your own kayak and do offers here in Greenland.

[Locals] are more than qualified to take people out but the problem is they are not certified as sea kayak instructors, even though they know more about the kayak.

This raises the question of how to create a certification framework which acknowledges local knowledge and its anchoring in local cultural heritage, but also responds to standardized requirements.

In Canada, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), founded in 2015, support the growth of Indigenous tourism in the country, by focusing through a unified voice, on marketing, product development support and partnership creation. The purpose of the association is to ‘improve the socio-economic situation of indigenous people within the ten provinces and three territories of Canada’. They provide advisory services to Indigenous tourism operators and communities and those looking to start a cultural tourism business such as economic development advisory services, conferences, professional development training and workshops, and access to industry statistics and information. ITAC has facilitated the sharing of best practice of the successes of cultural tourism in Canada’s southern Aboriginal communities, by signing in 2018 a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Northwest Territories’ Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment and Northwest Territories Tourism to develop Indigenous cultural tourism in the territory with annual investments.
of up to $257,000. The work includes ongoing mentoring and best practice missions with communities or entrepreneurs.

Evan Walz, the Northwest Territories’ Director for Tourism and Parks, said:

Indigenous cultural tourism will become increasingly important for the territory, and that its diverse population is already making it an increasingly attractive destination. For us in the North West Territories, we’ve got 33 communities, 11 official languages and each of those communities had their own vibrant and rich culture and unique story that helps define them and every one of them can benefit from this area of tourism because it’s something anyone can participate in if that’s what they want.

Key Organizations

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council was created in 1996 and is an intergovernmental forum for addressing issues related to the Arctic Region. Its focus is on sustainable development and environmental protection, including the long-term interests of local communities and indigenous populations.

The Council is composed of eight Arctic States members, six permanent participants (organizations that represent Arctic Indigenous people) and 38 expert observers (non-Arctic states, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs). Implementation of its guidelines or recommendations are primarily the responsibility of individual Arctic States or international bodies.

The council’s activities are carried out through working groups, task forces and expert groups. Working groups include the Arctic Contaminants Action Programme (ACAP); Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); and the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME).

The PAME working group has worked on the topic of Arctic Marine Tourism since 2009. A recent project is ‘Arctic Marine Tourism: Development in the Arctic and enabling real change’, co-led by Canada, Iceland and the United Kingdom. The group is working to harmonize the guidelines of different states and organizations; also compiling data on tourism vessels in the region (number of cruise ships, size, pollution information etc.) and identifying gaps in that data, so as to better understand recent developments in areas visited by passengers of marine tourism vessels.

Visit Arctic Europe II (VAE)

Visit Arctic Europe is an EU-funded project whose partners are the Finnish Lapland Tourist Board (lead partner), Northern Norway Tourist Board and Swedish Lapland Visitors Board, together with 125 companies in the tourism industry all over the Arctic region participating in the project.

The first phase of Visit Arctic Europe (2015–2018) concerned cross-border collaboration in the tourism sector. Actions implemented led to the arrival of over 70,000 new travellers to the region and over 500,000 new bed nights.

Its main aims include:

- Continuing development of Finnish Lapland, Swedish Lapland and Northern Norway as an all year round sustainable and high-quality destination. Improving seasonality, in particular by promoting the concept of Autumn in the Arctic.
- Increasing profitability for the tourism industry and creating new opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in Arctic Europe. Specifically, an increase of 10% in guest nights from selected market areas and seasons.

The main activities of VAE II are related to marketing, ‘accessibility’ (development of external and internal traffic connections) and digitalization.

For Rauno Posio, Project Leader at Visit Arctic Europe, ‘the problem is how to combine pristine nature with tourism flows. The north should not become a mass tourism destination. Instead, we need to provide high-quality services with prices that help us avoid overpopulating our tourist attractions. We (also) need to construct services to preserve nature. For example, … waste management and recycling organized along the tourist route, so as not to damage the environment too much.’
The WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature)

The WWF Arctic Programme was set up in 1992 and is the only circumpolar environmental NGO with Observer status at the Arctic Council. Their work involves all seven Arctic countries. In the Arctic Region, they see:

- On the one hand, fragile environments. Although the number of tourists traveling to the North is still relatively small, some areas are already seeing mass tourism development and the risks of large-scale environmental damage are growing.
- On the other, economic opportunity. Responsible Arctic tourism allows visitors to appreciate and respect arctic nature and cultures and provide additional income to local communities and traditional lifestyles.

The WWF has worked with tourism operators, government, researchers, conservation groups and communities from all over the Arctic to create the first Arctic-specific guidelines for tourism. This is done in the belief that tourists coming to the Arctic can be ‘ambassadors’ for arctic conservation, and that the tourism industry can remain profitable while adopting sustainable practices.

The WWF’s ‘Ten principles for Arctic tourism’ are as follows:

1. Make tourism and conservation compatible.
2. Support the preservation of wilderness and biodiversity.
3. Use natural resources in a sustainable way.
4. Minimize consumption, waste and pollution.
5. Respect local cultures.
6. Respect historic and scientific sites.
7. Arctic communities should benefit from tourism.
8. Trained staff are the key to responsible tourism.
9. Make your trip an opportunity to learn about the Arctic.
10. Follow safety rules.

These ten principles effectively summarize the intentions of the more responsible organizations and operators working in the Arctic.

The Government Perspective

The European Union (EU)

The EU has called for the introduction of a new Arctic governance structure. Its Arctic Policy document was adopted in 2016, but is already considered out of date, in light of the global implications of the accelerating melting of the ice and the consequences for the environment. In 2019, the EU started work on a new Arctic strategy document. The EU confirmed at the first EU Arctic Forum in October 2019 its strong commitment for the Arctic remaining a ‘low-tension-high-cooperation’ area. The EU Ambassador for the Arctic, Marie-Anne Coninsx said at the time that the new Arctic EU strategy ‘will have to focus on climate change and its implications on geo-economic, geopolitical and security issues in the region’.

Iceland

In Iceland, good governance of the Arctic is at the heart of its national interests.

In 2017, Eliza Jean Reid, Prime Minister of Iceland, was appointed the first UN special ambassador for tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Region. ‘These natural ecosystems are particularly fragile—and in smaller communities, both positive and negative changes in tourism may be felt more acutely. Like all places with unique natural environments and populations, we should be mindful of our impact and work to increase sustainability.’

Iceland is chair of the Arctic Council for the period 2019–2021 and has indicated that ‘initiatives that aim to promote the wellbeing of the roughly four million people living in the region will remain central to the Arctic Council’s work’. It believes that ‘new economic opportunities, including in shipping and tourism, can contribute to growth and prosperity of Arctic communities, if they are carried out sustainably’.

Russia

In Russia, although there are environmental concerns, the local governments of the Federation’s northern rim also see a huge economic opportunity. A new bill on the development of cruise travel in the Arctic and Russia’s
Far East will allow for more flexible itineraries and potentially double or triple cruise traffic. However, the Ministry of Economic Development warns that ‘we need to remain careful about the increasing number of tourists because this is a unique rather than a mass product’.

For Inna Karakchiyeva of the Analytical Center for the Russian Government, ‘it is necessary to draft a White Book of Cluster Policy in Arctic Tourism, because we must have a concept of exploring Arctic tourism as a development driver for the region’.

Canada

Canada’s vision for the Arctic is for ‘a stable, rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant Northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems’.

The Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy statement details the country’s priorities with respect to ‘exercising sovereignty, promoting economic and social development, environmental protection, and improving and devolving governance for empowering the Peoples of the North’.

For Canada, the Arctic Council is the pre-eminent forum for Arctic cooperation.

Greenland (Denmark)

Greenland is an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognizes that due to climate change and technological developments, vast economic potential is becoming more accessible, but that with those new opportunities also come new challenges.

The Kingdom’s strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020 has helped the Government of Denmark, the Government of the Faroes and the Government of Greenland to define their common political objectives for the Arctic. The Kingdom wishes ‘through close cooperation in the Kingdom and with our international partners, to work towards the common overall goal of creating a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future for the Arctic’.

Norway

The Norwegian government’s vision for the Arctic is ‘to be a peaceful, innovative and sustainable region where international cooperation and respect for the principles of international law are the norm’. The government launched an integrated Arctic strategy in 2017 that incorporates both foreign and domestic policy.

The number and size of cruise ships to the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard in the Arctic Ocean, has increased year-by-year. Some mega cruise ships are disembarking more tourists than inhabitants in the town. Local people support the suggestions from Norway’s Minister of Environment, Ola Elvestuen to limit the size of passenger ships sailing to Svalbard, along with an expansion on the existing ban on heavy fuel oil. In December 2019, the Minister said ‘it is now necessary to protect the wilderness and cultural heritage values at Svalbard from the increased pressure caused by both tourism and climate changes’. The ban was welcomed by AECO. The government’s statement also calls for an action plan that also would see stricter rules to avoid disturbing polar bears and restrictions on landings at vulnerable places.

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- Nature Trek: https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tour-focus/arctic-tours
- Adventure Canada: https://www.adventurecanada.com/
- Off the Map: https://www.offthemap.travel/green-aurora/