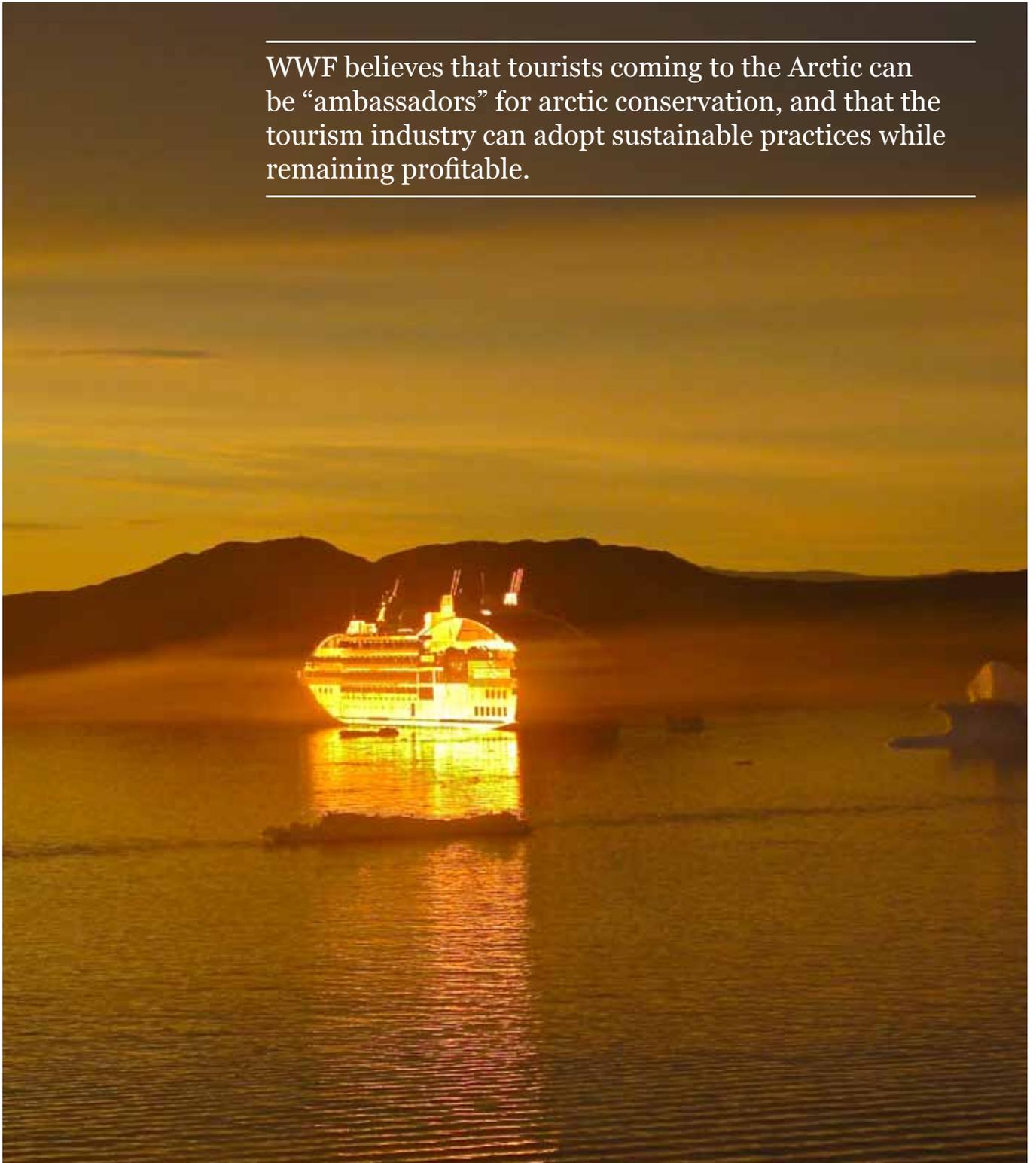




WWF Arctic Tourism Project

Working with tourism for Arctic conservation, 1995-2006

WWF believes that tourists coming to the Arctic can be “ambassadors” for arctic conservation, and that the tourism industry can adopt sustainable practices while remaining profitable.



KEY ACTIVITY 1

THE “LINKING TOURISM AND CONSERVATION IN THE ARCTIC” INITIATIVE AND THE TEN PRINCIPLES FOR ARCTIC TOURISM

What: Development of tourism industry and visitor guidelines.

Who: Multi-stakeholder group (academics, tour operators, community reps, nature managers) under the lead of the WWF Global Arctic Programme (GAP)

Output: Ten Principles for Arctic Tourism, Code of Conduct for Arctic Tour Operators, Code of Conduct for Arctic Tourists, series of workshops, pilot projects. The principles were translated into several Arctic languages.

From the beginning, WWF considered arctic tourism to be an activity that could provide benefits to both conservation as well as local communities – if done “the right way”. In order to help define and promote “the right way” the WWF GAP began to develop principles and codes for arctic tourism in 1995. Those first drafts were further developed and discussed in two workshops on Svalbard in early 1996 and 1997 under the umbrella of the GAP and a loose group of interested stakeholders under the name of the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” (LTCA) Initiative.

WWF ARCTIC TOURISM PROJECT: PRINCIPLES FOR ARCTIC TOURISM (1997)

Following the Svalbard meetings, the multi-stakeholder group under the lead of WWF agreed on Ten Principles for Arctic Tourism, and adapted versions for tour operators and tourists (the Code of Conduct for Arctic Tour Operators and the Code of Conduct for Arctic Tourists). The Principles were published, first in English, and eventually translated into ten languages (some of which were also printed in larger numbers).

In the following years, the LTCA group (consisting of small and larger tour operators, academics, authority and community representatives) gathered in workshops to discuss ways to promote and enforce implementation and compliance with the Principles. This included the discussion of possible certification schemes and implementation models through pilot projects. A number of tourism partners were involved in trialling the principles and six of them were rewarded for their efforts with the first Arctic Award (see Key Activity 2). The recognized pilot project partners were: Svalbard Polar Travel (later on Spitsbergen Travel), Regional Development Association of the Westfjords, Hapag Lloyd Cruises, Greenland Tours, Jann’s Adventure Lofoten, and Arcturus Expeditions/ Nonni Travel.

The Principles have not been updated since 1997, but they have been and still are widely cited in publications on and discussions about sustainable (tourism) development, certification and industry practice.

The last and biggest WWF-organized tourism workshop was held in April 2002 in Sweden.

Some key stakeholders early in the project

Academics: Dave Twynam, Margret Johnson, Debra Enzenbacher

Tour operators: Ko de Korte, Oceanwide Expeditions; Bärbel Krämer, Hapag Lloyd Cruises; Ulf Prytz, Svalbard Polar Travel; Jann Engstad, Lofoten Aktiv; Sarah Leonard, Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association

Communities/ regions: Dorothee Lübecki, Iceland’s Westfjord Region; Mike Couvrette, Government of the Northwest Territories; Michael Johnson, State of Alaska; Maureen Bundgaard, Nunavut Tourism

THE TEN TOURISM PRINCIPLES

For several years, WWF worked with operators, communities, and governments on Arctic Tourism projects before handing off the work to partners. The work resulted in the setting up of organizations and recognition programmes, as well as standards and guidelines for Arctic tourism.

Some core ideas for how tourism could respect conservation and Arctic communities were developed as part of this work. These ten guiding principles are still used today.

- 1. Make Tourism and Conservation Compatible**
Like any other use of the environment, tourism should be compatible with and a part of international, national, regional, and local conservation plans.
- 2. Support the Preservation of Wilderness and Biodiversity**
Vast areas of wilderness without roads or other traces of development are a unique characteristic of the Arctic. These areas are both environmentally valuable and one of the main reasons why tourists come to the Arctic.
- 3. Use Natural Resources in a Sustainable Way**
Conservation and the use of natural resources in a sustainable way are essential to the long-term health of the environment. Undeveloped areas in the Arctic are a non-renewable resource - once developed, it is impossible to return them to their original state.
- 4. Minimise Consumption, Waste and Pollution**
Reducing pollution and consumption also reduces environmental damage. This improves the tourism experience, and reduces the high cost of cleaning up the environment.
- 5. Respect Local Cultures**
Tourism should not change the lifestyles of peoples and communities unless they want it to do so.
- 6. Respect Historic and Scientific Sites**
Archaeological, historic, prehistoric and scientific sites and remains are important to local heritage and to science. Disturbing them diminishes their value and is often illegal.
- 7. Arctic Communities Should Benefit from Tourism**
Local involvement in the planning of tourism helps to ensure that tourism addresses environmental and cultural concerns. This should maximise benefits and minimise damage to communities. It should also enhance the quality of the tourism experience.
- 8. Trained Staff Are the Key to Responsible Tourism**
Staff education and training should integrate environmental, cultural, social, and legal issues. This type of training increases the quality of tourism. Staff should be role models for tourists.
- 9. Make Your Trip an Opportunity to Learn About the Arctic**
When tourists learn about communities and the environment, tourism provides the most benefits for all concerned and does the least damage. Knowledge and a positive experience enable tourists to act as ambassadors for Arctic environmental protection.
- 10. Follow Safety Rules**
The Arctic can be a treacherous environment and everyone involved in Arctic tourism needs to exercise caution and follow safety rules and practices. Failure to do so can result in serious injury and costly rescue or medical intervention that burdens communities.

KEY ACTIVITY 2

THE WWF ARCTIC AWARD/GRANT FOR LINKING TOURISM AND CONSERVATION IN THE ARCTIC

What: Annual award to recognize businesses or other individuals/ groups that have demonstrated conservation commitment. The concept was changed from an award for past achievements to a small grant for planned conservation projects in 2005.

Output: A number of profiled pioneer businesses and conservation projects.

The award was given the first time in 1998 to the pilot projects under the LTCA initiative and was then called the Heidi Andersson Pilot Project Award.

The following year, it became an “open competition” where companies could be nominated – or apply themselves – based on their track record in achieving a link between tourism and nature conservation.

ARCTIC AWARD AND GRANT RECIPIENTS

Arctic Award 1999

Number of applicants: 9
Winner: Arctic Treks, Alaska, USA
Runner up: Jann's Adventure Lofoten AS, Norway

Arctic Award 2000

Number of applicants: 7
Winner: Lapplandsafari, Sweden
Runner up: Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, Canada

Arctic Award 2001

Number of applicants: 14
Winner: Alaska Wildland Adventures, USA
Runner up: Igloolik Outdoor Adventures, Canada

Arctic Award 2002

Number of applicants: 11
Winner: Svalbard Villmarkssenter, Svalbard, Norway
Runner up: Canoe Arctic, Canada

Arctic Award 2003

Not given (due to the delay in awarding the previous one and an evaluation and redefinition of the award into a small grant concept)

Arctic Grant 2004

Number of applicants: 9
Grantee: Bathurst Inlet Road and Port Committee (BRPC), Canada, a partnership between the residents, organizations and businesses of the Bathurst Inlet area.
Grant support for: The BRPC received the grant to develop a conservation strategy for the Bathurst Inlet to preserve natural and cultural values for local people and ecotourism interests.

Arctic Grant 2005

Number of applicants: 12
Grantee: Ocean Sounds, Norway, non-governmental organization that is dedicated to research on marine animals, public education, and conservation of the marine environment.
Grant support for: The company's tourism activities aim to combine and support marine research and conservation, and the grant will help to pay for an exhibition illustrating the marine ecosystem and its need for conservation.

Arctic Grant 2006

Grantee: Arctic Wildlife Watch, a joint initiative between Canadian tour operator, Adventure Canada and Dr Chris Malcolm of Brandon University.
Grant support for: Arctic Wildlife Watch encourages new and systematises existing wildlife observations from tour operators in the Arctic and makes them accessible to researchers, nature managers and conservationists through a central database. Researchers and policy developers can access the information with a click of the mouse. The Internet-based database will offer a readily available, password protected, selection of GPS coordinates and species sightings that may be downloaded and used as needed to interpret wildlife-habitat information. Potential wildlife management areas will be easily identifiable.

KEY ACTIVITY 3

CERTIFICATION OF TOURISM PRACTICES

Objective: Framework for promoting and recognizing environmental “best practice”

Output: An update of the key principles for sustainable arctic tourism, supplemented with training modules for practitioners.

Flowing from the development of the Ten Principles (see Key activity 1) and discussions on how those could be promoted and implemented, exploring and supporting a form of certification scheme for tourism that supports and respects nature and people was one of the main activities of the tourism project from 2001 to 2005.

At the last LTCA workshop in Alaska, WWF together with the Alaska Wilderness Tourism and Recreation Association (Sarah Leonard) and the State of Alaska (Michael Johnson), discussed plans for how to go about a circumpolar tourism certification scheme. The idea was to transform the Ten Principles in a basis for certification. The working name of the initiative was LINKS.

In 2001, another planning meeting with the Alaskan partners was held, and at the same time, the WWF/Alaska initiative joined forces with the Finnish SusTour project, and gained recognition as an officially supported project of the Arctic Council’s Sustainable Development Working Group. No funding though. A market review of eco- and cultural tourism in the Arctic was commissioned by the State of Alaska, and Miriam Geitz completed her master thesis on what an arctic tourism certification could look like.

(Eco)tourism certification had been a much bigger topic already in the international arena, and one of the key players in this niche, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), had joined forces with UNEP to arrange six regional preparatory conferences for the UN International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) and the UN World Ecotourism Summit (WES) in 2002. WWF partnered with TIES, UNEP, the Swedish Ecotourism Society and The County Government of Västerbotten to host the Arctic Ecotourism Conference (AEC) in Northern Sweden prior to the WES.

The conference was attended by 64 people and workshops were grouped around three themes:

- Arctic Ecotourism and Conservation
- Arctic Ecotourism and Communities
- Arctic Ecotourism Certification and Marketing

In connection with the AEC, another meeting of the LINKS/SusTour partners was held and following the conference, with input from a larger group, a large stakeholder workshop planned and arranged in June 2002 in Tornio, Finland.

At the end of the workshop, the following five objectives for a project that now was called SMART (Sustainable Model of Arctic Regional Tourism) were selected:

1. To collect, document and analyse best practises in ST, market information and benefits acquired from adopting them that are relevant to Arctic tourism
2. Market sustainable tourism practices and benefits from adopting them.
3. Assist the arctic tourism sector to learn how to implement the ST practices
4. Develop a specific scheme for the arctic-wide tourism sector to recognise good businesses in the market place
5. Create incentives for the tourism sector to adopt ST practices and join the recognition scheme

The idea was that by going through these phases one would build capacity, interest and momentum for a certification.

The SMART project was completed in December 2005, and the Sustainable Arctic Tourism Association (SATA), an organization that would take on the further development and promotion of the obtained results, established. SATA is currently voluntarily maintained by a group of people, some of them from the SMART project, but apart from the website (www.arctictourism.net) appears almost dormant. Mike Couvrette (Government of the Northwest Territories) was involved in the project and is apparently interested in reviving it.

KEY ACTIVITY 4

CRUISE TOURISM

Objective: Reducing the environmental risk from cruise ships by improving operations and management of cruise tourism in arctic waters through a combination of improved regulation and self-regulatory measures by the industry.

Outputs: New regulations: Ban on heavy fuel oil and limit on passenger numbers per ship for the Eastern Svalbard Nature Reserves (and an expanded fuel ban and the exclusion of cruise visits from some of the most sensitive sites in the pipeline). On the industry side, the expedition cruise operators have formed the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) and require their members to comply with a certain standard of environmental, cultural and safety guidelines.

SVALBARD CRUISE TOURISM PROJECT

Representatives from cruise tour operators have been among the most “loyal” participants of the WWF-organized workshops, particularly those that offer natural history cruises on smaller boats.

At the Arctic Ecotourism Conference, some tour operators expressed again their concern for cruise developments on Svalbard. The archipelago in the Norwegian high Arctic was seeing a growth in tourism and especially cruise tourism. As a result, WWF started to talk to more cruise operators about the issue as well as the Norwegian government and authorities. As the concern for potential negative impacts from the industry was also shared by the authorities, WWF started to develop and fundraise for a project that would improve Svalbard cruise management.



'National Geographic Endeavour' ship, Svalbard, Norway.
© Jim Leape / WWF-Canon

In October 2004, WWF presented its report “*Cruise tourism on Svalbard – a risky business?*” which outlined the impacts and risks associated with cruise tourism in general and particularly on Svalbard, and provided recommendations on what should be done. The findings showed that the areas of biggest concern were the occurrence of a major oil spill and the continued disturbance of wildlife and degradation of landing sites. Throughout the report production, WWF had been in contact with both industry and authorities to collect feedback and discuss particular issues. WWF also participated and discussed the issues at the annual meeting of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), as many cruise operators on Svalbard are (founding) members of that organization. The initial idea to expand IAATO to the Arctic as well or otherwise “spawn” an arctic chapter was dismissed. Instead, the Svalbard cruise operators started their own group, the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO). The establishment of such a group was very welcome by WWF as it would provide a central point of contact to discuss issues of concern and work on solutions.

The operators had been supportive and in agreement with the draft versions of the report, but they felt that the final version where some recommendations had been sharpened was going too far.

WWF concluded the Svalbard cruise project officially with an article and a four page Svalbard leaflet printed in the Arctic Bulletin in summer 2005.

In summer 2007 a restriction on fuel use was introduced for the Eastern Svalbard Nature Reserves.

BERING SEA CRUISE PROJECT

Building on WWF's experience in working with cruise tourism and its implications for conservation in the Arctic, specifically in the Svalbard archipelago, the WWF Bering Sea Ecoregion Program and the WWF AP jointly developed a project in early 2005 that would assess cruise tourism as a factor affecting conservation in the Bering Sea Ecoregion.

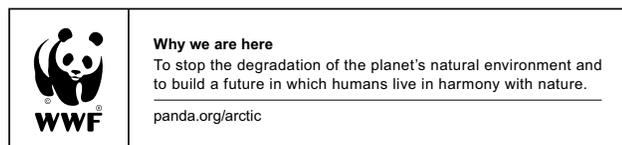
The idea arose after two groundings of a cruise vessel in the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, who were concerned about the possible impacts of cruise tourism in the protected area.

Project Objectives

- To assess the type, scale and potential challenges from cruise tourism activities in the Bering Sea.
- To promote environmental-friendly ship operations and conduct among operators and visitors.
- To improve information exchange and cooperation between cruise industry and protected areas, especially the Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge.

Outputs

1. Inventory of companies conducting tourism on the Russian and Alaskan sides of the Bering Sea (including an overview of services they provide to passengers; the practices employed to minimize environmental impacts and maximize educational opportunities; and their policies toward providing benefits to local nature and communities).
2. "Best practice" guidelines for cruise tourism in the Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR).
3. Example of coordination and information exchange routines between cruise operators/ field staff and protected area managers that can be used as a model.
4. Model partnership with cruise operator to promote Bering Sea conservation and best practice conduct.



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