

Chapter 22

Tourism Futures in the Arctic

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Abstract The Arctic is changing; it is ever changing in many social, cultural, economic and environmental ways. This chapter will look specifically at tourism in the Arctic: how has it changed? And how might it change in the future? Since the International Polar Year (IPY) in 2007–2008 there has been a rise of interest in tourism from academia, industry and local communities. Many authors have provided a look into the “deep” past of tourism development; with a number of books and article coming out around 2010, and some have offered thoughts on the future. This chapter will gaze further into the future, to the year 2030. What might the growth in tourism look like, based on the trajectory since 2008 or 2010? What will be the priorities for tourism growth or tourism research in the region?

22.1 Introduction

Tourism is growing and changing; this can be seen in emerging destinations as well as in those, which are now on everyone’s “bucket list” of must-sees. Globally more people are travelling, and to destinations that were once far off the typical route. There is a larger world population with the disposable income to travel, and there is a need to forecast some of this growth. Tourism futures, as a type of holistic forecasting, is relatively new. Yeoman’s (2012) work gives an excellent overview of this field, and with specific reference to Arctic tourism there are examples of “what if?” and “where are we headed?” – the speculative questions, which have already been examined in relation to some Arctic/Polar nations (see Enger et al. 2015; and others in the *Journal of Tourism Futures*). Tourism in the Arctic is an example of a forecasted change or future by its very nature. The Arctic had been an emerging or unknown destination for many years, but with the scientific focus of the International Polar Year (IPY) and media attention to climate change, more so than ever before

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people now want to “see it before it’s gone”, to use a catch phrase for this type of last chance tourism. We could go back to the beginning of tourism development in the Arctic to start the discussion, but perhaps a more useful starting point lies in the past 10 years.

Ten years ago the world was focused on the Polar Regions through science and the media – this was the International Polar Year (IPY 2007–2008). At that time there was very little attention paid to tourism by the large IPY projects and by various international scientific committees (Maher 2007). Academics did their work in traditional disciplines, and the tourism industry went about business as usual. Tourism was certainly present and had been so for hundreds of years in the Nordic countries. The IPY did, however, give us a tidy starting point from which to examine the future. Maher (2013) provides a thorough run down on the more distant past through the keynote of the 2nd conference of the International Polar Tourism Research Network, so between those two publications (Maher 2007, 2013) it is possible to create a starting point. In 2007 (pp. 3–4), Maher listed some key questions as part of the discussion at the 2006 Canadian Association of Geographer’s meeting. A few of these were as follows:

General research issues

- In terms of research, there are many opportunities, but what should be the priorities?
- While the Polar Regions may be ‘high profile’ again with renewed interest and political will, will it all dry up at some point?
- Is the sense that tourism growth is inevitable correct?
- What are the implications of climate change?

Communication

- Amongst both researchers and operators, what is the scope or rather need for networking opportunities?
- Where can they occur?
- When and under what auspices?

Niche sectors

- Specific to cruise ships, what are the dangers (bigger ships, bigger infrastructure, bigger cultural changes, leakage of \$\$)?
- What is the social impact of cruise ships, and what is the role of participatory research?

Maher (2013) posited that within each of the three realms (academia, industry and community) there were critical issues to work on. For academia it was celebrating new ideas, creating collaboration, updating publications, and simply cooperating. For industry there was the need to mend bridges, the mistakes of past researchers, and a carefully cultivated future together; one which recognizes good science/social science, but also the practicalities of running a business. For communities it was all about engagement and respectful relationships. So how have some of these questions and concerns been addressed in the subsequent years? This chapter will next attempt to address that, and then forecast for the next 15 years and beyond.

Table 22.1 Estimates of tourist numbers to a variety of Arctic Regions then, as modified from Maher (2013, pp.23–24)

Country/region/province	Tourist numbers (Estimates)	Sources/notes
USA (Alaska)	1,631,500	Summer 2006 data for all out-of-state visitors
Canada		
Yukon	8049	2004 data – covers only the Northern Yukon tourism region
Northwest territories	62,045	2006–2007 data for all non-resident travellers to the entire territory
Nunavut	9,323	2006, summer only
Nunavik (Northern Quebec)	25,000	Nord du Quebec statistics included both the Nunavik and James Bay regions
Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador)	565	2008 visitors to Torngat Mountains National Park
Greenland	33,000 (air arrivals) 22,051 (cruise arrivals)	Data reported in 2011
Iceland	277,800	Data reported in 2008
Svalbard (Norway)	29,813	AECO personal communication, August 2010; 2009 cruise visitors arriving from overseas
Norway (Finnmark)	2,420,959	Data from 2002
Sweden (Norrbotten county)	1,700,000	Data from 2001 tourist overnight stays
Finland (Finnish Lapland)	2,117, 000	2006 data for the number of registered tourist overnights
Russia	Estimated at a few tens of thousands and growing steadily	Actual data difficult to obtain

22.2 Tourism Growth

The growth of tourism in the circumpolar North is perhaps the easiest future metric to map. Is this growth inevitable, as was asked in 2007? Perhaps. Table 22.1 (modified from Maher 2013) showcases some tourism numbers from the mid 2000s, generally from 2006 until 2009 (the IPY years), but in some cases earlier.

Table 22.2 is an updated version covering the same regions, as best as possible, and offering updated estimates.

Using the jurisdictions where there is some consistency in data source and metrics recorded (Alaska, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Iceland, Sweden and Finland) the future of tourism growth does appear to have been inevitable. Each of these jurisdictions continued on an upward trajectory. The most staggering increase is Iceland with almost a six-fold increase. All tourism markets appear to be growing,

Table 22.2 Estimates of tourist numbers to a variety of Arctic Regions now by using the most current numbers available

Country/region/province	Tourist numbers (Estimates)	Sources/notes
USA (Alaska)	2,066,800	https://www.commerce.alaska.gov (Accessed January 2017); April 2016 update on 2014-2015 data for all out-of-state visitors
Canada		
Yukon	255,000	http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca (Accessed January 2017); 2015 estimated total overnight visits to the entire territory
Northwest territories	93,910	http://www.iti.gov.nt.ca (Accessed January 2017); 2015-2016 total visitors to the entire territory
Nunavut	16,750	http://nunavuttourism.com (Accessed January 2017); 2015 exit strategy – non-resident visitors
Nunavik (Northern Quebec)	1,000	http://www.tourisme.gouv.qc.ca (Accessed January 2017); 2010 report for 2008 visitor volume in Provincial zone 21
Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador)	19,840	http://www.btcrd.gov.nl.ca (Accessed January 2017); 2015 accommodation occupancy for Provincial zone 1 (Rigolet-Nain, Labrador)
Greenland	80,862 218,539	http://www.tourismstat.gl (Accessed January 2017); 2015 Greenland Tourism statistics for international air departures and number of paid overnights
Iceland	1,289,100	http://www.ferdamalastofa.is (Accessed January 2017) 2015 international visitors to Iceland
Svalbard (Norway)	118,614	http://sysselmannen.no (Accessed January 2017); 2014 Svalbard Reiseliv statistics for overnight stays in Longyearbyen
Norway (Nord Norge – northernmost 3 counties)	1,045,538	http://ec.europa.eu (Accessed January 2017); 2016 data for the number of nights spent at tourist accommodation by a non-resident
Sweden (Norrbotten county)	2,152,000	http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/norrboten (Accessed January 2017); 2014 <i>Facts about Norrbotten</i> report; data from 2013 tourist overnights
Finland (Finnish Lapland)	2,523,897	http://visitfinland.com (Accessed January 2017); 2016 data for the number of registered tourist overnights
Russia	500,000	Tzekina (2014)

and what little decline we see, may be best discussed with regards to the issue of how/where/when statistics are collected. The article by de la Barre et al. (2016) notes this as a foremost issue for the future, one that does impede our ability to forecast and strategically plan. There is now data available from Russia, and also many other jurisdictions, whether country or sub-national region, seem to have improved their data collection systems; although there are still remaining issues with being able to tease out regional subsets versus data from large units (e.g., country-wide).

22.3 Tourism Priorities

In the Arctic, discussion of priorities (or a research agenda) for tourism could be seen to begin with the work of Stewart et al. (2005). They set the initial bar and opened up the conversation again, as earlier researchers in the early 1990s had done so already in a previous wave of interest in polar tourism. This became a step towards much of the action, which has addressed Maher's (2007) questions on communication. Since 2008, there have been five conferences of the International Polar Tourism Research Network (IPTRN), and each of these has progressed the conversation by including new participants. Some conferences had more industry, others more community members; all had a slate of new graduate students depending on the location and year, or former graduate students now with early career positions. While there is no concrete "path" that has been detailed for tourism futures in the Arctic, there is much more recognition of the various possibilities. The IPTRN conferences have led to many joint publications and large-scale research projects, but recognizing that tourism is such a broad field of research an agenda cannot possibly contain everything at the same time. Thus, a true joint research agenda may be an impossibility. The future of the IPTRN appears solid with conferences already planned for the Yukon (2018) and Tierra del Fuego (2020). The corresponding University of the Arctic Thematic Network on Northern Tourism has also seen growth and expansion, which should continue. As Maher (2013) notes, the Thematic Network on Northern Tourism was founded to bridge the teaching-research barrier and when started in 2008 had big ideas, but little functional support. It is now one of the largest thematic networks in the University of the Arctic network, with more than 20 partners as of 2017, and its flagship program, a joint masters curriculum, has begun to take shape. A SIU funded pilot allowed seven institutions in five Arctic nations to implement a field course to Eastern Finnmark and two additional online courses in 2016/2017 – bringing together more than 40 faculty and students from 17 countries.

Topics such as climate change have become increasingly important in Arctic tourism, and the academic community has responded with insightful empirical research abounding (see Dawson et al. 2007, 2010; Kajan 2014). Local communities have become more and more engaged – as was deemed critically important by Maher (2013). This has occurred in almost every scientific discipline since the IPY. Examples of community-based citizen science in relation to tourism, which provides true feedback to the community are documented by de la Barre et al. (2016) in locations across the North, but still more could be done.

With regards to niche sectors, cruise tourism has certainly become a critical player. In 2007 when the MS Explorer sank, it opened up many people's eyes to the true dangers possible in Arctic cruise tourism (see Stewart and Draper 2008). In the Canadian Arctic, the concern was that a similar incident could happen near a local community without any possibility of assistance due to aging infrastructure and/or non-existent monitoring. In 2010, when the Clipper Adventurer grounded (see Stewart and Dawson 2011) there were new fears of the same kind, yet the largescale

voyage of the *Crystal Serenity* took hold in 2016. By all accounts the future involving larger cruise ships, seeking passage through key routes is upon us, and for tourism the attractions, such as the discovery of Franklin's ships and subsequent media attention, is upon us as well. More large ships will come, that is certain with Crystal Cruises (owners of the *Crystal Serenity*) already planning additional transits in summers 2017 and 2018. The real concern now is whether other operators will give as much thought for the environment (having an additional icebreaker accompany the voyage) or culture/society (through extensive pre-trip consultation), and thus due diligence to the undertaking; and when or if the Canadian management/permitting system will catch up to its European counterparts (using AECO and the Governor of Svalbard as an example).

Another niche tourism sector, which is very much growing, is Indigenous tourism. Canada has chosen to focus much of its marketing on Indigenous (Aboriginal) products and attractions, particularly in the Arctic and provincial peripheries. This focus is echoed through new governance regimes (autonomy, self-government, etc.) that give Indigenous communities more say and engagement in many regions of the Arctic. The academic community is also at the crest of this wave with new work such as that by Viken and Müller (2017).

22.4 Conclusions – Futures Towards 2030

The year 2017 has been named the “International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development” by the UN General Assembly, so what better time to forecast the future than now. Overall, the growth, communication and engagement in Arctic tourism are on positive trajectories. There are some concerns around carrying capacity of vulnerable Arctic areas; for example, can Iceland both culturally and environmentally, sustain such continued growth? There are also concerns around the “slippery slope” entered in regards to large cruise vessels. However, more than ever there is enthusiasm for new ideas and new technologies, and there is starting to be some proof that better networks lead to better results; collaboration is a good thing (see Stewart et al. 2016). Cooperation will manifest through the loss of national or academic politics – creating synergies vs. isolationism and leading to full engagement with a full suite of industry and community partners.

Governance issues and skepticism of industry-academia collaboration should subside and there are already many examples whereby tourism and science can go hand in hand. Industry associations are growing, which is good – especially when the most promising practices are shared. This is most evident in the recent move by the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) into Canada, as well as the interest of the Arctic Council's working group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) in more circumpolar cruise guidelines. However, no group such as the Arctic Council or AECO, is forgetting the need for grassroots and sub-jurisdictional buy in – a laddering of planning strategies from circumpolar to national and to regional levels. The development towards 2030 will be interesting.

Hopefully, the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development can be a starting point for another five IPTRN conferences, where more people safely and securely see the region, and where all facets of the tourism industry develop. There will as well be a new suite of educators and researchers if some of the University of the Arctic activities prevail until 2030.

The comparative work done by Maher et al. (2014) has revealed many possible directions for future research, which could move Arctic tourism in a more sustainable direction – corresponding to the UN designated year. The strain between the perceived need for economic development through tourism (and the resultant demand for more infrastructure) and the fear that more tourism will degrade natural environments and negatively impact small communities will continue. There is no automatic or standardized solution to this, and every location will feel the strain differently. As research offers better proof – for example in a comparison of governance of tourism in multiple Arctic countries, jurisdictions will not be able to fully understand all the possible public, private, and civic stakeholder roles in the development of tourism.

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