Antarctic tourism through Ushuaia: Comparative data from fifteen seasons

English version provided by the author

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*Information paper submitted by Argentina*

Summary

This document presents a comparison of different aspects of tourist flows to Antarctica via the port of Ushuaia, from summer season 2008/2009 to the last season, 2022/2023, based on the data provided by Argentina to the ATCM for fifteen years [IP 119 (2009), IP 129 (2010), IP 20 (2011), IP 88 (2012), IP 86 (2013), IP 84 (2014), IP 126 (2015), IP 108 (2016), IP 137 (2017), IP 63 (2018), IP 63 (2018), IP 84 (2019), IP 111 (2022) and IP 106 (2023)].

***Number of passengers that visited Antarctica***

The number of passengers to Antarctica via the port of Ushuaia show different variations along the fifteen seasons that were analised. First thing to note is the significant decrease of 27 % in the number of passengers for the 2011/2012 season, compared to the previous one. However, in the following seasons the number of passengers increased and continued to grow until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/2021. In the 2021/2022 season, activity started to recover with few voyages, reaching the highest figures in the history of Antarctic tourism in the last 2022/2023 season. Figure 1 shows the evolution of tourist flows and the number of voyages over the past fifteen years (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1 - Total number of passengers and voyages through the port of Ushuaia per season**

Gráfico, Gráfico de líneas

Descripción generada automáticamente

*Source: Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF)*

Even though this Information Paper deals with the comparison of the past fifteen seasons, it should be noted that the 2007/2008 season showed a peak of 44,605 passengers who visited Antarctica through the port of Ushuaia[[1]](#footnote-1), number that was only reached again ten years later, in the 2017/2018 season, when a total of 43,000 passengers made the journey. In part, the decrease that occurred after the 2007/2008 season was due to the international financial crisis.

A significant difference appears in the ratio between the number of visitors aboard vessels that carry more than 500 passengers and those that carry up to 500. The number of passengers aboard the largest ships, which do not land but only navigate Antarctic waters, has remained practically constant from the 2008/2009 to 2010/2011 seasons, only to drop notably in the following season. This decrease began with the amendments to Annex 1 of the MARPOL (IMO) Convention which entered in force in August 2011, banning the use and transport of heavy fuel south of the 60º S degrees, thus affecting large vessels, which activity dropped 75% compared to the previous season. However, for the following season (2012/2013), the number of passengers aboard large vessels increased, and steadily grew until the 2019/2020 season. This type of vessels did not make any voyages to the Antarctic Treaty Area for two seasons due to the pandemic (2020/2021 and 2021/2022), but their activity recovered in the 2022/2023 season, demonstrating a relevant increase both in the number of passengers on board and in the number of voyages (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2 - Visitors aboard vessels that carry more than 500 passengers and number of voyages made through the port of Ushuaia per season**

Gráfico, Gráfico de líneas

Descripción generada automáticamente

*Source: Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF)*

Vessels carrying up to 500 passengers showed more moderate fluctuations, with a gradual decrease in the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 seasons, beginning a relatively constant increase until the 2020/2021 season when there was no movement at all. In the 2021/2022 season a total of 17,265 visitors were registered, a 65.3% decrease compared to the 2019/2020 season. Figure 3 shows the number of visitors and voyages made by said vessels during the period of analysis.

**Figure 3 - Visitors aboard vessels that carry up to 500 passengers and number of voyages made through the port of Ushuaia per season**

**Gráfico, Gráfico de líneas

Descripción generada automáticamente**

*Source: Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF)*

***Number of vessels that travelled to Antarctica***

Although the number of vessels varies each season, fluctuation can be observed until the 2014/2015 season, as from the 2015/2016 season onwards there is a constant growth in the number of vessels that make landings (except for the Covid pandemic).

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that during the last few seasons there has been a change in the shipping fleets, as these tend to provide greater capacity, thus allowing an increase in the number of passengers transported. Some innovations include hybrid power units and battery systems that facilitate navigation without emissions and silently in sensitive areas, solar panels, advanced systems for waste treatment, waste heat recovery systems, anti-icing systems for bridge windows, among others. In addition, some vessels include specific equipment such as helicopters, small submarines and submarine remotely operated vehicles (ROVs). Some vessels may also have hydrophones that can capture the sounds of the sea. In this respect, vessels must comply with the requirements derived from the Polar Code on environmental and safety matters that came into force in 2017. Figure 4 shows the number of vessels that operated throughout the different seasons.

**Figure 4 - Number of vessels that operated through the port of Ushuaia, according to their type**

Gráfico, Gráfico de barras

Descripción generada automáticamente

*Source: Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF)*

***Length of the seasons***

In general terms, the tourist seasons present a greater extension since the 2015/2016 season, coinciding with the increase in voyages and passengers, except for the 2008/2009 season which lasted 179 days.

In the first seasons of the analysed period, the departure of the icebreaker Kapitan Khlebnikov marked the early beginning of voyages in October.

Four seasons lasted more than 170 days, with the 2018/2019 season being the longest, as it extended for 180 days.

Based on the consequences caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a small dip is observed in the 2019/2020 season compared to the previous one, since some voyages were cancelled by the end of the season.

The 2021/2022 season is the shortest, coinciding with the lower flow of tourists as a result of the pandemic. Figure 5 presents the extension of the tourist seasons for the entire period of analysis.

**Figure 5 - Extension of tourist seasons**

**Gráfico, Gráfico de líneas

Descripción generada automáticamente**

*Source: Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF)*

1. The IP 160 (2017) submitted by Argentina presents a synthesis of the movement of Antarctic maritime tourism through the port of Ushuaia over 60 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)