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PROMOTION OR PROTECTION

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**THE MANAGEMENT OF TOURIST VISITATION TO NEW ZEALAND'S
ANTARCTIC AND SUB-ANTARCTIC TERRITORIES
NEW ZEALAND AS A CASE STUDY**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree

of Master of Business Studies

in Management Systems at

Massey University

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1993

ABSTRACT:

Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands are among the last regions on earth that are still relatively unspoilt from human activity. At the same time, they are also among the last tourism frontiers in the world. The forms of tourism, trends, impacts and the current management mechanisms are described and assessed.

New Zealand is offered as a case-study because it is experiencing increased visitation to its Antarctic and sub-Antarctic territories. As claimant to a section of Antarctica and signatory to the Antarctic Treaty, New Zealand has a vested interest in preserving this unique area. As the operator of Antarctic bases, it is probable that the New Zealand government may be called upon to provide assistance to tourist expeditions in the Antarctic. New Zealand companies are involved in tourist visits to the sub-Antarctic islands. Attention is drawn to areas of concern, and the various policies New Zealand applies to Antarctic and sub-Antarctic ecotourism are analysed. The need for a sustainable tourist management regime is examined, in order to balance the paradox between preservation and visitation.

The varying aspects of international and national management regimes to manage Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism are discussed. Antarctica is managed by an international system, whereas the sub-Antarctic islands are subject to national legislation. This has implications for tourism management in these regions. It is questioned whether the present tourist regulations are adequate to protect the sub-Antarctic and Antarctic environments from the impacts of tourism. It is suggested that the current mechanisms are not sufficient, and the establishment of an International Convention on Antarctic and sub-Antarctic Tourism is proposed.

PREFACE

Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands are unique among the continents and islands of the world. Their natural environments are generally described in superlatives. Although Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands are usually associated with scientific research and fishing, tourism is increasingly becoming a major factor in the management of activities in these regions.

Green, sustainable, or eco tourism have become much-used terms of the 1990s. Public awareness of environmental issues is growing, and tourism has become a focus of this. Ecotourism is indeed the fastest growing sector of the world-wide tourism industry. As tourist numbers continue to rise and the industry even reaches the South Pole, there is increasing concern about the impacts and regulation of tourism

Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism is generally in the form of nature or ecotourism. This form of tourism has as its primary objective nature-oriented experiences, but even this type can still impact on the natural environment. Tourism to Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic regions can produce environmental changes which may be irreversible. It is not always possible to predict the ultimate consequences of tourism to these areas. Before any management regimes are composed, it will be necessary to conduct research in the ecological consequences of tourism impact. A major obstacle in the formulation of rational strategies of conservation and tourism management is the difficulty in obtaining information, and the irregular exchange of information.

Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism is invariably associated. Many cruise ships travelling to Antarctica will visit several sub-Antarctic islands *en route*. There are a range of opportunities for the visitor to travel to the sub-Antarctic and Antarctic. These various methods differ in the impact they produce on the natural environment, which has implications for management.

The major objective of this thesis is to review the current forms of regulation of Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism. Antarctica is controlled by the Antarctic Treaty System, whereas the sub-Antarctic islands are covered under national jurisdiction. Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism is expected to grow, posing

the question whether current regulations are sufficient. Currently, tourism management relies on self-regulation by the tour operators.

Antarctic and sub-Antarctic ecotourism management is complicated by the issue of sovereignty. In the sub-Antarctic national jurisdiction applies, which regulates any visitor. This can result in a wide variety of measures being applied by the nations administering the islands. In the Antarctic, all activities are regulated by the Antarctic Treaty System, which only affects the nationals of its member states. New Zealand's policies for the administration of Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism are reviewed to illustrate the variances in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism regulation.

The author suggests that current tourism regulations are insufficient and incoherent. The establishment of an International Convention on Antarctic and sub-Antarctic tourism is promoted, which will enable increased coordination of tourism management throughout the Southern Ocean.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

This thesis would not have been possible without assistance from the following people. I wish to thank them for their attentions, support, suggestions and acknowledge their valuable contributions.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Michael Hall, for his valuable input, suggestions of topics, and general perseverance.

I thank Professor T. Vitalis, Head of Department, for his encouragement.

I am grateful to my fiancé, Tom Hanly, whose endurance and support are immensely appreciated.

My extended family, who were always available for encouragement.

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