

*Cruise Tourism in Polar Regions: Promoting Environmental and Social Sustainability*. Edited by Michael Lück, Patrick T. Maher and Emma J. Stewart. London: Earthscan, 2010. 246 pp. Index, figures, tables, boxes, and B&W photos.

The principle thesis of *Cruise Tourism in Polar Regions* is that the response to increasing evidence of negative environmental and social impacts of cruise tourism in the polar regions has been woefully inadequate. In particular, the book examines the sustainability of cruise tourism in regions where sensitive ecosystems, small populations, and fragile economies are ubiquitous. The editors' dialogue around the sustainability of polar cruise tourism began in earnest in 2007 at the *Tourism and Global Change in Polar Regions* conference in Oulu, Finland. They concluded that while there is a respectable volume of literature that examines the impacts of polar cruise tourism, the "tough questions" (227) have not been asked. More important, they contend that the data and findings in the literature have not been consolidated or connected in a manner that would enable a more holistic examination of the sustainability of polar cruise tourism. The editors and contributors to this book represent a broad range of interests and considerable cruise tourism and sustainable development expertise, which enables a pragmatic assessment of polar cruise tourism in the context of social and environmental sustainability. The editors selected articles that align under four key dimensions: Market, Human, Environmental, and Policy and Governance.

**Market Dimensions:** This section provides a somewhat narrow summary of market trends and behaviours. The emphasis on yacht cruising seems a bit disproportionate to the scant examination of trends in global cruise markets like the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. The editors propose that economic sustainability is a "given" (227) driven by the willingness and capacity of consumers to purchase polar cruises. This approach ignores the significant impact that environmental regulations, head taxes, fees, and political will have on cruise markets like Alaska. The section fails to provide meaningful perspective on the market demand and capacity for polar cruising in the context of economic sustainability. A deeper examination of these factors would enable a more strategic assessment of the sustainability of the polar cruise tourism.

**Human Dimensions:** This section provides an assessment of a number of safety, security, and social issues that affect the well-being, prosperity, and lifestyles of residents who experience impacts from polar cruise tourism. The chapter serves a warning that it is not a matter of whether a cruise ship disaster will occur in the polar regions, but simply when. Sheppard (Chapter

6) proposes that while the visitor industry has placed significant emphasis on sustainability in recent years, the practical application of sustainable practices and behaviours by tourists is not widely evident (75). She contends that the more cruises a passenger has been on, the more they appear to lower their ethical standards, which suggests that the ethical principles and behaviours of cruise tourists (especially the multi-time cruiser) may be a long way away from influencing more sustainable practices in the cruise ship industry (V. Sheppard, personal communication, February 20, 2012). This chapter reinforces findings across sustainable tourism development literature that while tourism suppliers/operators and visitors declare their support for sustainable practices in the tourism industry, visitor behaviour falls short on this commitment, particularly if it hits them in the pocketbook (*ibid.*). Green (Chapter 7) argues that achieving sustainable tourism development is inextricably linked to our ability to inspire today's youth to become agents of change (104) and champions for sustainable development.

**Environmental Dimensions:** This section proposes that: 1) the unfettered increase in the number of cruises and passengers visiting the polar regions will have an increasingly negative impact on fragile polar environments; 2) environmental regulation, monitoring, and management of cruise volumes and behaviours is inadequate and unsustainable; and 3) climate change is occurring in the polar regions and very little is known about the impacts these changes will have on the cruise tourism experience, communities, residents, Aboriginal populations, flora and fauna, sea life, biological systems, and the economy of the regions.

**Policy and Governance Dimensions:** This section points to the inadequacy and inconsistency of tourism management practices in the polar regions. Hull and Milne (Chapter 12) point to the need for longer term sustainable development planning and practices supported by enforceable regulation. Ringer (Chapter 13) contends that it is critical to develop key performance indicators for sustainability in order to effectively monitor, manage, and regulate the cruise market in a manner that preserves the ecological systems and accommodates the needs of communities, residents, and the cruise companies. While this section tables concrete approaches to addressing some of the policy and governance issues related to polar cruise tourism, it is somewhat impractical to examine these issues in regions that are notably distinct in terms of the political landscape, governance, regulation, cruise volumes, capacity, maturity, and populations.

## Summary

Inspired by the fourth International Polar Year (2007–2009), this book explores the crosscutting themes of market change, climate change, monitoring, and education to highlight a sector of tourism at risk. The contributors provide a reasonable assessment of existing research and literature that examines the environmental and social sustainability of polar cruise tourism. In their introduction and throughout each chapter of the book, the contributors acknowledge the absence of a coordinated commitment to research that would enable an ongoing critical analysis of the impacts of polar cruise tourism. Notably, the editors provide a responsible research agenda (232) that they hope will serve as a call to action.

Readers may find it difficult to envisage the Alaska, northern polar and Antarctic cruise markets as a homogenous cluster of polar cruising. For example, the Alaska cruise experience includes visits to a state capital, an urban centre of more than 300,000 people, and shore experiences driven more by revenue potential than authenticity (Mak, 2008). The book does not convince the reader that it is realistic to layer findings, trends, and experience from the Alaska cruise market across a polar cruise cluster.

The book provides compelling evidence that cruise tourism in the polar regions is at a crossroads in its evolution and unless immediate action is taken to manage and mitigate the economic, environmental, and social impacts, disastrous consequences are inevitable. The book proposes that the sustainability of polar cruise tourism is at risk unless the stakeholders (cruise companies, governments, regulators, communities, residents, future generations) are prepared to work together to protect the fragile social and ecological environments in the regions. In the end, the book raises more questions than provide answers in respect to the environmental and social sustainability of cruising in the Polar Regions.

## References

Mak, J. (2008). Taxing cruise tourism: Alaska's head tax on cruise ship passengers. *Tourism Economics*, 14(3), 599–614. doi:10.5367/000000008785633613

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