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## Arctic Destinations and Attractions as Evolving Peripheral Settings for the Production and Consumption of Peak Tourism Experiences

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### Background

The Arctic has attracted considerable research attention from various disciplines and this trend has intensified in recent decades. Reasons for this increased scrutiny include growing social and political foci on climate change that is felt sharply in the region (Sturm *et al.*, 2001; Ford and Smit, 2004; Hinzman *et al.*, 2005); increased debates over the sustainable use of natural and cultural resources of the Arctic (Kaltenborn, 1998; Riedlinger and Berkes, 2001); and amplified geopolitical tensions that result from the opening of the region (Heininen and Nicol, 2007; Young, 2009). The Arctic tourism experiences described and analysed in this edited book are informed by all of these ‘macro issues’. Despite this increased interest in the macro issues in the Arctic area, there is still a need for knowledge regarding the micro issues, such as how to facilitate sustainable tourism. The present book focuses on the tourist and the tourist experiences, in addition to the tourism facilitators: that is, the firm, the organizations and the stakeholders providing for tourism in the Arctic.

The aim of this book, specifically, is to better understand the production and consumption of visitor experiences in the Arctic

region as a rapidly changing tourist destination. This knowledge will contribute to a balanced triple bottom line (TBL) sustainability approach in Arctic tourism. Tracing the historic and contemporary experiences of how the Arctic has been and is currently visited and ‘consumed’, the book focuses on the paradoxical dichotomy of the Arctic where the peak tourist experience, or a multidimensional ‘experiential core’, is attained through a context of geographical peripherality. With the core–periphery dichotomy as its fundamental approach, the book discusses how and by whom such experiences are created and consumed in the Arctic region, and considers the environmental, sociocultural and economic repercussions of this production/consumption nexus.

Compared with other disciplines, concerted research into Arctic tourism is relatively recent, appearing in the mid-1990s (Maher, 2007). However, we can trace visits to the Arctic by tourist-outsiders as far back as to 1795 (see Chapter 2). In an era when tourism accounts for 9% of global GDP and 30% of all service exports (UNWTO, 2015), it is a worthwhile investment to give dedicated attention to the Arctic as a destination in order to better understand the region’s relationship with tourism in all its diverse economic, cultural, political and

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environmental dimensions. Two reasons can be given about why this edited collection focuses exclusively on the Arctic. First, and notwithstanding some excellent Arctic-focused outputs (Mason, 1997; Mason *et al.*, 2000), research and discussion of Arctic tourism mostly occurs as a dimension of a broader polar tourism construct that often gives more focus to the Antarctic (see for example Hall and Johnston, 1995; Stewart *et al.*, 2005; UNEP, 2007). Aside from the especially exotic and attractive character of that remote continent, the study of its tourism is facilitated by the gateway role of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators, which sanctions a small group of elite tour operators, imposes strict behavioural regulations in accordance with various Antarctic Treaty provisions and compiles detailed visitor statistics. Its system of international bases, moreover, fosters a culture of scientific research that can easily be applied to the growing number of tourists who visit these sites out of curiosity or adventure. The Arctic has neither its own dedicated tour operator organization, strict visitor regulations that accord to broader treaties nor accurate visitor data, all of which suggest the need for heightened tourism research in the face of rapid change in this distinctive polar tourism region.

A second reason for our exclusive Arctic focus, accordingly, is to stimulate the production of a more systematic knowledge base on Arctic tourism. The lack of such a research database is confirmed in the Social Indicators project – a project to develop a database that would serve to track social changes brought about by the expansion of Arctic tourism resulting from climate change (Fay and Karlsdóttir, 2011) where an urgent need for an Arctic tourism observation system is raised. One example of government and industry awareness for heightened research engagement is a 2015 European Union grant to the Visit Arctic Europe project. Here, industry collaboration among Finnish Lapland, Swedish Lapland and northern Norway received major funding to develop and promote nature-based tourism in the northern regions of Scandinavia. The project aims to increase sustainable tourism business and cooperation across the borders of the northern European countries (Interreg, 2015), thereby highlighting the urgent need for more systematic and continued collaboration among

tourism stakeholders, including academics. This edited book, the first Arctic-dedicated collation, is an initiative from a group of Arctic tourism researchers to understand tourism activities in the Arctic and facilitate their sustainable pursuit.

### Defining Arctic Tourism

The quest for a robust knowledge base that will help to operationalize sustainable Arctic tourism requires a clear working definition of 'Arctic tourism'. Indeed, it is difficult initially to find one single definition of what constitutes the Arctic (Hall and Johnston, 1995; Maher, 2007). Various factors can be taken into consideration individually or collectively to define the Arctic, including phytogeography (e.g. the regions located above the treeline, which is in reality a zone of transition rather than an unambiguous boundary), climate (e.g. the regions where in July the long-term average isotherm is below 10°C), geomorphology (presence of permafrost) or latitude (e.g. regions north of the Arctic Circle at 66°33'N or 60°N). The definitional attempt becomes even more complicated when political criteria are added (Hall and Saarinen, 2010: 450–451). However, several Dependencies (Greenland, Svalbard) and subnational units (Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Yukon, Alaska, Finnmark, Murmansk and Arkhangelsk Oblasts, Nenetsia, Yamalia, Yakutia, Chukotka) are widely recognized as being located entirely or mostly within the Arctic. We largely adhere to these geopolitical criteria but remain open to non-conforming perceptions. From the tourism perspective, we take a similarly liberal approach, embracing all types of recreational visitation as well as business and social visits, and including scientific research personnel, the military, resource workers and local residents to the extent that tourism is implicated in any of their activity. Taken altogether, we employ the following definition of Arctic tourism:

Any tourism-relevant activities that are associated with businesses, communities, organizations or other stakeholders in the Arctic region, defined to include the areas and regions as per the consideration of relevant phytogeographic, climatic, geomorphological, latitudinal and geopolitical criteria.

## Travel and Tourism in the Changing Arctic

Research into Arctic tourism has identified various themes and approaches and can be placed under three main themes of sustainability, climate change and tourist experiences.

### Sustainability

TBL sustainability forms the underlying philosophy in the main theme of Arctic tourism research. Unlike some other destinations where the tourism industry was developed by early explorers and a few entrepreneurial-minded local people, who capitalized on the new economic potentials in tourism, formation of the Arctic tourism industry was subject to more monitoring and regulation. This is evidenced in reports and academic research publications on Arctic tourism; for example, the first volume that discusses Arctic tourism as part of polar tourism highlights tourism impacts in polar regions (Hall and Johnston, 1995). The relevant chapters discuss lack of political sovereignty, economic benefits not transferred to indigenous peoples, negative environment impacts and some disruption of scientific research. The authors (Hall and Johnston, 1995) recognized that the state of polar tourism implied a need for a clear code of conduct or regulations. In the same vein, recognizing the increasing volume and distribution of polar tourism and hence concerns for environmental and cultural sustainability in the region, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provided 'Good Practices' as a set of recommendations to follow in order to protect wildlife, and to respect protected areas and scientific research (UNEP, 2007). Given the fragile nature and increasing vulnerability of the Arctic region, where tourism is highly dependent on nature, support for a regulatory standpoint is not surprising.

The start of more organized group-level research into Arctic tourism can be attributed to the formation of the Arctic Council in September 1996. This comprises eight member countries: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the USA; and six organizations with Permanent

Participant status, which represent indigenous peoples of the Arctic (Arctic Council, 2016). Working closely with, and significantly influenced by, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Arctic tourism has been investigated from the standpoint of regulating activities and resource use to prevent environmental and cultural degradation. For example, as part of a WWF project launched in Svalbard in 1996, a set of codes of conduct for Arctic and sub-Arctic tourism was developed, detailing acceptable and recommended activities as well as steps to take for sustainable tourism operations in the fragile Arctic environment (Mason, 1997; Mason *et al.*, 2000). The Arctic Council subsequently initiated the formation of the University of the Arctic (UArctic) as a cooperative network of universities, colleges, research institutes and other organizations concerned with education and research in and about the north. UArctic was officially launched in Rovaniemi, Finland, in 2001 (UArctic, 2016) and has since established the Northern Tourism Thematic Network to conduct seminars and research on northern tourism with sustainability as the underlying key principle in the network's research agenda (Pashkevich, 2014).

The culture of indigenous peoples has been researched as part of sustainable tourism in the Arctic; this too is a major point of departure from tourism in Antarctica, which has no indigenous or permanent human population. Research into Canada's western Arctic region, where the Inuvialuit and the Gwich'in have their settlement areas, revealed complex relationships among community groups, government organizations and the tourism industry. The study reflects the need for careful management of the indigenous peoples' way of life when used as a tourism resource. Traditional ways of living that have strong land-based activities are both assets and hurdles to indigenous tourism development in the region, particularly with the desire for authentic tourist experience creation and provision (Notzke, 1999).

### Climate change

The research approach into TBL sustainability has further accelerated recently with increased

awareness of climate change in the Arctic. The impact of climate change on society has become an equally important issue. Assumed impacts are negative overall and in severe cases result in climate change refugees (Biermann and Boas, 2010). Understanding the impacts of climate change and developing effective mitigating measures have been subjects of tourism research (Scott *et al.*, 2008; Simpson *et al.*, 2008). An especially insidious factor here is that anthropogenic climate change will have dramatic and probably negative effects on tourism, including destinations and attractions that are otherwise managed according to best practice precepts of sustainable tourism. A review of climate change-focused tourism research literature produces the themes of businesses, consumers, destinations, policies and frameworks that can all usefully inform the interrogation of climate change issues as they apply to tourism (Kaján and Saarinen, 2013). The study also highlights the relatively little attention given to community perceptions of climate change adaptation and calls for a more concerted effort to address this. The call is justified given the grave implications for this particular stakeholder group.

In the context of Arctic tourism, the overall negative impacts of climate change are to some extent balanced by possible opportunities. For example, easier access to the Canadian Arctic by cruise ships has been predicted and this is regarded as a new opportunity of high potential. However, caution is advised by Stewart *et al.* (2007), who point out that the warming effect alters the distribution and character of sea ice and may have negative implications for cruise tourism in the region. Recognizing the complex relationships among the cultural, economic and environmental realms, Dawson *et al.* (2007) recommend a systems approach as an underlying principle to develop adequate frameworks for understanding and developing appropriate mitigation measures. A recent investigation of small communities in northern Finnish Lapland further highlights the need to reconsider current *laissez-faire* development approaches in tourism in relation to climate change (Kaján, 2014). Based on the case studies of the Kilpisjärvi and Saariselkä communities, which are both snow-dependent and see the current pathway of development as

problematic, Kaján (2014) argues that increased collaboration between climate and social scientists is required for a comprehensive understanding of the current situation, to minimize negative impacts and to identify possible opportunities. Indeed, cooperation among academics from different disciplines and countries is required for a better assessment of climate change impacts on Arctic tourism. However, because of the multiple Arctic jurisdictions, relevant statistical data sets are incompatible (Fay and Karlsdóttir, 2011). A comprehensive database that can help monitor the changes in Arctic tourism due to climate change is in urgent need of development.

### **Tourist experiences in the Arctic**

Arctic tourism has been associated with sentiments of adventure on the edge of the world (Weber, 2001; Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004) and unique nature-based experiences (Dupuis and Muller, 2004). Adventure in nature is a main trait of Arctic tourism. Skiing, mountain hiking and – more recently – snow scooting (Eckerstorfer *et al.*, 2009) have been means to embody the adventurous spirit of the Arctic. Additionally, the Arctic as a destination has been increasingly perceived as something soon to vanish, and thus more valuable to pursue as a scarce resource (Lemelin *et al.*, 2010; Lemelin *et al.*, 2012). With its rapidly changing geography, flora and fauna, the Arctic has been on the list of disappearing, doomed or ‘last chance’ destinations to visit. This ‘disappearing Arctic’, attributable to global warming but also to increased development pressures, paradoxically contributes to an increasing number of tourists to the vulnerable region. It is paradoxical because the very concern for the environmental vulnerability of the Arctic creates the growing number of tourists in the region, particularly those who are supposed to be environmentally conscientious. This phenomenon subsequently evokes debate over whether such concerns for the vulnerable environment from the environmentally concerned tourists, would in effect expedite the disappearance of the Arctic. This status quo in the Arctic tourism has significant implications for the nature of tourist

experiences. For the benefit of protecting the vulnerable Arctic and to demonstrate this to the environmentally conscious tourists, tourism activities in the Arctic must have environment-protecting elements, while opening up the vulnerable region to the increasing number of tourists. What is clear in this conundrum, nonetheless, is that people are expected to continue to travel, in increasing numbers, to one of the last frontier destinations on earth, the Arctic.

Experiencing the Arctic is not limited to seizing the last chance to visit the vanishing ice flows and polar bears. Combined with the perception of a wild and mystical north, food tourism has also received attention in the circumpolar north. A study of textual and visual materials to promote Swedish Lapland demonstrates the increasingly intertwining experiences of environment and its products (ingredients for local food production) and the stories that enhance the consuming experiences. Ultimately, consuming food in this setting is more about consuming stories (de la Barre and Brouder, 2013), especially when they involve local food that is perceived as disgusting (e.g. decomposing whale blubber) and hence peripheral and adventurous. This recent trend in the promotion of food in Arctic tourism as the central entity of consumption is a reminder of the rather skewed research focus directed to Arctic tourism. While TBL sustainability has been guiding the central philosophy in Arctic tourism research, the experiences from tourists' points of view, and the relationship between these experiences and sustainability, have been relatively under-researched and misunderstood. The lack of balanced attention in Arctic tourism, particularly on tourist experiences, has been raised earlier. In a review of tourism research in polar regions, Stewart *et al.* (2005) identify two areas that require more attention: (i) tourist experiences, such as the nature of tourist experiences in the polar regions, expectations, knowledge and satisfaction; and (ii) global trends and large-scale influences such as climate change adaptation. The climate change phenomenon and the tourism industry's adaptation strategies have been gathering steady and increasing attention, as reviewed in the section above. However, for a balanced understanding of Arctic tourism that aspires to TBL sustainability, the tourist experience and its production and

consumption manifestations in the Arctic remain to be explored. This book aspires to fill this critical knowledge gap.

## Outline of the Book

This evidence-based collection of chapters from leading scholars of Arctic tourism is organized into two main parts. The first part is Introduction and Issues: Tourist Experiences of the Arctic. The introductory Chapter 1 by Lee, Weaver and Prebensen is followed by a historical account of Arctic travel in Chapter 2. Here, Guissard and Lee consider the diverse experiences of three French travellers in the context of the periphery–core dynamics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Røknes and Mathisen, in Chapter 3, give their research insights into the interplay between risk and safety in Arctic adventure tourism. They consider these elements in the context of the role of tour guide for experientially, economically and environmentally sustainable adventure tourism within the unique conditions and constraints of the Arctic. The authors of Chapter 4, Davoudi, Högström and Tronvoll, investigate the role of organizational identity in tourism in the Arctic periphery. This chapter adopts a similar approach to Chapter 3 and highlights the multiple stakeholders of networks and actors. In Chapter 5, Edenheim and Lee discuss the changing experiences of museums, highlighting new museology and articulating a self-reflective element in museum viewing. The theory relates to the provision of tourist experiences in viewing the museums of the Arctic periphery that are both economically and culturally sustainable. Economic sustainability of world heritage sites and the role of tourism on these sites is the topic subsequently offered by Olsen in Chapter 6. Highlighting the need for a clear conceptualization between valorization of world heritage and its link to tourism, the chapter poses important questions about the management of world heritage sites in the context of experience-providing tourism in the Arctic.

The second part presents various chapters focusing on Creating Tourist Experiences in the Arctic. In Chapter 7 Weaver and Lawton contextualize tourists' experiences in Greenland in

terms of variable spatial and temporal peripheralities. Mathisen explores the northern lights (aurora borealis) of the Arctic in Chapter 8. This chapter examines the myths and narratives of the northern lights and considers this quintessential Arctic element within today's tourism industry-provided experiences. Subsequently, in Chapter 9, Stubberud and Ruud provide an account of two explorers following the tracks of the Iditarod trail in Alaska and consider what the tourism industry may learn from the narratives of the explorers in order to develop sustainable tourist activities before and after the Iditarod race. Huang, Tang and Weaver then give an appraisal in Chapter 10 of the Chinese tourist market in the Arctic, giving insights into the actual and potential behaviour of the world's largest and fastest growing outbound tourist segment. Continuing to discuss different perceptions of the Arctic from a tourist market perspective in Chapter 11, Komppula highlights the different emotions that Japanese tourists to Finland may have. By studying well-being tourism in Finnish Lapland, different meanings of the 'feel-good' experience are explored. Chapter 12, on the Sami festival in the remote Norwegian Arctic town of Snefjord, draws from the film *The Kilt & the Kofte*, and narrates the rebuilding of Sami identity. The author, Bursta, is Sami herself and one of the makers of the film. Bursta recounts identifying and rebuilding Saminess by connecting through a joint celebration with some Scottish traditions brought by some visitors to the Arctic. Fischer focuses on services and experience production in Chapter 13, with insights into nine family firms in the Norwegian county of Finnmark and in Finnish Lapland. The perspectives of service design and experience production, and the concept of 'coopetition', a term indicating cooperation of competitors are used in the chapter. In Chapter 14, Bertella reviews commercial whale

watching and suggests certain contextual elements that may facilitate or impede the development of whale watching as a sustainable tourism activity. Prebensen and Lyngnes investigate fishing as a sustainable tourism activity in the Arctic in Chapter 15. Focusing on fishing tourism products and experiences in the Arctic, the chapter recommends aspects to be considered for a responsible fishing tourism industry in the Arctic. Motorcycling as part of drive tourism in the Arctic is investigated by Cater in Chapter 16, based on his own experiences in the region. The chapter emphasizes safety issues in remote peripheral areas in relation to sustainable motorcycle tourism in the Arctic. Chapter 17 examines one specific adventure tourism opportunity in the Canadian Arctic: recognizing the changing conditions of Canadian marine tourism resulting from climate change. In this chapter Johnston, De Souza and Lemelin discuss the potential for Arctic marine expeditions as a new tourism product in the region. The final two chapters address issues involving the Russian Arctic, a vast region that nevertheless has received scant attention in the English language literature. First, in Chapter 18, Ilkevich and Strömberg provide an extensive review of Russian Arctic tourism experiences, challenges and opportunities, and their links to TBL sustainability and the military presence. Adopting a social science perspective, Haugseth and Wråkberg then investigate Russia–Norway Arctic borderland tourism in Chapter 19. Links between geopolitical and sociocultural sustainability are examined.

The book is concluded in Chapter 20, where the findings and themes of the diverse chapters are reviewed and synthesized, and stakeholder implications and further research directions for the advancement of a sustainable Arctic tourism are discussed by Lee, Weaver and Prebensen.

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