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Safe and ecologically just travel to Antarctica New visitors guide and flyer for cruise ship tourists

Fascinating Antarctica: Ever more people are attracted to the austral summer in the vast expanses of the icy continent, to penguins, seals and whales. There were more than 46,000 visitors in last year's travel season alone. There was a fivefold jump in visitor numbers from 1992 to 2008, making it impossible to avoid negative impact on the environment. Nevertheless, any visitor to the South Pole, whether tourist, researcher, journalist or member of a film crew, needs valid authorisation, for which the Federal Environment (UBA) Agency is the issuing authority for all German citizens. Yet preserving the nativeness and intactness of the continent requires practical binding guidelines of behaviour. UBA is educating all travellers, especially cruise ship tourists, about how to behave ecologically on the "white continent" in its updated guide and a new flyer. The guide explains how best to protect the unique and ever so sensitive Antarctic animal and plant kingdoms. One important rule of thumb is: watching is allowed, but keep your distance.

Animals and plants in the Antarctic have adapted to the extreme conditions, especially the low temperatures, that exist there. Flora and fauna are therefore in a poor position to react to changes in their environment and very sensitive to outside interference. Antarctic animal species are not afraid of humans and seldom seek to flee as there are no land-living predators there. It is therefore most enticing to photograph the animals at close range as they seem trusting, yet a layperson can not usually recognise if the animals are frightened or feel threatened. Visitors ought to keep certain minimum distances between themselves and seabirds, penguins, and seals, so as to not expose them to unnecessary stress. During breeding season from December to March in particular, one should not come closer than ten metres to brooding penguins. The animals are specially sensitive to interferences during moulting, breeding or rearing of the young. Elephant seal cows, for example, will stop breastfeeding if disturbed. Should this occur repeatedly during the first three weeks of their offspring's lives, risk of malnutrition would result and thus jeopardise their survival.

Mosses and lichens, the main form of vegetation in the Antarctic, react extremely sensitively to damages caused by footsteps and ruts made by vehicles. Any parts of plants torn out dry out after only two weeks. Uprooted and re-impacted plant parts will not recover in the same Antarctic summer. Crustose lichens grow at a rate of a mere 0.01 to 0.1 millimetres per year—a

footprint will therefore stay for over 100 years. Visitors should do their utmost not to tread on vegetation and only walk on trails and paths.

In order to preserve the pristine conditions in Antarctica for the future, there are internationally binding rules of behaviour. The signatory states of the Antarctic Treaty, including Germany, made according resolutions to protect plants and animals at the 18th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting back in 1994. Tourism has increased sharply since then, concentrated mainly on the Antarctic peninsula. More than 30,000 tourists went on land during the past austral summer, that is from December through March, at the site where seabirds and penguins breed and seals rear their young. So-called 'Visitor Site Guidelines', which are additional binding rules valid since 2005 in heavily frequented shoring locations, apply in many coastal areas to prevent further damages and are designed to promote ecological behaviour.

The guide and flyer are available free of charge in German and English at the following addresses:

Visitor Guidelines for the Antarctic (German):

<http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/2528.pdf>

Visitor Guidelines for the Antarctic (English):

<http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3653.pdf>

How to behave? Visitor Guidelines for the Antarctic (German):

<http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3651.pdf>

How to behave? Visitor Guidelines for the Antarctic:

<http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3652.pdf>

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