

# ANTARCTIC DISCUSSION HOTS UP

While parts of Antarctica shivered through  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperatures as winter approached last May, delegates at the 30th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in New Delhi sweltered in  $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Despite the heat, both the ATCM and the preceding meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) were productive. On Australia's agenda were further measures to protect the Antarctic environment, improvements in the management of Antarctic tourism, and actions to strengthen the Antarctic Treaty.

As a result of the CEP meeting – which included environmental impact assessments for India's proposed station in the Larsemann Hills – management plans were adopted by the Treaty



The Australian delegation to the ATCM and CEP meeting comprised representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Antarctic Division, Tasmanian Government, WWF Australia and University of Tasmania.

Parties for Antarctic Specially Managed Areas in the Larsemann Hills (page 18) and at the South Pole.

Discussions on Antarctic tourism focused on passenger vessel safety, site guidelines and the potential impacts of tourism. The ATCM adopted a resolution recommending that Treaty Parties discourage tourism that may substantially contribute to long-term degradation of the Antarctic environment. Also adopted were site guidelines for another two frequently visited sites in the Antarctic Peninsula; and a resolution

discouraging landings from vessels carrying more than 500 passengers, and restricting the numbers of passengers ashore at any one time.

The full report of the New Delhi meeting can be found at the Treaty website: [www.ats.aq](http://www.ats.aq). It includes the report of the CEP and the text of the Measures, Resolutions and Decisions adopted. The next ATCM and CEP meeting will be hosted by Ukraine in Kiev in June 2008.

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## Australian tourists in Antarctica

Tourism offers an opportunity for people other than scientists and support workers to see Antarctica.



Antarctic tourists can now choose from a range of non-traditional tourism experiences.

It is now a regular and substantial activity in Antarctica, with a wide diversity of experiences on offer. The Australian Government, Australian companies and Australian travellers are prominent in the tourism industry and its management.

Australians are particularly keen to visit Antarctica. Of the 37 552 visitors to Antarctica in the 2006-07 season, some 2950 (8%) were Australian – a figure out of all proportion to our population, and an indication of the appeal of Antarctica to the Australian imagination.

Some Australian companies operate tours direct from Australia to Antarctica, while others visit from ports in other nations. Compared to the Antarctic Peninsula, which is close to South America, the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT) is still a challenging place for tourist visits, due to the long distances and sometimes stormy seas that must be traversed.

One place in the AAT visited regularly is Mawson's Hut Historic Site at Commonwealth Bay – the 'home of the blizzard', and the first base for Australians embarking on scientific

and geographical discovery in Antarctica. The importance of this site to Australia's heritage is acknowledged in its place on the National Heritage List. The AAT can also be viewed from above, with overflights of passenger aircraft providing a unique perspective on the icy continent. Voyages from Australia visit the Ross Sea region too – a place with many links to the heroic era of polar exploration and the quest to reach the South Pole.

Antarctic tourism has traditionally involved ship travel, with small boat excursions for wildlife viewing. Australian companies have, however, been active in offering visitors non-traditional experiences, including diving, sea kayaking, climbing, photography and camping; while yachts offer passengers longer and more adventurous trips, or support expeditions for science, mountaineering, and even film crews.

For more information see [www.aad.gov.au](http://www.aad.gov.au), and follow the links to 'experience Antarctica' and 'tourism'.

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