

Guidelines in works for Antarctic tourism

As the number of Chinese tourists to Antarctica soared to the No 2 ranking, experts urged the country to speed up legislation on Antarctic travel to protect the environment there as well as tourists' safety and interests.

Last year, 5,286 Chinese tourists visited the frozen continent, amounting to 12 percent of worldwide visitors there, second only to the United States with 14,566 tourists, according to the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

Fewer than 800 Chinese tourists made the trip in 2010, when China was ranked behind countries such as Australia, Canada and Germany in visitor numbers.

"The size of the market for Antarctic tourism grew dramatically with people's rising interest in natural wonders, but the legislation in this respect lags behind," said Qin Weijia, director of the China Arctic and Antarctic Administration.

He said the number of Chinese tourists to Antarctica last year alone was equal to the total visits by team members participating in the country's expeditions to the Antarctic since 1984.

"Among the 29 countries that are consultative parties of the Antarctic Treaty, China, together with India, Poland and Ecuador, are the only four that have not yet made laws to specify their citizens' behavior and protect their safety when they travel to the most remote place on Earth," he said.

Yang Huigen, director of the Polar Research Institute of China, said, "The legislation may also put what President Xi Jinping said into practice – to pursue a community of shared future for mankind and to be a responsible great power."

In April, Lin Shanqing, deputy director of the State Oceanic Administration, told Xinhua News Agency that the country's legislative body had started to pay attention to the legislation on issues regarding traveling to Antarctica.

Ponant, a French cruise company, started to offer polar excursions to Chinese three years ago. Prices range from \$400 to \$1,250 per person per night based on different cabins for a journey ranging from 11 to 16 days.

Jean-Philippe Lemaire, a captain of a Ponant cruise liner, said the staff vacuum all the tourists' garments before they go on shore each time to minimize dust pollution.

But Wang Wenlong from Guangzhou, Guangdong province, who has taken the cruises to both poles, said tourists still need guidance on dos and don'ts and the corresponding legal liability and punishment.

“We had plenty of opportunities to encounter a large number of rarely seen animals but didn’t have rules of how to interact with them without interrupting them,” Wang, 41, said.

The legislation will come in handy in case of accidents or trouble happening to Chinese tourists, Qin said.

“It may stipulate a fixed coordinating mechanism after an accident occurs and give clear requirements regarding the purchase of travel insurance,” he said.