Revised Tourism Management Policy for Vernadsky Station, Galindez Island

Revised Tourism Management Policy for Vernadsky Station, Galindez Island

Information Paper submitted by Ukraine

Summary

In 2011 in pursuance of the ATCM recommendations (paragraph 245, Final Report XXXIII ATCM) Ukraine presented its policy regarding visits by tourists and nongovernmental expeditions to Vernadsky station (XXXIV ATCM Information Paper IP-110). This policy was revised after the last year discussion under the issue of developing Site Guidelines for the Argentine Islands included in the CEP 5YWP for the intersessional period 2021/22.

Like a number of other Parties developed its national procedures relating to visitors to their Antarctic stations, Ukraine has prepared it in a format of Visitor Site Guidelines, facilitating tourist vessel expedition crew comprehension and use (without, however, seeking ATCM/CEP endorsement). Ukraine would appreciate that these revised guidelines be included in the IAATO Field Operations Manual in order to apply them during visits to those facilities by their associated operators and individuals.

Vernadsky Antarctic Station

Year-round Vernadsky Station, operated by Ukraine, is situated on the Marina Point in the NW of Galindez Island, one of the largest islands in the Argentine Islands (along with Winter Island and Skua Island), lying 5-6 km NW of the Antarctic Peninsula (Graham Coast, Kyiv Peninsula).

This area has several significant features. Firstly, this area experiences long-term regional climate warming fastest on the planet. Secondly, the area with the glaciers disintegration and, as a consequence, with changes in the basic types of Antarctic ecosystems. Thirdly, this area is one of the richest in terms of biodiversity in the West Antarctic Peninsula, with important assemblages of species including considerable coverage of old moss banks and lichens communities, invertebrates, and breeding colonies of birds and marine mammals, which are very sensitive to observed global changes. In particular, the site is recognised as being one of the southernmost recorded Gentoo penguin colonies as well as a number of other confirmed breeding bird species.

That is way this is an area of particular interest to ongoing and planned scientific research. Meanwhile, Vernadsky station (as the Argentine Islands as a whole), has been regularly visited by tourists since 1968, and it has seen a growth in visitor numbers in recent pre-COVID years. According to the IAATO statistics, this site is amongst the twenty most visited sites along the Antarctic Peninsula.

Therefore, the special location of the area allows studying complex environmental processes and conducting the comprehensive monitoring of environmental parameters in Antarctica. In view of the observed high number of visitors and spatial trends in ship-borne tourism, this area requires special management to ensure that all important environment values are protected and sustained in the long-term.

Tourism Management Policy for Vernadsky Station

In order to minimize possible impacts on the environment and avoid interference with scientific investigations and station work schedules, the revised guidelines include more restrictions on access and number of visitors ashore. For the first time it is suggested to designate the landing requirements not only for the cruise ships, but for the private yachts as well. Nevertheless, these guidelines applicable to visitors to Vernadsky station’s facilities zone, while yachting and small boat cruising without landing within the internal waters of the Argentine Islands are not restricted.

Moreover, a special visitor route is developed to divert visitors away from the station facilities to alternative attractions, namely the top of the ice cap offering glacial scenery. In addition, the revised guidelines also include the CCAMLR Environmental Monitoring Program (CEMP) site on Galindez Island, managed by Ukraine, as well as the inter-islands water areas, which Ukraine intends to include as one of the scientific reference areas in the newly proposed MPA in Domaine 1 (para 6.11-6.12 of the SC-CAMLR-38 Report).

Compliance with the attached guidelines should be observed by all visitors requesting a visit to Vernadsky station, whether it is carried out as part of an activity organised by an IAATO member operator or an independent operator. In this regard, Ukraine would appreciate that these revised guidelines (developed within the framework of national procedures, without seeking ATCM/CEP endorsement) be included in the IAATO Field Operations Manual.