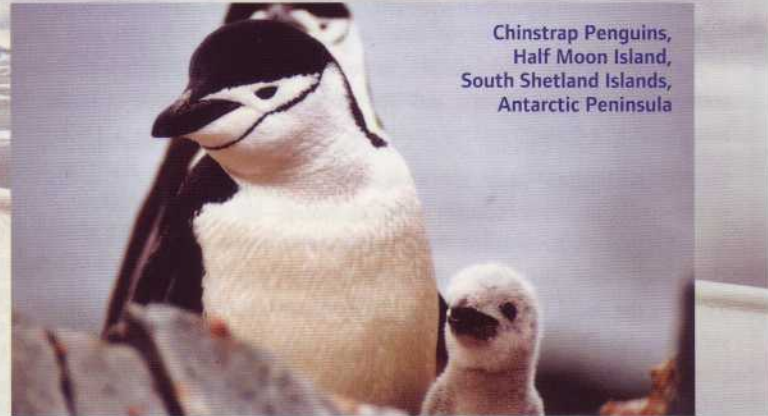


Dr Rob Lambert, TTRI,  
on board MV Ushuaia,  
Antarctic Peninsula

# Ambassadors to the Last Great Continent

## Observing Tourism in Antarctica



Chinstrap Penguins,  
Half Moon Island,  
South Shetland Islands,  
Antarctic Peninsula

In 2005, Dr Robert Lambert was invited to serve as an appointed Observer for the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) on board an Argentinean-owned tourist cruise ship.

An expert on the relationship between tourism and the environment, Robert's task was to report on the conduct of the ship, crew, and tourists in Antarctica to ensure that they upheld IAATO's rigorous guidelines for maintaining and promoting responsible and sustainable tourism. Founded in 1991, IAATO is a non-profit, global network of 70 tour operators that voluntarily established extensive procedures for regulating the private sector tourist industry in Antarctica, which includes a requirement that new tour operators carry an on-board Observer. IAATO hopes that tourists will return home as ambassadors of goodwill, guardianship, and peace for the White Continent.

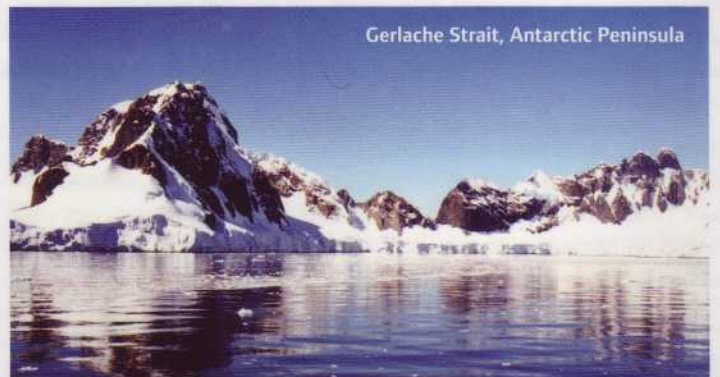
IAATO developed its Observer scheme in 1996 and Robert's role involved ensuring that everything from waste disposal and oil spillage equipment, to the management of tourists while they were watching Antarctic wildlife ashore, met the requirements. IAATO's regulations are detailed and extensive: Passengers are instructed not to throw cigarettes or food overboard; battery collection boxes are used on board; the conduct of drivers when they encounter marine mammals is monitored; poultry products have to be separated from other food waste; and there are comprehensive emergency plans. Robert's work included on-board observation, interviews with crew and staff, and document inspection. To do this successfully meant that he effectively became part of the ship's expedition staff and was closely involved in daily activities. Most Observers have a particular interest that is useful to the expedition staff, and Robert's interest in seabirds allowed him to support the staff in bird watching sessions on the boat as it crossed the Drake Passage. He found that by participating in such activities, the more formal aspects of his duties as Observer went more smoothly. He also found that the expedition staff and the Chilean crew were keen to talk to him about his research interests in sustainable tourism.

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IAATO's approach to tourism is that it should be a driving force in the conservation of Antarctica. IAATO member operators carry about 95% of all annual tourists to Antarctica and the 2004-05 season brought over 30,000 people. The Observer's role is vital to the continued success of the organisation, whose vigilance is mainly responsible for limiting the impact of tourism on such a fragile ecosystem.

Robert noticed that passengers on the cruise experienced a powerful environmental awakening during their journey and that his own experience of being an Observer promises to have real benefits for his teaching and research. He has found that this direct experience allows him to speak to his popular undergraduate module on 'Managing Tourism and the Environment' with greater authority and clarity on the complex issues around the development of sustainable tourism initiatives in Antarctica. It also opens up potential opportunities for collaborative research that bridge the gap between the academic and policymaking world, both with IAATO, national government Antarctic programmes, international environmental NGOs, and private tour operators.

Robert Lambert is Lecturer in Tourism and the Environment at the Business School and the University's School of History. He is a member of the Business School's Christel DeHaan Tourism and Travel Research Institute (TTRI).



Gerlache Strait, Antarctic Peninsula

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