There is significant potential for tourism development in Canada’s Arctic. The Government of Nunavut must ensure that any such development is done responsibly, sustainably, and in a manner that has long-term benefits for Nunavummiut (residents of Nunavut). Progress towards this development is being achieved through general updates to the territory’s tourism legislation, the creation of new marine tourism regulations, the implementation of the territory’s first formal marine tourism management plan, and the expansion of the government’s tourism and cultural industries division.

Nunavut is one of several Inuit homelands across the Arctic. The territory is an intricate series of waterways and passages framed by tundra, glaciers, and towering mountains. The borders of Nunavut are designated by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, the most comprehensive Indigenous land claims treaty on the planet.

If Nunavut capitalizes on current global tourism trends, with more people choosing to travel across an increasingly interconnected world, the territory can realize substantial economic growth over the next few decades—in tourism as well as other sectors of Nunavut’s economy. From a government perspective, development of tourist destinations and programming is only viable when overall community sentiment and private business interests are aligned. It is government’s role to ensure that this development takes place in a way that encourages investments to remain within the community, and by extension, within the territory. In Nunavut, responsible development means that Inuit in particular, and Nunavummiut in general, should benefit from industry growth more than outside interests or businesses.

In 2016 11 ships conducted 25 voyages throughout Nunavut, carrying a total of approximately 4,600 cruise passengers who undertook 59 separate community visits. Alaska, by comparison, saw over a million cruise passengers landing on its shores in 2015. Svalbard received around 35,000 cruise passengers in 2014, and Greenland received roughly 20,000 passengers in 2014. Against these other Polar destinations, the amount of marine tourism in Canada’s Arctic is minimal.

One of the primary barriers to development in Nunavut is that the territory does not have the kind of marine support infrastructure that nearby Alaska, Greenland or Svalbard can offer. While this does limit meaningful short-term development, in many ways the lack of marine infrastructure heightens the desirability of visiting Canada’s Arctic. It underscores the unique “remoteness” of Nunavut that can be a considerable draw for visitors. For some visitors, what the territory lacks in infrastructure it gains in the sheer expanse, mystery, and extreme nature of the Canadian Polar landscape.

Over the past 10 years generally smaller, more resilient cruise expedition vessels have navigated...
The Nunavut government is preparing for a potential increase and shift in the Arctic cruise tourism industry. The two most significant ways involve the development of a formal management plan designed specifically for marine tourism, and the creation of new marine tourism regulations as part of general updates to the territory’s tourism legislation.

The management plan will help communities better assess the potential benefits of marine tourism. It will also provide support for the local development of marketable products, programs and services, address inconsistent communication flows within the marine tourism sector and, finally, will support the new regulations under development.

The territory’s tourism legislation, the *Travel and Tourism Act*, was grandfathered from the Northwest Territories and is no longer relevant to Nunavut’s contemporary tourism industry. The act was drafted during a time in which marine tourism was not prevalent, and when the economic viability of cruise ships in Canada’s Arctic only existed as a remote possibility.

Updating the legislation includes developing new marine tourism regulations that, among other requirements, may result in a cruise ship-specific licence. These updates are not being developed in isolation; consultations took place in 2008 and again in 2015 throughout Nunavut, with extensive input heard from industry, community members, and other interested parties.

The arrival of the *Crystal Serenity* could signal a new era for tourism growth in the territory. The Government of Nunavut will make every effort to ensure that the sector does not grow at the expense of Nunavut’s extraordinary environment and wildlife, which are a significant draw for tourists in the first place and must be preserved in order to protect the traditional heritage of Inuit and the authenticity of the tourist experience.

Most importantly, Nunavut can only capitalize on a sustained increase in cruise tourism if communities are ready to receive and take advantage of such an increase. Achieving this will take significant efforts from local municipal governments and their community members, interested local stakeholders, and the cruise industry itself. Cruise tourism will only be successful if positive relationships continue to be fostered between the ships and the communities they visit. This will involve more consistent communication, increased collaboration on product and program offerings, and a willingness to build on and foster the relationships between cruise ships and the communities they return to every year.

If marine tourism development in the territory is managed in a way that effectively reflects community concerns, it presents an exciting opportunity to directly stimulate Nunavut’s local economies. More cruise ships means more jobs, and while only seasonal in nature, these opportunities will be consistent and in an industry that is more sustainable than other alternatives, especially in an Arctic context.

Cruise ships want to come here because their passengers are driven by a desire to visit the Arctic. It is up to government to ensure that communities benefit from these visits, both economically, and from the pride that comes from showcasing our dramatic landscapes and reinforcing our rich cultural heritage.