

Thinking of flying a drone in Antarctica?

Read this before travelling....

IAATO is cautioning all potential travellers to Antarctica, who are hoping to fly a drone, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), to check with their travel agent or tour operator before packing their device. Opportunities may be limited until more is known about their safe and environmentally responsible use in this last great wilderness – particularly in the wildlife rich coastal regions of Antarctica. Tour operators will either prohibit the use of UAVs altogether or only allow them to be operated under strictly defined conditions.

The use of UAVs is currently the subject of much discussion by the Antarctic community.

Through the unique global partnership that is the Antarctic Treaty system, the entire continent is formally designated as a 'natural reserve, devoted to peace and science'. Antarctica is regarded as the last great wilderness on our planet, still pristine with wildlife and landscapes that show little evidence of direct human activity. To visit, and operate in, an environment like this comes with a responsibility to do so carefully and with minimal impact.

Ultimately, this means that **all** human activities, whether for science or tourism, have to go through an Environmental Impact Assessment by a relevant Competent Authority/government agency. Critically, IAATO Member operators have agreed that their activities must have less than a minor or transitory impact on the environment. They submit permit applications annually and, if their planned activities meet all criteria, they are authorized and a permit granted.

IAATO member operators must include an application to fly UAVs within their overall permit application. The difficulty for prospective UAV pilots is that Treaty Parties, and IAATO members, are concerned about their use in Antarctica; flying drones is a relatively new activity and while there are situations when they may be useful (e.g. science, ice reconnaissance for vessel navigation, giving visitors a unique perspective of historic sites), there are many questions still to be answered in terms of their potential impact on the environment. The use of UAVs is therefore in a state of development and, until more information is available, both the Competent Authorities (that authorize activities in Antarctica) and IAATO Member Operators are taking a precautionary approach when it comes to their operation.

IAATO is working closely with Treaty Parties and has been requested, on a consultancy basis, to present draft UAV guidelines and experiences at the next Antarctic Treaty Consultancy Meeting (ATCM). The idea is not to ban UAVs outright, but to devise a pragmatic policy framework that will allow safe and

environmentally responsible use under controlled circumstances.

If you are thinking of taking a UAV with you to Antarctica, please discuss this with the operator you intend to travel with **before departure**.