



IAATO reports latest Antarctic tourism figures ahead of responsible tourism conference

IAATO's proactive management strategies can act as a role model for safe, environmentally responsible travel as Antarctic growth continues in line with global trends.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 30 April 2018, 0900 EST

Newport, Rhode Island, USA: The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) reported its visitor numbers for the 2017-2018 Antarctic season at the start of its annual meeting in Newport, Rhode Island, USA. IAATO has been monitoring, analyzing and reporting trends since 1991 as part of its commitment to 'leave only footprints' through the effective self-management of its activities.

The upward trend in visitor numbers recorded since 2011/2012 continued in 2017-2018. The majority, 41,996, of visitors travelled by sea to Antarctica on vessels offering excursions ashore, representing a 16% increase compared to the previous year. Of these, 3,408 flew to the South Shetland Islands on the Antarctic Peninsula where they immediately boarded a vessel for onward travel. This sector, known as air/cruise, has increased (6%) compared to the previous season. In addition, 9,131 visitors experienced Antarctica on one of four cruise-only vessels that do not make landings, an increase of 22% since 2016-2017.

580 visitors flew to field camps in Antarctica's interior with IAATO land operators. Overall, the total number of Antarctic visitors in 2017-2018 was 51,707, an increase of 17% compared to the previous season. All visitor activities follow strict codes of conduct developed by IAATO and through the Antarctic Treaty System.

Terry Shaller of Ponant and Chair of the IAATO Executive Committee said, 'Antarctica receives relatively few visitors compared to other destinations. The number of tourists who set foot on the continent this past year (42,576) is less than half the number of spectators at the Super Bowl. We are, however, mindful that the unique



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IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic.

qualities of Antarctica require stringent safeguards. Our proven success in responsible visitor management is the result of forward planning based on deep understanding of the industry. This helps us fine tune our strategies to protect the precious places we visit while enabling people to have an enriching wilderness experience.”

Overall American visitors remained the most numerous, accounting for 33% of the total number, the same proportion as the previous year. Chinese visitors were the second most numerous, accounting for 16% of all visitors and increasing by 4 percentage points compared to 2016-2017. Australian, German and British visitors were the next most enthusiastic visitor nationalities, accounting for 11%, 7% and 7% respectively.

IAATO’s Executive Director, Dr. Damon Stanwell-Smith, added, “Visiting Antarctica is a privilege that comes with a responsibility to leave it pristine. The growth reported by IAATO mirrors a global upward trend in visiting remote places. Increasing evidence shows that these travelers want to tread lightly on the places they visit. IAATO operators are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to operate responsibly and deliver strong conservation messages to their guests who we hope will return home as ambassadors for its preservation.”

IAATO will present its latest figures at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Buenos Aires, 13-18 May 2018, to facilitate discussions on effectively managing human activity in Antarctica.

Issued by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

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Notes for Editors:

- Images are available.
- 98% of all visitors experience the Antarctic Peninsula region by sea after departing from South America.
- The Antarctic season lasts for approximately 5 months from November to March.
- Air-land tourism includes those IAATO member operators who provide flights to the Antarctic interior for deep field excursions.



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- The air/cruise tourism category describes travel programs with at least one flight in or out of King George Island, combined with a Peninsula cruise.
- IAATO requires its members to abide by the Antarctic Treaty System. Tour operators refrain from making any landings in Antarctica from vessels carrying more than 500 passengers. They also coordinate with each other so that not more than one vessel is at a landing site at any one time, no more than 100 people are ashore at once and a staff: passenger ratio of up to 1:20 is maintained.
- IAATO maintains the most comprehensive database on any human activity in Antarctica. Data are submitted annually to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) to facilitate discussions on effective visitor management and are publicly available on www.iaato.org/tourism-statistics.

Table I. Antarctic visitor numbers between 2013 and 2018 as of April 24, 2018, subject to change. See also www.iaato.org/tourism-statistics.

	2017-2018 Season	2016-2017 Season	2015-2016 Season	2014-2015 Season	2013-2014 Season
Seaborne tourism with landings ¹	38,588	33,237	27,607	25,341	25,526
Air & cruise combination with landings	3,408	3,203	2,353	1471	1848
Air & land tourism, Antarctic interior	580	452	409	431	361
Seaborne tourism, no landings ²	9,131	7,475	8,109	9459	9670
Total	51,707	44,367	38,478	36,702	37,405

¹ 'Landings' are excursions ashore.

² These ships carry more than 500 passengers and cannot make landings.



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Table II. Percentage of Known Passenger Nationalities for the 2017-2018 Season

Nationality	Percentage (%) of Total
United States	33
China	16
Australia	11
Germany	7
United Kingdom	7
Canada	5
France	4
Switzerland	2
Netherlands	2
Other	14

About IAATO

IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. IAATO Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. These standards have proved to be successful including but are not limited to: Antarctic site-specific guidelines, site selection criteria, passenger to staff ratios, limiting numbers of passengers ashore, boot washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of alien organisms, wilderness etiquette, ship scheduling and vessel communication procedures, emergency medical evacuation procedures, emergency contingency plans, reporting procedures, marine wildlife watching guidelines, station visitation policies and much more. IAATO has a global network of over 100 members.