



International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators Announces New Restrictions on Commercial Drone Use by Visitors

Commercial users now join recreational drone pilots in robust measures for Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) in wildlife-rich coastal areas

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Kingstown, Rhode Island, USA: The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators has announced robust new restrictions on commercial drone use in Antarctica.

The constraints, voted in at IAATO's annual meeting in Cape Town, South Africa (April 30 – May 3), mean those using Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) for commercial purposes on IAATO vessels will have new restrictions limiting piloting opportunities.

The recreational use of RPAS is already banned in coastal areas of Antarctica, but IAATO members agreed that for the 2019-20 season, commercial RPAS flights are not allowed in coastal areas unless the activity is covered by the IAATO Operator's permit/authorization and/or the RPAS pilot has approval from the IAATO Operator with whom they are traveling, regardless of any personal authorization they may have.

Introducing the latest limitations, Lisa Kelley, Interim Co-Executive Director - Operations and External Relations for IAATO said, "The Antarctic Treaty Parties, and IAATO members, are concerned about the use of RPAS in Antarctica; while there are situations where flying them may be of value with regards to science, ice reconnaissance for vessel navigation and education, including documentary film making, there are many questions still to be answered in terms of their potential impact on the environment.

"IAATO has worked for 28 years, advocating and promoting safe and environmentally responsible tourism in Antarctica and our core mission is to offer visitors an enriching and educational expedition, while only having a minor or transitory impact. Drone flights in Antarctica, come with risks; from lower temperatures making battery life difficult to gauge, to how these devices may be inadvertently affecting wildlife behaviour.



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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.

“To visit, and operate in, Antarctica comes with a responsibility to do so carefully and with minimal impact. These new restrictions are one of a raft of measures IAATO voted in at its annual meeting in order to deliver our responsible tourism mission.”

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.

Each year, IAATO members set aside competitive interests to have open and candid discussions on safety, environmental protection and self-regulation. Decision-making is supported by recommendations developed by IAATO's many dedicated committees and working groups throughout the year. The meetings conclude annually with the voting in of new policies on best practice which support our mission of promoting and advocating safe and environmentally responsible travel to Antarctica.

The RPAS restrictions join a host of responsible tourism measures introduced by IAATO during its three-and-a-half day annual meeting, including a unanimous vote to impose mandatory measures to prevent whale strikes in cetacean-rich Antarctic waters, more stringent restrictions on the commercial use of submersibles, robust adjustments to visitor guidelines for activities on the Antarctic peninsula; a new code of conduct for vessel operators; implementing a mandatory observer scheme; support for the development of Marine Protected Areas; and approval to expand research into the health of penguin populations at visitor sites.

IAATO and its counterpart in the northern hemisphere, the Association for Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, introduced guidelines that will arm visitors to the polar regions with responsible solutions for reducing their waste and plastic footprint.

Ends –

Issued by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

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Notes for Editors:

- In addition to its own bylaws and requirements for membership, IAATO requires its members to abide by the Antarctic Treaty System and other international regulations.



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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 work to ensure that their activities have less than a minor or transitory impact on the environment. They submit permit applications annually to their Competent Authority/government agency and, if their planned activities meet all criteria, they are authorized and a permit granted.

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.

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