The opportunity to engage and educate visitors as they are experiencing Antarctica creates a unique opportunity for lasting knowledge and advocacy, says expedition leader Jimmy White.

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand, and we will only understand what we are taught.” Baba Dioum

The chance to engage and educate visitors as they are experiencing Antarctica creates a unique opportunity for lasting knowledge and advocacy. IAATO members embrace this concept, incorporating education programmes and science, including citizen science, into their itineraries to create ambassadors for Antarctica.

Antarctic visitors traveling with IAATO members often ask how they can support ongoing charity, conservation and scientific research in the form of financial donations or direct action. Citizen science offers a new opportunity to enrich the experiences of travelers by collecting valuable data that will help to conserve and manage fragile environments. In participating in a citizen science program, they are contributing to the understanding of our planet while donating their most precious resource - your time and your attention.

Citizen Science programs, like all things, have occurred on a spectrum of success. Rather than shy away from early shortcomings, these lessons need to be carefully examined and learned from. The academic establishment has cited poor sampling design, untrained observers, and disorganized data sets as examples of these programs inability to contribute to science. In fact, these are simply examples of design challenges to be worked out and not the potential value of citizen science as a contributor to our understanding of the natural world.

Our smart phones contain an array of sensors that let us analyze and record the world around us. Coupled with effective project design and data management, it is possible to overcome the major obstacles that have challenged the ability of citizen science to meaningfully contribute in the past.

Many IAATO Operators, including Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic, are bringing together scientists, explorers and photographers to develop projects that harness the capability of our fleet and the access our itineraries provide around the world. We are creating long term sustainable projects
that will produce scientifically valid data. Many of the projects currently in development contribute toward open source data sets like Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), so that the data collected on our vessels can be accessed and utilized by anyone whether for research, conservation and management or just general interest in the natural world.

Dr Jimmy White
Expedition Leader, Lindblad Expeditions – National Geographic

About the author

Dr Jimmy White is a researcher, educator and expedition leader with diversity of experience and skill having coordinated education and research teams for national universities, international non-government organizations and documentary companies for more than 15 years.

Jimmy has dedicated his life to understanding and conserving the marine environment. His ground-breaking research has led to the development of new techniques for tagging whales with satellite transmitters that uncovered the mysteries of the dwarf minke whale migrations in Australian and sub-Antarctic waters. Along the way, Jimmy has been on expeditions to track tigers in the Sumatran Jungle, uncover Anthrax on the Etosha plain, study seals in the Southern Ocean, and uncover desert vipers in the Middle-East.

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.