



Busiest Day of the Year for Antarctic Tour Operators as IAATO Ship Scheduler Opens

Launched by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) in the early 2000s, the IAATO ship scheduler enables the Antarctic fleet to coordinate their itineraries in the best interests of Antarctic protection

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Kingstown, Rhode Island, USA: The Antarctic travel season may still be months away, but responsible Antarctic tour operators from across the globe will experience their busiest day of the year today (June 5) as the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators' (IAATO) Ship Scheduler opens.

IAATO has long taken a proactive role in managing its activities so that visitors have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment. Part of this work involves the annual launch of the IAATO Ship Scheduler, a database which has used IAATO and Antarctic Treaty System requirements to set limits on time, number of passengers allowed, and number of daily visits to visitor sites around the Antarctic coast for almost two decades.

Each year in June or July, outside of the Antarctic travel season, IAATO members log their desired landings for the Antarctic season ahead using the scheduler. The ship scheduler, which was introduced in the early 2000s, provides the basis for coordination between IAATO member vessels. Each vessel knows where the others will be and the visits are planned and confirmed well in advance of the start of the season. No more than 100 passengers can be ashore at any one time, with a minimum staff to visitor ratio of 1:20. The majority of Antarctic coastal visitor sites also have Antarctic Treaty System approved site guidelines that set a maximum daily number of ship visits.

IAATO Head of Operations, Lisa Kelley, said: "This is a huge day in the calendar for responsible Antarctic tour operators. There are stringent protocols in place to manage human activity in Antarctica and the IAATO Ship Scheduler is one of our most robust tools to ensure that visitors to the white continent leave nothing but transient footprints.

"The scheduler ensures that visits to landing sites on the peninsula are planned well in advance, according to IAATO and Antarctic Treaty System requirements for limiting the numbers of visitors that



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set foot ashore at any one time and all IAATO and Antarctic Treaty System guidelines and restrictions are followed.”

“We all have a responsibility as visitors to Antarctica and the annual launch of the IAATO Ship Scheduler is a part of our membership’s ongoing commitment to safe and environmentally responsible travel to the region.”

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. The organization’s 116 members work together within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System, to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. These standards include 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 and station visitation policies among others.

Last month, IAATO announced it was redeveloping its ship scheduler to prepare for tourism growth. The redevelopment will meet increasing vessel and management needs and offer a solution for streamlining vessel to vessel communications. The project was announced on May 3 during IAATO’s annual meeting in Cape Town, South Africa.

The scheduler redevelopment joins 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 procedures to prevent whale strikes in cetacean-rich Antarctic Peninsula waters, more stringent restrictions on the commercial use of remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), 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 of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators, introduced guidelines that will arm visitors to the polar regions with responsible solutions for reducing their waste and plastic footprint.

Work to redevelop the IAATO Ship Scheduler has been underway since last year, beginning with a database upgrade, but last month’s full membership meeting was an opportunity for members and polar partners to see what a more robust, future-proof system could look like.

Lisa Kelley added: “Our proven success in conscientious visitor management is the result of forward planning based on long-term understanding of the industry and a deep passion for Antarctica. The



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annual launch of the ship scheduler, and the redevelopment project moving forward, is an important part of what we do and demonstrates the commitment of our members to responsible tourism.”

Ends -

Issued by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

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Notes for Editors:

- For more information about Antarctic site guidelines, visit; https://www.ats.aq/devAS/ats_other_siteguidelines.aspx
- 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.

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.