



Antarctica Tour Operators Introduce New Measures to Manage for Tourism Growth

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Cape Town, South Africa:

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) has closed its annual meeting in Cape Town with multiple new measures in support of its mission for safe, environmentally responsible Antarctic travel.

IAATO has been carefully monitoring, analysing and reporting Antarctic tourism trends since 1991 as part of its commitment to ‘leave only footprints’ through the effective self-management of guest activities. Every year at IAATO’s annual meeting, members 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 the association’s mission.

The measures given the green-light at the organization’s 2019 annual meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, aim to support the effective management of the growing number of visitors to the white continent. 56,168 people travelled with IAATO members in 2018/2019, via both deep field and cruise expeditions, including 10,889 visitors who travelled on cruise-only vessels and did not set foot on the continent. The actions agreed include a unanimous vote to impose mandatory measures to prevent whale strikes in cetacean-rich Antarctic 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 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.

Mark van der Hulst, incoming chair of the IAATO Executive Committee, said: “Antarctica receives relatively few visitors compared to other destinations, but its unique qualities require rigorous safeguards. IAATO’s success in responsibly managing its activities relies on the willingness of its members to act for Antarctica and, once again, members have demonstrated their commitment by making critical decisions at the 2019 meeting.”

Lisa Kelley, IAATO Head of Operations, said: “Visiting Antarctica is a privilege and we all have a responsibility to keep it pristine. We find that our guests are sensitive to the potential impact that tourism can have on our precious places, and therefore embrace IAATO and Antarctic Treaty System guidelines, stringent bio security measures and wildlife proximity rules.



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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.

“Our proven success in conscientious visitor management is the result of forward planning based on long-term understanding of the industry. Focused gatherings such as the IAATO annual meeting help us hone our policies and strategies to protect Antarctica while enabling Antarctic travellers to have an enriching, educational experience.”

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Issued by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

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- Antarctic wildlife images are available.
- IAATO's 2019 annual meeting was held from April 30 – May 3
- Latest Antarctic visitor numbers are given in Table 1.
- 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.
- Deep field tourism includes those IAATO member operators who provide flights to the Antarctic interior for deep field excursions.
- 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.

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Table 1. Antarctic visitor numbers for the 2013-2019 season as of April 12, 2019, subject to change.

	2018-2019 Season	2017-2018 Season	2016-2017 Season	2015-2016 Season	2014-2015 Season
Seaborne tourism with landings ¹	40,665	38,588	33,237	27,607	25,341
Air & cruise combination with landings	3935	3,408	3,203	2,353	1471
Deep field tourism, Antarctic interior	679	580	452	409	431
Cruise only tourism, no landings ²	10889	9,131	7,475	8,109	9459
Total	56,168	51,707	44,367	38,478	36,702

¹ 'Landings' are excursions ashore.

² These ships carry more than 500 passengers and are not allowed to make landings in Antarctica