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Report of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators 2021-22

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Under Article III (2) of the Antarctic Treaty

Introduction

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) is pleased to report its activities to ATCM XLIV.

IAATO focuses activities in support of its mission to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica. Further information on IAATO, its mission, primary activities and recent developments can be found at:

www.iaato.org.

Overview

Over the last three decades, IAATO has been committed to the promotion of safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel. This commitment has been unwavering through two previous major growth periods and, recently, the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic.

IAATO's membership totals 106 Members, comprised of 55 Operators and Provisional Operators and 51 Associates. IAATO's strength has been and continues to be its membership's ability to draw upon their own experience and the advice from other stakeholders to address emerging challenges and evolve its procedures and management when necessary.

After experiencing minimal activity in the 2020-21 season, the 2021-22 season saw a moderate resumption of operations though COVID-19 challenges persisted. This modest restart did allow Operators to deploy some new vessels; however, most Operators did not run at full capacity.

IAATO's Members expect the upcoming season will look very different, with visitor numbers reaching a record level. IAATO has invested in various tools during its history that will be further leveraged to manage the challenges this growth may present. Additional new measures, further detailed below, were recently agreed during IAATO's 2022 Annual Meeting and will continue to enable IAATO and its membership to fulfill their commitment to the promotion of safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica, and to ensure activities have no more than a minor or transitory environmental impact.

Further information on IAATO Operators' activities can be found in ATCM XLIV IPxx *IAATO Overview of Antarctic Tourism: A Historical Review of Growth, the 2021-22 Season and Preliminary Estimates for 2022-23*.

COVID-19 and the 2021-22 Season

When the 2019-20 season was curtailed due to global concerns around COVID-19, IAATO responded by forming the IAATO COVID-19 Steering Group (now the IAATO COVID-19 Advisory Group). The purpose of this Advisory Group was to seek updates from gateway ports, COMNAP, SCAR and other stakeholders and to share this information regularly with the membership. During the past two years, virtual Town Halls and informal virtual discussions were hosted by IAATO to allow the membership to share perspectives and lessons learned in order to develop industry best practice in this new and unprecedented environment.

In July 2021, IAATO announced the following recommendations for the 2021-22 season, which received overwhelming support from the membership:

- Passengers should be fully vaccinated before embarking from their gateway departure point;
- Crew members and staff should be fully vaccinated before embarkation;
- In some circumstances, if vaccination is not feasible or applicable, individuals should have appropriate documentation regarding recovery from COVID-19 or are quarantined following most recent medical advice and/or relevant national requirements;
- In addition to the steps listed above, operators should adopt an effective testing scheme to detect the presence of COVID-19 and take the necessary steps to reduce potential spread.

More than 65% of IAATO Operators and Provisional Operators operated during the 2021-22 season. However, ship operators often ran at reduced capacity, and many had to cancel trips due to the challenges presented by the Omicron variant.

The total number of visitors in the 2021-22 season was 23,597.

Further information on IAATO tourism statistics, including activities and nationalities, can be found in ATCM XLIV IPxx *IAATO Overview of Antarctic Tourism: A Historical Review of Growth, the 2021-22 Season and Preliminary Estimates for 2022-23*. The Membership Directory can be found at www.iaato.org.

IAATO Annual Meeting

IAATO's 2022 Annual Meeting was held as a hybrid meeting, 25-28 April 2022. This hybrid meeting allowed members to attend either live in Providence, Rhode Island, US or virtually. Actions at the Annual Meeting included:

- Committing to a Climate Change pledge, which included:
 - Taking the necessary steps to account for our greenhouse gas emissions.
 - Reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2050 compared with 2008
 - Implementing a meaningful climate strategy that includes target setting and allocating resources.
 - Reaching Net Zero as soon as possible before 2050.
- Strengthening the guidelines for submersible (HOV) activities
- Establishing the requirement that additional office and field personnel, including captains and certain senior officers, take and pass the relevant IAATO Online Assessment.
- Approving updates and enhancements to guidelines including operations in the vicinity of fast and other ice and helicopter guidelines following discussions with National Antarctic Programs; and in line with previous decisions on RPAS and jet skis, the meeting agreed to explicitly recommend against certain water activities, including surf, kite, skim and wind boards.

It was also agreed that the Managing for Growth Working Group will be broken into five subgroups that will focus on client expectations, assessment of new activities, short-term and long-term site management and IAATO's mandatory observation scheme. These subgroups will address immediate considerations for the upcoming season and also strategic planning around anticipated continued growth.

IAATO Support of Research & Conservation

IAATO encourages collaborative opportunities with scientific organisations particularly where these enhance the Antarctic community's understanding of human activities in the region.

Projects include(d):

- IAATO/COMNAP Fellowships – IAATO, in collaboration with COMNAP, will continue to invest in the development of early-career researchers by awarding its fourth US\$15,000 Fellowship in 2022. Suitable candidates are encouraged to [apply](#). IAATO awarded a [2021 fellowship](#) to early career researcher Ross Nichols from the University of California, Santa Cruz, for work on whale activity around the Antarctic Peninsula. See also ATCM XLIV-IP005 *Early Career Opportunities: Antarctic Fellowships & Scholarships*.
- IAATO/SCAR Systematic Conservation Plan – SCAR and IAATO are undertaking a collaborative project to develop a systematic conservation plan for the Antarctic Peninsula, aimed at facilitating the concurrent management of biodiversity, science and tourism (ATCM XLII - IP24; ATCM XL - IP166). Following the finalization of stakeholder engagement workshops, initial analyses and scenarios were created. During the review, it was identified that further clarification on certain site-related data sets needed to be incorporated. Dr Jasmine Lee was contracted on a short-term basis by IAATO in late 2021 to address these. Upon finalization, IAATO will discuss the results with its members and SCAR and report to stakeholders, including the CEP.
- SOOS DueSouth – Execution of the SOOS DueSouth and IAATO collaboration to provide historical information regarding routes and sites visited by IAATO Operators. This data will assist the scientific community in determining future collaboration opportunities with operators as well as possible transport assistance.
- UN Southern Ocean Decade – IAATO is a member of the Southern Ocean Task Force, coordinated by SCAR, which used a community driven process to create an Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. See also ATCM XLIV IP107 *The Southern Ocean Contribution to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development*.
- Support in Antarctica – IAATO Operator expeditions during the 2021-22 season were able to provide support for various scientific projects, such as the Antarctic Site Inventory - Oceanites and Penguin Watch. Five IAATO Operators also provided air or vessel support to National Antarctic Programs.

Other Work and Activities

IAATO also continues to prioritise activities that strengthen its institutional structure and help position it as a reputable, valued partner in the wider polar community. In addition to the work described above, over the past year, IAATO has:

- Developed tools to support field staff when delivering the Antarctic Ambassadors message to clients and further executed on the Antarctic Ambassadors strategy through public engagement in events such as the inaugural Antarctic Ambassadorship Day.
- Hosted webinars for Field Staff at the beginning and end of the 2021-22 season to discuss best practices and lessons learned. Webinars will continue to be delivered to the field staff in advance of the 2022-23 season.
- Facilitated over 3,000 online assessments for field staff, crew & office personnel which were successfully completed for the 2021-22 season.

In addition, IAATO Secretariat staff and Operator representatives participated in internal and external meetings, liaising with Treaty Party representatives, National Antarctic Programs personnel, and governmental, scientific, environmental, and industry organisations, including but not limited to:

- **COMNAP Annual Meeting**, Online, July 2020 and July 2021
- **Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) Conference & Annual Meeting**, Online, October 2021

Tourism Incidents 2021-22

IAATO's policy is to disclose incidents to ensure risks are understood and appropriate lessons are learned for all Antarctic Operators. There were no major incidents involving IAATO Operators during the 2021-22 season.

With Thanks

IAATO appreciates the opportunity to work cooperatively with Antarctic Treaty Parties, COMNAP, SCAR, CCAMLR, IHO/HCA, WMO, ASOC and others toward the long-term protection of Antarctica.