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Workshop on Education and Outreach - Using Education to Create a Task Force for Antarctic Conservation

Using Education to Create a Task Force for Antarctic Conservation

Information Paper Submitted by the
International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO)

Summary

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) is pleased to participate in the Education and Outreach Workshop on 31 May in Sofia, Bulgaria, just prior to ATCM XXXVIII, as proposed by Brazil, Belgium, Bulgaria, Portugal and the UK in 2014 (ATCM XXXVII/WP9, *Education and Outreach activities associated with Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings [ATCM]*). IAATO has long advocated the importance of education and outreach and, as part of its ongoing education programmes, promotes the work of the Antarctic Treaty to a wide audience both in and outside Antarctica, most of whom are nationals from countries supporting their own National Antarctic Programmes.

IAATO believes that the education and outreach programmes of both the Association and IAATO member operators have two key roles, the first in promoting the unique values of Antarctica, such as its political setting, its importance to science and as an environment in its own right and the second in supporting a wider global conservation movement through educating individuals about the wonders of this great wilderness by experiencing it first-hand.

IAATO welcomes the opportunity the workshop provides for sharing experiences and facilitating discussion, standing ready to support the educational and outreach work of the ATCM further, as required.

Creating a Task Force for Antarctic Conservation

Background

IAATO is a member organisation that has, for almost 25 years, been advocating and promoting the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to Antarctica. In addition, IAATO also has a vision that includes creating a corps of ambassadors for the continued protection of Antarctica, while having no more than a minor or transitory impact on the environment. To help deliver this vision and other engagement aspirations outlined in IAATO's new Communications Strategy, Members voted to establish an Education and Outreach Working Group at their Annual Meeting in April 2015.

IAATO's education and outreach efforts differ from that of the wider Antarctic community in that they are bringing a general public audience directly to the continent, giving IAATO a unique opportunity to focus education on some of the most Antarctic focused individuals amongst the travelling public. Providing visitors with a quality wilderness experience may ignite a passion to care more about Antarctica, but IAATO members do more than this, believing that visitors should be empowered with knowledge. All IAATO member operators provide education programmes as part of their trips and, since 1991, have enabled almost half a million visitors to experience and learn about this unique wilderness, returning home with a renewed sense of its importance and value to science globally.

The majority of visitors travelling with IAATO are taxpayers from countries supporting a National Antarctic Programme, representing over 100 different nationalities on average each season. In 2014-2015, IAATO clients represented all Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties and 87% of Non-Consultative Parties. These visitors are self-selecting, demonstrating an inherent interest and inquisitiveness about Antarctica by

committing their time and money to visit. IAATO thus has a valuable opportunity to communicate the importance of Antarctica for scientific research. More information about visitor nationalities and trends is given in the supporting poster presented at the workshop.

Delivery

Visiting the coastal regions of the Antarctic Peninsula, on ships or yachts carrying fewer than 500 passengers, remains the most popular form of tourism, accounting for 73% of IAATO visitors in 2014-2015. A quarter of visitors do not set foot ashore in Antarctica because they were travelling on 'cruise only' vessels, which do not make landings, and approximately 1% travel to the interior of the continent on deep field expeditions.

All of the operators working in these different sectors of the Antarctic tourism market offer an educational component to their programmes. The component can vary slightly depending on the experience or expedition. For the purposes of this workshop, IAATO will concentrate on providing information about the educational elements of the principle sector: seaborne trips with landings.

Education begins before leaving home:

Pre-departure information sent to potential clients about Antarctica and their trip includes details on how to be a responsible Antarctic visitor, such as [IAATO's Don't Pack a Pest Leaflet](#) and ATCM agreed [Visitor Guidelines](#). Key documents and briefings have been translated into multiple languages and are available at www.iaato.org.

The IAATO Field Staff Assessment and Certification Programme promotes best practice amongst field staff, testing their working knowledge of current information prior to each season, much of which is updated in line with relevant outcomes from the most recent ATCM. Most member operators make completion of the Assessment a mandatory part of their hiring process.

En route to Antarctica:

After leaving port, passengers are invited to attend a varied series of seminars and workshops on board delivered by field staff and scientists who are either travelling as part of the group or being transported to a research station or field site. This ranges from lectures on subjects such as glaciology, oceanography, history, wildlife, climate change and non-native species to more hands on activities such as bird and marine mammal watching and plankton tows.

Prior to arriving in Antarctica, visitors are given [IAATO's Mandatory Briefing](#) that, in addition to visitor guidelines, gives an introduction to the Antarctic Treaty System and how IAATO helps to support the work of the Antarctic Treaty System.

In Antarctica:

In addition to the safety briefing given before landing at any site, visitors are also provided with a suite of local information about the area such as the flora and fauna, history and geography and ATCM protected areas, including Historic Sites and Monuments, Antarctic Specially Managed Areas as well as any Antarctic Specially Protected Areas that must be avoided. This is derived both from IAATO and Antarctic Treaty System [Site Guidelines and Protected Areas archive](#), and from field staff, who have expert working knowledge of visitor sites.

Education continues on shore, or in small boats, through having guides available to answer questions and point out areas of interest. Member operators subscribe to IAATO's Wilderness Etiquette, which recognizes that the wilderness aspect is intrinsic to visitors' experience of Antarctica. Itineraries build in space and time for visitors to quietly experience the natural splendor of their environment and encourage mindfulness.

Visits to National Antarctic Programme Research Stations are hugely beneficial and appreciated by both visitor and field staff who value the learning opportunities they afford, and by station personnel.

Visitors are also made aware of the various science projects and long term monitoring programmes, many of which are supported by IAATO, often through researchers on board or by being encouraged, for example, to

submit marine mammal sightings and photographs for photo-ID work to several government and non-government science institutes.

At the end of each day, further discussions and questions are facilitated through ‘recap’, which also provide an opportunity for field staff to provide further information on specific observations or activities throughout the day. For example, a sighting of a fishing vessel is an ideal opportunity to introduce the work of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and the concept of Marine Protected Areas. IAATO provides recap material and lectures on these particular subjects in the Field Operations Manual.

The Journey Home and Beyond

As the Antarctic Treaty System demonstrates, protecting Antarctica for future generations is a huge collaborative effort. IAATO believes that tourism is an integral part of this by empowering visitors with first hand experience and education, leading to a greater understanding and appreciation of the continent. The concept of becoming an Antarctic Ambassador is first introduced to visitors as part of IAATO’s Mandatory Briefing. Field staff can also initiate discussions on the journey back about how visitors can capture and take home what they have learned and experienced in Antarctica, highlighting how this can be a powerful conservation tool.

It is IAATO’s aspiration to formalize the Antarctic Ambassador concept and make it more tangible. Plans to do this are outlined in the Association’s Communications Strategy, supported by their newly established Education and Outreach Working Group. IAATO has a unique opportunity to deliver key messages about Antarctica and the work of the Treaty System to a wide, international and interested audience. It is hoped that this information paper is helpful in outlining some of the educational opportunities provided by IAATO and its member operators. The Association welcomes further discussion on the Antarctic Ambassador concept or any other Education and Outreach aspects that would support the work of Treaty Parties and the ATCM.