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## **Report of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators 2024-25**

Attachments:

atcm47\_att049.e.pdf: IAATO 2024-25 Strategic Plan ATCM Update  
atcm47\_att050.e.pdf: IAATO Statement on Marine Resource Conservation  
atcm47\_att051.e.pdf: Beyond Fuel IAATO Sustainability and emissions reduction Guidance  
atcm47\_att052.e.pdf: IAATO Climate Strategy Guidance for members March 2025  
atcm47\_att053.e.pdf: IAATO Communicating the Antarctic Experience Guidance\_2025.01  
atcm47\_att054.e.pdf: IAATO Travelling with Influencers Guidance\_2025.01



# Report of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators 2024-25

## *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 47.

IAATO focuses on 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](http://www.iaato.org).

### **Overview**

IAATO has been committed to promoting safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel over the last three decades. This commitment has been unwavering through periods of major industry growth, the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic and most recently, the emergence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Antarctica.

IAATO's strength has been, and continues to be, its membership's ability to draw upon their own experience and advice from stakeholders to address emerging challenges and evolve its procedures and management when necessary. IAATO's current membership totals 126 members, comprising 55 operators and provisional operators, and 70 associates.

The total number of visitors (Vessel and Deep Field) in the 2024-25 season was 118,491. As forecast in ATCM 46 (2024) IP102 *IAATO Overview of Antarctic Vessel Tourism: The 2023-24 Season, and Preliminary Estimates for 2024-25*, the 2024-25 passenger levels are approximately 5% lower than the 2023-24 season. This can primarily be attributed to one cruise-only operator not operating during the 2024-25 season. The number of landed passengers remained virtually the same between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons.

The further spread of HPAI in Antarctica, particularly in the Antarctic Peninsula region, was, and remains, a high concern in advance of and during the 2024-25 season. The collaboration between IAATO, SCAR and COMNAP continued and was further enhanced with additional communications and protocols. Internal communication between IAATO and its operators continued to be strong during the season, which included increased reporting relating to HPAI (92 reports received for potential suspected cases).

Lessons learned from the 2024-25 season, considerations for our evolution as an industry and action points for the upcoming season were discussed at IAATO's Annual Meeting in Cascais, Portugal (14-17 April 2025). Additionally, 19 new guidelines were approved to further support visitor site management. Progress on IAATO's five-year strategic plan, *Embracing our Role as Stewards of Antarctica*, was reviewed, and short-term goals for 2025-26 were approved to support the plan further. All of these steps are important to fulfil IAATO's mission and to ensure operators' activities have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the environment.

Further information on IAATO Operators' activities and nationalities can be found in ATCM 47 IP032 *IAATO Vessel Overview of Antarctic Tourism: 2024-25 Season and Preliminary Estimates for 2025-26 Season*. IP033 *Deep Field and Air Overview of Antarctic Tourism*:

*2024-25 Season and Preliminary Estimates for 2025-26 Season. ATCM 46 (2024) IP107 A Catalogue of IAATO Operator Activities.*

Further information on IAATO tourism statistics focused on site usage and management can be found in ATCM 47 IP034 *A Five-Year Overview and 2024–25 Season Report on IAATO Operator Use of Antarctic Peninsula Landing Sites and ATCM Visitor Site Guidelines* and ATCM 46 (2024) IP108 *IAATO Site Management Methods*. The Membership Directory can be found at [www.iaato.org](http://www.iaato.org).

### **IAATO Annual Meeting**

IAATO's 2025 Annual Meeting was held in Cascais, Portugal, 14-17 April 2025. IAATO was pleased to have Treaty Party member representatives from Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom attend the open sessions as well as other valued stakeholders, including ASOC.

Actions at the annual meeting included:

- Review of IAATO's five-year strategy, *Embracing Our Role as Stewards of Antarctica* and the status of the 2024-25 Short Term Actions (See Attachment 1) and the approval of six Short Term Actions for 2025-26, examples which include:
  - Harness new and improve existing technology to enhance operational safety and efficiency, including the release of the new IAATO Antarctic Expedition App.
  - Develop new and existing relationships with outside experts (scientific and field specific) to further IAATO's strategic goals including data utilization.
  - Strengthen interactions with gateway stakeholders including collaborative opportunities
- Review of the 2024-25 season results of IAATO initiatives including:
  - 19 Mandatory/Provisional Operator Observations
  - 199 Site Stewardship Reports from 28 Sites submitted
  - 5020 Online Assessments taken
- Adoption of several new guidelines and infrastructure strengthening including:
  - 19 new and updated IAATO Visitor Site Guidelines, which cover both terrestrial and marine locations (ref. ATCM 47 IP034).
  - 20:1 Guest to *Actively* Guiding Field Staff Ratio
    - See IAATO's updated [IAATO Bylaws](#)
  - Creation of several Sub-Committees: Field Staff, Medical and Air-Cruise (IAATO now has 12 committees, nine working groups and three Sub-Committees.)
  - Update to IAATO's Statement on Marine Resource Conservation (See Attachment 2)

Treaty Party member representatives are cordially invited to join any of the open sessions during IAATO's future Annual Meetings. IAATO's 2026 Annual Meeting will be held in Annapolis, Maryland, USA, during the week of April 20, 2026.

### **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):

- HPAI Response: IAATO's collaboration with COMNAP and SCAR continued regarding the enhancement of protocols related to HPAI, which included considerations when working with scientists as well as a reporting process for suspected cases to SCAR. These were communicated to IAATO Operators July through October of 2024 through virtual Town Hall sessions, webinars and materials developed to assist with the education of field staff and guests related to these protocols. See also ATCM 47 WP050 *Update on High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza in Antarctica* and ATCM 47 IP035 *2024-25 Update IAATO Marine Operator High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza Response*.
  - IAATO and its operators also continued to support scientific efforts to gather more information on HPAI, with financial, data and logistics support.
- IAATO/COMNAP Fellowships: IAATO, in collaboration with COMNAP, will continue to invest in the development of early-career researchers by awarding its seventh US\$15,000 Fellowship in 2025. Ten early-career persons have received funding since the award was launched. Suitable candidates are encouraged to [apply](#) by June 1, 2025. IAATO [recognised](#) two fellows in 2024: Dr. Katherine Gallagher from Stony Brook University, USA and Lucila Belen Morales from Andres Bello University, Chile.
- Alternative Fuels: As part of IAATO's commitment to help its operators reduce emissions and reach Net Zero by 2050, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) and Antarctic Gateway Committee continue to collate information on safe, sustainable fossil fuel alternatives that are suitable for polar operations. IAATO held a webinar on alternative maritime fuels for vessel operators and ship management companies in March 2025 by Charlotte Rojgaard from Bureau Veritas. The webinar was also attended by the COMNAP Secretariat. IAATO and COMNAP will continue to share information related to this topic.
- Climate Strategy and Guidance: The IAATO CCC updated its '*Climate Change Strategy Guidance for IAATO members*' and delivered new recommendations, '*Beyond Fuel: IAATO Sustainability and Emissions Reduction Guidance*' (See Attachments 3 and 4) to help all members reduce emissions outside of fuel. IAATO continues to invest in collecting fuel consumption data annually from its operators, working with an external analyst to monitor and understand aggregated greenhouse gas emissions, Antarctic gateway-to-gateway, each season. This analysis helps inform IAATO's internal strategy and that of its operators.
- Tourism Research Projects: IAATO continues to collaborate with stakeholders on tourism-related research, including programs under SCAR and projects funded through the Dutch Research Council, Proactive Management of Antarctic Tourism (ProAct) and Antarctic tourism - Research Programme on Assessment of Impacts and Responses (PT-REPAIR).
- Support in Antarctica: IAATO Operator expeditions during the 2024-25 season were able to provide support for various scientific projects, including but not limited to the Antarctic Site Inventory - Oceanites and Penguin Watch. Many IAATO Operators also provided logistical field support by air, overland traverse or vessel 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:

- Hosted six webinars, covering 17 topics, for field staff at the beginning and end of the 2024-25 season to discuss best practices and lessons learned. These webinars were recorded and made available for field staff who were unable to attend the live session or wanted a refresher during the season. The recorded webinars are part of an education library available for field staff and operators. This practice will continue for the 2025-26 season.
- IAATO hosted a joint Polar Field Staff Conference with the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators ([AECCO](#)), in Providence, Rhode Island, USA September 01-04, 2025.

- Launched the Polar Communicators Forum. Open to all communications, marketing, social media and sales teams working for IAATO members, the Forum creates a place to share updated guidance such as the *Travelling with Influencers* guidance and the *Communicating the Antarctic Experience* guidance (See Attachments 5 and 6).

In addition to ATCM Intersessional work, IAATO Secretariat staff and operator representatives participated in internal and external meetings, liaising with Treaty Party representatives, National Antarctic Program personnel, and governmental, scientific, environmental, and industry organizations, including but not limited to:

- **COMNAP Annual Meeting**, August 2024
- **SCAR Open Science Conference**, August 2024
- **AECO Conference & Annual Meeting**, October 2024
- **CCAMLR**, October 2024 (Online)
- **IMO Polar Maritime Seminar**, January 2025

### ***Tourism Incidents 2024-25***

IAATO's policy is to disclose major incidents to ensure risks are understood and appropriate lessons are learned for all Antarctic operators. There were no major environmental or safety incidents in the Antarctic Treaty area during the 2024-25 season.

IAATO is committed to reviewing all incidents, and taking appropriate actions for updating operational procedures as needed. In this way, referring back to the 2022 World Explorer Incident and following the publication of the [United States Coast Guard Report](#) released in October 2024, IAATO has circulated lessons learned with its operators. Additionally, IAATO continues to value the collaboration with COMNAP, in particular the triennial SAR Workshop, where all Antarctic stakeholders can work towards shared goals and lessons around incident management.

### ***With Thanks***

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