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.

Together, IAATO’s worldwide network of member tour operators have agreed to operational procedures, membership requirements and guidelines that fulfill their mission. The success they have achieved is unprecedented in the global tourism industry.

Celebrating 25 Years of Advocating and Promoting the Practice of Safe and Environmentally Responsible Antarctic Travel

Antarctica symbolizes the greatest expression of international peace in our world today. Managed for more than a half-century through the Antarctic Treaty System’s extraordinary global partnership of over 50 countries, the entire continent is formally designated “a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science,” putting all territorial claims on hold. The Treaty is supplemented by the Protocol on Environmental Protection that sets standards for all human activities – governmental and tourism alike – and which aims to ensure that those activities are planned and conducted in a way that limits adverse impacts on the Antarctic environment.

Tourism is a legitimate activity under the Antarctic Treaty, and for the past 50 years organized tours have enabled visitors from all over the world to witness and experience Antarctica’s tranquil natural splendor of ancient glaciers and unique wildlife. In that time, almost no discernible impact on the environment has been observed. This is due, in no small degree, to the efforts of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), a member organization that has devoted itself for the past quarter of a century to fulfilling its mission of safe and environmentally responsible tourism. Together, IAATO’s global network of member operators have developed and agreed to operational procedures, membership requirements and guidelines to protect the Antarctic environment while ensuring that visitors have a safe, enriching wilderness experience. The success they have achieved is unprecedented in the global tourism industry.

Nearly all visitors traveling with IAATO operators arrive by sea from South America, with the remainder cruising from other gateway ports or arriving by air. Following a peak of 46,265 travelers during the 2007-08 austral summer season, there was a decline in numbers due to the world economic crisis and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) ban on the use and carriage of heavy fuel oil in Antarctica. Overall, there has been a steady recovery since 2011-2012, with 38,478 visitors during the 2015-2016 season.
Fulfilling IAATO’s Mission and Vision

Membership

The majority of Antarctic tour operators are IAATO members. 120 members belonged to IAATO as of 26 April 2016, representing almost 70% of Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party countries. Of these, 53 members are tour operator/organizers who secure authorization from their respective Treaty Party to conduct tourism activities; 43 are associate members who market other members’ programs; and 24 are affiliate members who support Antarctic tourism and IAATO’s objectives. IAATO has represented all passenger vessels operating in Antarctic waters under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) since 2010, with one cruise only exception in the 2015-2016 season.

Developing Best Practice

IAATO regularly reviews its comprehensive list of regulations and guidelines, and develops new ones in response to evolving operations, often in collaboration with the research community and Treaty Parties. These are included in IAATO’s Field Operations Manual, updated annually for use by tour operators, vessel captains and expedition staff. Examples include visitor management at specific sites, procedures to avoid introducing non-native species and standards for activities such as wildlife watching and small boat operations. Internally IAATO has several committees and working groups that address emerging or ongoing issues throughout the year. The annual meeting provides an opportunity for members to share knowledge, best practice and lessons learned.

*Recent additions to IAATO policy include guidelines for underwater activities and sea kayaking, and a restriction on the recreational use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles until more was known about their responsible use.

Ship Scheduler

IAATO’s Ship Scheduler is designed to support pre-season planning for its members enabling them to reduce visitation pressure by abiding to IAATO’s bylaw of only one ship at one landing site at a given time. Each year at an agreed date and time, IAATO’s ship operators around the world book their intended landing sites in Antarctica for the following season. Operators communicate regularly in the field to ensure this is maintained should itineraries change due to operational or environmental conditions.

Visitor Numbers and Trends

IAATO collects data through post-visit reports submitted by members to the Secretariat. The IAATO members’ database of activities is the most comprehensive dataset of any human activity in Antarctica making it a valuable resource for visitor management decisions. IAATO regularly analyses trends in the spatial and temporal distribution of its members’ activities.


IAATO Field Staff Training and Certification

The Field Staff Online Assessment and Certification Program tests staff’s working knowledge of the IAATO Field Operations Manual and is a mandatory part of the hiring process for many IAATO operators. The assessments are tailored by geographical area and reviewed annually. During the 2015-2016 season 663 staff passed at least one of the assessments.

Field Staff Newsletters are published three times a season and supplemented with regular email updates to keep field staff and crew informed.

*In September 2015, IAATO, in conjunction with its sister organization in the Arctic, The Association for Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO), held the first polar Field Staff Conference in Toronto, Canada.

Education and Outreach

Education, knowledge exchange and advising is an important element of IAATO’s work, whether between members, field staff and the traveling public or with stakeholders, the media and students.

*IAATO has developed new videos to brief travelers en route to Antarctica that reinforce actions visitors need to take to ensure their visit is safe and environmentally sensitive. The three-minute animations will be shown to guests traveling with IAATO member operators to supplement the existing general briefing. They are available with subtitles in ten different languages.

Other key documents are available in multiple languages including various visitor guidelines and pamphlets such as, Climate Change in
Antarctica – Understanding the Facts and Don’t Pack a Pest, which is aimed at reducing the risk of introducing non-native species.

*In celebration of its 25th Anniversary, IAATO produced a book detailing its history, tourism trends and current operations including how it works within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System.

Creating Ambassadors for the Continued Protection of Antarctica
Tourism is, and should continue to be, a driving force in Antarctic conservation. First-hand travel experiences lead to a better understanding of the destination, the need for responsible tourism and, ultimately, continued protection for future generations. To fulfill the association’s vision, IAATO members highlight education as a component of visiting Antarctica, enabling visitors to learn about this unique, natural environment and its value to global science. Visitors to the continent – representing more than 100 different nationalities on average per season – return home as ambassadors for the guardianship of this last great wilderness.

*To stay involved after their visit, travelers can now follow Antarctic Ambassador groups on Facebook (AntarcticAmbassadors), Twitter (@ANT_Ambassadors) and Instagram (@Antarctic_Ambassadors). These provide a forum for all visitors or individuals with an interest in the future of Antarctica.

The Future of Antarctica Forum, February 28 – March 9, 2016
Organized by Oceanites (oceanites.org) and hosted on an IAATO vessel in Antarctica, the forum brought together representatives from governments, industry and environmental and scientific organizations to discuss current issues, challenges, and opportunities facing the Antarctic Treaty System. Participants focused on the global importance of climate change, Antarctica’s central role in better understanding climate change impacts, the continued evolution of the Antarctic Treaty System in the 21st century, and maintaining the ecological relationships of Antarctica’s living marine resources.

Science Support and Citizen Science
Antarctic science is challenging to do given the harsh environmental conditions and remote location. IAATO member operators have a long history of supporting scientific endeavor, carrying over a 100 scientists and National Program personnel with their equipment free, or at minimal expense, to and from research sites or stations annually. This includes long term monitoring programs, critical for understanding how the Antarctic ecosystem is changing over time. Increasingly, visitors traveling with an IAATO member operator are invited to participate in research projects, e.g., wildlife counts, seawater sampling and marine mammal research.

*With data on whales in the Southern Ocean still surprisingly scarce, an IAATO member operator developed happywhale.com, a platform that allows people to share their whale images and sightings with the research community. Individual whales can be identified and tracked, improving our knowledge about the movements & populations of these animals.

Polar Code
As an advisor to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), IAATO was an active participant in the development of the International Maritime Organization’s (IMO) mandatory Polar Code.

*In preparation for the Polar Code, that will enter into force on January 1, 2017, IAATO and Lloyd’s Register held a facilitated workshop in June 2015 for vessel operators & other relevant stakeholders.

IAATO is now contributing to the development of tools for implementing the Code’s requirements, such as a database of ice and temperature information to support operator’s risk assessments.

Yacht Observer Scheme and Outreach Campaign
The Dockside Observer program for IAATO yacht operators is part of the association’s enhanced observer scheme, which involves making actual observations of member operations to promote best practice.

*IAATO revised and updated its Yacht Outreach Campaign materials in 2015. The campaign targets non-IAATO yacht operators intending to travel to Antarctica to raise awareness about necessary safety and authorization requirements. Multi-language posters and leaflets are distributed at relevant gateway ports. These emphasize the need for yachts to seek authorization for any planned activities in Antarctica as well as for their passage to the region. www.iaato.org/yachts

Search and Rescue (SAR)
SAR is a collaborative effort and IAATO has strong relationships with the five Maritime Rescue Coordination Centers (MRCCs) with responsibility in Antarctica, conducting regular SAR exercises.

*IAATO attended an Arctic Search and Rescue Workshop and table top exercise in Iceland in April 2016 coordinated by AECO and the Icelandic Coast Guard. Combining knowledge from both poles strengthens safety and relationships across the polar tourism industry.

All commercial SOLAS passenger ships in the IAATO fleet actively participate in a web-based satellite vessel tracking system. Designed to enhance contingency response, the website has proven extremely useful among IAATO members, MRCCs and appropriate international governmental agencies.

Attendance at Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM)
As an invited Expert since 1992, IAATO participates in annual ATCMs, providing expert advice on tourism-related issues, submitting substantive Information Papers and contributing to discussions. IAATO Information Papers from ATCMs can be found at: www.iaato.org/the-antarctic-treaty. IAATO also actively participates in ATCM Intersessional Contact Group (ICG) discussions on a variety of topics.

*In its efforts to be collaborative with other Antarctic stakeholders, IAATO attends a variety of meetings throughout the year. In addition to government meetings, IAATO attended gatherings organized by the following organizations in the past year: The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP, August 2015), Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO, October 2015), Year of Polar Prediction – Geneva (July 2015) and UK (November 2015).

Antarctic Community Support
In addition to providing free, or at cost, transport for scientific personnel and equipment to and from Antarctica, IAATO members and passengers have contributed more than $4 million (US dollars) in cash or in-kind donations to Antarctic related scientific and conservation organizations over the past decade.

*Ongoing projects supported actively by IAATO include the eradication of non-native species from sub-Antarctic islands, the conservation and management of historic Antarctic buildings and long-term monitoring of seabird populations.
Effective Tourism Management is a Collaborative Effort

A quarter of a century ago, in the same year that IAATO was established, the Antarctic Treaty Parties agreed to the Environment Protocol (Madrid, 1991). This requires that anyone planning activities in the Antarctic – including tour operators – must submit environmental impact assessments of the potential impacts of their intended activities. For IAATO operators this includes the prevention of waste disposal and discharge; deference to scientific research and protected areas; adequate response plans to potential environmental emergencies; and other protection, self-sufficiency and safety requirements. Not all Treaty Parties have brought the Environment Protocol into place so IAATO has endeavored to fill in any potential loopholes by requiring its member operators to abide by the provisions of the Protocol and supply Environmental Impact Assessments if their National Authority does not request them.

Collaborative effort has continued in the ensuing years between governments, the industry and environmental organizations to ensure good regulation and management of Antarctic tourism. For example, IAATO has actively assisted Treaty Parties to develop sound and practical ATCM site guidelines and Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMA) with the most-visited sites now covered through Site Guidelines or National Antarctic Program Management. [www.ats.aq](http://www.ats.aq).

Measure 15, codified by Antarctic Treaty Parties in 2009, is based on prescriptions that were developed by IAATO. The Measure is a legally binding requirement that tour operators refrain from making any landings in Antarctica from vessels carrying more than 500 passengers. The same measure requires that tour operators coordinate with each other so that not more than one vessel is at a landing site at any one time; that no more than 100 passengers are ashore at a landing site at any one time; and that a 1:20 guide-to-passenger ratio be maintained while ashore.

### Percentage of Known Passenger Nationalities for 2015-2016 season

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL (as of April 26, 2016)</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### A Summary of IAATO Member Antarctic Tourism Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seaborne tourism with landings</td>
<td>31,493</td>
<td>27,607</td>
<td>25,341</td>
<td>25,526</td>
<td>23,305</td>
<td>20,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaborne tourism, no landings</td>
<td>8680</td>
<td>8109</td>
<td>9459</td>
<td>9670</td>
<td>9070</td>
<td>4872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air &amp; cruise combination, with landings</td>
<td>3154</td>
<td>2353</td>
<td>1471</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air &amp; land tourism, Antarctic interior</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-flights, no landings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>43,885</td>
<td>38,478</td>
<td>36,702</td>
<td>37,405</td>
<td>34,316</td>
<td>26,519</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Passenger numbers for 2015-16 and 2016-17 (estimate) as of April 26, 2016, subject to change. See also [www.iaato.org/tourism-statistics](http://www.iaato.org/tourism-statistics).