



May 2020

IAATO and Tourism Growth

Growth in visitor numbers to Antarctica is one of the most common themes IAATO receives enquiries about. Below is a selection of questions we received most regularly from journalists and researchers interested in safe and environmentally responsible Antarctic travel

Question /How many ships or cruise lines currently sail to the continent?

The vast majority of Antarctic visitors travel there by ship, using the vessel or boat as their "hotel" during their stay on the White Continent.

IAATO Operator members offer a wide array of vessels to the prospective traveler, all authorized or permitted for such cruises by their Treaty Party authority, flag state and classification society. Vessels can be grouped into any of the following categories:

- C1 – Traditional expedition ships that carry 13-200 passengers and are making landings.
- C2 – Mid-size vessels that carry 201-500 passengers and are making landings.
- CR – Vessels that carry more than 500 passengers and do not make landings (cruise only).
- YA – Sailing or motor yachts that carry 12 or fewer passengers.

Please see our [Vessel Directory](#) for more information.

It is a condition of IAATO membership that our operators are operating under a permit or authorization from an Antarctic Treaty Party or relevant government. As part of this process, they must also submit their Environmental Impact Assessment to IAATO. If an IAATO organizer is registered in a country without necessary legislation in place (i.e the country is not a Treaty Party or has not implemented the Environmental Protocol into their national legislation), the organizer must submit the equivalent documentation to the IAATO Secretariat ahead of the Antarctic season.

A full list of IAATO members is given in our [Membership Directory](#). Note that some operators are listed under 'Provisional Operators' until they have met all requirements for full membership, including carrying an observer.

Question /How many people visit per year?

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.



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IAATO is still compiling data from Operator Post Visit Reports (PVRs) for the 2019/20 season. This information will be published on the IAATO website iaato.org when it becomes available.

The table below will give you a breakdown of seaborne tourism (including Cruise Only) based on data provided by companies who submitted Post Visit Reports.

679 people travelled to Antarctic during the 2018/19 season with deep-field operators.

Antarctic Treaty Parties come together once a year at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM). As an invited Expert since 1992, IAATO participates in annual ATCMs, providing expert advice on tourism-related issues. In its role as representative for the Antarctic tourism industry, IAATO also submits [Information Papers](#) including visitors figures and contributes to discussions by the Antarctic Treaty party delegates.

Year	No. of operators	No. of ships & yachts	No. of voyages	No. of passengers making landings	No. of cruise only passengers
1992-93	10	12	59	6,704	
1993-94	9	11	65	7,957	
1994-95	9	14	93	8,098	
1995-96	10	15	113	9,212	
1996-97	11	13	104	7,322	
1997-98	12	13**	92	9,473	
1998-99	15	15**	116	9,857	
1999-00	17	21**	154	13,687	936
2000-01	15**	32**	131	12,109	0
2001-02	19**	37**	117	11,429	2,029
2002-03	26**	47**	136	13,263	2,424
2003-04	31**	51**	180	19,369	4,949
2004-05	35**	52**	207	22,297	5,027
2005-06	47**	44**	249	25,167	4,632
2006-07	42**	47**	268	28,622	6,930
2007-08	48	55	308	32,637	13,015
2008-09	44	53	290	26,921	10,652
2009-10	44	51	239	21,622	15,020
2010-11	41	47	223	19,065	14,373
2011-12	36	41	234	21,131	4,872
2012-13	39	45	258	24,892	9,070
2013-14	42	51	283	27,374	9,670
2014-15	37	44	268	26,812	9,459
2015-16	38	48	286	29,960	8,109
2016-17	38	47	298	36,440	7,475
2017-18	44	50	344	42,576	9,131
2018-19	44	56	360	44,600	10,889
2019-20	46***	63***	432***	***59,367	***18,420

Question | When did the growth in Antarctic cruising start?



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Commercial tourism to Antarctica started in the late 1950s when 500 or so fare-paying passengers traveled aboard Chilean and Argentine naval vessels each season to visit the South Shetland Islands on re-supply missions to research stations. The first vessel specifically built for the purpose of taking fare-paying passengers to Antarctica was the ice-strengthened m/v Lindblad Explorer built in 1969. She paved the way for tourists to visit and enjoy the world's last pristine continent by means of "expedition cruising" — defined by the industry as cruising coupled with education as a major theme.

By the late 1980s, four companies were conducting ship borne tourism to the Antarctic as well as one land operator who pioneered commercial tourism flights to Antarctica in 1985. These flights took guests to a seasonal inland field camp for guided climbs, ski expeditions and other adventurous activities.

By the 1991-92 season when IAATO was founded, approximately 6,400 tourists visited Antarctica, traveling aboard ten different expedition ships operated by six operators plus the land-based activities of the one land operator. New members continued to join at a steady pace.

Seven companies that had already been operating expeditions to Antarctica for several years founded the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators in 1991. The main impetus behind forming a global, non-profit industry association was two-fold; firstly, the signing of the Antarctic Environmental Protocol in early 1991 by the Antarctic Treaty nations established rigorous standards beyond those already outlined in the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, which designated Antarctica as a "natural reserve dedicated to peace and science." The Protocol provided the framework for the continued protection of the Antarctic environment. And secondly, by joining together, the companies were able to pool resources and lobby their national governments to develop substantive regulations and guidelines compatible with the best practices that were already being followed in the field.

Antarctica receives relatively few visitors compared to other destinations, but its unique qualities require rigorous safeguards. IAATO's 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 the organization hone its policies and strategies to protect Antarctica while enabling Antarctic travelers to have an enriching, educational experience.

The actions agreed at the 2019 annual meeting include imposing 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.

Question | How many companies are members of IAATO?



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As of the 2019/20 season, we have 112 members in total, 52 of which are Companies that operate directly in Antarctica and 60 of which are Associates; Tour operators, travel agents or other marketers that book their customers into Operator member's Antarctic programs. Also, companies or individuals with an interest in supporting responsible Antarctic tourism and IAATO's Objectives.

Aside from small yachts (vessels carrying 12 or less), none of the passenger vessels operating in the Antarctic are operated outside of IAATO at this point.

Question | Is there any advice I can share with travelers considering a trip to the southern region?

Part of the wonder of Antarctica is its unpredictability. Don't forget, while it may be the most untouched, it's also the most hostile place on Earth. Bad weather or moving icebergs can often scupper expedition itineraries, so it's always best to approach your trip with an open mind.

We'd encourage potential visitors to Antarctica to visit the [Guidelines and Resources section of the IAATO website](#) for advice on appropriate clothing, what to expect, [bio security](#), wildlife guidelines, [reducing single-use plastic](#) use while traveling and other responsible travel information.

Issued by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators

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Notes for Editors:

- Stock images are available.
- In addition to its own bylaws and requirements for membership, IAATO requires its members to abide by the Antarctic Treaty System and other international regulations.

About IAATO

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IAATO Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. These standards have proved to be successful including, but not limited to;

- Antarctic site-specific guidelines and site selection criteria;
- passenger to staff ratios and limiting numbers of passengers ashore;
- boot washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of non-native organisms;
- wilderness etiquette;
- ship scheduling and vessel communication procedures;
- emergency medical evacuation procedures and emergency contingency plans;
- reporting procedures;
- marine wildlife watching guidelines;
- station visitation policies.

IAATO has been carefully monitoring, analyzing and reporting Antarctic tourism trends since 1991 as part of its commitment to 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.