



July 2020 | Update 3

# IAATO's Response to COVID-19

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators has held a COVID-19 Town Hall meeting for its members to discuss the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The meeting, held on July 3 via video conference, gathered responsible tour operators from within IAATO's membership to discuss a COVID-19 operational approach and the work that is being undertaken in collaboration with the Antarctic gateway's for the upcoming Antarctic season.

One of IAATO's strengths is the willingness of its members to set any competitive interest aside to come together to act for Antarctica by sharing best practice for safe and responsible operations. The meeting opened with an introduction to the IAATO COVID-19 Steering Group, and a discussion on the challenges the industry is facing as it approaches the 2020/21 Antarctic season. The Steering Group then spoke about the future product of the work being done, the IAATO Guidance for COVID-19 Operations, which will provide the Operators tools to assess risks and challenges within their own companies, as well as their mitigation measures. IAATO operators then shared their own in-company best practice.

IAATO and its members are moving forward with preparations for the forthcoming season, all the time seeking out and monitoring advice from experts. The Association has been in close discussions with stakeholders, and the local and national governments since the crisis started. Attendees were updated on the status of each Antarctic Gateway and the individual concerns of their associated governments.

As well as observing the latest expert advice regarding post-pandemic protocols, at the heart of all discussions about future operations are the safety of all seaborne and deep-field visitors, field staff and crew, and the protection of Antarctic wildlife and the environment.

There is still much work ahead as IAATO's membership develop procedures as expeditiously as possible, but IAATO has proven success in using the vast experience and strength of its membership to find solutions.

The COVID-19 Town Hall was the latest in a series of positive steps for the organization to strengthen its commitment to visitor safety in the Antarctic.

**Ends –**



## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ANTARCTICA TOUR OPERATORS

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*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.*

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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

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.

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.