



December 11, 2020

Statement | IAATO emphasizes the importance of safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica during COVID-19

Since May of 2020, IAATO and its members have taken numerous steps to determine if a 2020/21 Antarctic season is feasible in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. These steps, guided by IAATO's mission for safe and environmentally responsible travel, have included forming a COVID-19 Advisory Group, engaging with Gateway Ports regarding the possibilities for COVID-19 secure travel, monitoring scientific developments, seeking the advice of external experts and assessing operational procedures.

Global knowledge about COVID-19 has rapidly evolved since the emergence of the virus, requiring our members to constantly reassess and adapt operations. Despite the considerable collaborative work that has been undertaken, both within and outside of IAATO, to try to make a season work, over the past few months, many IAATO operators have decided to postpone travel for the upcoming Antarctica season due to the operational challenges the pandemic presents.

We are all encouraged by recent advancements, such as vaccines and rapid testing. However, we are still in the early stages of a recovery and it is clear, based on the best available knowledge today, that there is no risk-free way to continue business as usual in the short term.

The Antarctic community includes, not only IAATO and its members but national science programs, their supporting infrastructure, and Rescue Coordination Centers. This community, with its spirit of cooperation under the Antarctic Treaty System, has an overarching goal this season to keep COVID-19 out of Antarctica.

While COVID-19 has disrupted what we do, it has not disrupted who we are. IAATO's mission is to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private sector travel to Antarctica. Therefore, considering the current status of COVID-19 globally and related challenges in secure travel, IAATO recommends any operators who are still considering operating in the 2020-2021 season to develop appropriate plans to support that mission.

IAATO members already operate under strict international rules and regulations and IAATO's own bylaws and procedures. IAATO emphasizes that any operations in 2020/2021 season are to include strict COVID-19 management protocols, consistent with, or exceeding, the requirements adopted by the broader Antarctic community. These include specific mitigation



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measures implemented by Antarctic gateway authorities and should be done under the guidance of their respective competent authority.

COVID-19 is a global event that has affected many of us and our thoughts are with those who have felt the impact of the pandemic on a personal level.

What we do know now is that there is hope on the horizon. As more is understood about the virus, the means to protect ourselves and the environment from it become clearer. IAATO will become stronger and, with patience and perseverance, we will return to the region we love soon.

Ends -

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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 and include, but are 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;



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- 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.