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IAATO Operators respond to continued challenges of COVID-19 as Antarctic season reaches halfway point

IAATO Operators are responding to the continued challenges of COVID-19 as the Antarctic season approaches its halfway point.

As with industries the world over, the pandemic presented IAATO and its members with a series of exceptional challenges. Decision-making regarding what this Antarctic season would look like was particularly challenging as pandemic response around the world adapted and evolved (as it continues to do) with each new variant.

IAATO has continued to keep lines of communication open with Antarctic Gateway countries and other polar stakeholders as governments release enhanced COVID-19 protocols and procedures, most recently with the arrival of the Omicron variant.

IAATO members have unique operations. Operators are therefore responsible for developing their own operational and contingency plans that adjust their processes according to their specific requirements and the needs of their guests pre-departure, on expedition, and post-voyage.

Due to the challenges created by COVID-19, including the recent development of the Omicron variant, some Operators took the difficult decision not to operate for the 2021/22 season, others have recently chosen to cancel voyages or curtail their season. Remaining members are continually assessing the situation as their operations continue with enhanced COVID-19 protocols.

IAATO is aware of COVID-19 cases on some vessels, and of the swift action taken as a result. As a community, members continue to adapt to updated COVID-19 protocols based on the latest health advice, gateway requirements and information available.

IAATO's administration has always taken an agile approach to seasonal planning, last year offering guidance and keystone recommendations to strengthen safe and responsible member operations as they embarked on the 2021/22 season.

In June 2020 IAATO created a COVID-19 Advisory Group to strengthen its management of safe, environmentally responsible Antarctic travel leveraging the strength, skills, and experience of IAATO's Gateway Working Group chairs, committees and working groups, as well as the expertise of the secretariat, stakeholders, and worldwide industry standards. The



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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.

IAATO membership meets regularly to discuss developments and share experiences and best practice.

As well as compliance with the best-practice advice and government protocols, at the heart of all discussions about operations are the safety of all seaborne and deep-field visitors, field staff and crew, and the protection of Antarctic wildlife and the environment.

Although the situation created by this pandemic is unprecedented, IAATO has proven success in responding quickly to change and developing and implementing best practice procedures for responsible tourism. The Association will continue to monitor the evolving situation, communicate with experts and polar stakeholders, and adapt as required.

Our mission, as always, is to advocate and promote safe operations that have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment. We're grateful for the collaboration from our gateway stakeholders which supports us in addressing the challenges COVID continues to create.

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;



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- 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-management. 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.