

Why We Are IAATO!

Ask a professional in the field what or whom is IAATO and you're met with a range of answers often beginning "**they** are..."; **they** are the regulatory body for tourism in the Antarctic (actually that's the Antarctic Treaty parties), **they** create the guidelines for landing sites, **they** oversee field staff assessments. While the general essence of those answers paints a picture of what IAATO is, there's one glaring error made time and time again; IAATO is not 'they', it's you – it's '**we**'.

IAATO is its members, its operators, provisional operators, associates, field staff, executive committee and its secretariat. All these groups represent an essential cog in the machine.

The IAATO Secretariat comprises eight people: You can find out about them, [here](#), but in a nutshell, the Secretariat works to advocate for the membership, which is comprised of operators and associates. The Secretariat are the ones overseeing the ship scheduler on that busy day in July, the ones who send out the newsletters and updates, the helpful hints for the assessment and the updated site guidelines, the Secretariat supports the delivery of meetings and workshops, manages the database, the budget, the social media accounts and, of course, the Field Operations Manual.

More than 100 companies, ranging from port agents to operators, make up the [IAATO membership](#). All are dedicated to safe and environmentally responsible tourism to the Antarctic. The members are represented by an Executive Committee, but there are also many working groups and committees focusing on specific areas from climate change to field operations, from finances and education and outreach. These committees are made up of member representatives who dedicate their free time helping to create a stronger IAATO.

The decisions made by these committees outside of the Antarctic tourism season are brought to the annual meeting, where major decisions affecting the future of the tourism industry are voted on and resolved by the membership. During this process, the secretariat is a facilitator for the proposals coming from the membership.

IAATO is increasingly represented, and recognized as experts, in important Antarctic forums such as The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), to name but a few. These forums allow IAATO to be up to date on Antarctic changes and most importantly contribute to the Antarctic regulating decision process.

The most important forum IAATO attends is the annual Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM). The ATCM and associated Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) meeting usually comes a couple of weeks after IAATO's annual meeting. This gives the IAATO secretariat a short window to review and create a briefing on any papers tabled by the Treaty Parties for discussion at ATCM, as well as finalize any papers IAATO will submit to ATCM. Members of the Secretariat, as well as Operator representatives, make up IAATO's delegation. Additionally, IAATO members can sit on Treaty Party delegations. IAATO attends the ATCM and CEP as an invited expert and observer respectively; representing the IAATO members' perspective, reporting annually on activities and providing expert input on tourism related issues.

All IAATO representatives attending ATCM are advocating for the future of safe and environmentally responsible tourism in Antarctica, showing the world that the environment, education and ambassadorship are at the very heart of all we do.

The field staff are on the front lines of it all; the (clean) boots on the ground and IAATO Antarctic Ambassadors. They represent not only IAATO but the Antarctic Treaty System itself.

It is easy for those in the field, dealing with the day-to-day challenges of ice, guests and scheduling, among other things, to feel like a very small cog in the machine. But the field staff role is critical to the success of IAATO's mission.

Field staff keep visitors and the environment safe. They deliver essential information to the Secretariat and their employers about what is and what isn't working; information that keeps us moving forward as an organization. This input, whether it be issues with post-visit reports or updates on landing site conditions, goes further than the secretariat; it can be shared with the whole membership, either through the Executive Committee or other committees and working groups, and with the Treaty Parties. For example, the Field Operations Committee, comprised of current field staff, helps create site guidelines. These guidelines aren't meant to restrict operations, but be proactive – a concept IAATO holds at the core of our mission. The site guidelines support our mindfulness of the Antarctic environment, and strengthen our future operations. They also demonstrate our "good citizen" status to the Treaty Parties, as after being voted on by all IAATO members, these guidelines are presented by a Treaty Party at ATCM for formal acceptance. This is just one example of why field staff are integral to the evolution of the organization, and more so as the industry continues to grow.

Not unlike the Antarctic Treaty and its diverse collection of nations with different global agendas, the only way our industry will continue to thrive is if we all – at every level – work together. As activities increase we must find solutions to maintain our mission while managing growth in a proactive manner that protects and continues to preserve the landscape we all hold so dear.

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