

Antarctic Treaty General Guidelines

General Guidelines for Visitors to the Antarctic

The General Guidelines apply to all visitors and all activities in the Antarctic Treaty area¹. All visits to Antarctica should be conducted in accordance with the Antarctic Treaty, its Protocol on Environmental Protection, and relevant Measures, Decisions and Resolutions adopted at Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCM). All activities must be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment and must have prior approval/permission or meet all the requirements of the relevant National Competent Authority.

These Guidelines provide general guidance for visiting any location, with the aim of ensuring that visits do not have adverse impacts on the Antarctic environment, including wildlife and ecosystems, or on its scientific, wilderness and aesthetic values. *ATCM Site Guidelines* for Visitors provide additional site-specific advice for some locations. Guidelines concerning particular risks such as aircraft use, or avoiding the introduction of non-native species may also apply.

Consult these Guidelines before you visit Antarctica and plan how to minimize your impact.

If you are part of a guided visitor group, abide by these guidelines, pay attention to your guides, and follow their instructions. If you are part of a guided visitor group, abide by these guidelines, pay attention to your guides, and follow their instructions. If you are the organizer of your own visit or the visit of a group and respective activities, you are responsible for abiding by these guidelines. You are also responsible for identifying the features of the sites you visit that may be vulnerable to visitor impacts, and for complying with any specific requirements related to protected areas, *historic sites and monuments*, activities or risks. Specific requirements can be included within *ATCM Site Guidelines*, *Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA)* and *Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA)* management plans, or station visit guidelines.



Secretariat
of the
Antarctic Treaty

Protect Antarctic Wildlife

Wildlife

- The taking of, or harmful interference with, Antarctic wildlife is prohibited.
- When in the vicinity of wildlife – either on land or at sea, move or maneuver slowly and carefully and keep noise to a minimum.
- Maintain an appropriate distance from wildlife to avoid disturbance. While in many cases a greater distance may be necessary, in general keep at least 5 m from wildlife on land. Abide by any guidance on distances in speciesor site-specific guidelines.
- Always give animals the right of way and do not block their access routes between the sea and land, nesting places or other destinations.
- Animals may alter their behavior if disturbed. Observe wildlife behaviour. If wildlife changes its behaviour (standing when it was sitting, moving its head around alerted, start vocalizing when it was silent, etc.) stop moving, or slowly increase your distance.
- Stay outside the margins of a colony and observe from a safe distance. Animals are particularly sensitive to disturbance when they are breeding (including nesting) or moulting.
- Every situation is different. Consider the topography and the individual circumstances of the site, as these may have an impact on the vulnerability of wildlife to disturbance.
- Watch your steps for eggs, chicks or nest materials of skuas, penguins or petrels.
- Unmanned aerial vehicles must not be used in the vicinity of wildlife.
- Do not feed wildlife or leave food or scraps lying around.

Vegetation

- Vegetation, including mosses and lichens, is fragile and very slow growing. Do not walk, drive or land on any moss beds or lichen covered rocks, in order to avoid damage.
- When travelling on foot, stay on established tracks whenever possible to minimise disturbance or damage to the soil and vegetated surfaces. Where a track does not exist, choose your route carefully, taking the most direct route while avoiding vegetation, fragile terrain, scree slopes, and wildlife.

Introduction of non-native species and pathogens

- Do not introduce any plants or animals into the Antarctic.
- In order to prevent the introduction of non-native species and disease, carefully wash boots and clean all equipment including clothes, bags, tripods, tents and walking sticks before bringing them to Antarctica. Pay particular attention to boot treads, velcro fastenings and pockets which could contain soil or seeds. Vehicles and aircraft should also be cleaned.
- In order to prevent the transfer of non-native species and disease between locations in Antarctica ensure all clothing, boots and equipment are cleaned thoroughly before moving between sites and regions.

Respect Protected Areas and Structures

Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMAs) and Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs)

- Activities in *ASPAs* and *ASMAs* must comply with the provisions of the relevant Management Plan and abide by any restrictions regarding the conduct of activities in these areas.
- A permit from a National Competent Authority is required for entry into any ASPA. Carry the permit and obey any permit conditions at all times while visiting an ASPA.
- Check the locations and boundaries of ASPAs and ASMAs in advance and refer to the provisions of their Management Plans (all can be found at the [Antarctic Treaty Secretariat-website \(www.ats.aq\)](http://www.ats.aq).

Historic Sites and Monuments, (HSMs) and other Structures

- Some historic huts have been designated as ASPAs and require a permit to visit. Visits must follow the provisions laid out in the respective management plan.
- Historic huts and structures can, in some cases, be visited for touristic, recreational and educational purposes. Visitors should not use them for other purposes except in emergency circumstances.
- Do not damage, remove, destroy or change any historic site, monument, or artefact, or other building or emergency refuge (whether occupied or unoccupied).
- Consult relevant *ATCM Site Guidelines for Visitors* for specific rules concerning historic sites, monuments, items or buildings and other structures in the vicinity.
- Before entering any historic structure, clean your boots of snow and grit and remove snow and water from clothes, as these can cause damage to structures or artefacts.
- Take care not to tread on any artefacts which may be obscured by sediments or snow when moving around historic sites.
- If you come across an item that may be of historic value that authorities may not be aware of, do not touch or disturb it. Notify your expedition leader or NCAs.
- A list of the formally designated HSMs can be found at the *ATS-Website*.

Respect Scientific Research

- Some Antarctic stations may accept visitors where prior arrangements have been made. Obtain permission before visiting Antarctic stations.
- Reconfirm scheduled visits well in advance, or according to guidance provided by the manager of a station before arriving.
- In addition to these general guidelines, comply with any site-specific rules or visitor guidelines in place when visiting Antarctic stations.
- Do not interfere with or remove scientific equipment or markers, and do not disturb experimental study sites, field camps or stored supplies.

Keep Antarctica Pristine – Leave No Trace of Your Visit

Waste

- Do not deposit any litter or garbage on land nor discard it into the sea.
- No smoking except in designated areas at stations or camps, to avoid litter and risk of fire to structures. Collect ash and litter for disposal outside Antarctica.
- Ensure that wastes are managed in accordance with Annexes III (waste disposal) and IV (marine pollution) of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.
- Ensure that all belongings, equipment and waste is secured at all times in such a way as to prevent dispersal into the environment through high winds or wildlife foraging.

Wilderness Values

- Do not disturb or pollute lakes, streams, rivers or other water bodies (e.g. by walking, washing yourself or your equipment, throwing stones, etc.)
- Do not paint or engrave names or other graffiti on any man-made or natural surface in Antarctica.
- Do not take souvenirs, whether man-made, biological or geological items, including feathers, bones, eggs, vegetation, soil, rocks, meteorites or fossils.
- Place tents and equipment on snow or at previously used campsites where possible.

Be Safe

Safety Precautions/Preparations

- Be prepared for severe and changeable weather. Ensure that your equipment and clothing meet Antarctic standards. Remember that the Antarctic environment is inhospitable, unpredictable and potentially dangerous.
- Know your capabilities, the dangers posed by the Antarctic environment, and act accordingly. Plan activities with safety in mind at all times.
- Keep a larger safety distance from potentially dangerous or territorial wildlife like fur seals, both on land and at sea. Keep at least 15-25 m away where practicable.
- Be careful where you walk as seals can lie camouflaged on and among rocks. Keep a safety distance from sea ice edge and be cautious when stepping over cracks in the sea ice.
- Skuas are very territorial birds and will attack anyone approaching their nests by plummeting down on intruders. If this happens, retreat away from the point when the attack started.
- Any wildlife, even penguins, can cause serious harm. Do not underestimate risks.
- If you are travelling in a group, act on the guidance and instructions of your leaders. Do not stray from your group as survival in Antarctica can be a matter of minutes (especially in case of acute hypothermia).
- Do not walk onto glaciers or large snow fields without proper equipment and experience. There is a real danger of falling into hidden crevasses.
- Be vigilant in the vicinity of calving glaciers. Breaking pieces of ice can generate dangerous waves.
- Pay special attention when climbing rocks and/or boulders, as melting permafrost with changing temperatures lead to an increase risk of avalanches.
- Do not expect a rescue service. Self-sufficiency is increased and risks reduced by sound planning, quality equipment, and trained personnel.
- Enter emergency refuges only in case of an actual emergency. If you use equipment or food from a refuge, inform the nearest research station or the National Competent Authority that has approved/permitted the visitors activity in Antarctica once the emergency is over.
- Respect any smoking restrictions. Use of combustion style lanterns and naked flames in or around historic structures is strictly discouraged. Take great care to safeguard against the danger of fire. This is a real hazard in the dry environment of Antarctica.

Landing and Transport Requirements

Transport

- Do not use aircraft, vessels, small boats, hovercraft or other means of transport in ways that disturb wildlife, either at sea or on land.
- Avoid flying over concentrations of birds and mammals. Follow the advice in Resolution 2 (2004) *Guidelines for the operation of aircraft near concentrations of birds in Antarctica*.
- Refilling of fuel tanks for small boats should take place in a way that ensures any spills can be contained, for example onboard a vessel.
- Check small boats are free of any soil, plants or animals prior to the commencement of any ship-to-shore operations.
- Small boats must at all times regulate their course and speed so as to minimise disturbance to wildlife and to avoid any collisions with wildlife.

Ships²

- Only one ship may visit a site at any one time.
- Vessels with more than 500 passengers shall not make landings in Antarctica.

Landing of Passengers From Vessels

- A maximum of 100 passengers may be ashore from a vessel at any one time, unless site specific guidance requires fewer passengers.
- During landings from vessels, maintain a 1:20 guide to passenger ratio at all sites, unless site specific advice requires more guides.

¹ It is acknowledged that exceptions to the application of elements of these guidelines may be made for scientific and official governmental activities if the realization of these activities so require and if prior approval has been given by the national competent authority and the activity meets all requirements of the relevant national authority.

² A ship is defined as a vessel which carries more than 12 passengers