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IAATO Guidelines for Sea Kayaking and Underwater activities

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Information Paper Submitted by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO)

Introduction

IAATO is committed to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. Industry peer reviewed guidelines have been the backbone of IAATO Members operations in Antarctica.

The IAATO Field Operations Committee has prepared new guidelines for sea kayaking and underwater activities. These new guidelines were adopted during the recent IAATO26th meeting in Rotterdam 28th-30th April 2015 and will be incorporated into the IAATO Field Operations Manual for the 2015-16 season onwards.

Sea Kayaking

Sea kayaking provides opportunities for visitors to appreciate Antarctica as a wilderness from a different perspective, allowing visitors the opportunity to enjoy the unique environment in a tranquil, quiet way. Sea kayaking tends to take place concurrently with small boat cruising or landings in daylight hours under the supervision of an experienced cold-water sea kayak guide/s.

Sea kayaking has become an increasingly popular activity in Antarctica and opportunities exist for the activity at most landing sites in the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands, weather and ice conditions permitting. Operators have been offering it as an activity for many years. The scope, scale and variety of sea kayaking offered by operators varies greatly. Appendix A details the new IAATO Sea Kayak Guidelines which are intended to provide IAATO operators with a general framework, within which they can tailor their own specific sea kayaking activity.

Underwater Activities

Guidelines for Underwater Activities can be found in Appendix B. Underwater activities give a unique perspective on Antarctica's marine wildlife in its natural habitat and the underwater icescape. These experiences can, for example, be given through diving for those trained at an appropriate level and snorkelling. Underwater activities have formed an integral part of National Programs marine research for many years. Operators have offered experienced divers the opportunity to dive in Antarctic waters since 1997/98 season from ships and diving from yachts has taken place for longer than that. Snorkelling is also a common activity offered by ships and yachts and although no previous experience is required by the passengers to do this, snorkelling is included in these guidelines as similar basic level briefings and safety precautions are required for both activities.

Appendix A – IAATO Sea Kayak Guidelines

Appendix B – IAATO Underwater Activities Guidelines

IAATO Guidelines for Sea Kayaking

Prior to conducting the activity, please ensure that sea kayaking is included in your operators permit/authorization conditions (Advance Notification and EIA).

Introduction

Sea kayaking provides opportunities for visitors to appreciate Antarctica as a wilderness from a different perspective. The spread of activities across different experience platforms may also decrease pressure on landing sites. Sea kayaking tends to take place concurrently with small boat cruising or landings in daylight hours under the supervision of an experienced cold-water sea kayak guide/s.

Sea kayaking has become an increasingly popular activity in Antarctica and opportunities exist for the activity at most landing sites in the Antarctic Peninsula, South Shetland Islands and South Georgia. Operators have been offering it as an activity for many years. The scope and scale of sea kayaking offered by operators varies.

Site selection

- Weather, sea and ice conditions determine which site is favourable at any specific time, following your companies operating procedures.
- The sea kayak guide with the EL and ship's master are to make an on-site decision on a case-by-case basis.
- Any sea kayaking activities that take place within a protected or managed area will be done in accordance with the relevant ATCM management plan provisions.

Clothing and equipment

- Sea kayakers are to wear suitable clothing for polar waters.
- Equipment should be regularly inspected and maintained.
- Safety equipment should be carried by the sea kayak guides, and/or safety boat(s).
- Sea kayakers are to wear personal flotation devices with sufficient buoyancy at all times.
- All kayaking equipment should go through bio-security checks prior to landing in Antarctica and if any equipment is landed it should go through biosecurity measures between excursions.

Briefing

- Experienced and appropriately trained cold water sea kayak guide(s) will lead the activity.
- A designated authorized person should provide a pre-activity briefing at the start of the voyage, site specific briefings should also take place prior to launching at each site.
- Briefings should include:
 - Overview of operation procedures from client perspective
 - Advice on appropriate dress
 - Safety practices for changes in weather conditions and ice conditions
 - Familiarization of communication strategies between the guide and clients
 - Wildlife awareness

- Passenger ability to perform the minimum standard skill level should be assessed so the guide can ensure the passenger can safely participate in the activity.

Deployment

- Time limits should be established for the activity.
- Boundaries should be set to limit the range of paddling.
- Guide to kayak ratio must be specified and justified in your operating procedures and risk assessments
- The sea kayak group should stay together at all times and in sight of the guide.
- There should be at least one sea kayak guide on the water and/or a safety boat driver.
- Sea kayakers should adhere to IAATO wildlife watching guidelines at all times.
- Sea kayakers should observe the guidelines for small boat operations in the vicinity of ice. (FOM section 7h)

NB: Consideration to other vessels should be given if sea kayaking in main shipping / transit channels (e.g. Lemaire channel)

Ship

- Communication should be continuously maintained between the bridge, safety boat and sea kayak guide for the duration of the activity. The bridge officer should monitor the weather and vessel traffic during the activity and notify the sea kayak guide and/or boat driver of any adverse changes.
- An activity log should be kept for the activity.

IAATO Guidelines for Underwater activities

(Including diving and snorkeling)

Prior to offering the activity, please ensure that diving and or snorkeling is included in your operators permit/authorization conditions (Advance Notification and EIA).

Introduction

Underwater activities give a unique perspective on Antarctica's marine wildlife in its natural habitat and the underwater icescape. These experiences can, for example, be given through diving for those trained at an appropriate level and snorkeling. Underwater activities have formed an integral part of National Programs marine research for many years. Operators have offered experienced divers the opportunity to dive in Antarctic waters since 1998 from ships and diving from yachts has taken place for longer than that. Snorkeling is also a common activity offered by ships and yachts and although no previous experience is required by the passengers to do this it is included in these guidelines as similar basic level briefings and safety precautions are required for both activities.

These guidelines are for recreational diving activities. Activities that would fall outside these guidelines require separate permissions/certifications.

Pre requisites

- A risk assessment should be undertaken; standard operating and emergency procedures are to be in place specific to the operators' vessel and operations.
- The vessel should be staffed with a Dive master with extensive experience in polar waters and dive guides who hold professionally recognized diving qualifications, with up to date logbook and medical fitness certificate.
- On booking divers should show their diving qualifications and cold water diving experience (this will generally be advanced diver level with at least 20 cold water dives), appropriate insurance for diving, medical information, liability release and assumption of risk agreement.

Operation from the vessel

- The Dive master is responsible for the day-to-day management of the dive program.
- The Dive master with the EL and ship's master should make an on-site decision on the suitability of each site on case by case basis.
- Weather, sea, ice conditions, tides and current will determine which site is favorable at any specific time.
- Any diving or snorkeling activities that take place within a protected or managed area will be done in accordance with the relevant management plan provisions.

Clothing and equipment

- Divers and snorkelers should wear suitable clothing for polar waters.
- Equipment should be fit for purpose and at least 2 regulators suitable for cold water diving should be taken per diver.
- Equipment should be regularly inspected and maintained.
- Dive computers should be used on each dive.
- Safety equipment will be carried by the dive guides as well as the safety boats.

Briefing

- The Dive master and dive guides should provide a pre-activity briefing at the start of the voyage, site specific briefings should also take place prior to entering the water at each site.

- Briefings should include:
 - Overview of operation procedures from client perspective
 - Safety practices for changes in weather conditions and ice conditions
 - Familiarization of communication strategies between the guide and clients
 - Wildlife awareness

Deployment

- A check out dive should be undertaken to allow the Dive master to assess the divers abilities and suitability for cold water diving
- Time limits are to be established for the activity.
- Boundaries are to be set to limit the range of diving or snorkeling.
- All equipment should be checked prior to entering the water.
- All dives are to be planned as no-decompression dives with a depth limit of 20m.
- The buddy system should be used; no solo diving should be undertaken.
- Extreme caution should be exercised when diving near ice, the Dive master should assess the suitability prior to diving.
- Extreme caution should be exercised when diving with marine wildlife and animal behavior should be observed through the period from the safety boat/s as well as in the water.
- Communication should be maintained between the bridge, safety boat and Dive master for the duration of the activity. The bridge officer should monitor the weather during the activity and notify the Dive master of any adverse changes. A diver recall system should be in place in the safety boat.
- All dives should be logged.
- A mandatory safety stop should be included at 5m for 3 minutes, except in distinct circumstances.
- An activity log should be kept for the duration of the activity including times of briefings, deployment and return to the vessel.