

Regional Guide – General

Falklands, South Georgia, and the Antarctic Peninsula

Geography

Antarctica is the fifth-largest continent, covering approximately 14 million square kilometres, with nearly all of its surface—around 98%—permanently covered by ice. It is the southernmost landmass on Earth, located almost entirely within the Antarctic Circle and surrounded by the Southern Ocean. With no permanent population, Antarctica is home only to seasonal scientific research stations operated by various countries. Its unique position at the bottom of the globe results in long, dark winters and round-the-clock daylight during the summer months. Access to the continent is most commonly via the Antarctic Peninsula, which stretches toward South America and is known for its dramatic landscapes and relative accessibility.

Geology

Antarctica has a diverse and fascinating geological makeup. Beneath the vast ice sheets lie ancient mountain ranges, active volcanoes, and subglacial lakes. The Transantarctic Mountains divide East and West Antarctica, while features like the Ellsworth Mountains and Mount Vinson—the continent's highest peak at 4,892 metres—punctuate the icy terrain. Volcanic activity is present in locations such as Deception Island and Mount Erebus, one of the world's southernmost active volcanoes. Glaciers, ice shelves, and towering icebergs continually reshape the coastal environment, and the continent plays a crucial role in Earth's climate system and sea level regulation.

Antarctic Peninsula

A dramatic landscape of mountains, glaciers, and ice-filled fjords. Home to large colonies of penguins, seals hauled out on ice, and regular sightings of humpback and minke whales.

South Shetland Islands

An island chain off the northern tip of the Peninsula, known for wildlife, historical sites, and volcanic formations. Deception Island offers a unique opportunity to land inside an active caldera.

Neko Harbour

One of the few continental landing sites, offering the chance to set foot on mainland Antarctica and observe glacier calving activity up close.

South Georgia

A sub-Antarctic Island known for its staggering concentration of wildlife, glacially carved fjords, and dramatic mountain ranges. Often called the “Serengeti of the Southern Ocean.”

- **Grytviken:** A historic whaling station and burial site of Sir Ernest Shackleton. Includes a museum and restored church.
- **St. Andrews Bay:** Home to one of the world’s largest king penguin colonies—sometimes over 150,000 pairs.
- **Gold Harbour:** A scenic bay backed by hanging glaciers and waterfalls. King penguins, elephant seals, and light-mantled sooty albatrosses are commonly seen.
- **Salisbury Plain:** Another major king penguin rookery with extraordinary wildlife viewing.
- **Fortuna Bay:** A key site in Shackleton’s journey, often visited as part of the Shackleton Walk.

Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)

A remote archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean with windswept coastlines, grassy headlands, and a fascinating cultural mix of British and South American influences. The Falklands offer excellent wildlife diversity and a glimpse into island life.

- **West Point Island:** Known for its black-browed albatross colonies and dramatic sea cliffs.
- **Carcass Island:** Offers a rich variety of birdlife including Magellanic penguins, striated caracaras, and upland geese.
- **Stanley:** The capital and cultural hub of the Falklands. Colorful houses, a maritime museum, and friendly pubs make this a charming port of call.
- **Volunteer Point:** A remote landing site home to a large colony of king penguins along with gentoo and Magellanic species.

Conservation Efforts

Antarctica is protected by the **Antarctic Treaty**, signed in 1959 by 12 nations and now supported by over 50. The treaty designates the continent as a place for peace and science and prohibits mineral mining and military activity. The **Protocol on Environmental Protection** (1991) further established Antarctica as a natural reserve, imposing strict guidelines on human activity to prevent environmental degradation.

The **International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO)** plays a vital role in regulating visitor impact. All tour operators, including Adventure Canada, adhere to IAATO guidelines, which cover everything from wildlife approach distances to waste management and biosecurity measures. Guests receive mandatory environmental briefings prior to shore landings to ensure best practices are followed.

Tourism

Tourism in Antarctica is carefully managed and continues to grow steadily. Most visitors arrive aboard small to mid-sized expedition ships between November and March, when sea ice recedes and wildlife is most active. Shore landings, Zodiac cruises, and onboard education are central to the experience.

All visits are conducted under strict supervision by trained expedition staff. Only 100 passengers may land at a site at any given time, and visits are rotated to minimize impact. Visitors must follow established protocols to help preserve the pristine environment and wildlife habitat. While accommodations are comfortable onboard, there are no permanent lodgings on the continent itself.

Rules for Visiting Antarctica

The Visitors to Antarctica must follow strict environmental and safety guidelines established by the Antarctic Treaty System and the [International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators \(IAATO\)](#). These protocols are designed to minimize human impact and preserve the continent's delicate ecosystems:

- Do not approach, feed, or touch wildlife. Maintain a minimum distance of 5 metres (15 feet) at all times.
- Do not crouch, kneel, or sit on the ground in penguin rookeries or seabird colonies due to the risk of avian influenza transmission.
- Do not remove any rocks, bones, feathers, or other natural materials.
- Stay on designated paths and avoid trampling vegetation or moss.
- Do not smoke during landings or Zodiac excursions.
- Disinfect boots and outerwear between landings to prevent the transfer of biological material between sites.
- Carry out all waste and do not leave anything behind—this includes food scraps and tissues.
- Respect historical sites and scientific research stations.
- Always follow the instructions of your expedition team and certified guides.

By following these guidelines, you help protect one of the last great wildernesses on Earth. Take only photographs and memories—leave only footprints.