

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING AVIAN INFLUENZA IN THE ANTARCTIC

As passionate guardians of this pristine region, we want to share some important information to ensure the safety of Antarctic and sub-Antarctic unique and delicate wildlife.

Since 2021, there has been a notable increase in highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 outbreaks, resulting in the tragic loss of hundreds of thousands of seabirds globally. Marine mammals, such as seals and sea lions, have also been impacted.

Unfortunately, cases of Avian Influenza (HPAI) have been confirmed in brown skua populations on Bird Island, South Georgia. These are the first known cases in the Antarctic region. The primary mode of transmission for HPAI is through natural pathways, and it is likely that the disease's spread is linked to the return of birds from their migration to South America, where a high number of HPAI cases have been reported.

While scientists cannot definitively ascertain whether HPAI had already arrived in Antarctica, monitoring the disease in wild bird populations is exceptionally challenging.

In response to this situation, Antarctic Treaty parties, scientists, National Programs, and the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) have united to proactively minimise the risk of Avian Influenza transmission to and within Antarctica. Our collective goal is to protect the integrity of this exceptional ecosystem.

To this end, we are intensifying our protective measures and implementing rigorous procedures to safeguard Antarctica from pathogens and non-native species.

Before You Go:

As you prepare for your journey, take a moment to ensure that anything you're bringing with you—clothing, gear, and equipment—is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Our “Don't Pack a Pest” guidance will assist you in this process. This small step can make a big difference in keeping the Antarctic environment healthy.

Shore visits during your expedition:

Once you've arrived, you'll have the incredible opportunity to witness Antarctica's wildlife up close. To ensure their well-being, we have established some essential guidelines:

- **Stay on your feet:** While exploring, please refrain from sitting, kneeling, or laying down on the ground. This minimises any potential disruption to the environment and its inhabitants.
- **Equipment care:** Avoid placing any equipment on the ground or snow. This simple action helps prevent the introduction of foreign elements to this delicate ecosystem.
- **Adaptable exploration:** In the interest of safeguarding the unique wildlife of Antarctica, there may be instances where affected landing sites are temporarily closed. These proactive measures are taken to prevent the potential transmission of Avian Influenza and to ensure the long-term health of the fragile Antarctic ecosystem. If closures are encountered on your expedition, please know that we remain dedicated to offering alternative landing sites that are equally remarkable and that prioritise environmentally responsible tourism.
- **Seek guidance:** If you're unsure about any action, don't hesitate to ask your Expedition Team for guidance. They're always there to assist you in ensuring a safe and environmentally conscious visit throughout your Antarctic voyage.

Optional Camping in Antarctica:

At this stage, we are planning to operate camping in Antarctica; however, we are diligently monitoring the most recent developments. In the event that a decision is made to cancel the camping experience, a full refund will be provided.

During our 2023/24 Antarctic season aboard the Ocean Endeavour, we will host Avian Influenza scientists from the Antarctic Wildlife Health Network. Their presence will provide them with unprecedented access to the Antarctic Peninsula, enabling further research on the effects of Avian Influenza. This research is crucial for our understanding and the effective management of this issue moving forward.

By gaining a better understanding of the problem, we collectively become better equipped to contribute to the protection of Antarctica's remarkable wildlife. For more information about Avian Influenza, please visit:

<https://www.oie.int/en/disease/avian-influenza/>

We greatly appreciate your cooperation in maintaining the pristine beauty and ecological balance of Antarctica. By collectively taking these steps, we can make a positive impact and help preserve this unique and valuable part of our planet.

Thank you for being a responsible visitor.