

Expedition Policy and Application Procedures

Part 1: General Expedition Information

Part 2: Application Requirements

Part 3: Expedition Report

Part 1: General Expedition Information

1.1 Introduction

Except for GSGSSI, BAS and staff based at KEP, approved HMG personnel, permitted BAS staff, officially sponsored visitors, members of HM Forces, or MOD personnel on operational duty, all visitors intending to spend nights ashore on South Georgia or the South Sandwich Islands are classified as expeditions.

Every expedition requires a permit issued by the Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. From 1 August 2025 all persons (unless otherwise exempted) entering South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands for work or visitor purposes will require an Entry Permit.

If any information provided in an expedition application is inaccurate or misleading, or if it later becomes evident that professional guides have not exercised due care for their clients, the Commissioner reserves the right to revoke the expedition permit and/or restrict future access for individual applicants, guides, or commercial operators.

Expedition applications must be submitted to the Office of the Commissioner no later than 60 days prior to arrival in South Georgia (or the South Sandwich Islands). Applications are reviewed by a panel of experts who advise the Commissioner. In determining whether to issue a permit and any conditions attached, the Commissioner will take this advice into account

“On receipt of an Expedition Application GSGSSI will invoice the applicant in accordance with the rates specified in Section 2.3 of the Visiting South Georgia Booklet, based on the length of the stay per person. The invoice will include the GSGSSI bank details and payment information.

In addition to the information provided in this document, all applicants must familiarise themselves with the latest version of the Information for Visitors to South Georgia booklet,

which incorporates the South Georgia Tourism Management Policy. This can be found here: https://gov.gs/documents_visitors/

All expeditions must be supported at all times by an adequately insured expedition support vessel. Participants are also required to hold appropriate personal insurance (see section 1.3.4). Please note that GSGSSI does not provide support services, including Search and Rescue, for expeditions. Emergency assistance offered by vessels in the vicinity may incur costs payable by participants. Similarly, participants should be aware that they may be liable for any costs incurred by the Government for environmental clean-up or remediation resulting from their actions.

1.2 Application Assessment Process

All expedition applications are reviewed by a panel of consultants with extensive experience in planning and leading expeditions to South Georgia. The panel's assessment is guided by the planning factors and application requirements outlined in this document. Applications must be submitted no later than 60 days prior to the expedition's departure from its home location. This timeframe allows for liaison between the panel and the Government and, if necessary, further consultation with applicants to clarify or amend details.

All correspondence regarding applications should be directed to GSGSSI's Visitor Manager: Jamie.oliver@gov.gs

Upon completion of the assessment, the Chair will submit the panel's recommendations to the Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. GSGSSI will then decide whether to issue a permit, refuse the application, or request alterations before reconsideration.

If your expedition aims to deliver benefits to the island, please include these proposals in your application. All scientific data collected must be made available to the South Georgia Geographical Information System (SGGIS). Scientists should liaise in advance with Paul Cooper at BAS (APRC@bas.ac.uk), who manages SGGIS, to ensure compatibility of data formats.

A post-expedition report must be submitted to the Chair of the advisory panel and the Commissioner within one month of departure from South Georgia (see Part 3).

1.3 Planning

These notes provide background on South Georgia and highlight key considerations for expedition planning. They are not exhaustive and should be supplemented with detailed research.

Part 2 offers guidance on submitting an application. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide all relevant information to support the assessment process.

1.3.1 Topography

South Georgia is a remote, mountainous sub-Antarctic island approximately 170 km long and 40 km wide. Two mountain ranges dominate the landscape, with Mount Paget rising to 2,934 m (9,625 ft). The interior is permanently snow-covered, with extensive glaciers terminating in crevassed zones and unstable ice cliffs. Winter snowfall can exceed one metre at sea level, with frost and snow possible even in summer. The coastline is rugged, with steep cliffs and glaciers descending into the sea.

1.3.2 Weather

The island is exposed to deep depressions moving east from Drake Passage across the Scotia Sea. The south coast bears the brunt of prevailing weather, while the north offers some sheltered bays. Katabatic winds are frequent and can reach gale force; moderate winds may accelerate to over 100 mph on the north side. Average summer temperature is +4.8°C, winter average –1.2°C at sea level. Extreme wind chill and severe conditions occur year-round.

1.3.3 Local Population and Visitors

South Georgia has very few residents. Two Government Officers are based at King Edward Point (KEP), supported by BAS staff at the fisheries research station. Museum staff reside at Grytviken during summer. BAS stations at KEP and Bird Island are staffed year-round. Visiting vessels include fishery patrol ships, MOD vessels, fishing and research vessels, cruise ships, and yachts. The cruise season runs late October to late March.

1.3.4 Self-Sufficiency, Insurance and Resources

Expeditions must be fully self-sufficient due to the harsh environment and lack of local resources. Participants must hold personal insurance covering medical evacuation and repatriation. Support vessels must carry appropriate insurance and remain in close proximity to respond to emergencies. There is no search and rescue (SAR) or medical

support from GSGSSI or BFSAI. The nearest SAR and hospital facilities are in the Falkland Islands, 850 miles away, and any rescue would involve significant delay and cost.

1.3.5 Environmental Protection

South Georgia is ecologically sensitive, hosting numerous marine species, including penguins, albatrosses, petrels, and seals. Applicants must consult the Information for Visitors to South Georgia booklet and include a comprehensive environmental plan with biosecurity measures. The panel may recommend WAG Bags for human waste disposal in sensitive areas.

1.3.6 Participants and Group Size

Expeditions should be led by highly experienced leaders with appropriate qualifications. Members must be physically and medically fit and prepared for self-rescue. Applications must include participant details, experience, CVs, and next-of-kin information. Recommended group size: minimum 4 persons (or 3 with two additional competent support personnel) and maximum 15, subject to activities and locations. For commercial expeditions, a minimum guide-to-client ratio of 1:4 and at least two guides per group is advised.

1.3.7 Safety

A comprehensive safety plan, including emergency and medical contingencies, must accompany the application.

1.3.8 Maps

Use the 2004 BAS map of South Georgia (Sheets BAS (Misc) 12A and 12B), available from Stanfords (www.stanfords.co.uk) or downloadable from www.add.scar.org. Ensure compasses are correctly balanced for the Southern Hemisphere.

1.3.9 Former Whaling Stations

Permission will generally not be granted to visit or approach within 200 metres of the former whaling stations at Husvik, Stromness, Leith, and Prince Olav, and their jetties must not be used. These sites are in an extremely hazardous condition and pose a risk of exposure to airborne asbestos. Any matters concerning these former whaling stations must be addressed separately through direct correspondence with GSGSSI.

Glossary

<i>GSGSSI</i>	<i>Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands</i>
<i>BAS</i>	<i>British Antarctic Survey</i>
<i>KEP</i>	<i>King Edward Point</i>
<i>HMG</i>	<i>Her Majesty's Government</i>
<i>MOD</i>	<i>Ministry of Defence</i>

Part 2: Application

The Expedition application should be formatted as follows:

Title of Expedition To South Georgia:

Expedition Leader:

2.1 Introduction (maximum 10 lines of text)

- a) Provide a brief outline of the proposed expedition and its objectives. Include key dates and the size of party.
- b) Mention any other details of importance.
- c) Confirm you have received and read the current version of the “Information for Visitors to South Georgia ” booklet (available on the website www.sgisland.gs)
- d) Applicants must state if the proposed expedition is private, commercial, charitable, filming or other, or any combination of these.

2.2 Background

- a) Include any relevant detail of previous experience in the Polar Regions.
- b) Mention any other information relevant to your application.

2.3 Support Vessel

- a) Provide details of your support vessel, including type of vessel and description. Include any IAATO membership details.
- b) Crew details and experience.
- c) Provide vessel contact details.
- d) Provide details of communication, medical and life-saving equipment carried as well as any launches or Zodiacs carried.

(Masters of support vessels must include vessel insurance details when completing their visit application).

2.4 Insurance details

- a) Provide details of the participants insurance policies, including cover for medivac and repatriation.
- b) Copies of policies should be attached.

2.5 Scope & Composition

- a) Describe the expedition in detail, its aims and objectives, dates, programme and the places to visit including overnight campsites, intended overland routes, support vessel details, pick up and drop sites, dates and duration.
- b) Attach a list of those involved with CV's detailing their previous experience, relevant qualifications, contact details and Next of Kin details. This should also detail their role or combination of roles in the expedition and clearly state whether each participant is a crew member, guide, client, researcher, film maker etc. Please state whether each participant is there in a professional (ie receiving payment) or amateur capacity.
- c) Describe how the expedition is to be supported and sustained.
- d) The application should state clearly the areas of authority of each member of the party, any Chain of Command within the party and identify those members with ultimate responsibility for decision-making on safety issues.

2.6 Safety Plan (to include emergency and medical contingencies)

- a) Emphasise any experience within the group that would enhance safety e.g. dealing with cold weather injuries, avalanche rescue, snow-hole survival, and rescue at sea.
- b) Explain the size of groups, their movement, any critical decision points and emergency exit routes as appropriate.
- c) Provide details of the expedition's medical arrangements and the relevant experience of those responsible, particularly dealing with the prevention and treatment of cold weather injuries.
- d) Include any details of pre-medical assessments of participants.
- e) List communication devices to be taken (and contact details).
- f) Explain and assess the factors that might cause you to change your itinerary (e.g. weather, medical, accident, equipment failure or fire)
- g) Detail your contingency plans in the event of a medical problem or accident ashore.
- h) Attach a list of personal equipment including safety equipment (e.g. evacuation sledges, snow shovels, emergency bivouac equipment and first aid kits) to be taken.

2.7 Environmental Plan

- a) Explain how the environmental and wildlife protection measures detailed in the current publication “Information for Visitors to South Georgia” booklet are being met. This should also include measures to protect buildings and artefacts of historical interest.
- b) Provide a detailed biosecurity plan (refer to the biosecurity protocols detailed in the Information for Visitors to South Georgia Booklet). Confirm your support ship will provide a De-ratting / ship sanitation certificate if over 100 tonnes. If moving from infested areas to Rat free areas, explain the precautions you will take to avoid any risk of possible transfer of rodents. Explain your other invasive species migration avoidance measures (e.g. procedures for bootwashing between sites and use of disinfectants / biocides before going ashore, checks that no alien soil or seeds or invertebrates will be inadvertently taken ashore or translocated between sites in personal kit or stores).
- c) Confirm no poultry products will be taken ashore.
- d) Explain how refuse including garbage, excess food, grey water and human waste will be disposed.
- e) Explain how the risk of fire will be minimised.
- f) Identify any potential environmental impacts that may arise from your activities and explain how these will be minimised. This must cover all activities affecting all flora and fauna in both terrestrial and marine communities. (For example explain your arrangements for campsites – e.g. 200m away from wildlife concentrations, not on lichen or moss beds and the removal and disposal of waste).

2.8 Post Expedition Report (see Part 3)

Confirm a post expedition report will be sent GSGSSI and the Chairman of the Expedition Assessment Panel.

Attachments:

List of Participants (to include CV's, contact details and Next of Kin details).

List of Safety Equipment

Copies of insurance certificates for participants

Part 3: Expedition Report

The Expedition Report should be submitted to the Chairman of the assessment panel and copied to GSGSSI within one month of completing an expedition and departing from South Georgia.

This report may be made available for public access on the South Georgia Government's website. If you wish to include information that should not be made public, please detail this in a separate annex, with reasons for confidentiality. The Government will not make such an annex public without further discussion with you and will only do so if it deems publication to be in the public interest.

The Expedition Report should include the following.

3.1 Introduction

Include a brief summary of the expedition highlighting any major occurrences.

3.2 Expedition Objectives

Summarise the expedition's objectives.

3.3 Reports on Activities

- a) Report on the activities of the expedition including the following:
- b) Relevant dates, location of campsites (including huts used), routes walked, vessels pick up and drop off sites, any unexpected incidents.
- c) A map showing land routes and campsites, vessel pick up and drop off points.
- d) A list of any peaks attempted. Details should clearly indicate the mountains concerned (Any name, altitude, latitude and longitude from map. The particulars of the map referred to should also be included.) A definitive statement should be made saying whether the summit was successfully reached or whether the attempt was unsuccessful. The date of successful summit bids should be recorded along with the names of the successful summiteers.
- e) Standard Post-Visit Report for the expedition vessel, to be completed by the Master of the vessel.
- f) Any other sketches and photographs, diagrams and maps as appropriate.

3.4 Safety Plan

Comment on the safety plan. Did it work? Could it have been improved?

3.5 Environmental Plan

- a) Include an assessment of how well the expedition's measures worked in minimising environmental impacts, including a record of observed direct impacts and implementation of biosecurity measures.
- b) Any unusual wildlife and or environmental events observed e.g. large numbers of dead seals or birds or accumulations of beach debris or other rubbish.

3.6 Expedition Application and Processing

Comment on the way your expedition application was processed and suggest any ways in which the process could be improved.

3.7 Summary

Summarise the achievements of your expedition.