

Site Guidelines for Tour Ship Visits to Rothera Research Station

Introduction

Rothera is located at 67 degs 34' S, 068 degs 08' W on Adelaide Island to the west of the Antarctic Peninsula. It belongs to the British Antarctic Survey which is a component of the UK Natural Environment Research Council. The station is occupied all year round. During winter (April to October) twentyone people keep the station running and continue the science programme. In the summer (November to March) the station is very busy with over one hundred scientists and support personnel in residence. Rothera is the hub for aircraft operations in support of the BAS science programme. In recent summers BAS scientists have been deployed to locations throughout the Antarctic continent.

General Information

Rothera is an active scientific research station, people will be working during your visit.

Aircraft may use the runway at any time of the day or night. Visitors must not access the runway.

Rothera operates using the South American and Falkland Island time zone ie UTC minus three hours.

There are many ways to contact Rothera:

By email rbc@south.nerc-bas.ac.uk to contact the Base Commander

By phone Inmarsat 00 870 323 201 510 (Comms Room)
 Iridium 00 88 16314 47977 (Comms Room)
 00 44 1223 221 672 (Base Commanders Office)

By radio HF 7775 USB & 5080 USB when there are aircraft operating.

VHF Channel 1

Site Guidelines

Recommendation XVIII-1 (1994) of the Antarctic Treaty outlines the general standards expected by visitors. The following guidelines specific to Rothera Research Station supplement that Recommendation.

Guidelines for Expedition Staff

Two tour ship visits per year are accepted at the station. These must be pre-booked through IAATO following the guidance laid down in BAS document "Procedures for Tourist or Non Governmental Expeditions Requesting a Visit to a British Antarctic Survey Research Station or Historic Site". This document is readily available from IAATO.

Accepted ships should confirm their intentions with the Rothera Base Commander two weeks prior to the visit. This communication should detail the numbers of passengers plus ships crew coming ashore. At this point it can also be useful to commence dialogue to ensure the passengers get the maximum value from their visit to the station. 48 hours prior to the visit ships should give final confirmation of their intentions.

Generally ship visits should last no more than one half of a working day eg a morning or an afternoon visit. For vessels with larger numbers of passengers we can discuss how best to achieve a successful visit.

During the summer the standard working day for the majority of Rothera personnel follows the pattern: breakfast completed by 08:30, lunch 13:00 to 14:00, evening meal 18:30 to 19:30. Whenever possible we like to give the station personnel a day off on a Sunday. It is helpful if visits do not interfere with the station routines.

There is a wharf with slipway at the south of the station, this is the preferred point for landing by zodiac. In conditions of heavy swell or dense brash it might be better to land on the beach to the north of the station. Prevailing conditions can be discussed with the Rothera BC (Base Commander) immediately prior to the visit.

To ensure the visitors get the most from their visit they should be split into groups with a maximum of ten people per group. Additionally each group should be accompanied by a tour guide from the vessel. A Rothera station member will lead the group around the station. It is not possible for visitors to enter station buildings unaccompanied. No more than four groups should be touring the station at any one time.

A nominated representative of the station will give each shore party a safety brief immediately on landing. Alternatively, if feasible, it might be preferable for the representative to give this brief aboard the ship addressing all the visitors at the same time.

Guidelines for Visitors

Rothera is our workplace but it is also our home, please respect this.

Smoking is strictly prohibited inside any building, please use the bins provided to dispose of cigarette butts.

Please clean your footwear before entering the buildings.

Please stay with your group during your visit, do not wander off or enter buildings unaccompanied, refrain from picking up or touching things unless your BAS guide advises you otherwise.

Shop and Post Office

The station shop and post office will open for the visit. The shop sells items such as T shirts, caps, badges and post cards. Stamps and first day covers can also be purchased, it is possible to post letters and cards, they will go north from the station on the next scheduled flight. We can advise on the likely date of this at the time of the visit.

Walking around Rothera Point

It is possible to take a walk around Rothera Point, the distance is just less than two kilometres. The terrain varies considerably with time of year and prevailing weather.

Early in the summer the walk will be mostly on snow, by mid summer it will mostly be over rock. At any time of year you will have to negotiate patches of ice.

A fit person walking with a sense of purpose will take approximately forty minutes. Those wishing to appreciate the scenery and wildlife should allow one and one half hours. Stout footwear is essential.

A person used to walking in the countryside off prepared paths will not find the walk difficult but the elderly or infirm might well find it a challenge. The Rothera BC can advise at the time of the visit, station personnel can be made available to lead this walk.

Antarctic Specially Protected Area No 129

The northern tip of Rothera point has been designated an Antarctic Specially Protected Area. The UK government requested the ASPAs existence in order to conduct a study of the affect of Rothera station on the local environment. Access to the area is by special permit issued to terrestrial scientists only. Nobody else can enter the area under any circumstances. A long term comparison study is being conducted looking at what is happening to flora and fauna inside and outside of the ASPA.

Wildlife

Sadly Rothera does not boast the abundance of Antarctic species that can be seen in some other localities. However it can still be possible to enjoy very good views of the mammals and birds that are in residence. Species that are likely to be encountered include

Weddell Seal (*Leptonychotes weddelli*)

Crabeater Seal (*Lobodon carcinophagus*)

Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus gazella*) late summer only

Adelie Penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*)

Antarctic Tern (*Sterna vittata*)

Wilson's Storm Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*)

Dominican (Kelp) Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) two or three pairs breed

South Polar Skua (*Catharacta maccormickii*) around fifteen pairs breed

Blue-eyed Shag (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*)

If fur seals are encountered these mammals should be given a wide berth, they are very playful by nature and frequently chase people. Fur seals will bite humans if they get the chance!

History

The Adelaide coast was first sighted from the vessel Tula in February 1832, master John Biscoe named the land after Queen Adelaide wife of King William IV of Great Britain. In 1909 the area of Marguerite Bay was visited by French explorer Dr Jean Charcot and the yacht Pourquoi Pas, you will notice that many geographical features bear French names. It was not until the British Graham Land Expedition of 1934–37 that Adelaide was finally confirmed to be an island.

From 1945 British exploration in Antarctica was conducted by the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, in 1962 this organisation was re-named British Antarctic Survey. FIDS explored the islands, mountains and glaciers surrounding Marguerite Bay and established Horseshoe Island Station which was occupied 1955 to 1960. During the winter of 1957 John Rothera and Peter Gibbs crossed the sea ice and surveyed what is now known as Rothera Point. The UK established and operated out of Adelaide Island Station from 1961 to 1977, this station still exists as the Chilean summer only Carvajal. The British Antarctic Survey transferred their operations to Rothera in 1975 as this location offered a better flat surfaced glacier for the ski equipped aircraft that had become essential for furthering scientific work and exploration. Additionally the waters of Ryder Bay are much calmer for transferring cargo from ships.

At the start of the 1990's the runway was constructed enabling the landing of larger wheeled aircraft. An airbridge using a de Havilland Dash 7 aircraft has operated ever since with regular summer flights connecting the station to Stanley (Falkland Islands) and Punta Arenas (Chile).

In 2005 a re-development programme commenced, the aim being to replace the ageing wooden buildings with modern ones. The work will happen over a period of ten years or more. This will lead to improvements in energy management, buildings more suited to the occupants needs in the twenty first century and a better site layout for the management of drifting snow.

Further Information

Is available from the British Antarctic Survey website (www.antarctica.ac.uk).