

The Continent Without Coronavirus

Antarctica is the only continent in the world without the virus.



James McClintock in Antarctica

People around the world have been affected by the coronavirus. The virus has spread everywhere. Well, *almost* everywhere. Antarctica has remained untouched by the virus outbreak. Scientists want to keep it that way!

There's one main reason the coronavirus hasn't spread to Antarctica. The virus needs people, and no one lives full-time in the southern land. However, that doesn't mean there's no one there at all. There are many research stations in Antarctica. Scientists come from all over the world to study.

There are three U.S. research stations. James McClintock is a marine polar biologist. He was at Palmer Station before the pandemic hit. McClintock was studying the ocean there. He left in mid-March before the coronavirus grew into a larger problem.

McClintock told *News-O-Matic* that fewer scientists will make these trips next season. There are also new rules for people who do head to Antarctica. Scientists must quarantine for 14 days before and after traveling. They must also receive daily temperature checks. Some research missions have been canceled or pushed to a safer time.

Scientists aren't the only ones impacted. "Antarctic tourism has been affected just as much as the rest of the tourism industry worldwide," said Gabriela Roldan. She's an Antarctic tour guide and researcher in New Zealand. Roldan told *News-O-Matic* that some travelers had trouble getting home when the pandemic started. Southern countries had closed their ports. Antarctic cruise ships had nowhere to dock.

Roldan explained that some people think Antarctica is perfectly safe. After all, it's very far from other places. Still, Roldan said this isn't "a shield from global issues." People in Antarctica still need to be careful. Roldan said there are a lot of questions about Antarctic travel. There is no official rule saying tourists can't go. But will travelers feel safe on the ships? Will countries open their ports?

If the virus did reach the continent, it could be very serious. The three U.S. research stations in Antarctica each have a medical center. However, they don't have the same machines as most hospitals. They may not be able to help a person with the virus. Transportation also makes medical emergencies in Antarctica more difficult. Stations are spread out. And it's harder for people to get to the help they need.

There may be fewer people going to Antarctica. But that doesn't mean the learning has to stop! McClintock said that "science goes on" even though it leaves a "smaller footprint." He added that the special place will continue to be a "continent for peace and science."

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By Teresa Johnson

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