

KEY FACTS

Official name: South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor Nigel Robert Haywood (resides in Falkland Islands) (from 16 Oct 2010)

Head of government: Commissioner Howard J S Pearce (resides in Falkland Islands)

Area: 3,755 square km

Population: 20 (2004) (British Antarctic Survey (BAS) scientists)

Capital: King Edward Point (administrative centre)

Official language: English

Currency: Falkland Islands pound or pound sterling (F£ or £) = 100 pence

Exchange rate: F£ or £0.66 per US\$ (Jul 2013); (pegged to pound sterling)

South Georgia

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1775 Captain Cook landed and took formal possession of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI).

1904 A whaling station was established by the Norwegian C A Larsen.

1908 The UK government annexed SGSSI by Letters Patent as part of the Falkland Islands Dependencies and the islands came under UK administration.

1965 Leith Harbour, the last shore-based whaling station in South Georgia, was closed.

1982 Argentine military forces occupied South Georgia for 22 days. South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands became overseas territories of the UK.

2001 The UK military garrison closed and was replaced by a British Antarctic Survey (BAS) base at King Edward Point. There is a science station for biological study on Bird Island.

2005 A revised version of the 2000 environment management plan was made available on the British Antarctic Survey's website. The new plan was published in 2006 and sets out environmental policies for the next five years.

2006 Alan Huckle became Commissioner.

2009 Doctor Martin Collins was appointed as the new Senior Executive; he is a member of the UK delegation to the scientific committee of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR – pronounced 'Kammelar'), which manages marine resources in the Southern Antarctic Ocean.

2010 In the Falkland Islands *Economic Development Strategy* released in July, part of the plans, the bilateral fisheries agreement with South Georgia, will be re-negotiated so that the Falkland Islands fishing interests are better promoted and receive priority in the allocation of fishing rights.

2011 In May, a rodent eradication programme was initiated targeted at rats and rabbits (which had been accidentally introduced over the years) that have had a detrimental impact on seabirds and penguin colonies and the habitat in general. In July it was announced that the ashes of Frank Wild were to be disinterred from a chapel in South Africa and buried in Grytviken cemetery on South Georgia in November. Wild had been Earnest Shackleton's second-in-command on the *Endurance* expedition and charged with

leading the men left on Elephant Island when Shackleton went for help. 2013 Schedules for the coming 2013/14 summer season show there will be around 58 cruise ship visits to South Georgia, made by 23 different vessels, an 11 per cent increase in ship visits over 2012. With normal occupancy levels, the number of cruise ship passengers could be as high as 7,000, a 20 per cent increase over last season.

Political structure

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) are British overseas territories, legally distinct from the Falkland Islands but, for convenience, they are administered from the Falkland Islands. With no indigenous or permanent inhabitants, there is no need for representative government, but a separate constitution for the territory was promulgated in 1985. The governor of the Falkland Islands is also the commissioner for the SGSSI; in this capacity he consults the Falklands Executive Council on those matters relating to the territory which might affect the Falkland Islands.

Other administrative posts based in Stanley, Falkland Islands, include the assistant commissioner who is also director of the SGSSI Fisheries, a financial secretary and attorney general. The marine officer, based at King Edward Point, is responsible for customs, immigration, posts and fisheries liaison.

Population

20 (2004) (British Antarctic Survey (BAS) scientists)

There is no indigenous population. Since 2001, when the British military garrison left, there has been a British Antarctic Survey (BAS) base where a marine officer and 17 staff of the BAS are permanently stationed at King Edward Point.

Main cities

Two British Antarctic Research Stations (Bird Island and King Edward Point) have government officers and museum curators during the summer months. Grytviken, formerly a whaling station on South Georgia, was the garrison town.

Languages spoken

Official language/s

English

Media

Press

Weeklies: The South Atlantic Remote Territories Media Association publishes an

online newsletter which includes articles on South Georgia (www.sartma.com).

Economy

Income is derived from fishing licences, fees for trans-shipping fish catches, tourist landing charges and the sale of postage stamps.

The *South Georgia Environmental Management Plan* (2006–10), outlined the British government's commitment to providing a sustainable policy framework which conserved, managed and protected the rich natural environment, at the same time allowing some human activities and the generation of revenue.

Large-scale fishing began in 1969/70 by Soviet bloc countries. In 1993, the UK extended its territorial waters around the SGSSI from 19.3km (12 miles) to 321.8km (200 miles) and created the SGSSI Maritime Zone. In 1996, new laws opened fishing grounds with a licensing scheme. Approximately 100–200,000 tonnes of krill are caught around South Georgia each year. The SGSSI government applies conservation measures to the maritime zone, but has the right to impose additional measures if appropriate. There is satellite imagery surveillance of the fishing zone.

The toothfish total allowable catch (TAC) for the 2006/07 season was increased by 15 per cent by the SGSSI and approved by the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Resources

Tourism

Schedules for the 2013/14 tourist season show a significant increase in the number of ships planning to visit South Georgia, and a consequent expected increase in tourist numbers by as much as 20 per cent, assuming normal occupancy rates. Cruise ship visits to South Georgia fell over the last four years following a downturn in the global economy, and other factors. Tourism to South Georgia reached its height in the 2008/09 season, when 71 cruise ships visited bringing around 8,000 passengers; after which it dropped back to 62 cruise ship visits and around 7,000 passengers in 2009/10.

The last two seasons have seen nearer 50 cruise ship visits and 5,500 passengers. The islands of South Georgia are primarily sites of scientific research. Tourist visits to South Georgia are strictly controlled according to the tourism management policy (2011). The principal objective of this policy is to protect the island's environment, including its flora, fauna and cultural heritage. All visits must be authorised, by permit from the commissioner (located on the Falkland Islands) prior to arrival, and all visits must be managed (under the leadership of a designated escort) from approved landing

sites; no visitors may remain on the islands overnight, unless approved as an 'expedition' and treated accordingly. The authorities warn that visits to South Georgia carry a greater risk level than many other destinations due to its total lack of medical or emergency facilities, and there are no evacuation services available.

Environment

The South Georgia Environmental Plan 2005 (for the period 2006–10) was published on the British Antarctic website in January 2006.

South Georgia is the breeding ground for some 85 per cent of the world's southern fur seal population, as well as significant populations of elephant seals, albatrosses, petrels and penguins. In 1910, reindeer were introduced by Norwegian whaling companies.

The South Sandwich Islands represent a maritime ecosystem.

Time

GMT minus two hours

Geography

South Georgia is an isolated, mountainous sub-Antarctic island, which lies in the South Atlantic Ocean, 2,150km east of Tierra del Fuego and about 1,390km east-south-east of the Falkland Islands. Surrounded by cold waters originating from the Antarctic, South Georgia has a harsher climate than expected from its latitude. More than 50 per cent of the island is covered by permanent ice with many large glaciers reaching the sea at the head of fjords. The main mountain range is the Allardyce Range, which has its highest point at Mount Paget (2,960m). The South Sandwich Islands, which comprise a chain of active volcanic islands around 240km long, lie about 750km south-east of South Georgia. The climate is wholly Antarctic and in the late winter, the islands may be surrounded by pack ice.

Hemisphere

Southern

Climate

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are prone to very sudden and unexpected changes of weather brought on by the Antarctic Convergence, where cold waters flowing up from Antarctica meet warm water from the north. The average temperature in summer is -2 degrees Centigrade.

Entry requirements

Only a limited number of visitors are allowed to land each year. All visitors must apply to the Office of the Commissioner, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, Government House, Stanley,

Falkland Islands (tel: (+500) 27-433, fax: (+500) 27-434; e-mail: gov.house@horizon.co.fk) at least 60 days in advance of their journey for permission to land. Application forms can be obtained from the Commissioner's office or on-line from the official South Georgia government website (www.sgisland.org). Details of all places to be visited must be provided and there is a landing fee. There are no search-and-rescue facilities.

Passports

Passports must be valid for a minimum of six months.

Visa

Not required, but visitors must report to the Marine Officer at King Edward Point, Cumberland Bay East.

Health (for visitors)

Advisable precautions

There are no medical facilities available. Comprehensive medical emergency insurance is necessary as well as sufficient stocks of prescribed medication. Sunburn is a problem in this sub-polar region, sunblock should be applied regularly. All of the historic buildings in the territory present a safety risk; they are storm damaged and flimsy, causing wind blown asbestos particles. Visitors should not approach within 200 metres of them without permission of the Marine Officer at King Edward Point.

Credit cards

The museum shop accepts VISA and Mastercard, but not American Express.

Working hours

Government

Mon–Fri (winter): 0900–1315, 1430–1730; Mon–Fri (summer): 1100–1315, 1630–1930.

Telecommunications

Postal services

A new post code for the islands has been issued through the Universal Postal Union: SIQQ 1ZZ.

Getting there

Air

There is currently no routine air access, but there are plans for an international airport.

Surface

The only access is by yacht or cruise ships.

Getting about

National transport

Road: There are no road links on the islands.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially

Nations of the World: A Political, Economic and Business Handbook

to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

There are no land lines on South Georgia. All communications are by either radio or mobile/cell phones

Travel information

The Office of the Commissioner, Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Government House, Stanley, Falkland Islands, South Atlantic FIQQ 1ZZ (tel: +500 28200; fax: +500 28201; email: info@gov.gs; internet: www.sgisland.gs).

Other useful addresses

British Antarctic Survey, High Cross, Madingley Rd, Cambridge CB3 0ET, UK (tel: (+44-1223) 221-400; fax:

(+44-1223) 362-616; e-mail: information@bas.ac.uk).

Licensing Officer SGSSI, Fisheries Department, Stanley, Falkland Islands (tel: (+500) 27-260; fax: (+500) 27-265; e-mail: fish.fig@horizon.co.fk).

Office of the Commissioner, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, Government House, Stanley, Falkland Islands (tel: (+500) 27-433, fax: (+500) 27-434; e-mail: gov.house@horizon.co.fk).

Project Atlantis (Environmental and educational resource) Dundee University, 23 Springfield, Dundee, Scotland DD1 4JE (tel: (+44) (0)1382 388-159; internet: www.atlantishome.org).

Internet sites

British Antarctic survey: www.antartic.ac.uk

British Geographical Survey: www.bgs.ac.uk

Government website: www.sgisland.org

Information for Yachts visiting South Georgia: www.rccpf.org.uk/ anc click on *Index MAPS* showing *PUBLICATIONS*.

South Atlantic Remote Territories Media Association: www.sartma.com

South Georgia Heritage Trust: www.sght.org

University of Dundee educational resource: www.atlantishome.org

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: www.fco.gov.uk