

Across the Antarctic Circle

Aboard *Sylvia Earle* | 28 February–08 March 2024



Puerto Williams, Chile

DAY 1 | Wednesday 28 February 2024

Position at 1000 on 28 Feb

Latitude: 54°55.4'S

Longitude: 67°35.8'W

Course: Anchored

Speed: Anchored

Wind Speed: 5 kts NW

Barometer: 997 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

It was a relief to touch down on the airstrip at Puerto Williams. That meant there was only one final leg of the epic journey to go – the Zodiac ride from shore to ship. Luckily, the weather was kind to us, and we arrived nice and dry onto the *Sylvia Earle*. After getting our photos taken for the photoboard, our hotel crew awaited us with cocktails and a welcome spread of snacks. We could finally relax and look forward to exploring Antarctica.

Once everyone was checked in, we met our Expedition Leader, Christian, in the lecture theatre, and were introduced to Rosie (onboard expedition manager), Nicole (medic), Jose (doctor) and Alex (hotel director) with his team.

Next was the safety drill. The sound of seven short, one long blasts was our cue to don warm clothes, bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster station. Our crew guided us up to the lifeboats to get us familiar with their whereabouts.

After lunch, we did our first bird survey – spotting a variety of birds including imperial shags, over 100 shearwaters, gulls, and the majestic black-browed albatross.

In the evening, we met our whole line-up of Expedition Team. There are 23 E-Team in total, with various specialities including photography, conservation, oceanography, ornithology, marine biology, marine mammals, geology, glaciology, history, kayaking, snorkelling, SCUBA diving and first aid.

In addition to our Expedition Team, we have 85 wonderful ship's crew, from all corners of the world, here to look after everything from your cocktail order to the keeping the engines running.

We total 93 Expeditioners: 44 American, 25 Australian, 9 Indian, 4 Canadian, 3 British, 2 Dutch, 5 German, 1 French, 1 Belgian, and 1 New Zealander.

Later, as we dined, we cruised through the Beagle Channel on the border between two countries: Argentina on our port side, and Chile on our starboard. The green, rolling hills are a stark contrast to the landscapes will experience in days to come.

Cruising into the night, we were met by a very mild Drake Passage. Tierra Del Fuego disappeared behind us, as we made our way to the frozen south.



Drake Passage

DAY 2 | Thursday 29 February 2024

Position at 0700 on 29 Feb

Latitude: 57°37.6'S

Longitude: 64°06.5'W

Course: 153°

Speed: 11kts

Wind Speed: 12 kts NW

Barometer: 1001 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

After days of waiting, we are finally well on our way to the Antarctic Peninsula. Despite being told that we were experiencing a 'Drake Lake', the ship's motion took some getting used to. The Drake Passage is the body of water between the southern tip of South America at Cape Horn, Chile, and the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica. It connects the southwestern part of the Atlantic Ocean (Scotia Sea) with the south-eastern part of the Pacific Ocean and extends into the Southern Ocean. The passage receives its English language name from the 16th-century English privateer Sir Francis Drake. Drake's only remaining ship, after having passed through the Strait of Magellan, was blown far south in September 1578.

The morning was busy with mandatory IAATO and Zodiac briefings. Then we sorted out our Muck Boots and performed biosecurity checks, which involved inspecting our used outerwear for any grass seeds. Our E-Team photo guide, Scott Portelli, presented our first lecture on how to get the most from our smartphones.

We also heard from our 'whaleologist', Olivia, about marine mammals we are likely to experience, from eared to true seals, to baleen and toothed whales. Later, our Citizen Science, NASA-linked cloud survey led by Marcos was a simple exercise. Timed to coincide with a satellite passing overhead that was recording the skies looking down, we recorded the conditions looking up in what is called 'ground truthing'. It was raining lightly and foggy, which we learned was classified as nimbostratus. The subsequent 30-minute eBird survey was similarly very limited. With no real wind, no seabirds were sighted but a few penguins were briefly spotted porpoising away from the ship (we could not determine the species). Captain Artem introduced himself and the ship's heads of departments at our pre-dinner briefing and we learned about our proposed landing tomorrow at Robert Point on Robert Island. During the evening, we expect to cross the Antarctic Convergence. The Antarctic Convergence is a natural boundary between the relatively warm subantarctic surface water and the cold Antarctic surface water. It lies between 49° and 55° south and is detected by a drop in sea surface temperature as cold, dense water dives beneath the warmer waters to the north. During the southern summer, the sea temperature may drop from 7°C to 3°C at the convergence. The location of the convergence is not a precise line but varies slightly throughout the year, from year to year, and from century to century. This convergence zone is an important biological phenomenon influencing the distribution of plankton, fish, birds and mammals. The convergence is considered the ecological boundary of Antarctica. We can't wait to get to see land tomorrow.



Drake Passage & Robert Point

DAY 3 | Friday 1 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 1 Mar

Latitude: 61°20.8'S

Longitude: 60°20.4'W

Course: 153°

Speed: 10kts

Wind Speed: NW Force 4 kts

Barometer: 994 hPa

Air Temp: 4°C

After a pretty calm night at sea, our wake-up call was followed by a hearty breakfast. The Drake Passage has been very gentle with us. Christian said, 'We are going to pay for this one on the return!' Well, maybe, maybe not – only one certainty, we cannot control it.

We got some whales during breakfast. A lot of blows in the distance, and few times some whales came super close to the *Sylvia Earle*, giving us a great view. They were mainly fin whales, the second biggest animal on the planet after the blue whale! They love to be around the South Shetland Islands to feed all the austral summer. We were privileged to see them – just their blows and their backs, as these whales do not show their tail flukes when they dive.

At 9am, everybody joined Marcos in the lecture theatre for his lecture 'Antarctic Peninsula: a land of Fire and Ice'. That was a perfect introduction before reaching land. He was followed by Christian's lecture 'everything you always wanted to know about penguins but were afraid to ask'. And straight after the lecture 'Whales portside!' We got more fin whales and even humpback whales.

Some penguins were porpoising around the ship and we saw our first big icebergs. Best morning ever. We have finally arrived in Antarctica!

Time for lunch. And on both our portside and starboard side we saw more whales.

We arrived at Robert Point just as the fog disappeared. Now let's go to the mudroom and get in a Zodiac. On the shore, antarctic fur seals, southern elephant seals, penguins everywhere; we even saw two species: gentoo and chinstrap penguins! It seems like Antarctica is welcoming us.

At the end of our landing, getting back on board, the light was amazing on the glacier.

Christian briefed us for tomorrow's exciting landings, including entering an active volcanic caldera. Marcos, our geology guru, explained some more about Deception Island and why it is so special. And, of course, Olivia took the opportunity to tell us more about the beautiful fin whales we had been seeing throughout the day.

The Captain came on stage to celebrate Leo's birthday and offer him a broken propeller (allegedly broken by Leo, but transformed into a wall-hanging memento).

Time for dinner. The view by the windows was beautiful. We cannot believe we are in Antarctica for real.

Let's go to sleep and dream about tomorrow!





Half Moon Island & Whalers Bay

DAY 4 | Saturday 2 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 2 Mar

Latitude: 62°34.6'S

Longitude: 59°47.1'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 7kts

Wind Speed: Calm

Barometer: 997 hPa

Air Temp: 5°C

As the sun rose above the horizon, we awoke to the promise of an extraordinary day exploring the hidden treasures of the South Shetland Islands. Our destination: the enchanting Half Moon Island, a horseshoe-shaped wonder nestled between Greenwich and Livingston Islands.

After a hearty breakfast, we went promptly outside. The day's canvas began to paint itself with adventure. We discovered that this small wonder was not just an island – it was a volcano's caldera, akin to the renowned Deception Island but on a smaller, more intimate scale, and inactive. For the intrepid souls, kayakers and paddlers set out on a unique paddle around the island, while divers and snorkellers delved into the water, regaling us with tales of playful fur seal encounters. The rest of us revelled in the proximity of gentoo and chinstrap penguins, alongside the grandeur of elephant and fur seals. Strolling amid this incredible wildlife, against the backdrop of colossal glaciers and the occasional thunderous icefall, proved an experience beyond compare.

We returned to the ship just in time and synced in with a satellite flyover, allowing us to have a Citizen Science cloud observation session. The sun pierced through the morning's stratus clouds, transforming into a captivating array of cloud types that we, the citizen scientists, eagerly described – a perfect excuse for some impromptu sunbathing. After a sumptuous lunch, we recharged for the afternoon's highlight: the legendary Deception Island.

Deception Island, an active volcano's flooded caldera in the middle of the Bransfield Strait, unfolded before us like a surreal landscape. A unique place that appears to be a mixture between Iceland, Antarctica, and Mars! The geology, with its unique shapes and colours, prompted reflection on nature's immense power. Amid the captivating scenery, the island's rich historical heritage came alive – from sealers in 1820 to the whaling era, early explorers, scientific bases, and now, our own presence. Exploring remnants like the Hektor whaling station, the old aeroplane hangar, and a former British base and station, alongside whale bones and a small cemetery, painted a vivid picture of this unique island's heritage.

Returning to our vessel, we passed once again through Neptune's Bellows, a unique seaway that sparked countless tales. Bidding farewell to these places we gathered for our recap and briefing. Tomorrow's agenda promised the Antarctic Peninsula, and our excitement soared. Katia enlightened us about elephant seals, while Jonathan presented a short film showcasing the human legacy of Deception Island.

The day concluded with another delectable dinner, followed by an encore in the lecture theatre. Jonathan's presentation and the screening of *The Last Husky* transported us to the realms of Antarctic exploration. Retiring to our rooms, memories bounced in our minds, leaving us with the anticipation of another day of unparalleled adventure and exploration in the pristine beauty of Antarctica.





Recess Cove & Foyn Harbour

DAY 5 | Sunday 3 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 3 Mar

Latitude: 64°17.4'S

Longitude: 61°37.8'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 7.8kts

Wind Speed: SSW Force 6 kts

Barometer: 1007 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

Every once in a while, you experience a day that will stay with you forever. Today was such a day. These words won't truly capture the feeling.

We started in the wild and windy waves of the Bransfield Strait this morning, heading to the sheltered Recess Cove. As we glided in, we could see the mountains and glaciers rising out of the bay. With their protection, the water was glassy calm. Huge icebergs had drifted in to dramatically lay rest here.

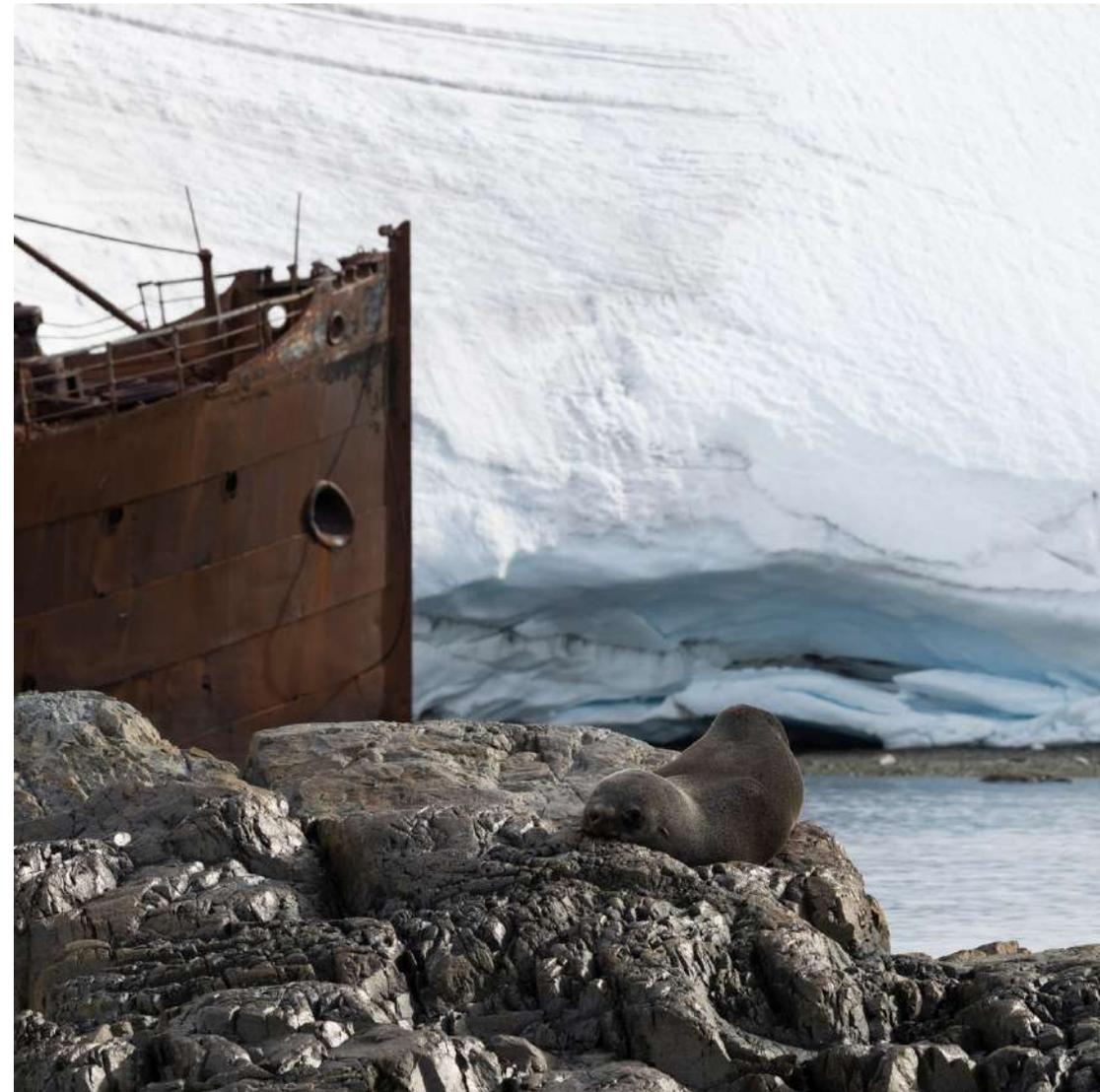
The landing site was our first time stepping on the Antarctic Peninsula. A milestone for many of us. A short but steep hike up the icy snow to a viewpoint was our plan. The reward was sweeping views of the cove below. We could see on the water, kayakers and snorkellers as they explored above and below the water. Also, we could see whales. Lots of whales. At one point the kayak group had small pods of them on three sides. Humpback whales were feeding everywhere in the cove.

We kept our distance as they dived and lunged and fed all around. The experience was profound. The feeling of intimacy with these gentle giants was touching. We were very moved.

The humpbacks were curious and not shy. They gracefully dived, tails in the air, rolled over and slapped with their fins. They occasionally spy-hopped to get a good look at us.

The sound of them, and the smell, it was impressive. We will never forget it. After lunch we were out again in the picturesque Foyn Harbour on Enterprise Island. Here a group of many small rocky islets and big icebergs made for a great place to explore via Zodiac or kayaks. This is a protected harbour and was popular with early whaling vessels. One such ship, the *Governoren*, did not make it home to Norway and is still here, wrecked and rusted.

The snorkellers were happy about that, as it was excellent clear conditions to view the remains of the ship. Fur seals shared the rocky islets with the lovely terns, arctic, and antarctic. On our return to the ship, another couple of whales wanted to say hello. They put on a show for the returning Zodiacs. Spectacular. The day was not over yet. Forty-four brave souls then jumped off the back of the ship for the polar plunge. They will also not forget this any time soon. Well done! To seal this auspicious day, we had news of Ivette's birthday and also the birth of baby Max, the grandson of Julie and Bruce. I think a soft whale as a gift would be fitting.



















Useful Island & Cuverville Island

DAY 6 | Monday 4 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 4 Mar

Latitude: 64°40.9'S

Longitude: 62°57.1'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 4.9kts

Wind Speed: N Force 2 kts

Barometer: 1019 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

The morning's first light illuminated the mountains and together they were mirrored by the calm sea.

A palette of pastel purple and pink eased everybody into a day of wonder and ethereal beauty with the spectacular wake-up bestowed upon us feeble humans.

As if guardians to our superb strike of wonderful weather, whales guided us to our first stopping place, reminding us that together we share this blue planet and there is so much to celebrate from our coexistence.

As we rugged up ready to load Zodiacs, the Antarctic coolness set in. Chilled to the bone became a reality as the wind began steadily to pick up. The timing of a hike to the summit of Useful Island became rather 'useful' providing a little heat. An entertaining landing for monitoring the 'fluff' rock puberty stage of fledging penguins, fashioning all sort of feather styles as they matured steadily, opting for their greased-back adult suits.

Some fluff-balls chased parents around, begging for food and rivalling their siblings. Exhausted parents hastily took to athletic feats between rocks to try and find some peace. Whether clumped together for warmth or strutting about studiously, the gentoo population made for some great bird gazing.

As if the day could spoil us any more, we made our way through glacier-filled, fjord-like channels, navigating through growlers and effortlessly passing stupendously sculpted icebergs.

Yet again, the humpback whales brought the ice to life and countless penguins porpoised in all directions.

Seals barely lifted a brow on ice floats and we sailed on to lichen-coloured cliffs for another marvellous landing.

The wind had finally caught up to us by the time we anchored.

We were encouraged to rug up and prepare for some splashes.

A splash here is more potent than a double shot of espresso... tequila even.

Gratefully we made it onto Cuverville Island. An enchantress of an island with tall cliff faces decorated with thick carpets of moss and lichen. Looking out to sea, the iceberg gallery was delightful, yet the penguin energy was highly strung.

Our first look at a leopard seal for the trip gave us a sense of sentience as this very aggressively depicted pinniped

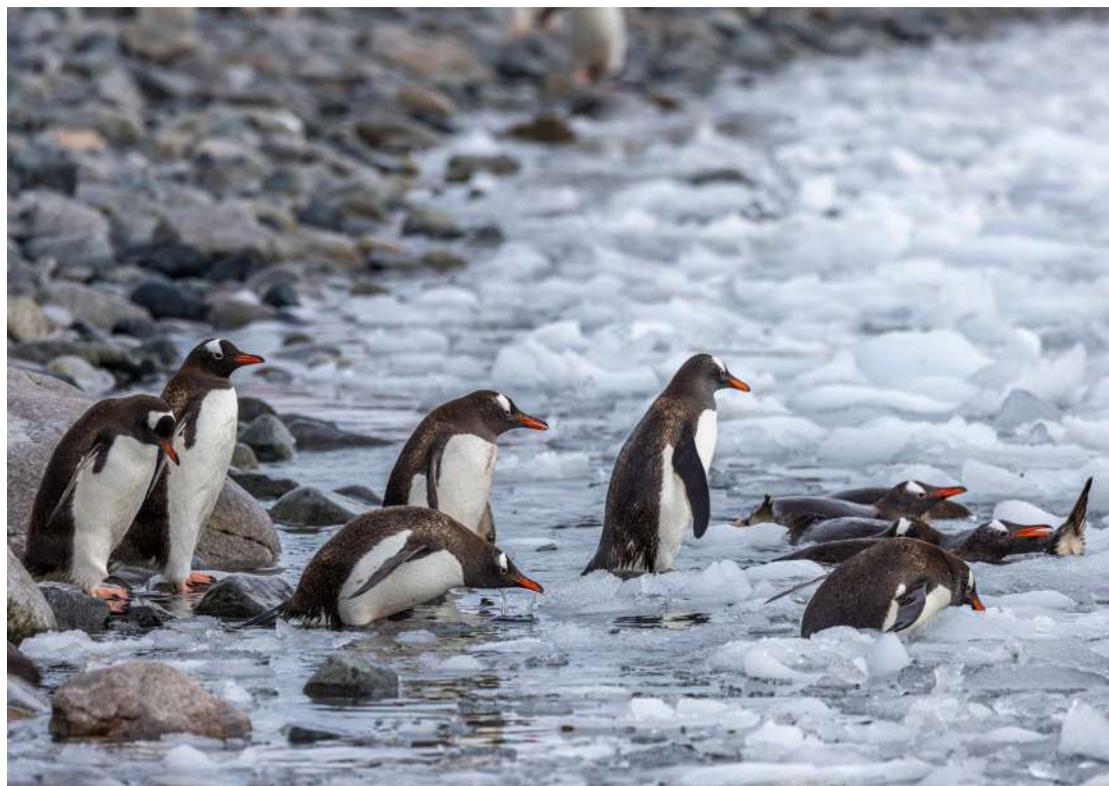
lazily snoozed on a floe, happily allowing all to build an infatuation with the skilled predator.

To celebrate the day and to engage with the community we are building on board, we all tested our skills at guessing the hidden history of our crew.

Dreams were big this night; how could we possibly have more to see and do?

How lucky we are to be here, together...





Lapeyrère Bay & Chiriguano Bay

DAY 7 | Tuesday 5 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 5 Mar

Latitude: 64°23.7'S

Longitude: 62°58.8'W

Course: Variable

Speed: 1.1kts

Wind Speed: N Force 7 kts

Barometer: 1000 hPa

Air Temp: 4°C

We woke up to an authentic Antarctic morning... grey skies, strong winds and the sound of whale blows around the ship.

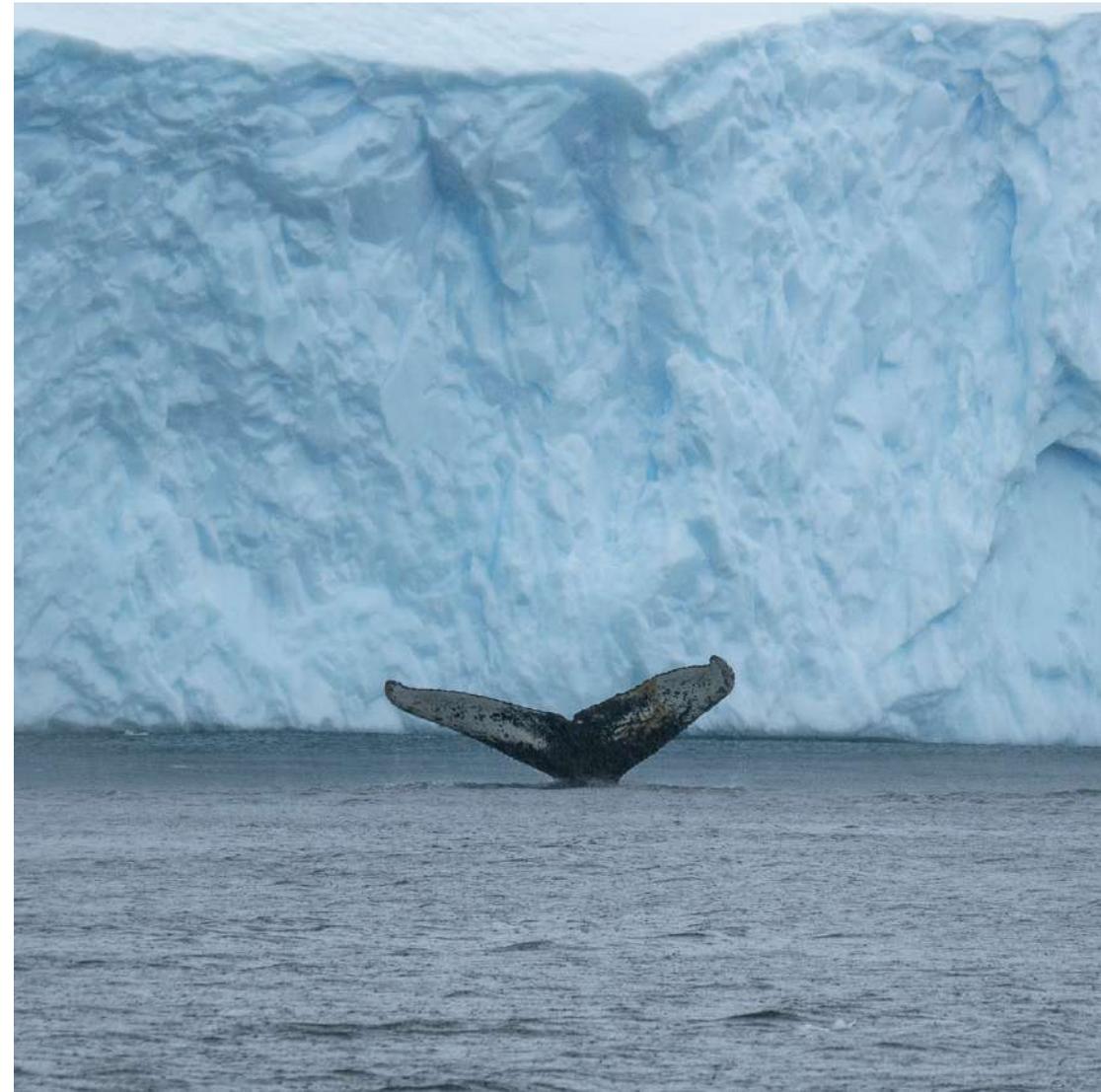
We made our way towards Lapeyrère Bay, a true adventure as the Captain had never been there himself!

After a relaxing breakfast, we enjoyed the beautiful navigation towards our destination. Big icebergs, brash ice and ice cliffs along with the rain outside are giving us our first glimpse of how harsh Antarctica can be. We have been very lucky with whales this trip and it seems our luck has continued. Our Zodiac exploration was very much worth braving the wind and the rain for some breathtaking encounters with our humpback friends. Some boats were lucky enough to have over 10 minutes with the beautiful animals right beside them... and we can't forget our lucky divers having a whale pass by them in the water... something we will never forget.

Back to get warm and have some nice lunch on the ship, we head to our next destination - Chiriguano. On arrival we see howling winds up to 50 knots, creating some harsh conditions. Christian makes the call to cancel this afternoon's operations... but there is plenty to do on board instead!

As we cruised the Neumayer Channel, Leo gave us an insightful lecture on the research projects he has been involved in across the South Shetland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula. We learned about his work with a variety of seals and also emperor penguins and some of his stories, personal favourites being him getting bitten by a seal and having to tackle a penguin! But the highlight must be the videos of the elephant seal weaner and the emperor penguin chicks. So cute!

An evening was filled with our Expedition Team sharing their knowledge. Eddie and Marcos held a fjordphyto and phytoplankton ID workout in the Citizen Science lab for those keen on learning the important role these play in our oceans. Heather shared with us all we need to know about ice and glaciers, and how we are able to read, hear and see what the ice is really telling us. After a beautiful dinner, Andrew shared with us a wonderful short film he was involved in, *Plunge of the penguins*, to finish off another exciting day down in Antarctica.





Neko Harbour & Melchior Islands

DAY 8 | Wednesday 6 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 6 Mar

Latitude: 64°50.6'S

Course: 117°

Longitude: 62°30.0'W

Speed: 1kts

Wind Speed: NNE Force 4 kts

Air Temp: 6°C

Barometer: 1003 hPa

What a day! From the early rise for our last continental landing, to the afternoon Zodiac exploration around the Melchior Islands, it has been a fantastic day and a great way to say farewell to Antarctica!

We had to wake up early to enjoy our activities, but it was worth it! The first stop was Neko Harbour—our second and last continental landing. There was a bit of a hike in the snow, avoiding the crevasses, but the views at the top were amazing. Not only were penguins walking around, but also the backdrop of the glacier calving was awe-inspiring.

The kayakers and paddlers had the opportunity to go out and do their activities, and so did the snorkellers. It was a very peaceful morning to be on and in the water. We even saw a pod of beaked whales, a rare sight in this part. About 15 of them showed up, but most disappeared quickly, while a couple stayed to ensure we would not follow them.

For lunch, we had a treat! For the long repositioning of the ship, we had a barbecue! We wore the mandatory costume hats and enjoyed the burgers, hot dogs, many sides, and desserts. Possibly having overeaten all that delicious food, we had enough time to relax and take a short nap before the afternoon activity, exploring the Melchior Islands on our Zodiacs.

The Melchior Islands house the second oldest Argentinian research station in Antarctica. It used to be a permanent base, hosting scientists all year round, but since 1961, people have only come here in the summer. But we mainly came here to see its natural beauty and the wildlife.

These little rocky islands, covered with ice and snow, greatly contrasted with the enormous icebergs floating around. The grey sky made the colour of this ice even more dramatic, distinguishing them even more.

Petrels and a couple of snowy sheathbills were flying around, but the cute fur seals took the top spot, playing in the rockpools looking so playful and innocent.

Back on the ship, it was time to relax and prepare for the Drake Passage. We were expecting nice weather, but having all the cabins secure from falling objects is always better.

We might have said goodbye to Antarctica, but we still have two more days of knowledge-sharing and albatross-watching!









Drake Passage

DAY 9 | Thursday 7 March 2024

Position at 0700 on 7 Mar

Latitude: 60°88.6'S

Longitude: 62°26.0'W

Course: 330°

Speed: 13kts

Wind Speed: NNE Force 4 kts

Barometer: 1003 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

It was a moody, misty morning as we made our way back across the Drake Passage headed for home. We were gently woken by Eamon and enjoyed a leisurely breakfast prepared with great care in the Gentoo Restaurant.

Many people spent the morning sorting their photos and looking at the maps on deck 6 to get the big picture of where we had been.

At mid-morning, Jonathan offered a fantastic lecture on Sir Ernest Shackleton's life and his Antarctic expeditions. Now we have spent a little time in the elements in Antarctica, it is phenomenal to think about what Shackleton and his men went through during their fateful expedition. It is a true testament to Shackleton's family motto, '*Fortitudine Vincimus*', which means 'by endurance we conquer'.

After the lecture we were on deck 8 conducting a cloud survey for Citizen Science with Marcos. The fog began to clear and the sun started to break through. This information provides ground proofing data to time-stamped satellite imagery, to help confirm what they see from above or add to the accuracy of what is seen in real time, to improve the technology and create a big picture of what is happening in the atmosphere.

Lunch was a lovely affair; fun conversations reminiscing about our journey and chatting about our lives away from the ship and onward travel.

After lunch, Bia gave a very interesting presentation entitled '*Kings of the deep: The Apex predators of the Antarctic Abyss*', and a film that followed a chase by Sea Shepherd of an illegal fishing poachers across four oceans for 110 days that ended in a dramatic fashion!

As the afternoon rolled around, the photo competition gathered momentum. So many great submissions! The onboard judges had a hard time narrowing it down to the top 10 in each category. These were then on display around the ship for voting. Best whale shot, best landscape/nature and best wildlife were the categories.

The quality of the competition was nothing short of amazing! The Tektite Bar was the place to be as the evening wore on. The Captain entertained us at his Farewell Drinks, followed by another delicious dinner. It was a nice way to end a relaxing and informative day travelling on board our home the *Sylvia Earle*.



Ushuaia

DAY 10 | Friday 8 March 2024

Disembarkation day

The entire Aurora team thanks you for joining us on this adventure, and we hope to see you on the high seas again!



Diving Log

Diving Guides: Darren Clarke, Freya Dooley

Number of Divers: 3

Total Outings: 8

Divers: Christopher Looker
Emily Waters John Hunt

01/03/24, PM: Robert Point

After the excitement had built over the Drake Passage, we finally made it to Robert Point. A perfect opportunity for our divers to have their first 'shake-out' dive to check equipment and get comfortable in the cold Antarctic waters. John was keen to come along for the dive, so we got ready into our drysuits and performed our gear checks in the warmth of the mudroom - to prevent a free-flowing regulator in the cold. Once gear was set up, off we went into our Zodiac to find a nice shallow area to dive. After gearing up and performing our buddy checks, we lowered ourselves into the water. Unfortunately, John found a leak in his suit, which meant we aborted the dive before it would get any worse. To shore we went, where we saw gentoo and chinstrap penguins as well as elephant and fur seals.

02/03/24, AM: Half Moon Island

A beautiful morning in the South Shetlands and the perfect opportunity for another shake-out dive. Emily was keen this morning to get into the water and get a taste of diving in Antarctica. After setting up our gear and performing our checks on the ship, we got into our drysuits and loaded up the Zodiac to find a shallow area for our dive. Emily was keen to try out some new equipment and get comfortable under the water. A shallow area with a nice rocky/weedy bottom of 7 metres was the perfect spot to work on our buoyancy; we were even lucky enough to get a glimpse of some playful gentoo penguins swimming around us!

02/03/24, PM: Deception Island, Whalers Bay

This afternoon was a great opportunity for John and Emily to have their first dive together. After gearing up and loading the Zodiac, we headed towards the bay to find a reasonably shallow area to try find some whale bones left over from the whaling era. Gearing up and performing our pre-dive checks is getting easier. Once in the water we descend down to around 8 metres and spend a few minutes getting comfortable. The bottom sloped down quite steeply and the silty bottom was home to lots of life. Thousands of brittle stars along the sea floor as well as sea urchins and sea stars meant there was lots of littler creatures to study down there. After almost lasting 20 minutes, we ended the dive and even got some time to explore the history on shore after.

03/03/24, AM: Recess Cove

A beautiful morning with perfect dive conditions at Recess Cove. After the usual pre-dive routine, we loaded the Zodiac and went on a mission to find a good dive site. We found some perfect-sized icebergs in a little cove,

giving us around 10 metres of depth. After performing our checks, we keenly descended and met the weedy, rocky bottom to start exploring. The icebergs made for a refreshing change, and it was cool to really see how big they are under the water. The sea floor was abundant with limpets, which are likely the most common benthic invertebrate you will see down here. We lasted 25 minutes in the cold waters before heading to the landing site for our first continental landing!

03/03/24, PM: Foyr Harbour - *Governoren* Wreck

The *Governoren* was an old whaling ship that partially sank back in 1915 when it caught fire. It is an awesome spot for a Zodiac exploration and an even better spot for a dive! Upon descent you can see the true size of this great ship. We headed towards the stern, which lays in around 20 metres depth, and got to appreciate how intact she really is. Some debris lay next to the wreck, including hand railings. Limpets, anemones, kelp and a variety of sponges call the ship home now and give the wreck an abundance of colour and life. After exploring the wreck for 30 minutes, we headed to the surface, with an underwater appreciation of the ship that not many people are lucky enough to have.

04/03/24, AM: Useful Island

A stunning morning down in Antarctica and a great opportunity for another dive. We found a sheltered cove near the landing site, with hopes of spotting some penguins coming in and out of the water. John and Emily geared up and performed their checks then down we went. The bottom sloped away from the island and had some nice rocks abundant with kelp the closer you went to land. Colonial seal was definitely a highlight of the dive, a fascinating-to-watch organism that moves through the water sort of like a worm. After managing 25 minutes, the cost became too much and we ended the dive with enough time for John to explore the landing site too.

05/03/24, AM: Lapeyrère Bay

A cold Antarctic morning with rain and wind, but we are still keen to get in the water! Humpbacks everywhere around the channel so we decided the aim for the day is to try and snorkel with these incredible creatures. After moving away from the rest of the group, we searched for our own whales in hopes of getting to jump in with them. After a while we spotted one sleeping on the surface and seized the opportunity. We geared up and jumped in about 100 metres from the whale, in the hope it would get curious and check us out. It was our lucky day as the whale came to see what weird creatures we were. Getting to spend about 5 minutes in the water with it circling us, we were able to see the true size of these animals and how gracefully they move through the water. An experience we will never forget!

06/03/24, AM: Neko Harbour

Our last dive this morning and it was another stunning morning. With very few icebergs around we decided to spend this dive attempting to spot some penguins entering the water. Upon gearing up we noticed a pair of curious humpbacks making their way towards our Zodiac. The two danced and swam around our boat for almost 10 minutes, allowing us to appreciate their beauty. We headed towards shore and jumped in for our dive; hopefully our big friends might come and say hi under the water. We got comfortable at 10 metres and followed the shoreline towards the colony, enjoying all we could find hiding in the kelp. An exciting last dive to finish the trip and appreciate all that lives beneath the cold waters of Antarctica.

Snorkelling Log

Snorkel Guides: Eddie, Katia and Pete

Number of Snorkellers: 17

Total Outings: 6

Snorkellers:	Sasha	Nicole	Harold	Amand
Sara	Carolyn	Debra	Camile	Joann
Matt	Carmen	Jason	David	
Sharon	Dave	Veronica	Mei	

01/03/24: Robert Point, Robert Island

Robert Island, also known as Mitchells Island or Polotsk Island, is part of the South Shetland Island group and lies between Nelson and Greenwich Islands. It is thought that the island may have been named by Captain Richard Fildes after his brig, the *Robert*. Fildes was a sealer in the South Shetlands between 1821 and 1822, until his vessel was destroyed by the ice.

We approach Robert Island in the mid-afternoon, a mist that has been lingering for several hours starts to clear and the coastline comes into view.

We embark the Zodiacs and go ashore for a 45-minute exploration; we find chinstrap and gentoo penguins, elephant seals and giant petrels.

Just to the east of our landing site, there is a small area separated by a rocky reef that helps to dissipate the swell – we chose to conduct our check-out snorkel here while the divers move to the rocky headland to the west of the landing site. Slipping one-by-one into the water, we check the seals on our drysuits, make any final adjustments and head out to start refining our finning techniques.

After 20–30 minutes, everyone is back on the Zodiacs. Some of us have found it cold, but no-one has experienced any leaks, and everyone wants to do it again.

02/03/24: Half Moon Island

Half Moon Island, part of the South Shetlands, lies in the McFarlane Strait, just under a kilometre north of the Burgas Peninsula on Livingstone Island. It is home to the seasonal Argentine naval and research station, Cámara Base, named after Juan Ramón Cámara, an Argentine frigate lieutenant.

A beautifully clear morning with high clouds covering the sky; in the distance the cloud-base is slowly rising and revealing more of the mountainous backdrop to the north of the island.

The snorkel team are ready so fast that we're off the ship and ashore before any other Zodiacs are moving (apart from the shore party, of course). We have a full hour to explore the island, the penguin colony and walk over the ridge to the beach on the northern side of the island; seals watching us from the beach, bleached whalebones on the shore a reminder of the past.

Back into the Zodiac – only one as all seven of us can fit. Pete driving and Katia organising; Eddie and Edwin are in the safety boat.

The team have scouted while we explore ashore and have decided that the best spot is just to the left of the landing site, where we have a beach, a wall then another beach. Just off the shore is a grounded bergy bit of ice – perfect for photos.

In the water all the snorkellers are accompanied by penguins and seals, twisting and jumping around us.

After a long time in the water, we return to the Zodiac and have a cruise along the coastline to the south-east of the landing site before returning across the glassy waters to the ship, where we change and head for the hot chocolate and cookies.

03/03/24: Recess Cove

Recess Cove is approximately 4 kilometres wide and lies in the eastern side of Charlotte Bay, along the western coast of Graham Land.

We cruise into the tranquil bay between small islands and grounded ice; much of the surface of the sea is covered with smaller pieces of ice, probably from a recent calving event. In the background, ice-covered mountains reach up and disappear into the clouds high above us.

We decide to snorkel in front of a rocky outcrop with many small bergy bits of ice in the water, exploring them and the shoreline as we fin through the water. The water feels colder here than it did on our previous adventures, but everyone is becoming acclimatised, and we all manage to enjoy ourselves for an easy 30 minutes.

Did someone say whales? Back in the Zodiacs, we only have to cover perhaps two hundred metres before we spot our first humpback, slowly cruising towards us, the sigh of its breathing helping us locate it after each dive. Then there is another, and another. We sit transfixed, changing position sometimes, but mostly just drifting, taking photos and letting the scene sink in and imprint itself in our memories.

Eventually we start to move back to the ship but find our route blocked by three more humpbacks, resting on the surface of the water, side by side. After a while they sink below the surface, rising again, head-first, observing us, observing them.

02/03/24: Foyen Harbour, Nansen Island

Foyen Harbour lies in the NNE corner of Nansen Island, which itself lies within Wilhelmina Bay. The harbour was used by whalers as an anchorage for factory ships in the early 20th century. Our exploration is on one of the only accessible wrecks on the Antarctic Peninsula: the *Governoren*.

In 1915, the Norwegian Whaling Transport Vessel, the *Governoren*, caught fire after an oil lamp was knocked onto her deck and was beached by her captain in order to save the lives of his crew – and his valuable cargo – and sits in approximately 20 metres of water at the stern, with her bow above the water. The captain gambled that the *Governoren's* sister ship would pass by, as planned, some three weeks later and they would be able to signal them and be rescued.

The snorkel team ease ourselves into the water and circumnavigate the wreck, working initially along the starboard side towards the stern, much of which lies silent beneath the still waters, before returning to the bow via the port side of the ship.

Starfish, nudibranchs and sea urchins wander the tangle of the wreck's spoil grounds. Whalebones litter the holds and the open decks; another reminder of our history in the region.

The water is crystal clear, the sea calm and the weather holds fair; everyone agrees that this is certainly an exceptional site to visit.

We return to the Zodiac and conduct an exploration of the coastline, in and out of the small bays. We spot two old water boats on the rocks, perhaps remnants of the wreck from more than 100 years ago.

We cannot escape the humpback whales: we stop to admire one passing slowly by our position, and then, when we return to the ship, we find another pair gently swimming around the stern of the ship. They seem in no hurry to move, so we quietly re-embark through the side gates and move swiftly to the deck to admire them some more.

04/03/24: Useful Island

Useful island rises in the Gerlache Strait, off the west coast of Graham Land, approximately 3 kilometres west of Rongé Island with a chain of rocks between them. It was discovered during the Belgian Antarctic Expedition of 1897–1899 under the command of Adrien de Gerlache.

The ship remains some distance from the island, so we approach by Zodiac, navigating larger icebergs, and then smaller bergy bits grounded in the channels between the main island itself and some of the rocky outcrops that extend from its shores.

A short exploration on foot allows us to discover gentoo and chinstrap penguins and also to warm ourselves a little as the wind has a bite to it this morning.

Some of us decide that we are too cold to snorkel and make the sensible decision to return to the ship after our exploration while the hardier (or foolhardy?) among us take the Zodiac across a small channel of water to a shallow cove on the far bank, which looks ideal for a plunge into the near-freezing waters.

We explore the seabed in depths ranging from several metres, shoaling up to the shallows. Penguins, skuas and arctic terns sit on the rocks and fly above us. This feels quite extreme.

On the way back to the ship, the more observant among our reduced crew spot Pete returning from a Zodiac shuttle run, a hot mug of Earl Grey tea in his hand – how very British of him!

04/03/24: Cuverville Island

Also known as Île de Cavalier, Cuverville Island is located between Rongé Island and the Arctowski Peninsula, off the west coast of Graham Land in the beautiful Ererra Channel. Jules de Cuverville was a vice admiral in the French navy and rose to the position of chief of staff of the navy.

The weather feels like it is turning as we head off between the icebergs towards the northern tip of the island. We land on the northwest corner in a shallow bay full of brash ice and spend an hour ashore before heading back into our Zodiacs to snorkel.

A leopard seal lies on a flat bergy bit, raising its head to check us out as we pause to take photos, before we continue around the tip of the island, rising in an enormous dome-like shape above us. As we move downwind, the colonies of penguins treat us to their distinctive smell and we watch them moving in and out of the water as we prepare to explore.

The water definitely feels colder, the wind is biting, but that doesn't stop us exploring along the coastline, inside a shallow bay where the penguins zip past as we watch, so much more elegant under the water than they appear on land.

Small pieces of ice, driven by the northerly winds, allow us to admire their incredible shapes and colours under the water as well as above.

It's a shorter exploration this time; more ice is in the distance, bearing down on us, so we exit the water and skim back across the choppy surface to the ship for hot showers and warm drinks before dinner.

06/03/24: Neko Harbour

Neko Harbour is an inlet within Andvord Bay on the Danko Coast, a section of the western coast of Graham Land. It was discovered by Adrien de Gerlache and named after the Scottish whaling boat the *Neko*, which operated here from 1911 to 1924.

We take the opportunity to go ashore, another continental landing, and explore for an hour, visiting the gentoo penguin colony and sighting southern giant petrels and south polar skuas. On the beach, with one eye on the nearby glacier, which, if it calves, can send large waves running across the beach, a pair of elephant seals watch us impassively from their position in the shadow of some large boulders.

Shortly before we enter the water for our exploration, some of us are lucky to spot a pod of Arnoux's beaked whales cruising up and down the strait. Also known as the southern four-toothed whale or southern beaked whale, encounters with this species are rare.

We slip from the Zodiacs into the water, our last chance to experience the environment beyond the shoreline where so few have ventured before. The seabed is a pleasing mixture of sand, rocks and seaweed, small molluscs hiding between and on the waving fronds. Penguins watch from the water's edge, lined up in what seems to be an orderly manner, before slipping into the water. They are so more graceful than us, moving like a blur as they head for the depths and return to the shore.

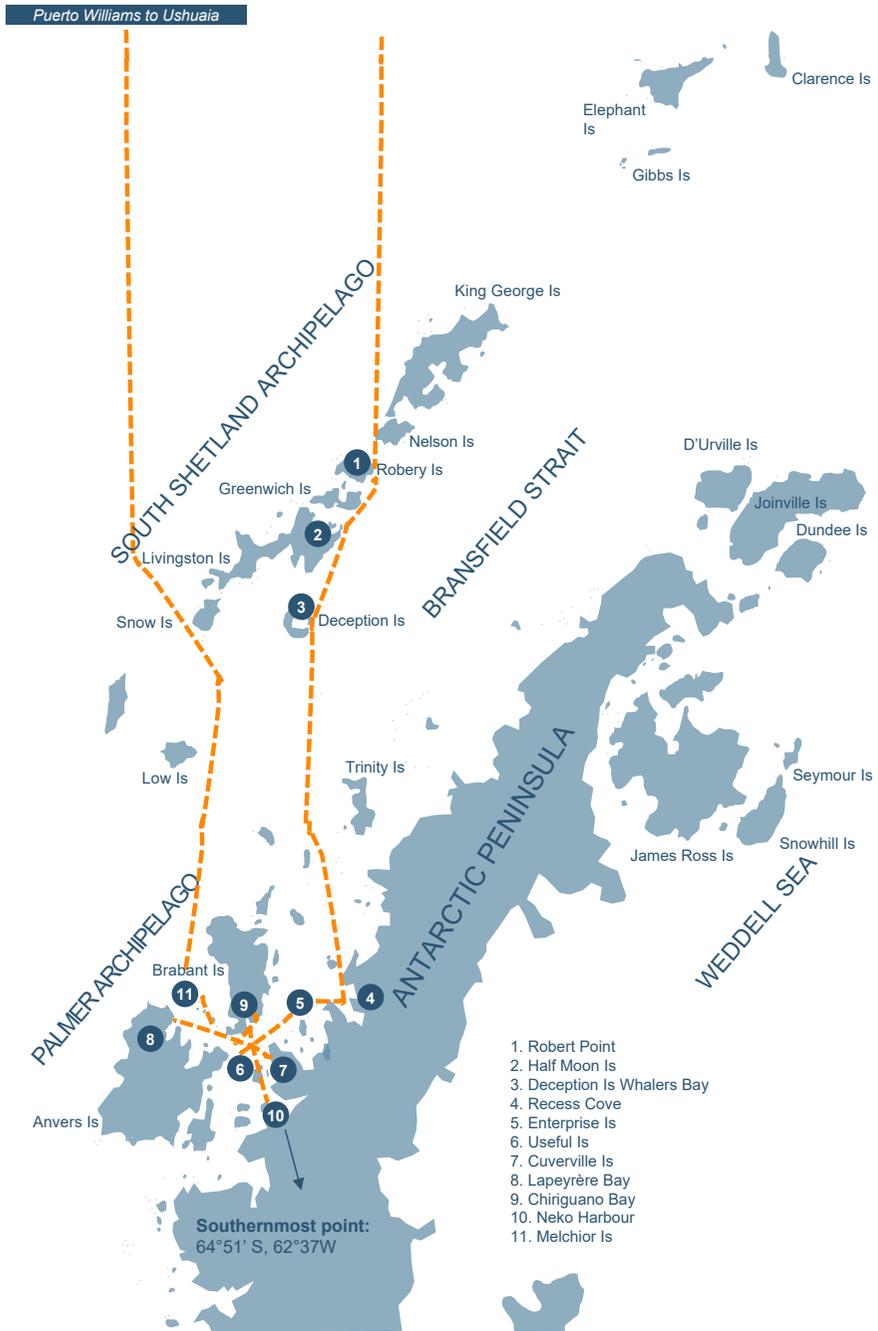
There are several pieces of grounded ice along the shoreline as we move from the rocky wall at the start of our exploration back towards the Zodiac landing site. Shades of blue entrance the observer and the textures, from craggy fissures through smooth waves, and semi-circular indentations speak of the journey the ice has been on before reaching its current resting place.

All too soon we are back into the Zodiacs – we have this manoeuvre down to a fine art now – and heading back towards the ship. Humpback whales swim in the distance, just beyond the ship.

This voyage of adventure and discovery has given each of us so much; we doubt we will ever forget the feelings and emotions of being immersed in such a wonderful place.









Expeditioners:

Adriana De Amicis

Drew Ason

Sharon Ason

Amy Bellinghausen

Danielle Belz

Bhoomi Bhanvadia

Tushar Bhatia

Justin Bloesch

Sasha Buch

Carson Calabria

David Calfee

Yuk Ching Cecily Chan

Leslie Chatham

John Chatham

Bill Coones

Mark Coones

Younga Craddock

David Craddock

Nicole Cuppy

Craig Divoky

Carmen Ellis

Wayne Frantzen

Saumya Gandhi

Sangita Ganesh

Sonali Ganguly

Yang Gao

Anna Mc Gill

Shivani Goswami

Jaimee Hamm

Ginette Handfield

Brian Hedt

Dave Hedt

Pam Hedt

Elinor Hunt

John Hunt

Richard l'Anson

Sharon Jackson

Matthew Jackson

Aswin Bharadwaj Kalyanaraman

Veronica Larson

Jason Larson

Richard De Lhorbe

Kathy Liersch

Jesselyn Lim

Gabriel Maeckelbergh

Sadhan Majumder

Andrew Marshall

Rohit Mathews

Casey Mita

Vijay Murali

Stephanie Murray

Sumedh Naik

Sara Noel

Mandy Oakley

John Oakley

Rob Oxford

Odette Oxford

Benita Panizza

Ellen Perre

Mckenna Poole

Craig Pressler

Michael Prichard

Varun Prusty

JoAnn Pyle

Yi Qin

Gaurav Rao

Geoff Rivers

Wendy Rivers

Karen Rivers

Steve Rivers

Sharon Rivers

Alexander Rivers

Ivette Ruelle

Stephen Ruelle

Shrutii Sarda

Bruce Steele

Julie Steele

James Schule

Debra Sharkey

Martin Silarski

Tanya Silarski

Stephanie Smith

Guy Templeton

Hans-Guenther Ulfert

Ute Ulfert

Jeroen van der Meer

Huguette Viguet

Emily Waters

Charlie Williams II

Carolyn Wiseman

Mei Yu



Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Christian Savigny
Assistant Expedition Leader: Leopoldo Soibelzon
Onboard Expedition Manager: Rosie Leaney
Onboard Expedition Assistant: Aridnere Ciria
Oceanographer / Naturalist: Bia Figueiredo
Geologist / Citizen Science Coordinator: Marcos Goldin
Marine Biologist: Olivia Capeillere
Historian: Jonathan Chester
Naturalist: Heather Chrystie
Expedition Medic: Nicole Genoud
Photography Guide: Scott Portelli
Zodiac Manager: Serghei Hincu
Lead Kayak Guide: Eamon Larkin
Kayak Guide: Tracy Gibson
Senior Kayak Guide: Sigurd Davidsen
Kayak Guide: Hodei Orueta Ruibal
Kayak Guide: Vanja Davidsen
Lead Snorkel Guide: Eddie Hauzer
Snorkel Guide 2: Katia Benini
Snorkel Guide 3: Edwin Sargeant
Snorkel Guide 4: Peter Shaw
Dive Team Leader: Darren Clarke
Dive Guide: Freya Dooley

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Artem Kolmykov
Chief Officer: Sergio Saldanha Hernandez
Second Officer: Yevhenii Zolotarov
Deck Cadet: Vladislav Klaptenko
Safety Officer: Alexandru Chiriac
Bosun: Leo Francis Magnaye Marzan
Ship Doctor: Jose Muller San Juan
Chief Engineer: Luis Gil
1st Engineer: Warlito Verzosa
IT Officer: Valentin Cojocar
Hotel Director: Alex Barkar
F&B Service Manager: Narendra Seeram
Head Bartender: Lloyd Laylo
Chief Purser: Josephine Blanco
Executive Chef: Rosauro Soriano
Sous Chef: Hubert Ramiro Barreto
Hotel Controller: Orlando Costa
Receptionist: Kateryna Tauzhnianska
Receptionist: Jaypee Alota Abonitalla
Head Stateroom Attendant: Marthony Penalosa
Able Seaman: Lexter Fadriquela
Able Seaman: Rene Casipe
Able Seaman: Anthony John Brosas
Able Seaman: Noel Reugia
Able Seaman: Rossell Fernandez Araujo
Able Seaman: Eduardo Aloyan

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Scott Portelli

