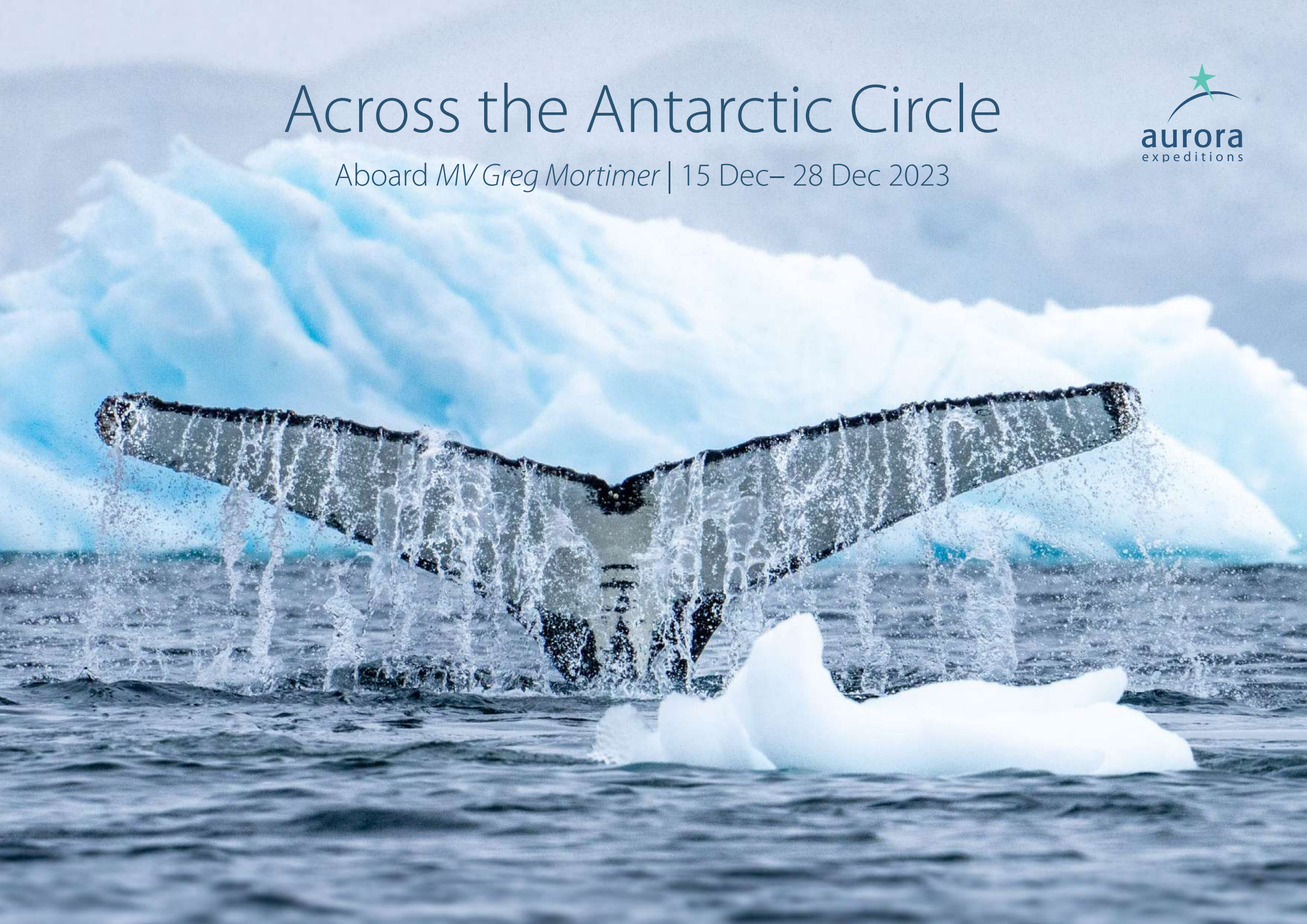


Across the Antarctic Circle

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 15 Dec– 28 Dec 2023



Ushuaia, Argentina

DAY 1 | Friday 15 December 2023

Position at 1100 on 15 Dec

Latitude: 54°48'6" S

Longitude: 068°17'9" W

Course: At wharf 217°

Speed: 0 kts

Barometer: 998hpa

Air Temp: 15°C

Here we are in the stunning town of Ushuaia, "el fin del mundo", the end of the world.

The wharf was abuzz this afternoon with arrivals, departures, fishing vessels unloading their catch, and all sorts of activity. Our Expeditioners were met by the Aurora team and had their photos taken for our photo board, to help us learn each other's names. Drinks and a buffet awaited us in the Elephant Island Bar, then our hotel team helped us navigate the decks to our cabins and settle into our "home away from home". It had been a long couple of days of travelling, and many of us probably wanted to crawl into the comfort of our beds, but there was no time to rest just yet!

After a welcome briefing from our Expedition Leader Alex and an intro from Hotel Director Pascal and Dr Anzor, our Onboard Expedition Manager, Anne, then gave us some handy hints about life onboard.

Just after the Greg Mortimer set sail, we had the all-important safety drill. The sound of the ship's horn signalled us to don bulky orange lifejackets and muster in the lecture theatre. We followed our crew up to Deck 7 where the polar class life vessels sit (they can hold 136 people each, for 5 days). With the safety drill completed, we were cleared to begin our journey.

We made our way to the dining room to enjoy a delicious dinner prepared by our talented galley team and served by our smiley and welcoming waiting staff.

The last task was a jacket swap, so that we could cope with whatever weather Antarctica decides to throw at us.

We'd had our last glimpse of town life, knowing that from then on, we were more likely to see a colony of penguins than a crowd of people.

Together we total 92 passengers (33 Americans, 30 Australians, four Canadians, seven from the UK, 10 Chinese, one Estonian, one Indian, one Irish, two Singaporeans, two Germans, one Japanese and one New Zealander) along with 83 crew from all around the globe.

Our 22 Expedition Team members have a variety of specialties including polar exploration, mountaineering, skiing, glaciology, geology, history, marine and terrestrial biology, ornithology, photography, medicine, and kayaking.

After the many hours of travel to reach the *Greg Mortimer*, it's time to kick back, breathe in the sea air, and get excited for the next 10 days of adventure!



At sea

DAY 2 | Saturday 16 December

Position at 1230 on 16 Dec

Latitude: 57°28'3"S

Longitude: 63°10'3"W

Course: 170°

Speed: 12kts

Wind Speed: 25 kts SW

Barometer: 1060hpa

Air Temp: 2°C

We fell asleep in the Beagle Channel, awoke in the infamous Drake Passage – named, of course, for the English explorer and privateer Sir Francis Drake, known for his circumnavigation of the world during 1577-1580.

A wonderful breakfast set us up for our first lecture of the voyage, where Linda introduced us to the amazing seabirds of the Southern Ocean and some of their fantastic adaptations. We learned of tubenoses, their salt sloughing, scent sniffing and barometric sensing. Their elbow locking mechanism and dynamic soaring allows these creatures to be like kites and spend very little energy to travel ever so far.

Photographers both serious and recreational gathered for Jamie's top tips on Antarctic photography. Focus on the eye, keep your gear dry and always make sure your batteries are charged! Wouldn't want to miss the shot of the trip, but remember to put the camera aside, and really soak in the views as well.

With our minds full, it was time to fill our bellies. Fuelled up and wanting some fresh air, we took to the outer decks for a citizen science bird survey. Looking out the window, there only seemed to be ocean waves, however, once on the back deck all the birds from Linda's lecture came to life; royal albatross, wandering albatross and black-browed albatross, Wilson's storm petrel, both dark morph, light morph and everything in between; giant petrels too.

Activity groups gathered to see what kind of adventures they were going to get up to and all the gear required. Joselyn launched a bird survey to kick off the citizen science program and Jamie was putting theory into practice with cameras out.

TA gave us a great introduction into penguin evolution and anatomy, including an amazing 360-degree penguin skeleton.

The shop opens! We got our first taste of whale stuffies, penguin socks and all the outdoor gear we might have forgotten. Christmas shopping, check!

We then met the master of the *Greg Mortimer*, Captain Oleg. With his fantastic team taking care of us both above and below deck, we are in great hands, and look forward to another delicious dinner.



At Sea, Drake Passage

DAY 3 | Sunday 17 December

Position at 1600 on 17 Dec

Latitude: 562°47'7"S

Longitude: 61°57'7"W

Course: 168°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 16 kts W

Barometer: 1016hpa

Air Temp: -2°C

Among the many myths and legends surrounding Sir Francis Drake, there's an outstanding anecdote about him playing croquet. The great English man of war was enjoying the lawn game with some of his fleet's captains when news arrived that the mighty Spanish Armada, then one of the strongest navies ever assembled, was gathering in the English Channel ahead of a planned invasion of the British mainland. Drake was said to have acknowledged the missive, then carried on playing. For a man capable of extraordinary violence, he was calm.

Mercifully it was this side of the Drake Passage that the passengers of the Greg Mortimer were able to enjoy on their second day at sea – not quite flawlessly calm, but largely unperturbed. While it may not have lived up to its reputation for ferociousness, this was still, as marine biologist Annette later described in her lecture about the passage, "the most amazing section of ocean anywhere in the world."

While the ship didn't move much, being south of the Antarctic Convergence meant that the wind bit with especially hard enamel. After a series of briefings and a biosecurity session, it was impossible to resist heading outside, especially when the ship was surrounded by a dozen or so cape petrels, followed by their much larger cousins, the light-mantled sooty albatross. There was no shortage of distractions in the air, but soon passengers' eyes were also being drawn to the surface of the ocean.

A pair of humpback whales swam casually in front of the ship, leaving some witnesses literally jumping for joy – and perhaps for warmth out on the observation deck, too.

Sir Ernest Shackleton famously said that when describing Antarctica, "tongue and pen fail in describing the magic" but the man they called The Boss always gave it a good go. Arriving to Antarctica aboard the Nimrod in 1908, he could very well have been describing the scene facing the Greg Mortimer in late 2023. To the surprise of many – including the Expedition Team – we found ourselves surrounded by tabular icebergs, huge sections of glaciers and ice barriers that had sailed out to sea. It was a dramatic welcome to a frozen world, unknown to many but beloved by all who have ever seen it.

As Shackleton put it: "As far as the eye could see... the great, white, wall-sided bergs stretched east, west, and south, making a striking contrast with the lanes of blue-black water between them. A stillness, weird and uncanny, seemed to have fallen upon everything when we entered the silent water streets of this vast unpeopled white city."



Port Lockroy | Jougla Point

DAY 4 | Monday 18 December

Position at 1324 on 18 Dev

Latitude: 64°46'6" S

Longitude: 63°26'0"W

Course: 255°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 6 kts

Barometer: 999 hpa

Air Temp: 3°C

After a stunning blue-sky approach to the icy continent, we awoke to a reminder that changing weather is ever constant in Antarctica. Flat light and eerie fog gave us tantalising glimpses of sheer icy cliffs and sculpted curves of icebergs. The air was so still that the increasing snowfall was settling on the water's surface and beginning to form pancake-like masses.

Voices stayed quiet as we left the ship in our trusty rubber boats to explore this new unknown and mostly unseen world in Chiriguano Bay. Eerie shapes of ice loomed out of the mist, and we were treated to views of our first penguins, the gentoo, and even a small Antarctic shag nesting area.

Marine mammals also gave us a couple of treats—we got to see our first Weddell seal doing a fine imitation of a land slug. Not to be outdone, we had a unexpected sight of a female Elephant seal equally at home having a snooze on the ice.

Back onboard, as the ship repositioned further south, there was a lot of activity at the shop – a run on postcards in prep for sending home with a very special postmark from Antarctica. On arrival to our anchorage, the Port Lockroy team came onboard and shared their experience of life there on Goudier Island and gave us an opportunity to go home with unique souvenirs, with proceeds going to support the ongoing preservation and education work by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust.

Once our shopping urges had been satisfied, the Expedition Team were on hand to give us a ride to shore where we were able to explore Jougla Point, complete with gentoo and Antarctic shag colonies for our viewing pleasure. The weather was quite atmospheric to start, with big fat flakes of snow whipping around, but then visibility rose and the sun began to light up icy slopes both near and far. Even Snow White and her seven dwarf mountains tried to peek through the clouds for a few moments.

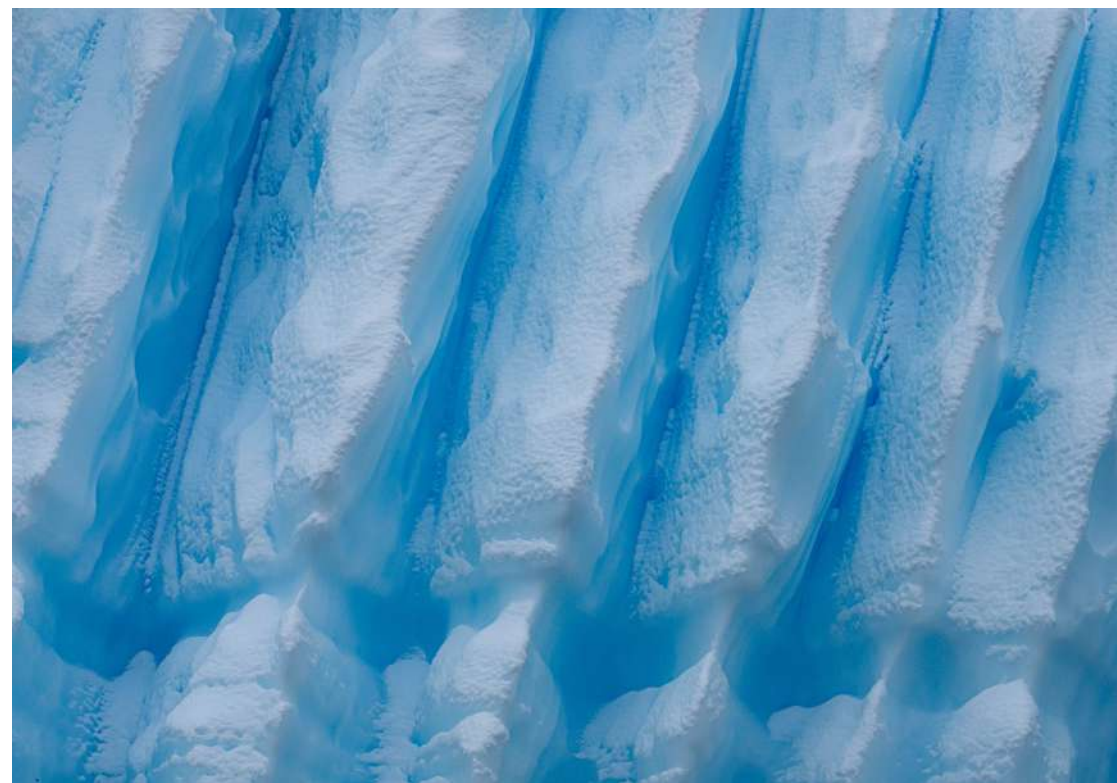
The penguins were unperturbed through it all, continuing their rock stealing and ecstatic braying regardless of wind, snow or sun.

Towards the end of our time ashore we experienced a rare treat—listening to Weddell seals communicate to each other while they were hauled out on the ice. Their trills and sonic whistles seemed like a backdrop to a space-themed movie and may have inspired an onboard competition for who could do the best seal song imitation... followed closely by best penguin bray attempt!

The wide variety of sights and sounds from today were an unforgettable introduction to this icy continent and left us only wanting more. Onward south!









Across the Antarctic Circle!

DAY 5 | Tuesday 19 December 2023

Position at 0907 on 19 Dec

Latitude: 65°59.9'S

Longitude: 67°11.8'W

Course: 205°

Speed: 8 kts

Wind Speed: 20 kts W

Barometer: 998 hpa

Air Temp: 4°C

Southward ho! After a lovely first day in Antarctica, we decided to take a day onboard the ship to push south towards the Antarctic Circle.

In the morning, many of us went to Annette's presentation where we were regaled with a fascinating deeper dive into the lives of penguins. Who knew that they could dive so deep and hold their breath for so long? Or that the calls between partners or parents and chicks are so unique that they can be heard distinctly through the cacophony of a colony? We felt we knew these curious birds a bit better by the time Annette's lecture was through.

Through the fog we pushed further, nearing ever closer to the circle. Next up in our daily educational program, Linda presented an appetiser plate of everything Antarctic with her lecture 'Antarctica 101'.

She covered everything from the formation of the continent, the depth of the icecap, the intricate food web and delicate polar ecosystem to the human exploration and discovery of this remote place and on to more contemporary Antarctic politics and the effects of climate change.

She shared that the polar regions are really the harbingers of the change we are seeing in our climate systems. Since they are the coldest places on earth, they are most quickly affected by any general warming in our earth's atmosphere. While changes are already happening in Antarctica, it is special to be able to witness the continent as is right now.

Then it was time! 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.....HONK. The ship's horn blared out as we crossed the famed Antarctic Circle, where the sun is above the horizon for 24 continuous hours at least once a year.

First crossed by Captain James Cook 151 years ago this coming January, it is still a unique and special place to be able to experience. Foreheads were stamped and champagne glasses clinked in celebration of this wild and wonderful place.

Jamie's dulcet tones filled the afternoon as he shared the story of the Belgian explorer, Adrien De Gerlache as the first expedition to ski in Antarctica, camp in Antarctica, and overwinter in Antarctica. The places we will explore on our own voyage bear the namesakes of many of the members of this expedition.

As we sailed further south aiming for Marguerite Bay, it was easy to do a double take as we passed our fellow passengers onboard with a big round circle on their forehead – truly signifying that we are all part of a special group that gets to experience life below the Antarctic Circle.







Horseshoe Island and Bongrain Point

DAY 6 | Wednesday 20 December

Position at 1354 on 20 Dec

Latitude: 67°48'2"S

Longitude: 67°43'5"W

Course: 245°

Speed: 10kts

Wind Speed: 10 kts WSW

Barometer: 1002 hpa

Air Temp: -3°C

We woke this morning to Alex announcing the arrival of a new day, and oh what a day to remember! Opening the curtains to the wintry world below the Antarctic Circle, calm seas stretched away to island landscapes blanketed in ice and snow. Mountain peaks soared into clouds, snow flurries drifted by. We'd made it to Marguerite Bay, discovered in 1909 by the French Antarctic Expedition. Jean-Baptiste Charcot named several landmarks in the area, including Marguerite Bay, for his wife.

At 0730 the snowshoe crew layered up, ready to explore with Monika and Dan. They headed out to scale Mount Searle, a vantage point high up on Horseshoe Island. Finishing breakfast, the rest of us soon followed suit.

We took a Zodiac ride back in time to this small rocky island, discovered and named by the British Graham Land Expedition under John Rymill, who mapped the area by land and from the air between 1934 and 1937. We were interested in visiting Horseshoe Island Hut, or Y- Base, at 67°48'S, established by the British Antarctic Survey in 1955 as a scientific base for the upcoming International Geophysical Year (IGY). Research carried out here included geology, meteorology and topographic surveys. Our exploration around the now historic site, conserved under the Antarctic Treaty, gave us a real flashback to the 1950s and '60s, enriching our knowledge of Antarctic science and exploration.

Hikers, snorkellers and kayakers alike observed an abundance of wildlife: crabeater seals taking a break from hunting for krill, Adélie penguins pondering the possibilities of a new rockery, Brown skuas and Antarctic terns guarding nesting sites from curious visitors. An amazing outing, we were all keen for a hot cup of tea back in the comforts of Greg Mortimer.

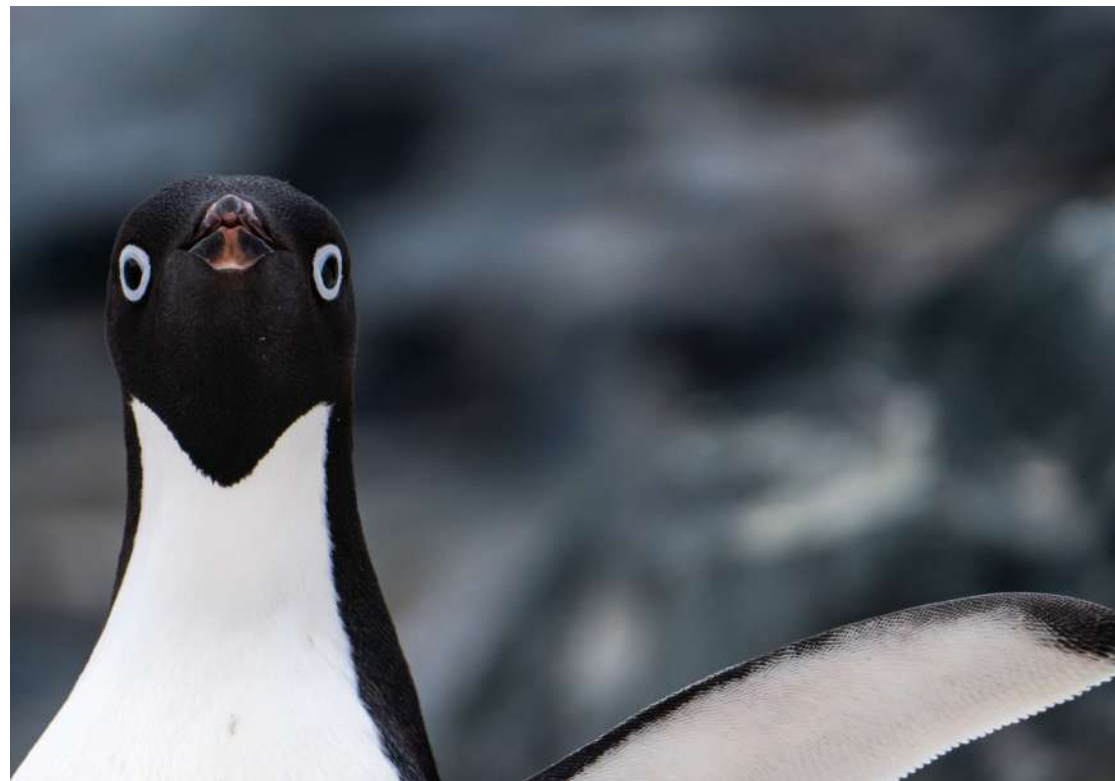
Cruising north along the coast of Porquois Pas Island, the expedition team announced a pod of Orca had been sighted. Binoculars and cameras in hand, everyone took to the top decks for better viewing as approximately a dozen showed off their tall dorsal fins.

In the afternoon our team went ashore at Bongrain Point Adélie penguin colony. On approach to the icy beach, hundreds of the curious Adélie Penguins paused what they were doing to watch us. We remained a polite distance away, wandering around to explore. Little penguin highways were busy with adélies waddling or tobogganing to or from shore. Cutest of all, the first fluffy chicks of the season huddled close to their parents for warmth and food.

To finish off the amazing activity of the day, it was time for the Polar Plunge! Swimwear on, we launched off the plunge platform into the frigid icy waters, surfacing to applauding spectators while realising just how special it was to be in this place, Antarctica.







Polar Plunge

DAY 6 | Wednesday 20 December













Red Rock Ridge and Stonington Island

DAY 7 | Thursday , 21 December 2023

Position at 1159 on 21 Dec

Latitude: 68°16'0"S

Longitude: 67°12'0"W

Course: 020°

Speed: 0.1kts

Wind Speed: 0.7 kts

Barometer: 1002 hpa

Air Temp: 4°C

The day can be summed up by three words: sun, ice, and fun!

What a day to be in Antarctica, at 68°20' south, our southernmost point of the voyage.

Early morning, the sky clears up and the sun comes out as a brilliant surprise to make our seventh day of the expedition brighter than we could have expected. The mountains around us are showing their tops and sunscreen is now a mandatory piece of equipment for the operations.

Two landings are made. In the morning, we step for our first time on the Antarctic Continent itself! The view is breathtaking. The sea is covered with massive blue icebergs and broken sea ice where many resting seals can be observed including even the amazing Leopard seal. Which, by the way, doesn't seem to bother the few adélie penguins of the area near Red Rock Ridge, our first landing site of the day.

Everyone seems to realise that it is summer now in this part of the earth when we gather on the top deck for the voyage photo.

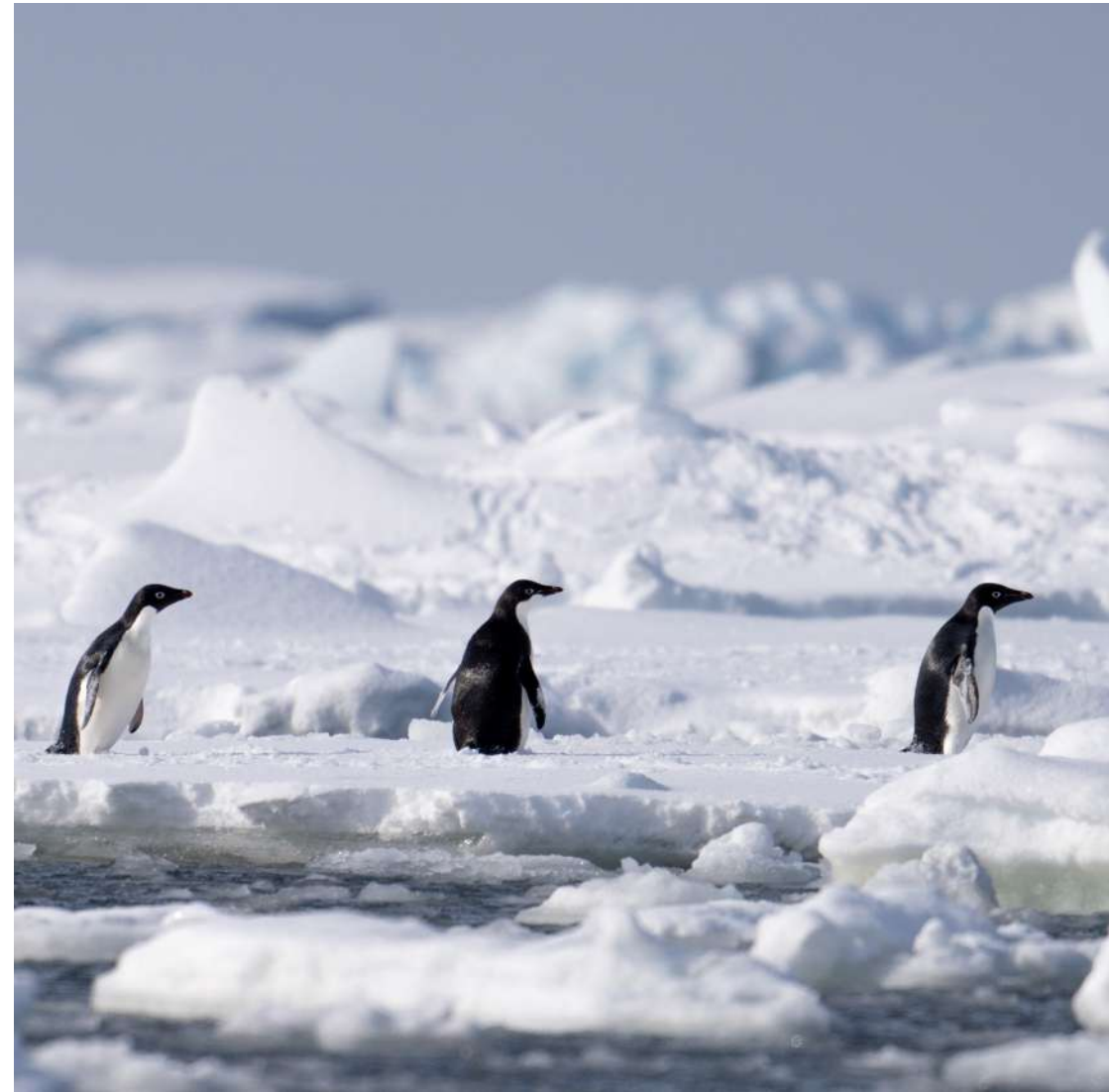
The afternoon had nothing to envy from the prior landing. Stonington Island proves to be an epic location with indescribably beautiful scenery. No wonder this place was chosen by the Americans and the British to conduct surveys below the Antarctic Circle.

A little gem in the calm water of a beautiful, sheltered bay against a gigantic glacier front that used to connect to the island of Stonington at the time of early Antarctic exploration. The ride from our home, the Greg Mortimer to the landing site is a memory that should stay in the Expeditioners' minds for many years to come.

Indeed, the broken sea ice in the bay makes the Zodiac ride a tricky moment for our drivers. The moving maze built from the drifting blocks of ice provides the afternoon with the special treat of an icy bumper boat ride to and from the island. Visiting the historic bases on shore always feels like a dive into history.

A few other ships have made it this far south during the season and we have made it memorable.

While it is now time to slowly start our journey back north, wearing our most beautiful hats, we finish our day with a top deck barbecue, marking the end of a special expedition day in Marguerite Bay. A great way to end our day below the Antarctic Circle... as we wish you a Happy (Southern) Summer Solstice!













Crystal Sound

DAY 8 | Friday, 22 December

Position at 1741 on 22 Dec

Latitude: 65°45'6" S

Longitude: 66°48'3"W

Course: 020°

Speed: 11 kts

Wind Speed: 1 kt NE

Barometer: 998 hpa

Air Temp: 0°C

A flurry of excitement and a flurry of snowflakes this morning as we woke to news of a white humpback whale (thanks Niall!) and a generous covering of snow on the decks. Not to mention the bonus second crossing of the Antarctic Circle that we'd achieved overnight as we looped up over the north of Adelaide Island and then back down again. Quite a lot to take in before the first cup of coffee! And, as it turned out, the surprises for the day were only just beginning.

After breakfast, we headed out for a Zodiac cruise to explore Crystal Sound. Thick white cloud and a curtain of falling snow filtered the mid-summer light, creating an intriguing atmosphere. Icebergs shimmered in the near-distance, with low flat ice floes corralled at their feet and the occasional snow petrel bursting through the scene, piercing the white with its whiteness. All very lovely to look at of course, but wouldn't it be much more fun if we could just step out onto an ice floe and...

"WHALE!"

Everything always stops for a whale! In this case, our encounter with an exceptionally playful minke whale definitely justified the digression. The whale surfaced right amongst us. As Zodiacs tried to ease away, the whale simply followed, so instead we sat the boats quietly where they were and let it check us out on its own terms. What a beautiful and humbling experience to see and hear and even smell a whale, and to find ourselves an object of its curiosity.

Meanwhile, back at the ice floe... one by one, each Zodiac was driven up onto the edge of the floe and we were able to step out onto the floating platform of frozen sea water. A slightly unnerving experience for some, a fun photo opportunity for others!

Part way through proceedings, we were reminded just how dynamic an environment we are in here in Antarctica when our ice floe and the nearest iceberg started heading towards each other. Time to retreat and pick a new ice floe for the remaining Zodiacs to land on.

Back on board the Greg Mortimer, the coffee machine worked overtime as we all gathered around to warm up and share stories and photos from a truly unforgettable morning. And the ship turned its bow for the north.

As we made miles through the afternoon, we joined Joselyn for a fascinating lecture about life under the water in Antarctica, including the surprising variety of organisms that can be found there and the many associations between them. Sea butterflies – ferocious predators with a deceptively beautiful name – were a clear crowd favourite.

And then as we settled in for another delicious dinner and the chance to chat and reflect and compare notes from the day, suddenly, through the restaurant window...

"WHALE!"





Orne Harbour, Foyn Harbour & Enterprise Island

DAY 9 | Saturday 23 December

Position at 0724 on 23 Dec

Latitude: 64°37'7" S

Longitude: 62°32'9" W

Course: 156°

Speed: 4 kts

Wind Speed: 10 kts SW

Barometer: 999 hpa

Air Temp: -4° C

Just when we thought Antarctica had given us enough, we were proved wrong with another fantastic day along the Antarctic Peninsula! Chinstrap penguins, humpback whales, and more!

The morning started off with the classic Antarctic moods with beautiful snow flurries encapsulating our seemingly winter (looking) wonderland. We sailed into Orne Harbour with the objective of seeing the adventurous chinstrap penguins.

All the activities were in full operation as well: snowshoers blazing a trail up to the nearby ridge line, snorkellers seeing all of the wonderful critters under the sea surface and kayakers exploring the brash ice and rugged coastlines where chinstraps reside, all with the towering ice surrounding us as we set off on our own adventures.

Everyone was able to enjoy the character of the hearty chinstrap penguins, feeding, squawking, swimming and jumping around on rocks among the harsh environment they chose to inhabit. Safe to say Orne Harbour exceeded expectations for our morning outing.

However, our next location was calling as we boarded back onto the comfortable Greg Mortimer and tucked into some lunch, provided by the amazing team onboard.

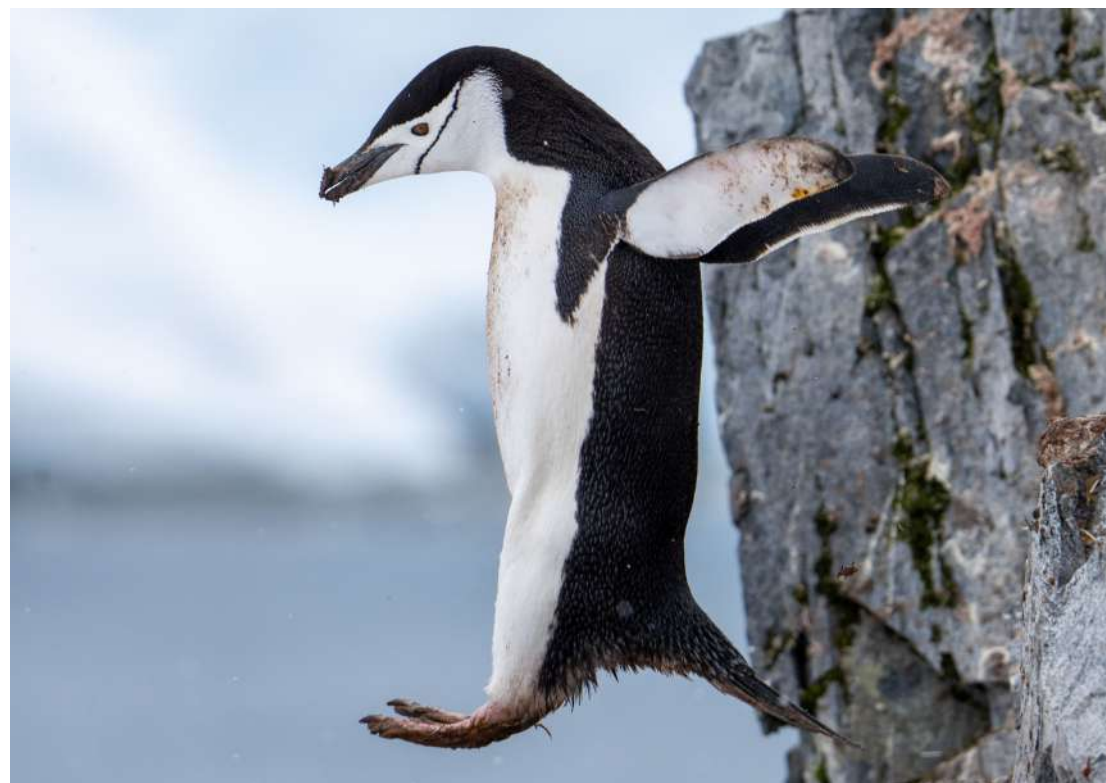
Next stop Foyn Harbour and Enterprise Island a few miles northeast. Known for the wreck of a whaling factory ship that caught fire, this was our next location to explore with a Zodiac cruise. As we prepared for the day's events, humpback whales had already been spotted in the area creating more excitement to get out on a Zodiac and explore another beautiful location. All activities were in full operation making the most of this amazing place. Snow flurries still surrounded us as everyone enjoyed Zodiac cruises, snowshoeing, snorkelling and kayaking. Seals (or Mark's infamous spotty rock seal) were spotted, with special encounters with humpback whales feeding! Before we all got too chilly, we went back on the ship to continue our journey north.

The day's adventures were followed with an entertaining recap where favouritism was encouraged. We all voted on our favourite animals and activities, with the Nacho and the high tech 'applausometer' recording the live voting. Some crowned animals being the infamous minke whale that Jamie did not photograph. Adelie penguins famed for their charismatic behaviour and, of course, kayakers taking the top spot in best activity (the writer of this day's post may be a little biased!).

Again, thank you Antarctica for delivering amazing experiences for us all.







Robert Island | Drake Passage

DAY 10 | Sunday 24 December

Position at 0615 on 24 Dec

Latitude: 0615 on 24 Dec

Longitude: 59°30'3"W

Course: 036°

Speed: 10.7kts

Wind Speed: 12 kts SW

Barometer: 986 hpa

Air Temp: -1°C

We woke in the morning to relatively calm seas and winds coming up on Robert Island in the South Shetland Sub Antarctic Islands, at the northern end of the Peninsula.

The suspense was palpable at Recap the previous night as it was unsure whether we would get out for an activity this morning. Excitement then built in the morning as our fearless leader Alex had announced we would indeed get to set foot on the island and explore a rocky beach, full of elephant seals and penguins.

It was like being transported to South Georgia as the diversity of wildlife and Antarctic greenery - with mosses and plants - was a notable difference from the cold, harsh rock and ice of the Peninsula.

The early start was well worth the effort, as we approached the island bay in Zodiacs landing on a calm sheltered beach which looked like a postcard for Subantarctic wildlife.

We watched in awe as the elephant seal weaners and adolescents were practicing jousting with each other and belching and blowing raspberries making many of us burst out with laughter. The chinstrap and gentoo penguins were swimming around in the bay preening and rinsing themselves while doing little barrel rolls, seemingly playing with each other in a display of inter-species harmony.

We explored our last penguin rookery of the trip, with a strong smell of guano in the air with less snow cover to hide the pungent scent. A short walk to a high point on the ridge provided glorious views into the next bay on the other side of the spit of land we were on. Here we were treated to a literal pile of elephant seals, that looked like it must have harboured a few hundred of these giant animals.

The snorkellers got into the frigid waters for the last time as well and experienced the swimming penguins up close and personal while the snowshoers took the opportunity to get higher and catch a view of the surrounding icy islands through the snow and cloud hanging low over our heads.

Avoiding some nesting Antarctic terns in the rocks on the ridgeline, the alpine team made their way down to the beach to get in some quality time with the elephant seals.

Then it was back on the ship for 11:00 so that we could set sail and turn our bow to the north and head with haste to Ushuaia to get ahead of the mega windstorm that was brewing off Cape Horn.

The motion of the ocean continues to increase in intensity and we celebrated the Christmas Holidays with a special Christmas Dinner, followed by a carol sing-along, rounding out Christmas Eve.





Christmas Day: At Sea, Drake Passage

DAY 11 | Monday, 25 December

Position at 1518 on 25 Dec

Latitude: 56°51'6" S

Longitude: 63°46'3"W

Course: 332°

Speed: 12kts

Wind Speed: 37 kts W

Barometer: 1003hpa

Air Temp: 3°C

If we got the "Drake Lake" treat on the way down to Antarctica, Neptune was now catching up with us on the "Drake Shake". As we headed back northwards into the Drake Passage, we got a real feel of why this stretch of the ocean between the latitudes of 50° and 60° South is called the "Furious Fifties". Strong westerly winds build up through the lack of land masses around Antarctica and are known to cause large waves and rough seas. The terms "Furious Fifties" and "Roaring Forties" were first used by sailors in the 19th century while sailing in the southern oceans in reference to the loud noise made by the wind as it blew across the seas and against the ships' sails and rigging.

In these wild Furious Fifties and after last night's Christmas celebrations, we started our day with an extended Christmas brunch, and settled into the increasing rocking and rolling of the ship. White crests on the grey waves and spray washing over the ship reminded us of the harsh conditions outside the windows of our comfortable warm ship.

Just after brunch the hotel department delighted us with a towel folding workshop, with Fernando and Fathur providing detailed instructions about how to magically transform ordinary white towels into the cutest animals – we witnessed the creation of a penguin, bear, elephant, rabbit and hanging monkey.

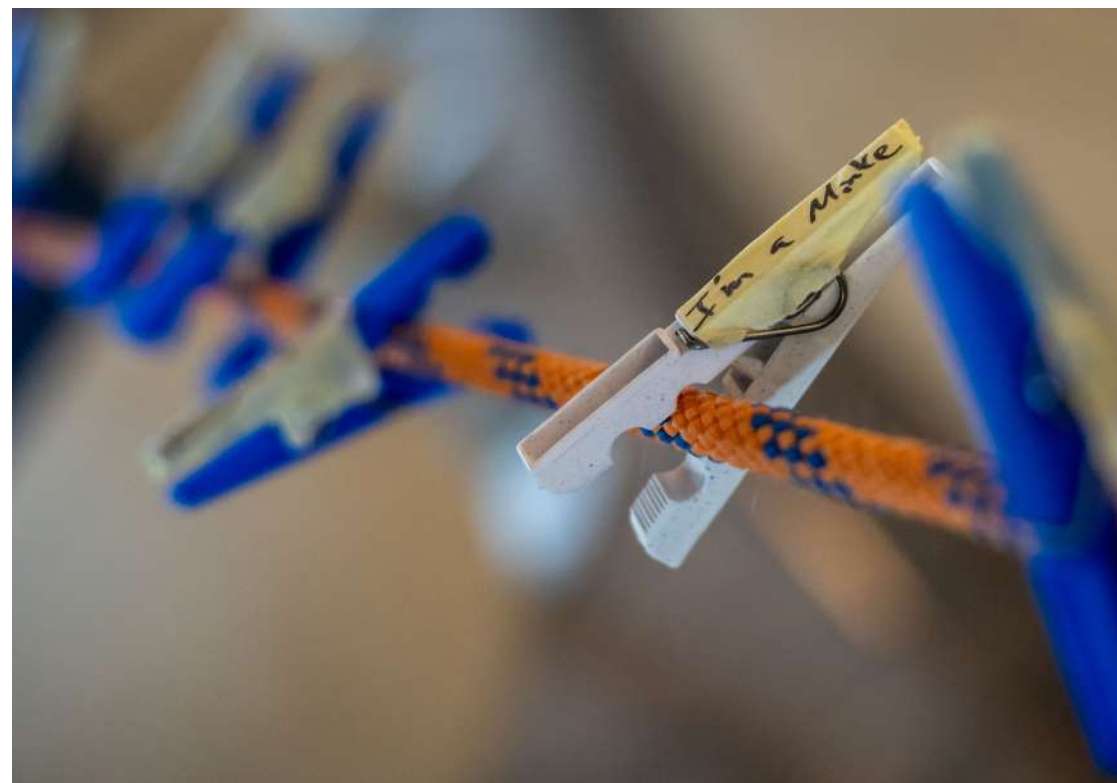
As we got deeper into the Drake Passage, we had again some of the majestic albatrosses following us, just like those gliding around the ship on our southward trajectory. This was finally our transition journey from planet Antarctica back into the real world.

The "How big is it?" quiz challenged our knowledge and estimation capacities for a wide range of animals and objects, from a gentoo penguin over a humpback whale pectoral to the size of our Assistant Expedition Leader Elena, measured from tiptoe to the last extension of her hair.

The Happy Feet movie took us back once more into the icy world of penguins that we had just got to know so well. Nourished by bags of tasty popcorn, our thoughts drifted between the icebergs, whales, seals and penguins that we had encountered during our voyage, and we became once more aware of the privilege of having been able to visit this unique place.

By the end of the day, we had approached the northern quarter of the Drake Passage, which held us in its rolling waves until the very end. Our memories of rolling seas were accompanied by the quote of Alfred Nansen: "This, then, was the Drake Passage, the most dreaded bit of ocean on the globe – and rightly so. Here nature has been given a proving ground on which to demonstrate what she can do if left alone."





At Sea in the Drake Passage

DAY 12 | Tuesday 26 December 2023

Position at 0900 on 26 Dec

Latitude: 53°54'0" S

Longitude: 61°25'7" W

Course: 034°

Speed: 13 kts

Wind Speed: 30 kts SW

Barometer: 1015 hpa

Air Temp: 4°C

If anyone doubted the definition of tumult, our extended trip coming back from Antarctica gave us a pretty good definition. A windstorm that we hoped would blow through without much consequence unexpectedly dwelt around the southern tip of South America, making our return to port much more complicated than forecast. We rocked and we rolled, pitched and listed.

While breakfast was quieter than usual, those lucky enough to have dodged Poseidon's wrath continued with the daily program.

During the morning lecture on adventure photography, guests in the lecture room could have been forgiven for thinking they were being given a 4DX experience, as the ship dramatically listed to starboard.

As the sound of crashing glasses filled the room and the speaker struggled to stand, it suddenly felt as though we had been dragged back into the legendary Drake Passage of our hopes and nightmares.

In Britain, the 26th of December is known as Boxing Day. Its original meaning long since lost, (it once was a time when people gave away boxes to the needy) it is now as likely to relate to family members challenging each other to a boxing match as it is to do with boxes being donated to charity. In any case, there was perhaps a feeling of concussion as we swung back towards the green continent having spent so long in a world of ice.

The heroic work of the hotel staff meant that we never lost a meal, nor a drink, and to see them gracefully dancing through the restaurant with bottles of wine and trays of dishes was reminiscent of watching sublime albatross over a stormy sea.

While lectures were given, movies shown, and memories shared, land was eventually sighted. Ahead lay Staten Island, or Isla de los Estados, a vast and largely unvisited Argentinian Island. Giant, under-studied, and always uninhabited, it felt as though it could belong to the continent we'd just left behind, but to eyes now adjusted to the whites, blacks and blues of Antarctica, its presence felt almost jarring.

Home was looming, but this final wild frontier was soon to be replaced by a tangible part of the South American continent. Just as we thought civilisation was around the corner, however, a dramatic swoop of albatross and a gang of giant petrels flew out to the ship. The sun shone as it disappeared over the horizon, while the mighty silhouettes of these massive birds reminded us that we weren't quite home just yet.



At Sea | Beagle Channel

DAY 13 | Wednesday 27 December

Position at 1105 on 27 Dec

Latitude: 55°00'0" S

Longitude: 65°36'0" W

Course: 252°

Speed: 6 kts

Wind Speed: 20 kts SW

Barometer: 1001 hpa

Air Temp: 1°C

We woke up at the entrance of the Beagle Channel. What a different view, mountains with green on them, the smell of grass and the Tierra del Fuego birds round the ship. There is a different feeling today maybe because it's our last day and this all trip was so amazing, full of experience and new friends.

After our great breakfast we have a Q&A from Chief Mate Andrey and Chief Engineer, they told us about how they managed the bridge, how they navigate and all the gadgets that they use to sail through ice, fog and islands, how they get the water and what they do with the waste. It is super impressive to hear about everything that happens behind the curtain. While we are having fun on board or on land in Antarctica, they are planning and looking at the weather to provide us the best experience. Right after, Pascal, the Hotel Manager, told us everything about overseeing the biggest department onboard, taking care of all the facilities and the great meals, how they keep the greens and lettuce fresh and that they have used 55 to 60 dozen eggs per day during this trip.

Disembarkation briefing was followed by a session to answer all the questions not answered from the question box. We learned that in fact there are sharks in Antarctica; how to navigate with a sextant. This was followed by a bird survey on the Beagle Channel; we saw albatrosses and sooty shearwaters flying gracefully right on the top of the waves. We experienced the sound of the furious wind from the southwest. After lunch we had some time to pack, but also some time to do galley tours. We could visit the place where these amazing guys do their magic to feed us. We saw some good old videos from the British Antarctic bases, places where we visited in this trip and some about huskies in Antarctica.

All activities have their final meetings with photos and bubbles, celebrating their experience together. And finally, we gather in the lecture theatre for the Captain's Farewell. Alex gave us an inspirational speech, making us understand that now we have a mission, we are ambassadors of Antarctica, of the magic, and that we can protect it.

Dinner was fantastic, Pascal and the team sang for us, and we sang together, making us feel like part of a big family, followed by a talent show for our final night.

This trip was marvellous from the beginning when, all full of hope, we embarked in Ushuaia ready for an adventure along with the E-Team, and we got far more than we came looking for.





Ushuaia

DAY 14 | Thursday 28 December

Position at 0850 on 28 Dec

Latitude: 54°48'6" S

Longitude: 68°18'0"W

Course: Docked in Ushuaia

Speed: 0 kts

Wind Speed: 18 Kts SW

Barometer: 1015 hpa

Air Temp: 6°C

Disembarkation day at Ushuaia, Argentina

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





Snowshoe Log

Snowshoe Guides: Dan Phillips, Monika Bishoff

Snowshoers:	Kevin Moriarty	John Gannon	Jennifer Thomson
Janet Couch	Deborah Meaden	Emma Gannon	
Judy Myers	Paul Farmer	Benjamin Gannon	
Joanna Moriarty	Julie Blackshaw	Thomas Gannon	

Day 4 – December 18 Chiriguano Bay/Port Lockroy

Morning session in Chiriguano Bay scouting for Snowshoe access in a lesser known location. Eventually found access on northern spit between tidewater glaciers. This is the known documented landing but it was a little steep and intimidating for the guys' first trip out. Zodiac cruise was great with first penguins, seals and a whale. Boots on the ground, with a small rocky beach landing to step out onto the island.

Afternoon session in Port Lockroy with a nice mellow intro to the snowshoes without the confusion and complexity of the rope at the same time. Everyone very happy after being intimidated by seeing the last steep site and relaxed a lot more after walking around gently on the flats of Jougla Point.

Day 6 – December 20th Horseshoe Island Base 'Y'

Non-glaciated Snowshoe at Shelly Bay. Viewpoint from north broad ridge of Mt Searle. Views of glacier and tidewater as well as fast ice in far off bays. The team went high to an impressive viewpoint and descended via a small loop variation to get back to the same pick up. Penguins and skuas prevented an A to B style trip getting back to the base, but timing wise this worked well anyway.

PM Bongrain Point, Porquois Pas. Snowshoe up steep rolling convexity to a high point. Keen crew went for a bit of a steeper walk to a great view of the surrounding scene. Also had time to visit the regular landing to check out the chinstrap colony.

Day 7 – December 21st Southern Most sites

AM Redrocks ridge Zodiac cruise. Quite entertaining, driving around in the sea ice with many Weddell and crab eater seals on floes. One leopard seal as well. Regular landing was continental which was a buzz to tick off the 7th continent for many, and all other slopes in range were inaccessible due to steep ice cliff protection. Lots of beautiful big icebergs littered the bay.

PM Stonington: Neny Island provided an opportunity to have a less steep enjoyable walk on non-glaciated snow bench with great views of glassy conditions with mountain reflections as well as an impromptu polar plunge bonus round for the boys.

Day 8 – December 22 Ice Floe Landing, Laird Island.

AM Managed a landing on a 60m square ice floe with some light winds providing entertainment to protect access to the ice with the Zodiacs. While boating around, a few lucky Zodiacs had a close encounter with an inquisitive and playful minke whale.

PM At Sea. Headed for the Gerlache.

Day 9 – December 23 Orne and Foyn Harbour

AM Orne Harbour – Spigot Peak was a nice easy uphill to a view of the colonies to the south, on rope and then avoided ridge to summit as too many birds that proximity protocols would not allow us to pass. Half the clients totally happy with this. Clients joined main landing highway track and spent time with the chinstrap colony.

PM Foyn Harbour – Enterprise Island, did the regular short moderate angle slope north of the shipwreck and gained the wide broad summit cap of the island.

Day 10 – December 24th Robert Point, Robert Island, South Shetlands.

AM Robert Point elephant seal beach. Short walk to a high point to see the other side of the island then down with plenty of time for the guests to spend time with the elephant seals (on enthusiastic request).

PM At Sea. Headed to Ushuaia to avoid a significant windstorm preventing access to the Beagle on our planned schedule.



Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: Liz MacNeil, Gabe Vink Wackernagel, Gabby Bruce

Number of Paddlers: 14

Total Paddle Outings: 8

Total Distance Paddled: 30.8 km

Paddlers:	Mark Miller	Gemma McDonnell	Kevin Chin
Brian Chinn	Aleksei Ivanov	Jane Seabrooke	Secy Cheung
Kari Chinn	Jennifer Monaham	Jean-Marc Joly	Niall Trainer
Darline Holland	Benjamin Mossop	Andre Joly	

18/12/23 Morning: Chiriguana Bay, 1.8km

Our very first paddle with the entire team, with near perfect conditions. Flat and calm within the sheltered bay with snow falling. A quick paddle chat, and we were off on our adventure. Low hanging fog made for amazing scenes and moods along the paddle. Surrounded by ice, bergy bits, brash ice and large icebergs made for an interesting first paddle, not to mention the glassy calm conditions. Gentoo penguins were porpoising around us with the odd chinstrap penguins swimming about as well. A small iceberg did an amazing roll which was spectacular to see; perfect conditions and scenes for the first paddle of the trip!

18/12/23 Afternoon: Port Lockroy & Jougla Point, 2.1km

We had 10 participants on the second outing of the day, while the others decided to head ashore to meet the gentoo penguin colony. We had slight easterly winds of about 7-10 knots said to increase, with that in mind we set off keeping an eye on conditions. Paddling into the sheltered bay, we observed many penguins porpoising and a sleeping Weddell seal on the fast ice. The glacial face close by made for beautiful views with the clouds clearing a tiny bit to spot some mountain tops. A quick Zodiac pick up from Gabby allowed everyone who wanted to have a brief visit to the gentoo penguin rookery.

20/12/23 Morning: Horseshoe Island, 4.3km

Nine keen paddlers launched from the ship eager to explore the icebergs around us. The paddle started well with some scenic views of the icebergs close by. Observing cormorants (also known as the flying penguins) nestled on the ice and flying overhead. Low clouds loomed and sea conditions were calm but cold. As we made our way to the headland, we spotted many Adélie penguins keeping us entertained. The fast ice around the bay prevented us paddling deeper so we skirted the edge of it to find a sleepy crabeater seal on an ice floe. The slight breeze kept temperatures chilly, making the 1.5 hour paddle a perfect amount of time to be on the water and get to shore to check out the historic hut.

20/12/23 Afternoon: Bongrain Point, 4km

Amazing paddle: the Adélie colony onshore provided plenty of entertaining penguin action. With a slight tail breeze, we barely had to paddle maximising our time to view the Adélie penguins. Plenty of weaving and ducking through brash ice, observing Weddell seals and funny penguin behaviours made for an excellent paddle. We

eventually ended up at the glacial face where we paddled into the iceberg graveyard, which was spectacular. We paddled our way winding through the iceberg graveyard with the cracks and crashes from the nearby glacier. The paddle was so good we didn't feel the need to go to shore, so we stayed on the water.

21/12/23 Morning: Red Rock Ridge, 3km

The sun finally blessed us with its presence! A beautiful day as it peaked through the clouds, a rarity in Antarctica. Ice floes filled the bay which provided some excellent kayaking, weaving and bobbing through the gaps in the ice. Adélie penguins porpoising and popping up onto the ice floes to check us out, sliding on their bellies as usual, sparking joy in everyone. The water was as flat as a pancake which allowed us to make an ice floe landing! As we rammied up onto the ice floe with our kayaks, we were joined by one, two, three... more Adélie penguins! After some group photos we paddled on saying goodbye to our Adélie friends. Eventually we paddled back to the ship to all jump in the zodiac to make our very first continental landing!

21/12/23 Afternoon: Stonington Island, 3km

The sunny skies persisted and the low winds remained for another beautiful paddle. Again, the bay was clogged with plenty of broken sea ice which made for glassy paddling conditions. Many of the floes were scattered with plenty of crabeater seals all enjoying the sunshine. The most memorable aspect of the paddle was the seals perched almost everywhere, allowing closer encounters to watch them yawning and enjoying their day. Enough time was allowed to do another landing and check out the British base hut.

23/12/23 Morning: Orne Harbor, 7.1km

Brash ice! We were able to paddle through plenty of brash ice in front of a spectacular glacial front. The protection from the ice created calm waters for us to enjoy, with 12 of us on the water – almost the whole team on the paddle. The main objective of this paddle was to view the chinstrap colonies; these guys love rugged and rough conditions, which were no trouble for us kayakers to view. After our amazing brash paddle, we made our way out to the coastline to see chinstraps, cormorants, and a couple of gentoos all hanging out together on a rugged point. While we were out there the wind picked up which made for rougher waters, however everyone was up for the challenge. After enjoying the diverse birdlife, we paddled across the bay to find some shelter. WHALE, in the distance we spotted a humpback which we paddled toward. With a couple fluke sightings, we called it a day and jumped into the Zodiac, back to the ship to a warm coffee after our biggest day on the water.

23/12/23 Afternoon: Foyn Harbor, 5.5km

As soon as we entered the bay there were plenty of humpback whale sightings. Eager to get out on the water we pre-arranged two groups; a chill out paddle with the aim to take it easy stop and take photos, and a go the distance paddle. With four chillers and three goers, we set off on our adventures. Snow was flurrying about as we all paddled, more icebergs and amazing scenery. We were able to check out the wreck of an old whaling ship that caught fire in the early 1900s. Rock hopping and weaving through small islands, the goers caught the chillers as we all observed a humpback whale feeding in the bay. A truly amazing experience to witness. Little did we know at the time that this would be our last kayak outing. An excellent paddle to finish the trip with!







Snorkel Log

Snorkel Guides: Eddie Hauzer, Thomas Gov, Birgitta Muerk

Snorkellers:	Erin Michelle Compton	Alice Kenny
Jacquelyn Myers	Sophia Noguchi	Simone Rudolph
Lok Ian Tam	Isaac Noguchi	Dirk Buchta
Kuong Leng Chan	Patricia Shelton	

18/12-2023 PM: Jougla Point

Our first snorkel in Antarctica! For most of us, it is our first time in a drysuit. To get used to the gear and get comfortable with the wondrous, cold environment we are about to jump into, we do a try out snorkel in shallow water. Very excited, we enter the water one by one from the Zodiac. The visibility is good. Only small movements are needed when we relax and slowly drift along the underwater wall of Jougla Point, which is inhabited by beauty filled life such as sea stars, yellow snails and algae. The sea floor is covered by kelp and some of us are very lucky to see a couple of gentoo penguins quickly pass by. Such a thrilling start of our Antarctic snorkel adventure!

20/12-2023AM: Horseshoe island

First dive into history! After visiting the British base, occupied now by brown skuas and some blue shags, we snorkelled in a little bay with beauty icebergs safe enough to look at their blue bellies. A few seals came near the Zodiacs to check on our operations.

20/12-2023 PM: Bongrain point

Adélie snorkelie! After an hour on shore enjoying the presence of many Adélie penguins, we wondered whether we should we try to get in the water with the ones getting in and out off the beach? Yes! The visibility wasn't great, but our dear Mouse managed to spot a few! Good sighting of seals around including a leopard seal.

21/12-2023 AM: Red Rocks Ridge

After a continental landing, followed by a Zodiac cruise among the many amazing icebergs, we got ready to explore Red Rocks Ridge underwater too. We entered the water not very far from the landing site. With an estimated visibility of approximately five metres, we can nicely see the bright coloured rocks beneath us and have a closer look at the ice, which is so cool to observe underwater. So many patterns and shapes the different ice sheets and growlers have, none is the other like and it was amazing to see how much more ice there was hidden beneath the surface!

21/12-2023 PM: Stonington

The sun keeps smiling at us when we eagerly head out with the snorkel Zodiacs to scout a good place for snorkelling. There is a lot of ice packed in the bay. As the visibility doesn't look good along the shoreline of Stonington island, we decided to do an ice snorkel further out from land. The strong sun and blue skies provide us with great light when swimming around the floating ice sheets. So beautiful it is to see the sun light playing in the ice underwater. Close to the ice we also saw the small but very important krill. So cool to see them close! After a fun time in the water, we went back to the ship for a brief clothes-change to thereafter enjoy a sunny walk on Stonington island.

23/12-2023 AM: Orne harbour

Just a night after learning about Antarctica plankton, we are swimming in a plankton soup! A literal bloom of krill and c....everywhere. Our early start allows us to quickly get out of our dry suit and join the main operation up the hill to the nesting chin straps penguins.

23/12-2023 PM: Enterprise Island, Governoren wreck

A literal plunge into history. We went out to snorkel above a 108 year old Norwegian shipwreck from the whale hunting time. Such a different snorkelling site.

Cruising around with Zodiacs, we got the chance to meet a humpback whale.

24/12-2023 AM: Robert Point

When arriving at Robert Point in the South Shetland Islands, a playful ocean, with a bit more swell than our previous days in Antarctica, welcomes us for more underwater exploration. Eagerly we dress up in our drysuits and off we go with the first Zodiac. On our way to the snorkel spot, we see chinstrap penguins on the cliffs and young elephant seals on the beach. We choose a stony shallow in the lee side of the cliffs to explore underwater and it doesn't take long until we all are in the water. Kelp and various kinds of algae cover the colourful underwater rock. It truly is beautiful to observe how the underwater vegetation moves with the ocean swell. We also see many limpets on the rocks and to our great happiness, several gentoo penguins quickly pass by. Such a lovely sight and wonderful ending of our Antarctic snorkel adventure!





Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	December													
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Gentoo Penguin				●					●	●				
Chinstrap Penguin				●	●				●	●				
Adelie Penguin				●		●	●	●		●				
Wandering Albatross		●									●	●		
Royal Albatross													●	
Black-browed Albatross	●	●	●								●	●	●	
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross		●	●										●	
Giant Petrel	●	●				●	●		●	●		●	●	
Antarctic Petrel					●									
Cape Petrel		●	●							●		●		
Snow Petrel						●		●						
Antarctic Fulmar (Southern)			●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●		
Blue Petrel		●												
Prion sp. (probably mostly Antarctic)		●	●										●	
White-chinned Petrel		●	●										●	
Sooty Shearwater													●	●
Wilson's Storm-petrel		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	
Black-bellied Storm-petrel		●	●											
Imperial Cormorant (blue-eyed)	●			●		●	●		●					
Cormorant sp. (unidentified)	●												●	●
Chilean Skua	●												●	●
Skua (Brown and/or South Polar)				●		●	●	●	●	●				
Kelp Gull				●		●	●	●	●	●				●
Tern (probably mostly Antarctic)				●		●	●		●	●				
South American Tern	●												●	
Dolphin Gull	●													●



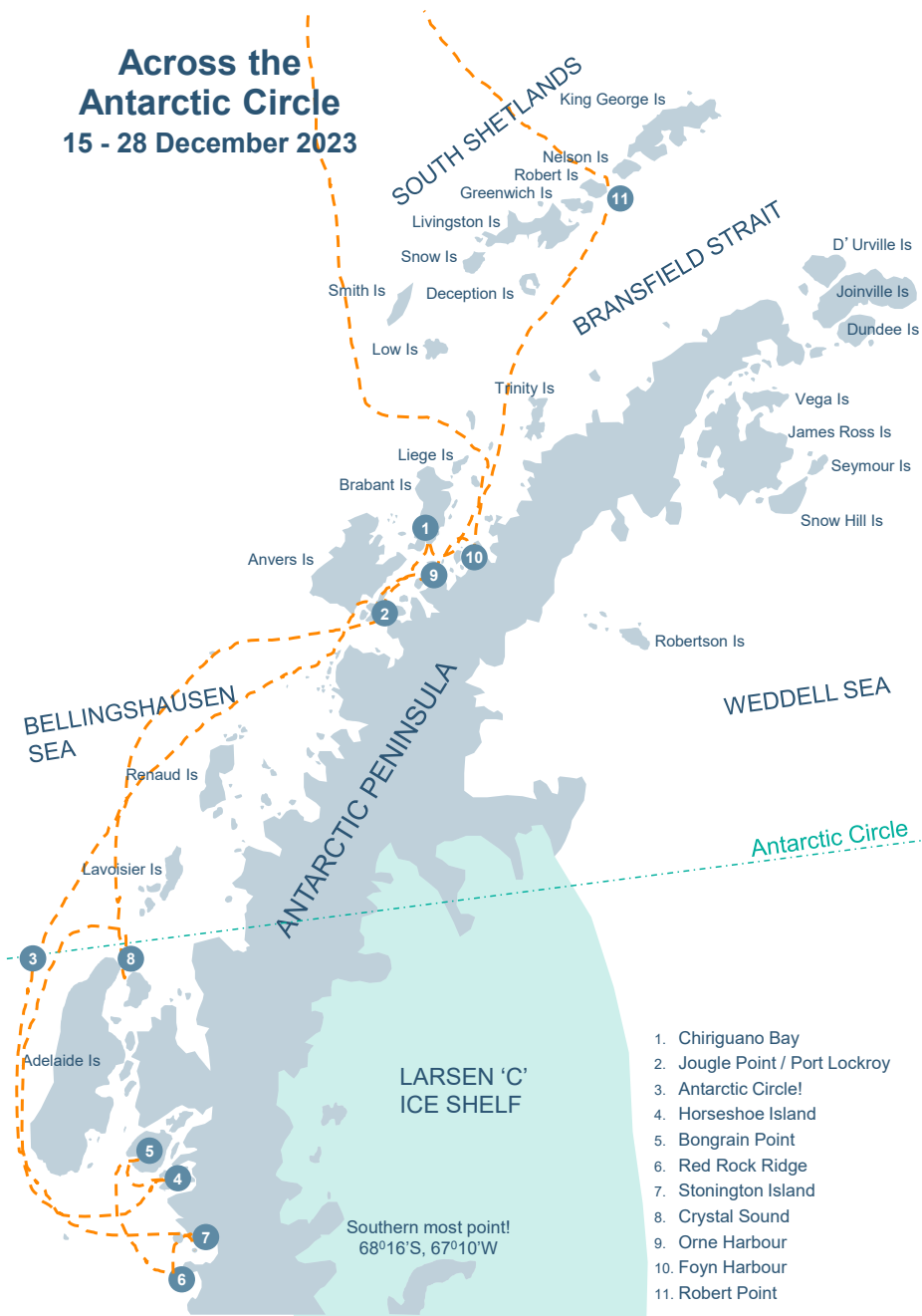
Bird and Mammal Sightings

Mammal Species	December													
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Fur seal sp.														●
Southern Elephant Seal				●						●				
Crabeater Seal				●		●	●	●						
Weddell Seal				●		●	●		●					
Leopard Seal							●							
Minke Whale							●	●						
Humpback Whale			●	●	●				●	●				
Orca						●								
Unidentified Whale	●													
Peale's Dolphin														●



Across the Antarctic Circle

15 - 28 December 2023





Expeditioners:

Owen Allen

Kris Allen

Sanjeev Bandari

Kim Batchelor

Les Batchelor

Julie Blackshaw

Anna Boguslavsky

Dirk Buchta

Brian Carrick

Kuong Leng Chan

Secy Cheung

Kevin Chin

Brian Chinn

Kari Chinn

Mrs Mook Chiu

Ling Chung

Erin Compton

Janet Couch

Wanda Da Rui

Paul Farmer

Diana Franz

David Franz

Emma Gannon

Ben Gannon

Tom Gannon

John Gannon

Hongyuan Gao

Alison Gough

Yaowei Guo

Darlene Holland

Aleksei Ivanov

Andre Joly

Jean-Marc Joly

Vere Kenny

Melissa Klumpar

Paul Lee

Arlene Lee

Hui Liu

Amy Lo

Raymond Lo

Wai Loo

Jeremy Mc Kinstry

Gemma McDonnell

Deborah Meaden

Jenni Metcalfe

Mark Miller

Lauri Mitchell

David Mitchell

Jennifer Monahan

Kevin Moriarty

Joanna Moriarty

Victoria Moss

Ben Mossop

Judy Myers

Carmen Myers

Mook Ng

Isaac Noguchi

Sophia Noguchi

Jennifer Perrin

Hayley Peters

Andrew Peters

Heidi Price

Anthony Price

Pamela Robb

Julie Rose

Simone Rudolph

Tammy Sayer

Jane Seabrooke

Patricia Shelton

Mark Shelton

Linda Shelton

Yazhou Shi

Gary Spink

Neil St John

Laura St John

Tam Tam

Jennifer Thomson

Crystal Threet

Niall Trainor

Matthew Tulini

Pamela Upton

Timothy Vorbach

Rieko Vorbach

Senna Vorbach

Yamato Vorbach

Ozzie Vorbach

Wendy Williamson

Linda Wilson

Alan Wilson

Daniel Wong

Sylvia Wong

Valerie Yuen



Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Alex Cowan

Assistant Expedition Leader: Elena Wimberger

Onboard Expedition Manager: Anne Oeyasaeter

Onboard Expedition Manager Trainee: Kerry Lorimer

Marine Biologist: Annette Sheffer

Naturalist: Linda Steutel

Naturalist / Citizen Science Coordinator: Joselyn Fenstermacher

Naturalist: Mark Brophy

Naturalist: Tracey-Ann Hooley

Expedition Guide: Nacho Marino

Lead Sea Kayak Guide: Liz MacNeil

Sea Kayak Guide: Gabriel Vink Wackernagel

Sea Kayak Guide: Gabby Bruce

Lead Alpine Guide: Dan Phillips

Alpine Guide: Monika Bishoff

Lead Snorkel Guide: Eddie Hauzer

Snorkel Guide: Thomas Gov

Snorkel Guide: Birgitta Mueck

Expedition Medic: Eddie Quinn

Photography Guide: Jamie Lafferty

Zodiac Manager: Sergei Andronov

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Reza Rusooly

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Oleg Kapko

Chief Officer: Andrey Zakalashnyuk

Safety Officer: Sergeii Voina

Bosun: Francis Marvin Linga

Deck Cadet: Goncalo Alexandre Saraiva Aniceto Costa

Ship Doctor: Anzor Chomakhidze

Chief Engineer: Dimitar Vasilev

Hotel Director: Pascal Joubin

Chief Purser: Pia Blanca Bangug

Executive Chef: Edgar Mangalinao

Head Waiter: Jemuel Alcantara

IT Officer: Ihor Yesmienieiev

Receptionist: Ana Gabriela Fernandez

Receptionist: Jonathan Valdez

Head Stateroom: Florente Lusomg

Able Seaman: Dan Well Danico

Able Seaman: Jufri Mujahid

Able Seaman: Nikola Georgiev

Able Seaman: Mark Christian Torero

Able Seaman: Joel Noble

Able Seaman: Roberto Ixtan Mejia

Photography thanks to:

Jamie Lafferty

