

# Antarctic Explorer

Aboard *Greg Mortimer* | 5 February – 14 February 2024



# Frei Station, Antarctica

DAY 1 | Sunday 4 February 2024

Position at 1000 on 4 Feb

Latitude: 64°17.2'S

Longitude: 061°06.4'W

Course: 282°

Speed: 0

Wind Speed: 14 kts SSW

Barometer: 974 hPa

Air Temp: 1°C

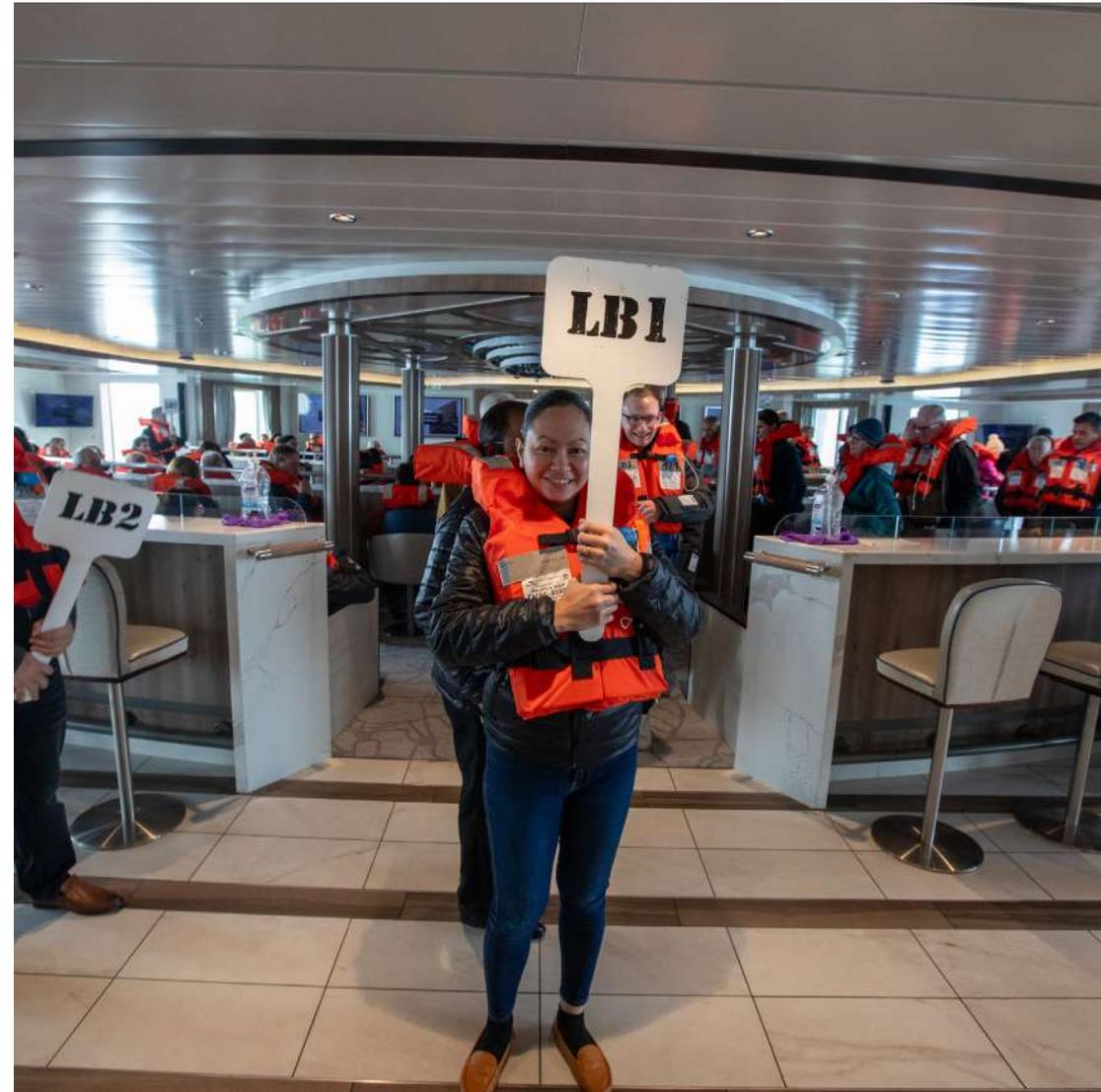
Welcome aboard the *Greg Mortimer*! It was a VERY early start for all, as we met at the airstrip. After the plane, with its lovely chinstrap penguin design, touched down on the black gravel runway, we boarded our bus which brought us down to the beach. Here, a few gentoo and chinstrap penguins splashed in the shallows and preened on the shore – a lovely beginning to our adventure.

Frei Station, King George Island is our first 'taste' of Antarctica. Although much of King George Island is glaciated, this bay is an area of contrast, for here the terrain is stripped bare by the frequent high winds, revealing a stark volcanic landscape that has its own allure, with small, rocky towers and plugs. This will be the last time in over a week that we see anything in the way of civilised activity. It is a bustling little harbour, a small town really, with other ships going about their business, helicopters offloading supplies, and plenty of happenings on shore.

The South Shetland Islands and King George Island were the first to see human activity in the 1820s, not from exploration or scientific study, as many of the stations do now, but as an economic endeavour in sealing. Seal skins were hugely profitable, and as the common story goes, humans hunted the seals to near extinction and the industry went bust. Thankfully fur seals are in a full rebound today, and in the late Austral summer, they are often seen in streams, making their way from South Georgia Island to the South Shetlands.

Once on board, we checked in at reception and were shown to our comfortable staterooms by the housekeeping staff. A delicious breakfast ensued. This was then followed by a large amount of information with some key players in the E-Team as well as our 'Frenchie' Hotel Director, Pascal. It was a busy afternoon with our mandatory safety drill, snorkelling and kayaking briefings and voyager overview. These were ticked off so that the coming days can be filled with outdoor adventure. Understandably it can take some days to become accustomed to ship life, but it took almost no time before there was a buzz of excitement.

We can only imagine what it took to reach the ship from our homes in this new age of travel. But finally, we were all together on board, with those challenges behind. Together we total 115 guests from 8 different countries, along with the 22 Expedition Team and 83 ship's crew from around the globe. We hope you are as excited as we are, about exploring this incredible environment together.



# Sprightly Point

DAY 2 | Monday 5 February 2024

## Position at 1200 on 5 Feb

Latitude: 64°17'2" S

Longitude: 061°06'4" W

Course: 282°

Speed: 0.8 kts

Wind Speed: 4 kts SSW

Barometer: 974 hPa

Air Temp: -1° C

Overnight we transited Bransfield Strait, which separates the South Shetland Islands from the Antarctic Peninsula. The fresh winds that whipped up a swell in the Bransfield eased as we tucked into Hughes Bay on the Danco Coast.

Our Expedition Leader, Ashley had analysed the weather well to find a place we could operate. Nearby Spring Point was possibly the first ever landing site on the Antarctic mainland and Sprightly Island, the object of our morning exploration, was named after one of the many sealing vessels that once plundered nearby waters as early as 1821!

Ready for action, we dressed for antarctic conditions and boarded Zodiacs. Although the temperature was a mild 3 degrees Celsius, the rain cooled us down but did not dampen the enthusiasm for our first adventure.

Icebergs abounded in myriad shapes and sizes and there was plenty of wildlife, all fed by the rich waters of Antarctica. Kelp gulls and skuas circled overhead and our first colony of chinstrap penguins came and went from the water to their hungry chicks on the rocky islets. Their short waddle with outstretched flippers endeared us to them immediately.

A couple of Weddell seals hauled out on ice, with their striking mottled underside, and a couple of fur seals were also spotted. The latter being the prey of the vessel *Sprightly*.

We completed circumnavigating Sprightly Island somewhat damper than we started but happy to have experienced Antarctica in the raw. Our thoughtful galley team had prepared a nice hot mug of bouillon to help us warm up.

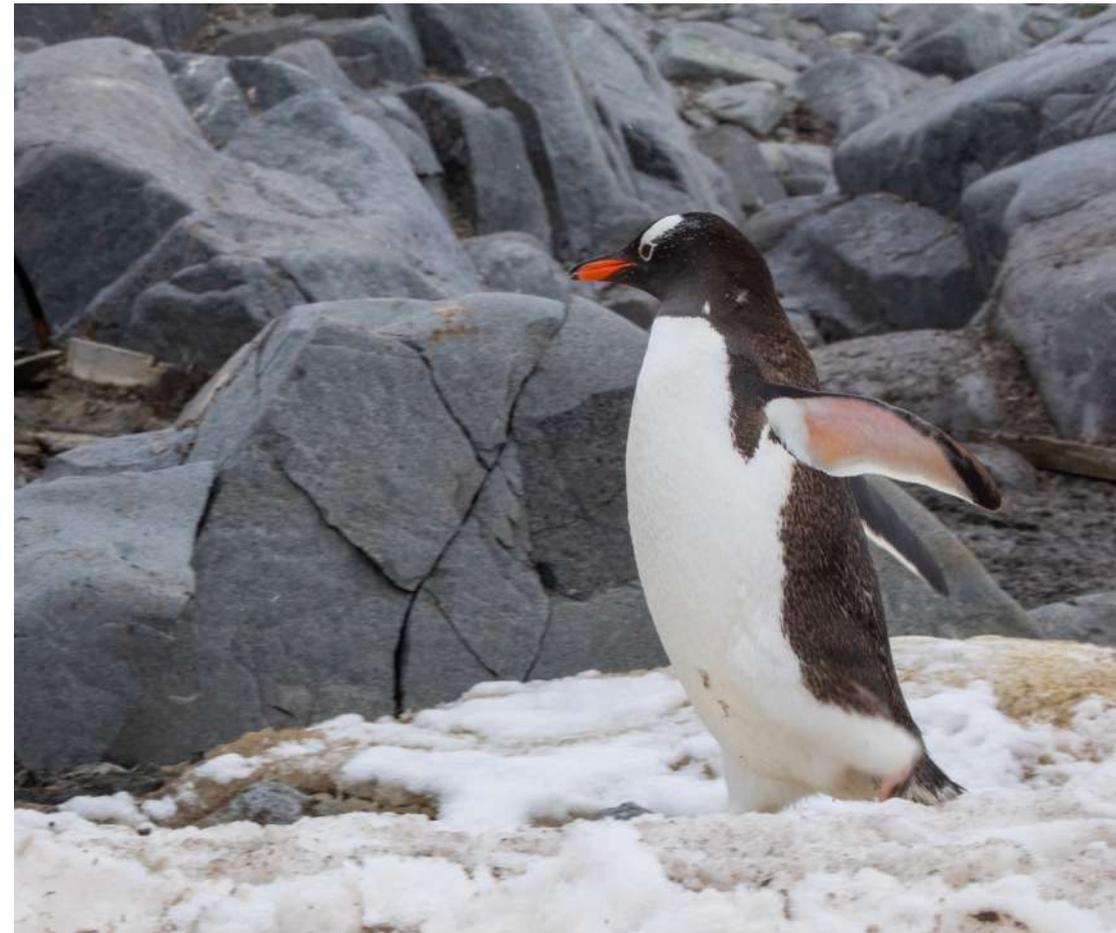
As we entered the northern part of the Gerlache Strait, the brisk winds returned and so the afternoon was spent aboard hearing more about Antarctic environs.

First from our historian, Alasdair, we learned how early Europeans searched for an assumed southern land that would balance the northern landmasses and some of the exploitation, science and land-based expeditions that followed. Being wooden ships with no engines in the early days, their accomplishments were even more amazing amongst the ice and land that we now cruise in comfort.

Next our marine biologist, Lea, took us on a light-hearted but in-depth summary of the seals of the Southern Ocean. We learned the difference between true and eared seals and the extent to which sexual dimorphism exists, how the animals can help us with science, and their varied diets.

Before dinner we gathered with our Captain Oleg Kapko for a welcome cocktail. He introduced his senior officers from the many departments aboard the ship and wished us an enjoyable voyage.

As the whales surfaced in the waters about the ship and put on a spectacular display of 'bubble feeding', we enjoyed another delicious meal.





# Portal Point | Enterprise Island

DAY 3 | Tuesday 6 February 2024

Position at 1515 on 6 Feb

Latitude: 64°32'6" S

Longitude: 061°57'8" W

Course: 205°

Speed: 1.7 kts

Wind Speed: 4 kts NNE

Barometer: 988 hPa

Air Temp: 2°C

This morning we found ourselves sailing through the beautiful Gerlache Strait. This water mass which runs through the heart of the Antarctic Peninsula, welcomed us with very Antarctic-like weather: chilly, windy and with some light rainfall.

After an early breakfast we started the first activity of the day. The rocky landing site at Portal Point was waiting for us. Located at the narrow point in the northeast of the Reclus Peninsula, Portal Point offers amazing views across the entrance to Charlotte Bay.

We were also able to see the remains of the British hut CR (Cape Reclus), established in 1956 and occupied intermittently for survey work from 1957 to 1958. A four-man party, led by Sir Wally Herbert, completed the first traverse by dog team from Hope Bay to Cape Reclus between 9 October and 30 December 1957.

Only the concrete foundations now remain at Portal Point; the rest of it was removed to be displayed outside Antarctica.

Once ashore we enjoyed a beautiful hike and views, as well as some wildlife action with the fur seals and the skuas provoking them.

The brave snorkellers went out for their first mandatory outing, with some challenging conditions, and the kayakers had their first paddling too.

Around 11am, everyone was back on board and we repositioned towards our next destination, not too far away.

After a refreshing lunch, we arrived at Enterprise Island, and it was then time to gear up and get ready. As soon as the *Greg Mortimer* found its anchor spot, we started to lower the Zodiacs to begin our activities. In this stunning place there is a partially submerged shipwreck.

The *Governoren* was a Norwegian factory ship that deliberately ran aground after catching fire in 1915 during a crew celebration, after filling their tanks with whale oil. The snorkellers had the amazing opportunity to circumnavigate the shipwreck, as it rests in shallow waters.

During the Zodiac cruise in Foyen Harbour and Enterprise Island we went around some massive icebergs with all shades of blue. The glacial scenery offered the opportunity to see the glacier fronts with their unique layering.

Coming to the end of our excursion, the bridge informed us that there were whales just off the bow of the ship, so we ended the afternoon with a wonderful humpback sighting.

After we all came back on board, the great galley team offered a delicious dinner, as we started to head south to our next destination.





# Cuverville Island | Neko Harbour | Lemaire Channel

DAY 4 | Wednesday 7 February 2024

Position at 1200 on 7 Feb

Latitude: 64°41'8" S

Longitude: 062°35'8" W

Course: 160°

Speed: 7 kts

Wind Speed: 7 kts SE

Barometer: 995 hPa

Air Temp: -1° C

The crisp Antarctic morning greeted us as we embarked on our journey to explore the snow-covered landscape of Cuverville Island, a remote and breathtaking location nestled along the Antarctic Peninsula. As we stepped onto the rocky shores, we were immediately greeted by a cacophony of sound as gentoo penguins waddled and frolicked in the snow, their distinctive calls echoing across the icy landscape. In the background there were fluttering wings and shrill cries of skuas looking out for their next potential meal.

We all watched the gentoo penguins, with their sleek, torpedo-shaped bodies and endearing, waddling gait, going about their daily routines against the backdrop of gently falling snow. We observed these charismatic creatures as they tended to their nests, interacted with each other, and undertook their fishing expeditions in the frigid waters surrounding the island. Some of us were even lucky enough to enjoy a front-row seat to a spectacular breaching humpback whale show.

As the morning unfolded, we absorbed the serene beauty of Cuverville, taking in the stunning vistas of towering ice cliffs and pristine, untouched landscapes. The snowfall added an ethereal quality to the scene, casting a soft, tranquil blanket over the island and its inhabitants, creating a picture-perfect moment that will forever be etched in our memories.

Following our time at Cuverville, we set sail for Neko Harbour, where we were treated to yet another extraordinary display of antarctic wildlife. Here, we encountered more enchanting gentoo penguins, observing them as they navigated their well-worn pathways known as 'penguin highways,' weaving through the snow in a charming display of natural order and purpose.

We marvelled at the resilience and adaptability of these remarkable creatures, whose existence is intricately intertwined with the harsh and unforgiving antarctic environment. Against a backdrop of towering glaciers and pristine, clear waters, we gained a profound appreciation for the delicate balance of life in this remote and awe-inspiring corner of the world.

The afternoon was filled with a fascinating lecture by Heidi about the importance of krill in Antarctica, before another tasty dinner served by our amazing crew. As the day drew to a close, we gathered on deck, surrounded by the breathtaking spectacle of antarctic icebergs drifting by lazily, along with the occasional humpback whale. We traversed the famous Lemaire Channel – aka 'Kodak Alley' – with mountains towering almost a kilometre high on either side, silhouetted in the colourful sunset. Against this stunning backdrop, we reflected on the profound beauty and tranquility of the Antarctic, a place where time seems to stand still and the wonders of nature unfold in all their unspoiled glory.







# Winter Island | Yalour Islands

DAY 5 | Thursday 8 February 2024

Position at 1200 on 8 Feb

Latitude: 65°13'4"S

Longitude: 064°13'8"W

Course: Variable

Speed: 5 kts

Wind Speed: 2 kts S

Barometer: 992 hPa

Air Temp: 1° C

What a day! Overnight, as we drank in the stunning views of the Lemaire Channel at sunset, the *Greg Mortimer* continued to steam south to past 65 degrees south – our furthest southern point of the voyage! We woke to find growlers and icebergs drifting past us as we anchored north of the Ukrainian Vernadsky Station.

We set off into the Zodiacs and the kayaks – the Zodiacs flew past towering iceberg spires towards the inner tidal channels surrounding Wordie Hut, the site for our morning's exploration.

Wordie Hut was originally the British 'Base F', a base established during Operation Tabarin – a WWII-era military expedition to solidify Britain's claims to the Antarctic Peninsula by opening and operating a network of bases for meteorological and scientific purposes. Wordie Hut was named after James Wordie – the chief scientist of Shackleton's trans-antarctic expedition that ended with an over 1000-nautical-mile crossing of the South Scotia Sea – and one of Operation Tabarin's lead proponents.

This base was manned, often for two-year stints, until the mid-1950s, when the base was closed and most activity shifted to the British base Faraday – later transferred to Ukrainian ownership.

Inside the hut, we examined the cosy living quarters, dog room, and preserved meteorological equipment, before we headed back to our Zodiacs for a cruise between icebergs, narrow channels - complete with several obliging pairs of Adélie penguins on icebergs - before passing by Vernadsky Station, currently undergoing renovations.

The paddlers then took off for a transit between Wordie Hut and the Yalour Islands – heading off on their own kayaking adventure for a few hours.

The afternoon was no less busy. We headed off in dazzling sunshine (we could finally see the high peaks overlooking Booth and Hovgaard Islands on the Peninsula!) and towering icebergs to explore the Yalour Islands chain – home to several Adélie colonies perched up on the snowline.

Highlights included a sweeping view over the Penola Strait and the Peninsula, with icebergs up to 25 metres tall in all directions and different shapes and sizes.

Back on board for the polar plunge! Fifty plungers bravely jumped into the frigid – yet beautiful - waters around the Yalours in the balmy afternoon sunshine, with barely a cloud in sight.

But our day wasn't finished yet: in the late evening sunshine, up on Deck 8, we held an outdoor BBQ with mulled wine, a roast suckling pig, burgers and sausages. With 80s hits playing, many of us danced the night away under the fading evening light.









# Polar Plunge

DAY 5 | Thursday 8 February 2024



















# Danco Island | Recess Cove

DAY 6 | Friday 9 February 2024

Position at 1100 on 9 Feb

Latitude: 64°41'3"S

Longitude: 062°35'6"W

Course: 071°

Speed: 6 kts

Wind Speed: 2 kts SSE

Barometer: 994 hPa

Air Temp: 0° C

We awoke to the snow-laden peaks of the Arctowski Peninsula, shepherding us as the ship plied north to our morning destination of Danco Island. The sun provided dabbled blotches of golden light on these rocky crags and powdered slopes. Once outside, the air was crisp and still. The water silky, like black ink, hypnotising those who became lost in the ripples made by the Zodiac as it glided forward. This tranquillity was deceitful, as many Zodiac drivers became ensnared by a boulder-strewn shore as they attempted to reach a point to unload.

A smattering of gentoos had set up home just above the high-tide mark, snubbing the rest of their kin who had made the arduous journey uphill to the more traditional patches of elevated rocky outcrops.

Those Expeditioners who chose to linger a while were treated to the antics of this busy little rebel community. Most laboured up, along a minorly treacherous path, as overnight sub-zero conditions had rendered a layer of ice. Those who ventured upward were rewarded with a fantastic 360-degree view over mountains and the Errera Channel from the apex of Danco island, after encountering an elevated penguin rookery and penguin highway enroute.

Down below, in the bay, the kayakers and paddlers were making a circumnavigation of Danco Island, revelling in the perfect conditions, joining some friendly humpback whales, locking eyes with a Weddell seal on a small berg and enjoying the silence, stillness and serenity.

Snorkellers were also out on their own foray – bedazzled by both glistening crystals of ice and gentoo penguins rocketing seemingly effortlessly through their watery kingdom.

After a hearty lunch there were many activities for those inclined to indulge. Grant provided valuable insights and tuition during his photography workshop. Alasdair led those with a more artistic flair for painting, while there was a mixture of skill and fun in the dumpling masterclass, where skilled practitioners led many eager novices in the art of dumpling making for Chinese New Year.

Our main afternoon activity was a Zodiac cruise at beautiful Recess Cove. The water remained still and mirror-like. The sky had darkened, and light snowflakes fell as we set off. Again, humpback whales greeted us upon arrival. Some had some very close encounters with these gentle giants as they feasted on krill in the cove. Others encountered an inquisitive crabeater seal. Snorkellers frolicked in the water with both acrobatic fur seals and a more subdued - although intense - elephant seal.

All too soon it was time to head back to the *Greg Mortimer* for a group photo on the upper aft deck, followed by recap, in which Jack eloquently discussed events and initiatives in Antarctica against the geopolitical backdrop of

the 1930s to 1960s, discussing, amongst other things, Operation Tabarin and the seeming miracle of the forging of the Antarctic Treaty during the height of the Cold War.

Heidi and Stephen again led the charge for citizen science. Heidi displayed the beautiful and delicate diatoms collected during filtering of the sea and explained the importance of photosynthetic algae as the basis of the food chain in Antarctica, on which all other larger life forms depend. Stephen displayed the results of his Happy Whale submissions, encouraging all to partake. The night ended with a special dinner to celebrate the Chinese New Year and welcome in the Year of the Dragon.



# Palaver Point | Cierva Cove | Spert Island

DAY 7 | Saturday 10 February 2024

Position at 1200 on 10 Feb

Latitude: 64°11.4'S

Longitude: 061°30.5'W

Course: 066°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: light & variable

Barometer: 1007 hPa

Air Temp: 3°C

The calm weather continued as the *Greg Mortimer* glided slowly towards our morning operation at Palaver Point on Two Hummock Island in the Palmer Archipelago. The name was given to this delightful spot by the Falkland Islands Dependency Survey (later known as the British Antarctic Survey) back in the 1950s and relates to the constant 'palaver' of many thousands of noisy chinstrap penguins that inhabit its rocky ramparts.

In such gentle conditions we were quickly ashore, arriving in a small cove with a mix of sand, gravel and boulders on the beach. It was then an easy climb up a slushy snow slope to a couple of lofty vantage points.

These afforded excellent views of the scattered penguin colonies, looking vaguely like medieval hill towns below, while further out we could see the kayakers and paddlers revelling in the still conditions. And close to shore, just in front of one of the main penguin jumping-off points, our snorkellers were clearly visible in their high-vis yellow, bobbing about in the shallows, taking in the wildlife action.

Back on board before 11 am, it was then time for the *Greg Mortimer* to transit to our afternoon's activity site at Cierva Cove. Named in 1960 after Juan de la Cierva, the designer of the precursor of the modern helicopter, this cove is a biological hotspot and is therefore deemed an Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA). Landings are not allowed but Zodiac cruising, kayaking and paddling is just fine. The tag of 'hotspot' was certainly justified, with no less than seven leopard seals, a Weddell seal, and a humpback whale observed during our afternoon's excursion.

Back on board around 4.30pm, there was barely enough time to relax before the evening recap and an early dinner. This was one action-packed day!

Around 8pm, we again jumped in the Zodiacs and cruised around Spert Island. Again, named in the 1960s, Spert Island commemorates Sir Thomas Spert, Controller of the King's Ships for Henry VIII, and England's first Master Mariner.

What an adventure this proved to be, as we fittingly went out on a high as far as Zodiac cruising is concerned.

Sheer cliffs of gunmetal-grey basalt rose from the buffeting backwash as we cruised around and through a maze of alleyways, sea stacks and several caverns that penetrated right through one corner of the island. And like pieces of giant flotsam caught in a trap, icebergs of myriad sizes and shapes added to this unforgettable scene.

Back on board around 9.30pm, there was only one word to describe such a special experience – WOW!







# Half Moon Island | Edinburgh Hill | Drake Passage

DAY 8 | Sunday 11 February 2024

## Position at 1350 on 11 Feb

Latitude: 62°21'6" S

Longitude: 059°44'4"W

Course: 330°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 20 Kts NE

Barometer: 1010 hPa

Air Temp: 1°C

Our day began with a wake-up call from kayak guide Martin, who very politely requested that we make the most of the last operational day by signing up to get off the ship and stretch our legs, before setting off for Ushuaia.

After breakfast we eagerly boarded the Zodiacs for a final landing at Half Moon Island.

Half Moon Island is so named because the shape resembles a crescent moon if viewing from above. It lies in the MacFarlane Strait in the South Shetland Islands and consists of a series of gravel bars that connect volcanic bedrock islands composed mainly of andesitic intrusions from the late Jurassic to Early Cretaceous periods.

The landscape appears particularly barren and not dissimilar to a lunar landscape and, although it is often subjected to strong winds, we were lucky to have relatively calm conditions at the time of landing. Low-level cloud added to the raw beauty of the place.

We walked uphill to a chinstrap penguin colony near the landing site, and hiked around to the other end of the island, past the Argentinian base.

At the shoreline were a few resting fur seals, and in the water we saw a large leopard seal that looked like it was lying in wait for unsuspecting chinstraps entering the water. It was very curious of the Zodiacs that were standing just off the beach, and we could see that the guides in the Zodiacs were thoroughly enjoying their close encounter.

On the other side of the bay, the kayakers had their own interaction with another leopard seal.

Reluctantly, the time came to leave the island and climb aboard the Zodiacs for one last shuttle back to the ship.

Once back on board, the ship slowly headed towards Edinburgh Hill. We wrapped up in warm layers and stood on the observation deck to get a closer look.

Edinburgh Hill is a narrow point jutting out 650 metres high from the east coast of Varna Peninsula, on Livingston Island. It is composed of basalt that has been subjected to columnar jointing, which forms when the molten rock cools quickly enough for horizontal fractures to occur.

These cause the newly solidified rock to be hexagonal in shape.

It was a very imposing contrast against the surrounding icy landscape, and it was a fitting way to say our goodbye to the Antarctic Peninsula.

As the ship began the journey across the Drake Passage, we enjoyed lectures from Alasdair and Melina on historical Antarctic conservation and the geology of the Antarctic Peninsula, before enjoying a final recap and dinner.







# At Sea

DAY 9 | Monday 12 February 2024

Position at 1100 on 12 Feb

Latitude: 58°32'8"S

Longitude: 063°59'2"W

Course: 355°

Speed: 12 kts

Wind Speed: 6 kts SW

Barometer: 1018 hPa

Air Temp: 1° C

We began our day when we were woken up with a call from Wes, whose sultry voice encouraged us to fully participate in the day's activities while at sea. There was a full day planned for, what ended up, a relatively calm day on the Drake.

Ashley conducted a lecture on all things 'behind-the-scenes' on board the *Greg Mortimer*. We were treated to a look at the ship's functions from each department and were given a virtual tour of the ship.

Shortly thereafter there were guided bridge tours, which were very well attended with passengers commenting on how incredible this ship is managed and how modern and sophisticated all of the systems are on board, to help make the voyage safe and comfortable. There are lots of crew who work behind the scenes to make our voyage safe and comfortable; it is a great way to get a peek into their world.

Heidi managed to squeeze in another citizen science activity, up on deck 7, that included observing clouds. This was well attended and was a great reason to get outside and get some fresh air whilst on the Drake.

There was a lecture on 'all things under the ice' with Lea and another one with Jack on the Antarctic Treaty. Both lectures were well attended and very informative.

Our afternoon concluded with cocktails and canapes in the Elephant Island bar, followed by dinner in the restaurant.

Dinner was, as always, amazing, and was closely followed by a screening of *The Last Husky in Antarctica* in the lecture theatre. It was difficult to determine if the movie was the hit or whether it was the popcorn that was provided by our amazing restaurant team!

While the movie was playing, some of the passengers were participating in an impromptu concert on the piano and guitar, and a hotly contested game was being played at the other end of the lounge.

All in all, it was a lovely day at sea to relax, get some photos sorted for uploading on the shared computers in the library, and to enter our best photo in the photo competition or to prepare for our imminent arrival into Ushuaia.

Stories were swapped of our adventures during the Antarctic voyage, where new friendships were created that will inevitably last a lifetime.



# At Sea

DAY 10 | Tuesday 13 February 2024

## Position at 1200 on 13 Feb

Latitude: 55°08'3"S

Course: 301°

Longitude: 66°25'7"W

Speed: 4 kts

Wind Speed: 7 kts NW

Air Temp: 12° C

Barometer: 1010 hPa

This morning we said goodbye to our adventure in the Drake Passage, notorious for its tempestuous seas and fierce winds, earning it the nickname, 'The Drake Shake' or 'The Drake Lake,' depending on the prevailing conditions. This morning continued to have a little sway on the ship which was due to the 1.5-metre swell.

The Beagle Channel, named after Darwin's ship HMS *Beagle*, presents a passage through some of the most untouched and awe-inspiring scenery on earth. Towering snow-capped peaks, ancient glaciers, and dramatic fjords line the channel, creating a mesmerising backdrop as the ship glided through. As we travelled toward the port of Ushuaia, we had a full day of activities. Thus, with tummies sated after a relaxing breakfast, I headed up to the presentation lounge to listen to Ashley's fascinating presentation on her life in Antarctica.

Following the disembarkation briefing, we went for a wander on the deck to look out for wildlife. Think of the *Greg Mortimer* as a floating hotel that explores some of the remotest parts of the world and also offers up fun and adventure.

We wildlife enthusiasts delighted in spotting so many seabirds with the rugged coastline as their backdrop. Above the sea we were fascinated by the number of antarctic cormorants soaring above the water. We estimated that over the course of two hours we saw over 100 individuals, or maybe it was the same 10 circling the ship? We were also lucky enough to see two species of albatross, a black-browed and the largest albatross in the world, the royal.

A sense of wonder prevails as the albatrosses soar overhead, their graceful wingspans casting shadows on the waters below. An impressive 2.4-metre wingspan aids them by conserving energy during long-distance flight. The fact that they can live up to 70 years is a testament to their adaptability and resilience in the harsh marine environment. Below the sea was a completely different story; just a few sporadic sightings of the fur seal and the highlight was, of course, the dolphins swimming beside the ship.

Lunch was bright and tasty with a variety of mains, accompanying salads and, of course, delicious desserts, with the excellent restaurant team's usual splash of smiles and good energy. After this, we headed to the presentation lounge again for the hotel department's question-and-answer session, which really did highlight the complexities of the behind-the-scenes operations.

At Captain's Farewell we were ready for a celebratory drink to toast such a special occasion as an official farewell by our amazing Captain. The champagne was flowing and laughter abounded as it was a most successful and

enjoyable voyage.

As the journey draws to a close, a sense of awe washes over all of us on board. As the southernmost city in the world, Ushuaia sits at the tip of Argentina's Tierra del Fuego archipelago, surrounded by the stunning beauty of the Beagle Channel. Ushuaia, known as the 'end of the world,' serves as the gateway to Antarctica, but for us it was the end of our journey. We had a journey of discovery and wonder, with the untamed beauty of the landscape, the rich tapestry of history and the thrill of outdoor adventure.



# Disembarkation

DAY 11 | Wednesday 14 February 2024

Position at 0800 on 14 Feb

Latitude: 54°48'6" S

Longitude: 068°17'8" W

Course: Anchor

Speed: Anchor

Wind Speed: NE 3 kts

Barometer: 1016 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

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



# Kayaking Log

Kayak Guides: Wes McNeil, Gabriel Vink Wackernagel, Martin Rickard and Ivan Klochkov

Number of Paddlers: 10

Total Paddle Outings: 10

Total Distance Paddled: 47.2 km

Paddlers:	James Cunningham	Amie Wilson	Kerry Lin
Anna Millstein	Amanda Marshall	Eduardo Garcia Ramos	Doron Haifer
Corinne Cunningham	Richard Flook	Daniel Reid	

## 06/02/2024, AM: Portal Point - Gerlache Strait. Distance: 0.6 km

All geared up in dry suits, PFDs, spray skirts, booties and lots of headwear, we sure were toasty and ready to take on the antarctic conditions outside. Last we needed to do was fit out our kayaks. Feeling familiar and comfortable in our kayaks. Ivan, Martin and Gabe sent them out the back door of the ship, attaching them together to form a long chain of colourful plastic ducks all tied in a row. Paddles and drybags in hand, we boarded the Zodiac. With Ivan driving, we headed for the sheltered cove south of Portal Point.

Getting into the kayaks from the side of the Zodiac is a little awkward, but everyone managed fine and we were happy to be on the water with paddles in hand. Martin introduced various strokes, including low brace, sweep stroke, draws and forward paddling. We then tested them out paddling around the small bay.

By the end of the short session everyone looked noticeably more at ease and fluid with strokes. We had done our best in regard to the windy conditions and even saw a few seals and krill swimming near the surface. A quick change into Muck Boots, then we made landfall on Portal Point, for many of us our seventh continent; great to be here!

## 06/02/2024, PM: *Governoren* - Enterprise Island. Distance: 6.5 km

A very different afternoon compared to this morning, as the wind had dropped and the sea was calm. We took a short Zodiac ride away from the ship, then explored Foyn Harbour. Heading north along the coast of Enterprise Island, we rounded into the cove of the wrecked factory whale ship *Governoren*. Keeping well away from steep ice cliffs we explored around the island, noting the old wooden rowing boat and numerous rusting mooring bollards. Poking north out to sea to explore house size icebergs, a headwind picked up and the swell increased. Turning back for calmer waters and our Zodiac pick up, everyone managed the following seas and preferred tail winds. A great start to our adventures.

## 07/02/2024, AM: Cuverville Island - Circumnavigation. Distance: 6 km

Today we were able to set off straight from the marina at the back of the ship. Conditions were overcast, cold and snowy, giving the day a mystical feel. All who took part in the adventure loved it. Kayaking close by to the gentoo penguins was fantastic, although the smell at times was a bit pungent. That aside, there were chicks pestering

parents for breakfast and others chattering away, delighted to see each other again.

With big goals in mind to circumnavigate the island, we set off making good time without racing. With snowflakes coming down heavily and away from the colony, the kayak around Cuverville was calm and peaceful, and thoroughly enjoyable. Another amazing adventure.

## 07/02/2024, PM: Neko Harbour. Distance: 5 km

The conditions were just great - no wind and glass-calm water! We decided to paddle to the southern part of the bay where we spotted amazing icebergs and brash ice. From the first look the place seemed quiet and empty but as soon as we approached, we started to observe so many animals! We spotted a couple of Weddell seals resting on ice floes. There were also lots of curious penguins swimming around us. We also heard a distant whale blow! It appeared that there were two humpbacks sleeping or resting in the brash ice - what a magnificent sight! We spent several minutes next to them, trying to absorb the stunning ambience of the moment - distant frozen peaks, blue icebergs and sounds of humpback whales' calm breaths/breathing. That was a gem of a paddle!

## 08/02/2024: Argentine to Yalour Islands. Distance: 18 km

Today's kayak outing was a special event. We planned and packed for a full day out in our kayaks. We left the ship at 8.30am to explore the maze of icebergs and islets that made Argentine Islands. Late morning, we called up at Winter Island where the Expedition Team were offering a landing to visit the historic Wordie Hut. Walking through felt like being in a time capsule of the 1950s. With time to stretch our legs, we headed up the hill for a view with JB.

We ate lunch on the Zodiac and passed around cups of hot lemon tea. Cautious of the big day out, no-one drank too much. In the afternoon we started to cross the Penola Strait for the Yalour Islands. Halfway through the crossing we had the best encounter with humpbacks we could wish for! Three or four whales were feeding, surfacing nearby. We rafted up to watch, then they must have noticed us and moved our way. Holding tight to the kayaks beside us, boils pushing to the surface beside us meant they were exhaling underneath us, our hearts in our throats and holding our breath... feeling relief as we saw them surface continuing to feed on krill instead of kayakers. Both Martin and Gabe said it was the most amazing moment with humpbacks and we were extremely lucky.

Kayaking over to the Yalours we were full of excitement about what we just experienced and awe of the beautiful icebergs on the shallow islands. Soon everyone was filled with more wonder and joy at the sight of the Adélie penguins, the most southern and smallest brushtail penguin of Antarctica. Taking in the beauty of the penguins we paddled around the main island twice and still couldn't get enough! Antarctic fur seals and a Weddell seal lounged on patches of snow. Navigating around icebergs on our way back to the ship, we realised it was the furthest south many of us had ever paddled and what a fantastic day in Antarctica it was.

## 09/02/2024, AM: Danco Island. Distance: 6 km

It was a great morning for a decent paddle - conditions were perfect so we decided to circumnavigate the island! It was great to get to the other side of the island and have a little Zen moment, just floating in silence, gazing upon massive glaciers. We also saw many Weddell seals on the way. Towards the end of the circumnavigation, we reached the shallow waters at the northern part of the island and approached a gentoo penguin colony - it was so fun to watch them play in the water!

### 09/02/2024, PM: Recess Cove. Distance: 6 km

It began as a moody morning with promise of whales. The low cloud obscured the mountainous landscape that stretched out before us. Exploring along the shallows of southern coast of the bay we were able to observe what lived below the beautifully reflective ocean surface. Seaweeds and kelps of different colours, mini zooplankton, limpets and much more. In the reflection we could see the tops and lower sections of amazing bergy bits and large icebergs floating to our left and right, as we paddled through the bay. Above, the Weddell seals rested on shore and antarctic cormorants flew by to a nearby colony. Before we made it back to the ship, a humpback decided to appear, breathing then diving deep, showing off its tail fluke. Thank you, whales!

### 10/02/2024, AM: Palaver Point - Two Hummock Island. Distance: 3.5 km

While the rest of the Expeditioners were landing at the Palaver point, we decided to go on our own little mission - we towed our kayaks to the south-east, a couple of bays away from the landing site and started a paddle from there. While we were towing our kayaks, we spotted a sleeping leopard seal on the ice floe! He looked comfortable and cosy and did not wake up even when we saw him again as we were paddling back. We got on the water at a very beautiful rocky point exposed to the sun. Lots of fur seals and seabirds were enjoying the sunlight there; it was like a little warm oasis in the middle of the ice desert! On the way back we also saw an impressive ice calving. Once we reached Palaver Point, we spent some time observing a large penguin colony and then got back to the ship. What a great paddle!

### 10/02/2024, PM: Cierva Cove. Distance: 3.6 km

A nice, calm afternoon with the clouds breaking open. Cierva Cove is known to be chock-a-block with ice. Today as we paddled along deeper into the glaciated bay, indeed there was lots of ice and some of the biggest, most beautiful icebergs we have ever seen. Feeling really small beside a huge tabular, but also very capable to push through dense brash ice. We noticed a seal on an ice floe, paddling closer and identified that it was a leopard seal. Over two metres long and likely around 300 kilograms. He lay there resting, stretching flippers and an occasional yawn. Further on we observed the sheer size of Gregory and Breguet Glaciers. Listening out for cracking or calving. We took a group photo with the magnificent glacier in the background, then paddled back into the colourful late afternoon setting sun. A brief transit and quick dinner and we were out on the Zodiacs for a third time. The twilight Zodiac cruise at Spert Island sure was a splendid way to finish off a great day!

### 11/02/24: Half Moon Island. Distance: 2km

Sadly this was our last outing before heading across the Drake Passage to Ushuaia. The guide team was pleased that even with dreary weather the whole kayak team assembled and headed out to explore the coastline of Half Moon Island. Beginning in the shelter of bay, the team meandered through shallow rocky areas then along the beach. Soon after we set off, we had an amazing, very close encounter with a large leopard seal who followed our kayaks for quite a while. Passing the abandoned Argentine base of Camara to the chinstrap colony where we loaded up with Ivan. Swapping boots, we were swiftly amongst penguins and exploring the rocky point. Once again, a memorable experience in this faraway place, Antarctica.







# Paddling Log

Guides: Eloisa Berrier, Ivan Klochkov, Rob Barth, Pablo Passera, Eduardo Larrañaga

Number of Paddlers: 8

Total Paddle Outings: 3

Total Distance Paddled: 10.3 km

Paddlers:	Tamara Rath	Stefanie Bair
Robert Billington	Steven Rath	Marc Israel
Patricia Billington	Steven Bair	Elisa Yu

## 07/02/2024, AM: Cuverville Island. Distance: 3 km

It was the first outing for the paddling team in our expedition! We towed our kayaks to the eastern side of Cuverville Island and started paddling from there. While we were loading into the kayaks, we observed humpback whales right next to our Zodiac, floating peacefully right on the surface – what a wonderful start! We began with a short introduction to the basic paddling strokes and got familiar with the kayaks, practised some steering techniques. Once everyone started to feel confident enough, we started to work our way to the northern part of the island, paddling along its beautiful coastline. Some cliffs were surprisingly green and colourful, and at some point, we saw that some parts of the island are just carpeted with hundreds of gentoo penguins – it was so fascinating to observe them from the water! We finished our paddle next to the landing side and hopped into the Zodiac, which took us to the beach, where we also had a wonderful time!

## 10/02/2024, PM: Cierva Cove and Primavera Base. Distance: 4.5km

We use the Zodiacs as a launch point and ending point with the kayaks. We navigated in the direction of the building of Primavera Base, from west to east.

It was the second session of the day. Sea conditions were beautiful with some swell but no wind. The cove had a lot of icebergs and some brash ice. We paddled close to these areas but not directly into them. We saw many groups of penguins in the water, mainly gentoo. We ended the day in the penguin colony in Primavera Base!

## Snow Island. Distance: 2.8 km

Very rarely visited, the remote Snow Island, in the Shetlands archipelago, welcomed us with its very dramatic landscape.

We embarked our inflatable kayaks next to impressive basaltic formations and once we were all on the water, we paddled along this beautiful coastline for about 45 minutes. While exploring the site, we saw elephant seals for the first time. These are the largest seal species in the world! We were all very impressed with their behaviour and their vocalisations, which were very loud. The rocks on the coastline were covered with very colourful lichens and mosses. After observing the elephant seals, we paddled along the huge glacier front before hopping back into the Zodiac. We enjoyed the silence of this unique and wild place!





# Snorkelling Log

Snorkel Guides: Ania Baranek, Richard Devanney, Edwin Sargeant

## 06/02/2024, AM: Portal Point

Today is our first snorkel outing, and we are so excited to see how it feels to jump into freezing water. First, we landed at Portal Point for a 30-minute walk. Next to the landing site was the foundations of a British base. The hut itself has been removed. After a short walk on thick snow, we saw some fur seals and a Weddell seal resting on the rocks. We were set to snorkel in the same bay that we landed at, so it was a very short drive in the Zodiac once it picked us up. We had our first briefing, and then entered the water. Although there was a bit of a swell, there was lots of ice around to observe, and a few of us saw a comb jellyfish. We spent approximately 30 minutes in the water before getting back on the Zodiac. It was a great first experience and we were all excited to do it again.

## 06/02/2024, PM: Foyn Harbor

Weather was outstanding and the sun was out from time to time. We went for a lovely Zodiac cruise around Enterprise Island and saw a wooden flensing boat, a glacial front, and some grounded icebergs before proceeding to the famous *Governoren* shipwreck to start our snorkelling operations. We were super excited to snorkel around a wreck, especially as this site is rarely visited during voyages to Antarctica. *Governoren* was a whaling ship that was working in this area in 1915. When the whaling mission wrapped up, the crew threw a party (as was standard practice aboard floating factories) to celebrate the success of a long and laborious mission hunting and processing whales, and the anticipated journey home. Because *Governoren's* working decks were designed for flensing, and not for dancing and partying, the celebration was held below decks.

Someone, perhaps while dancing too boisterously, knocked a lamp off a table and the ship caught fire. The *Governoren* was, of course, full of thousands of gallons of whale oil, ready and waiting to be hauled back to Norway. This oil fuelled the fire, causing it to quickly grow out of control. Although resulting in the terrible loss of whale oil and of a historical ship, the captain set *Governoren* aground and the entire crew of 85 were able to escape, only to watch the blazing ship burn to ruin. None of the crew members were injured by the fire; all were rescued by another whaling vessel. Today, the wreckage of the *Governoren* lies in wait for the occasional antarctic cruise to Foyn Harbor. The rusting remains, leftover wooden flensing boats, and old whale oil barrels remind us of the ship's long history, and what must have been a massive economic loss and setback to the industry during its time. We felt privileged to be able to snorkel in such a special site, and we noticed a few envious looks on the faces of our fellow Expeditioners, as they were watching us from their Zodiacs as we swam close to the wreck and had a unique chance to see how it looks under the water. Definitely a highlight of our expedition so far!

## 07/02/2024, AM: Cuverville Island

The outing began in spectacular fashion courtesy of two humpback whales that were initially asleep close to the *Greg Mortimer*. As soon as we boarded the Zodiac they woke up and started breaching. Then we headed to the snorkel site, which was in a bay next to the landing site. There were some small icebergs that we were able

to swim close to and observe the colours. We were also lucky enough to have some gentoo penguins enter the water in front of us. They swam close enough to us that a couple of people got some footage of them swimming. Our snorkel lasted approximately 30 minutes, before we got back on board the Zodiac and headed back to the *Greg Mortimer*.

## 08/02/2024, AM: Wordie | Vernadsky

After an early wake-up call, we were greeted by a chilly antarctic morning as our ship anchored a couple of miles away from the landing site. We dressed up warmly, as we knew it will be a long shuttle ride and a Zodiac cruise before we put our fins in the water again. Standing sentinel in the icy embrace of Antarctica, the historic Wordie Hut and the Ukrainian Vernadsky Base offer a glimpse into different eras of polar exploration. Wordie Hut, a quaint wooden structure on Winter Island, was built in the 1930s as a temporary shelter, and it was later restored as a historical monument, whispering tales of early British expeditions. We enjoyed a short visit to the hut before we jumped back on our snorkel Zodiac. Our guide, Edwin, skilfully navigated the narrow channels of the Argentine Islands Archipelago, passing towering ice walls and penguin rookeries on our way. We arrived at the adjacent Vernadsky Base, originally established by the British, later transferred to Ukraine in 1996. This active research station hums with scientific exploration, a testament to international collaboration in the pursuit of Antarctic knowledge. We waved at the friendly Ukrainians who were working outside the station, and they responded with warm smiles. Despite the cold, all of our snorkellers were keen to jump into the icy waters opposite Vernadsky. It was a short, but pleasant polar dip.

## 09/02/2024, AM: Danco Island

This morning, we arrived at Danco Island, surrounded by a fairytale-like natural harbour. Glimpses of sunlight danced on the mirror-flat water, reflecting the stark beauty of the snow-capped peaks that ring the island. Chi and his wife dressed up in their beautiful, traditional wedding outfits to celebrate the first year of their marriage and took some memorable photos at the landing site. The rest of us went for a crisp hike up the steep slope to admire magnificent vistas around the bay and enjoy gentoos marching up and down their penguin highways. Back on the Zodiac, we zipped through the bay in search for a perfect snorkel spot. We decided to jump into the deep waters close to our ship, surrounded by brash ice, and marvelled at the intricate sculptures carved by wind and water. As we enjoyed this surreal landscape and took photos holding small crystalline pieces of ice in our hands, a group of playful gentoo penguins came along, their curiosity echoing our own. As the morning drew to a close, we left Danco with grins plastered across our faces, feeling so lucky that we had a chance to see penguins under water.

## 09/02/2024, PM: Recess Cove

We left the ship with snowy but calm conditions, and were only cruising for a few minutes before we saw a large male fur seal on an iceberg, and then a humpback whale feeding. We then moved to a small island that had some fur seals resting on the rocks and an elephant seal lying in the water near the shore.

We decided that this would be a good place to snorkel and started gearing up. After entering the water, it took no time at all before two fur seals became curious of our presence and entered the water to take a closer look at us. It was a male and female, which was unusual at this time of year. We spend the entire snorkel having them

repeatedly swim up to us very close and very fast! The elephant seal also decided to come and take a closer look at us, but it was just far enough away that we couldn't really see it under the water.

After the seals departed, we got out of the water and spent some time watching the female seal, which had jumped onto a bergy bit and was scratching herself against it. An incredible experience in great conditions!

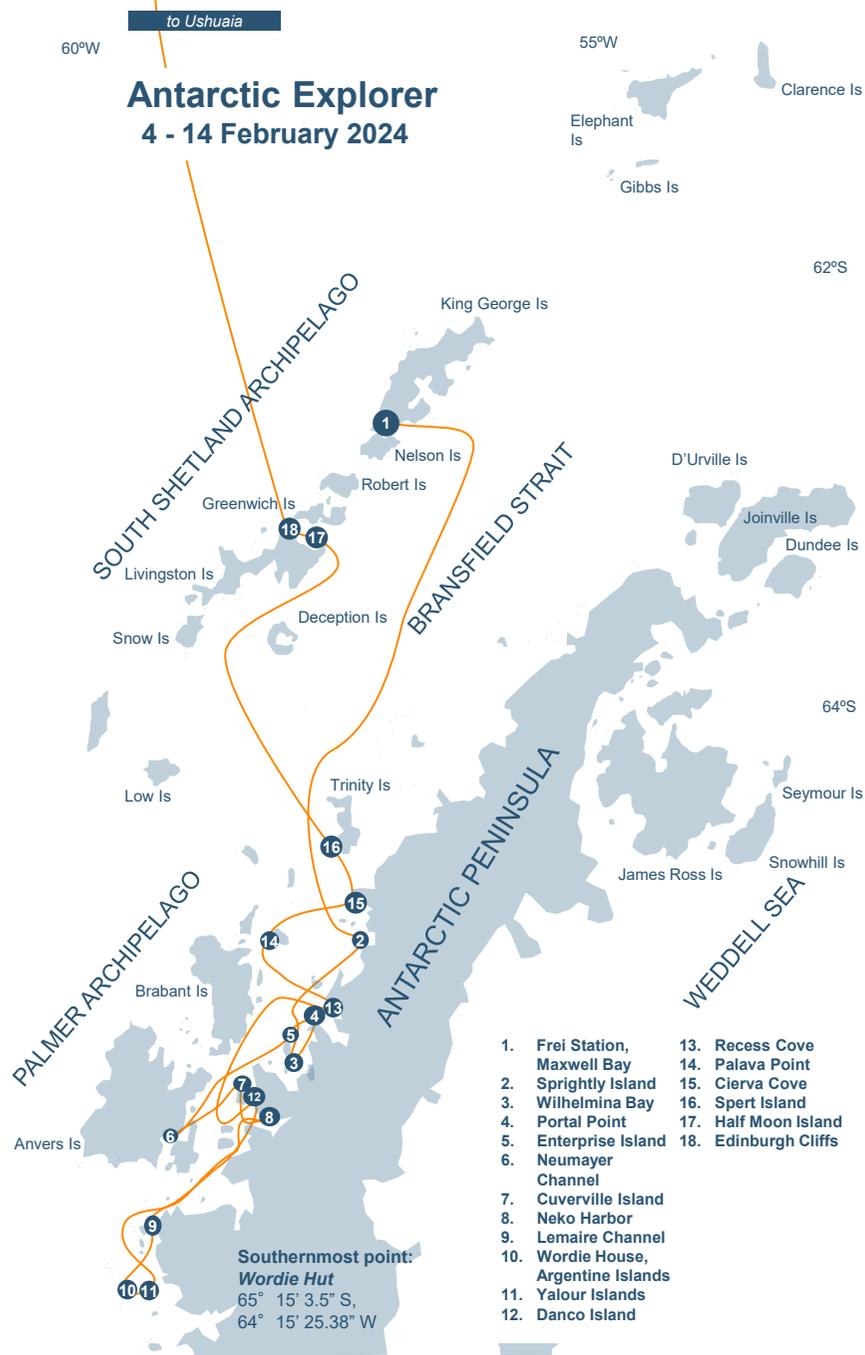
### 10th February (AM) Palaver Point

Antarctica greeted us with another spectacular morning! The water was still, and the sun was shyly coming out from behind the clouds. The ship anchored close to the landing site at Palaver Point, situated on the west side of Two Hummock Island. We have now moved much more north compared to our previous snorkel outings, and you can notice a change in the landscape. Dramatic glaciers could still be seen, but there's no brash ice anymore, and less icebergs were present. The name of the Palaver Point arose because the feature is the site of a chinstrap penguin rookery, with its endless noise resembling the profuse and idle discussion, echoing the meaning of 'palaver'. Our intrepid snorkellers enjoyed a short walk around the landing site, while the snorkel guides zipped around on their Zodiacs to scout the place for a suitable landing site – none of us has been here before! Palaver Point turned out to be surrounded by high glaciers, and the only good place for snorkelling was the rocky wall just around the corner from the landing site, but what a perfect spot it was! Plenty of chinstrap penguins were entering the water, jumping off the submerged rock shelves; there were also shags diving fast into the water, and a couple of fur seals who came along to play. We stayed in the water for more than half an hour. As it turned out, Palaver Point was our last snorkel outing on this voyage, and we felt very lucky that we could make it such a pleasant experience!











# Expeditioners:

Ashne Amoils	Kathy Finney	Furong Li	Anjani Patel	Cindy Wang
Ashaun Anand	Richard Flook	Hao Liang	Mike Payne	Fengyi Wang
Arnew Sarah	Forrest Bill	Kerry Lin	Bev Payne	Zhenhui Wang
Bev Ashford	Ramos Eduardo Garcia	Mali Ma	Derek Peddlesden	Yongli Wang
Jim Ashford	Xiuzhu Geng	Reichert Daniel Manolios	Victoria Ribot	Dana Wang
Carmen Axmann	David Gibson	Amanda Marshall	Mike Ribot	Joey Watson
Denise Banting	Federico Giovannini	Bill Marshall	Gertrude Rizzo	Christine Whitman
Chris Banting	Doron Haifer	Jennifer Marshall	Joe Rizzo	Amie Wilson
Marianne Bateman	Jen Harry	Merino Mikel Martin	Richard Ruston	Yi Wu
Peter Bateman	Asith Herath	Mahendra Mashru	Cherril Ruston	Yuan Xu
Rodney Brown	Kirsten Hetherington	Ashita Mashru	Dilipkumar Sodha	Wei Yang
Cheyenne Calvert	Harry Hu	Vickie Mattimoe	Bhavna Sodha	Yihui Yao
Steph Chau	Jiebai Huang	Maureen McInerney	Zeyuan Song	Jiaqi Yu
Liang Chen	Prakash Iyer	Elizabeth McNeil	Jie Song	Ted Zeng
Jojo Chen	Khadija Iyer	Ian McNeil	Jiewen Song	Helen Zhang
Carolyn Cooper	Zena Jiang	Anna Millstein	Minghui Sun	Chi Zhang
Scott Cooper	Emily Kerr	Mario Montes	Jo Tang	Dongjiang Zhao
James Cunningham	Steven Klein	Sally Moody	Jenny Te	Zoe Zhao
Corinne Cunningham	Hong Kuang	Gerry Naughtin	Yan Tian	Tina Zheng
James Dargjic	Lois Leonberg	Mark Nerwich	Tony Tipa	Joe Zheng
Cyndi Dawson	Zhenzhen Li	Steve Nichols	Gutierrez Silvia Trujillo	
Sue Doyle	Pu Li	Joanne Nichols	Brigitte van Kwikkelberghe	
Ye Fan	Shihui Li	Pushyant Patel	Aguilera Jorge Venegas	



## Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Ashley Perrin

Assistant Expedition Leader: Elena Wimberger

Onboard Expedition Manager: Kerry Lorimer

Historian: Alasdair McGregor

Marine Biologist: Lea McQuillan

Naturalist / Citizen Science Coordinator: Heidi Krajewsky

Geologist: Melina Pelzmajer

Lead Sea Kayak Guide: Wes McNeil

Senior Sea Kayak Guide: Gabriel Vink Wackernagel

Sea Kayak Guide: Martin Rickard

Sea Kayak Guide: Ivan Khlochkov

Lead Snorkel Guide: Ania Baranek

Snorkel Guide: Richard Devanney

Snorkel Guide: Edwin Sargeant

Expedition Guide: Jack Alscher

Expedition Guide: Stephen Anstee

Expedition Medic: John Barry

Photography Guide: Grant Thomas

Zodiac Manager: Nacho Marino

Mandarin-speaking Guide: Zhongyuan Chen

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ana Prado Pardo

## Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Oleg Kapko

Chief Officer: Andrey Zakalashnyuk

Safety Officer: Sergeii Voina

Bosun: Francis Marvin Linga

Third Officer: Goncalo Alexandre Saraiva Aniceto Costa

Ship Doctor: Anzor Chomakhidze

Support Doctor: Julio Andres

Chief Engineer: Sergiy Melynk

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

Deck Cadet: Giuseppe Guidice

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Grant Thomas



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