

Spirit of Antarctica

Aboard *Sylvia Earle* | 12-22 December 2023



Ushuaia

DAY 1 | Tuesday 12 December 2023

Position at 1300 on 12 Dec

Latitude: 54°49.1'S

Longitude: 068°14.4'W

Course: 285°

Speed: Alongside

Wind Speed: 16 knots SW

Barometer: 980 hPa

Air Temp: 7°C

Today we embarked the *Sylvia Earle*, our lovely home for the next ten days. We decided to leave Ushuaia a few hours earlier than planned, in order to make the most of the weather window we had in front of us. In proper expedition fashion, plans sometimes change!

Once everyone was on board, it was time to go through our safety briefing and lifeboat drill. We donned our orange lifejackets and went out on deck as we left Ushuaia behind. We then met our Expedition Leader Mario and the rest of the Expedition Team, all coming from a variety of backgrounds and specialties.

After leaving Ushuaia, we headed through the Beagle Channel, enjoying the end of the South American continent before making our way even further south. We settled in for dinner at the Gentoo Restaurant while watching the waves roll by. It was nice to be treated with calm seas at the start of our trip.

We started crossing the infamous Drake Passage in the evening, and will continue crossing over the next couple days. We're hoping for smooth sailing, but it's nevertheless exciting to cross over such a legendary body of water. What makes the Drake so dramatic? The strong Antarctic Circumpolar Current circles around the globe uninhibited, no land mass to slow it down. The heavy winds and currents funnel through this narrow passage between Tierra del Fuego and the Antarctic Peninsula, often causing enormous swells and waves.

On board we total 110 Expeditioners with nationalities representing Australia (18), Brazil (1), Canada (4), China (1), India (7), Indonesia (2), Israel (2), Italy (1), Malaysia (4), Mexico (2), New Zealand (2), Singapore (2), Switzerland (1), Taiwan (3), UK (6), USA (54), along with 20 Expedition Team and 87 ship's crew from all over the world.



Drake Passage

DAY 2 | Wednesday 13 December 2023

Position at 0630 on 13 Dec

Latitude: 57° 21.708'S

Longitude: 063° 14.297'W

Course: 156°

Speed: 14.1 knots

Wind Speed: 20 knots WNW

Barometer: 982 hPa

Air Temp: 5°C

As we started our journey south towards Antarctica, we were lucky enough to have a calm Drake Passage (sorry to say this to all those who were seasick). Not quite a Drake Lake but not a Drake shake either! We got through all our mandatory briefings, biosecurity and fittings, and now we are ready for Antarctica! Crossing the famous Drake Passage is quite the feat! From Cape Horn to South Shetland Islands, the Drake connects the waters of the Pacific Ocean in the West to the South Atlantic Ocean in the East and the Antarctic in the South. The passage, only 800 kilometres wide, is the shortest crossing from Antarctica to the other continents. The waters of the passage are known to be the roughest in the world and are considered one of the most treacherous voyages a ship can make. Currents at its latitude meet no resistance from any landmass and in severe weather, waves can reach a height of over 10m. It is here where the cold, humid sub-polar climate starts changing into freezing, dry Antarctic climate. The passage was named after Sir Francis Drake, the 16th-century English privateer. In 1577, Sir Francis Drake became the second man to circumnavigate the world, after Ferdinand Magellan's expedition, and he is said to have sighted the passage. However, the Spanish navigator Francisco de Hoces was the first European to sight the passage in 1525. That is why the Spanish Armada and some Latin- American natives call it Mar de Hoces (Sea of Hoces).

In the afternoon we had a great lecture from Vicky on seabirds, and then got to meet our Captain and his wonderful team! Now we have paid our dues crossing the Drake, and we are ready and excited for our first landing tomorrow!



South Shetlands; Deception Island

DAY 3 | Thursday 14 December

Position at 0615 14 Dec

Latitude: 62° 29.2'S

Longitude: 059° 18.2'W

Course: 225.7°

Speed: 6.1 knots

Wind Speed: 2.9 knots

Barometer: 987 hPa

Air Temp: 2°C

Our first day in Antarctica. And one that started early, with first glimpses of icebergs from the bridge shortly after midnight (was that your prediction?). Long before breakfast the ice-clad archipelago of the South Shetland Islands, around 120 kilometres north of the Antarctic Peninsula, rose from our southern horizon, with more icebergs, bergy bits and growlers filling the steely-grey water around our ship.

After challenges presented by wind and waves thwarted our first attempt at landing, at President Head on Snow Island, we turned southwards towards Deception Island. We approached the island, cruising the wave-washed outer coast before entering into the sunken caldera of a still-active volcano through a narrow channel known as Neptune's Bellows. It sounds very much like events from the pages of a Jules Verne adventure once written down.

Deception played an important role in the history of Antarctica, and Kelsey's commentary led us through this polar time capsule from the early days of exploration, where Port Foster, the interior of the island was a safe haven for sealers in search of fortunes in fur, to the gory sights of the industrial whaling era in the early 20th century, the transition from the so-called Heroic Era of Antarctic exploration to a more technological age, with the first flights of Hubert Wilkins, and latterly the dramatic escape and rescue of Chilean and British scientific teams in the late 1960s, when the island last erupted.

Now the human story of Deception Island is limited to small, seasonal teams deployed to research stations operated by Spain and Argentina, and a few visitors, like us, who make their way here on expedition ships and sailing yachts. The island has returned once again to wildlife, with tens of thousands of chinstrap penguins making homes on the relatively snow-free slopes, waddling back and forth on well-trodden highways from cloud-shrouded summits to the black sand beaches to enter the water to forage.

There are moments of looking at landscapes, however familiar or new they may be, which are unrepeatable. A particular play of light, exact temperatures, the wind, the time of the season. One could live several lives and never again see this place quite like that again. Though the rock and ice and ocean remain the same, and could almost be considered eternal, they will never again repeat themselves. They exist on another timescale.

These first moments of ours in Antarctica, fleeting glances of birds and whales, of ice and rock and sea spray, are ours alone, never to be rerun.





Orne Harbour, Wilhelmina Bay

DAY 4 | Friday 15 December

Position at 0554 on 15 Dec

Latitude: 64° 29.7'S

Longitude: 062° 14.6'W

Course: 215°

Speed: 8.3 knots

Wind Speed: 13.7 knots N

Barometer: 983 hPa

Air Temp: 1°C

We woke up to an atmospherically authentic Antarctic morning with a wake-up call and quote from our Expedition Leader Mario, before we enjoyed breakfast. Off it was to Orne Harbour, a small cove one nautical mile wide, indenting the west coast of Graham Land on the west side of the Antarctic Peninsula. Orne Harbour was discovered by de Gerlache in 1898 during the Belgian Antarctic expedition, and was named by the Scottish geologist David Fergusson travelling on board the whaler ship *Hanka* in 1913.

Arriving at the destination was a ship of ready and excited Expeditioners to venture outside the ship for the first time. Conditions at the side gates were adventurous but everyone made it into the Zodiacs and on their way. While the Zodiacs enjoyed their exploration penguins were seen for the first time, small rookery of chinstraps and gentoos gave us the Antarctic welcome! Then we continued exploring the coast to the south out of the harbour, where we saw two Weddell seals resting on the shore; such a productive morning! Returning to the ship and enjoying a hot beverage to warm up, everyone was exhilarated by this first experience of authentic Antarctic weather.

The *Sylvia Earle* made way to the next destination and along the way we were spoiled with views of humpback whales feeding in the nutrient-rich waters close to the ship - what extraordinary animals these gentle giants are!

After lunch we arrived at Wilhelmina Bay, an enchanted place that would not seem out of place in a Narnia movie. This was also discovered by de Gerlache, who named it after Queen Wilhelmina I of the Netherlands. The sea was calm and full of brash ice and icebergs, which we enjoyed driving through. Fortunately, our Expedition Leader Mario found a continental landing site that may have been previously untouched by human feet... Everybody took the opportunity to jump onto the beach and land on the continent.

A curious leopard seal checked out the arriving Zodiacs close to the beach, before potentially chomping on a Weddell seal we discovered hauled out on an ice floe a short time later. Judging by its numerous wounds, this animal had been through something eventful in recent times. Our courageous kayakers also had a great time paddling off for their first time and gliding through the beautiful ice landscape. Once safely back on board and after our evening briefing, which ran through the plans and goals for the next day, dinner was a well-deserved treat before relaxing in the lounge, bar, library, or our comfortable cabins.





Lemaire Channel, Port Charcot, Yalour Islands, Hovgaard Island

DAY 5 | Saturday 16 December

Position at 0645 on 16 Dec

Latitude: 65° 02.7' S

Longitude: 063° 54.1' W

Course: 249.9°

Speed: 6.1 knots

Wind Speed: 2.9 knots N

Barometer: 987 hPa

Air Temp: 2°C

What a wonderful way to start a Saturday, out on the observation deck, taking in the peaks, glaciers, and icebergs in Lemaire Channel, and perhaps sipping on a warm tea or coffee. Clear enough to see all the sites, with some low-lying fog and clouds mixed in to add to the drama. As the ship dodged icebergs, our eyes followed glaciers up to the *bergschrund* where the glaciers clearly separate from the stagnant ice or *firn* higher on the slopes.

After a wonderful start to the day, we set our sights on Port Charcot to enjoy some gentoo colonies. Due to hazards, the ship needed to stay back as we enjoyed a longer than usual Zodiac exploration to reach the landing site. Making it up the steep, snowy (guano-covered) slope at the landing site paid off, as things flattened out and two gentoo colonies were on the horizon. With some sun finally peeking out, the snow seemed to suck our boots in every few steps. The gentoos in all of their glory and glam with their white eyeshadow and bright lipsticked beaks could be seen stealing rocks, hiking up to high rock outcroppings, or jumping in for a wash and fresh fish. Hidden in the snow along the way, a few gentoo eggs were spotted that had succumbed to the skua who consider them a delicacy. Skua were seen swooping overhead or sneakily lingering near the colony edges, waiting for their chance to sneak a snack.

We had spotted a few Adélie penguins along the way, but were surrounded by colonies once we reached the Yalour Islands. Watching the penguins' drama play out was a treat. A few followed our footsteps up the landing site and made the steep, slippery rocks look like a walk in the park.

And after all of that, some of us still had it in us to camp out overnight on Hovgaard Island. What an adventure. Stomping our own nest and building our burritos as a light snow began to fall. We woke up a tad chilled, perhaps with a puddle under us, and a light dusting of fresh snow on top. We quickly packed up our gear and headed back to the *Sylvia Earle* to cosy up, take a nap, and reflect on the wonderful day and night we had immersing ourselves in Antarctica's wonders.





Lautaro Island, Paradise Bay

DAY 6 | Sunday 17 December 2023

Position at 0756 on 17 Dec

Latitude: 64° 56.3'S

Longitude: 063° 38.5'W

Course: 121°

Speed: 7.9 knots

Wind Speed: 16.4 knots

Barometer: 996 hPa

Air Temp: 1°C

In the early hours of the morning, one could notice scarce movements on the otherwise sleepy ship. A couple of Zodiacs cruised to the island of Hovgaard, towards what to an untrained eye might have seemed like one of the many gentoo colonies. In fact, the individuals turtling together on the shore in order to stay warm, were the brave campers who just spent the night under the open sky.

Darkness does not visit this part of the world in the southern summer, often keeping the penguins and humans alike wide awake. Yet the tired but happy faces met onshore seemed to say it was worth it – after all, they just became some of the very few humans who can now say 'I have camped in Antarctica!' As one of the Expeditioners described it: 'The only sound imprinting on the surrounding silence, was the one of snowflakes falling gently on the Bivvy Bag.'

With some on the ship waking up and others taking much-needed naps, we got on our way towards Paradise Bay, our destination for the afternoon. With the perfect day we were already having, it was just a matter of time for a large pod of orcas to show up on the portside of the ship.

While we cruised along the Lemaire Channel, Kelsey shared her historical knowledge on the Belgian expedition of de Gerlache. Among all the fascinating, and sometimes dramatic, stories of the expedition, she showed us the human face of exploration and discoveries.

The afternoon brought the spirit of true exploration as we repositioned to Lautaro Island – a site that none of us, neither Expeditioners, nor the Expedition Team, had ever visited before. The location, bathed in sunshine as far as the eyes could see, making for a stunning afternoon.

Some of us Expeditioners, walked, paddled, snowshoed and snorkelled, surrounded by incredible landscape: The Seven Sisters and Wiencke Island. Weddell seals, gentoo penguins and antarctic octopus were only some of the wildlife sightings.

To finish off the day we had a lively BBQ on the outer upper decks, where we were handed fancy hats given to us by some of our enthusiastic Expedition Team. We compared the intensity of sunburn on our tired but content faces while having enjoyed another incredible day in Antarctica.





Anvers Bay, Cuverville Island

DAY 7 | Monday 18 December 2023

Position at 0651 on 18 Dec

Latitude: 64° 44.1'S

Longitude: 063 01.2'W

Course: 079°

Speed: 6.2 knots

Wind Speed: 30 knots

Barometer: 992 hPa

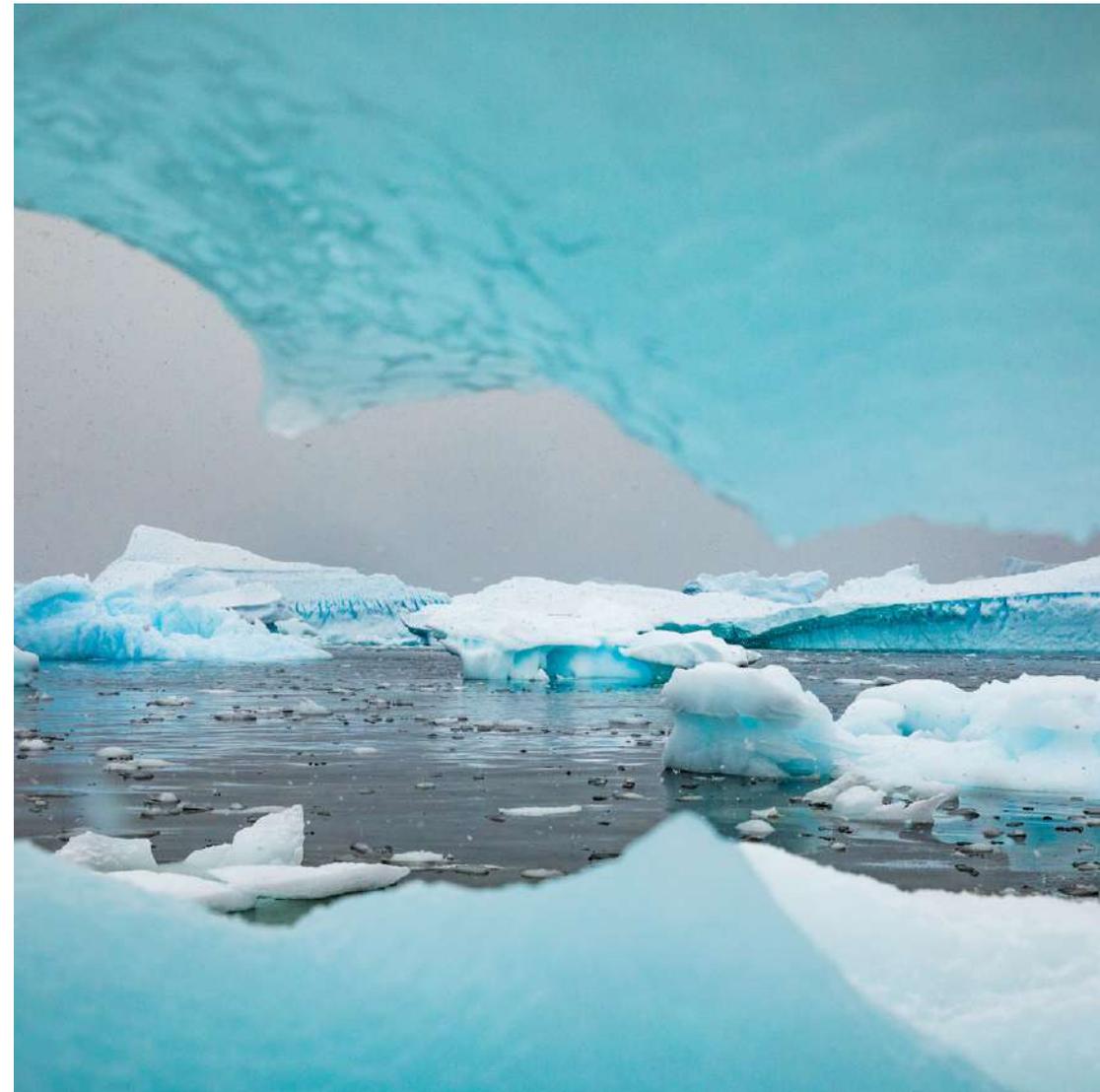
Air Temp: 1°C

Another Antarctic day dawned (although the sun was already up!) in the Gerlache Strait. In Mario's immortal words, 'The most beautiful place in the world... this morning.' In this case it was beautiful in a windy, choppy, damp kind of way. Given the weather, Plan A quickly gave way to Plan B of Zodiac exploring and sea kayaking in Anvers Bay. The intrepid mariners braved the elements and cruised through the newly forming grease ice in truly Antarctic weather. Then we were on to the main event of the morning, the Polar Plunge. All those crazy souls who decided they wanted to leap into the frigid Antarctic Ocean lined up in the mudroom in their best beachwear. Making their way down the stern steps with an impending sense of doom, there was a final warm (relatively speaking) step onto the Zodiac pontoon, a moment of pondering one's life choices, and then a launch into the dark, 3-degrees Centigrade depths. Surprisingly, when they came to the surface, everyone seemed very focused on the exit. A cheering crowd, dry towel and a shot of vodka seemed to revive the smiles. Everyone looked very awake, happy, and remarkably youthful.

A beautiful lunch was spent cruising around the bottom of Ronge Island and North past Danco Island. Then it was all hands to the mudroom for the afternoon operations. Cuverville Island was the destination, with a huge gentoo penguin rookery of up to 60,000 birds accessed through a graveyard of stranded icebergs. Onshore proved to be a slightly crazy penguin city, with prospective mums and dads finding and defending their pebbles, keeping their eggs warm, and keeping a wary eye on the circling and patient skuas.

The snowshoers headed up the hill, aiming for the top of the Island, but snow conditions dictated that discretion was the better part of valour, so they headed back down the hill on an extended circuit of the great gentoo circus. Meanwhile, the snorkellers were bobbing around finding disco balls, experiencing penguin swim-bys and iceberg explorations. On the other side of the island, the sea kayakers enjoyed a paddle around and conducted a birthday celebration.

The day ended in the wilds of Antarctica after a reluctant decision was made to head north early due to an impending storm system. A final evening cruise north in the evening light along the Northern Peninsula before casting off into the infamous Drake Passage.





Polar Plunge

DAY 7 | Monday 18 December 2023













Drake Passage

DAY 8 | Tuesday 19 December 2023

Position at 0600 on 19 Dec

Latitude: 62° 39.5' S

Longitude: 062° 00.0' W

Course: 300°

Speed: 13.2 knot

Wind Speed: 8 knots N

Barometer: 986 hPa

Air Temp: 2°C

Another day dawned... A day we all knew could be a rocker and a roller on board. Today is all about finding comfort and balance when all else is a little unsteady around us!

We are not in full Drake shakes, but unfortunately we are also not on the Drake Lake.

The Drake Passage is a legendary 800-kilometer-wide stretch of the Atlantic Ocean between the tip of South America (Cape Horn) and the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica. It connects the Scotia Sea with the Southeastern area of the Pacific Ocean. The Drake Passage happens to be the intersection of a powerful combination of currents. With no nearby land, water can flow as fast as 150-million cubic metres per second. Combine this with brutal winds and the propensity for storms to develop in the area, and you have got one rocky stretch of sea.

The day started with a fascinating lecture from Andrea about the mental health problems that staff working in Antarctica can face. She weaves in many interesting and amusing (some not so amusing!) firsthand accounts from explorers and scientists, and displayed some charming mugshots of the Expedition Team!

Following shortly afterwards we had Don empowering us all to engage in citizen science and to find a way in which we as individuals can all start to make a change with the environment around us... Perhaps with an extra push being inspired from the recent days in the Antarctic.

Lunch (for those of us who could join) was a much quieter affair than usual. There were a lot of horizontal Drake navigators sensibly sleeping their way through the crossing.

Kelsey wowed us with another Antarctic history lecture. This time about Shackleton's journey on the *Endurance*. A very good lecture for the Drake Passage to remind all of what a luxury we are experiencing in comparison the explorers before us. For those of you who do not know the account of Shackleton's journey and missed the lecture, there is a great book by William Grill called *Shackleton's Journey*.

Recap time! Vicky gave an eye-opening recap lecture about the ecosystem around a whale fall. Over dinner this provided a lot of follow-up chat.

Then to bed. Sleepy time, ready for another night of being rocked to sleep by big mama Drake.



Drake Passage, Beagle Channel

DAY 9 | Wednesday 20 December 2023

Position at 0858 20 Dec

Latitude: 56°23.49'S

Longitude: 064°00.012'W

Course: 343°

Speed: 14.6 knots

Wind Speed: 22.7 knots

Barometer: 100 hPa

Air Temp: 3°C

After a night being gently rocked to sleep by the ferocious Drake Passage, we woke to calmer seas but without the happy voice of our Expedition Leader Mario, who had decided to let us start the day organically and without his regular wake-up call. We enjoyed breakfast, with tranquil views of the sea and the occasional seabird soaring past, before mountain guide Mike from New Zealand gave us an excellent introduction to the geology of the Antarctic continent. As an Antarctic field training officer and safety guide, Mike has been working for various clients, mostly scientists in the deep field, since the 1980s. He taught us not only about geological developments, from Gondwanaland to today, but also about logistics and operations in Antarctica, including proper toileting on the ice.

After a leisurely lunch, we were called out on deck to admire a pod of dolphins that were surfing the bow of our ship as we were making our way towards Ushuaia. The Citizen Science team gathered its loyal followers out on deck and managed to count a black-browed albatross, a white-chinned petrel, a snowy albatross (recently renamed from the wandering albatross resident to South Georgia), a sooty shearwater and several northern giant petrels. Those of us who took the opportunity to go outside enjoyed the fresh air and relatively mild temperatures – very different from the biting cold of just a day ago! The air started to smell more fragrant as we continued sailing along what was now the Drake Lake.

We had the opportunity to visit the Bridge in small groups – careful not to touch anything that could result in us sinking, we learned about the instruments that keep the ship working and on course. Someone is always on the bridge, looking out for whales, and Carlos explained what happens when the ship enters uncharted territory, how to avoid hitting wildlife, how to determine depth of water beneath the ship, and graciously answered any other questions we fired at him.

In the afternoon, special guest lecturer Don gave his third and last presentation on climate change and what one can do to play their part in combating it. This was followed by an E-Team slide show on Happy Whale, a Citizen Science project that tracks and identifies whales from around the world.

Sailing in the Beagle Channel, we enjoyed glimpses of our first South American mountains since we began this extraordinary journey... what a day, what a trip it's been!

Beagle Channel

DAY 10 | Thursday 21 December 2023

Position at 0854 on 21 Dec

Latitude: 55° 02.356'S

Longitude: 066° 44.115'W

Course: 127.3°

Speed: 4.3 knots

Wind Speed: 10.2 knots

Barometer: 1008 hPa

Air Temp: 4°C

This morning we woke up to the calm water near the entry of Beagle Channel after what seemed to be a very windy night. Many of us enjoyed a sleep-in after an exciting night playing Antarctic Trivia with Tamsin. It is quite unusual to spend the day on the Beagle Channel; however, leaving the peninsula was necessary to avoid a weather front coming through the Drake Passage. Thanks to this decision we all avoided a couple of days of discomfort.

It was stunning sailing through the channel, amazed by the view of the mountain range that surround the city of Ushuaia and the sumptuous nature that surrounds it. We spotted a few dolphins in the distance, penguins and many birds.

The Expedition Team knew how to keep us entertained and the day was filled with amazing lectures. We were also surprised by an organised group picture, which brought us lots of laughter. Today was also the perfect time to share stories, and exchange contacts and photos with the new friends made on board.

The lectures were equally interesting and diverse: 'Weddell Seals' by Leo, 'Race to the Pole' by our historian Kelsey and 'Women in Antarctica' by Andrea. The activity group gathered for a farewell catch-up and sharing memories.

As the evening fell, it was time for the Captain's Farewell cocktail and canapés which was followed by a beautiful photo summary of our adventures by Pia.

Tonight, we are retreating to our cabins, with a little nostalgia and dreading tomorrow morning as this concludes the end of this unique and extraordinary journey, for now. We will head back home with our hearts full of gratitude from this experience and already dreaming of our next expedition.

Ushuaia

DAY 11 | Wednesday 22 December 2023

The Aurora Expeditions Team send out a big thank you to you all for your great humour, infectious enthusiasm and smiling faces. It was a pleasure having you all on board and being able to share some of the pleasures the icy south has to offer. May your memories live long and bright.



Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: Russell Henry, Tim Vanhoutteghem, and Anula Jochym

Number of Paddlers: 20

Total Paddle Outings: 6

Total Distance Paddled: 28.5 km

Paddlers:	Lina Rahmane Bissu	Robin Yeager	Jintian Ye	Andrew Stauffer	Michael Hoghe
Vera Hui	Jorge Zundevich Benabib	Sebastian Heusser	Xiuxia Yu	Mahta Ariarad	
Michelle Leen	Babbett Ruby	Jason Ye	Alec Ye	Alfonso Scognamiglio	
Annaleise Getley	Erin Johnson	Michel Hoy	Xiao Yu Li	Amanda Blöse	

Friday 15 December 2023 - Wilhelmina Bay 5 km

After a stormy morning, no one had hopes too high that we would get on the water this afternoon. Miraculously though, Mario made a snap decision and got the ship relocated into some beautiful calm water full of brash ice! The paddle was a perfect first time for the group. Calm with lots of brash and slush that we putzed across the bay in. Once we made it to shore, we eventually got out of our boats and stepped foot on land in Antarctica! A great first outing.

Saturday 16 December 2023 - Port Charcot 3 km

After a beautiful wake-up cruising through the Lemaire Channel, we were excited to explore the area around Booth Island with our kayaks. The weather was in our favour this morning; no wind, mirror-like water and some sunshine peeking through the clouds. Since there was so much ice around, the Captain decided to anchor the ship further away from Port Charcot. This meant we had a beautiful start with our kayaks launching from the Zodiac, just aside the south entrance of the Lemaire Channel. We paddled alongside a small gentoo rookery, and found a junior elephant seal resting on some rocks. After our morning portion of wildlife watching from the kayak, we decided to paddle towards Port Charcot while venturing in between some spectacular icebergs. Since everyone wanted to land, we got a pickup by the Zodiac, and a fast drive towards the landing place of the day.

Saturday 16 December 2023 - Yalour Islands 7 km

Our afternoon paddle started as usual: with us sitting in the Zodiac, our kayaks strung behind it like little rubber duckies. Yet we were headed in the exact opposite direction than the rest of the boats. Instead of the outline of the Yalour Islands we followed the spray of two humpback whales spotted in the distance. When we got closer, we got into our kayaks and followed the two gentle giants for a little while. Some of us decided to stay behind and hang out with them for bit longer, as the rest of the group paddled towards the Yalours. Snaking in between the icebergs we explored and scouted the chain of small islands, often having the bays and nooks all to ourselves – in many places the shallow waters of the archipelago allowed only kayaks to pass by. Among the boisterous Adélie penguins we spotted a few Weddell seals taking their afternoon naps.

Sunday 17 December 2023 - Lautaro Island 5 km

The outing was a quite special one, since it was the first time for everyone (including the E-Team) to visit Lautaro Island. Being the new spot on our expedition map, there was only one way to go about its exploration – to circumnavigate it! The weather conditions also delivered some excitement: after the calm and sleepy conditions of the days before, now we had wind, waves and sunshine. We paddled around, first headed straight into the wind until we reached the southern tip of the island. The cornices overhanging from the edge of the glacier kept us at a distance for part of journey. After rounding the corner, we found a small bay with a stranded iceberg and threatening glacier face in the background, where we chatted about the surrealistically shaped icebergs and how they come to be. After the short stop we surfed the windwaves towards the beacon marking the north side of Lautaro.

Monday 18 December 2023 - Andvord Bay 3.5 km

After a wavy night, we started the morning already on plan B: Finding shelter from the storm winds inside Andvord Bay. The wind was blowing towards our upper operating limits through the Errera Channel, but on the corner of Beneden Head we could find some shelter. We started with zodiacing upwind, so we could launch the kayaks where it was more sheltered and have a downwind paddle, following the coastline around Beneden Head. On our way we saw some penguins on the rocks, and a gentoo in disguise teaming up with a skua on one of the icebergs. A windy, cold, foggy, and snowy paddle, but we had lots of fun being out in the Antarctic elements, paddling through slushy waters.

Monday 18 December 2023 - Cuverville Island 5 km

With some bad weather on the way, everyone was warned this may be our last opportunity to paddle. So, despite the heavy rain and breezy conditions, almost everyone suited up and got on the water... And oh boy, was it a goodie! The rain quickly turned into snow, then as we weaved our way through grounded bergy bits the snow stopped, the wind abated and the sun even popped out! We took our time paddling through bergs and along the shoreline watching gentoos bathe themselves. Eventually the two groups merged and we had a celebratory toast to Vera's birthday and the great trip we've had. A beautiful paddle around the cliffed backside of Cuverville brought us back to the ship to wrap up our paddling adventures. What a time we've had!



Snorkelling Log

Snorkelling Guides: Nicki Meharg, Anais Poulalion

Number of Snorkels: 10

Total Outings: 4

Snorkellers:

Julie Bitter

Tim Tivvis

Annie Doughty

Zoe Tippet

Michael Paxton

Sweta Patel

Limor Payne

Sriwati Sunkorjanto

Iwan Tjam

Donald Maruska

DAY 4 16.12.23 AM. Booth Island - Port Charcot

The excitement was high with our first outing, happening this morning in the most perfect conditions we could have wished for. No wind, the sun was peeking out and showing some blue sky. Geared up into their space suits our snorkellers were ready for a short Zodiac exploration before going in the water. Everyone was amazed with the sighting of penguins jumping in and out of the water and we had an incredible encounter with a humpback whale feeding; we observed it for a little while before heading to our snorkelling site. The site was next to a rocky wall, and one by one the snorkellers entered the water and experienced their first brain freeze before they swam away from the Zodiac. A Weddell seal was nearby and swam next to a couple of snorkellers, and a couple of gentoo joined the party a little later. Everyone was stoked coming back into the Zodiac: 'We just snorkelled in Antarctica.'

DAY 4 16.12.23 PM Yalour Islands

The Yalour Islands are a small group of low-lying islands surrounded by mountains scenery, and home of the Adélie penguin colony. We snorkelled in this protected, rocky shallow bay with icebergs in the background. While snorkelling along the shoreline, we were able to see the rocky bottom; it was interesting to see some algaesponges and we even spotted a few pink starfish. On those rocks, we spotted some copepods, limpid and were mesmerised to see some krill - a strange-looking creature - translucent with some pink shade. We swam close to a very small iceberg, and experienced the incredible views from underwater. Just above us on a rock, a crabeater seal was sleeping, while in a distance we experienced an iceberg rocking back and forth.

DAY 5 17.12.23 PM Lautaro Islands

Lying just west of Lemaire Island in Gerlache Strait, Lautaro Islands was a first for all of us, and as the Expedition Team we were super excited to explore a place we haven't been to yet. As soon as we saw the surrounds of the landing site, we knew this would be an amazing snorkelling site. The clarity from the site of the islands was showing us a rocky pebble bottom covered by algae. The main word from our snorkellers at the end of their 40 minutes exploration was 'Amazing'. Today our snorkellers entered the world of wonder and awe; they experienced the sight of multiple zooplankton. They described seeing some disco balls with electric colours going through.

Later on that night, they learned what they saw are called Ctenophorae - comb jellyfish. A snail-like animal - gastropod *Pellilitorina pelita*, a caterpillar-like creature with two long antennae called Tomopteridae. Annie mentioned following a krill for quite some time; she was very interested in the fascinating creature's behaviour.

Day 6 18.12.23 PM Cuverville Island

Little did we know this would be our last snorkel in Antarctica; however, this was the cherry on the top of the cake. The scenery was spectacular, and along the shallow water we were able to observe penguins standing on the shore from a different perspective. The islands were surrounded by lots of icebergs. We were amazed by the clarity of the water; it was a perfect setting. We saw what we have been wishing for since our first snorkel: seeing penguin underwater! They glide through the water super quick, but what an amazing sight. A Weddell seal stayed with us for a little while, observing us as much as we were observing it before swimming off. The sun came out and we all happily chilled and enjoyed the Antarctica serenity.





Snowshoeing Log

Guides: Mike Roberts, Dave Stark and Sean Waters

Number of Snowshoers: 12

Total Outings: 3

Snowshoers:

Dan Donohoe

Jason Burek

Elizabeth Cole

Penelope Maddick

Inessa Stanishevskaya

Alexander Gage

Christopher Schultz

Lauren Gage

Indra Finch

Briohny Morgan

Jamin Cherry

Rudolph von Sinner

12 December 2023 - Embarkation Day

Crew and Passengers onboard at 12.30 and a quick start on the Drake to get ahead of the weather system. The adventure begins!

13 December 2023 At Sea - Crossing the Drake Passage

Woke up to a bright sunny day and 4-metre waves. Settling into a life of good food and rolling horizons.

First Team meeting at 5.30. Meet and greet and explanation of the program. Lots of great questions. Captain's welcome and dinner.

14 December 2023 - At Sea

Woke up in Antarctica! Mix of sun and cloud and a balmy 0 degrees Centigrade with light winds. In the lee of the South Shetland Islands and the big swell and waves have calmed down.

Landing at Snow Island was not advised due to weather conditions. We moved on and had a cruise into the caldera on Deception Island in wet and windy conditions. A very historical place and it was hard not to imagine what it would have been like to live there as a whaler.

15 December 2023 - Orne Landing | Willhemina Bay

Orne Landing position 640. 63441, 620. 55263

A foggy morning with some blowing snow. Activity operations were cancelled, and we went for an exhilarating Zodiac exploration around Spigot Peak in Orne Harbor. The rookery on the point had chinstrap penguins, some gentoo penguins and blue-eyed shags (antarctic shag). Around the corner we spotted a Weddell seal in the snow.

Wet and cold, we returned to the ship for a cruise in Willhemina Bay where we had a few humpback whales surfacing.

Late-afternoon conditions looked good for another Zodiac exploration, and we headed 4 kilometres across the bay to a point, where we set foot on continental Antarctica.

16 December 2023 - Port Charcot | Hovgaard Island | Yalour Islands | Hovgaard Island camping

Very busy day of activities today. We started at 7.00am with a beautifully stunning cruise down the Lemaire Channel and into Port Charcot. A short Zodiac drive over to Hovgaard Island to begin our first snowshoe exploration. Good conditions took us up 200 metres onto the shoulder of Hovgaard peak overlooking Lemaire. Round trip was about 2.5 hours and we travelled about 3 kilometres. The afternoon was a trip down to Yalour Islands to see the Adélie penguin rookeries. The fun didn't stop for some, as after dinner it was back to Hovgaard Island for a night out camping.

17 December 2023 - Paradise Bay | Lautara Island

Our ship cruise from Port Charcot to Paradise was rudely interrupted by a large pod of orca. Of course, we had no option but to deviate course and watch them. Certainly, a special treat and not that common to see.

The afternoon saw us land on Lautara Island. This was a new landing and site for all of us. It was a nice short and easy snowshoe, with incredible views of Paradise Bay and the Seven Sisters. Lots of seals and penguin rookeries.

BBQ night with good food, fun times and goofy hats up in the Rock Hopper Restaurant. Great way to end a fun and full day.

18 December 2023 - Zodiac Exploration | Polar Plunge | Cuverville Island

Oh my, high winds, big waves and snow was what were served this morning. Snowshoeing was possible on Peon Peak but as it was far away, we couldn't fit in a snowshoe exploration and the Polar Plunge. We were set to go with one and we had to unfortunately call it off. A Zodiac exploration ensued in the brisk breeze and wet snow.

Polar Plunge, Brrrrr.

Many brave snowshoers turned out for the dance of the lemmings. By all accounts it was an awesome experience.

Our afternoon exploration was to Cuverville. Up to 60,000 gentoos reside in the rookeries here. We attempted to get up high on Cuverville peak but snow conditions weren't ideal for safe travel, so we turned back and did a nice loop through the rookeries. Absolutely stunning and so much fun watching the penguins travelling up and down their roads.

Surprise news after dinner that we are departing to Ushuaia a day early to outrun a storm. While disappointing, we recognise the wise decision Captain Soto has taken to keeping us safe at sea.

19 December 2023 - At Sea

By 7.00am we had passed through the South Shetland Islands and were heading into the waters of the Drake Passage, sad to say goodbye to Antarctica. At sea connecting with new friends, sorting photos and attending some outstanding lectures. A trip we will never forget.



to Ushuaia

Spirit of Antarctica 12 – 22 Dec 2023

1. Ushuaia
2. Drake Passage
3. President Head (attempted landing)
4. Whaler's Bay, Deception Island (ship exploration)
5. Orne Harbour
6. Sadler Point, Willhemina Bay (Continental Landing)





Expeditioners:

Eric Anderson

Cindy Anderson

Mahta Ariarad

Prakash Balasubramanian

Julie Bitter

Amanda Blose

James Borg

Warwick Bowen

Cathy Bowen

Ginny Brush

Linda Burek

Jason Burek

Andrew Chee

Jamin Cherry

Elizabeth Cole

Kimberlee Curley

Jonathan Curley

Renee Dempsey

Nathan Diller

Dan Donohoe

Annie Doughty

Nancy Efron

Harris Efron

Anna Ferguson

Indi Finch

Alexander Gage

Lauren Gage

Vernon Geh

Jenny Geh

Evelyn Geh

Clementina Getley

Ian Getley

Annaleise Getley

Alison Gilmore

Brent Gisslen

Godfrey Godfrey

Rob Gordon

Rhoda Gordon

Robert Grignon

Bonnie Hansen

Sebastian Heusser

Michael Hoghe

Michel Hoy

Vera Hui

Iwan Tjam

Shahid Jalal Syed

Erin Johnson

Melissa Laitman

Kim Langley

Michelle Leen

Xiao Yu Li

Mei Ling Loh

Bin Low

Penelope Maddick

Deetya Mahendra

Lien-Cheng Mai

Hsiao-Wan Mai

Donald Maruska

Steve McLaughlin

Maria Moore

Robyn Moore

Briohny Morgan

Mervyn Olson

Margaret-Anne Olson

Bharti Patel

Mahesh Patel

Sweta Patel

Michael Paxton

Limor Payne

Keith Payne

Yze Yang Poh

Megan Powers

Lina Rahmane Bissu

Kimberley Rainer

Mahendra Rajan

Nisha Ramdas Chandnani

James Rameson

Tyler Rameson

Ann Richer

Babbett Ruby

Pawan Sahu

Christopher Schultz

Alfonso Scognamiglio

Dmitriy Sheykman

Nina Shirling Spinrad

Joey Springer

Inessa Stanishevskaya

Andrew Stauffer

Sriwati Sunkorjanto

Zoe Tippet

Timothy Tivvis

Adam Townson

Max Townson

Stephanie Tsoi

Ching-Chu Tsou

Anubhuti Varma

Naomi Venegas

Rosi Viljoen

Rudolf von Sinner

Charles White

Freda Widawski

Cathy Wigder

Herb Wigder

Jason Ye

Xiuxia Ye

Jintian Ye

Alec Ye

Robin Yeager

Jorge Zundelevich Benabib



Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Mario Placidi Spring
Assistant Expedition Leader: Jeff Nagel
Onboard Expedition Manager: Justine Bornholdt
Onboard Expedition Manager Trainee: Ashleigh Peters
Marine Biologist/Citizen Science Coordinator: Vicky Inglis
Naturalist: Leo Siobelzon
Historian: Kelsey Camacho
Anthropologist: Andrea Herbert
Photography Guide: Pia Harboure
Expedition Medic: Laura Boenish
Expedition Guide: Tamsin Both
Kayaking Guide: Russell Henry
Kayaking Guide: Anula Jochym
Kayaking Guide: Tim Vanhoutteghem
Snowshoe Guide: Mike Roberts
Snowshoe Guide: David Stark
Snowshoe Guide: Sean Waters
Snorkel Guide: Nichola Meharg
Snorkel Guide: Ana Poulalion
Zodiac Master: Jeb Pearce
Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ana Prado
Enrichment Specialist: Don Maruska

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Donael Soto Hernandez
Chief Officer: Andrey Gilevskiy
Second Officer: Raymer Fernandes
Deck Cadet: Carlos Florido Carvalho Da Silva
Safety Officer: Matko Zagorac
Bosun: Leo Francis Magnaye Marzan
Ship Doctor: Gloria Gonzales Iraheta
Chief Engineer: Constantin Turmacu
First Engineer: Petr Alyenkov
IT Officer: Valentin Cojocar
Hotel Director: Balvant Singh
F&B Service Manager: Narendra Seeram
Head Bartender: Lloyd Laylo
Chief Purser: Josephine Blanco
Executive Chef: Cristiand Carlos Mini Pineda
Sous Chef: Hubert Ramiro Barreto
Hotel Controller: Orlando Costa
Receptionist: Kateryna Tauzhnianska
Receptionist: Jaypee Alota Abonitalla
Head Stateroom Attendant: Marthony Penalosa
Able Seaman: Lexter Fadriquela
Able Seaman: Rene Casipe
Able Seaman: Anthony John Brosas
Able Seaman: Noel Reugia
Able Seaman: Rossell Fernandez Araujo
Able Seaman: Rajiv Rauniyar

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