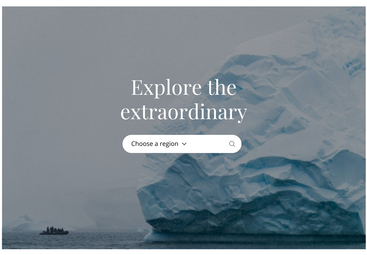

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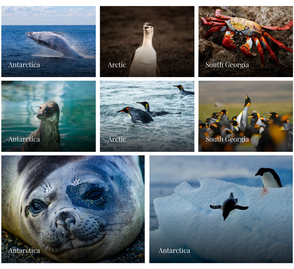

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Expert tip

By Teresa Machan

PEOPLE PHOTOGRAPHY & ED. TELLEMARK TRAVEL

Keen on whales, photography, or have a penchant for seabirds? Do itinerary research to ensure you get the most from your time in Antarctica.

Be prepared to pass a medical. This requires a signature from a GP to say you are fit enough to travel. Most GPs charge for this service.

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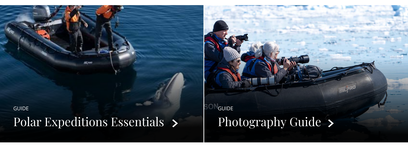

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Mark Stratton

PROFESSIONAL WRITER & JOURNALIST

By Mark Stratton

APRIL 05, 2024

The Antarctic Peninsula

COMBINE ADVENTURE AND 5* COMFORT

Sustainability 8 Exp. Bio fuel | Budget $$$$ | Ship type Icebreaker | Duration 12 days

Antarctic Peninsula cruise overview

With a variety of ships and multiple departure dates to choose from throughout the season, this well priced voyage is a great option. For those looking for more adventure, optional kayaking or camping is available and highly recommended by previous customers.

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Map & itinerary

Crossing the Drake Passage is an explorer's milestone for many, but it adds several days to your travels. On this new itinerary, experience the best of both worlds as you sail via ship to Antarctica and then return to Puerto Natales on a 2-hour flight, saving time without sacrificing any of the adventure.

Read more

DAY 1 Ushuaia, Argentina

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DAY 2-3 Ushuaia, Argentina

DAY 4-5 Exploring Antarctica

DAY 6-7 King George Island

DAY 6-7 Peurto Natales

Availability

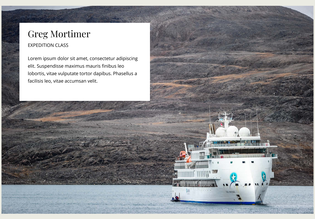
3 ITINERARIES

2024 JUNE 18 10 DAYS	2024 SEPTEMBER 01 12 DAYS	2024 AUG 05 10 DAYS

Cabin	Available	$$$$$	ENQUIRE
Veranda	Sold out	$$$$$	ENQUIRE
Suite	Available	$$$$$	ENQUIRE

About this ship

OVERVIEW DINNING ENTERTAINMENT ENRICHMENT HEALTH & FITNESS DECK PLANS



Greg Mortimer

EXPEDITION CLASS

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Highlights

Whale watching
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Polar plunge
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Zodiac tour
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Whale watching
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Penguins or Polar bears?

YOUR FIRST CHOICE BETWEEN THE POLES...

Image attribution here

By Mark Stratton
APRIL 25, 2024

ExplorEarth writer Mark Stratton explores the common question of which region to visit first, the Arctic or Antarctic?

During a recent vacation, I met a traveller from Italy who told me he desperately wanted to visit the Arctic ... to see penguins. Without at all sounding patronising, as a frequent traveller to the polar regions, I nodded and suggested he'd have better opportunities to see them in Antarctica but not to expect any polar bears down there.

It would be easy to oversimplify the polar regions as simply ice-bound, remote, and frigidly cold, with little difference between the two. After all, even the names of the two polar regions bear semblance. The word 'Arctic' derives from the Greek, Arktos, meaning bear, so named because of the prominent stellar constellations in the northern hemisphere - Ursa major and Ursa minor. Antarctica, meanwhile, rather unimaginatively translates as 'opposite to the Arctic'.

Yet the differences between both regions are myriad and each offer completely different experiences and reasons to travel. The first question any traveller needs to ask before choosing between the two is what do you want from your voyage? Is it solely to see wildlife, or to be dazzled by extreme landscapes, or dig deeper into the exploits of derring-do explorers. With ice-loaded small expedition cruise ships offering ever more adventurous and varied itineraries to both, your starting choice is whether to head north or south?

Antarctic Versus Arctic

Geography Matters

Antarctica's realm is easier to define than the Arctic. It is a vast uninhabited continent (the 7th) of thick ice-caps and high altitude mountains and plateaus, surrounded by the Southern Ocean. No nation lays claim nor has deed to it. Over 95% of travellers experience the western region, the Antarctic Peninsula, which is the most northerly point of the frozen continent – a finger of land pointing towards southernmost South America that is reachable by a two-day sailing across the Drake's Passage. Ten or eleven day cruises to the peninsula offer an ideal entry introduction to Antarctica and most voyages explore the peninsula's fractured archipelago to the west in the Bellingshausen Sea above the Antarctic Circle at 66° 32'. To the east of the peninsula is the less-visited Weddell Sea, which Shackleton made famous during his epic 1914-16 expedition. Antarctic Peninsula trips can stretch out to three weeks with the addition of the remarkable South Georgia and Falkland sub-Antarctic islands – both British Overseas Territories.

Fewer travellers venture to East Antarctica, especially the Ross Sea ice shelf, which has accessible emperor penguin colonies yet more challenging conditions for ice navigation. This wild region is sailed to from either Australia or New Zealand. Trips tend to be longer, 21-to-28 days, and itineraries are more fluid.

By contrast, the Arctic is trickier to define. It's a complex juxtaposition of continental landmass and islands above the 66° North line of the Arctic Circle that are part of sovereign territories. The landscape diversity plus inhabitation ensures a greater variety of adventures await. A huge swathe of the Arctic lies within Russia and Canada. With the former inaccessible, the quintessential Arctic journey is a ship traverse through the Northwest Passage via Northern Canada's Nunavut region between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Yet there are so many more options, and for European travellers, much closer to home. The world's largest island, Greenland, remains enigmatic, but west and east coast cruises have become increasingly popular, especially to encounter Inuit culture. Arctic Norway likewise offers voyages down its fjord-riven western coast or to the most northerly inhabited islands on Earth, Svalbard, which is extremely popular for wildlife. The most visited subarctic island is the remarkable Iceland – the Land of Fire and Ice.

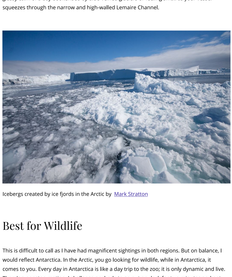
Gerlache Straight in Antarctica by Mark Stratton

Different Landscapes

Let me start with a similarity. Forged by the feeling you are a frontier traveller the landscapes of both regions are sure to leave you in raptures. The sense of space, remoteness, narrow passes, glorious bays, icebergs, sea ice, towering sea cliffs, and snowy mountains create an endorphin surge like no other.

The most noticeable difference could be argued vegetation. In the lower Arctic, the coniferous treeline eventually gives way to permafrost tundra, with mossy flower-rich plains while, by contrast, just a couple of plants – a hairgrass and pearlwort - survive in Antarctica. You will generally see less ice and snow in the former's landscapes - the Arctic's issue with rising sea temperatures is well documented. I'd describe Arctic landscapes as stark yet magnificent. I think of the towering sea cliffs down the Northwest Passage and the austere sweeping shingle beach of the legendary Beechey Island, which attained notoriety during Sir John Franklin's expedition. My highlight is the breathtaking Ice-fjord at Ilulissat in Western Greenland, where icebergs disgorge into the funkily named Disko Bay and float like a frozen Mary Celeste.

In Antarctica, there are few moments when you will ever experience anything less than being wowed by your surroundings. Every minute and every angle offer frozen beauty, whether that is looking down from the rocky promontory above Neko Harbour over the glassy calm of a bay bookended by blue-veined glaciers or feeling small as your vessel squeezes through the narrow and high-walled Lemaire Channel.



Icebergs created by ice fjords in the Arctic by Mark Stratton

Best for Wildlife

This is difficult to call as I have had magnificent sightings in both regions. But on balance, I would reflect Antarctica. In the Arctic, you go looking for wildlife, while in Antarctica, it comes to you. Every day in Antarctica is like a day trip to the zoo; it is only dynamic and live. There's a nonstop motion. I challenge anybody to go out on deck for two minutes and not see anything at all.

This could be penguins porpoising across the sea like bouncing bombs or being ripped to shreds (Antarctica is a visceral environment) by a leopard seal. You should see four penguin species during a voyage: Adelie, chinstrap, Gentoo, and macaroni. Look skywards, and there is always an albatross or giant petrel patrolling above your ship. At any minute, expect to see a humpback whale lunge feeding or breaching while orcas are commonplace. Carefully examine every floating piece of ice as, more than likely, a doe-eyed crabeater or Weddell seal will be hauled out and staring back at you.

For a further wildlife upgrade, especially if nature photography is your oeuvre, South Georgia offers, in my humble opinion, the greatest show on earth. Millions of fur seals, king penguins, elephant seals, and albatross colonies present a spectacle like no other. Serious birders should ensure the Falkland Islands are added to any cruise, as the avian life there is sensational.

When it comes to the Arctic, wildlife is not served up on a plate – although I was once offered frozen narwhal in a remote Inuit community. I've had incredible sightings in the Arctic, yet they are harder to win. I've seen polar bears in Arctic Canada, herds of shaggy muskox in Greenland, and big walrus tuskers basking in Svalbard sunshine. When cruising down the eastern coast of Baffin Island a few summers ago, we overtook a slow-moving pod of bowhead whales, once hunted to near extinction and now slowly recovering. Yet, for all my eagle-eyed observations on deck, I've never set eyes on a narwhal ... or eaten one!

Related stories

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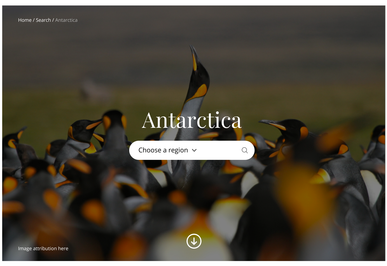

By Mark Stratton
APRIL 05, 2024

Antarctica Overview

Antarctica, the southernmost continent, is likely the first place that comes to mind when considering polar travel, expeditions, and small-ship adventures.

Often scribed by marketeers and copywriters as a vast, icy wilderness, the ultimate polar destination and the coldest, driest, and windiest continent on the planet. The Antarctica we see visualised in travel brochures is Earth's last true wilderness adventure. It is a place with icebergs the size of skyscrapers and wildlife that does not consider the ship visitors a threat; their innocent curiosity is all the more enchanting for imagery and storytelling. All true, of course, but there is so much more to this critical and vast destination than the adjective superlatives that tend to feed off it.

Read more

Antarctica interactive map

- ANTARCTIC PENINSULA
- SOUTH GEORGIA
- FALKLAND ISLANDS
- WEDDELL SEA & SNOW HILL
- ANTARCTIC CIRCLE & ROSS SEA

Some copy about Antarctic Peninsula, possibly about 50 words max. Although that depends on how much is needed.

EXPLORE

Traveller snapshot: Why visit?

Iceberg and Glacier Viewing: The scenery is breathtaking, with massive icebergs and glaciers. Zodiac boat tours allow close-up views and navigation through ice-filled waters.

Antarctica expeditions and small-ship adventures offer hundreds of Zodiac landing opportunities at various sites, including research stations, wildlife viewing areas (especially penguin colonies), and historic sites like Ernest Shackleton's hut.

Some trips offer kayaking among icebergs and for real close-ups with marine life and the famous "polar plunge," where you jump into the icy waters from the ship, reserved mainly for the hardier adventurers, but you never know.

Educational Programs and Citizen Science are essential features of trips to Antarctica. These are important because it is expensive to send scientists down to this isolated continent, so deputising travellers as scientists can be a significant advantage and cost-saving in research. Also commonplace are onboard lectures and presentations by experts in glaciology, marine biology, climate change, and polar history, enhancing the experience and offering more profound insights into the region's environment, wildlife, and exploration history.

Wildlife

Wildlife Watching: Antarctica's wildlife is a major attraction, with opportunities to see different species of penguins (such as Emperor, Adélie, and Chinstrap), seals (including Weddell, Leopard, and Fur seals), whales (like Humpback, Minke, and Orca), and numerous seabirds.

Related guides

GUIDE
Birding

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Adventure & Exploration

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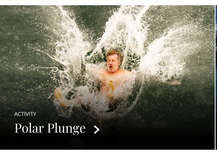

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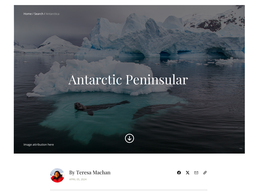

Antarctic Peninsular

Image: ale.thurlow-farm

By Teresa Machan
APRIL 30, 2020

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Read more ↓

Antarctica interactive map

ANTARCTIC PENINSULA

SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS

FALKLAND ISLANDS

NORTH, SOUTH & DRAKE PASSAGE

SOUTH GEORGIA & SOUTH SANDWICH

Some copy about Antarctic Peninsula, possibly about its wildlife. Maybe this depends on how much is needed.

EXPLORE ↗

Where is the Antarctic Peninsula?

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When & how to travel

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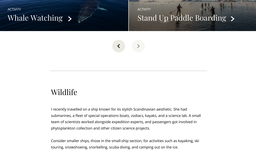

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Ship types

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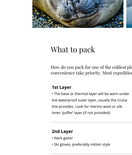
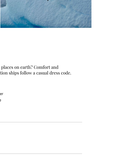


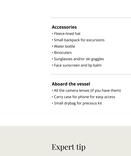


Activities

I recently travelled on a ship known for its stylish Scandinavian aesthetic. She had submarines, a fleet of special operations boats, zodiacs, kayaks, and a science lab. A small team of scientists worked alongside expedition experts, and passengers got involved in phytoplankton collection and other citizen science projects.

Consider smaller ships, those in the small-ship sector, for activities such as kayaking, ski touring, snowshoeing, snorkelling, scuba diving, and camping out on the ice.

Some ships have longer itineraries that combine Antarctica with the Falkland Islands and Patagonia, as well as a summer itinerary that takes in the highlights of the peninsula before dipping below the Antarctic Circle. Its citizen science endeavours include working with the Polar Collective to monitor seaweed biodiversity. Other ships will take passengers by helicopter to visit a remote penguin rookery near Snow Hill Island, east of the peninsula. The final approach to the colony involves a walk across dense sea ice.



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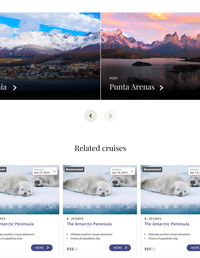

What to pack

How do you pack for one of the coldest places on earth? Comfort and convenience take priority. Most expedition ships follow a casual dress code.

1st Layer
- The base or thermal layer will be worn under the waterproof outer layer, usually the cruise line provides. Look for merino wool or silk. Inner 'puffer' layer (if not provided)

2nd Layer
- Neck gaiter
- Ski gloves, preferably mitten style

Outerwear
- Two or three pairs of thermal or 'heat tech' socks and a couple of pairs of inner silk socks for colder months
- Icyclopentine patches, bands, or other sea sickness medication for the Drake Passage
- Long-sleeve fleece or heat tech tops for shore visits

Footwear
- Gumtex boots
- Slippers or comfy shoes

Accessories
- Fleece-lined hat
- Small backpack for excursions
- Water bottle
- Binoculars
- Sunglasses and/or ski goggles
- Face sunscreen and lip balm

Aboard the vessel
- All the camera lenses (if you have them)
- Carry-on phone for easy access
- Small drybag for precious kit

Expert tip

By Teresa Machan
Author, Explorearth & Travelbeyond Tasmania

Keen on whales, photography, or have a penchant for waterfall? Our itinerary research to ensure you fit the most from your time in Antarctica.

Be prepared to pass a medical. This requires a signature from a GP to say you are fit enough to travel. Most GPs charge for this service.

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