

YATCH

Inside
Parsifal III

Edition
26 April





EXPLORING DRAKE PASSAGE

The difference between a strait and a passage is that a strait is a narrow water body connecting two larger water bodies, while a passage connects water bodies between islands.

However, the two terms are often used interchangeably. The Drake Passage is one of the most famous waterways or passages in the world. It is one of the most treacherous places for sailors and water vessels because of the strong currents that do not meet any resistance from a landmass. It has a reputation for being the most powerful convergence of seas. The Drake Passage connects Antarctica to the rest of the world.

The Drake Passage has an average depth of 3,400 meters, with the deepest part (near the southern and northern boundaries) measuring 4,800 meters below the water surface. The passage is the shortest crossing from Antarctica to the rest of the world, with the narrowest point being the 800-kilometer passage between Livingston Island and Cape Horn. The passage's seafloor has sediments of varying degrees. The region south of Tierra del Fuego has sandy and clay silt on the seafloor, while the regions near Antarctica have ice-rafted material.

The Drake Passage is approximately 1,000 kilometers long and is the site for the most powerful convergence of seas. The Southern Seas, Pacific Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean converge at the passage, creating a strong current mix. The currents do not meet any resistance from any landmass, forming the Antarctic Circumpolar Current.

The air and surface water temperatures vary across the passage. The average air temperature over the Drake Passage ranges from 41 degrees Fahrenheit in the north to 27 degrees Fahrenheit in the south. Water surface temperature also varies from 43 degrees Fahrenheit in the north to 30 degrees Fahrenheit.



The History of the Drake Passage

This body of water is named after the famous English explorer, Sir Francis Drake. Though Drake never sailed through his namesake waters himself, one of his ships did pass near its location, discovering a connection between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This meant that they inadvertently discovered the Drake Passage in 1578, and proved the existence of an open water route south of South America.

Many decades after its discovery, a ship named the Eendracht made the first recorded successful voyage through the Drake Passage. Willem Schouten, a Dutch navigator, served as captain of this voyage in 1616. He also named Cape Horn on this journey. Despite the difficulties involved in navigating it, the Drake Passage proved to be an important part of future international trade routes in the 19th and early 20th centuries, prior to the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914.

Throughout history, the Drake Passage is known for its often turbulent seas. These conditions made it a very dangerous crossing for wooden sailing ships. However, this has changed with modern ship construction and technology. With the advent of sonar and advanced navigation systems, the journey is now much more accessible to travelers from across the globe. In December 2019, a team of rowers even achieved the first human-powered transit of the Drake Passage!

The air and surface water temperatures vary across the passage. The average air temperature over the Drake Passage ranges from 41 degrees Fahrenheit in the north to 27 degrees Fahrenheit in the south. Water surface temperature also varies from 43 degrees Fahrenheit in the north to 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

Drake Passage Wildlife

The fauna on display in the Drake Passage is incredibly diverse. The Passage plays host to many species, including but not limited to: hourglass dolphins, a wide variety of seabirds (such as giant petrels and wandering albatross), humpback whales, orcas ("killer whales"), ever-popular penguins, and more. The waters of the Drake Passage are rich in plankton and krill, which are an essential food source for blue and fin whales, squid, emperor penguins, and crabeater seals.

Tips for Preparing to Cross the Drake Passage

If you are planning to take a sea voyage to Antarctica, it is important to prepare yourself for crossing the Drake Passage and getting your 'sea legs.'

First of all, attitude can be everything. The experience, while atypical and decidedly thrilling at times, is really 'what you make of it.' If you approach potentially choppy seas with a "this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience!" mentality, that confidence and eagerness can go a long way.

