

Devotees Take Srila Prabhupada on Historic Trip to Antarctica

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By: Madhava Smullen for ISKCON News on Dec. 2, 2016



Kesihanta (left) and Trivikrama with their Hare Krishna mantra banner in Antarctica

In a unique offering for ISKCON's 50th anniversary, two devotees have made a preaching trip to Antarctica, the southernmost and coldest continent in the world.

The intrepid explorers are Kesihanta Das, a Prabhupada disciple and co-director of ISKCON Alachua's Save the Cow program, and Trivikrama Das, bass player for Vaishnava hardcore band 108.

The two held the first kirtan in Antarctica and distributed Prabhupada's books there for the first time, placing the Bhagavad-gita As It Is in several Antarctic research stations.

What's more, in bringing a murti of Srila Prabhupada himself with them, they have ensured that the ISKCON Founder-Acharya has now visited every continent in the world.

"During the Prabhupada arrival festival at Boston's Commonwealth Pier last year, many devotees were giving exciting and inspiring talks about Srila Prabhupada's achievements, saying he went to six continents," Kesihanta says. "That got me thinking – what about the seventh continent? What about Antarctica?"



Celebrating ISKCON 50, Antarctica-style

Meeting in Miami on November 10th, Kesihanta and Trivikrama flew to Buenos Aires, then took a domestic flight to Ushuaia, Argentina, the southernmost city in the world.

From there, they embarked on a two-day voyage to the Antarctic Peninsula aboard the MV Ushuaia, a small passenger ship originally built for the U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration.

Because they were upgraded for free to a more expensive cabin, the devotees were able to set up an elaborate altar for Srila Prabhupada, making offerings and holding kirtans for him every day.



Performing arati for Srila Prabhupada at Cierva Cove

On November 14th, the Western calendar day of Srila Prabhupada's disappearance, the ship crossed the notoriously rough seas of the Drake Passage.

"According to the crew, it was relatively mild this time," says Kesihanta. "But the ship was still rocking and pitching throughout, sometimes listing over 30 degrees, and many passengers experienced seasickness. Fortunately, we didn't because we wore prescription motion sickness patches, but it was still a challenge – you'd be walking along, and suddenly have to grab onto the railings so you wouldn't smash into the wall."

The devotees managed to secure Srila Prabhupada's vyasasana so that he wouldn't tip. Meanwhile, they meditated on his bravery and sacrifice through his much worse sea voyage in 1965, when he experienced two heart attacks aboard the Jaladuta to the USA.

They also observed his disappearance day by fasting till noon, making an offering, and singing the song Je Anilo Prema Dhana for departed Vaishnavas.

Throughout the voyage, Trivikrama and Kesihanta's dietary restrictions were well accommodated, and so they were able to eat and connect with the other passengers, with whom they shared their mission.

"There were about ninety passengers, from at least twenty countries and ranging in

age from early twenties all the way up to seventies,” says Kesihanta. “It’s not a cheap cruise, so many were wealthy world-travelers. We didn’t hide that we were devotees, and made a lot of friends. We met lawyers, psychologists, a high-ranking anti-terrorism operative, a world-renowned doctor and an Academy-Award-winning screenwriter. They were all very supportive and appreciative when we told them what we were doing.”

The screenwriter, a New Yorker in his seventies, had been in New York while Prabhupada was there, and took a copy of *Your Ever Well-Wisher*, Srila Prabhupada’s condensed biography. His traveling companion, the world-renowned doctor, had been to India many times and took a *Bhagavad-gita*.

Another woman, a reiki master and world traveler who had been to 76 countries, took a *Bhagavad-gita* and japa beads from Trivikrama, who showed her how to chant, and promised she’d connect with devotees when she returned home. Others, such as one man who was going through a divorce, and a Christian couple who were intrigued to find out more about Krishna consciousness, also befriended the devotees and took books.

Arriving at the Antarctic Peninsula’s Orne Harbor on November 16th, the devotees were encouraged by their expedition leader – whom they also immediately befriended – to take Srila Prabhupada with them on their first venture ashore.

“We suited up in knee-high boots and waterproof pants, took these heavy-duty military-style rafts called zodiacs close to the shore, and then jumped out and waded ashore carrying our huge duffle bag with Srila Prabhupada and all his arati paraphernalia,” says Kesihanta. “Then, while everyone else went off to see the penguins, we set Srila Prabhupada up on his altar on the ice. It was too windy to do a full arati, but we did a kirtan for him right there, with the icebergs and penguins in the background.”

The devotees also did kirtan with inquisitive penguins at Half Moon Island in the South Shetland Islands, considered part of Antarctica. And they planted in the ice a Hare Krishna banner, a “Krishna South” flag, and an ISKCON 50th anniversary flag to claim the final frontier for Srila Prabhupada.



A penguin wanders by a 'Krishna South' flag

Later, Kesihanta and Trivikrama got their chance to offer arati to Srila Prabhupada in Antarctica, performing the worship on the deck of their ship at Cierva Cove, as ice sheets floated in the background.

They also visited the Argentine research station Base Esperanza, a small year-round community of fifty people with families and children, a school, and a church. There, they met station master Lieutenant Colonel Miguel Vazquez, explained to him that they were visiting to commemorate the 50th anniversary of ISKCON's founding by Srila Prabhupada, and presented him with a Spanish edition of Prabhupada's Bhagavad-gita As It Is.

Through a translator, the Colonel expressed that he was honored to receive it on behalf of the station, and said he would place the Gita in either its library or its museum, with an explanatory sign for visitors.

"The station's name – 'Esperanza' – means 'hope' in Spanish, so we felt that was very apt, as Srila Prabhupada is the great hope for the world," says Kesihanta.



Entering the Argentine research station 'Esperanza'

Although weather conditions prevented the devotees from visiting Ukraine's Vernadsky Research Base as originally planned, the expedition leader very kindly promised he would deliver their Ukrainian edition of Bhagavad-gita to the Base on his next trip.

In addition, Kesihanta and Trivikrama received word from a woman who works with the three year-round U.S. research stations in Antarctica that she had placed pocket editions of Bhagavad-gita As It Is in their libraries. The stations are McMurdo, the largest research station in Antarctica, Palmer Station on Anvers Island off the coast of the Peninsula, and the Amundsen Scott Station at the South Pole, which sits at the Earth's axis on a shifting continental ice sheet several miles thick.

The devotees also placed English and Spanish editions of Bhagavad-gita in their ship's library for future passengers who visit Antarctica multiples times a year from all over the world.

At the end of the trip, the MV Ushuaia's expedition team included a shot of Kesihanta and Trivikrama with their Hare Krishna mantra banner in an Antarctica 2016 video, which they produced and distributed to all ninety passengers on the cruise from over twenty nations.



Presenting the station master at the Argentine 'Base Esperanza' with Bhagavad-gita As It Is

"The video will undoubtedly be shown to our fellow passengers' many friends and family when they return to their respective home countries all over the world," says Keshianta.

Finally, the icing on the cake came when all the passengers were given certificates commemorating their momentous voyage.

"I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get one of these for Srila Prabhupada!" Keshianta says.

Extremely supportive and helpful, the expedition leader happily presented them with an "Antarctica Expedition Certificate" signed by himself and the captain.



Holding the first kirtan in Antarctica

The certificate reads: "We hereby certify that Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada has crossed the perilous waters of the Drake Passage onboard the expedition vessel Ushaia from Tierra Del Fuego to Antarctica, and has landed on the Antarctic continent at Orne Harbor. Duly witnessed on Wednesday, November 16th, 2016."

Returning to Argentina on November 23rd, the devotees made sure to exchange email addresses with several of the passengers they gave Prabhupada's books to, and will also keep in touch through a Facebook group.

"What began as a joke turned into a wonderful reality," says Kesihanta. "We did everything we set out to do. I'm just an ordinary guy, but I feel honored that I somehow or other was inspired to do something extraordinary for Srila Prabhupada on the 50th anniversary of his ISKCON."

He concludes, "When we were doing kirtan for Prabhupada in Antarctica, we felt that he was very pleased with our endeavor and our offering. And that's what matters."

ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION CERTIFICATE

We hereby certify that:

Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

has crossed the perilous waters of the DRAKE PASSAGE on board
the expedition vessel **USHUAIA** from Tierra del Fuego to ANTARCTICA
and has landed on the ANTARCTIC CONTINENT at:

Orne Harbour: 64°37' 53.8" S, 62°33' 7.4" W

Duly witnessed on: Wednesday, November 16th 2016


Sergio Osiroff Calle


Augustin Ullmann

CAPTAIN-MASTER OF THE SHIP

EXPEDITION LEADER

The expedition certificate certifying Srila Prabhupada's visit to Antarctica

[pilgrimage]