



Your chance to dive on the *Titanic*

EXPLORATION

FROM JUNE TO AUGUST, OceanGate is organising a series of week-long expeditions to the wreck of the RMS *Titanic*.

The Titanic Survey Expedition will comprise a total of 18 planned dives in a series of six missions in manned submersibles. Starting in St John's in Newfoundland, Canada, the expeditions will travel approximately 595 kilometres southeast into the North Atlantic where the wreck lies. The goal is to assess its deterioration over time and collect footage and data to ultimately create a high-resolution 3D virtual model of the shipwreck over a number of years.

A privately-owned company, OceanGate

Expeditions invests in the research, development and manufacture of manned submersibles for exploration, commercial and scientific purposes. They own a fleet of untethered, self-contained manned submersibles that allow experts to operate and collaborate in harsh subsea environments.

The ship came under the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage in 2012 – on the 100th anniversary of its sinking – in attempts to fend off salvagers and commercial exploitation of its artifacts. Still, the wreck is susceptible to the extreme conditions at 3,800 metres underwater.

While no one has a clear picture of how

long it will remain relatively intact down there, microbial ecologist and six-time visitor Lori Johnston, speaking to the BBC, predicted it would last only a few more decades.

Since its discovery in 1985, only a few hundred people have directly laid eyes on the wreck of the *Titanic*, with most data gathered by remote or autonomous vehicles. One of the most notable manned expeditions was led by James Cameron during the production of the eponymous 1997 film.

At the time of publication, OceanGate is accepting applications for its 2020 mission – with a waitlist for 2019. Participants must be 18 years old and will receive training to take on supporting roles for the expedition crew. The cost to join is approximately US\$100,000 per person, equivalent to the First Class passage on the RMS *Titanic*'s inaugural journey, after adjusting for inflation.

For fans who don't have that kind of cash, cruise operator Blue Star Line are building *Titanic II*, an identical ship in looks, but with 21st century amenities, navigation and safety systems. It will sail the Southampton to New York route on its maiden voyage as did its ill-fated predecessor. First sailing is scheduled for 2022.

