



# Antarctica

*A spectacularly wild and pristine frontier land of dramatic topography, weather and wildlife, Antarctica is almost entirely covered in perpetual ice. During the long days of the austral summer expedition cruises depart from the southern tip of South America, the shortest and probably most scenically impressive approach.*

## *Climate and when to go*

The season runs from November to early March. Each month has its own special and often unique highlights:

In November the spring ice begins to break up, creating sculpted new landscapes of pristine icebergs with abundant pack ice. This is the courting season for penguins and sea birds, with whole colonies in spectacular displays of courtship rituals. Seals are visible, spring flowers bloom on the Falklands, and beautiful sunrises and sunsets create stunning photographic opportunities.

December and January are witness to wildlife in full swing as temperatures and activity levels rise and days lengthen. On South Georgia and the Falklands the first penguin chicks emerge and fur seals are breeding. Whale sightings increase as receding ice opens new channels for exploration. February is already late summer in Antarctica: whale sightings are at their best, penguin chicks begin to fledge and the receding pack ice permits forays further south. Snow algae blooms, chicks leave their nests and fur seals are increasingly common on the Antarctic Peninsula.



Hope Bay, Esperanza



Photo: Thorsten Ensinger



Weddell seal

Photo: Thorsten Ensinger

### ***Cape Horn and the Drake Passage***

In 1578 Sir Francis Drake, aboard the Golden Hind, reached 57° South, and the 500 miles of open water south of Cape Horn have carried his name ever since. This notorious section of the Scotia Sea is roamed by albatrosses, blue-grey prions and storm petrels. You will cross the Atlantic Convergence, an unfixed biological barrier where cold polar waters dive beneath the warmer oceans to the north.

### ***South Shetland Islands***

This group of islands is a haven for wildlife, including chinstrap, Gentoo and Adélie penguins, fur seals and southern elephant seals. Cruises usually sail through a narrow channel into the flooded caldera of Deception Island.

### ***The Antarctic Peninsula***

A highlight of many trips are the narrow waterways, such as the Antarctic Sound (known as 'iceberg alley'), and the Lemaire and Neumayer Channels. Port Lockroy, a former British scientific station, now houses probably the most isolated museum in the world. At breathtaking Paradise Bay glaciers flow from the 10,000 foot Foster Plateau into calm waters. The dramatic cliffs are dense with nesting Cape petrels, Antarctic blue-eyed shags, kelp gulls and Antarctic terns. Minke, humpback and killer whales are often seen at close range.

### ***Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)***

This collection of about 420 islands lies 300 miles east of South America. There are high concentrations of fauna and flora, much of it endemic, particularly off West Falkland. The capital, Port Stanley, is a town of brightly painted houses. Along the rocky shores you can see oyster-catchers, geese and endemic Steamer ducks. Other wildlife likely to be seen on the outer islands includes Magellanic, Gentoo and Rockhopper penguins, and black-browed albatrosses. Peale's and Commerson's dolphins are often seen alongside the ships.

### ***South Georgia***

Renowned as having one of the highest concentrations of wildlife in the world, South Georgia is also scenically stunning. Colourful king penguins crowd the beach at Salisbury Plain against a snow-covered backdrop of towering mountains and glaciers. At Albatross Island four species of albatross make their home, including the majestic wandering albatross. The beaches are packed with an estimated 2 million noisy fur seals, and there are also some 300,000 elephant seals. Grytviken was once the hub of the South Atlantic whaling industry, and is also the burial place of Sir Ernest Shackleton.



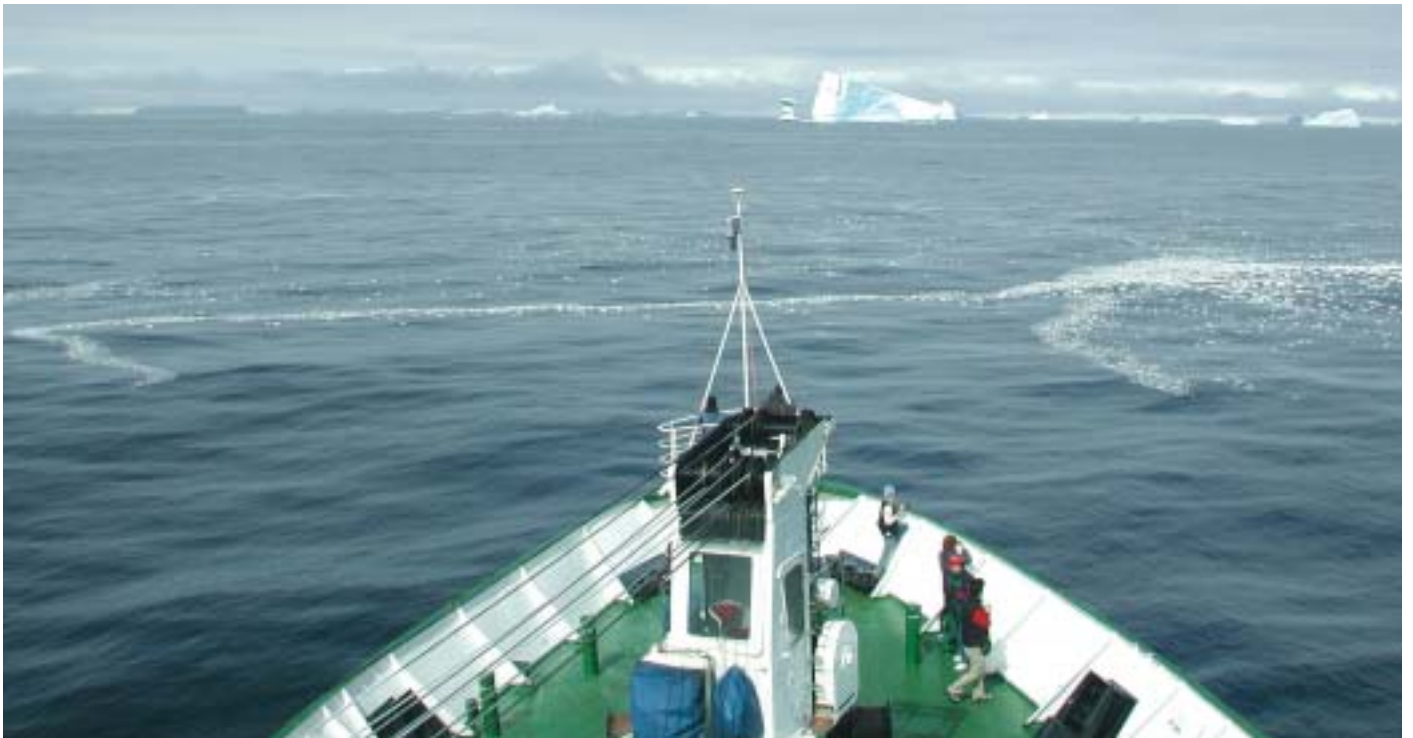
Hope Bay, Esperanza



Gentoo penguin



Caldera on Deception Island



## The Ships

All the vessels that we recommend have ice-strengthened hulls, outside cabins, library, infirmary and use zodiacs for shore excursions. The atmosphere on expeditions is relaxed and intimate.

### ***Professor Multanovskiy, Professor Molchanov and Akademik Shokalskiy***

Sister ships (235 feet) built in Finland for polar and oceanographic research. Extensively refurbished (although not all cabins have private bathrooms) and carry a maximum of 49 passengers. Captain and crew are Russian, expedition staff international and chefs European. Operated by Quark Expeditions.

### ***M/V Orlova***

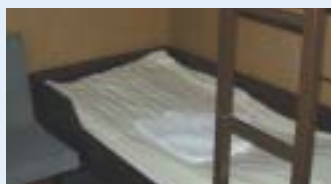
Elegant 295 foot cruise ship built in 1976, carries a maximum of 110 passengers. All cabins and 2 suites have private bathrooms and the international expedition staff are assisted by an experienced Russian captain and crew and European chefs. Operated by Quark Expeditions.

### ***Explorer II***

A very comfortable 437 foot ice-strengthened ship, built in 1996. Carries up to 199 passengers, all in spacious outside cabins, 12 of which are suites with private balconies. European captain and officers and dedicated international expedition staff. Operated by Abercrombie & Kent.



Photo: B&C Alexander



While these are our preferred ships, others we can book include the M/S Andrea (Elegant Cruises), Akademik Ioffe and Akademik Sergei Vavilov (Peregrine Adventures), Aleksey Maryshev and Grigoriy Mikeev (Oceanwide Expeditions) or Explorer (Gap Adventures). Quark have occasional departures from points other than Tierra del Fuego using vessels such as the Kapitan Dranitsyn, whose itinerary includes New Zealand, Tasmania, and a complete circumnavigation of Antarctica. Please ask for details.



# Antarctica Itineraries

## CLASSIC ANTARCTICA: ANTARCTIC PENINSULA AND THE SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS



*The shortest cruise we recommend while still giving you enough time to appreciate the wonderful wildlife and*

*brehtaking scenery of the far south.*

### Ushuaia

**Day 1:** The first night is spent either on board ship or in a hotel.

### Cape Horn and the Drake Passage

**Days 2-3:** Embark, and navigate along the Beagle Channel and past Cape Horn, before heading across the infamous Drake Passage. Introductory lectures and slide presentations by the specialist expedition staff will help prepare you for the days ahead.

### The South Shetland Islands

**Days 4-5:** Finally, land is sighted! Boarding

zodiac inflatables, the first landing is an exciting experience. Penguins peck at Wellington boots whilst fur seals sit on the rocks and glare. Days begin early with occasional landings before breakfast and visits to research bases. Sailing through Neptune's Bellows requires skill from the captain. Deception Island is the site of the largest of three volcanic craters in the South Shetlands. The thermal pools in Pendulum Cove make an interesting dip for those feeling brave!

### The Antarctic Peninsula

**Days 6-9:** A zodiac cruise in Paradise Bay allows you to drift through crunching ice, surrounded by snowy peaks and glaciers, while penguins float by on small bergs. The reflections encountered while sailing through the Neumayer Channel brings everyone out on deck. A zodiac trip around the huge tabular bergs in Pleneau Bay gives one a true understanding of the vastness of these huge blocks of ice.

### The Drake Passage

**Days 10-11:** Bid farewell to Antarctica and head north across the Drake Passage. Between bird and whale-watching, enjoy final lectures and presentations and review the adventures of the past week.

**Day 12:** Arrive in Ushuaia and disembark.



Photos: Thorsten Ensinger

## ULTIMATE ANTARCTICA: THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA



*A longer itinerary that adds the Falklands and South Georgia, both of which have wildlife that you would not see on shorter cruises.*

### Ushuaia

**Days 1-3:** After an night in Ushuaia, embark and set sail towards the Falkland Islands, 300 miles east of Tierra del Fuego.

### The Falkland Islands

**Days 4-5:** Exploring the outer islands of the Falklands (such as Carcass and New islands), where Rockhopper penguins can be seen. The

friendly capital, Stanley, is also visited.

### South Georgia

**Days 6-11:** After two days at sea you arrive at the remote South Georgia islands. Visits usually include Salisbury Plain (King penguins), Prion Island, Gold Harbour and Grytviken, the site of Shackleton's grave.

### The South Shetland Islands

**Days 12-14:** Two further days at sea, accompanied by an impressive variety of sea birds, bring you to the South Shetland Islands, a haven for wildlife with vast penguin rookeries and also southern elephant seals. Elephant Island, where Shackleton and his men spent considerable time on their epic journey, is visited on some cruises.

### The Antarctic Peninsula and Drake Passage

**Days 15-20:** See previous itinerary (days 6-12).

Activities and sites visited do vary slightly depending which boat you travel on: some cruises operate in the opposite direction and they are all subject to change due to daily weather conditions.



Photo: Thorsten Ensinger