

ANTARCTICA: 2018/19

TRIP NOTES



Marine Mammals of Antarctica



23 MAR 2019 – 02 APR 2019



10 NIGHTS / 11 DAYS



STARTS USHUAIA

VIEW ANTARCTICA'S WHALES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY ON THIS UNIQUE EXPEDITION

March is a time of great activity in Antarctic waters and historically we encounter a higher concentration of whales during this period. They are busy feeding prior to their annual migrations to tropical waters. However, scientists are now discovering that some whale species remain in the ice-free sections of Antarctica over winter.

On this voyage we plan to visit several known locations along the Antarctic Peninsula that are the focus of long-term research projects by esteemed academic institutions including University of California (Santa Cruz), California Ocean Alliance and the Australian Antarctic Division's Marine Mammal Centre. We are joined on the ship by several world-renowned cetacean (whale) experts and observe their important scientific fieldwork in close proximity. They share with us unique underwater footage and scientific data and interpret the behavior, migration characteristics and feeding patterns of adult whales and their calves. Their participation on our voyage is greatly valued and provides a fascinating glimpse into cutting-edge Antarctic research.

Antarctica's seals are also found in sizable numbers late in the season, resting and storing energy that will sustain them over winter. For those with a passion for Antarctica's marine mammals, this unique voyage should not be missed. Oh, and did we mention it's also our favourite time of the year for blazing orange and pink Antarctic sunrises and sunsets?



Expedition Highlights

- > Encounter large numbers of whales and observe important scientific field research
- > Outstanding wildlife observation on shore, zodiac cruising and from the ship
- > Visits to historic sites and science stations
- > Learn about the environment, wildlife and ecology of Antarctica from polar experts

ON THIS TRIP

-  Zodiac excursions
-  Onshore hiking options
-  Wildlife observation
-  Photographer in Residence
-  Sea kayaking available
-  Whale watching
-  Educational presentations
-  Active Cruising & Wellness

IMPORTANT VOYAGE LOGISTICS

This trip commences in Ushuaia (Argentina). We recommend arriving in Ushuaia at least one day prior to the scheduled voyage departure. This gives you a buffer in the event of any unexpected travel delays between home and voyage embarkation and departure. Here we board our expedition ship, charting a course down the Beagle Channel and into the Drake Passage towards Antarctica.

Our voyage is complete when we arrive back into Ushuaia. A transfer from the ship to the airport, or local hotels is provided upon disembarkation. We advise booking your flights out of Ushuaia from mid-morning onwards. Or consider spending a night in Ushuaia at the conclusion of your voyage.

Full joining instructions will be provided in your final travel documentation. If you have questions before this time, please ask us.



YOUR DAY-BY-DAY EXPEDITION ITINERARY

DAY 1 / USHUAIA (ARGENTINA) (SATURDAY, 23 MARCH 2019)

Our journey to Antarctica commences this afternoon in Ushuaia, in southern Argentina. We gather at our central meeting point and transfer to the pier and embark our expedition ship. After settling in to our cabins and exploring the ship, we meet our expedition team and fellow passengers. Excitement is in the air as we enjoy a welcome cocktail and dinner and cast off, bound for Antarctica and the adventure of a lifetime.

DAYS 2-3 / AT SEA – TOWARDS ANTARCTICA

We chart a southerly course for Antarctica. This stretch of the South Atlantic is rich in its bio-diversity and showcases an abundance of wildlife. We will be joined by hundreds of seabirds including the wandering albatross. Giant petrels and smaller Cape petrels are also constant companions as make our way south. Photographing these magnificent birds from the deck of the ship takes patience and skill and our photography expert will be on hand to show you the best techniques. Join the ship's Captain on the bridge and learn about the operations of our modern research vessel. Throughout the day our onboard experts educate us with a series of presentations about the environment, the wildlife and history and the locations we hope to visit in the coming days. As we approach the coastline of Antarctica, we anticipate an increase in whale sightings.

DAYS 4-7 / GERLACHE STRAIT AND THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA REGION

We awaken today and the magnificent snowy peaks of continental Antarctica are laid out before us. Even our experienced expedition staff, some with more than 100 journeys south, will take a moment to pause and reflect on the immense power of Antarctica. Take a deep breath – you have arrived. The waterways of the Antarctic Peninsula are home to deep bays, pristine coves and inlets and numerous islands. The landscape features heavily glaciated mountains permanently covered in ice and snow. Rocky outcrops, known as 'nunataks' are home to gentoo, Adelie and chinstrap penguin rookeries and the waters are rich in marine life.

We frequently encounter seals, including the powerful leopard seal, often found relaxing on an ice floe. Curious humpback whales and the smaller minke whales are found in sizeable numbers in this region. Sightings of orca are not uncommon. Fournier Bay is a known whale 'hot-spot' and ice permitting, we explore in Zodiacs hoping to encounter pods of whales.

The science team hope to deploy non-invasive tracking devices on the whales to collect data on dive and feeding patterns. Observation and photography of whale flukes (tails) is something everyone is encouraged to participate in both from the ship and while Zodiac cruising. Whale flukes are unique identifiers of particular animals, in much the same way as a human finger print. Collecting and analyzing this data is vital to our understanding of whale migration patterns and social behavior.

In addition to our whale encounters, we enjoy a regular program of exploration on and off the ship. Popular activities include guided hikes on shore and visits to wildlife colonies with our expert naturalist guides, while the historic huts and science stations provide a fascinating glimpse into the past and the present. Zodiac cruising among the ice is a memorable activity and our sea kayakers may range several miles from the ship. Our photography guide will be on hand to help you with your camera handling, image composition and the peculiar light found in Antarctica.

Planned excursions could include Cierva Cove, Danco Island, or a cruise through the Errera Channel to visit the penguin rookeries at Cuverville Island. Wilhelmina Bay never disappoints and is another important location where the scientists hope to deploy their research tools. Neko Harbour is yet another highlight and offers an excellent hiking route providing stunning 360 degree views.



After several busy days of exploration along the Peninsula, we head north across the Bransfield Strait, bound for the South Shetland Islands. This is an important whale migration corridor and frequent sightings can be expected of humpbacks and even the fast moving orca.

DAY 8 / SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS

By morning we arrive in the South Shetland Islands. The adventure is not over and if the weather conditions allow, we sail the ship into the flooded volcanic caldera at Deception Island. This is a very dramatic place and history is all around us as we explore the old whaling station, with the rusted old boilers and dilapidated wooden huts. At the far end of the beach is an old aircraft hangar. This is where Australian, Sir Hubert Wilkins made the very first flight in Antarctica in 1928. There is also an outstanding hike, high up onto the rim of the crater.

After leaving Deception Island, we cruise along the coast of Livingston Island which on a sunny day is a memorable experience. There are several other landing sites in the South Shetland's including Half Moon Island, or the broad pebbly beach at Yankee Harbour, where we sometimes encounter Weddell seals sunning themselves. This is another great spot for a hike or a zodiac cruise. Hannah Point, with its elephant seal colony and nesting Antarctic petrels - is another possibility. In the evening, we navigate north through the McFarlane Strait and into the Drake Passage, charting a course for South America.

DAYS 9-10 / DRAKE PASSAGE – RETURN TO SOUTH AMERICA

As we make our way back to South America, the educational presentations continue and we enjoy an entertaining and memorable voyage recap by our Expedition Leader. Join our photography experts in the multimedia room and download and back up your precious images. If weather conditions allow, we hope to make a rounding of Cape Horn. This fabled stretch of water is home to legendary tales of exploration and early navigation. It is a fitting place to reflect on a wonderful expedition. Approaching the entrance to the Beagle Channel in early evening light, we enjoy a special dinner attended by the Captain of the ship.

DAY 11 / ARRIVE USHUAIA (ARGENTINA) – VOYAGE CONCLUDES – (TUESDAY, 02 APRIL 2019)

In the early morning, we arrive into Ushuaia, Argentina. It is time to say farewell to your crew and fellow travellers. Guests will be transported to their hotels or to the airport for return flights home. It will be possible to connect to flights through to Buenos Aires or other destinations in South America. Otherwise enjoy a night in town or venture further afield to explore the highlights of Patagonia.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS FOR 'MARINE MAMMALS OF ANTARCTICA': An additional whale-focussed voyage departs in March 2019. Or consider any voyage departing in February or March to experience heightened whale activity in Antarctica. See the website for details.

ABOUT OUR ITINERARY: Polar exploration can be unpredictable. Specific sites visited will depend on prevailing weather and ice conditions at the time of sailing. The above itinerary should be read as a 'guide only' and may change. The ship's Captain in conjunction with the Expedition Leader continually review the sailing plan throughout the voyage, making adjustments to the itinerary along the way to take advantage of optimal weather and ice conditions or to maximize our encounters with wildlife. Decades of experience spent exploring these waterways mean we have a large number of outstanding landing sites and zodiac cruising locations to consider, even when the weather conditions may not be ideal or when heavy ice may hinder our planned route. A flexible approach is something we encourage you to bring to the ship.