

Ultimate Antarctica

11 nights/12 Days

Day 1 - Punta Arenas Chile to King George Island, Antarctica

Our journey commences this morning in the southern Chilean port city of Punta Arenas. We gather at a central meeting point and transfer to the airport for the two-hour flight across the Drake Passage to Antarctica (this flight is included in the price of your voyage). Upon arrival at the Chilean Antarctic base on King George Island, we embark our ship, the Akademik Sergey Vavilov, via zodiac. After settling in to our cabins and exploring our new surroundings, we meet our expedition team and fellow passengers. Excitement is in the air as we enjoy a welcome cocktail and dinner. Everyone on board will be looking forward to the incredible adventure ahead.

Day 2 - South Shetland Islands

Having flown directly into the South Shetland Islands, we chart a southwesterly course along this dramatic island chain planning to visit a number of well established chinstrap and gentoo penguin rookeries as well as southern elephant seal haul-outs. Weather permitting, we aim to visit Deception Island with its sizeable chinstrap penguin rookery at Baily Head. Here, inside the sunken volcanic caldera, is a perfect museum of natural and exploration history, with its old buildings and rusting remnants from the whaling era. For those wanting to stretch their legs, a spectacular hike to the crater rim offers a challenge. In the evening we cross the Bransfield Strait and approach the majestic white continent for the first time.

Days 3 & 4 - Gerlache Strait and Antarctic Peninsula

Today we enter the steely blue waters of Antarctica's Gerlache Strait. Protected by two large offshore islands, the waterways are home to deep bays, pristine coves and numerous small islands. The landscape features heavily glaciated mountains permanently covered in ice and snow. Rocky outcrops are home to gentoo, Adelie and chinstrap penguin rookeries and the waters are rich in marine life. We enjoy several days of exploration here. Breaking into small groups of just 10-12 guests, we enjoy guided walks on shore, visits to wildlife colonies, and zodiac cruising among the ice. Planned visits could include Cierva Cove, Danco Island, or a cruise through the Errera Channel to visit the penguin rookeries at Cuverville Island. Wilhelmina Bay is another favorite location and one where we frequently encounter playful humpback whales.

Days 5-7 - Antarctic Sound and the Weddell Sea

At about 25 nautical miles long and about 10 nautical miles wide, the Antarctic Sound separates Joinville Island from the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. As we sail into the sound we witness, for the first time the vastness and majesty of the Antarctic icecap. It is an awe-inspiring sight. Heading into the Weddell Sea we notice a significant increase in the number of huge tabular icebergs and the presence of sea ice. These massive icebergs break from the huge ice shelves to the south and drift north on the currents. This always makes for exciting navigation.

This region is home to Adelie penguin rookeries of staggering size. We maximize our time onshore as well as in our zodiac boats, absorbing as much of the wilderness as possible. Weather permitting, excursions may include Paulet Island, Brown Bluff and even the southerly Snow Hill Island, where we observe Weddell and elephant seals, skuas and other seabirds as well as a staggering abundance of penguins.

We plan to set foot on the continent in this vicinity and, if the weather allows, some may choose to camp ashore overnight. Sailing among the islands of the Weddell Sea, we are in the realm of the emperor penguin, the largest of the penguins, and everyone will be on deck keeping a lookout. Juvenile emperors are sometimes sighted riding the ice floes.

The region features a rich exploration history. We hope to visit Nordenskjöld's winter hut on Snow Hill Island. It was built in 1902 and remains intact. The Shackleton story also features strongly and it was here that he and his men drifted north on the ice after their ship had been lost in the ice months earlier. As we head north and out of the Weddell Sea leaving Antarctica behind, the lavender pink sunset off the port quarter of the ship will make some of us pause to consider the bravery and/or foolhardiness of those early explorers who traveled these waters a hundred years before us.

Day 8 - Elephant Island

We approach Elephant Island from the south. Point Lookout, on the southern tip of the island, is home to an impressive macaroni penguin colony. Gentoo penguins are also known to nest here and there are often sizeable numbers of Antarctic fur seals hauled out on the beaches. Shore landings at the fabled Point Wild on the north coast of Elephant Island, where Shackleton and his men were encamped under their upturned life boats, are notoriously difficult due to the surging ocean currents and pounding surf on the rocky beach. If conditions are right, we will attempt a landing. This is a thrilling location and a major highlight for history buffs.

Days 9 & 10 - At Sea

While sailing across to the Falkland Islands our onboard polar experts will recap our Weddell Sea adventures and prepare us for the days ahead. Much of our time is spent scanning the horizon in search of whales and other marine mammals. The spectacular seabirds including several albatross and petrel species are our constant companions as they soar above the ship. Our onboard educational program continues and our experts entertain us with interactive presentations.

Day 11 - West Point & Saunders

Arriving into the Falkland Islands overnight, we explore the islands of West Point and Saunders, both in the West Falklands archipelago. West Point is known for its sizeable rookeries of rockhopper penguins and nesting black browed albatross. While nearby Saunders Island, with its white sand beaches, features no less than four penguin species including gentoo, magellanic and rockhopper - and our ultimate goal for the Falkland Island visit, the impressive king penguin.

Day 12 - Port Stanley, Falkland Islands-Punta Arenas

In the early morning, we navigate through the narrows and into the harbor of Port Stanley. A transfer will take us to the airport for our return flight to Punta Arenas in southern Chile (this flight is included in the price of your voyage). It will be possible to connect to flights through to Santiago or other destinations in Chile. Otherwise enjoy a night in this delightful city, or venture further afield to explore the highlights of Patagonia.