



Across the Antarctic Circle



02 – 11 March 2019 | Polar Pioneer



About Us

Aurora Expeditions embodies the spirit of adventure, travelling to some of the most wild and remote places on our planet. With over 27 years' experience, our small group voyages allow for a truly intimate experience with nature.

Our expeditions push the boundaries with flexible and innovative itineraries, exciting wildlife experiences and fascinating lectures. You'll share your adventure with a group of like-minded souls in a relaxed, casual atmosphere while making the most of every opportunity for

adventure and discovery. Our highly experienced expedition team of naturalists, historians and destination specialists are passionate and knowledgeable – they are the secret to a fulfilling and successful voyage.

Whilst we are dedicated to providing a 'trip of a lifetime', we are also deeply committed to education and preservation of the environment. Our aim is to travel respectfully, creating lifelong ambassadors for the protection of our destinations.



DAY 1 | Saturday 2 March 2019

Puerto Williams

Position: 21:30 hours
Latitude: 55°05'S
Longitude: 66°59'W

Course: 139°
Speed: 111.8 knots

Wind Speed: 18 knots
Wind Direction: NNW

Barometer: 997.3 hPa
Air Temp: 8°C
Sea Temp: 8°C

After months of planning, weeks of anticipation and long-haul flights from around the globe, we took a final flight from Punta Arenas to arrive at Puerto Williams, Chile, raring to begin our Antarctic adventure. After a delicious lunch at Lakutaia Lodge, and a spin around town, we made our way to the wharf and clambered up the gangway where the Aurora team showed us to our cabins. It was time to explore the nooks and crannies of our new home.

Onboard we total 51 adventurers with nationalities representing Australia (18), France (1), Germany (1), Indonesia (1), Ireland (1), Italy (6), Mexico (1), Netherlands (2), New Zealand (3), South Africa (3), Sweden (1), UK (4) and USA (9), along with 11 far-flung Aurora Expeditions' staff, and 22 Russian crew.

We unpacked, settled into cabins and investigated the ship's many staircases. Some ventured down to the dining rooms for afternoon tea, others aimed skyward for the flying bridge, returning to the Bar when Expedition Leader Gary called us together to introduce the Aurora team and give a lifeboat and safety briefing.

The sound of seven-short-one-long rings from the ship's signal system was our cue to don warm clothes, bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster stations to sample the ambience of a Polar Class life vessel. Even without a full complement of Russian crew, the seating arrangements in the two lifeboats proved cosy.

At 1800 we cast off lines and steamed east along the beautiful Beagle Channel. Puerto Williams quickly receded as we made our way past slopes forested with beech, the channel of water brilliant in the steely light. To our portside the snow-capped peaks of Argentina; Chile on our starboard flank. Masses of seabirds crossed our path, with black-browed albatross, kelp gulls, imperial cormorants, South American terns and brown skuas.

A rain shower skirted across the Beagle, leaving in its wake a brilliant rainbow pressed against the shoreline. To the west the sun dipped below the horizon. Soon it was time for a first dinner, where we met chefs Al and Bert, and stewardesses Elena and Iliana.

Some stayed up to watch our Chilean pilot clamber down the rope ladder and step across to his waiting vessel. Finally, it was time for a much-needed sleep.







DAY 2 | Sunday 3 March 2019

Drake Passage

Position:	21:15 hours	Course:	152°	Wind Speed:	18 knots	Barometer:	989.3 hPa & falling
Latitude:	59°35'S	Speed:	11.6 knots	Wind Direction:	NNW	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	62°37'W					Sea Temp:	2°C

The weather gods looked kindly upon Drake Passage; barely a roll or shudder was felt through the night, our sturdy ice strengthened vessel forging south toward the Antarctic Peninsula.

Mist shrouded our ship throughout the day but from the pall, black-browed albatross veered across our bow and wheeled about the ship. We were in for a lively introduction to seabirds with Roger who gave us a rundown on foraging patterns. He spoke about the contrast in wing anatomy between the “flappers” such as skuas and cormorants with their relatively short, deep, low ratio aspect wings, and the “gliders”— large albatross with their long, sleek, high aspect ratio wings.

The wandering albatross, with an enormous wingspan of 3.5 metres, is capable of foraging journeys that span thousands of ocean miles and may take months. Except to breed, a seabird is at home on the ocean. We took a firsthand look at Roger’s research into albatross and penguin populations on three remote islands off southern Chile. Scaling rugged cliffs to reach albatross colonies competed for dare devilry against images of the tiny campsite perched on a rocky ledge impossibly high above the waterline.

We learned that petrels range in size from the hefty Giant petrels to tiny Wilson’s storm petrels. These tube-nosed birds have a highly developed sense of smell and can detect krill and fish from kilometres away.

Our lazy day at sea rolled on, with a delicious lunch then a presentation by Scott on camera care and settings. Antarctic photography comes with its own challenges, with our cameras subject to condensation from cold, to salt water, sand and grit. Scott offered tips on how to manage each of these elements. We saw the impressive results from smartphone photography, including panoramas, time lapse and slo-mo. Plenty of occasion in the coming days to try out new settings with our photo expert at hand.

Following an afternoon presentation from Roger, Captain’s Welcome Drinks was time to gather in the bar to enjoy snacks, along with Kath’s delicious punch. Gary introduced Captain Aleksandr (Sasha) Evgenov who warmly welcomed us to his ship and wished us fair weather.

The Great Antarctic Iceberg Competition launched with glory and riches promised to the expeditioner who can guess, or calculate, the closest time and position of our first iceberg. Be quick! Entries close at 11:00 on Monday 4 March.

In the early evening we crossed the Antarctic Convergence, bringing a biological and geographical shift into Antarctic waters—and a sharp drop in air and water temperatures. By 11:30 at night we crossed 60° South, officially placing us in Antarctica. When might we see our first icebergs and penguins?



Aitcho Barrientos Island

Position:	20:40 hours	Course:	215°
Latitude:	62°48’S	Speed:	11.8 knots
Longitude:	59°51’W		

Our second and final day on the Drake was abuzz with landing preparations. Down to the lecture room we filed, to learn about environmental considerations, biosecurity, wildlife behaviour and etiquette around wildlife, Zodiac safety and the importance of the tag board and lifejacket bags. So much to take in! Then it was up to the bar with our belongings where vacuum cleaners whirled their way through the morning. Other than one zealous vacuum claiming a glove, we soon had everything cleaned and ready to go.

The morning remained shrouded in mist and while we could see icebergs dotted on the radar, it was at 12:30 that our first beautiful little iceberg came into view. Just as thrilling was the call to go ashore, quickly recalling the order of all those layers, tags, boot wash, hands for the gangway, and what to do with each foot in order to launch ourselves safely into Zodiacs. Everyone managed famously, and luckily for us, conditions were perfect!

Aitcho Barrientos— what a dynamic island. Our first wildlife encounter was on the water where several giant petrels, the largest birds of the petrel family, feasted on a dearly departed penguin. Close by, drawn by the scent, tiny Wilson’s storm petrels flutter danced as if across the water, plucking tiny morsels left over by the larger birds.

Our first steps on Antarctica were welcomed by countless gentoo penguins returning from foraging at sea or readying to head out. Some were just hanging out, landlocked through the uncomfortable annual moulting phase, during which time their feathers lose their waterproof quality until new feathers grow through.



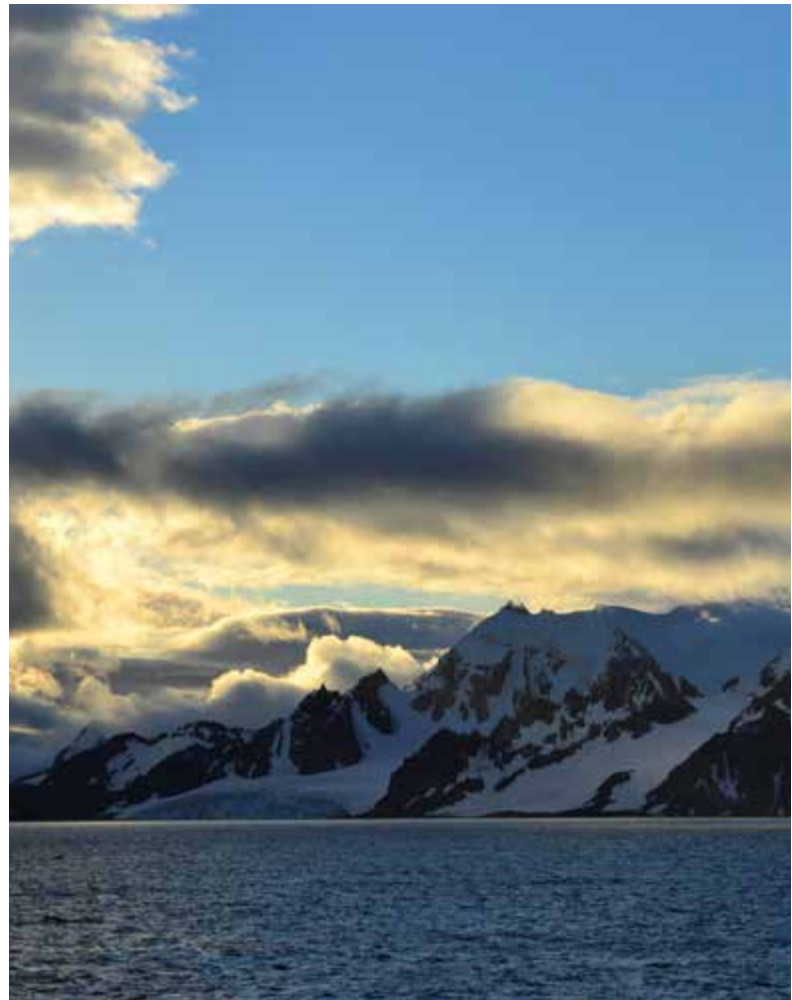
Wind Speed:	4 knots	Barometer:	982.6 hPa & rising
Wind Direction:	NE	Air Temp:	3°C
		Sea Temp:	1°C

Among the gentoos was a smattering of chinstraps, the second of the three brushtail penguin species, with their distinctive black band beneath the chin. The gentoo population onshore comprised fully grown chicks, ready to fledge. The teenagers were giving their parent no end of grief, chasing down the adult with demands of a free meal. The gentoos looked to be in magnificent condition, plumped up to their full 5-6 kg weight. The chinstraps weigh in a little smaller, around 4 kgs.

There was plenty of action on the shoreline. Not only were the kayakers preparing for their maiden paddle, but a leopard seal patrolling the shallows zoomed in within a metre of three of our passengers to claim a penguin standing on the shoreline. Throughout the afternoon we witnessed leopard seals on either side of the island, taking advantage of the late part of the breeding cycle when fully grown, unsuspecting chicks become easy prey to a smart and powerful predator.

Once the coast was clear our divers and snorkelers took their first foray into the water, enjoying clear visibility and the chance to see penguins literally fly through the water. Out in the distance our paddlers made a colourful flotilla, while those of us onshore were happy to be amongst all this fantastic scenery and wildlife, the penguins unperturbed by our presence.

Our four hours onshore raced by. One by one we gradually returned to the mother ship. As we upped anchor and turned our nose south west, the mist lifted and the surrounding islands glistened. Around us was a preview of Antarctica proper— magnificent glaciers silvered by the evening light. Through the night we motored 16 hours down the Bransfield Strait and into the Gerlache Strait to meet our next destination.





DAY 4 | Tuesday 5 March 2019

Cuverville Island, Errera Channel, Brown Station, Skontorp Cove

Position: 21:00 hours
Latitude: 64°51'S
Longitude: 63°14'W

Course: 207°
Speed: 10.1 knots

Wind Speed: 3 knots
Wind Direction: SSW

Barometer: 975.9 hPa & steady
Air Temp: 3°C
Sea Temp: 1°C

What a day! What a place! Where to begin? Cuverville Island was our first close-up look at icebergs, and what beauties they were. We learned how the dimpled pattern on the ice is created when the ice is underwater. The ice contains bubbles which continually pop, creating a tiny abrasion on the surface of the ice. Ocean currents sculpt those abrasions into dimples, and when the berg rolls, the dimpled underside is revealed above the water.

Cuverville was abuzz with gentoo activity and we observed that many of the chicks were downy and fluffy—not as advanced as those we saw at Aitcho Island.

The divers and snorkelers managed a beautiful dive around an iceberg in crystal clear water, while back at the ship humpback whales were frolicking. Wind and waves had got up and our flotilla of kayakers had their work cut out paddling back to the ship. Others arriving by Zodiacs had great views of the humpbacks on either side of the ship.

Chefs Al and Bert prepared a delectable curry for lunch, after which we headed out to the bow or up to the bridge to watch our passage through beautiful Errera Channel. This curved channel of water was dotted with icebergs while on either side was a vista of glaciers pouring down the mountainsides.

The afternoon was our big opportunity to plant our feet firmly on the Antarctic continent. At Paradise Bay we went ashore at Argentina's Brown Station to claim the continent. Some took the high road to the top of the hill to take in the views of Paradise Bay. The bumslide was the quick way down! Jim Lawless brought his peace torch ashore for a run across the snow, in the name of worldwide peace.

Our Zodiac cruise to Skontorp Cove was diverted by several humpbacks cruising into the bay. The kayakers, divers and snorkelers had a fantastic encounter, at times circled by humpbacks who seemed totally at ease with human company. The remaining Zodiacs arrived in good time, wowed by these magnificent creatures who swam just metres away. When the humpbacks returned for a second visit, they raised their heads out of the water, right beside the Zodiacs. This spyhopping action allows the whales to see the view above the water. They were as curious about us as we were them. When they dived deep in a display of flukes, we continued on our merry way.

At Skontorp Glacier we enjoyed one thunderous calving of the ice, then slowly made our way across the bay. Roger made the call for seven crabeater seals lounging on an icefloe and we all got close views of these sleek animals.

The ride out from the bay was one of crunching through brash ice. Anne made the call for a leopard seal, *Hydrurga leptonyx*, sleeping on an ice floe. These predatory seals look quite reptilian with a snake-like head outsized for a body dappled with 'leopard' spots on the throat, shoulders and sides.

It was time to return to the mother ship, but not before one more encounter with humpbacks. One whale swam directly beneath one of the Zodiacs!

Another delicious dinner awaited but it was hard to drag ourselves inside with the sun tracking low, the ice on the mountains turned pink, and the sky aflame with evening colour. It truly was a day in paradise.



DAY 5 | Wednesday 6 March 2019

Lemaire Channel, Pleneau Island, Petermann Island

Position:	22:20 hours	Course:	260°	Wind Speed:	14 knots	Barometer:	985.3hPa & falling
Latitude:	65°07' S	Speed:	12 knots	Wind Direction:	SSW	Air Temp:	2°C
Longitude:	65°25' W					Sea Temp:	0°C

Up and at 'em, came Gary's call at 0645. Our good ship hovered at the northern end of Lemaire Channel, readying to steam south through this legendary stretch of water. The Lemaire Channel is seven miles long, up to a mile wide, with cliffs rising either side to a height of 900 metres and plunging to the same depth below the water.

We gathered on the bow, flying bridge and bridge on an atmospheric morning with mist enveloping the mountaintops. The journey through the Lemaire was mesmerising. In the distance a pod of orcas with several young. Close by, crabeater seals lounging on ice floes, barely raising their head as we passed by. On our portside we passed the southernmost rookery of chinstrap penguins. On our starboard side, cliffs that scaled near vertical out of the water before dissolving into the mist. Captain Sasha and Chief Mate Vladimir expertly navigated the ice-choked channel, weaving around icefloes and bergs. Finally we were through! In the deep bay between the southern end of Booth Island and northern edge of Pleneau Island, our morning excursions got underway.

The kayakers vanished into the mist, their tiny craft breaking through fragile sheets of nilus—a first stage of sea ice that forms only in cold calm conditions.

Snorkelers and divers followed suit, cruising among the bergs then finding a beautiful berg for their diving spot.

Those of us in Zodiacs weaved around icebergs small and large, wowed by the sheer volume of crabeater seals cruising in the water and hauled out on icefloes. Most remained deeply asleep.

The mist lifted a little and onward we forged, exploring deep into the bay. On our return the ice closed in and we crunched through thick stretches of brash ice to reach our ship. Up the gangway and inside to thaw out and warm up!

Home-made pizza was on the menu for lunch, a perfect welcome home for 51 hungry adventurers.

Soon we had made our way south to Petermann Island for an afternoon landing. Snowflakes softly fell. The landing site at Petermann is dominated by an Argentinian Refuge Hut painted in the distinctive orange of all Argentine huts on the Peninsula, the roof adorned in the colours of the national flag. We clambered ashore and headed off in all directions to enjoy the wildlife, and to spot the occasional adelic penguin, the third of the brushtail species.

We returned home in time for hot showers then a recap in the bar. Roger steered us through the last jam-packed days, inviting us to share impressions and personal highlights.

Soon after dinner *Polar Pioneer* took a right turn through French Passage. Overnight we made a dash down the seaward side of the islands for our best chance to reach the coveted Antarctic Circle.







DAY 6 | Thursday 7 March 2019

Crossing the Antarctic Circle, Detaille Island

Position:	20:30 hours	Course:	20°	Wind Speed:	4 knots	Barometer:	997.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	66°32'S	Speed:	7.5 knots	Wind Direction:	NNE	Air Temp:	70°C
Longitude:	67°01'W					Sea Temp:	-0.5°C

We woke in Crystal Sound, having overnight motored down the outside of the islands through a somewhat bumpy Bellingshausen Sea.

By 10:00am we were “within cooe” of our grand destination the Antarctic Circle. We gathered on the bow, Kathrine and Anne poured champagne, and when the ship’s horn blasted (and blasted...) we raised a toast to the happy occasion. Gary read a ceremonial oath in honour of Captain James Cook’s ships *Resolution* and *Adventure* which, in January 1773, were the first known vessels to cross the Antarctic Circle at 66°33.66 South.

We were duly anointed by Robyn with the official “circle” stamp applied gently to the forehead, then it was time for our group photo where the peace torch took centre stage.

The excitement of the morning reached another crescendo with the announcement of the polar plunge. No less than 30 zealous adventurers proceeded to hurl themselves off a perfectly good ship in -0.5° Celsius water. Scott was in the water with his camera to capture the squeals and action!

Soon after lunch we arrived at Detaille Island, our most southerly destination at 66°51.6 South, 66°48.5 West. From a distance we could see the hut and aerials of “Base W”, one of several British research stations built along the peninsula. The prefabricated base at Detaille was erected in 1956 with its main focus of study being meteorology, survey mapping and geology. Significant scientific contributions were made, but sea ice access to the mainland proved unstable.

In summer 1958–59 the sea ice was so thick that the resupply vessel was unable to reach the island, despite several attempts. The decision was made to abandon the base, the men secured the building and left only with the essentials, travelling 25 miles across sea ice with their sledging dogs to reach the waiting ship. While loading the dogs onto the ship, one dog, Steve, escaped and raced back in the direction of the hut. Sadly, the men were forced to abandon their beloved dog, so it came as a great surprise and delight, three months later, when Steve turned up at the manned base at Horseshoe Island, 50 miles further south than Detaille Island, a place the dog had travelled to only once before.

We all got to visit the hut which remains a snapshot of how it was when it was abandoned in 1959. If the pantry cupboards were anything to go by, Scottish oats was the staple diet, along with stacks of Worcestershire and HP sauce, Heinz mayonnaise and a large stock of pickles. Outside the hut, the anemometer aerial and one radio aerial remain in place, along with an emergency shelter and the remains of puppy pens.

While we were exploring the island, our kayakers were having a delectable time, circumnavigating the island. They found a quiet cove in the company of many a crabeater seal cavorting in the water around their craft. From the top of the island a number of people spotted a large group of ~30 crabeaters patrolling the island, most likely fishing. Our snorkelers and divers enjoyed their outings in crystal clear water.

After a big day south of the circle we turned northward.



Fish Islands, Grandidier Channel

Position:	20:45 hours	Course:	2311°	Wind Speed:	17 knots	Barometer:	979.9hPa & falling
Latitude:	65°53'S	Speed:	11.7 knots	Wind Direction:	E	Air Temp:	2°C
Longitude:	66°45'W					Sea Temp:	-1°C

“The ice was here, The ice was there, the ice was all around; It cracked and growled, and roared and howled, Like noises in a swound.”

Today's quote from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* resonated in anticipated and unanticipated ways. We woke to crystalline surrounds amid a sea of glistening pack ice and icebergs. Captain slowly navigated *Polar Pioneer* through (if anyone can, Captain can), reaching alongside Fish Islands. This cluster of islands bear the names Perch, Plaice, Trout and Flounder, along with an outcrop of islets known as The Minnows, located near to Prospect Point on the west coast of Graham Land. These features were named by South Australia's John Rymill who charted the area in the 1930s.

A polar captain's greatest nemesis is ice, and for our good Captain Sasha there was no shortage of the pesky commodity, posing challenges with the launching of Zodiacs and even lowering the gangway. Eventually we were away, the kayakers heading off in search of solitude, the cruisers attempting to find a lead toward Fish Islands, the divers and snorkelers relishing a topside cruise before finding a tantalising spot to immerse themselves in -1°C water. Air and water were cold enough that patches of ocean had frozen into sheet ice, some 5–6 cms thick, while, as our divers discovered, the ice formed above them while they were diving!

Our snorkelers welcomed the company of a group of Adelies who collected on an adjacent iceberg to supervise. Daniel and his happy flotilla made a cheery splash of colour amongst all those extraordinary blues of the ice.

Gary and Roger reached close enough to the islands to see a pair of fighting crabeater seals, and a group of moulting Adelies, but not before landing their shipmates upon an enticing ice floe. Robyn's shipmates performed a spot of icefloe ballet while Anne pirouetted across the ice in a cartwheel.

The crabeater seals weren't nearly as prevalent at Fish Islands; as Cheryl remarked, 'they're all down at Detaille Island.' The wildlife attractions were south polar skuas and sightings of beautiful snow petrels, 'fairies of the south'. By midday, ready for some warmth, we wound our way back to *Polar Pioneer*. Our kayakers had their work cut out finding a path through the ice but their gallant leader battled through. Next was Birgitta with her snorkelers. But where were our divers?

The call came from Pete: 'we may be a little delayed for lunch.' Having trouble getting through the ice was not an understatement. The ocean current had pushed the ice toward shore and the dive Zodiac was hemmed in. 'The ice was here, the ice was there...' Would they need to winter over? From the bridge and Zodiac deck we anxiously watched, offering an overview of where the ice opened up. The sturdy Zodiac battled its way through frozen cul de sacs and exasperating dead ends, breaking through ice where it could to make progress. Captain brought the ship in closer, but finally, finally our divers pushed their way toward a lead, another, then another, to reunite with the mother ship. An epic adventure!

The afternoon saw us weaving our way northward. Roger gave us another tiptop presentation, this time on Antarctic penguins and seals. Birgitta offered several mesmerising trailers of nature documentaries filmed and produced by herself and her family, screened on Swedish television. A highlight was footage of an intimate nose to nose encounter Birgitta recently had with a sperm whale. Soon after a delicious dinner we felt the motion of open ocean. Ahead of us another full day of activities and wondrous surrounds as we explore more of the Antarctic Peninsula.







DAY 8 | Saturday 9 March 2019

Yalour Islands, Goudier Island and Jougla Point

Position:	20:15 hours	Course:	95°	Wind Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	990.6 hPa & falling
Latitude:	64°46’S	Speed:	5.6 knots	Wind Direction:	NE	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	63°23’W					Sea Temp:	1°C

A host of eager adventurers was out on the bow soon after 0600 to watch the sun track skyward from behind the mountains. The peaks remained in silhouette, the sky was ablush, the ocean painted; all was still and serene. The late part of the Antarctic summer is a time when dawn grows slow and lazy, its golds and pinks ever so slowly fading into day.

We were anchored off the Yalour Islands, named by French explorer Charcot during his 1903–05 expedition to Antarctica. Off we went for our various activities. Onshore we wandered the island which is lush with mosses and lichens., The Yalours are home to adolie penguins, many of whom were moulting, and imperial cormorants, also known as blue-eyed shags for their cobalt blue orbital ring. During the breeding season the adult cormorant has bright orange fleshy append-ages around the eyes at the top of the beak.

The backdrop of the Yalours was at its most beautiful with the continental mountains ablaze in sunlight. Several humpback whales cruised into the bay and our lucky kayakers had the chance to see them bubble-netting. Some in the Zodiacs spent time with the whales who, after feeding, were content to spend quiet time napping, or *logging* as it is termed in the whale world.

Where do the adolies, gentoos and chinstraps go once their chicks are reared and they finish their annual moult? At the end of summer, as the ocean threatens to freeze along the length of the peninsula, the brushtail penguins head out to open water and spend the winter foraging near the ice edge.

For juveniles, who roam for three years before becoming sexually mature, the winter is harsh and mortality is high. But for adults, come spring they return to the same nest site on the same island to begin a new breeding cycle.

After upping anchor we motored north to the southern end of Lemaire Channel. What a differ-ence a few days makes. This was the place where we went iceberg cruising in heavy fog, with no notion of the towering mountain surrounds, or even the full extent of Pleneau Island. Ice all but obscured the opening to Lemaire Channel but with an opening on the left hand edge, little *Polar Pioneer*, under Captain’s watchful eye, managed to squeak through, then it was plain sailing up this spectacular channel of water, this time with the 900 metre peaks in full view.

Our afternoon outing was at Port Lockroy/Goudier Island. Our divers geared up for their final dive, hoping for a leopard seal. They got their wish! Thirty magical minutes face to face with this magnificent creature as it shared itself between Zodiacs, divers and kayakers, plus patrolling back and forth along the shoreline, on the lookout for a penguin chick.

Mt Luigi and the Seven Sisters were in full view and we saw what a magnificent site had been chosen for Britain’s “Base A”. Postcards were posted in the hut’s red pillarbox, but alas, they will not begin their journey until November 2019 when the Port Lockroy team returns.

A BBQ on the back deck topped off an ace day, with delicious food, gluwein, party hats, good company and a lively dance floor.



DAY 9 | Sunday 10 March 2019

Whalers Bay, Hannah Point

Position:	22:00 hours	Course:	58°	Wind Speed:	8 knots	Barometer:	978.8 hPa & falling
Latitude:	62°44′S	Speed:	7.8 knots	Wind Direction:	NE	Air Temp:	2°C
Longitude:	60°00′W					Sea Temp:	1.6°C

Soon after breakfast Gary announced our approach to Deception Island. Deception lies at the southerly end of the South Shetland Archipelago, and was once a thriving whaling centre.

It was all quiet on the Bridge as Captain Sasha and his officers navigated Neptune’s Bellows, a narrow and treacherous entry into the caldera, with half the waterway too shallow for ships.

As we rounded the corner into Whalers Bay, several large rusted tanks came into view. The sheer size of these tanks, once brimming with whale oil, offered a sobering reminder of bygone days. Nearby were several derelict buildings and a hangar, partially demolished during the volcanic eruptions of the late 1960s. A striking feature of Whalers Bay is its graphic quality with a stark black volcanic gravel beach, and surrounding hills striped with remnant snow. Along the shoreline lay a gauntlet of Antarctic fur seals, who did their best to terrorise us.

Our kayakers set off for their final paddle after what has been a diverse mix of experiences. They made a striking splash of colour against the monochrome of Whalers Bay.

Some of us hiked to the hangar which once housed a single engine otter. Whalers Bay was the place where, in 1928, Australian aviator and polar explorer Hubert Wilkins took off and claimed the first flight in Antarctica.

Others hot-tailed it along to the end of the beach to climb up to Neptune’s Window, there to be treated to a magnificent view of cliffs, black beach and a steely ocean. Back onboard we were at the pointy end of business with the settlement of shipboard accounts, photo submissions and email exchanges.

Northward we motored, to Hannah Point on Livingston Island, another island in the South Shetland chain.

Ashore we were greeted by gentoo penguins and nearby a wallow of elephant seals. It was a perfect day for an easy kilometre walk across to Walker Bay. Roger led the charge which soon strung out, given the number of photos opportunities: fur seals, gentoos going about their business, Southern elephant seals blowing bubbles in the water, and hauled out on the beach.

What is there not to love about an oversized wallow of snorting, belching, farting layabouts? Full sized adult males weigh in at around 4 tonnes, while the females, having weaned their pups and gone out at sea to forage, are a sylph-like 900 kgs.

Many of us explored the collection of fossils further along the beach which included petrified wood and leaf fossils. All too soon it was time to return to our trusty ship. Back onboard we enjoyed Captain’s Farewell Drinks, with many a thank you, a nice speech from Captain, and the handing out of one or two certificates.

We sat down to a sumptuous meal lovingly prepared by our two wonderful chefs Al and Bert, and served by our lovely stewardesses Iliana and Alina. The highlight of the evening was the fabulous voyage slideshow compiled by Scott Portelli. Great work, Scott! What a wondrous snapshot of a fine voyage.





King George Island, Punta Arenas

Position: 09:00 hours
Latitude: 62°12'S
Longitude: 58°56'W

Course: At anchor,
Maxwell Bay

Wind Speed: 16 knots
Wind Direction: SE

Barometer: 986.6 hPa & rising
Air Temp: 4°C
Sea Temp: 2°C

King George Island in the South Shetlands. This is where our voyage onboard the trusty ship *Polar Pioneer* ends and we wing our way north across the Drake. King George Island has an auspicious history, it is where the merchant marine Captain William Smith was the first to sight land south of Drakes Passage, on 19 February 1819. He was transporting cargo around Cape Horn and was blown a long way south. On reaching Valparaiso in Chile, he reported his sighting to the naval authorities who didn't believe him. So, on a following voyage around the Cape – from Montevideo to Valparaiso – Smith deliberately detoured and in October 1819, he spent several days charting King George Island and surrounding islands. This time, the authorities took notice. They chartered Smith's boat with him as pilot under the command of Edward Bransfield, and sent them south to claim the islands for Britain. Today, many nations have bases on King George Island, including Chile who built and manage the airstrip.

Our individual journeys commenced some time back and culminated for us as a group on our arrival on *Polar Pioneer* at Puerto Williams, in the Beagle Channel. The ship looked sturdy and blue, and a fine size for our adventure to the Antarctic Peninsula. The Drake Passage was calm for us. Such a wonderful 'rite of 'passage' to experience this water body, though, and we didn't need to see it stormy. After a day and a half, we arrived at the South Shetlands, sighted our first icebergs and made a landing – on Aitcho Island.

Looking back now, the locations blend together and everyone had different experiences. Kayakers kayaked, divers dived, snorkelers snorkled and all explored. As we approached the shore there was the ominous sign of giant petrels and Wilson's storm petrels feeding on a penguin carcass. Sure enough, leopard seals were sighted and we witnessed with some discomfort, leopard seals preying on naïve gentoo chicks. Many gentoo chicks lined the shore and entertained us with their inquisitive antics. And groups of moulting chinstraps clustered uphill.

Where to then? We entered Bransfield Strait, a hard left past a group of orca and south to Cuverville Island.

This was a huge day – filled with memories. The gentoos and icebergs of Cuverville, higher snow slopes to explore, on through Errera Channel to Paradise Bay, Brown Station with its views and bum-slide, Skontorp Glacier, magic reflections, lots of ice, crabeaters, leopard seal and humpback whales. Oh, those humpback whales ... Spy-hopping on us, investigating and cruising around us, big tails beside us. Truly magnificent.

The days tumbled along – through the Le Maire Channel to Pleneau iceberg cruising and Peterman Island – where French explorer Charcot overwintered in 1909. Then south beyond the Antarctic Circle to Detaille Island, amazing backdrops and an old British hut. This was our furthest south. Coming north we visited the Fish Islands where landings, and even much movement of zodiacs, was thwarted by dense ice conditions. What fun it was to explore and ice-break in our bouncing rubber zodiacs and nimble kayaks.

Northbound we arrived at Yalour Islands, heralded by a tremendous sunrise and lighting over the mountains of the Peninsula. North through the Le Maire, spectacular, to Port Lockroy where frisky leopard seals darted around, and gentoos again filled us with joy – that wildlife can interact with us, showing no fear. It's a bit humbling really, considering how dangerous we can be. Whale bones on the shore at Jougla Point. Our BBQ on the back-deck, with fancy hats, fancy foot-work and gluhwein, followed by singing in the bar.

Then to contrast with the whiteness of the Peninsula, we arrived in Deception Island. Black volcanic sand – many Antarctic fur seals, and crumbling buildings – gradually being dismantled by the elements. On to Hannah Point for our last experiences with seals and penguins. And that brings us up to King George Island. What an absolute pleasure it has been.





Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert

Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert

Paddlers:

Diane Bell	Timmo Draaisma	Carol Luzinat
Kathie Bulters	Maarin Erbacher	Peter Luzinat
Tony Bulters	Warren Hart	Jan Moen
Margy Burn	Nicolle Hoogerdijk	Amy Roberts

DAY 3: Aitcho Barrientos Island – Distance: 2.5 km

Arriving at in the Aitcho Islands early in the afternoon, the kayakers went ashore to get their first taste of the Antarctic. There they found a shoreline teeming with gentoo and chinstrap penguins. Climbing on the kayaks, and sitting inside, these penguins investigated the strange colourful objects thoroughly. Soon, though, the paddling team got their gear in order, doing safety checks and fitting the kayaks, before slipping out into the cold waters around the island. After a short paddle in amongst swimming penguins, and shoaling rocks, the kayakers took a moment to appreciate where they were, how far they had travelled, and the privilege it was to be able to kayak in Antarctica. A quick paddle back to the ship, and the team faced the biggest challenge yet, the climb up the ladder back into the warmth of the ship.

DAY 4: Cuverville Island – Distance: 8.74 km

Choppy conditions in the Errera Channel made for an exciting embarkation into our kayaks, but we were soon underway, sailing downwind before tucking in behind the sheltered mass of grounded icebergs. The group marvelled at the shapes and sizes of the giant bergs, and the sudden calm of the water behind each. Picking their way from calm shelter to calm shelter, the kayakers headed further in behind the island of Cuverville, finding glassy calm water, curious gentoo penguins and a languidly sleepy crabeater seal lounging on an iceberg.

Pushing further around the island the kayakers moved out from behind its shelter, finding themselves in some quite dynamic conditions. A stiff paddle into the wind, brought the team back to the ship to find an equally exciting jump back into a Zodiac. The final challenge of the roper ladder ascent led to the warmth and comfort of the *Polar Pioneer*.

Paradise Harbour – Distance: 7.08 km

Glassy calm conditions awaited the team in Paradise Harbour. Paddling through this mirrored landscape, the kayakers marvelled at the sounds of the ice, and the echoing blows of humpback whales.

Soon the whales moved in closer and the group was content to sit and let them circle, rising to blow and lift their tail flukes, and to swim beneath the kayaks’ hulls. Eventually the team moved on, leaving the whales to continue their own journey through the bay. Moving deeper into Skontorp Cove, the team paddled across the glacier face, listening intently to the rumbles and crashes of the glacier before pushing through the thick brash ice. Ahead a point of land beckoned, and each kayaker engaged their icebreaker mindset and pushed through the ice. A landing on the Antarctic continent was a welcome reward for their effort, and the team sat looking out upon Paradise Harbour, across the shining sea and shifting ice. A truly special afternoon in this incredible place.

DAY 5: Pleneau Island – Distance: 7.81 km

An early morning passage through the Lemaire Channel saw the *Polar Pioneer* in the shelter of Pleneau island. With a thick fog obscuring all view of land, the kayakers set out following a compass bearing out into the ice. Sleeping crabeater seals and drifting sea ice floes awaited them as they rounded the corner of the island. Larger icebergs loomed out of the fog, with deep sighs and breaths as they rose and fell with the swell. Pushing through a band of brash ice the paddlers found themselves in open water and could explore some of the larger bergs. With lifting visibility the mass of Booth island revealed itself as the kayakers turned for home. Some thick brash ice slowed them down but the *Polar Pioneer* came into view, drifting serenely in the swirling ice and snow.

Petermann Island – Distance: 7.54 km

With thick falling snow and rising winds, the kayak team paddled out towards Petermann Island. Finding shelter behind the land, the team were tasked with a mission to find Adelie penguins. After paddling out to the north of the island and finding only rising winds and choppy seas, the team turned south and was on the verge of giving up until, when rounding a corner, a lone Adelie was seen, preening itself on a rock by the shore. This true Antarctica resident was a special sight for the group and a relief for the guide to find. Heading further around the island, the team found giant icebergs rocking in the swell and seals asleep, oblivious to the crash of rolling ice. With more falling snow and the temperature dropping, the team turned and headed for home. A wonderful end to a very Antarctic day on the water.

DAY 6: Detaille Island – Distance: 4.5 km

After a morning spent sailing south of the Antarctic circle the kayak team left the ship and headed towards the snow-covered shoreline of Detaille Island. In the shallow protected bay the team landed and climbed on foot up the hill towards the historic base that lies there. The walk up to the top of the hill with its beautiful views of Crystal Sound, and the historic hut and the clothing, food, and furnishings of the 1950s were a real highlight of the trip. Soon though the calm water drew the team back and they were paddling again. Dozens and dozens of surfacing crabeater seals, curious adelie penguins, and calmly snoozing weddell seals were a delight. But the true joy of this paddle came from the serenity of the ice and the still silence of Antarctica south of the circle.

DAY 7: Fish Islands – Distance: 5.2 km

A chilly morning at the Fish Islands greeted the kayakers as they scrambled down the rope ladder, into their boats and away. A sea thick with all variations of ice pressed thickly around the *Polar Pioneer*. Sea ice floes, flat and clean, deep blue glacial icebergs, and freshly frozen grease ice. The leads and pathways appearing and vanishing as the kayakers carefully picked their way through an ever-changing landscape.

After an hour of paddling with various kayaks taking the lead through the labyrinth, a final cul de sac and closing leads prompted a valiant retreat to the warmth of the ship. Spying a clean flat ice floe the team took a moment to stretch their legs and marvel at the improbability of walking on frozen water three hundred metres above the ocean bottom. A final complex navigation through the rapidly closing ice and the team was back at the ladder and safely on board.



Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert

DAY 8: Yalour Islands – Distance: 6.91 km

It was a cool crisp morning at the Yalours as the kayak team slipped out onto the water. A still calm day with the sun shining; glowing white mountains rising above the sea, with the ever-present ice rocking in a gentle swell. The kayakers moved out into this landscape, drifting between icebergs and around gushing rockpools, adeline penguins looking curiously down from the small island archipelago. Rounding the last point of the island the kayak team found three humpback whales, slowly moving across the bay. The calm seas, sunshine and luminescent blue ice, along with the steady breath of the whales, made for a serene morning in Antarctica.

Goudier Island – Distance: 4.1 km

After a sun filled transit through the Lemaire Channel, the kayak team entered the bay of Port Lockroy into a slight chop and a light breeze. Reaching the shore they paused to watch gentoo penguins skittering on the rocks, and peering down from the snow banks.

Rounding the point, the reason for their agitation became apparent: a leopard seal raised its serpentine head and paused to watch the approaching kayakers. Rolling its back and sliding under water the huge carnivore swam under the kayaks, flipping onto its back and casting its huge eye over each colourful vessel. Every kayaker in turn had this treatment, as the seal raised its head out of the water, sniffed the boat and then submerged. Its exhalations met by inhalations of surprise and a little trepidation.



Leaving the leopard seal behind to play with the divers, the kayakers headed into the sheltered bay behind Goudier Island. Rounding the point and turning their noses for home, the kayakers spent a last few minutes with our friendly apex predator before the last run back to the ship and the awaiting back deck barbeque.

DAY 9: Deception Island – Distance: 2.1 km

A blustery morning found the *Polar Pioneer* navigating through the narrow channel of Neptune's Bellows and into the caldera of Deception Island. The kayakers quickly deployed on the water and paddled out into the wind. In the shelter of the northern shore the team found hundreds of raucous, and curious fur seals. These 'teenage' males rushed furiously into the water, launching up into the air to gape and bark at the strange colourful passersby. After laughing and chatting friendly with these incorrigible creatures, the kayak family continued on down the shore, landing in amongst the old whaling station. There they stretched their legs for a brief sojourn on land before a final a paddle, a final rope climb and the end of the last paddle of an excellent Antarctic expedition.

TOTAL PADDLE OUTINGS: 10

TOTAL DISTANCE PADDLED: 47.74 km





Diving Log

By Pete Shaw

Diving Guide: Pete Shaw
Diving Photographer: Scott Portelli

Divers:

Luigina Aggio	Leo Fratoni	Maurizio Moles	Alison Vincent
Marco Bebi	Chris Hutchings	Sergio Riccardo	

DAY 1: Puerto Williams

Our passengers all arrive at the *Polar Pioneer* at 1600; the luggage has been sent ahead and is already stored in their cabins by the ship’s crew and expedition staff. After some exploration, everyone gathers for introductions, safety and lifeboat briefings, followed by a lifeboat drill. Shortly after dinner we slip our moorings and glide into the Beagle Channel, heading towards Cape Horn and the open seas of the Drake Passage; the small town of Puerto Williams rapidly dwindles as we head South. Back inside the ship, divers and snorkelers gather in the lecture room for safety and operational briefings, a Q&A session and the issue of equipment for the snorkelers.

DAY 2: Drake Passage

The weather is being kind to us. The *Polar Pioneer* emerged from the lee of Cape Horn at around 0100 this morning and the swell is gentle; a mist hangs over the water as we steam South at about 12kts towards the South Shetland islands. During the day we have three lectures, one on the seabirds of Antarctica, the first of a series on photography and one entitled ‘Antarctica 101’. After lunch, Pete and Birgitta assemble the divers and snorkelers to give them a hands-on orientation to the aft deck and the way we conduct dive operations. This evening a poignant and thought-provoking film called Ice and the Sky is showing.

DAY 3: Cuverville Island

Our journey brings us to Cuverville early in the morning; by 0900 we are ready and embark our Zodiacs for the ride in to shore. We cruise between grounded icebergs until we run onto the gently sloping pebble beach. We are immediately surrounded by inquisitive Gentoo penguins and stretch our legs with walks across and over the ridgeline. Whilst most of us are ashore, the *Polar Pioneer* is surrounded by three humpback whales, logging, spyhopping and rolling in the swells around the ship. After an hour or so, we head out amongst the icebergs; Pete chooses a safe and pretty example out of the many available and we dive.

The water is cold but the colours within the ice and in the waters over the toe of the berg are worth it; our dive is shared by another leopard seal, this one a juvenile. On our way back to the ship we meet the same three humpback whales and stop to watch them for a while before they continue their journey and we return to the ship for lunch and warm drinks.

DAY 5: Almirante Brown, Paradise Harbour, Skontorp Glacier

Shortly after lunch we once more load our equipment in to the Zodiacs and head off; our first stop being the Argentine Almirante Brown station and a chance for us all to set foot on the Antarctic mainland. Pout in the harbour, humpback whales spout and glide through the unbelievably blue waters. Back in the Zodiacs we cruise slowly round to Skontorp glacier; the scenery here is almost impossible to describe, the glacier face is vast, sat in the distance across a glassy sea filled with icebergs; if you ever watched Game of Thrones, take The Wall, put it on a mystical coastline and you’re 10% of the way there. We sit in silence, drinking it all in; it

is almost impossible to put this place into words. We move back out into Paradise Harbour and find whales, lots of whales. With the engine in idle, they glide within a few metres of our Zodiac, blowing, grunting, circling, apparently enjoying the deep waters as much as we are. We dive again around a small iceberg, making landing on it too. The sun is out, the afternoon light incredible and we sit and watch the seabirds, humpbacks and the small speck of the *Polar Pioneer* silhouetted against the immensity of the glaciers that surround us.

DAY 6: Drake Passage

Our journey South continues until at around 1000 we slow as we approach the Antarctic Circle, 66°33’.66” South; everyone assembles on the foredeck to celebrate in the traditional style with champagne and a reading of Captain Cook’s oath. This is quickly followed by a Polar Plunge with Pete at the bottom of the gangway to help pluck the intrepid plungers from the icy waters. By mid-afternoon we reach Detaille Island and head out in the Zodiacs to explore the island, the abandoned Base W British research station and then it’s time to don our SCUBA gear and get wet!

Few people have crossed the Antarctic Circle, fewer still have dived in these latitudes. The group splits, some electing to dive amongst the ice packed into the bay, others venturing out to dive along a rocky wall extending into the depths. In both locations, the waters are crystal clear, and many amazing photographs of the underwater environment are captured. In the evening we turn and begin our journey North once more.

DAY 7: Fish Islands

We plan for a relatively early start to the day, events commencing at 0830, but the amount of ice in the vicinity of the Fish Islands slows our passage so we re-schedule Zodiac operations for 1000. Out on the water, the ice is packed and moving; we thread our way through the leads as they open but cannot make landfall. The cruise is very pretty though as we wind our way past ‘bergs, floes and ice-faces. The water is a bit green, but we decide to drop in for a dive on the side of a small floe. By the time we surface, the ice has drifted and Pete is working hard to pick each member of the dive team up; manoeuvring the Zodiac back and forth to smash through the ice. Everyone safely back into the Zodiac, we try to get back to the ship.

The *Polar Pioneer* is only 1km away, but it takes us two hours to cover the distance; the ice has all drifted together and we have to fight through every metre, breaking the surface ice which is now mostly at least 8cm thick, pushing at larger lumps with our feet to force gaps wider to allow us to fit through. Two at the front, chipping away at the ice, people pushing from the sides and Pete driving the Zodiac backwards and forwards, breaking though, metre by metre, looking for the most likely path and pushing away the large slabs that gather under the Zodiac and make steering impossible.

Finally, we make it back to the ship and the *Polar Pioneer* can leave, one and a half hours later than planned, but with everyone safely back on board. All the staff help empty our Zodiac whilst we change and have a late lunch at the table the crew have kindly prepared for us. This afternoon we continue to steam North towards the Yalour Islands and Port Lockroy.



Diving Log

By Pete Shaw

DAY 8: Yalour Islands

By breakfast, our overnight travels North have brought us to the Yalours, a group of small Islands at the junction of the Grandidier Channel, French Passage and the Penola Strait. Home to a colony of moulting adelia penguins and a lone elephant seal pup. For an hour we explore on land and then into the zodiacs to dive. The rocky outcrop South of the landing site offers a wonderful wall dive and also shallows protected from the drifting ice, perfect options for our inquisitive explorations.

Port Lockroy – Goudier Island and Jougla Point

After lunch we maneuver carefully through the icebergs at the Southern end of the Lemaire Channel and, for the last time on our trip, glide through the narrow passageway. This visit, the sun is shining, the tips of the mountains clear in the pure Antarctic air, mirrored by their reflections in the glassy waters before our bow-wave shatters the picture into a million pieces. What a way to end the diving excursions of this trip: the request to Pete was ‘please find a leopard seal we can photograph in the water’... Port Lockroy did not disappoint. Almost as soon as we enter the bay a ‘lep’ circles the zodiacs, then shoots off. Quickly the divers change, and we cruise around trying to re-find him (or her); we succeed, and the divers hit the water. The seal is juvenile and very curious, playing with the divers for half an hour before gliding off into the depths. Hugs and big smiles all round... Antarctica, you have delivered again!

DAY 9: Whalers Bay & Hannah Point

Today we focus on land-based excursions whilst our freshly washed SCUBA equipment dries before we have to pack it for our onward journeys to points all around the globe.

DAY 10: Departure

TOTAL IN-WATER OUTINGS: 9





Snorkel Log

By Birgitta Mueck

Snorkel Guide: Birgitta Mueck

Snorkelers:

Shayne Earley	Dani Milosevic	Jami Van der Merwe
Courtney Herring	Joe O’Dea	Izelle Volman
Jim Lawless	Leopoldo Palomba	Hailey Zirkle
Manolo Mendieta Villareal	Amy Roberts	

DAY 1

The Antarctic adventure starts in Puerto Williams, where our mobile home *Polar Pioneer* is docked. After an informative welcome briefing and safety drill, we start to cruise the scenic Beagle Channel. Decorated with beautiful evening light, a strong and long-lasting rainbow and plenty sea birds, our voyage south begins in the most picturesque way. A yummy dinner is served onboard and followed by snorkel and dive briefing in the lecture room. The snorkelers are thereafter geared up with drysuits and snorkel equipment. After a long and informative day, the Drake gently moves us asleep.

DAY 2

At sea on the Drake, our day consists of a couple of nice lectures about Antarctica and seabirds. The snorkelers and divers meet on the aft deck to get familiar with the snorkel/dive procedures onboard. This is then followed by a photo lecture and Captain’s Welcome Drinks!

DAY 3

As respectful Antarctic ambassadors we want to keep Antarctica pristine, so our morning is busy with IAATO briefings and vacuum cleaning of our gear. We are then all ready and prepared for our first landing in Antarctica!

After lunch we visit the Aitcho islands, were we get welcomed by huge numbers of curious Gentoo penguins, among them also Chinstraps. The young, charming Gentoos quickly get curious about our presence and start to investigate our gear by picking and climbing on it. Less fortunate penguins become pray for the sneaky leopard seal patrolling the coast line.

Joe, who is wading in the water, manages to capture a really cool split shot of this big predator. Meanwhile a couple of Minke whales are swimming next to *Polar Pioneer*, the snorkelers, dressed in their Waterproof drysuits, enjoy their time on land among the huge volume of penguins surrounding them. The planned snorkel session is postponed for another half hour. This as we are not supposed to snorkel with leopard seals in the vicinity. We thereafter make a short in-water session in waist deep water to test the drysuits and equipment. Energetic Gentoo penguins are swimming around the snorkelers and some fish are seen too. What a wonderful start of our Antarctic stay!

DAY 4

We wake up to chilly wind and beautiful, grey skies. During breakfast, the sun starts to break through the clouds just in time for our first landing of the day. On Cuverville island we once again get welcomed by big numbers of Gentoo penguins and some resting fur seals. After a nice walk among the adorable wildlife, the snorkelers get ready for their iceberg snorkel session. We head out on the Zodiac again, in search for an iceberg suitable and safe for snorkeling. The clear, blue water looks so inviting next to the huge sculpture-like iceberg. In the freezing cold

water, the snorkelers go to explore it further. As amazing the icebergs are to observe from above water, the more breathtaking they are to discover beneath the surface. Happy laughs and growing smiles are spread among the snorkelers during their astonishing time in the wet and salty environment. When a leopard seal is seen approaching the area, we all get up in the zodiac to instead continue to be amazed by the Antarctic beauty from above water. Cold and happy we head back towards *Polar Pioneer* when three humpback whales draw our attention before boarding the ship. After such a stunning morning lunch tastes extra good!

Recharged with new energy, it is time to make our second outing of the day, a continental landing at Base Brown. The small group of snorkelers, who were not too cold to make another dip in the water, make a brief visit at the Argentinian station to thereafter head out in a combined snorkel/dive zodiac to explore the beauty filled surrounding of Paradise Harbour. The mountains surrounding us are decorated with thin layers of mist and perfectly mirrored in the total calm bay.

The warming sun nicely lights both the high mountain peaks and the many fantasy-filled ice formations. In the refreshing, blue water, humpback whales peacefully are resting and energetic Gentoo penguins porpoising. Crabeater seals sleep next to the impressive Skontorp Glacier. The entire scenery is like taken from a fairy tale, of which we are fortunate to experience live! After a stunning zodiac cruise, snorkelers and divers are entering the refreshing wet environment. A beautifully formed “ice-island” is chosen and explored from above- and beneath surface. A curious Gentoo penguin joins our enthusiasm and makes the thrilled snorkelers even more lucky when it keeps them company for a bit next to our icy floating island. There are no words good enough to describe this marvelous afternoon we are having in this magical place. We all feel speechless and lucky. Yes, we truly are in Paradise!

DAY 5

Polar Pioneer makes a pre-breakfast cruise through the narrow Lemaire Channel. In contrast to yesterday, the surrounding mountains are now all covered by thicker fog. The very limited visibility provides a mystical touch to the morning cruise. So it does as well to our zodiac cruise after breakfast. It feels like an opening scene taken from a mysterious movie when we slowly zodiac-ing through the fog and ice. Many crabeater seals are seen resting on the ice or swimming in the water.

After a couple of hours of zodiac cruising, we find the perfect iceberg for polar snorkeling. It doesn’t take long until all snorkelers slips into their crisp-blue surrounding. Again the iceberg shows off even more when observing it from beneath surface. The ice formations are so fascinating to watch, so is the tiny krill next to the huge wall of ice. A shy, brown fish is also briefly seen before it disappears into the secret filled, dark depth. After a good time in the water we all feel very cold and happy to head back to the ship for some hot chocolate and pizza lunch!

Our afternoon is spent on lovely Petermann island, where the snorkelers enjoy their time in the small, sheltered bay next to our landing point. Here they swim among both energetic Gentoo penguins and smaller ice-formations. A fur seal is also enjoying the afternoon in the area, but does not get curious enough to say hello to the underwater cameras. The silent snow, falling from the sky, gives the entire setup a very peaceful feeling. Yet another magical day in Antarctica!



Snorkel Log

By Birgitta Mueck

DAY 6

Crossing the Antarctic circle, followed by Polar Plunge, is the highlight of the morning.

In the afternoon, we make a landing on Detaille Island, our most southerly destination. The old abandoned research station, Base W, brings us back in time while the majestic landscape scenery surrounding us yet again fills us with great awe and wonder. Huge pods of crabeater seals are seen swimming close to shore. After a nice walk on the island, the snorkelers get ready for further underwater adventures. In hope for a possibility to see the seals from beneath surface, we head out on the water with the zodiac. The awesome visibility provides the snorkelers with a flying feeling when entering the water. The small island we snorkel along has nice underwater cliffs covered by many limpets. A couple of crabeater seals finally decide to get curious enough to have a quick look at the black- and white drysuit dressed snorkelers. We thereafter make another jump in the water next to a blue, nicely formed iceberg shaped in a fantasy filled way. A small group of Adelie penguins are curiously watching us from their ice castle, most likely wondering what we are so excited about. Our cold feet and fingers are thereafter pleased to get back to the ship to warm up after another eventful day.

DAY 7

Zodiac cruise at the Fish islands is today's refreshing adventure. Various shaped clouds and magic light on the mountain tops are our surrounded scenery when cruising this beautiful and immense garden of ice. Among icebergs in all sizes, we navigate our way through the frozen beauty in hope to find wildlife we can photograph and hopefully snorkel with. A couple of crabeater seals are sleeping on the ice. As they do not seem to be too interested about our company, we continue our ice cruise. We enjoy some photo shoot time on a "floating ice island", where we also do snow angels in the soft, fresh snow.

Our dive further into the ice garden continues until we head back to where we plan to snorkel. It is when we are dressing up for our upcoming snorkel session when five Adelie penguins suddenly pop up from nowhere. From the water t, they jump up on the ice next to us, providing good opportunities for split shot photography. Such a nice surprise these Adelie penguins gave us! Back onboard *Polar Pioneer* our afternoon is spent on the ship cruising north. Roger gives us a nice lecture about penguins and seals, making us even more eager for next snorkel opportunity! Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

DAY 8

Our last day of snorkeling and what an amazing grand finale we had! A good hour is spent exploring Yalour Islands. The snorkelers are thereafter eager to get back on the water again. As we have seen many humpbacks in the area, we like to try our luck of getting closer to these majestic creatures. When seeing the cetaceans in distance, the snorkelers all get ready for the water. Slowly we drive our way a bit closer to the two humpback whales.

The snorkelers make their first try to enter the water. Silently and carefully they all slide in to the wet surrounding. A soft approach is our aim, without splashing or rushing, and to give the animals the final decision if they like to have a closer look on the Waterproof dressed snorkelers or not. The whales keep staying with us in a smaller distance without any signs of being disturbed or stressed. We keep being patient, in hope the whales will get more curious about us. Another whale turns up so we now have the company of three whales. They start to spy-hop and roll around waving with their long pectoral fins. They all seem to be very relaxed, simply enjoying their time together. So do we. Time flies way too quickly when wishing to be able to stop it. When it is about time to head back to the ship, the humpback whales start teasing us big time!

They pop up next to both snorkelers and zodiac, getting more and more curious. It almost feels like they are telling us not to leave, but as we have to keep our schedule we finally have to wave goodbye to our huge friends. Filled with gratefulness we so head back to the warm *Polar Pioneer* and a tasty lunch. The happy smiles that are spread among the snorkelers say it all, what an incredible experience we just had!

In the afternoon, we visit Port Lockroy, where we do a shorter landing before heading out for our last snorkel-zodiac cruise. As a leopard seal is patrolling the area, we do not get in the water for snorkeling, but get a good opportunity to watch and photograph the powerful seal from the zodiac. The seal is curious about our dive team and circles both divers and our zodiacs until it is time for us to head back to the ship for an awesome barbeque on the aft deck. What an amazing final day for our polar divers—and snorkelers.







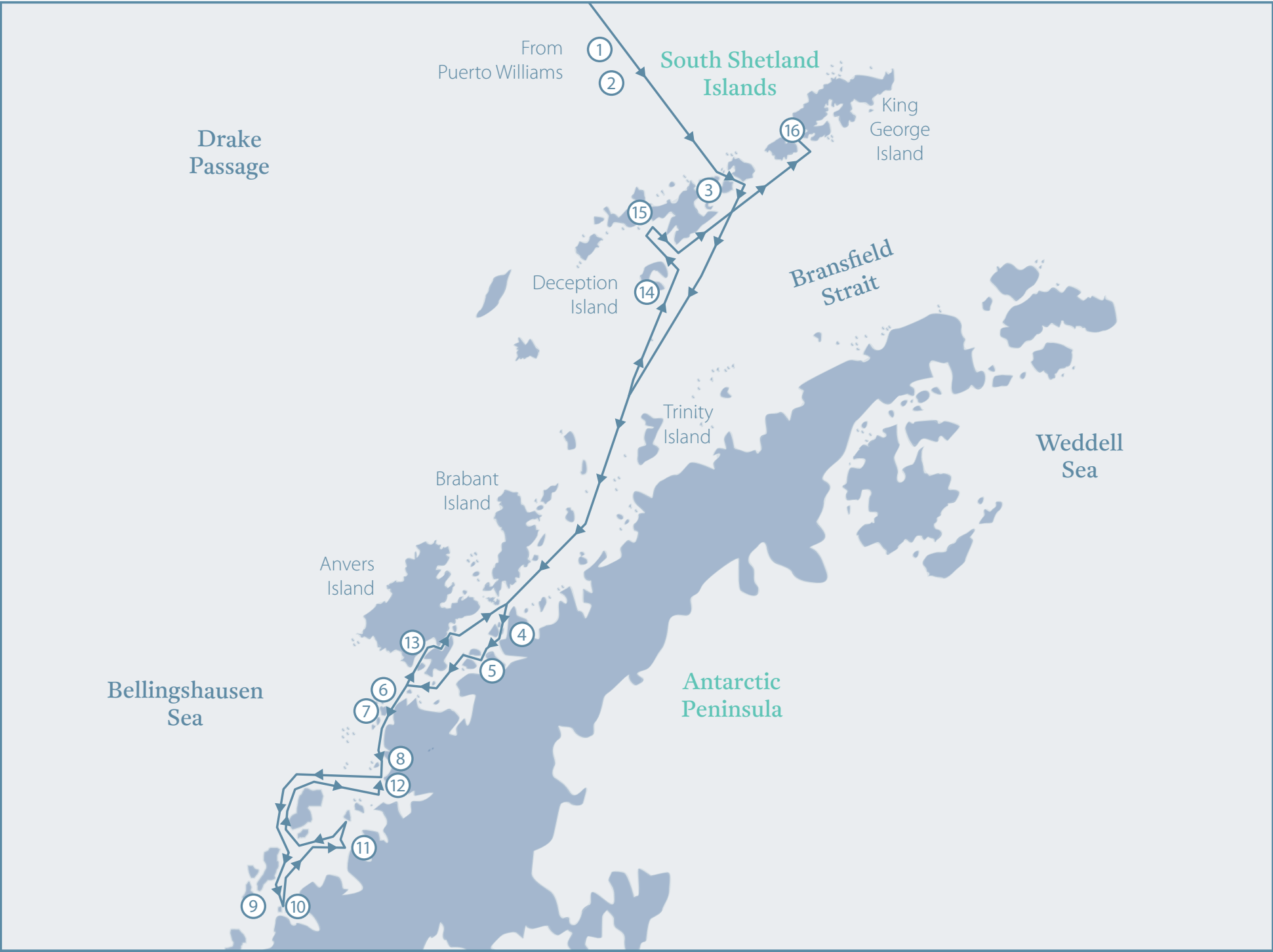




Across the Antarctic Circle

02 – 11 March 2019 | Distance Travelled: 1,461 nautical miles

Southernmost point of voyage: Detaille Island, 66° 51.6 South, 66° 48.5 West



Destinations

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Puerto Williams (Chile) | 7. Pleneau Island – iceberg cruise | 13. Port Lockroy (Goudier, Jougla) |
| 2. Drake Passage | 8. Petermann Island | 14. Deception Island (Whalers Bay) |
| 3. Aitcho Island (South Shetlands) | 9. Antarctic Circle | 15. Livingston Island (Hannah Point) |
| 4. Cuverville Island | 10. Detaille Island | 16. King George Island (Frei Base) |
| 5. Paradise (Brown, Skontorp) | 11. Fish Islands | |
| 6. Le Maire Channel | 12. Yalours | |









Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	MARCH									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Gentoo Penguin			X	X	X			X	X	
Chinstrap Penguin			X	X	X				X	
Adelie Penguin				X	X	X	X	X		
Macaroni Penguin										
Magellanic Penguin										
Wandering Albatross										
Southern Royal Albatross										
Northern Royal Albatross										
Black-browed Albatross	X	X	X							X
Grey-headed Albatross										
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross										
Southern Giant Petrel			X	X	X		X	X	X	
Northern Giant Petrel	X									
White-chinned Petrel		X	X							
Cape Petrel										X
Antarctic petrel										
Snow Petrel				X		X	X			
Blue Petrel										
Antarctic Prion										



Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	MARCH									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Fairy Prion										
Slender-billed prion										
Wilson's Storm-Petrel			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel		X	X							
Southern fulmar						X	X		X	
Sooty Shearwater										
Imperial Cormorant	X									
Antarctic Cormorant			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Snowy Sheathbill			X							
Brown skua	X		X	X						X
South polar skua				X	X	X	X	X	X	
Chilean skua	X									
Kelp Gull	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
Dolphin Gull										
Antarctic Tern			X	X	X	X	X	X		
Arctic Tern										
South American tern	X									
Soft-plumaged Petrel										
Antarctic Prion										



Mammal species log

MAMMAL SPECIES	MARCH									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Antarctic Fur Seal			X	X	X	X		X	X	
Leopard Seal			X	X	X					
Weddell Seal							X			
Crabeater Seal				X	X	X	X	X		
Southern Elephant Seal			X					X	X	
Unidentified seal (at sea)										
Hourglass Dolphin										
Peale's Dolphin										
Dusky Dolphin										
Commerson's Dolphin										
Orca			X		X					
Unidentified Dolphin		X								
Beaked Whale										
Minke Whale			X	X	X	X		X		
Humpback Whale			X	X			X	X		
Fin Whale										
Sei Whale										
Blue Whale										
Southern Right Whale										
Unidentified Whale		X								
Long-finned Pilot Whale										



Fur Seals



Humpback Whale



Crabeater Seal



Leopard Seal



Expeditioners

Luigina Aggio
Marco Bebi
Diane Bell
Alan Bestry
Karen Bowland
Howard Bowland
Kathie Bulters
Tony Bulters
Mick Burges

Margy Burn
Cheryl Croft
Mike Daily
Timmo Draaisma
Shayne Earley
Belinda Ensor
Maarin Erbacher
Kelly Fox
Bill Fox

Leo Fratoni
Jackie Gordon
Gwen Griffiths
Ian Griffiths
Warren Hart
Nathalie Hauk
Courtney Herring
Nicolle Hoogerdijk
Chris Hutchings

Paul Kerridge
Von Kerridge
Janine Lai Lan
Jim Lawless
Irene Liew
Nora Liew
Heather Little
Carol Luzinat
Peter Luzinat

Ghea Mellissa
Manolo Mendieta Villareal
Nicolas Meyer
Dani Milosevic
Jan Moen
Maurizio Moles
Joe O'Dea
Leopoldo Palomba
Jesse Potter

Sergio Riccardo
Amy Roberts
Jami Van der Merwe
Alison Vincent
Izelle Volman
Hailey Zirkle



Expedition Team

Expedition Leader:	Gary Miller
Assistant Expedition Leader:	Robyn Mundy
Naturalist & Lecturer:	Roger Kirkwood
Kayaking Master:	Daniel Stavert
Dive Master:	Pete Shaw
Snorkel Master:	Birgitta Mueck
Photographic Guide:	Scott Portelli
Doctor:	Mari Fleri
Head Chef:	Allan Estoque
Second Chef:	Herbert Cruz
Hotel Manager:	Kathrine Ersando
General Assistant:	Anne Oyasaeter

Polar Pioneer Crew

Captain	Aleksandr Evgenov	Able Seaman	Aleksandr Kiselev
Second Captain	Vladimir Zimin	Able Seaman	Rashit Ganiev
Second Mate	Sergei Abramaov	Motorman	Dmitrii Litvineko
Third Mate	Evgenii Terentev	Stewardess	Daria Boykova
Radio Operator	Dmitry Korchevskiy	Stewardess	Alina Glazkova
Chief Engineer	Denis Strelkov	Stewardess	Svetlana Fedora
Second Engineer	Pavel Voronov	Stewardess	Anna Plavina
Third Engineer	Britvin Maksim	Stewardess	Iliana Koval
Electrical Engineer	Viacheslav Deviatkin	Stewardess	Elena Liukshina
Boatswain	Dmitry Belousov	Russian Crew Chef	Denis Zhenchevskii
Able Seaman	Valerii Riabtcev		

Photo Credits

Marco Bebi	Gary Miller
Shayne Earl	Birgitta Mueck
KellyFox	Robyn Mundy
Bill Fox	Joe O'Dea
Nathalie Hauk	Scott Portelli
Courtney Herring	Daniel Stavert
Roger Kirkwood	Sergio Riccrdo
Peter Luzinat	Izelle Volman
Carol Luzinat	





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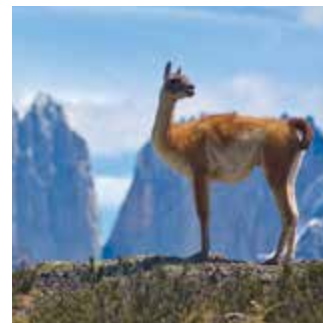
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