



South Georgia and Antarctic Odyssey



02 – 19 February 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 February 2019

Port Stanley; South Atlantic Ocean

Position:	21:30 hours	Course:	Alongside in Stanley	Wind Speed:	16 knots	Barometer:	1014 hPa & steady
Latitude:	51°41.5'S			Wind Direction:	SSW	Air Temp:	8°C
Longitude:	57°49'W					Sea Temp:	8°C

After weeks of excited anticipation and long, long flights from around the globe, we finally landed at the Falklands, our departure port for our South Georgia and Antarctic adventure.

First the coach ride from Mt Pleasant Military Airport to Stanley, and then a tour of the surrounds. We arrived at Polar Pioneer, met Expedition Leader Howard and our friendly team. We ambled up the gangway and the Aurora staff showed us to our cabins. Then it was time to explore the nooks and crannies of our cosy new home .

Onboard we total 50 adventurers with nationalities representing Australia (36), Canada (4), Germany (2), New Zealand (1), United Kingdom (4), Spain (2) and Switzerland (1) along with 11 Aurora Expeditions staff and 22 Russian crew.

We explored the decks, ventured down to the dining rooms for tea and coffee, then clambered up and down the various staircases. Howard then called us together to introduce the Aurora team and give a lifeboat and safety briefing.

The sound of seven-short-one-long from the ship’s horn was our signal to don bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster station, to sample the ambience of a Polar Class life vessel. Even without a full complement of Russian crew, the seating arrangements in the two life-boats proved cosy.

The kayakers met for the first time and with Alex’s expert help, tried gear on and became acquainted with their Antarctic kayaking kit. After a delicious dinner prepared by our chefs Al and Bert, many folk made their way to their cabins for a much-needed sleep. As the last of the summer light left the sky, the hum of the Polar Pioneer’s engines filtered into our fading consciousness – we had cast off from the wharf and were steaming out of Stanley Harbour and through the Narrows.

The few night owls up and about saw us take a sharp right into the outer harbour, known as Port William, within sight of the distinctive Cape Pembroke lighthouse and soon we had left the colourful town of Stanley in our wake.







DAY 2 | Sunday 3 February 2019

Scotia sea, South Atlantic Ocean

Position:	22:45 hours	Course:	97°	Wind Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	998 hPa & steady
Latitude:	52°25'S	Speed:	101.2 knots	Wind Direction:	NW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	51°22'W					Sea Temp:	7°C

The gentle roll of the Scotia Sea rocked us awake as we opened eyes to our first day at sea. Ever-changing mounds of water surrounded the ship in all directions. Rising then falling, crystal blue illuminating the break of each wave. We wobbled down to breakfast, testing out our new sea legs on the way.

Breakfast was a lively affair as mugs and cutlery zoomed from one end of the table to the other. Some braved ‘mal de mer’ in search of sustenance, while others decided to forego dining room smells and remain horizontal for the morning.

To travel to South Georgia is a very special venture indeed, and we began our education about the biosecurity precautions we must take before stepping foot on land. Cozied up like sardines, we managed to fit all 50 expeditioners into the lecture room for an illuminating movie on how to minimize our impact on South Georgia. Charming pan-pipes accompanied us on our journey through the do’s and don’ts of South Georgia, bringing home just how much is needed to protect one of the world’s natural hot spots. As privileged visitors, we all play a part in keeping it pristine and wild.

The purring of vacuum cleaners filled hallways as we hauled our gear to the bar, lecture room and clinic to clean whatever organic matter we could find from our clothes and equipment. Nozzles searching pockets and corners of our packs was the morning’s entertainment.

We scoured Velcro and gumboot soles in search of sneaky seeds and unruly hitchhikers. We signed the requisite paperwork and then, phew! We were free to enjoy our day at sea.

Scrumptious smells enticed us to the dining rooms where Al and Bert – the heroes of sea days! – had prepared a delicious lunch of spaghetti bolognese. We ate our fill before retiring for a post-prandial snooze.

Seemingly in no time, the call rang out beckoning us to the lecture room to hear Matt’s discourse on seabirds. What Incredible adaptations these birds have experienced. Living on the wing at sea for months and only returning to land to raise chicks, they are able to sleep while flying by turning off half their brain at a time.

As we barrelled ever-forward, our side-to-side movement built in a steady crescendo. Out on deck we saw and took photos of seabirds galore – gliding over peaks and troughs, gracefully speeding and plunging through the sea-spray. Matt’s tips and tricks helped us locate the wandering albatross, black-browed albatross, Wilson’s storm petrels , sooty shearwaters and giant petrels soaring around the ship.

In the bar we enjoyed Kathrine’s delectable berry punch and toasted to our fabulous Captain Sasha and the voyage ahead.



DAY 3 | Monday 4 February 2019

Scotia sea, South Atlantic Ocean

Position:	20:40 hours	Course:	110°	Wind Speed:	14 knots	Barometer:	998.6 hPa & steady
Latitude:	52°26'S	Speed:	12.3 knots	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	43°32'W					Sea Temp:	4°C

Morning dawned on a misty vista. Peering out of our portholes, we encountered the swell of the open ocean undulating out into the grey unknown. Not long after, we crossed the invisible line of the Antarctic Convergence and water temperature dropped from about 7° C, down to a chilly 4°. This is where the cold Antarctic surface water meets and dives beneath relatively warmer waters from the north. With such a change in temperature and salinity it forms an important biological boundary affecting the distribution of plankton, fish and birds.

The Scotia Sea that we have been crossing is bounded by Shag Rocks and the South Sandwich, South Orkney and South Shetland Island groups and was named after the ship used by the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition under the command of William S. Bruce.

Our day kicked off with briefings from Howard and Elena about the Zodiacs and all we needed to know for our landings and outings in these sturdy workhorses.

Later in the morning Alex showed us tips and tricks for taking the best expedition photos. He covered the functions of our cameras, how to best prepare for cold weather with valuable (and sensitive!) equipment as well as how to think about composing a photo. All very nifty stuff!

A delicious lunch was followed by a siesta, for those not on deck. Wildlife spotting helped us digest not only food but all the information from the morning.

In the afternoon Ben introduced us to the history of South Georgia. First discovered by Captain Cook in 1775, the island's past has, sadly, been dominated by the slaughter of 1.3 million Antarctic fur seals and elephant seals (1785-1815), and then whales (1904-1965).

The start of the whaling industry was one of the reasons that the island was taken over by Great Britain in 1908, and ever since it has been governed as one of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. Luckily the fur seals have bounced back almost to their pre-sealing numbers, and many whale species appear to be recovering well too.

Later in the afternoon we got into the spirit of arguably the most famous human story associated with South Georgia with a screening of the excellent dramatisation Shackleton: Part I.



MV Polar Pioneer: Zodiac Operations





DAY 4 | Tuesday 5 February 2019

South Georgia Ahoy! Elsehul

Position: 19:45 hours **Course:** at anchor
Latitude: 54°01'S
Longitude: 37°58'W

Wind Speed: 25 knots **Barometer:** 992 hPa & steady
Wind Direction: SW **Air Temp:** 4°C
Sea Temp: 3°C

Fingers of mist laced with wheeling black-browed albatross enticed us ever onward on our journey to South Georgia. Antoine de Roche, blown off course from Cape Horn, was the first man to describe sheltering in the lee of this island in 1675, but our seas were more conducive to a mildly-rolling passage.

Breakfast roll call was complete today as the excitement of our approach struck home. Ben, our historian “unshackled” Shackleton and the Imperial Transantarctic Expedition describing the Endurance as essentially a tourist ship, lacking the rounded bow proven to rise up above crushing ice. Manhauling the boats to Ocean, then Patience camp, Shackleton knew of supplies at Nordenskjold’s hut on Paulet Island but ultimately their fate was sealed by the ice drift.

With Shackleton’s tent teetering on a rift in the ice floe and a man in the water, it was time to launch the three boats and make for Elephant Island, unfortunately taking little ice for water with them. Seven days of pitching, misery and suffering with the steely Frank Wild unmoved by fatigue, a final gale almost prevented them reaching their grim and desperate destination. Initial delirious delight changed to dismay as the men realised that their haven was tide-washed and they had to clamber into the boats again through seething seas to Point Wild.

Knowing rescue was unlikely, Shackleton decided that Crean, Worsley, Vincent , McCarthy and McNeish would take the James Caird across 800 nautical miles of the stormiest sea. With Worsley’s few sextant readings to guide them, a hurricane welcome and a tidal surge first robbing them of their rudder at Cape Rosa, then delivering it back the next day! Who could believe that Shackleton, Crean and Worsley then crossed the unknown interior of South Georgia from King Haakon Bay to Fortuna Bay to hear the joyous whaling whistle, which meant they were

safe. The men left behind in” the Snuggery” on Elephant Island endured 4 ½ months of simply appalling weather, but were constantly buoyed by Frank Wild exhortations “Get your things ready boys – the boss may come today”. The sight of Shackleton on the trawler Yelcho must have overwhelmed those men rescued 18 months after they had left South Georgia.

Matt’s penguin parade introduced us to the world of brushtail and crested penguins. We lived through the two-year life cycle of the king penguins catastrophically moulting, fledging and keeping new eggs incubated on feet, all happening simultaneously in the colonies we are shortly hoping to visit.

Our first gently parabolic iceberg, followed by cavorting humpbacks, interrupted our curry lunch then the anticipation mounted as we encountered prions, albatrosses, giant petrels, and leaping fur seals on our approach to Bird Island.

The first Zodiac cruise tested our new skills in squally Elsehul. A sheltered bay on the northeast coast, with a 350 m narrow isthmus allowed sealers to haul boats across the island. Macaroni penguins, the most numerous at South Georgia and in the world, streamed down to the bay – their foppish headgear a reminder of fashionable London hairstyles. Krill eating black browed and grey-headed albatross, who forage squid off South Africa, nested together on the cliffs, but chicks were shy. Fur seals cavorted around and each beach had a whole cacophony of wildlife. Some walkers on the ridge viewed Joker Cove – seal heaven! What a wonderful taste of South Georgia’s magic!



Salisbury Plain, Prion Island

Position:	21:20 hours	Course:	143°	Wind Speed:	5 knots	Barometer:	987.1 hPa & steady
Latitude:	54°06′S	Speed:	2.8 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	36°33′W					Sea Temp:	7°C

As Howard’s dulcet tones awakened us from slumber, a glorious vista awaited. Precipitous peaks with vibrant, snow-filled valleys cascaded down to the grassy plain filled with a plethora of penguins. Most notably, the sun shone brightly with blue skies above. Our first morning on South Georgia.

Breakfast was polished off more quickly than usual as we scurried back to our cabins in eager anticipation of the morning. As our Zodiacs neared the sandy shore, the landing was occupied by a copious amount of fur seals lolling and bathing in the water and curious king penguins onshore, not at all intimidated by our black rubber boats.

A summer day. King penguins marched down the shore, pausing to inspect various curiosities, including our life-jacket bags and boots. The fur seals huffed, puffed and bluffed ferociousness, doing their best to bully us away from ‘their’ spot of beach.

Penguin calls echoed along the shoreline, a peculiar sound, similar to that of an accordion, a cacophany of air and many chords. The sulphur-sweet smell was the aroma of the day, the olfactory swathe of an area where myriad animals live. Some of us traipsed to the penguin crèche, where brown round ‘oakum boys’, or chicks, stood proudly in their fluffy penguin puff. Others climbed through tussock grass for a view of the plains below, an indescribable panoply of whites, blacks, oranges and greens – burned into our memory for years to come.

The much-needed vitamin D was appreciated by all. Seals languidly lay drying off their furry exteriors. Expedition staff too, took this opportunity to bask in the rare phenomena of the region.

The paddlers jumped in the water for their first excursion. Under Alex’s measured guidance, nine hardy souls took to their plastic hulls and sailed up the beach. Surrounded by king penguins bathing, fur seals dipping and diving, the kayakers enjoyed Salisbury Plain from a different perspective.

Bombarded by sights, sounds and more, the rest of us spent a heavenly four hours shore taking this relatively untouched haven of wilderness. Blue seas, blue skies and a balmy breeze, what more could one ask for in a day on South Georgia? The afternoon brought more sun! Oh, we are a lucky few. Prion Island was the afternoon’s objective, a sanctuary for the magnificent wandering albatross. Fur seals, gentoo penguins, king penguins and giant petrels greeted us on the beach. From there we traipsed up the boardwalk, past countless fur seals to the viewing platform to watch the breathtaking wandering albatross.

These birds are phenomenal. They have the longest nesting period of any bird - 278 days. With a wingspan of up to three meters and average weight of nine kg they soared with effortless grace above Prion Island. Some on big nests, others walking somewhat awkwardly through the tussock, the wandering albatross charmed us all afternoon.

A captivating Zodiac cruise during which we whizzed in and out of rocky coves admiring gradients of algae and lichen coloring the walls above. More birds to see – white-chinned petrels, black-browed albatross, cormorant chicks, pin-tails and kelp-gulls mesmerized us all afternoon.

Back onboard we enjoyed a loquacious cocktail hour before enjoying yet another delicious dinner from Al and Bert.







DAY 6 | Thursday 7 February 2019

Jason Harbour, Fortuna to Stromness walk

Position: 21:35 hours
Latitude: 54°12'S
Longitude: 36°34'W

Course: at anchor
Jason Harbour

Wind Speed: 16 knots
Wind Direction: E

Barometer: 994.6 hPa & rising
Air Temp: 10°C
Sea Temp: 3°C

We awoke yesterday to the magnificent mountains of the Allardyce Range bathed in morning light and wreathed in cloud. There was also over 40 knots (75 km/h) of wind! Hercules Bay, Plan A, was shelved in favour of the more sheltered Jason Harbour. First charted in 1894 by explorer Captain C. A. Larsen and named for his ship, it turned to be the ideal destination for the morning. An almost perfect 3/4 circle of pebbly beach was backed by tussac hills leading to steep, stony peaks. To the west, the snow-covered mountains of the interior rose through misty scarves and to seaward, our ship floated on aquamarine waters dotted with bergy bits. Beyond an isthmus at the western side of the cove lay little Jason lagoon, a wonderful crèche for fur seal pups and a great destination for our kayakers to explore. Near the isthmus stood a small hut which in the early 20th century was used as a staging point for mail deliveries to nearby Stromness. The weather was positively tropical! Some of us strolled the beach, which was scattered with king penguins and frolicking fur seals, and visited the hut which has sheltered whaling, government and research parties over the years and hosts an interesting log book. Others explored the tussac or climbed the hills behind the cove, which afforded superb views of the bay. The warmth inspired much relaxing on the beach, the disentanglement from a lethal fishing net of a fur seal pup and in the case of one intrepid expeditioner, a quick dip.

No rest for the adventurous! After a scrumptious lunch, 40 hardy souls, accompanied by six eager expedition staff and five excited crew, donned hats and sunscreen and were shuttled to shore for the six kilometre walk from Fortuna Bay to Stromness. Well-fed, watered and comfortable in modern clothing, our hike was a far cry from Shackleton, Worsley and Crean's torturous trek over one hundred years ago. Nonetheless, walking in their footsteps, with Ben's descriptions bringing their experiences to life in our minds' eyes, did seem a homage to their epic journey of survival in 1916.

The jagged ridge of Admiralty Peak and the Wilckens Peaks beyond the Köenig glacier set the scene as we plodded up through tussock mounds. Our dear Polar Pioneer seemed rather miniature in the bay below as it sailed from view, hopefully to reappear in Stromness. Myriad mountains surrounded us as we climbed higher, higher and higher.

The chilled-out 10 on board gathered at the bow for chocolate and enlightenment on Hercules Inlet, and enjoyed rounding Cape Saunders and entering Stromness Harbour just as the walkers came over the pass. On the way we saw Leith, the largest whaling station on South Georgia, before coming to anchor off Stromness itself. Once a busy whaling hub of South Georgia, this region hosts three abandoned whaling stations: Husvik, Leith and Stromness. They were at their most active from 1909 to the 1960's when whaling was finally banned in the region. Over a thousand workers worked on stations and ships all over South Georgia at the height of its whaling industry.

The eerie rust-covered remnants of Stromness still haunt the shore, a reminder of history from the not-so-distant past. Rosy-cheeked expeditioners streamed down past Shackleton Waterfall, encountering a juvenile gentoo rather far from home, and criss-crossed the braided glacial watercourse below. The morning's sensational weather had remained with us for our walk – "once in 20 years" Howard was heard to say. A nursery of chocolate-brown baby fur seals greeted us at the shore, armed with growl and bluff as we loaded back onto the Zodiacs.

After a well-earned and delicious dinner from Al and Bert, we gathered in in the bar to hear about the delights that await us in Grytviken.



St Andrews Bay and Ocean Harbour

Position:	21:45 hours	Course:	142°	Wind Speed:	13 knots	Barometer:	998.6.hPa & steady
Latitude:	54°18’S	Speed:	7.4 knots	Wind Direction:	NW	Air Temp:	6°C
Longitude:	36°06’W					Sea Temp:	3°C

Waking early in Jason Harbour, a pink blush in the east and freshening winds accompanied our transit across Cumberland Bay West to Maiviken. Not so good for kayakers but all right for walkers. Twenty- two were set onshore in the shelter of Poa Cove. After investigating the gloomy prospects within an old sealers cave, the hikers made their way up through deep tussac-lined alleys, eyes peeled to identify the ‘adder’s tongue’, one of four fern species on South Georgia. As is often the way, as soon as we gave up searching, one appeared at Val’s feet. We continued in warm sunshine past the delightful lake Maivatn and up to the rocky saddle that was our high point. After a pause for views, chocolate and photographs, the hikers, descended the arid rocky slopes to the verdant banks beside the creek leading to Grytviken. Swinging around the corner, there the village suddenly appeared. The brilliant white, elegant steeple of the restored Lutheran Church a striking contrast to the russet curves of the rusting oil tanks of the whaling station.

In the meantime, the ship was making its passage across to Grytviken in Cumberland Bay East. Coffee was drunk, diaries brought up to date, and coastal vistas were photographed on yet another magnificent South Georgia day. Plans for Zodiac transfer to Grytviken (‘Pot Cove’ in Norwegian) were put on hold as the ship got blown out of the harbour by 40-50 knot winds. The party on shore struggled to keep upright as they gathered at Shackleton’s grave and the plaque for Frank Wild, Shackleton’s great friend and offsider. While the lack of whisky precluded a formal toast, nonetheless some words about the ‘the Boss’ and Mr. Wild were acknowledged with an ‘air toast’ using virtual whisky.

The shore party wended its way back to the settlement, and shortly the whole party was reunited as abating winds allowed Zodiac operations. Many accompanied South Georgia’s Sarah on her marvellously informative and entertaining tour of the whaling station. Between the commencement of whaling in 1904 by Captain Larsen and the final operations by a Japanese company preparing whale meat for consumption in the mid-1960s, around 175,285 whales were killed. Sarah also took us into the social history of the whalers, with such enticing facts as the recipe for turning boot polish into an alcoholic beverage by melting it and straining it through bread. Luckily we have Kathrine’s cocktails to keep us from having to resort to such strategies!

Postcards sent, presents purchased; a late lunch fortified us for an evening landing at Godthul. Although initially gusting 30+ knots, making a kayak excursion impossible, the contrast with the tearing gale on the sea outside illustrated perfectly why the whalers called this ‘Good Cove’. On the beach elephant and fur seals ambled and lolled amongst the relics from the whaling days. Walking up the tussac-y gully behind the beach led to a small gentoo colony, and a fine lake, its wind-riffled surface glistening silver in the late afternoon sun, surrounded by the bouncing emeraldine of the upland sward.

It was good to amble and laze in the warmth, see giant petrel chicks on the nest and an amazing large flock of South Georgia pintails. We tumbled back on board, tired after a fulsome day, and ready and raring for Al and Bert’s nourishing comfort.







DAY 8 | Saturday 9 February 2019

Drygalski Fjord, Cooper Bay, Gold Harbour

Position:	21:35 hours	Course:	270°	Wind Speed:	14 knots	Barometer:	985.3 hPa & falling
Latitude:	54°55'S	Speed:	11 knots	Wind Direction:	N	Air Temp:	5°C
Longitude:	35 54'W					Sea Temp:	4°C

Citrus-tinged sunrise greeted us early as we sailed into Drygalski fjord. Another blue-bird day in the works. How lucky are we! Spectacular peaks caught the alpenglow and we took the decks with coffee and tea mugs in hand. The narrow fjord rose steeply on each side of the ship, streaks of granites, schists and gneiss winding their way along the starboard-side wall.

Fourteen kilometres deep, Drygalski fjord is home to some of the oldest rocks on South Georgia. Once part of the continent Gondwana, the Drygalski Fjord Complex paints the northern side, while the southern side of our morning voyage was composed of rocks from the Larsen Harbour Complex. While the similar pearl of dolerite dyke could be seen on both sides, a significant difference was illustrated on the southern side, a pattern formed by volcanic activity, with basalt lavas, volcanic breccias, gabbros and tuffs, vestiges of an ancient ocean floor.

After our morning appetites were satiated, we gathered again on the bow to load Zodiacs. Nesting macaroni penguins, (the most numerous penguin on South Georgia!) were the headliners for the morning however there was myriad more to see. A veritable oasis of life featured in Cooper Bay.

As we perused the shore in Zodiacs, chinstrap penguins waddled to the water from their colony, with red-guano streaked bellies, ready for a bath. Northern and southern giant petrels bobbed on the water, a severe look in their eyes, challenging any animal that might try and bother them. Medusa-like kelp beds swayed in the swell, mesmerizing in its thickness and strength. Those on shore scrambled up through the tussock, on a scavenger hunt for macaroni penguins. Obscured until the last minute, the penguin nests blended into the dense foliage and it wasn't until we were practically upon them that fuzzy heads popped out.

Once again our appetites were appeased by a scrumptious meal - turkey wraps made by Al and Bert. And it wasn't long after that Howard made the call that our afternoon landing was on the horizon – our last outing in South Georgia.

Gold Harbour. Barely visible through the descending cloud, the hanging glaciers rimmed the amphitheatre backdrop. A panoply of penguins lined the shore, greeting us with their regal beak nod as they landed. Nature in action as we landed onshore, a giant petrel had scavenged a penguin chick and was morbidly fascinating to watch as it eviscerated its dinner. A careful walk down the shore guided us towards a peaceful lagoon. The cloud lifted to reveal the Bertrab glacier perched precariously above dolerite -striped cliff and a cascading waterfall all in one vista.

Around 25,000 pairs of breeding king penguin call this beach home. We witnessed their ability to maintain a dignified demean despite the uncomfortable task of moulting. Elephant seals too, were slowly sloughing old skin, grunting and huffing their way through the 4-6 week ordeal.

The kayakers had a wonderful evening as well. paddling Into the lagoon, keeping to the left side of the waterway to avoid breaking waves. After making their way along the shore, they trundled onto the beach to witness the action on land.

As we recalled the past few days in South Georgia at our evening recap, a truly prolific iceberg interrupted our stories. Captain Sasha navigated us around this ice cathedral, before we retired to a loquacious dinner in the dining rooms.



Scotia Sea

Position:	20:35 hours	Course:	238°	Wind Speed:	10 knots	Barometer:	979 hPa & steady
Latitude:	57°11’S	Speed:	12.6 knots	Wind Direction:	SE	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	42°29’W					Sea Temp:	6°C

The morning dawned on a gunmetal sea, a platinum sky and an air of serenity on board as our minds and souls absorbed the wonders of the past few days. During the morning, whale blows and the odd fin were seen now and again from the bridge, hopefully an augur of things to come as we head south.

After breakfast we gathered in the lecture room for Matt’s presentation, Seals of the Southern Ocean. We gained some great insights into the lives of the fur and elephant seals we’ve become acquainted with on South Georgia and were introduced to the more southerly-dwelling species we hope to meet soon. No-one is likely to forget the sounds of Weddell seals calling to one another through the ice – eerie and phantasmic, with an unexpected touch of techno music.

Today’s feature presentation in the *Polar Pioneer* cinema was Shackleton: Part 2. We were thankful for very different conditions on our passage than those experienced by Ernest Shackleton and his five companions, sailing in the opposite direction to us aboard the 22-foot James Caird. When they reached Elephant Island in April 1916, the men of the Endurance expedition stood on land for the first time in over 18 months.

However, still in dire straits in this isolated region, Shackleton realised that the only hope of survival lay in a perilous sea journey of 800 nautical miles (1200 statute miles or 1500 km) across some of the most tempestuous seas in the world, in little more than a dinghy. Worsley’s astounding navigation and the grit of the men in keeping the James Caird afloat remains one of the most remarkable feats of survival ever known.

After another of Al and Bert’s tasty lunches and a welcome siesta, we got to grips with biosecurity for the Antarctic Peninsula.

Ben then opened up a world of discovery for us – specifically of Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula. Ben described how this part of the world has existed in imagination and philosophy for centuries longer than it has actually been known. This was thought provoking... what do we imagine, even now, about these mysterious icy latitudes and what have we yet to discover?

We will have to wait for Part 2 of our intriguing explorations with Ben, because the late afternoon brought us an exceptional cetacean treat. We came upon great whales - humpback, fin, sei and very probably a blue - feeding at the surface in their dozens – at least 50 animals. At times they surrounded the Polar Pioneer on all sides, drawing audible excitement and wonder from us all as we marvelled at the size and grace of these phenomenal creatures. Many individuals came close to the ship, so much so that it was possible to “see right down its blowhole” in the words of Mandy, watching the scene from the flying bridge. Second Captain Vladimir kindly circled the area not once but twice to enable us to make the most of this rare opportunity. He also observed that the whales were in the vicinity of a seamount and Howard explained that the resultant upwellings would be likely to create good feeding grounds for the whales.

Ahead of us lies a new day at sea. Let’s see what else Mother Nature has in store as our sturdy *Polar Pioneer* ploughs its way south to the ice.





Scotia Sea

Position:	20:35 hours	Course:	237°	Wind Speed:	27 knots	Barometer:	993.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	59°34'S	Speed:	10 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	49°54'W					Sea Temp:	3°C

Our peregrinations with the albatross across the Scotia Sea continue and ship life settles into a routine of sleep, food and photographs, then more sleep in the lecture room!

As we travel, we may wonder what would it be like to be crew on *Polar Pioneer*?

On the bridge, Second Officer Anton shared his family history of seafaring – his grandmother was a radio officer and father a captain! Studying at the naval college on the White Sea at Arkangelsk, he has delivered explosives to Canada, travelled the Mediterranean on cargo ships and run the gauntlet of pirates in the Red Sea.

The gentle silence of the 12 pm to 4 am is his favourite watch, especially seeing the sheathbills clucking around the ship as we left South Georgia. Comparing jobs on the ship, apart from being Captain, he considers the engineer’s lot the hardest.

Radio Officer Dima’s face lit up when he was asked about his Zodiac Driving! “Fast cars and motor bikes are nothing ...compared to the thrill of driving small boats”. We all experienced his joy with the fur seals and penguins at Salisbury Plain. Videographing, especially whales, is his passion and he is renowned amongst the staff for being able to repair anything!

Our stewardesses, Daria and Anna, rushed out to share our whales yesterday and they shared their videos with Alina. From the Black Sea, Alina studied economics, but after two years decided that excitement was lacking so all three girls worked on the shore excursions of a ferry cruising the Baltic. Daria then tempted them to return with her to the southern seas and they all agree that the Polar Pioneer is very cute, cosy and a true expedition ship.

They are still amazed by the colours of the magnificent cathedral cave at Prion Island, captured so beautifully by seaman Sascha on his lensed up iphone! It is the wonder of landscapes, the quotidian colours of sea and the garish splashes of lichens that have captured Alina’s heart. She is using colour film photography and is excited about the results when her friend develops her photographs.

Sveta, our wonderful laundry lady, never seems to sleep and the staff enjoy her music as we do our own wash! She is loving this job after a very difficult previous position on a cargo ship where she was cook, cleaner, laundry girl ... girl Friday in fact!

The skilled and friendly crew onboard work hard and are away from family and loved ones for months at a time. This really is their floating home away from home. With a sense of adventure, working on the high seas they take great care of us and make this incredible trip on the good ship Polar Pioneer possible!





Scotia Sea & Elephant Island (South Shetland Islands)

Position:	19:20 hours	Course:	227°	Wind Speed:	30 knots	Barometer:	9773 hPa & steady
Latitude:	61°14'S	Speed:	11.8 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	5°C
Longitude:	54°44'W					Sea Temp:	1°C

We persisted through the night, speeding closer to Elephant Island. Three degrees Celsius out on deck a harbinger of the continent to come. It was a misty morning, with black-browed albatross wafting through haze greeting us on this sea-borne morning. Once again, we wandered down to breakfast, the last of our languorous morning meals before the jam-packed days ahead.

Up on the bridge, the sun peeked through, illuminating the choppy sea ahead. Troughs and peaks glistened gold as we steamed into them. Cape petrels dipped and dived, a grey-headed albatross soared and even two humpbacks swam languidly by, a billowing blow signifying their presence. Matt entertained us with stories of living and working in Antarctica for the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) during his four summer seasons. Mawson Station was considered the most scenic of the Australian bases, for good reason. Matt’s photos revealed a colourful array of buildings set against a mountain range emerging out of the polar plateau. Matt spent his time away from the main station, living in a ‘smartie’ or a ‘melon’, with no facility with which to shower, while he studied Adélie penguins for three months.

At noon, Elephant Island’s snow-capped peaks emerged from the clouds. As we neared this historical touchstone of the Shackleton tale, Howard pointed out Cape Valentine, where the men first landed after 18 months at sea and on ice. Into the Zodiacs we clambered, relishing fresh air after two days at sea. From the northern side of Point Wild, we were able to make out the bust and monolith of Captain Luis Pardo Villalon, the captain of the *Yelcho*, which finally rescued the 22 stranded men.

While the full complement of Shackleton’s men reached Point Wild in April 1915, Shackleton, Worsley, Crean, McNeish, McCarthy and Vincent departed on the *James Caird* on the incredible open-boat journey – 800 nautical miles to South Georgia. Frank Wild remained in charge of the remaining men. It wasn’t until more than four long winter months later that Shackleton returned through the ice with Captain Luis Pardo to bring all the men safely home. A reverence for their tale is impossible to ignore when faced with this forsaken spit of land.

We perused the rocky outcrop, taking in the pungent eau de penguin and listened to their cackling calls. A curious leopard seal poked its flaring nostrils above water to have a good look at our Zodiacs. Icebergs dotted the horizon and we zoomed out to have a good look at an impressive tabular berg. Into Cape Belsham, we enjoyed a brief, albeit significant, landing on Elephant Island.

Another leopard seal or was it the same as before? poked its nose above the water, intrigued by our bobbing boats. A gorgeous Weddell seal, silvery grey with a spattering of colour across its belly, made an appearance during our afternoon outing.

Before too long, it was back to the ship for a stirring toast by Ben on the bow as we raised a glass to the 22 men on Elephant Island, who survived against all odds.

To the south! As we made merry in the bar before dinner our dear *Polar Pioneer* carried us closer the white continent, and memorable experiences to come.







DAY 12 | Wednesday 13 February 2019

Iceberg A57A, Astrolabe

Position:	19:30 hours	Course:	220°	Wind Speed:	5 knots	Barometer:	963.3 hPa & steady
Latitude:	63°18’S	Speed:	12 knots	Wind Direction:	ENE	Air Temp:	1°C
Longitude:	59°05’W					Sea Temp:	2°C

Many folks were woken early this morning by a handful of big bumps on the bow. But as night receded and the morning light crept through swirls of fog, we felt the ocean quieting.

There was a hint of sun and slowly the shafts of light pushed ever widening chinks into the cloud. Brash ice and bergy bits began to glimmer as the mist dissipated and grew more numerous, like emissaries sent from the white continent to greet us.

Our objective for the morning was iceberg A57A. This massive tabular berg, measuring 22 x 5 nautical miles (33 x 7.5 statute miles or 40 x 9 km) originates from a portion of the Larsen Ice Shelf the size of Belgium, which broke away in 2016. The berg destined to become A57A broke off in turn, became caught in the Weddell Sea gyre, shot out northwards and eventually crossed the tip of the Peninsula into the Bransfield Strait.

Having breakfasted early, we had time for a dose of retail therapy at *Polar Pioneer's* Ship Shop. Buffs, beanies, books, tote bags, t-shirts and tea towels – there was a plethora of choices for happy gift recipients back home, no doubt including very lucky children and grandchildren!

Meanwhile, a glint of white on the horizon solidified into an iceberg of tremendous proportions. But was it The One? As we approached, the side we could see appeared to be about 5 nm wide. It was a sight to behold, icing sugar in the sunshine, with perfectly vertical sides insinuating a billiard table- top. The only way to be sure about the long dimension was to steam alongside and after an hour, discover that there was still more berg to enjoy. To reach our afternoon destination of Astrolabe Island we were obliged to turn away, but there was no doubt that this was A57A.

French explorer Jules Dumont D’Urville named Astrolabe Island after his ship during his Antarctic expedition of 1837-40. and the modern-day French Antarctic research vessel still bears the name. An astrolabe was an early navigational instrument, the forebear of the sextant, although Dumont D’Urville would (hopefully!) be using the latter as sextants were a significant technological advance on astrolabes.

Much of Astrolabe Island rises sheer from the sea to soaring, snow covered peaks. It is home to over 4,000 pairs of chinstrap penguins, many of which, with great energy, make their nests high on the precipitous slopes. As we approached we came across a slick, sinuous, leopard seal patrolling the waters below, very likely a female - which are bigger than males - given her huge head and sheer length, about two-thirds the length of our boats!

As we explored further we came upon fur and Weddell seals, cape petrels and nesting Antarctic fulmars. Little downy heads were visible at intervals on the cliff-face as adult birds wheeled gracefully past. Close inshore were numerous beautiful bergs, sculpted by wind and water into cathedrals and monuments of ice, one with a striking deep aquamarine band.

As the afternoon continued the weather became increasingly Antarctic until we were all dusted with snow and peering through veils of mist. As the last two Zodiacs approached the ship’s gangway, they were greeted by another watchful, curious leopard seal.

Back aboard we shared stories and perused photos, before dinner. Today we reach the heart of the Antarctic Peninsula. Enjoy!



DAY 13 | Thursday 14 February 2019

Enterprise Island, Neko Harbour

Position:	20:05 hours	Course:	305°	Wind Speed:	15 knots	Barometer:	970.6 hPa & falling
Latitude:	64°43'S	Speed:	10.5 knots	Wind Direction:	N	Air Temp:	4°C
Longitude:	63°03'W					Sea Temp:	2°C

A scintillating sunrise streamed over Danco coast as the Antarctica Peninsula welcomed us. Snow-capped peaks caught apricot-hued rays endlessly to the horizon. To be here at last, the White Continent, full of mystery – a beautiful thing to behold.

Our morning brought a Zodiac cruise around the gateau-cake layers of Enterprise Island. But before we began our meandering circumnavigation, there were whales to enjoy. Humpbacks on the horizon! We watched a sleeping humpback, magnificent in its deep bobbing and echoing exhalations. Feeding humpbacks swam beside us, dipping and diving, tossing up flukes to reveal shapes and colours as unique as a human fingerprint. These incredible animals are likely the longest migrators of all mammals, covering more than 8,000 km each season. Breeding in the warmer waters of South America, they migrate here to feed with their calves during the Antarctic summer.

Back onboard, pasta primavera helped satiate us for the afternoon. As we sailed through scenic Gerlache Strait, then the Ererra Channel and in to Andvoord Bay, binoculars were busy on the bridge, finding leopard seals, gentoo penguins and...more whales.

It would've been criminal not to investigate the many humpback sightings so once we had Zodiacs loaded, we zoomed off. Should we motor closer to the group on the left, straight ahead or to the right? The choices were overwhelming. Once again humpbacks exhilarated our outing. With a measured grace they surrounded us. Sights, sounds, even the fishy smell of their blow captivated us.

We watched them bubble-netting, making a circle with bubbles that looked like a boiling cauldron, which formed a wall to restrict movements of krill and small school fish before rising up from below to eat their fill. Barnacle-encrusted rorquals filled our viewfinders as did shapely flukes and billowing blows. A whale of a day to be sure!

And yet another highlight for the day – a continental landing! We stepped foot on Antarctica at Neko Harbour and were greeted by busy gentoo penguins (less smelly or noisy than the chinstraps), These laid-back brush-tails are the most common flightless bird we'll see on the peninsula.

An intrepid group followed Howard up to a vantage point to look down on the tidal glacier, brash ice and bay below. Others meandered along the shore, relishing in penguin antics and a lolling Weddell seal.

Wheweee! It was time for a joyful bum-slide down the hill. As Ben dutifully supervised, many brave souls let gravity do its trick and pull them ever downwards over the edge.

When it was time to return to our homey vessel, navigating through a maze of brash ice challenged us along the way.

The day was not yet done. Kathrine, Al and Bert prepared a merry BBQ on the back deck where we ate and danced the evening away – Antarctic style. We sailed through the Neumayer Channel, beautiful in its simplicity of rock and ice and sky.







DAY 14 | Friday 15 February 2019

Cuverville Island, Paradise Harbour

Position: 20:30 hours
Latitude: 64°39'S
Longitude: 62°55'W

Course: 060°
Speed: 10.1 knots

Wind Speed: 40 knots
Wind Direction: NE

Barometer: 979.9 hPa & falling
Air Temp: 2°C
Sea Temp: 1°C

Ahhhh, there is nothing quite like the Lemaire at dawn. Early risers were rewarded by the grandeur of the dramatic setting, the lofty alpine peaks above and an iceberg maze below. Despite the best efforts of Captain Sasha, Second Captain Vlad and Valerii the helmsman, our passage to the end of this narrow defile was thwarted at the final choke by a berg of immovable mass. We reached our furthest point south (65° 06'S, 63° 59W) before turning back, our return journey up the Lemaire and into the Gerlache Strait was punctuated by our first sightings of Adélie penguins.

That, and extraordinarily dazzling mountains lit by sun filtering through a gauzy sky. At Cuverville Island, we motored ashore amidst impressive icebergs to visit one of the largest colonies of gentoo penguins on the Antarctic Peninsula. There are over 4,500 breeding pairs, their numbers augmented by cuddly, gawky chicks carefully-guarded by their parents from the Antarctic skua, the local apex predators of the avian world.

Whalebones littered the shore, testament to the whaling industry on the Peninsula. Snow fell, the wind rose and we experienced one of our bounciest Zodiac rides yet, but arrived back on board more-or-less dry.

During lunch, in thickening weather and freshening breeze, we returned south once again along that central Peninsula waterway, the Gerlache Strait. Our destination – Paradise. Harbour home to the Argentinian Antarctic Research Base, Almirante Brown. We made our way through the rustic (and rusty) station buildings, rebuilt after a dramatic station fire in the 1980s, and onto the snow slope above. While some made their way out to photograph ancient moss-beds, many ascended to a viewpoint that gave expansive views over the ice-strewn bay, and the opportunity for a rapid snowy descent a la derriere.

The afternoon was kayakers' heaven – windless and flat - and soon they were joined by Zodiacs cruising on the glassy dark waters of Skontorp cove. Here the jumbled, rugged Skontorp glacier tumbles down to the ocean and breaks into precarious serracs. The deep, powerful beauty of the ice cliffs and craggy peaks was magnified by the profound silence, as we gently rocked in brash ice. Some minke whales made a fleeting appearance as we headed back to Polar Pioneer. As we returned to the ship, we were greeted by the announcement of a 'Polar Plunge'. Nineteen hardy plungers responded to the call and applied various styles and degrees of attire to their spontaneous leaps into the solemn waters of Antarctica.



Hannah Point, Deception Island

Position:	21:30 hours	Course:	304°	Wind Speed:	20 knots	Barometer:	989.2 hPa & steady
Latitude:	62°54'S	Speed:	12.2 knots	Wind Direction:	NW	Air Temp:	3°C
Longitude:	61°39'W					Sea Temp:	1°C

Overnight we barrelled northwards towards the South Shetland Islands and this morning woke to find Deception Island rising sheer from the ocean as we passed, giving a hint of what the afternoon had in store. The South Shetlands are young by Earth science standards - just a couple of million years - and are moving away from the Antarctic Peninsula by a few centimetres each year as the Bransfield Strait, a ‘spreading centre’, geologically speaking, widens. The islands were discovered in 1819 by a British sealer, William Smith and within four years the fur and elephant seal populations had been severely depleted, but fortunately their numbers have now recovered.

Our first landing was at the wonderfully atmospheric Hannah Point, set in the curve of Walker Bay on Livingston Island. We crossed wind-whipped waters from the ship to a pebbly shore filled with gentoo penguins and, a few steps further on, chinstraps, elephant seals, kelp gulls and their young. We also discovered, to our delight, that the low craggy outcrops of the Point were full of nesting southern giant petrels with enormous downy chicks close to adult size. The juvenile penguins were nearly fledged, displaying a diverse array of hairstyles as they lost their fluffy coats to smart new suits of adult feathers. These healthy populations were great to see and an indicator of a good food supply this season.

After lunch, we rounded off our Antarctic explorations in the striking, drowned caldera of Deception Island. Deception is an active volcano and is the most recent to erupt in Antarctica. Historically, it has erupted once every 50–70 years and the last occasion was 1970, so the next one is due... soon!

We slipped through the caldera’s narrow, majestic entrance, known as Neptune’s Bellows, and the wide circle of the crater rim opened up before us, recent snow painting the black peaks in monochrome stripes. Ashore at Whaler’s Bay we hiked up to Neptune’s Window, where, in the right conditions, the Antarctic Peninsula can be seen. Rusting tanks and dilapidated buildings, even an aircraft hangar, mark the human history of the bay, which played host to a whaling operation in the early 20th century and a British research station from the 1940s to the 1960s. The waters of the caldera are warm at the surface in some places and as Matt can attest, so is the land - he dug carefully to about 30 cm and found sand that was positively hot. A remarkable, eerie, beautiful and unique place to finish.

Back on board, with mist of the early afternoon vanished, we enjoyed excellent views as Captain Sasha and crew skillfully negotiated our exit from the crater.

Before dinner we gathered in the bar to recap our Antarctic experiences. Ably facilitated by Ben and Matt, we shared our reflections on our adventures - piquant, funny and thought-provoking.

Tomorrow we head north toward Ushuaia – look out for more marine life as we approach the nutrient-rich waters of the Antarctic convergence. Don’t forget to check our schedule below for fascinating talks and the most challenging quiz in the Universe.







DAY 16 | Sunday 17 February 2019

Cloud Nine Bay, Better Than the Brochure Harbour

Position:	Today	Course:	The whales know	Barometer:	Who knows?	Air Temp:	Bracing
Latitude:	Captain Sasha knows	Speed:	God knows			Sea Temp:	More bracing
Longitude:	Captain Vlad knows						

As the citrus sun peeked over the royal icing mountains, its apricot rays peeled down the sun kissed slopes reflecting in the gunmetal sea which was punctuated by shrapnel silver icebergs. The wallowing whales waltzed beside us in the wondrous waters.

As usual we were stirred from our slumber (or sea sickness) by radio Antarctica “Wake up with Howard”. His dulcet tones informed us of yet another perfect day of weather and activities.

There was a spot inspection in the morning and sadly Howards perfect 100% biosecurity rating (achieved under false pretences by off-loading the seed carrying velcro vandals on the walk), took a dive deeper than a sperm whale when the inspector found a pair of wandering albatrosses nesting in Ben’s (aka Matt) hair. In his defence, Ben (aka Matt) said he was just trying to look like James Clark Ross ‘The most handsome man in the Navy’.

Now that Matt (aka Ben) has discovered that he looks like a baby king penguin he will be winter-ing out in the penguin rookery. He has been tagged, so you can follow his antics with the other brown fuzzy chicks on ‘Track my Naturalist’.

Alex’s looking and liking for lichen has lightened and lifted our love for this little-known life form. He was also last seen diving from his kayak under A57A with a tape measure to prove only 2/3 of tabular icebergs are under water.

After lunch listen for your cabin number to be called as Elena will be organising the photo shoot for the 2020 Aurora Calendar, please be prepared to come wearing only your thermals.

Lesley has converted her surgery next to the bar into an artists studio. Be warned her sea sickness tablets may contain a disinhibitor to get models for the figure drawing session entitled ‘Three nudes with Adder’s tongue’.

Later in the afternoon Howard and Elena will be having the Zodiac time trials. As usual Anne will be the ballast for the two boats and is looking forward to perfecting her skills at forward and backward somersaults between them.

Happy Hour is at 6pm tonight. Katherine has kindly prepared the cocktail of the Day ‘Pioneer Purge’ - Guano and Virkon, this will help hair regrow after your next catastrophic moult. This will be followed by Al and Bert’s banquet. Due to the ferocious appetites of the guests, supplies are running low, but they have still managed to create a gourmet meal of tussac soup, lichen linguine and icy poles.

After dinner, Clare will be holding games in the bar. Tonight’s games include ‘Have you turned your tag’ and ‘The tag is right’.

With many thanks to special guest writers H.D. and M. P.



DAY 17 | Monday 18 February 2019

Drake Passage

Position: 21:30 hours
Latitude: 54°57'S
Longitude: 66°52'W

Course: at anchor
Beagle Channel

Wind Speed: 4 knots
Wind Direction: NW

Barometer: 997.2 hPa & steady
Air Temp: 8°C
Sea Temp: 9°C

The day dawned on an increasingly calm Drake Passage, with light winds and a hint of sunshine that grew through the morning. This gave our voyage an added bonus: the opportunity to approach Cape Horn and it's jagged archipelago. The sun now shining brightly, we were able to see the sweep of the cliffs and the peninsula of the Horn itself with one of the most remote lighthouses in the world perched on the end. Ben spoke about the history of Cape Horn and Maria gave a reading in Spanish of the beautiful poem inscribed on its monument. The English translation reads as follows:

**POEM BY SARA VIAL INSCRIBED ON THE CAPE HORN
ALBATROSS MONUMENT**

*I am the albatross that waits for you
at the end of the earth.
I am the forgotten soul of the dead sailors
who crossed Cape Horn
from all the seas of the world.
But they did not die
in the furious waves.
Today they fly in my wings
to eternity
in the last trough of the Antarctic winds*

Onwards towards the Beagle Channel, with the wild coast of Tierra del Fuego in sight, we spent time on the bridge or on deck enjoying the beautiful weather and occasional visits by schools of Commerson's dolphins. In the afternoon, Cinema 1 played host to a selection of screenings; the concluding part of Life in the Freezer, Ice and the Sky and Around Cape Horn, between them a homage to the significance of this region in natural history, climate science and human endeavour.

We rounded off the day with Captain's drinks, including accolades for the kayakers, walkers and plungers amongst us, followed by another of dinner Al and Bert's fantastic dinners.

Finally we gathered for our end of voyage slideshow, rich with the images and memories of the past 18 days.



AN ANTARCTIC CHRISTMAS SONG BY VAL HENNELLY (TO THE TUNE OF 'A PARTRIDGE IN A PEAR TREE')

On the first day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
A leopard seal on an ice floe

On the second day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Two Orca whales
And a leopard seal on an ice floe

On the third day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Three Weddell seals
Two orca whales
and a leopard seal on an ice floe

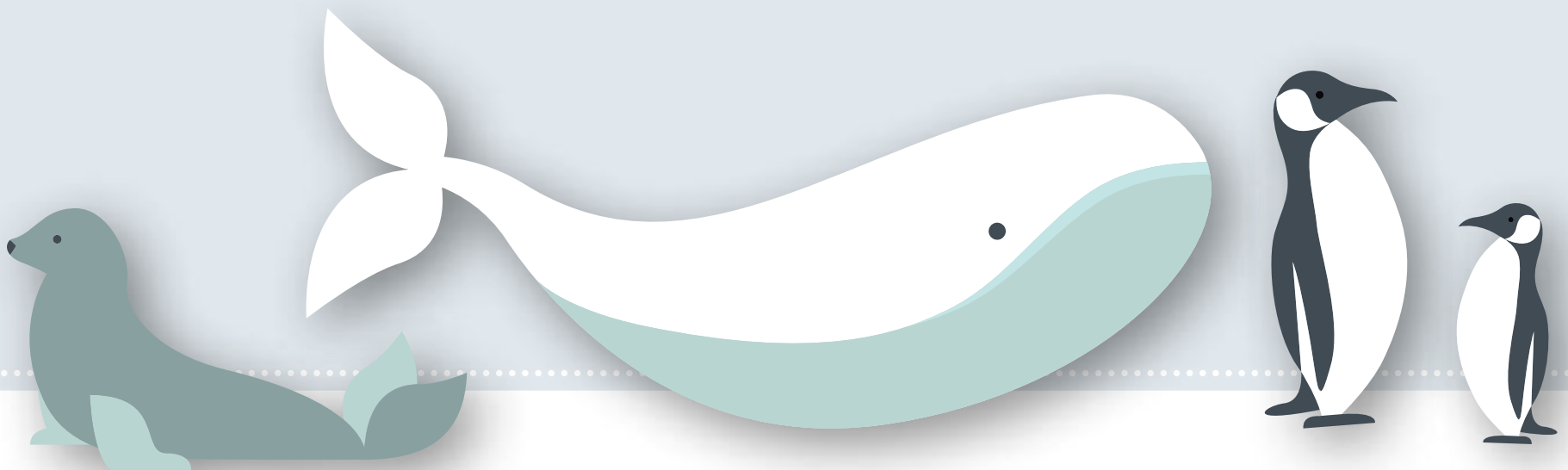
On the fourth day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Four giant petrels
Three Weddell seals
Two orca whales
And a leopard seal on an ice floe

On the fifth day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Five king penguins
Three Weddell seals
Two orca whales
And a leopard seal on an ice floe

On the sixth day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Six albatrosses
Five king penguins
Three Weddell seals
Two orca whales
And a leopard seal on an ice floe

On the seventh day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Seven humpbacks breaching
Six albatrosses
Five king penguins
Three Weddell seals
Two orca whales
And a leopard seal on an ice floe

On the eight day of Christmas Aurora gave to me
Eight fur seals barking
Seven humpbacks breaching
Six albatrosses
Five king penguins
Three Weddell seals
Two orca whales
And a leopard seal on an ice floe...





DAY 18 | Tuesday 19 December 2018

Beagle Channel, Ushuaia

Position: 08:00 hours
Latitude: 54° 48.5'S
Longitude: 68° 18.1'W

Course: Alongside in Ushuaia

Wind Speed: 5 knots
Wind Direction: W

Barometer: 1000Pa & steady
Air Temp: 6°C
Sea Temp: 7°C

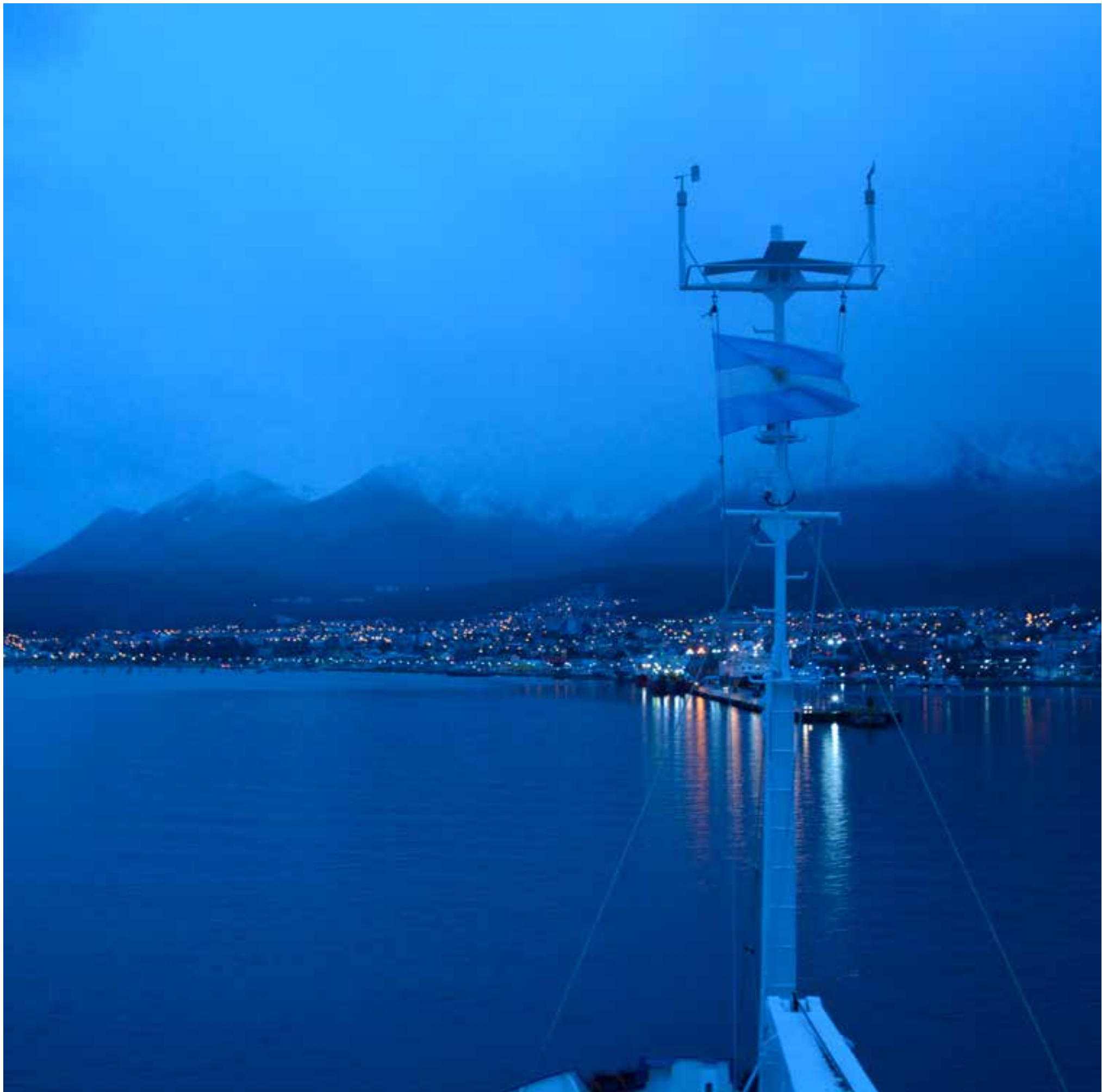
To quote Water Rat to Mole in Wind in the Willows: Believe me my young friend, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats... simply messing.

The orange light of Ushuaia twinkled merrily as we eased into the wharf early this morning. A light rain splashed the outer decks and we looked out at the lightly-dusted mountains receding into the clouds. Already our South Georgia and Antarctic adventure has come to an end. As we placed our luggage outside our cabins and headed down to our last breakfast, hearts, and memory cards, were full with the experiences over the last few weeks.

We have transited the southern-ocean to reach far flung destinations, shared our experiences, whether we be walkers, kayakers, history buffs or naturalists. Different viewpoints of the same experience, just as each and every one of us will take away our own unique lived experience from our marvelous time aboard.

A privilege to witness these untouched, remote places of beauty and serenity, we hope that you are able to carry that peace with you in your heart when you return home. Having experienced the deep peace and beauty that Antarctic and South Georgia hold, hopefully we can carry a bit back with us in our hearts.

Last night our trip of a lifetime ended as it began, with a cocktail in hand at our Captain's Farewell Drinks, we toasted our voyage and our new friends. From all the Aurora staff, a big thank you, to all expeditioners for sharing this journey with us. Thank you also for your great humour, enthusiasm and adventurous spirit. May your memories live long and bright!







Kayaking Log

By Alex Chavanne

Kayaking Guide: Alex Chavanne

Kayakers:

Helen Davis	Ros Firster	Dorian Sharota
Judy Jarman	Richard Lukacz	Elaine Forestell
Kathryn Jennings	Liz Sharota	Clair Forestell

DAY 4: Elsehul – Kayaking cancelled due to 30+ knot winds

DAY 5: Salisbury Plain – Distance: 5.1

Awaking at dawn, the Polar Pioneer sat off Salisbury Plain and rays of sunlight shone between mountain peaks to the south. The wind was a brisk 15-20 knots, but the sea was calm and the sun was shining, and it seemed like a good time for the first paddle trip. Assembling the kayakers on the back deck and laying out all the kayaks, we adjusted our boats and organized ourselves. Everyone performed a smooth first entry into the kayaks, and we pointed our bows into the wind and set off for several small islands. Resting in the lee of these islands we watched giant petrels soaring overhead and shags battling upwind.

Taking off towards the main beach as wind gusted upwards of 30 knots we found shelter behind a large rocky point, and watched as seals watched us and played in the water around our boats. We pointed our kayaks downwind and sailed down the long beach as king penguins darted under and around our boats in turquoise water. We aimed for the ship once we'd made good downwind progress and loaded our kayaks back onboard before we were taken by zodiac for a quick shore landing amid thousands of king penguins and fur seals.

Prion Island – Distance: 5.1

The wind was coming and going but the sun was still shining as we set off in the afternoon to circumnavigate Prion island. There was a bit of ocean swell breaking over submerged rocks as we paddled around them and through kelp beds in gusting wind. After reaching the northern tip of Prion Island and seeing the eastern coast a minefield of peaking waves, rebounding swell and shallow rocks, we decided to turn back and make a semi circumnavigation instead as a thick fog bank rolled in within minutes. Paddling downwind we came into the lee of Prion Island and found a bit of weak sun and calm conditions and explored many little inlets as wandering albatross wheeled overhead.

Once the island had been paddled on all sides except the east, we came back to make a landing to watch the albatross on their nest. After a good hour and a half on land, watching albatross zoom in out of the mist, and tending to their nests, we hopped back in the boats and came back to the ship to round out an outstanding first full day on South Georgia.

DAY 6: Jason Harbor – Distance: 4.7

Through the night the ship was rocking, and we awoke to find ourselves off the coast in a strong 50 knot wind. The paddlers looked discouraged, but we decided to wait and see about paddling until we got into our landing site of Jason Harbor. When we arrived, the wind had dropped, the sun was shining and all the paddlers came out for a lovely paddle in warm sunny conditions. We started out into the gusting wind, paddling into the protected lagoon, where we slowly paddled along shore playing and photographing fur seals and elephant seals, barely submerged in the shallow water. Heading out of the lagoon we went on to the outer point of Jason harbor to be met with very strong wind gusts that pushed everyone's boat backwards in the water. We decided to turn around and paddled with the wind, through some blue icebergs glinting in the sun and back towards the Polar Pioneer. We got all the kayaks back onboard and took a quick ride by zodiac to shore for 45 minutes.

DAY 6: Fortuna Bay – All kayakers on Shackleton Walk

DAY 7: Grytviken – Kayaking cancelled due to 40+ knot winds

Godthul – Kayaking cancelled due to 40+ knot winds

DAY 8: Cooper Bay – Distance: 6.9km

After sailing through Drygalski Fjord before breakfast with clear skies and no wind, our hopes were up for a beautiful day of paddling. Entering Cooper Bay, rafts of macaroni penguins porpoised alongside the ship, and the sea was glassy calm. Full of enthusiasm and energy after a day of not paddling, all the kayakers got out for a morning paddle. We headed off in the direction of the chinstrap colony, only to find the narrow channels awash with a hidden swell, so we turned north and followed the coast through the bay, paddling through surging water in narrow channels and into calm pools full of fur seals. We then set off for the outside of the bay where we found steep black-sided channels reminiscent of cathedral walls, and then took our kayaks back along cliffs with nesting light mantled albatross before heading in to make a landing to see the macaroni penguins from shore.

Gold Harbor – Distance: 6.7km

The same calm conditions of the morning presented themselves in the afternoon with the addition of the sun, so again, all the paddlers joined enthusiastically for a paddle in Gold Harbor. The group first set off for the glacial lagoon and were unsure at first if there was a channel through the shallow rocks and breaking waves to enter. Alex spotted a possibility and we all slipped through the surf zone with barely a whitecap.

We proceeded on inside in perfectly calm conditions to marvel at the two hanging glaciers, occasionally ceding small lumps of lumps of ice to the water. The group had their first experience paddling in brash ice, a harbinger of things to come as this was the last paddle trip in South Georgia. Paddling along shore, we watched fur seals drinking fresh water from the melting ice, and king penguins huddled on shore enduring the last of their molt. We then headed out of the bay and then followed the long shore full of penguins, elephant seals and fur seals to make a final landing in South Georgia.



Kayaking Log

By Alex Chavanne

DAY 12: Astrolabe Island – Distance: 6.7km

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DAY 13: Enterprise Island – Distance: 9km

We were awoken early just as the sun poked out from above the Antarctic Peninsula on what turned out to be an absolutely perfectly calm morning. Full of enthusiasm, we set off to circumnavigate Enterprise Island, but a close whale altered our course. Paddling hard to get out to it, we suddenly found ourselves surrounded by several of these enormous animals. As they swam underneath our boats, they looked up at us and we were all left speechless and smiling.

They continued on, off to keep feeding, and we left in a state of peace. We paddled on, navigating between icebergs with near mirror reflections on the water, and then came around to the ship side of the island before going to have a look at the shipwrecked Guvernoren. We paddled in close and found old harpoon tips on the inside of the wreck, a grim reminder of what this vessel was used for. Continuing, we paddled back towards the ship to complete our circumnavigation of the island, but not before another several humpbacks showed up. We all came back to the ship rightfully pleased from the morning's paddle.

Neko Harbor – Distance: 3.1km

After a few hours on the ship in transit and a solid lunch in our stomachs, the whole group got out for an afternoon paddle. We had seen some humpbacks as we were coming into the bay, and so we decided to first start with a little whale watching before setting off around some of the large icebergs in the area. It turned out that the icebergs would simply form the backdrop for our experience with the whales this afternoon.

As we paddled closer to a mother and calf, the Zodiacs lingering nearby took off in search of other sights, and we slipped in to see what these whales were up to. With deep breaths the whales came up near our boats and seemed to be unfazed by our presence, and we followed along as the two made loops around our boats, the calf spinning in circles underneath our boats showing its pectoral fins and fluke repeatedly. It was a tremendous moment when the mother lifted her head out of the water and took a look at us all before slipping beneath the water with a stroke of her tail and letting her calf continue playing amidst our kayaks.

Truly awed, we realized we had already spent more than half our time out kayaking, and decided that we all needed to step on the Antarctic continent for the first time.

DAY 14: Cuverville Island – All kayakers wanted to go ashore

Paradise Bay – Distance: 7.1km

With 30 knots of wind blowing snow sideways in the Gerlache, the group of paddlers all gave a conditional 'yes' when asked at lunch if they were interested in joining this afternoons outing. Fortunately, everyone decided to come out because when we pulled into Paradise Bay, the sea was glassy and we all set out to do a little whale watching to start things off. A single humpback made circles around our boat, again spy-hopping, perhaps curious about what we were. We then took off under calm conditions to make a loop around Skontorp Cove.

When we arrived at the bay, there were no Zodiacs around so we all spread out and sat in silence as gentoos squawked, avalanches rumbled and snow fell around us, melting into the mirror surface. We rejoined for a group photo before Elena showed up and several snowballs were exchanged before she took a photo of everyone. We continued on before pointing our kayaks back to the ship as we found out the polar plunge would be happening soon at this idyllic location.

DAY 15: Hannah Point – Distance: 3.4km

A storm was blowing north of the South Shetlands as dawn broke on our last day of paddling in Antarctica. As we entered into the relative calm on Hannah Point, though the wind hadn't abated significantly, the waves had. The majority of the group opted wisely to go to shore and spend the last moments with penguins, while Claire and Elaine took off in the kayaks into a stiff 30 knot headwind. We paddled hard into shore, then along the volcanic sands littered with elephant seals and penguins while we braced as stronger gusts whipped up water from the surface.

We paddled into a glacial lagoon and up close to the receding ice face of Livingston Island and got out for a quick breather and a chance to step foot on an Antarctic glacier. Feeling energized, we jumped back in our boats for a speedy paddle downwind, and we surfed our way back to the Polar Pioneer to finish up a quick and windy final paddle.



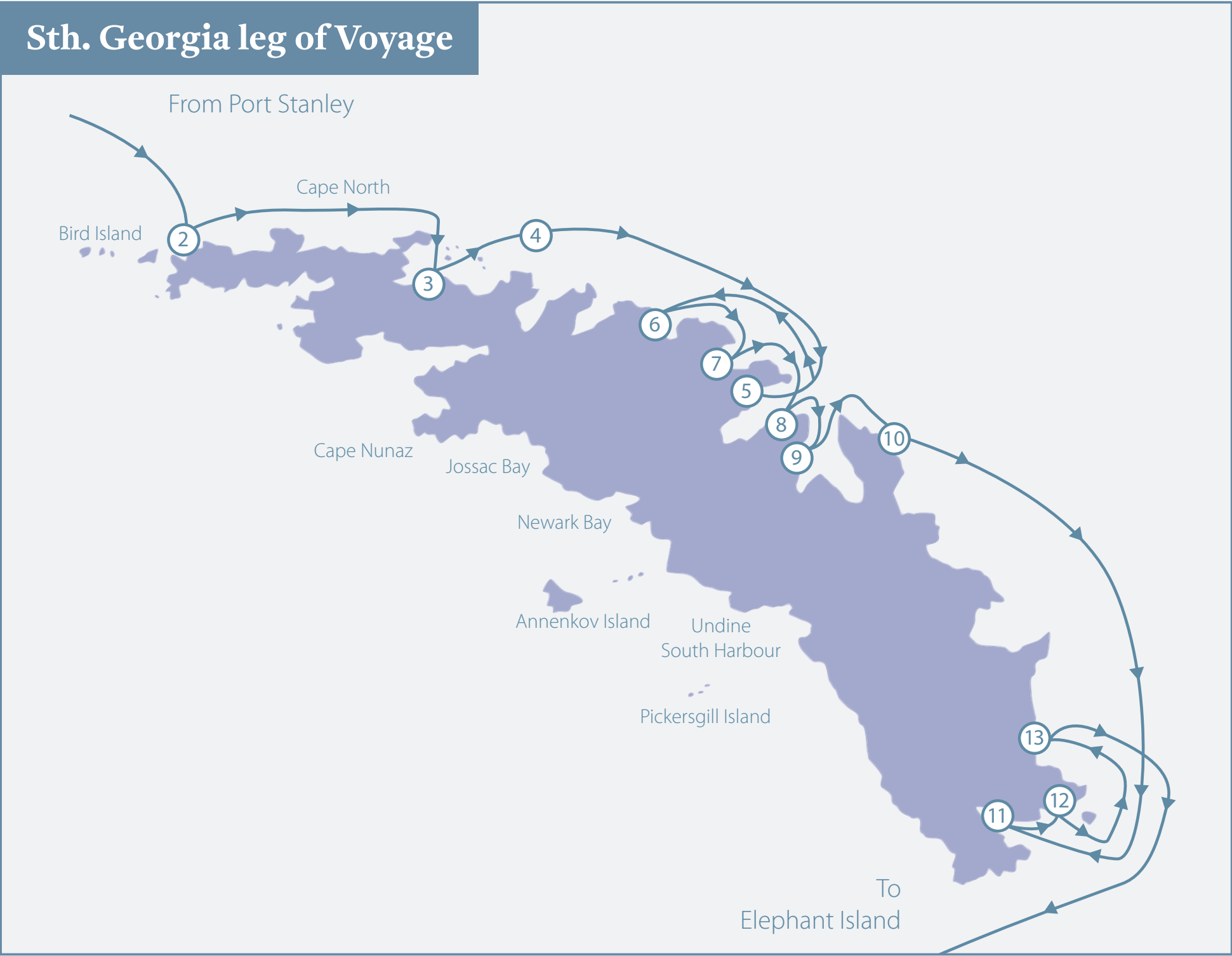


South Georgia and Antarctic Odyssey

02 – 19 February 2019 | Distance Travelled: 2,889 nautical miles

Southernmost point of voyage: 65°06' S, 63°59' W

Sth. Georgia leg of Voyage



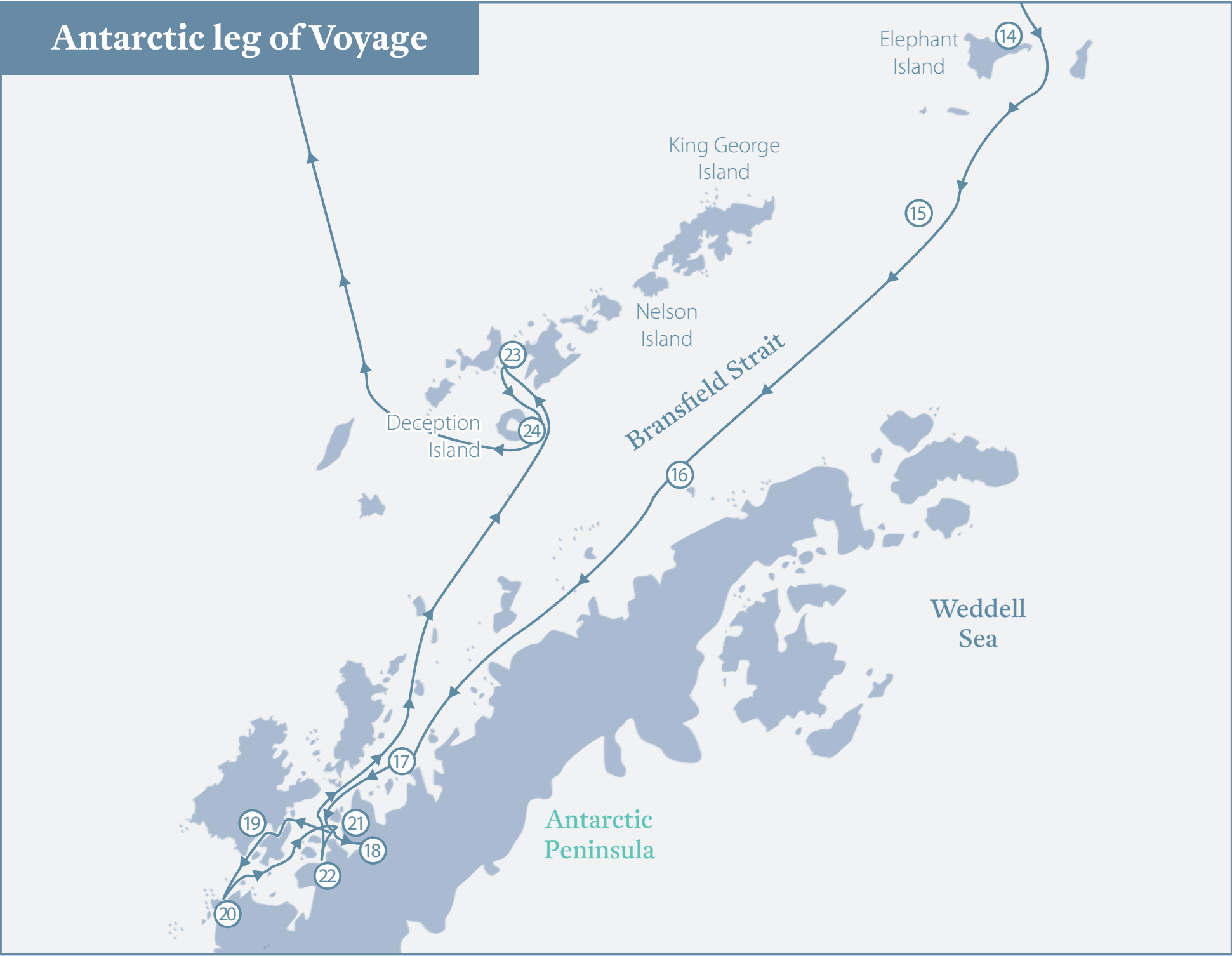
Destinations

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Stanley | 6. Fortuna Bay (Shackleton Walk) | 11. Drygalski Fjord |
| 2. Elsehul | 7. Stromness | 12. Cooper Bay |
| 3. Salisbury Plain | 8. Maiviken | 13. Gold Harbour |
| 4. Prion Island | 9. Grytviken | |
| 5. Jason Harbour | 10. Godthul | |

South Georgia and Antarctic Odyssey

02 – 19 February 2019 | Distance Travelled: 2,889 nautical miles

Southernmost point of voyage: 65°06' S, 63°59' W



Destinations

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| 14. Point Wild, Elephant Island | 17. Enterprise Island | 20. Lemaire Channel | 23. Hannah Point |
| 15. Iceberg A57A | 18. Neko Harbour | 21. Cuverville Island | 24. Whaler's Bay |
| 16. Astrolabe Island | 19. Neumayer Channel | 22. Brown Station/Paradise Harbour | 25. Ushuaia |









Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	FEBRUARY																		
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
South Georgia Pintail														X					
Magellanic Penguin					X	X					X	X	X	X	X	X			
King Penguin											X				X				
Adelie Penguin				X	X			X											
Gentoo Penguin		X	X	X	X	X									X				
Chinstrap Penguin																			
Macaroni Penguin		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X		
Wandering Albatross		X		X	X						X								
Southern Royal Albatross					X					X									
Black-browed Albatross		X	X		X	X		X	X	X						X	X		
Grey-headed Albatross		X	X		X		X				X			X	X		X		
Light-mantled Albatross								X	X	X	X	X	X		X				
Northern Giant Petrel				X			X				X			X					
Southern Giant Petrel																			
Cape Petrel											X	X		X	X	X			
Snow Petrel									X	X									
Antarctic Petrel																			
Antarctic Fulmar (Southern)		X	X	X	X		X		X	X						X	X		
Blue Petrel		x	x																
Soft-plumaged Petrel																			
Antarctic Prion																			



King Penguins



Cape Petrels



Macaroni Penguin

Bird species log

BIRD SPECIES	FEBRUARY																		
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
Slender-billed Prion																			
White-chinned Petrel		X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X				X	X		
Great Shearwater		X	X																
Sooty Shearwater		X															X		
Wilson's Storm-petrel		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Black-bellied Storm-petrel		X		X															
Grey-backed Storm-petrel																			
Diving Petrel (sp.)				X		X			X								X		
Antarctic Cormorant													X		X				
South Georgia Cormorant					X	X													
Imperial Cormorant														X					
Rock Cormorant																			
Snowy Sheathbill				X	X	X	X							X					
Chilean Skua																			
Brown Skua				X	X	X	X						X	X	X				
South Polar Skua											X		X	X	X				
Kelp Gull					X	X	X						X	X	X				
Dolphin Gull																			
Antarctic Tern					X	X	X				X		X	X	X				
South American Tern																			
South Georgia Pipit				X	X	X	X												



Antarctic Tern



South Georgia Pipit



Southern Giant Petrel



Albatross

Mammal species log

MAMMAL SPECIES	FEBRUARY																		
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
Antarctic Fur Seal			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X				
Southern Sealion	X																		
Southern Elephant Seal				X	X	X	X								X				
Crabeater Seal													X	X					
Weddell Seal											X		X						
Leopard Seal											X		X	X					
Sei Whale									X										
Fin Whale									X	X	X								
Humpback Whale					X				X	X	X	X	X	X					
Antarctic Minke Whale													X			X			
Southern Right Whale																			
Sperm Whale																			
Killer Whale (Orca)											X								
Hourglass Dolphin		X	X	X						X							X		
Peale's Dolphin																			



Elephant Seal



Humpback Whale



Crabeater Seals



Leopard Seal





Expeditioners

Charmayne Allan
Pru Cartwright
Hugh Chisholm
Lesley Chisholm
Michael Collins
Stewart Cottis
Lyndal Cottis
Dennis Cutts
Robyn Cutts

Helen Davis
Jeanette Deards
Janet Doherty
Tom Doherty
Denise Donaghey
Sharyn Farrell
Guy Farrell
Ros Firster
Helen Fleming

Elaine Forestell
Clair Forestell
Jesus Gonzalez Anero
Penny Griffith
Joelle Hausser
Val Hennelly
Judy Jarman
Kathryn Jennings
Peter Leggett

Bev Leggett
Pam Leunig
Richard Lukacz
Maria Martinez Gadea
Graham McKinney
Jane Meggitt
Annie Moeser
Denis Moeser
Jo Morland

Mandy Perrin
Joy Pullman
Graeme Relf
Anne-Maree Relf
Heather Robinson
Kim Robinson
Johanna Schmidt
Liz Sharota
Dorian Sharota

Gary Stevenson
Rolf Tiemann
Maureen Topps
David Topps
Lana Williams



Expedition Team

Polar Pioneer Crew

Photo Credits

Expedition Leader	Howard Whelan	Captain	Aleksandr Evgenov	Able Seaman	Valerii Riabtcev	Clare Ainsworth	Bev Leggett
Assistant Expedition Leader	Elena Wimberger	Second Captain	Vladimir Zimin	Able Seaman	Aleksandr Kiselev	CharmayneAllan	Peter Leggett
Assistant Expedition Leader Trainee	Clare Ainsworth	Second Mate	Sergei Abramaov	Able Seaman	Igor Popp	Pru Cartwright	Maria Martinez
Naturalist	Matt Pauza	Third Mate	Anton Bogdanov	Motorman	Dmitrii Litvineko	Alex Chavanne	Jo Morland
Historian	Ben Maddison	Radio Operator	Dmitry Korchevskiy	Stewardess	Daria Boykova	Hugh Chisholm	Mandy Perrin
Doctor:	Lesley Cadzow	Chief Engineer	Denis Strelkov	Stewardess	Alina Glazkova	Lesley Chisholm	Joy Pullman
Chef:	Allan Estoque	Second Engineer	Pavel Voronov	Stewardess	Svetlana Fedora	Michael Collins	Heather Robinson
Second Chef:	Herbert Cruz	Third Engineer	Britvin Maksim	Stewardess	Anna Plavina	Stewart Cotis	Kim Robinson
Hotel Manager:	Kathrine Ersando	Electrical Engineer	Viacheslav Deviatkin	Stewardess	Iliana Koval	Robyn Cutts	Liz Sharota
Kayaking Master	Alex Chavanne	Boatswain	Dmitry Belousov	Russian Crew Chef	Denis Zhenchevskii	Guy Farrell	David Topps
						Clair Forestell	Lana Williams
						Elaine Forestell	Elena Wimberger
						Joelle Hauser	
						Judy Jarman	





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