

Diving in the Polar Regions

Aurora Expeditions has been operating diving adventures in the polar regions for more than 20 years. In fact, we were the first expedition cruise operators in the world to offer this ultimate polar adventure.

The experience of diving in the freezing waters of the Antarctica and the Arctic wilderness is one that will stay with you long after your trip. Being able to observe the icebergs and the areas uniquely adapted wildlife, only seen by a select group of daring adventurers is guaranteed to stir your soul and create memories to share and cherish.

'Getting out amongst it' is our philosophy, and that is exactly what we do. Weather permitting, you will dive while other Expeditioners are doing their activities - kayaking, snorkelling, or exploring ashore.

Aurora Expeditions is proud to have an excellent dive team to guide our dive adventures. Our guides have the experience, knowledge and skills to look after you on your diving adventure and are skilled at finding excellent dive sites, while taking into account the ever-changing weather and sea ice conditions.

Required Experience

Our polar diving activity is not for beginners. You must be experienced, qualified and competent for the conditions the divers will face.

Minimum entry requirements:

- PADI Advanced Open Water (or equivalent from another agency)
- Drysuit qualified with a minimum of 30 drysuit dives
- In the previous 12 months before departure, you must have completed 10 drysuits dives
- You must have recent experience of cold water (below 10C)
- Upon completing an activity form, you will be contacted by our Diving Specialist, they will be able to answer any questions you may have and you will be asked to send copies of your qualifications, logbook, evidence of insurance and asked to fill in a self-declaration medical.
- Divers must be able to kit and de-kit themselves with minimal assistance.

Diving Procedure

Diving in these remote polar areas is not more dangerous than normal scuba diving. However, polar diving is more equipment and labour intensive.

When you get on board, there will be a briefing from your dive guides, you'll spend more time setting up your kit and the first dive will be a mandatory check out dive. The check out dive is an opportunity for the divers to adjust any weighting requirements, see how the procedure for diving from zodiacs works and a chance to ensure that you are comfortable with your equipment. The check out dive will always be done in shallow water. Divers must be able to kit and de-kit themselves with minimal assistance and demonstrate basic diving competence include: pre-dive checks, Buddy skills basic navigation (using a compass) and using an SMB (surface marker bouy).

There are only basic medical facilities on board and no decompression chamber facilities available. In order to minimise the risk of decompression illness, IAATO (International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators) stipulate a depth limit of 20m/65 feet which is mandatory and must be followed by all divers. Any deviation from this will not be tolerated by Aurora Expeditions.

The dives will be conducted using a buddy system of two or three divers. If you are not travelling with a dive-buddy, the dive team will pair you with another divers on board. All divers must have enough experience to competently manage a dive themselves, including reading a compass, using your computer and be able to perform rescue skills if required. (Please ask the diving activity specialist if you are unsure).

Aurora reserves the right to check dive computers after a diver and if the Lead Dive Guide feels that you are not safe to continue diving they will remove you from the activity. This decision will be made for your own safety and for the safety of the other divers. Please note if you have been suspended from diving due to insufficient experience/ skills, you will not be entitled to a refund from Aurora Expeditions.

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Marine Life at the Dive Site

The dive sites will vary from shallow topography where we might see penguins, to diving on iceberg or diving a wall.

Diving in polar areas offers opportunities to witness incredible ice formations under the water. The marine life in these areas can be very interesting to see. Walls that are protected from iceberg scour have huge amounts of kelp, nudibranchs, anemones, sea squirts, fish and much more. In Antarctica you may also be lucky enough to experience diving with some seals or penguins.

Number of dives

We plan to dive up to twice per day (except for days at sea), but an exact number of dives cannot be given. It all depends on ice and weather conditions. Voyage itineraries are only a guideline and safety is always the priority. Since this is an expedition to a remote part of the world, unpredictable weather conditions, availability of anchorages, wind conditions, and other factors beyond our control will always dictate when it's safe to dive. The check out dive is mandatory however after this you can choose which dives to attend and when to go with the planned excursion of the day with the rest of the passengers.

What to bring

Please contact your airline about their luggage restrictions. All excess baggage is at your own expense.

- Drysuit - it does not matter if it is a neoprene/membrane/trilaminate etc. as long as it is in good condition, keeps you dry and you are competent diving in it. A small repair kit might come in handy
- Hood – a 7 or 10mm hood is recommended for polar diving
- Gloves - for your hands either wet mitts or dry gloves are used by our divers. Either system is perfectly acceptable, but you must be proficient in conduction all your diving skills whilst wearing them.
- Thermals suitable to keep you warm in water as cold as -2C
- Regulators - two separate regulators suitable for cold water diving. You will need the following: two first stages, two second stages, a drysuit inflation hose, a BCD inflation hose, a submersible pressure gauge. The cylinders we use have a 'H' valve which is a dual outlet valve to reduce the risk of a free flow.

- Dive Computer
- Compass
- Buoyancy Control Device (BCD) capable of lifting you in all of your gear and the extra lead required in cold waters
- Knife/cutting implement
- Mask, snorkel, fins
- Torch
- Quick release weight system (weights will be provided onboard)
- Surface marker buoy and a spool or reel (and be competent in its use)
- Surface audible signalling device, whistle or /and air horn
- A mesh bag or similar to keep your fins/hood/gloves in is recommended.

Post dive clothing

It is important to remember to bring a warm hat and gloves to wear before and especially after the dive. You may also wish to bring a wind and waterproof spray jacket to keep the cold wind off your drysuit.

Equipment Provided Onboard

We have two compressors on board that provide compressed air. Onboard we have Faber 12 litre steel cylinders with a 'H' outlet for DIN regulators. We have DIN inserts if required, however we strongly recommend you use DIN regulators. Lead weight is available in a range of sizes.

Important note:

Please do not bring equipment that you are unfamiliar with and have not tested previously on a dive. The polar regions are not the place to test out new equipment. It is compulsory that you complete 5 dives with all the kit that you plan on using in the polar regions. This will allow you to fine-tune your buoyancy and trim characteristics, and make a note of how much weight you will need when diving in the polar regions.



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Things to be aware of - diving equipment.

Normal regulators will not function in sub freezing water, hence the requirement for cold water rated regulators. To avoid regulator malfunction regulators must be care for properly before, during and after diving. Avoid breathing from the regulator before submersion, except to briefly ensure it is functioning, but when doing so exhale after removing the regulator from your mouth so to avoid freezing the second stage with moisture from your exhaled breath. If during the dive your primary regulator freezes up and causes a free flow, switch to your octopus and immediately abort the dive with your buddy.

Group Size

We have small group sizes of divers, we always have a minimum of two dive guides with a maximum of 6 divers in a zodiac. While you are in the water your guide will be on the zodiac keeping an eye on changing conditions. One of the dive guides will be available for search and rescue if required.

Age Requirements

The minimum age for this activity is 14. If aged between 14-18 years old, they must be accompanied by parent or guardian at all times.

How to book

If you have the required experience and qualifications (or have sufficient time to get this before your voyage) please complete and return a Polar Diving Activity form. Our Diving Specialist will review the form for suitability and experience before approving your diving place. They will also be in touch with you to gain the necessary paperwork and to answer any questions you might have.

Quite often divers do not have enough experience at the time of booking their voyage, the diving specialist can keep in touch with you to ensure you are on the right track.

Booking Allocation

Each diving place is for one person only. All divers are required to bring their own personal equipment.

Important note:

The language used for our diving operations is English, therefore you must be proficient in English to participate in this activity.

For more information please contact your travel agent or Aurora on:

Australia and New Zealand

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