



FALKLANDS LANDSCAPE © GEORGINA STRANGE

Postcard from the **Falklands** **Islands**

Carolyn Foreman, Audley's Latin America Programme Manager, files a report from Stanley.

I am wrapped up warmly here in the Falkland Islands, a little piece of Britain at the other end of the world. Here to explore these islands, I am checking out the lodges, infrastructure and tours, and I have discovered that whether you are interested in wildlife, military history, or are just curious (or all of the above!) then these friendly and fascinating islands would be a perfect 'extension' to a trip to Chile or Argentina.

My trip started at Mount Pleasant airport where I disembarked the

LanChile Boeing and boarded one of the eight seater twin-engined Islander aircraft operated by FIGAS (Falkland Islands Government Air Service) that transports locals, tourists, post, eggs, cats etc around the islands. I then began my whistle-stop tour of the Falklands (which consists of two main islands – East and West Falkland and many smaller outlying islands of which I was visiting four). This trip has so far consisted of much wildlife spotting, an experience of a traditional Falklands

farm, three hearty meals a day (plus 'smoko' breaks of tea and cake), brisk walks in the freshest of fresh air, the realisation that everybody really does know everybody else and loves a good gossip, and wonderful photographic opportunities, the air seems to be clearer and the colours seem to be brighter than anywhere else I've seen.

The wildlife viewing opportunities here are truly exceptional – lumbering and loud bull elephant seals protecting their sleepy harem on a white sand beach. Rockhopper penguins gathering in little groups ready to set off in their distinctive gait on the arduous trip down the cliffs to the sea, and stopping for what seemed like a chat about the conditions with the little groups on their way back. Colonies of black browed albatross making their nests on a windy cliff top on Saunders Island, just one delight of many for birdwatchers. All of this was seen from a close distance, as the animals seem to have no fear of visitors. Orcas were spotted having a breakfast of baby sea lion three mornings running off Sea Lion Island but the day I arrived the Orcas were obviously full. I knew the feeling, as the food I had been enjoying was fabulous, much of it local produce

– so much so that the cows and pigs wandering around several of the lodges were now providing my freshly squeezed milk and crispy bacon.

I then took a FIGAS flight to the bright lights of the big city of the capital Stanley (population 2,000), meaning my Camp (anywhere that isn't Stanley) days were over. Stanley is a charming little place – just a few streets of colourful houses, a smattering of red phone boxes, a couple of pubs and a selection of the latest four wheel drives, all set on a gentle slope beside Stanley Harbour. From here I took a day trip out to Volunteer Point, home to the world's most accessible sizeable colony of King Penguins. Although the weather was being pretty cruel that day, I spent a happy few hours watching these distinctive penguins, with their bright amber head and neck markings, waddle in inquisitive groups from the nesting sites to the beach, where they turned into graceful creatures playing in the turquoise sea.

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So this is my postcard from the Falkland Islands – just over an hour's flight from Punta Arenas in southern Chile, but a proud part of Britain. The world's premier penguin spotting location, but as the islands are not really on the tourist map yet you may be the only visitor to their colony. If anyone is interested in the Falklands as a destination then please contact me as this fascinating place has so much to offer and it would be lovely to go whilst you have the beach just to you, the elephant seals, the oyster catchers and the penguins. I must go now, I have a big night out planned in the most southerly capital in the world!

Travel File

A week's tailor-made trip to the Falklands (as an extension from Chile) costs from £995 per person based on two sharing including return flights from Punta Arenas in Chile, full board accommodation and tours. A two week tailor-made trip of Chile starts from £2,500 per person based on two sharing.



CAROLYN AND ROCKHOPPER PENGUINS



TRACKS, SEALION ISLAND



PENGUINS, PEBBLE ISLAND



CARCASS ISLAND



DRAMATIC SKIES © GEORGINA STRANGE



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