



ANTARCTICA





The White Continent

Antarctica's majestic white landscapes of soaring mountains and icy plains are mainly accessible only to research scientists and penguins, but it is possible to visit this pristine wilderness on a cruise from South America. I recently went there on the Polar Star, a former Swedish icebreaker ship converted into a comfortable expedition vessel that explores the coastline of this last frontier in travel.

Life on board revolves around the daily shore excursions in inflatable motorised dinghies (subject to the notoriously changeable weather conditions). Passengers are accompanied by extremely knowledgeable guides who between them have made hundreds of polar voyages and have been chosen according to their specialist expertise. Back on board, the guides conduct presentations and lectures and you can pass the time chatting in the bar about the amazing sightings of the day, enjoying the delicious meals prepared for you by the ship's staff or simply gazing out of the window from the warmth of your cabin. I also seemed to spend a lot of time dressing and undressing with all the many layers involved!

Cruises operate during the five months of the austral summer - November to March - and there are highlights at any time during this period. For example, November is the courting season for the penguins, with the chicks starting to hatch in December and January when days are at their longest. In February and March whale sighting is at its best, fur seals have arrived and penguin chicks are starting to fledge. There really is no 'best time' to visit as there will always be something to fascinate you.

Accommodation on the Polar Star varies from basic cabins with shared facilities on the lower decks to large cabins with private facilities on the

upper decks. We also work with Peregrine Expeditions and Quark Expeditions, who use vessels accommodating up to 110 passengers and also a number of smaller boats, such as the Professor Multanovskiy, which take up to 50 passengers. These cruises tend to be more specialised but also attract those people interested in a more intimate atmosphere. The largest boat we use is the 199-berth Explorer II, which offers more luxury for people who want to cruise in style. We also include the unique Antarctica xxi experience which cuts out the Drake Crossing from South America by flying to meet your vessel in Antarctica.

There are different Antarctica itineraries to suit your wishes. Remembering that it takes two and a half days to cross the Drake Passage, there are short cruises (a total of 10 days) giving you a taste of the Antarctic Peninsula, or you can add a couple of nights to your trip by sailing a little further south to cross the Polar Circle (12 days). Longer cruises (18 days) will take in the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, and many operators will cater to particular interests and run specialist cruises that allow for kayaking, scuba diving, sailing, camping and cruises with specialist guides (including photographers and zoologists).

It is possible to take an Antarctica cruise as part of a longer trip to South America, usually including Chilean or Argentinian Patagonia and the exciting Argentine capital of Buenos Aires. You could also head off to the spectacular Iguacu Falls and then on to the warm beaches of Brazil for a touch of sun after the Antarctic cold. Whatever your wishes, we can tailor-make a trip for you based on our first-hand knowledge of the continent and I will of course relish the chance to relive my experiences in Antarctica!

Vicky Nagle
Antarctica Specialist

Opposite top: Whale watching in the Antarctic waters

Opposite bottom: Cruising on the Polar Star

WEB PLUS

www.audleytravel.com/whitecontinent

View a live webcam, a map of Antarctica and useful links.

FACT FILE

A ten day classic Antarctica cruise, plus all flights and three nights hotel accommodation costs from £4,500 per person. For details on this or other Antarctica cruises please call Vicky on 01869 276 276.

