



Royal penguin, Macquarie Island

The Sub-Antarctic and Antarctic regions south of New Zealand and Australia are amongst the most remote and, therefore, least visited in the world. However, isolation does not equal desolation. On the contrary, their distance from the rest of the world has ensured that their amazing biodiversity has remained unthreatened, offering a safe haven to many species of flora and fauna who call this area home. Audley is pleased to be working with Heritage Expeditions, an award-winning family company, to offer clients unique trips to this stunning part of the world.

to the end of the earth

by **RACHEL WOOD** Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific Programme Manager

Audley believes in travelling responsibly and in a manner that respects the environment, which is one of the reasons why we have teamed up with Heritage Expeditions. The company's credentials in this area are impeccable; it is thoroughly dedicated to increasing awareness of the natural world through responsible travel. Founder Rodney Russ, an experienced biologist, started the company in 1985 with the view of promoting wildlife and of enabling travellers to become 'ambassadors' of the natural world. Each expedition is carefully planned and passenger numbers are restricted to 50, ensuring that everyone has the maximum opportunity to see, learn and experience as much as possible during their trip.



Penguins, Sandy Bay, Macquarie Island

Life on the open seas

The very word 'expedition' doesn't normally conjure up images of safety and comfort but the company's vessel, the 'Spirit of Enderby', has been specially built for purpose and is ice strengthened to withstand the unpredictable Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic conditions. It recently underwent refurbishment and offers a variety of cabins, from the more basic standard rooms sharing facilities to en-suite suites, depending on preference and budget. Tasty meals are prepared by top New Zealand and Australian chefs to keep your energy levels up after a day in the fresh air. And, while this sort of holiday is not for people who just want to do nothing, a drink in the bar after a day of exploring the islands is the perfect way to unwind before dinner.

Travelling should be as much about the journey as the arrival and time at sea is well spent on these expeditions. Experienced specialists, including Aaron Russ, eldest son of Rodney, and marine biologist Aleks Terauds, accompany the voyages and give daily talks on the wildlife you are likely to encounter during your expedition, supported by informative videos. Aaron is an old hand on the Southern Ocean and has been leading expeditions for years, specialising in the Antarctic Peninsula and the Galapagos of the Southern Ocean. Aleks's specialisms include research into albatrosses, whales and seals but he also has a passion and talent for photography. This is a rare opportunity to pick the brains of experts in the natural world – nearly as good as having unlimited access to David Attenborough!



Hooker sea lion, Enderby Island



Light-mantled sooty albatross



Yellow-eyed penguin, Enderby Island

Wildlife

The Snares, Bounty, Antipodes, Auckland, Campbell and Macquarie Islands lie south of New Zealand and Australia, in the impressively named Roaring Forties and Furious Fifties. Unsurprisingly, this area is known as one of the world's wildest places. However, despite its reputation, it is not all gusts and gales here; the islands boast an amazing selection of flowers, insects, animals and birds that are unlike anything you will encounter elsewhere in the world. Take, for example, the stunning 15-foot tree daisies that rise dramatically from the shores of The Snares, or the rare and protected Hooker's sea lions, which take refuge on Enderby Island. The landscapes in which these thrive are equally impressive, from the rata forests and cushion bogs on Enderby to Macquarie Island, formed from molten rock, squeezed out of the earth's mantle around 600,000 years ago. Nature lovers will appreciate the stunning fields of perennial flowers (also known as 'megaherbs'), forests, flowers, fiords and extinct volcanoes.

The islands are home to the most diverse collection of seabirds in the world, some of which breed exclusively here. Twitchers will be thrilled at spotting new zealand pipits, brown (Sub-Antarctic) skuas and Cape pigeons, as well as lots of albatrosses – ten of the world's albatross species breed here, five exclusively. And you will never be very far from penguins – King Penguins, Royal Penguins, and Yellow-eyed Penguins are just some examples. These unafraid and splendid birds are often just as curious to observe you as you watch them with their babies and fledgling chicks.

Island expeditions:

The Forgotten Islands of the South Pacific (9 days)

The World Conservation Union has designated these islands as a world centre of floristic diversity, and our expedition is planned to coincide with the breathtaking annual flora display, which very few people are fortunate enough to witness.

The Galapagos of the Southern Ocean (13 days)

This is the only expedition on offer that gives such a complete understanding of the southern ocean's diverse eco-system – one that is said to be home to more species than the Galapagos Islands themselves.

Birding Down Under (19 days)

This tour features plenty of time ashore to meet and photograph 'the locals' – in this case the myriad bird populations – while the expedition experts talk you through the various islands and their inhabitants.

To limit any negative impacts of tourism on the environment, the governments of Australia and New Zealand have restricted access to the six island groups. Fortunately, Heritage Expeditions has sufficient landing permits to allow passengers to go ashore on every expedition, except on islands where landings are not permitted – for example The Snares, Antipodes and Bounty Islands – where zodiacs are used instead to tour around the dramatic coastlines.

March of the Penguins

There are two main ways to approach Antarctica: from South America (the best known) or from New Zealand or Australia, following in the footsteps of such great explorers as Scott, Shackleton and Mawson. After crossing the Antarctic Circle, you will arrive at the continent and will be able to visit the huts of these earlier explorers, spend time at some of the largest Adelie Penguin colonies and observe Emperor Penguins on the fast ice (basically, ice that has 'fastened' to the shoreline). Of particular interest is the opportunity to visit and discuss current Antarctic research with scientists at their bases.

Cruising is the best way to experience the riches the Antarctic has to offer. From the boat you can enjoy the austral summer at its best, with its vibrant, fiery sunrises and sunsets reflecting off towering glacial icebergs. These expeditions are by nature and necessity long but this allows you the very rare opportunity to appreciate untouched natural beauty far removed from the modern world.

The Antarctic expeditions on offer are:

The Ross Sea Expedition (30 days)

This runs twice a year, from New Zealand to the heart of Antarctica – also known as 'The Historic Gateway' – discovered by Sir James Clark Ross in 1842. The itinerary includes visits to both the huts of earlier explorers and modern bases run by scientists from New Zealand, America and Italy.

The Ross Sea is the breeding ground for millions of Adelie and Emperor Penguins, presenting a wonderful opportunity to observe them in their natural habitat; you can be sure of a willing audience and helpful models for your photos! Photographic fans will also appreciate the natural beauty offered by the surroundings; the Ross Sea is dominated by glacial ice, covering over 95% of the land surface and comprising over 90% of the Earth's ice.

In the Footsteps of Sir Douglas Mawson (26 days)

Sailing from Hobart on 2 December 1911, explorer Douglas Mawson hoped to explore the Antarctic coastline as the previous Nimrod Expedition had done in 1908/1909. After stopping briefly at Macquarie Island the team carried on south and landed at Cape Denison, in Commonwealth Bay – which has now been defined as the windiest place on the planet, or 'the home of the blizzard'.

This expedition follows in Mawson's footsteps – weather permitting – by reaching Cape Denison and allowing passengers to personally experience the beauty of the most isolated spot in Antarctica. Mawson's Hut still stands and there is also a French base near Commonwealth Bay to visit. Fans of the popular film 'March of the Penguins' will recognise this area and appreciate first hand the fantastic array of wildlife, particularly the emperor penguin colony.

Whatever your interest, whatever the weather, a trip to the Sub-Antarctic and Antarctica will provide an unforgettable experience in one of the last undisturbed areas of natural beauty on earth. It really is difficult to think of anywhere else that offers such variety in one trip alone.



FACT file



A 9-day cruise of the 'Forgotten Islands of the South Pacific' starts from **£3,300 per person**, based on two people sharing a superior cabin and return flights from London. A more comprehensive 30-day 'Ross Sea' staying in a superior cabin costs from **£9,935 per person**. Both cruises can be combined with a tour of New Zealand. For further information please contact our New Zealand specialists on **01993 838 820**.

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South Pacific Ocean

