

Antarctica

GENERAL INFORMATION

Climate and Weather Conditions

Embarkation occurs in Ushuaia, the world's most southern city. You can expect temperatures in summer (between December and February) to be around 5° to 15° degrees Celsius by day. You should have warm clothing available on arrival; the terminal is heated, but if there is a wind blowing you may need this clothing immediately you step outside. At night temperatures can reach 0°C. Patagonia and the Falkland Islands are on almost the same latitude, so expect similar temperatures.

As you head south into the Antarctic Convergence and around the Antarctic Peninsula the temperatures may be a little cooler. Most days are around 0°C to 5°C. A warm day can rise as high as 10°C whilst a cold misty night may get down to -5°C. Rain is rare during these months, but it may snow or sleet a little, and will often be foggy at night. Be aware that windy conditions - ashore, out on deck, or going ashore on zodiacs - will greatly increase the wind-chill factor. A feature of the weather in the Antarctic can be the remarkably quick changes that occur. Even when it is still and sunny, you must be prepared for the possibility of much colder conditions.

Buenos Aires is quite hot during these months; with temperatures ranging from 18°C to 35°C. Iguassu Falls will be even warmer and more humid.

Wildlife

A proliferation of wildlife will be sighted from the ship's deck and bridge, and whilst ashore. Birds such as albatross and petrels are often seen flying low around the ship. Seals and penguins are commonly observed on and around the ice floes surrounding the ship, whales and dolphins are quite commonly seen, often quite close to the ship. The frequent shore excursions offer you the chance to discover penguin rookeries and seal colonies and to observe many seabirds.

We have a responsibility to minimize the impact of our presence on the environment in Antarctica, to protect that environment and its wildlife in its own right; so you can have the best holiday; and so that others can continue to enjoy the same precious experiences in the future. We take this responsibility seriously and follow strict environmental guidelines in an effort to preserve the fragile natural environment.

We require you to follow these guidelines:

- Do not disturb the wildlife, either at land or at sea.
- Do not try to touch, feed or handle any of the wildlife in any way.
- Move slowly around the wildlife; don't move in a way that causes them to alter their behavior.

- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Keep well to the edge of rookeries: there are minimum distances that you should maintain between yourself and wildlife, which will be explained on ship.
- Be careful where you are walking, tread carefully and don't damage or walk on plants including mosses and lichens.
- Do not take non-native plants or animals into the Antarctic.
- Never remove or damage anything from a historic site.
- Never dispose of any items of rubbish on land or into the sea; (take particular care with items such as tissues, plastic bags and sweet wrappers that can be blown away in the wind. Preferably, do not take any of these items ashore). There are rubbish receptacles on ship.
- Read and understand the Antarctic Code of Conduct as set out by IAATO (International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators).

Customs

There are very few items available to purchase in Antarctica! Some of the research stations have memorabilia for sale such as t-shirts, clothing patches, stamps, and postcards, which should cause no problems with customs or quarantine on your return. Souvenirs from other areas in South America – especially wood or animal products – may require declaration on return to your home country. Never purchase animal products relating to endangered species.

WHAT TO BRING

The Antarctic Peninsula has relatively mild weather conditions when compared to the rest of the continent. This is because it is further north and does not get lashed by the ferocious katabolic winds that roll off the rest of the landmass. As a result, you should not need to make many expensive specialist gear purchases, although you do need good wet-weather gear and you do need warm clothing.

The dress code on board is relaxed and casual; you will not need to dress formally for meals. The inside of the ship is well heated, so you will not require special clothing on board. Indeed, you could spend most of your time in light trousers and a t-shirt! However, it is not unusual for you to want to go out on deck suddenly – a whale sighting, or seals on a nearby ice-floe, nearly always produce a major exodus, so you need to keep warm clothing handy at all times, even when a shore excursion is not imminent. When you do go ashore you will require warm clothing - a few layers of light and medium-weight items which can be easily adjusted rather than one or two large and bulky items - and wet weather gear to protect you from the spray which can sometimes be encountered on the zodiacs.

The following clothing items are suggested (or, if marked*, essential):

- *Waterproof boots – at least mid-calf in length (provided on most cruises). These are essential for landings, and must be sturdy - some landings are on rock shores. Take a size large enough to wear over at least one or two pair of thick woolen or fiber-pile socks.

- T-shirts and other casual clothes for layering and for wearing aboard the ship.
- *Long sleeved shirts - some with high or rolled necks such as skivvies or turtlenecks.
- *Warm trousers - (jeans/denim are not warm, corduroy or flannel tracksuit pants are better. Ski or Polar Tec 200 or 300 pants are very suitable)
- *Waterproof parka or waterproof coat – A sturdy, reliable wind and waterproof outer shell is often essential on deck and in zodiacs. It should have a hood, and coverage extending to below the waist. Avoid lightweight sailing “slickers”. A strong nylon or japara jacket may be an improvement on Gore-Tex – the pores on Gore-Tex equipment sometimes become clogged by salt spray.
- *Waterproof over-pants – To wear over your trousers for keeping you dry during zodiac rides and wet landings. Those with zippered bottom leggings are suggested. Make sure they are large enough to fit over your warm pants worn underneath, and that the bottom legs are large enough to fit over your rubber boots.
- *Woolen pullover or a polar fleece of medium weight. Two lightweight pullovers are better than one.
- *Gloves or mittens. Two pairs - a lightweight inner and thick pair of over-gloves or mitts – are recommended. A waterproof covering is strongly suggested. If you are wearing gloves, a very large size pair of rubber dishwashing gloves worn over these could be suitable. If you are wearing mittens, you will need waterproof over-mitts.
- *If you do not have a waterproof parka, a warm jacket (suggest Polar Tec 300) to wear under a waterproof outer shell.
- Pajamas/ tracksuit/pair of shorts.
- *Socks – woolen or polypropylene are far better than cotton, and a couple of thinner/medium pairs worn together are better than one thick one.
- Shoes with non-slip soles for walking around on deck.
- *Thermal underwear – singlets and long johns. These are very lightweight, extremely warm and are very useful in assisting in the ‘layering’ process.
- *Sun hat – you can get very sun burnt in Antarctica! One with a chinstrap is strongly suggested, in case of windy conditions.
- *Woolen hat or balaclava and scarf – for keeping the head, neck and ears warm. This is most important.

- Swim suit –there are some thermal springs at Deception Island that may be a chance to swim.
- Sturdy covered walking shoes/boots. When going ashore in Antarctica, especially to join our optional walks, some people find it useful to take these shoes to change into on the land. They are less cumbersome than gumboots when walking around, especially on longer hikes. (We are increasing the availability of walking options on shore where possible.) Such boots are also useful for wearing in Buenos Aires, or walking in Patagonia or Iguassu.

Please note that strong colors - yellows and reds – for outer clothing make for more striking photos.

We also recommend the following useful items:

- Lightweight, waterproof daypack (for camera gear, and any extra clothing you are taking ashore – you must have your hands free when getting in and out of zodiacs).
- Sunglasses (see earlier note about the effects of the sun).
- Neck band or wrap. Helps avoid chafe from life jacket or zips on waterproof jackets.
- Spare prescription glasses if worn.
- Dry bags for protecting camera gear and keeping spare clothing dry when going ashore.
- A 1-litre water bottle may be useful on shore excursions.
- Note book, diary
- Pens
- Peaked cap (better than a floppy hat in high wind conditions, or when going ashore in the zodiacs)
- Sandals or “slip-ons” may be useful on the ship.
- Pack of cards.
- Ear plugs – often useful for hotels, or if your cabin-mate snores.

THE ANTARCTIC TREATY

Any activity in Antarctica, be it scientific or tourist-related, is governed by the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. Journeys embraces the guidelines set for visitors to Antarctica. By following these guidelines you will minimize the impact of your presence and help to ensure that Antarctica remains unspoiled for future generations. These guidelines will be further explained to you once on board the ship. To summarize, however:

Protect Antarctic Wildlife

Taking or harmful interference with, Antarctic wildlife is prohibited except in accordance with a permit issued by a national authority.

- Do not use any means of transport in ways that disturbs wildlife, either at sea or on land.
- Do not feed, touch or handle birds or seals, or approach or photograph them in ways that cause them to alter their behavior. (You will be given instructions as to how close you may approach wildlife.)
- Do not damage plants, by walking, driving or landing on extensive moss beds or lichen-covered scree slopes.
- Do not use guns or explosives. Keep noise to a minimum to avoid frightening wildlife.
- Do not bring non-native plants or animals into the Antarctic.

In addition, when you come back on board ship, after zodiac landings, you will be required to carefully wash your rubber boots to remove all soil and penguin guano to avoid transporting any bacteria etc. from one rookery to another. A hose with running water and scrubbing brushes are provided for this purpose.

Respect Protected Areas

A variety of areas in the Antarctic have been afforded special protection because of their particular ecological, scientific, historic or other values. Entry into certain areas may be prohibited except in accordance with a permit issued by an appropriate national authority. Activities in or near designated Historic Sites and Monuments and certain other areas may be subject to special restrictions.

- Know the location of areas that have been afforded special protection and any restrictions regarding entry and activities that can be carried out in and near them.
- Observe applicable restrictions.
- Do not damage, remove or destroy Historic Sites or Monuments or any artifacts associated with them.

Respect Scientific Research

Do not interfere with scientific research, facilities or equipment.

- Obtain permission before visiting Antarctic science and support facilities, re-confirm arrangements 24 – 72 hours before arrival, and comply with the rules regarding such visits.
- Do not interfere with, or remove, scientific equipment or marker posts, and do not disturb experimental study sites, field camps, or supplies.

Be Safe

Be prepared for severe and changeable weather and ensure that your equipment and clothing meet Antarctic standards. Remember that the Antarctic environment can be inhospitable, unpredictable, and potentially dangerous.

- Know your capabilities, the dangers posed by the Antarctic environment, and act accordingly. Plan all activities with safety in mind at all times.
- Keep a safe distance from all wildlife, both on land and at sea.
- Take note of, and act on, the advice and instructions from your leaders; do not stray from your group.
- Do not walk onto glaciers or large snowfields without the proper equipment and experience; there is a real danger of falling into hidden crevasses.
- Do not enter emergency refuges (except in emergencies). If you use equipment or food from a refuge, inform the nearest research station or national authority once the emergency is over.
- Respect all smoking restrictions, particularly around buildings, and take great care to safeguard against the danger of fire. This is a real hazard in the dry environment of Antarctica.

Keep Antarctica Pristine

Antarctica remains relatively pristine, the largest wilderness area on earth. It has not yet been subjected to large-scale human perturbations. Please keep it that way.

- Do not dispose of and litter or garbage on land. Open burning is prohibited.
- Do not disturb or pollute lakes or streams. Any material discarded at sea must be disposed of properly.
- Do not paint or engrave names or graffiti on rocks or buildings.
- Do not collect or take away biological or geological specimens or man-made artifacts as souvenirs, including rocks, bones, eggs, fossils and parts or contents of buildings.
- Do not deface or vandalize buildings, whether occupied, abandoned, or unoccupied, or emergency refuges.

The following is a brief description of some of the destinations visited on some of our trips - check the individual trip notes.

THE SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS

The South Shetland Islands are a volcanic arc of islands about 60 kilometers north of the Antarctic continent. The chain of islands runs for 540 kilometers and consists of four main groups. From northeast to southwest they are the Clarence and Elephant Islands; King George and Nelson Islands, Robert, Greenwich, Livingston, Snow and Deception Islands; and Smith and Low Islands. These islands have a history of sealing and whaling during the 1800s. Some of the islands in this group that we may visit are:

Deception Island

This island is easily recognized on any map by its broken ring shape. This is due to the fact that it is a flooded volcanic island. You sail into the heart of this island through the narrow channel at Neptune's Bellows to find it is one of the most interesting islands in Antarctica. Sealers during the early 1800s used Deception's 12 kilometer-wide harbor as a base for operations. In the early 1900s Norwegian and Chilean whaling companies used the area as a base for their factory ship. Today there is still evidence of broken wooden huts, disintegrating wooden boats and wooden oil containers lying half buried in the black volcanic sand. Ringed by snow-capped peaks, the sheer cliffs provide refuge for pigeons, fulmars and petrels. There is also a colony of chinstrap penguins and some fur seals. If conditions are right, walks up to some of the higher points around the crater provide wonderful views.

Livingston Island

This is another island that was once an important hunting ground for local seal traders who decimated the local seal population around 1845. Today the island is rich in wildlife including Weddell, Elephant and Leopard seals, plus rookeries of Chinstrap, Gentoo and Macaroni penguins, petrels, terns and skuas.

Half Moon Island

Named because of its crescent shape, this island has a small Argentine base called Teniente Camara. This delightful place also has a sizeable rookery of Chinstrap penguins as well as the nesting terns, Kelp gulls, fur seals and Blue-eyed shags.

King George Island

This island is the largest of the South Shetlands and is sometimes known as Antarctica's 'unofficial capital' due to the large number of research stations here. It supports facilities constructed by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, South Korea, Poland, Russia, Ecuador, Germany, Peru and Uruguay. It also includes nearly 13 kilometers of gravel roads. The Chileans built a large establishment called Presidente Eduardo Frei Montalva Station in 1969 and the government encouraged families to live there. The first child was born there in 1984. Today there is a bank, post office, small supermarket and school, and a few children living there year round.

THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA

Against a spectacular backdrop of snow-capped mountains and ice-blue water, the Antarctic Peninsula has a rugged coastline of bays and channels, which offer excellent opportunities for exploration and wildlife sightings. The following sites are the most frequently visited:

Hope Bay

Situated at the most northerly point on the peninsula this is where three members of Nordenskjöld's Swedish Antarctic expeditions were forced to spend a long and freezing winter in 1903, surviving mainly on seal meat. The bay is named after these three men and the ruins of their hut can be seen there today. The Bay is home to one of the largest Adelie penguin rookeries in the world. Thousands of Gentoo penguins can be seen here also.

Lemaire Channel

This is a spectacular narrow channel running between the mountains of Booth Island and the Peninsula. The glacier-lined fiord offers a unique view of the steep surrounding cliffs and is undoubtedly one of Antarctica's most beautiful passages. Minke and Humpback whales can often be observed, following in the wake of the ship.

Paradise Harbour

Often referred to as Paradise Bay this is one of the most beautiful places on the Peninsula. Once inside the harbor you can get 360-degree views of breathtaking scenery. Majestic blue-tinged icebergs and reflections of the surrounding mountains with their incredible glaciers crashing into the sea are all around you. This is a common spot for a barbecue on deck and some zodiac cruising to investigate the stunning array of icebergs.

SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

East of Tierra del Fuego and to the north of the Antarctic continent lie the island groups of the Falklands and South Georgia.

The Falklands

These consist of two main islands, East and West Falkland, and several hundred smaller ones. Most of the population of nearly 2,000 people lives in the capital of Stanley. The others live on the widely dispersed sheep stations.

The group of islands is well known for their turbulent history. The Europeans were the first recorded inhabitants in the late 17th-century. The French built a fort in 1764, which was later supplanted by the Spanish. Unknown to either France or Spain, Britain also planted an outpost on Saunders Island. The Spanish then detected and expelled the British forces in 1767 and for the rest of the 18th-century maintained the islands as a penal colony, only to abandon it in the early 1800s.

In 1828, Buenos Aires sent an entrepreneur to initiate projects involving the exploitation of seals and wild cattle and horses left there by the Spanish. In 1833 British forces expelled him and

occupied and developed the islands until 1982 when Argentina's General Leopoldo Galtieri invaded the almost undefended islands on April 2. However, they did not anticipate the response of the British who organized an enormous naval task force and recovered the lost territory later the same year.

Today the islands have a haunting beauty, and in Stanley, the smallest capital city in the world, you can stroll past quaint homes with a distinctly Victorian character. The area has a remarkable sense of history - it was a major port and refuge for sailing ships in the 19th-century, there was a major naval battle nearby in 1914, and, of course, there was the 1982 conflict with Argentina. On the outer islands you can observe elephant seals, Southern sea lions and a host of sea birds including the wandering albatross. Rockhopper penguins can be seen at some locations, and also king penguins on occasions.

South Georgia

This was one of the first gateways to Antarctica and from 1904 to 1966 was the center for the huge Southern Ocean whaling industry. Ernest Shackleton and Robert Scott both called in here on their Antarctic expeditions. During the 1800s the island was popular for sealers with as many fur seal skins as 57,000 being recorded as taken by a sealer on one voyage.

South Georgia's heavily glaciated peaks rise some 3,000 meters above sea level providing undoubtedly some of the most dramatic views and scenery of all the sub-Antarctic.

Salisbury Plain and St Andrews Bay are homes to vast rookeries of brightly colored king penguins. (King penguins are seldom if ever-sighted further south in the Antarctic Peninsula area, so make the most of them). More than five million pairs of Macaroni penguins also nest on the island and the Antarctic fur seal population has recuperated from the slaughter and is again present in the thousands. To many people, South Georgia is the ultimate wildlife experience - with very good reason.