

ICE AGE

Edwina Hart sails south to Antarctica, on the world's greenest expedition cruise ship, treading lightly in the footsteps of heroic polar explorers.

PHOTOGRAPHY EDWINA HART

Another world:
Antarctica's ethereal
ice and cloud
formations

ANTARCTICA.





@portmanteau_press

The untouched beauty of Antarctica holds an enduring allure for travellers. Antarctica is the coldest, windiest, driest, iciest and most isolated continent on earth, making it the ultimate bucket list destination.

I fulfilled my dream of seeing the frozen frontier as I embarked on a trip-of-a-lifetime to Antarctica and the Falkland Islands onboard Hurtigruten's brand-new expedition cruise ship, the MS Roald Amundsen.

During the incredible 18-day voyage we explored an ethereal world of ancient glaciers, active volcanoes, eerily abandoned whaling stations and sculptural icebergs swirling with streaks of sapphire.

It's impossible to remain unchanged by the frosty icescapes and the most extraordinary display of wildlife you'll ever encounter – seals, sea lions, whales and platoons of penguins. This planet's last great wilderness will turn any tourist into an explorer.

HURTIGRUTEN'S MS ROALD AMUNDSEN

Hurtigruten is a Norwegian expedition cruise company whose explorer heritage dates back more than 126 years. Nowadays, Hurtigruten is a pioneering force in environmentally friendly exploration having launched the world's first-ever hybrid-electric powered cruise ship, the MS Roald Amundsen, in 2019.

The ship's namesake is Norway's most famous polar explorer, Roald Amundsen. In 1911 Amundsen won the race to the South Pole, assuring his place in history as one of the greatest figures of the 'Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration'.

The MS Roald Amundsen,

with its groundbreaking green technology, has the smallest footprint of any ship visiting Antarctica. The state-of-the-art vessel is also as stylish as it is sustainable. Design-conscious cruisers will delight in the contemporary, Scandi-chic interiors featuring natural materials such as granite, oak, birch and wool. The luxurious cabins and suites are decked out with all the creature comforts.

**"THIS PLANET'S LAST GREAT
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Voyages to the Antarctic region onboard MS Roald Amundsen depart from October 2021. Go to hurtigruten.com.au to book and for updated information on the cruise liner's updated Covid-19 policies.



CLOCKWISE: a tender boat sets off from MS Roald Amundsen; an inquisitive gentoo penguin; the observation deck is the ultimate place for whale-watching; smooth sailing on the polar class ship; rippled iceberg floating in the rigid water; a stunning sunset in Antarctica (inset).





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
brave the elements and take
a dip in the ship's infinity
pool; relax the Scandinavian
way in the sauna after a day
of epic adventures; dreamy
icescapes (inset); a colony of
gentoo penguins at
Yankee Harbour.

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“ONCE YOU REACH ANTARCTICA’S ICY REALM THE ACTION-PACKED ON-SHORE EXCURSIONS BEGIN...”

THE JOURNEY

As if a sign of the magic yet to come, a rainbow stretched out across the sky on the afternoon we embarked upon our adventure to Antarctica. We set sail from Punta Arenas, a windswept port at the tail-end of Chile and a popular jumping-off point for the Antarctic expeditions that run during the Austral summer (November-March).

As we cruised through the Chilean Fjords, escorted by a school of dolphins, expedition leader Steffen Biersack welcomed the 400-plus passengers on board – “We are going into the wild. We are going into the elements. We have to adjust. Sometimes a day turns out different to the way it was planned...”

A journey to the ends of the earth is a far cry from your standard cruise. You are at the whim of the ever-shifting conditions of the weather, sea and drifting ice. Nothing proves nature’s capricious ways more than crossing the perilous Drake Passage, one of the roughest seas in the world, which bridges the gap between the legendary Cape Horn at the tip of South America and Antarctica. Fortunate seafarers are blessed with the calm conditions known as the ‘Drake Lake’, whilst others brave the ‘Drake Shake’ with 10-metre plus swells.

ANTARCTIC ACTIVITIES

After a two-day crossing you will be rewarded with your first glimpse of the shimmering white expanse. Once you reach Antarctica’s icy realm the action-packed onshore excursions begin, with regular ‘landings’ that allow for close encounters with the wildlife.

No amount of nature documentaries will prepare you for the thrill of spotting a skyward spurt from the blowhole of a humpback whale as the magnificent creature surfaces only metres away from your tiny tender boat. Nor the exhilaration of being greeted by a colony of squawking gentoo penguins as you set foot on the rocky shoreline.

For an awe-inspiring afternoon, sign up for kayaking for a chance to glide past the towering, cathedral-like icebergs that soar out of crystalline bays. Keep your eyes peeled for penguins porpoising through the water like torpedoes or slabs of floating bergy bits dotted with slumbering crabeater seals. Other activities include hiking, snowshoeing or ice-camping overnight.

The ‘polar plunge’ is a rite of passage for any Antarctic tourist. For a story to write home about, strip down to your swimmers on the black gravelly beach of Whaler’s Bay before taking the heart-stopping leap into the near-freezing waters inside the caldera of an active volcano.

Sea days are spent attending lectures in the cutting-edge Science Centre or enjoying the extensive onboard amenities. An integral part of Nordic culture is the sauna, so be sure to spend time in the spectacular steam room which boasts floor-to-ceiling windows with uninterrupted views of the dreamy scenery. For an otherworldly experience, take a dip in the infinity pool or soak in the outdoor jacuzzi while the snow gently falls around you. Pamper yourself at the end of a long day with a ‘glacial glow’ facial at the spa.

FROM TOP: snoozing on ice; cruising the famously beautiful ‘Glacier Alley’ along the Beagle Channel.



FOOD FUELLING THE ADVENTURE

In April 1911, Roald Amundsen praised his cook, Adolf Lindstrøm, when he wrote in his diary "He has rendered greater and more valuable services to the Norwegian polar expedition than any other man". Food is the fuel that powered polar exploration, and you'll be pleased to know that Hurtigruten will ensure you're well-fed while discovering the white continent for yourself.

There are three restaurants on board. The main canteen, Aune, offers a smorgasbord of soups, fresh salads, seafood, cheeses (taste the nutty Norwegian Jarlsberg), smoked fish and cured meats that would be the envy of any polar explorer. The waitstaff seem trained in both table service and whale-watching as they simultaneously point out a pod of orcas whilst pouring your glass of pinot.

Fredheim, the ship's casual hangout spot, is where you can tuck into classic diner-style comfort food, such as gourmet burgers and the signature lobster roll with smoked ginger mayonnaise.

Records of the epic Norwegian expeditions show that Lindstrøm prepared stacks of buckwheat pancakes slathered in cloudberry jam, said to be a favourite of Amundsen and his men. So, as a nod to those early polar pioneers, Fredheim's dessert menu features a selection of decadent crepes.

Of all the reasons to visit the frozen continent, fine dining isn't at the top of the list. However, it's certainly an added bonus at the exclusive, intimately sized Lindstrøm restaurant. The sleek, moody decor wouldn't be out of place in a trendy Oslo eatery.

You'll notice a Nordic-influence on the à la carte menu, with seafood starters such as smoked shrimp with potatoes or beetroot-cured salmon. There's also a subtle homage to the history of polar cuisine, with dishes showcasing food preservation techniques of pickling, curing, salting and drying. For the main course, try the *klippfisk* (traditional Norwegian salted cod) prepared with a silky brandade or opt for the venison accompanied by browned cabbage stew and pickled lingonberries. Expect a hefty Euro-centric wine list.

DRINKS ON ICE

Bragging rights don't get much better than having a drink at the southernmost bar in the world. The far-flung drinking-hole at the Ukrainian research base Vernadsky Station provides much comfort to researchers overwintering in Antarctica. Raise a shot glass of vodka distilled on-site from glacial ice melt and exclaim '*budmo!*' (which roughly translates to 'We shall live forever').

On the last leg of the voyage the MS Roald Amundsen pulls into Stanley, the capital of the wildlife-rich Falkland Islands. It's a British Overseas Territory, so don't be surprised by the double decker bus and red telephone boxes. In fact, it feels as if you've been transported to a quaint English town, especially when you pop by the Victory Bar patriotically decorated with Union Jacks. They serve fish and chips and draught beer by Falkland Beerworks, a Stanley-based microbrewery. Before heading home, order a pint of the Rockhopper golden ale (named after the cheeky local penguins). 🍷

The writer was a guest of Hurtigruten.

For similar sailing to the 18-day 'Antarctica, Chilean Fjords and Falklands: Great Explorers and Wildlife' visit hurtigruten.com.au or call 1300 322 062.

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