

# Cloud

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surprisingly extensive; enormous rookeries of penguins either waddle about purposefully or make an astonishing racket, while pods of whales swim around you and elephant seals bellow at you. More than 100 million seabirds call the continent home, including mighty albatross with wingspans nearing four metres, tiny storm petrels and the mischievous Antarctic skua.

Silversea offers luxury Antarctic cruises aboard its vessels *Silver Explorer* and the recently refurbished *Silver Cloud*, and promises that travellers can enjoy the “most southernmost afternoon tea in the world” – quite the distinction, and one surely worth going all that way for. Meanwhile, Seabourn caters to those who wish to venture onto the land as well complete with landings by Zodiac for the classic shore party experience. Its Enrichment Program of special guest speakers and digital photography workshops engage the mind as well as the body, meaning you’ll have plenty to put into practice when you step ashore.

#### PENGUINS TO STARBOARD

For those wishing to follow in the footsteps of the legendary Captain James Cook, whose second pioneering voyage of discovery explored the region all the way back in 1773 and whose officers gave their names to landmarks they spotted, an Antarctic cruise offers a unique way to enjoy both the comforts of life aboard ship and the chance to see the continent as the first explorers did.

This is no ordinary cruise. Vast cliffs of ice tower above freezing seas and circumnavigating a maze of perpetually drifting icebergs means no two cruises can ever be truly alike. Meanwhile, the wildlife of this untouched wilderness is

#### CHILLED OUT

There is far more of Antarctica’s 14 million square kilometre expanse than just its coastline. Further into an interior twice the size of Australia, the opportunity to explore and walk where no-one else has in human history awaits.



Travellers who stick to the beaten track will doubtless tell you that things can start to look familiar when the romance of travel wears off a little. Wasn’t that the same Starbucks you saw a dozen airports ago? The Antarctic travel experience, however, is in a class of its own. For a start, no such beaten track exists – just virgin snow as far as the eye can see, beyond the frontier of any nation.

The proverbially frozen continent might seem forbidding at first, but a new and impressively hardy entrepreneurial spirit has changed that and you can enjoy true five-star comfort in spectacular style. Indeed, the first explorers would be stunned at the options available to today’s adventurous traveller who relishes bracing temperatures and a brisk exchange of snowballs.





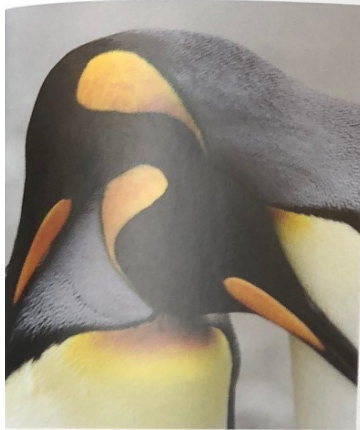


#### A FLYING VISIT

To enjoy both the continent's desolate interior and jet-setting glamour at the same time – yes, it very much can be done – is the idea behind White Desert. The company's whimsically named Whichaway Camp, proudly billed as 'Antarctica's first and only luxury camp', in the shadow of Ulvetanna Peak includes a blue-ice runway, an award-winning chef (try the wagyu steak tartare) and an interesting line in cocktails chilled with millennium-old glacial ice.

As an experience, it's certainly an unforgettable one – as such guests as Buzz Aldrin and Prince Harry have personally discovered. After flying in by private jet above 4,000km of ice pack during 24 solid hours of sunshine, an exclusive party of no more than 12 guests lands for a completely carbon-neutral stay in state-of-the-art sleeping pods and the kind of adventures almost nobody ever gets to experience. Exploring the Drygalski mountain range and its kilometre-high peaks that jut straight out of ancient ice? Trekking through ice tunnels and seeing the surreal whirls frozen within them? Visiting a colony of 6,000 Emperor penguins and getting to see how adorable all those curious freshly hatched chicks are in person? You can do it all.

For those who want to go, as Captain Cook put it, "not only farther than any other man has been before me, but as far as I think it possible for man to go", even the South Pole at the geographical end of the world itself is within your reach. You can hop aboard the seven-hour flight to the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station run by the United States and do with ease what so many explorers laboured for months or even years to achieve. Quite unlike anywhere else on the planet for obvious reasons, there can be no more distinctive highlight for your journey than that. ■



distance inland. This means you can really rely on the weather: it will be cold, the wind will be sharp and there's a good chance of seeing some serious snowfall. Amusingly, sunburn is something you'll want to keep an eye on – days can be up to 24 hours long thanks to the angle of the planet, meaning more sunlight to just bounce straight off all that snow and ice.

A particular treat for explorers is the *aurora australis* – the Southern Lights, the less famous but no less gorgeous twin of the *aurora borealis*, the Northern Lights. The unsettled interior of Antarctica offers the perfect vantage point for the greatest show off earth entirely free of light pollution.

Antarctica has no permanent population, but scattered research stations with barely 1,000 people between them tough out winters where the temperature averages -63°C in the name of science. In summertime, when 10°C is considered to be on the tropical side, Antarctica becomes as crowded as it ever gets when the population ticks back up to about 5,000 to make best use of the more agreeable weather. In short, it's not going to be overrun with tourists. You may find yourself outnumbered 40,000 to one by penguins, but that's another story...

It often surprises people when they find out that Antarctica is, officially speaking, a desert. Although it can snow as much as 122cm in 48 hours, rain is extremely rare and weather fronts seldom get more than a trivial



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