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The bucket list: Antarctica and back in 24 hours



Flying over mountains towards the South Pole.

There's winter sun – and then there's winter sun. Head to Antarctica for a 24-hour non-stop sunshine experience.

You always need to head south from the UK to enjoy some winter sun, but for the ultimate experience, how about doing it in style and heading all the way down to Antarctica and its 24-hour sunshine?

Greatest Day, a luxury 24-hour Antarctic experience run by travel specialist White Desert, is, quite literally, a flying trip. After a briefing in the Wine Gallery of the luxurious Ellerman House in Bantry Bay, Cape Town, the adventure begins along a 4,000km flightpath bound over the Southern Ocean beyond the Antarctic Circle, to the White Continent. The charter transports up to 14 passengers for five-and-a-half hours over pristine waters, thousands of icebergs and on into continuous daylight.

On board, to enhance the chilled mood, cocktails are served with slivers of one-thousand-year-old glacial ice chipped from the continent below.

Time to chill, explore and more

Touch down is on the specially prepared blue-ice landing strip at Wolf's Fang Runway, surely one of the most evocatively named airstrips in the world. Wolf's Fang is the iconic 1,000-metre peak that rises out of the ice nearby. This is one of the least trodden places on earth – a moment and a place to savour.

During the five hours or so on the ground, there's a choice of activities, from learning to ice-climb or painting the stunning view, to simply sitting, sipping champagne and taking in the magnificence of it all.



Taking in the stunning view of ice waves.

It's also possible to book seats for the trip on an Ilyushin IL-76 TD – the plane used by the scientific community for their Antarctic commutes. This trip lands at the ice runway of Novo from where guests are transported in 4x4s to the spectacular Schirmacher Oasis. This is a landscape of cliffs and dozens of freshwater lakes, and home to a number of scientific bases. Those lucky enough to join this trip will spend eight hours on the ground exploring and, as at Wolf's Fang, the guides are all polar pioneers in their own right.

Defrosted dreams

The ideas behind these trips for time-poor adventurers were hatched more than a decade ago: four explorers in the middle of an attempt to cross the icy continent were frustratingly cramped together in a tent. They'd been forced to amuse themselves for days while an Antarctic storm raged beyond the tent flaps. Despite their present predicament, the adventurers talked of feeling lucky that they were able to experience everything that the most southern continent has to offer and of how, although others were able to cruise the periphery of Antarctica, so few had the opportunity to become familiar with the magic of its interior.

“This is one of the least trodden places on earth – a moment and a place to savour”

These four had plenty of time to imagine the sort of experience that adventurers might relish, and it was in direct contrast with the one that they were currently experiencing: comfortable, heated, old-world luxury with a great chef and delicious food. One of the four was Patrick Woodhead, a record-breaking polar explorer who, together with his wife Robyn, went on to found White Desert. Since then, the Woodheads have been sharing Antarctica with many more fascinated people, just as he'd dreamed of doing while in that frozen tent.



The four-day Ice and Mountains trip allows plenty of time for adventure activities such as rock climbing.

If you're thinking 'fragile environment', 'melting ice caps' and 'imagine the carbon footprint on that', the company is a couple of ski lengths ahead of you. Renewable energy, including solar panels for lighting and heating water, plus a temporary camp and the removal and disposal of all waste responsibly are all guaranteed. The company also offsets the carbon emissions of its jet-set guests by making the entire trip carbon neutral.

When one great day isn't enough...

It may be that 24 hours in Antarctica would satiate only the tip of your interest in icebergs and if this is the case, there are extended options, both for a maximum of 12 guests. The four-day Ice and Mountains trip is based in the Drygalski Mountains. Days can be filled with gentle trekking, visits to scientific bases and 4 x 4 trips, while the truly adventurous can opt for ice climbing, abseiling or even high-lining across a spectacular lake.

As the name of the eight-day Emperors and South Pole option hints, this trip takes in emperor penguins and the geographic South Pole. Field guides lead thrill-seekers on expeditions to discover ice tunnels, climb peaks and sample kite-skiing. A DC3 Basler makes the two-hour journey to Atka Bay and the thousands of penguins and their chicks in its colony – the sounds, beauty and smell are unforgettable.



Sleeping pods at Whichaway Camp in front of the icefall.

Accommodation for both adventures is at the unique Whichaway Camp. Its distinctive two-person, six-metre diameter (and heated!) fibreglass sleeping pods include a writing desk, washing area and toilet. Communal pods house a shower, kitchen, a lounge with a library and a custom-designed dining room complete with fur-lined chairs.

The flight to the South Pole lands at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station and guests can visit the American science station. The designated marker here is the lowest point on Earth and you're so far south that on a compass there is no 'south'. It all makes for a delightfully original version of winter sun.

Further info

[White Desert Antarctica](#)

Greatest Day exclusive charter: £150,000, based on 14 passengers

Greatest Day Ilyushin: £7,500 per person – 28 Nov 2017 only

Ice and Mountains: £60,000 per person

Emperors and South Pole Adventure: £60,000 per person

By Julia Wheeler