

This year's ultimate Antarctica adventures



Day trips to Antarctica's highest peak are now a possibility CREDIT: B&C ALEXANDER

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For the truly intrepid (or those who are fatigued by politics and just desperately world-weary), complete escapism awaits on a unique trip that explores both Earth's southernmost point and the frozen continent's highest peak.

Long the only company to offer travellers overnight stays at the South Pole - a privilege afforded to only 30 clients each season - Antarctic Logistics is expanding the scope of its week-long South Pole itinerary to incorporate a flight to Mount Vinson base camp. An inkblot of colour and clamour in an otherwise desolate landscape, it is ordinarily accessible only to mountaineers who attempt to scale the 4897m/16,067ft-high peak. Many will ascend this most remote of mountains as the final strenuous step in conquering the Seven Summits challenge.

Far less exertion awaits those guests making day-long or overnight trips, who can marvel at Mount Vinson at leisure or share stories at the camp about their own inconceivable Antarctic adventures.



Untouched Mount Craddock, in the Sentinel Range, viewed from the aircraft window during a flight to Vinson Base Camp CREDIT: ADAM UNGAR/ALE

It will still, however, be the opportunity to sleep at the South Pole that will serve as the absolute highlight of most travellers' Antarctic adventure. Small groups will fly to the geographic South Pole and will reside at the South Pole Camp in two-person mountaineering tents akin to those normally used by ski expedition teams. They are unheated so occupants will be reliant on their insulated sleeping mats and polar-rated sleeping bags for warmth. Temperatures are likely to be in the range of -35C to -25C (-31F to -13F).

During waking hours, there'll be much to keep them occupied. Lectures on Antarctic themes will be held, games will be organised by guides, there will be an opportunity to visit the Amundsen-Scott Station. Having returned from the South Pole and back at their base atop a glacier by the Ellsworth Mountain, they will enjoy snowmobiling trips and cross-country skiing excursions, bathed in perpetual sunlight and surrounded by unblemished landscapes untouched by man and ceaseless vistas only ever seen by a scattering of people.

Costing from \$53,400 (£42,000), one week-long Antarctic Logistics trip departs in both December 2017 and January 2018, with the optional visit to Mount Vinson costing an extra \$4,425pp. The newly launched tour comes at a time of relative activity in Antarctica.



Antarctic skiing with Aurora Expeditions CREDIT: AURORA EXPEDITIONS

Aurora Expeditions has introduced Antarctic ski touring and Antarctic Snowshoeing expeditions as add-on experiences for passengers on certain cruises (from £6,995 per person, excluding flights) running over the 2017/2018 season. Participants on these packages can expect to undertake up to six excursions per voyage, and will have the opportunity to ski and snowshoe to near-virgin glacial slopes, iceberg-studded bays and penguin rookeries. The experience costs from \$900 per person for a single-day ski experience.

The continent's only luxury camp, White Desert Whichaway Camp has welcomed the likes of Buzz Aldrin, Bear Grylls and Prince Harry. Refurbished in 2016, the camp is fitted with heated fibreglass sleeping pods and features a library and dining room with fur-lined chairs and acts as a base for a number of adventurous itineraries that might include visits to an Emperor penguin colony and tours with scientists, astronauts and naturalists.



White Desert Whichaway Camp

For the coming season, the company has launched a private jet service that will fly a maximum of 12 clients from Cape Town direct to the camp's blue-ice runway. The camp runs predominantly on renewable energy and has been carbon neutral since 2007. Clients will be charged a 'carbon tax' for their flights, and the camp's owners claim that aspect of future trips will also be carbon neutral. Four-day all-inclusive tours, with private jet departures from Cape Town, cost from \$32,000 per person.



White Desert Whichaway Camp can now be reached by private jet

A more leisurely exploration of Antarctica is facilitated by Mundy Adventures' Pole to Pole cruise. Taking 133 days and visiting 13 countries across four continents, the itinerary incorporates visits to the Galapagos with tours of Alaska, the Amazon and Patagonia. For the Antarctica leg, clients will board Silversea's Explorer Silver Explorer at Ushuaia for a voyage that will pass giant icebergs, immense penguin colonies and abandoned whaling stations. The trip commences from Helsinki on July 31 and costs from £100,000 per person.

Intrepid cruisers who want something closer to home could instead elect to join a Quark Expeditions cruise to the North Pole. Culminating with a visit to the pole itself and with passage aboard the hulking Russian ice-breaker 50 Years of Victory, the cruise costs from £22,470 per person.

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