

White Desert
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The secret to the perfect Antarctic adventure

Astonishing in breadth, scale and beauty – our expert reveals the best ways to visit this bucket-list destination

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In a world where every path has been taken and no stone left unturned, it's hard to imagine there are places humans are yet to step foot. Extreme, uninhabitable and largely unknown, our seventh continent still harbours secrets scientists are yet to crack. Cradling our planet in her icy palm, she controls climates and moves oceans. More powerful than any government or monarch, she has shaped our past and continues to dictate our future.

A white wilderness spanning 14.2million square km – almost 1.5 times the size of Europe, Antarctica is astonishing in breadth, scale and beauty. The driest, windiest and coldest place on our planet has set the stage for great acts of heroism: Sir Ernest Shackleton, Roald Amundsen and Otto Nordenskjöld all risked their lives in the name of scientific discovery. But in modern times, ease of access and safer passage have enabled the rest of us to become great explorers, discovering a destination most people dream of glimpsing at least once in their lifetime.

There's no doubt the polar south is becoming increasingly desirable.

In the 1950s, only a handful of tourists visited the Antarctic Peninsula, rising to fewer than 2,000 people per year in the 1980s. That number increased drastically to 75,000 during the 2019/20 season. The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) expect that figure to exceed 100,000 in 2022/23.



Photographers flock to Antarctica for its unique environment | ©2023 Scott Herold/Arctic Expeditions



Extended voyages to sub-antarctic island South Georgia are worthwhile | CREDIT: Getty

The best packages

Whether booking directly with a cruise company or through a tour operator, make sure they can organise flights and all ground arrangements. If any accidents occur or ships are delayed due to bad weather, an operator can deal with all the changes. Specialist tour operators include [Swoop](#), [Exodus](#) and [Discover the World](#). [White Desert](#) are leaders in specialist trips at the top end of the market.

Veteran adventure

Polar veteran and expert wildlife photographer Paul Goldstein leads a 20-day Shackleton's Footsteps expedition to the Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica on the Magellan Explorer with [Exodus](#), carrying less than 100 passengers. Seizing every opportunity to capture great images, Goldstein puts passengers through their paces. Expect early starts, marathon landings and extraordinary wildlife encounters of the sort seen in BBC documentaries. From £13,950pp, excluding flights. Departs 28 October 2023.

Intimate sailing

Newcomers to the polar expedition scene, [Secret Atlas](#) specialise in small ship micro cruises, believing intimate voyages deliver much better experiences. Their 12-day Antarctica Explorer Photography and Wildlife Expedition, focussing on the Peninsula, sails on the newly refurbished 48-passenger Polar Pioneer, one of the early expedition vessels still in operation. There are enough Zodiacs for all guests to go ashore at the same time, maximising time for photography. Triple share cabin from £9,000, excluding flights. Departs 1 January 2024.

