

Antarctica – Aurora Expeditions – In the footsteps of Shackleton

Bronlyn and Gary Schoer

Brief outline of tour

This expedition cruise was an 18 day trip via Santiago, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, the Antarctic Peninsula and Ushuaia on the 'Polar Pioneer' carrying 50 expeditioners. Moderate fitness only is required but a capacity to transfer 2-3 times per day from the ship to a zodiac (with assistance) is needed. Refer to websites cited for current prices.

Major highlights of the tour

My husband Gary and I have made two journeys to Antarctica – once before, and then again after – retirement. Gary was so besotted by this extraordinary environment that he subsequently has made two additional Aurora Expeditions journeys, travelling with newly retired friends.



Why Antarctica? We can remember having a friend around to dinner before our first trip to the Antarctic Peninsula in the summer of 1995-96. We were assured that it was the closest thing to a religious experience that we may ever have. Sure enough, when our zodiac cut its motor beside a deep blue iceberg and we peered into the beauty of an ice cave, with the only sound being that of melt water gently dripping, there wasn't a dry eye in the zodiac. Your senses can be overwhelmed by the beauty of the ice and the joyous captivating behaviour of the fearless penguins.

We can recall many other deeply moving occasions involving 'spy hopping' killer whales in Paradise Bay on the Antarctic Peninsula, huge colonies of thousands of King, Chinstrap or Adelie penguins, and albatrosses you could touch as they seemed to skim over our ship and tip the white crests on the waves with their long slender wings. These trips have satisfied our every travel need for exploring wild places and led to countless retellings to any person, student group or Probus club that has been prepared to listen to our tales ever since!

There are three barriers mentioned by those contemplating the idea of travel to the deep white south. Firstly, the fear of sea sickness – yes it's real, but in our experience it only badly affected one or two of our 50 strong travelling companions on each of our trips. There is always a doctor on board to provide strong medication should the usual quells, patches or ginger not satisfy. I was feeling squeamish on one trip but recovered completely as we hit the calm waters within the sea ice, glacial harbours and icebergs. Surprisingly, we didn't feel sick at all on our return crossing of the Drake Passage in a Force 12 storm with 15 m waves, but hey, this is an expedition. We really FELT what it was like, however, to be in a region noted for challenging low-pressure systems and the unleashing of the full force of nature.

Next to a fear of sea sickness and the risk of high seas some people express a concern with potential cold temperatures, but believe me, by the time you don a wool thermal, warm shirt, jumper, waterproof parka,

2 pairs of socks, long daks and (rarely) long johns, balaclava and thick snow boots (supplied), you will be glad to be on deck contemplating a cooling zodiac ride to your next adventurous landing.

When you get onto Antarctic cruising web sites you will see that travelling to polar regions is not cheap, especially if prices are quoted in American dollars ... but believe us, you will find out why Antarctica is the ultimate getaway. It has stimulated a 40 year passion within Gary whose Antarctic library enables him to live many times over the great journeys of exploration in the heroic age of discovery as well as the modern era. It has informed a deep interest in how Antarctic science can contribute to an understanding of global climate change, adding to the quality of illustrated talks he gives to a diversity of groups ... so intellectual stimulation and an integration with his environmental activism has been a worthwhile spin-off!

We have travelled with two excellent Australian companies – Adventure Associates
<www.adventureassociates.com/tours/antarctica> and Aurora Expeditions
<www.auroraexpeditions.com.au>.

Go on ... just do it ... we promise it will be a life-enriching highlight of your travel bucket list. Shackleton spoke of a real sadness that befell him as he left the ice – it was this that drew him back there many times. The Schoers fully understand this yearning.

Useful references

You are welcome to contact the Schoers for a reading list – the expedition companies cited will also provide such references.

Contributor details

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Bronlyn was the principal of Lucas Heights Community School, 1992 - 2006. Since retiring from the Department she has consulted in the area of school leadership and combined a deep interest in voluntary roles supporting young women and students from a refugee background. Bronlyn is a life member of the NSWSPC and has enjoyed many travel adventures since retirement with her husband Gary, both in Australia and overseas.