

South Georgia and Antarctic Odyssey

Aboard *Greg Mortimer* | 17 January – 5 February 2024



Ushuaia, Argentina

DAY 1 | Thursday 18 January 2024

Position at 0800 on 18 Jan

Latitude: 54°48'6" S

Longitude: 68°17'9" W

Course: At wharf

Speed: 0 kts

Barometer: 1015 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

Here we are in the stunning town of Ushuaia, 'el fin del mundo', the end of the world.

The wharf was abuzz this afternoon with arrivals, departures, fishing vessels unloading their catch, and all sorts of activity. Our Expeditioners were met by the Aurora Expedition Team and had their photos taken for our 'photoboard' to help us learn each other's names.

Drinks and a buffet awaited us in the Elephant Island Bar, then our hotel team helped us navigate the decks to our cabins and settle into our 'home away from home'. It had been a long couple of days of travelling, and many of us probably wanted to crawl into the comfort of our beds, but there was no time to rest just yet!

After a welcome briefing from our Expedition Leader, Ashley, we had an introduction from Onboard Expedition Manager, Kerry; Hotel Director, Pascal; and our Medic, JB, who gave us some handy hints about life on board.

Just after the *Greg Mortimer* set sail, we had the all-important safety drill. The sound of the ship's horn signalled us to don bulky orange lifejackets and muster in the lecture theatre. We followed our crew up to deck 7, where the polar-class life vessels sit (they can hold 136 people each, for 5 days!).

With the safety drill completed, we were cleared to begin our journey. We made our way to the dining room to enjoy a delicious dinner, prepared by our talented galley team and served by our smiling and welcoming waiting staff.

The last task was a jacket swap, so that we can cope with whatever weather Antarctica decides to throw at us.

So, we'd had our last glimpse of town life, knowing that from now on we are more likely to see a colony of penguins than a crowd of people.

Together we total 129 passengers (54 Americans, 38 Australians, 25 Canadians, 11 from the UK, 1 from Hong Kong) along with 106 crew from all around the globe.

Our 22 Expedition Team members have a variety of specialities including polar exploration, mountaineering, skiing, glaciology, geology, history, marine and terrestrial biology, ornithology, photography, medicine, snorkelling and kayaking.

After the many hours of travel to reach the *Greg Mortimer*, it's time to kick back, breathe in the sea air, and get excited for the next 10 days of adventure!



At Sea

DAY 2 | Friday 19 January 2024

Position at 1100 on 19 Jan

Latitude: 53°37'8" S

Longitude: 63°50'3"W

Course: 025°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 11 kts NW

Barometer: 1012 hPa

Air Temp: 8°C

After exiting the Beagle Channel overnight, we entered the Argentine Sea separating the Falklands Islands – Islas Malvinas - from South America. Pastel colours of dawn and a gentle roll of the ship greeted the early morning risers. Giant petrels had joined us, soaring effortlessly about the ship while black-browed albatross skimmed the ocean swells.

We had a full day of educational presentations, mandatory briefings, and Citizen Science projects to keep us busy.

While learning about Zodiac operations and how to minimise our environmental impact on the places we intend to visit, we were also introduced to the rest of our large Expedition Team. The slightly increased swell did not deter too many for lunch and the dining room was abuzz with conversation.

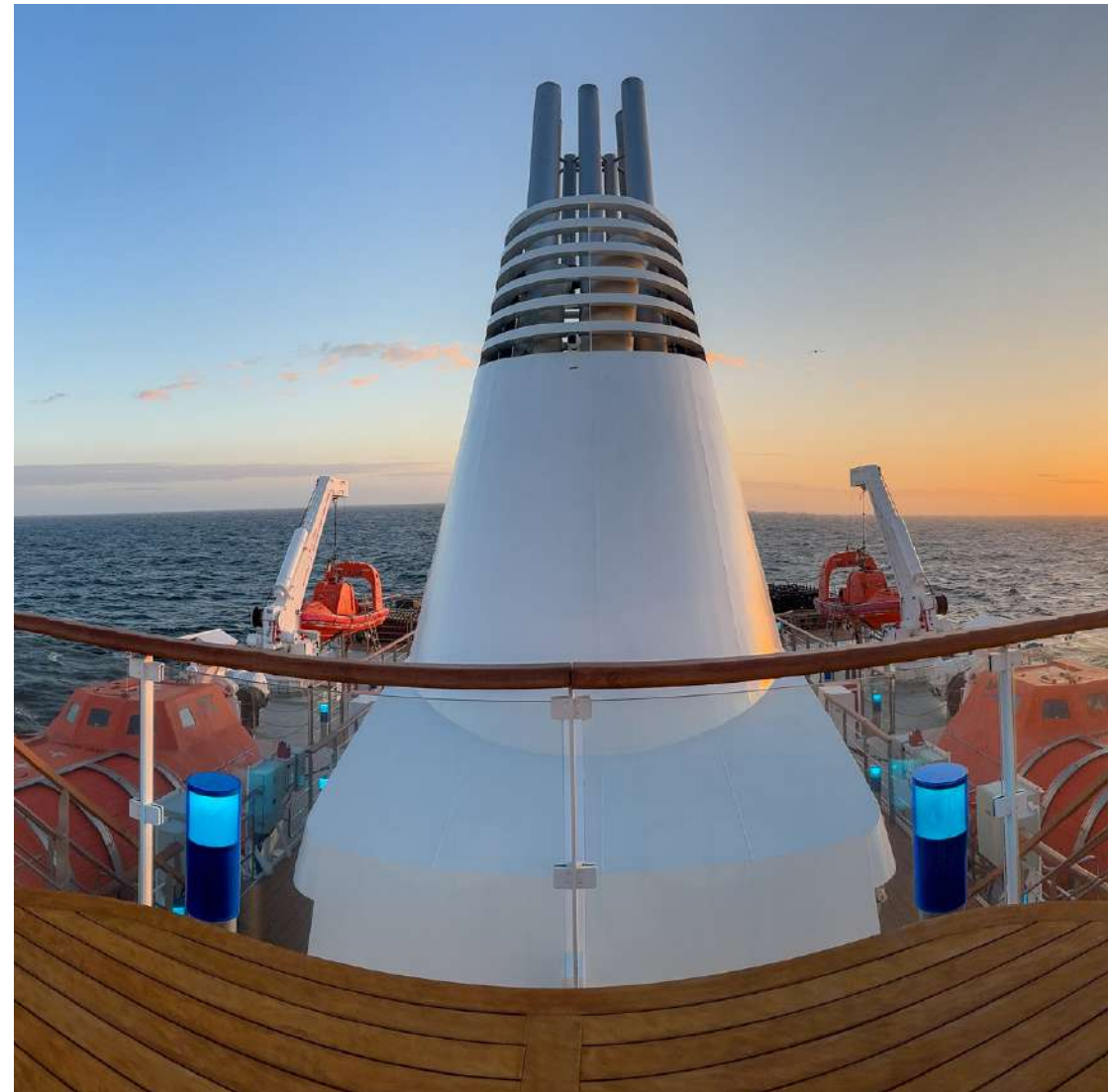
The kayakers, paddlers and snorkellers were inducted and we all tested our Muck Boot fit in anticipation of adventures ashore. We also made sure all our gear was scrupulously clean so that we do not introduce any unwanted pests to these remote islands. The Citizen Science projects in the afternoon gathered data on clouds for NASA's Globe Cloud project with Stephen, while learning of their importance and how to identify various types.

While those keen on birds joined in two surveys with Heidi recording a wide range of seabirds, from the tiny Wilson's storm-petrel pattering across the surface to the impressive wingspan of the wandering albatross soaring majestically over the waves.

Our photographer, Grant, gave an afternoon presentation on mobile phone photography. Everyone seemed to take something away from this practical subject, with many a question at the end as we put that newfound knowledge to use and finding that we are 'all photographers'.

Before dinner we gathered for Captain's Welcome Cocktails, enjoying some tasty canapes. Captain Oleg Kapko introduced his senior officers from the many departments aboard the ship and wished us an enjoyable voyage. For our first Recap of the trip, our Expedition Leader, Ashley, filled us in on tomorrow's intentions, the stronger winds possibly altering plans so we will need to stay flexible. Our historian, Alasdair, enlightened us on the *warrak* (or wolf) that once roamed the islands, our mammologist, Lea, shared some interesting facts about whiskers on pinnipeds, and our ornithologist, Heidi, surprised us with a visual on the wingspan of the wandering albatross.

Dinner was another culinary delight, served by our friendly dining room team as we continued our passage toward the Falkland Islands. The wind had increased throughout the afternoon to around 30 knots and seas built to 3 metres, but thanks to the ship's stabilisers, not a drop was spilled from our wine glasses.



Falkland Islands | At Sea

DAY 3 | Saturday 20 January 2024

Position at 0930 on 20 Jan

Latitude: 51°20'5" S

Longitude: 60°33'4"W

Course: 104°

Speed: 6 kts

Barometer: 1019 hPa

Air Temp: 14°C

We woke to find that we were seeking shelter from the weather, inside the north end of Byron Sound in the west Falkland Islands. The wind had increased during the night and was blowing a fairly steady 30 knots, with frequent gusts over 50 knots. Spray was blowing off the tops of the waves, but the southern sea lions didn't seem to mind and a few were seen jumping through the waves.

With this much wind there was no possibility of a Zodiac operation, so after our breakfast buffet we continued with the education program.

Melina, our geologist, gave us a brief 500-million-year history of the Falkland Islands. These quartz-rich rocks have been drifting west, away from their origin in South Africa for nearly 200 million years, possibly since the break-up of Gondwana.

We also learned of an intriguing theory that perhaps there was once a giant asteroid that hit the west coast of the Falklands 250 million years ago. Without any supporting geological evidence to prove it, whether this asteroid existed remains a mystery.

The wind continued to blow while Heidi presented her introduction to the seabirds of the Southern Ocean. We learned several tips and tricks on identifying this diverse group of birds, from the great albatrosses to little storm-petrels. Later on in the afternoon we were able to start practising these ID skills by helping with a Citizen Science seabird survey out on deck.

Throughout the morning, while we busied ourselves with the education program, the ship paced up and down the mouth of Byron Sound in the lee of West Falkland.

After lunch the ship stood off the 'Woolly Gut' which is the narrow channel between West Falkland and West Point Island, which was our intended landing site. The gusts at this point were very dramatic and topped 60 knots, therefore the decision was made not to attempt entering. As the ship turned back to Byron Sound we were joined by a small group of dusky dolphins that rode our bow wave.

With this wild wind we were on to Plan B and continued with our education. Alasdair gave us a presentation on the European history of the Falkland Islands from the early 1800s up until WWII. It was a tale with many countries involved and Darwin once described the settlement living here as, 'runaways, murderers and rebels'.

Later, we held several workshops: budding artists were painting in the observation lounge with Alasdair and Gabby; Grant was kept busy with smart phone photo questions in the lecture room, and Stephen held a workshop covering useful tips for using and choosing binoculars. The latter was held out on deck as the ship steamed downwind and was wonderfully interrupted by a group of Commerson's dolphin cavorting under the bow of the ship. The Commerson's were then wonderfully interrupted by a group of Peale's dolphins, including a very young calf.



At Sea en route to South Georgia

DAY 4 | Sunday 21 January 2024

Position at 1030 on 21 Jan

Latitude: 52°02'2" S

Longitude: 054°24'6" W

Course: 110°

Speed: 12 kts

Wind Speed: 28 kts NW

Barometer: 1018 hPa

Air Temp: 15°C

Bing bong. Alasdair's gentle morning greeting floated through the ship at 8am this morning announcing breakfast in a half hour. In the dining room, Pel cheerfully greeted everyone with her 'cha cha cha' song, hinting to us that we were going to be dancing around the swells all day aboard our floating home.

Soon, we were all in the lecture theatre with Lea. Her captivating lecture on seals kept us on the edge of our seats, especially when she hopped on the floor to demonstrate the difference between the movement of eared seals and earless seals. Who says lectures can't be fun? During her lecture, she also gave us some sage advice: stand your ground and don't run from cheeky fur seals, who would love nothing more than to chase you around all day!

Alasdair continued our daily educational program with part one of his Shackleton series: 'A Glorious Failure: Shackleton and the Imperial Transantarctic expedition'. We learned of how the Transantarctic Expedition came to be, with Shackleton's planning and dreaming. After becoming stuck in the ice, their ship, *Endurance*, fell prey to the Weddell Sea gyre, infamous for trapping ships in its circular current of ice. On 21 November 1915, the *Endurance* sank beneath the sea ice and so began the epic saga of escape for Shackleton and his men.

We stuffed our bellies with a wonderful lunch before Heidi elucidated us on the various evolutionary adaptations of penguins and specifically about the penguins we hope to encounter in the upcoming weeks. Unbeknownst to most of us, fossils were discovered of a penguin that once stood around two metres tall!

The sweet scents of crepes suzette filled the halls as we were drawn to fill our bowls with rich delight. This coincided with the birders, cloud gazers and seaweed searchers donning their jackets to embrace the warm winds of deck 8. Stephen led the cloud survey as they found translucent clouds at all levels of the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Heidi and the birders spotted many species soaring around the ship, including the wandering albatross, southern royal albatross, grey petrel and soft-plumaged petrel. Mere metres away in the observation lounge, Alasdair and Gabby expertly guided a group of blooming artists on a watercolour journey.

Soon after, Ashley led us through a personal history of the Falklands war, as her partner was working on a former cruise vessel – the famous *QEII* - outfitted as a mavy transport vessel during the war. Dinner followed shortly after. Dark and stormy outside, we came together in the lecture theatre again to watch a miniseries about Shackleton. As the swells bobbed us around through the night, we sailed closer and closer the remote reaches of South Georgia.





At Sea en route to South Georgia

DAY 5 | Monday 22 January 2024

Position at 1030 on 22 Jan

Latitude: 52°32'6" S

Longitude: 046°33'1"W

Course: 087°

Speed: 12 kts

Wind Speed: 1018 hPa

Barometer: 22 kts WSW

Air Temp: 11°C

Yesterday, as we settled into the night, we could see the rise of the 4.5-metre swells as we had expected, and the ocean started to take on an angrier and greyer look, with the waves beginning to streak and the whitecaps throwing their spray to the air.

Surprisingly, the night was comfortable and smooth as the *Greg Mortimer* surfed the following seas and slipped ahead of the storm, enough that we awoke to brighter skies and calmer conditions. By late morning we escaped any small fogbanks, and those who participated in Citizen Science activities, or wandered on deck themselves to watch the seabirds, or just to take in the ocean air, experienced the sun warming their souls through a lightly overcast, and often clear sky.

Despite the reality that we have been at sea for four days, spirits are high. It is not only having a nice-enough day to spend time outdoors, but also the social time, and all the new learning taking place that makes these sea days tolerable, and maybe even exceptional. One fellow Expeditioner expressed that wow, I wish I was getting college credit for all this.

Today's curriculum was full on. We launched with the 'Part 2' continuation of Alasdair's 'Shackleton and the Imperial Expedition'. It covered the expedition's time trapped in the Weddell Sea through to their rescue and also touched on their lives following the expedition.

After a small break, Rob Dunbar, an earth systems scientist and professor at Stanford University, gave a compelling overview of Antarctica's crucial connection to climate change in his presentation entitled 'Palm Trees and Ice: What's Up with Global Warming?'

Following lunch, Heidi rallied the masses with 30 people showing up for a sunny seabird and seaweed survey. Although no seaweed was spotted, the seabirds were abundant and there was a rare sighting of a sub-antarctic shearwater, seldom seen this far north. Stephen organised the Iceberg Spotting Competition, helping us plot longitude and latitude on the chart, so we could predict the position and timing of when we might see our first iceberg. Forty-five Expeditioners entered.

We also had some more photography fundamentals with Grant. Lea introduced us to krill; these cute little shrimp-like creatures are the foundational, keystone species for all of life in the Southern Ocean.

Ashley, along with David Attenborough, gave us our mandatory precap to prepare us for our visit to South Georgia and how to approach biosecurity. To close, Ashley had the difficult task, being the messenger of a sombre

reality. Even more landing sites are now closed on South Georgia due to HPAI. Ashley encouraged us, saying that we still have the opportunity to experience South Georgia in all its glory, mostly from the water.

We now all eagerly await our first glance and arrival in South Georgia tomorrow morning.



South Georgia | Leith Harbour

DAY 6 | Tuesday 23 January 2024

Position at 0945 on 23 Jan

Latitude: 53°46'2" S

Longitude: 038°41'6" W

Course: 114°

Speed: 14 kts

Wind Speed: 20 kts NE

Barometer: 1009 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

The day dawned early for some Expeditioners at 4.50am, the first Antarctic iceberg spotted on the southern horizon like a sentinel guarding the pristine wilderness of the Southern Ocean and beyond. For others, the awakening came with Elena's cheerful 'Good morning' announcement, setting the tone for the extraordinary day outside. She spoke about the wonders of nature, from majestic icebergs to the gentle giants of the ocean, whales, and the graceful albatross soaring in the wind.

Once breakfast had been enjoyed, fellow Expeditioners joined the Expedition Team out on the observation decks to enjoy fresh air and take in the scenes and observe those that call the ocean home. Wandering albatross with their great wingspan of 3.4 metres, the Wilson's storm petrel, weighing only 40 grams, and many others showed off aerial talents. Fur seals - once hunted to near extinction - today were seen in abundance out at sea. A small pod of orca, with a dorsal fin at least 1 metre tall and humpbacks, even the largest creature on earth, a blue whale was seen surfacing to breathe.

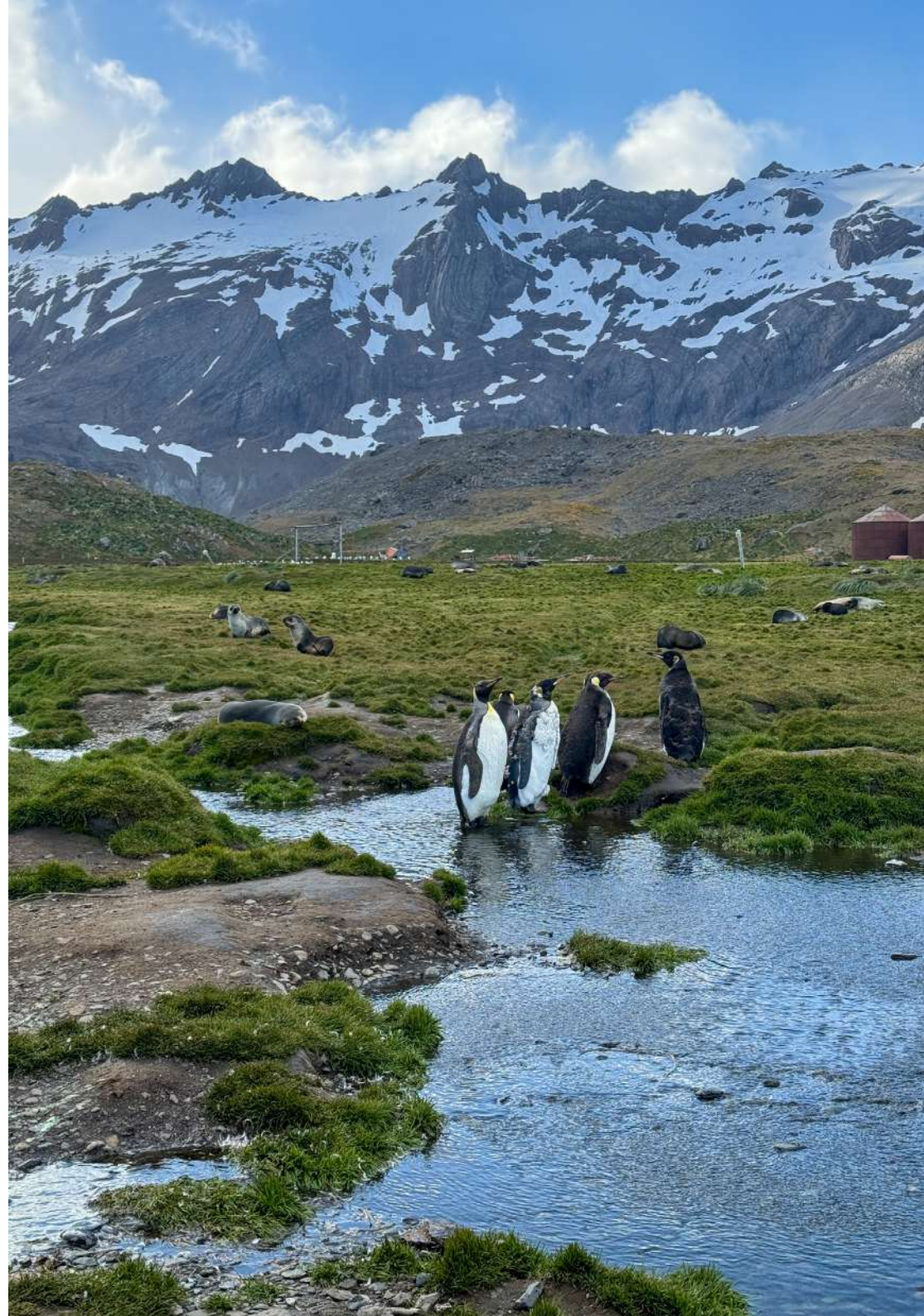
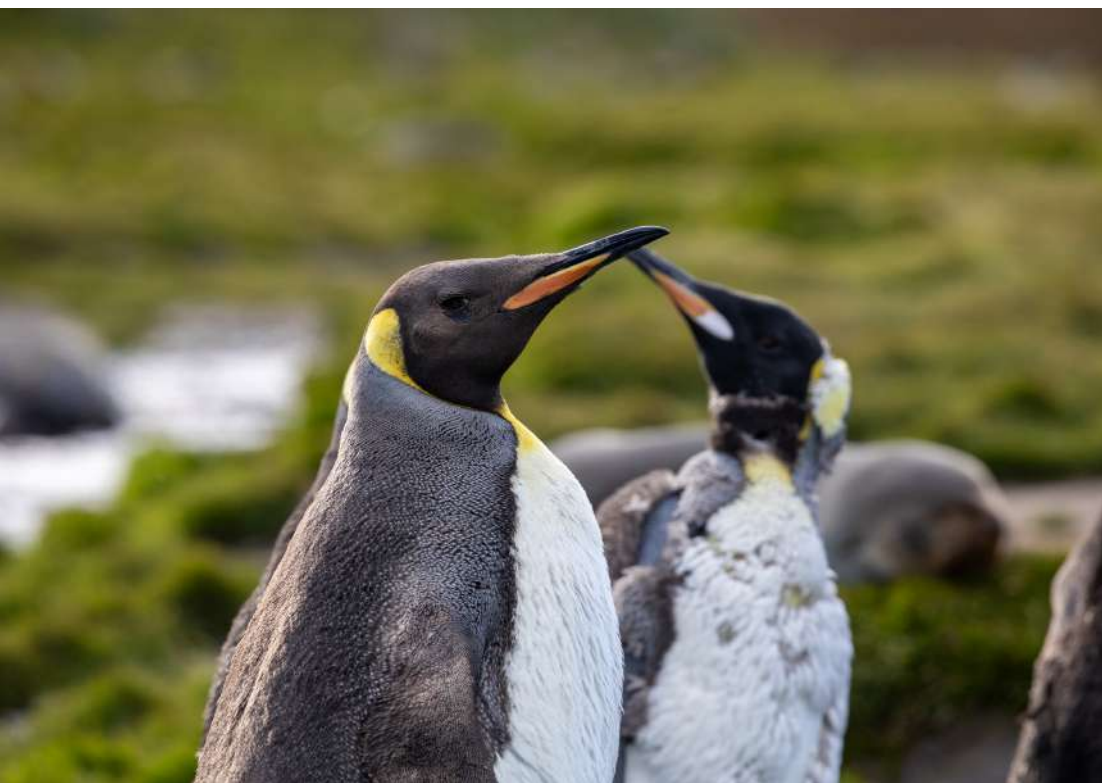
As the day unfolded, so did the layers of South Georgia's natural and human history. Nestled in the southern Atlantic Ocean, surrounded by floating castles of ice, this remote island has a rich past shaped by both its wild elements and human endeavours. Once a hub for sealing, then whaling, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Christian Salvesen & Co whaling station in Leith Harbour still stands as a silent witness to the industrial exploits of yesteryears. Abandoned since 1965, now reclaimed by the relentless forces of nature.

The cloudy sky had broken and sun rays shone down on the mountainous landscape of South Georgia. Eventually the winds eased, allowing the Expedition Team to offer a sunset landfall on the outskirts of Leith Harbour. Stepping ashore was delightful, to witness this remarkable encounter with the island's inhabitants, the antarctic fur seals with pups only a few weeks old, elephant seals lazing in their wallows, and the charismatic king and gentoo penguins waddling along the shores. It was a surreal experience, a harmonious coexistence of the remnants of human history and the vibrant wildlife that now claims the island.

The weather, a formidable character in the island's narrative, played its part in shaping the day's events. South Georgia's climate is often capricious, with rapidly changing conditions that can range from calm and serene to fierce and stormy. Yet, this unpredictability adds to the allure of the island, creating an environment where every moment is a dance between the elements.

As the Expeditioners returned to the ship, their minds buzzing with the sights and sounds of South Georgia, the transition from day to night was marked by the first stars and rising of the full moon. Tales were shared till later hours of the day's wonders and appreciation for the wild beauty and ecological significance of South Georgia.







Prion Island | Salisbury Plain | Hercules Bay

DAY 7 | Wednesday 24 January 2024

Position at 1045 on 24 Jan

Latitude: 54°01'6" S

Longitude: 037°14'0" W

Course: 066°

Speed: 1 kt

Wind Speed: 7 kts NW

Barometer: 1016 hPa

Air Temp: 9° C

After last evening's small and tantalising twilight introduction to South Georgia, we were all raring to go on our first morning excursion off the ship. The focus of our attention was to be Prion Island in the Bay of Islands, renowned for its wandering albatrosses.

It was to be an earlier start than what we'd become used to on lazy days at sea, but no-one minded the time as we stepped out into the South Georgia drizzle for a closer and more extended glimpse of South Georgia's abundant wildlife.

Prion Island and its adjacent islets, rocks and reefs are fringed in many places by kelp.

It therefore took some weaving to and fro through what are, in effect, the very 'treetops' of an underwater forest, until we found ourselves in a clear channel close to a small beach crowded with wildlife – moulting king penguins, a scattering of gentoo penguins, gambolling fur seals and, tucked away in one corner, a small wallow of corpulent elephant seals.

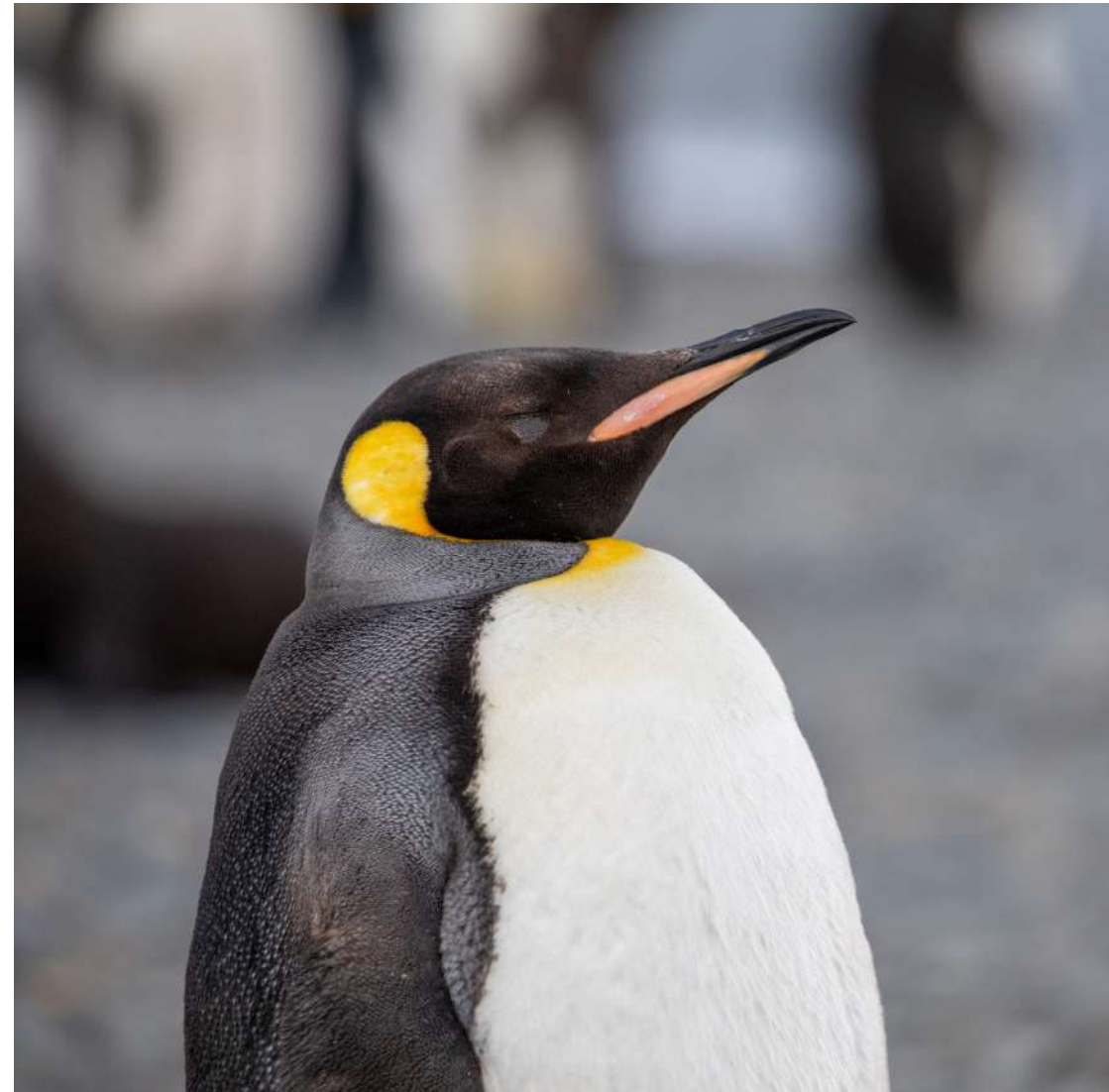
As we progressed along the channel, the beach gave way to rocky, wave-swept platforms necklaced by slithery strands of kelp. Then, making our way north along the edge of the island, an occasional kelp gull, blue-eyed shag and snowy sheath bill were seen, as well, flotillas of giant petrels in loose packs just offshore were spotted. Alas, in the rain and light airs, the expected albatross had not taken to wing.

Back on board, the *Greg Mortimer* then headed towards the shore of the encompassing Bay of Islands for a glimpse of one of South Georgia's extraordinary wildlife spectacles – the 60,000-breeding pair-strong aggregation of king penguins on what is known as Salisbury Plain. The majesty of such a sight was not lost on any of those who rugged up and headed outdoors.

After lunch – yes, more food – followed by a chance to rest, our second Zodiac cruise of the day found us in Hercules Bay. After a 'lively' gangway, successfully negotiated thanks to the brilliant skills of our Zodiac drivers, we were away to notch up our fourth species of penguin. On the way into this exquisite, small bay, we lingered for a while beside a grounded iceberg and marvelled at the idea that it had travelled all the way from the Weddell Sea.

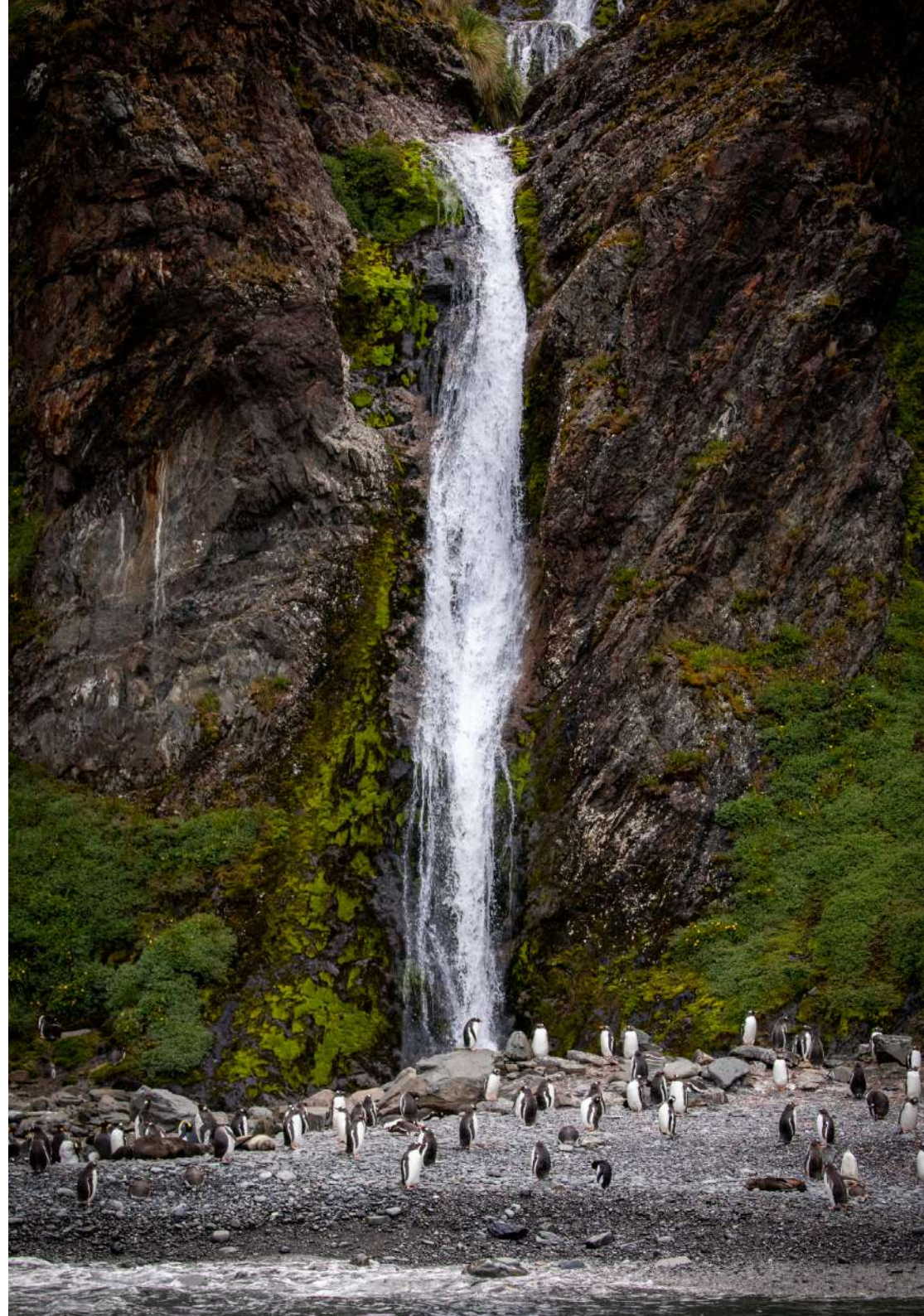
The penguin objective was the macaroni, and in sheltered waters deep in the bay, we were easily able to watch the show, as these diminutive birds clambered up the rocks and climbed their steep highways to the colony above. Talk about front-row seats at the theatre!

What a day – the buzz in the dining room at dinner said it all.









Godthul | Rookery Point | Cumberland Bay

DAY 8 | Thursday 25 January 2024

Position at 1600 on 25 Jan

Latitude: 54°08'7" S

Longitude: 036°47'8" W

Course: At anchor

Speed: At anchor

Wind Speed: 5 kts NW

Barometer: 1021 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

Overnight, Captain Oleg manoeuvred the good ship the *Greg Mortimer* into an anchorage at Godthul. It was a beautiful morning – the light shone between the mountains and the bay was cast in brilliant sunshine. Ashley had planned a morning Zodiac cruise – involving a transit around to Cobblers Cove before returning via Rookery Point back to Godthul.

We climbed down into the Zodiacs and set off for the morning's adventure. Along the transit, several large icebergs had become grounded along the shoreline. We stopped to admire them the tallest measuring about 40 metres tall at its peak. These bergs had likely calved from a larger, tabular iceberg stretching many kilometres long, and had potentially broken off from one of the ice shelves around the Antarctic continent before being brought by the currents, wind and swell around to rest along South Georgia's eastern coast.

We were greeted by extensive wildlife activity as we cruised around into Cobblers Cove. Close to the mouth of the cove, a macaroni penguin colony was perched precariously on sea cliffs, exposed to the breaking swell rolling in.

It was fascinating to watch these crested penguins – so well adapted to the rugged sub-Antarctic coastline – propel themselves out of the sea, barely clinging to land. We spent some time admiring the waterfalls and small beaches filled with fur seal pups and the odd juvenile elephant seal, before the call came to look up - as we saw two light-mantled albatrosses soaring and circling on the wind above us.

Back through the bull kelp, we had a quick fly-by of Rookery Point, admiring two more grounded icebergs – radiating a deep-blue hue – before coming back for lunch. Meanwhile, the kayakers reported calm and serene conditions as they paddled around the interior of Godthul Harbour, while the snorkellers' maiden snorkel had some surprise visitors from some friendly fur seals.

Over lunch, we repositioned to the other end of Godthul before setting off for an afternoon of adventure. Half of us elected to take a hike from Godthul to Sandebugden – and enjoyed a walk across tussock, meltwater tarns, Echo Lake and finally a steep climb across a mountain pass in some alpine terrain, before being picked up on the other side.

As the *Greg Mortimer* repositioned, kayakers also hopped off and paddled 5 kilometres into the bay, enjoying the evening light across the mountains surrounding Cumberland Bay, while the snorkellers revelled in a late evening swim.







Grytviken | Fortuna Bay

DAY 9 | Friday 26 January 2024

Position at 1600 on 26 Jan

Latitude: 54°08'7" S

Longitude: 036°47'8" W

Course: At anchor

Speed: At anchor

Wind Speed: 5 kts NW

Barometer: 1021 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

Those who awoke early were greeted by the glorious site of the snow-clad Allardyce Range, glistening white jagged peaks set amongst a rich-blue sky dominated by Mount Paget (2934 metres), Mount Roots (2280 metres) and Nordenskjöld Peak (2355 metres). Gus commenced the official day with a 6am wake-up call, beckoning those who weren't already on deck to bathe in the glorious sights and sunshine.

Shortly after breakfast the *Greg Mortimer* glided gently into King Edward Cove, the barking of fur seals and bellows of stirring elephant seals echoing across the bay, piercing the silence.

Officers of the South Georgia Trust boarded, giving a brief introduction to South Georgia and Grytviken, the historical seat of government administration, and centre of whaling in the Southern Hemisphere. Shortly afterwards we shuttled ashore with a short diversion to view the Boss's (Shackleton's) grave from the Zodiacs.

Grytviken is a picturesque site that is virtually encircled by a rampart of steeply walled crags. A whaling and museum tour amongst the rusting remnants gave an impression of what life might have been like here for the 300 who toiled during the summers between 1904 and 1964, during which 54,000 whales were processed in Grytviken alone.

During the landing some Expeditioners partook in a 90-minute hike up to a vantage point, while essentially all could not resist a visit to the post office and gift shop. Once we had had our fill of playful fur seal pups and shopping, it was time to return to the ship for a quick change of clothes and more all-too-yummy food. With the ship repositioning to Fortuna Bay during the hiatus.

A landing at Fortuna gave us the opportunity to retrace a small part of Shackleton's desperate 36-hour march across the rugged and, at that time, unknown South Georgia interior before his eventual return to civilisation at Stromness. It began with the accustomed dally and dance with the fur seals and tussock, before reaching the scree slopes interspersed with moss-laden streams. Different parties reached different points such as Crean Lake, and the 300-metre pass, which afforded a view down to Stromness. Beautiful views were seen of Fortuna Bay and its named glacier on the way back down, as well as the flotilla of kayaks who'd had their own adventure paddling amongst its azure waters hemmed by glacier, mountain peaks and seal-lined shores.

On returning to the ship, Alasdair led a toast to Shackleton before the fun and frivolity of the BBQ began. Sunshine had transitioned to drizzle, but spirits could not be dampened as the BBQ was moved indoors. As always, the hotel staff put on a fine spread, only outmatched by their energy and enthusiasm. Tony began the festivities with a masterful rendition of the Sinatra classic, 'I did it my way' while all will have etched in their memory, Alp leading the dancing of 'YMCA' – pure joy.







St Andrews Bay | Drygalski Fjord | Larsen Harbour

DAY 10 | Saturday 27 January 2024

Position at 1140 on 27 Jan

Latitude: 54°27'5" S

Longitude: 036°00'6" W

Course: 117°

Speed: 11 kts

Wind Speed: 11 kts NW

Barometer: 1020 hPa

Air Temp: 6°C

Today we continued with our exploration of South Georgia, with a morning Zodiac cruise in St Andrews Bay. The first thing that captivated us was the sheer abundance of wildlife. As we navigated the island's coastline, we marvelled at the cacophony of bird calls and the sight of vast penguin colonies blanketing the shores.

St Andrews Bay, home to the iconic king penguin, provided an awe-inspiring spectacle. The air was filled with the distinct aroma of guano, a reminder of the delicate balance between the island's wildlife and its pristine environment.

We discovered St. Andrews Bay has a wide glacial outwash plain behind the beach, which is ringed to the west by the Cook, Buxton and Heaney glaciers. The retreat of the Cook Glacier has left a large lagoon at its snout, offering the king penguins their own private paddling pool.

The scenery surrounding St Andrews Bay was dramatic and the rugged landscape contributed to its allure. Towering snow-covered peaks and glaciers painted a picturesque panorama that is nothing short of awe-inspiring.

Back on board we all wholeheartedly enjoyed Ashley's informative and occasionally humorous account of her time living on South Georgia. It really gave a different perspective to visiting this captivating island.

Fully refreshed and lunched, this afternoon the *Greg Mortimer* anchored at the entrance of Larsen Harbour and Drygalski Fjord. The landscapes of Larsen Harbour are as diverse as they are breathtaking. We were in awe of the rugged and massive cliffs towering over us. As we slowly cruised the fjord, we encountered fur seals basking on rocky beaches, and elephant seals lounging in the sun. The juxtaposition of these marine mammals against the backdrop of Larsen Harbour's formidable scenery is a testament to the resilience of life in one of the world's most challenging environments.

This evening as we admired the majestic Drygalski Fjord in glorious sunshine, we took the time to reflect on the untamed wilderness of South Georgia. We had found this remote island a haven for wildlife enthusiasts and history buffs alike, with its rugged landscapes and unparalleled biodiversity. Our days spent in South Georgia unfolded like a page from an explorer's diary, each moment revealing the island's unique charm.

As we depart Drygalski Fjord, we are left with a profound appreciation for the delicate balance between nature and history that defines this remote outpost. South Georgia was a destination that left an indelible mark on us adventurous souls.





At Sea

DAY 11 | Sunday 28 January 2024

Position at 1200 on 28 Jan

Latitude: 57°14'2" S

Longitude: 039°33'7" W

Course: 234°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 50 kts W

Barometer: 1009 hPa

Air Temp: 2° C

Farewell South Georgia! We experienced some of the most incredible wildlife encounters and breathtaking sunsets here. Now, leaving behind its wild beauty, we set sail towards our final destination: Antarctica!

The open ocean crossing brought rough seas. It was a slow morning and a few of us could definitely feel the 'motion of the ocean' today.

We started our day with a mandatory IAATO briefing for visitors to Antarctica, followed by the last biosecurity check on this voyage, which was a familiar routine by now. Boots scrubbed, jackets vacuumed, we were ready to finally step foot on the seventh continent.

The intrepid Heidi and Stephen, fearless of the elements, went up to the Observation Deck in the morning to run two Citizen Science projects: cloud observation and a seabird watch. A big shout out to Andy, who joined them despite the rough seas, cold winds, and high potential for motion sickness!

It was a busy day for Stephen, who, straight after the Citizen Science session, ran a very useful navigation training for the Expedition Team. Sea charts were laid on the carpet on deck 4, and our guides honed their compass and GPS skills.

We were wondering how many of us would dare to come to lunch – delicious stuffed jacket potatoes and a hearty oven-baked lasagne were served to those who managed to fight seasickness.

Even though sea days may seem slower than our outings, packed with adventure, it's never boring on the ship! The afternoon was filled with engaging lectures: Brian Keating, a renowned Canadian naturalist, author, radio and TV host, captivated us with tales of how technology aids in understanding wildlife, with a special focus on cetaceans and seabirds.

Brian's lecture was followed by an informative talk delivered by our historian, Alasdair, who masterfully condensed a thousand years of human history related to the polar regions and antarctic exploration into a single, captivating lecture, all while maintaining his balance on our rocking ship. Impressive!

Before dinner, we had an opportunity to watch a documentary made by one of our passengers, conservation photographer, Cheryl. The film documents the life of Takaya, a wild lone wolf, and the development of his unique relationship with Cheryl, who spent seven years tracing Takaya's footsteps and observing his behaviour.

In the evening, the dining room remained half-empty, a testament to the sea's persistent sway. Yet, even in the quietude, dreams of the frozen continent danced in our heads, lulled by the gentle rocking of our ship.





At Sea

DAY 12 | Monday 29 January 2024

Position at 1300 on 29 Jan

Latitude: 54°22'1" S

Longitude: 045°25'9" W

Course: 220°

Speed: 10.8 kts

Wind Speed: 30 kts NW

Barometer: 1000 hPa

Air Temp: 5°C

As our ship, the *Greg Mortimer*, ploughed through the tumultuous waters en route to the world's largest iceberg, A23a, our brave Expeditioners aboard were confronted with the mighty force of nature. Five-metre swells and high winds tested the mettle of everyone on board, but spirits remained high as we pressed on towards our next destination. The journey was challenging, but this is the true essence of adventure.

Amid the rolling waves and relentless winds, Heidi, our dedicated bird enthusiast, stood undeterred on the deck alongside a number of our hardy Expeditioners. They scanned the horizon with unwavering determination, binoculars in hand, ready to spot any wildlife. Their efforts were rewarded by multiple Cape petrels and fin whale sightings. Alongside our committed bird enthusiasts, Stephen was conducting his Citizen Science cloud surveys, collecting valuable research data for scientific analysis.

Below deck, our hotel director, Pascal, took the opportunity to shed light on the intricate workings of the ship's hotel department. We huddled in the lecture hall, fascinated by Pascal's insights into the logistics and coordination required to manage life on board. From ensuring the comfort of the passengers to overseeing the culinary experiences that we all enjoy so much throughout the journey, Pascal's talk provided a glimpse into the unseen machinery that keeps our Expeditioners fed and hydrated, even in the face of challenging weather conditions.

Meanwhile, the South Georgia photography competition was in full swing. Despite the rocking ship and challenges it brings, our talented photographers on board submitted breathtaking images that captured the raw beauty of the Southern Ocean. The competition fostered a sense of competitive excitement among our Expeditioners, with each photograph telling a unique story of resilience and appreciation for the untamed wilderness they were navigating.

Following on from a fascinating talk by Alasdair about the history of women in early expeditions, we had a technical presentation by Jack on the ship's hull design. Then, Melina, our resident geological expert, delved into the captivating world of ice. Her presentation covered glaciers, ice shelves, icebergs, and sea ice, providing a comprehensive understanding of the polar regions' icy wonders. Against the backdrop of the challenging weather outside, Melina's talk served as a reminder of the delicate balance that exists between the power of nature and the fragile ecosystems that depend on these frozen landscapes.

Throughout the day, our tough group of Expeditioners showcased an unwavering determination to make the most of their journey, turning challenges into opportunities for learning. As night fell and we retired to our cabins, the ship continued its journey towards our next destination, the world's largest Iceberg, A23a.



At Sea

DAY 13 | Tuesday 30 January 2024

Position at 1500 on 30 Jan

Latitude: 61°31'08"S

Course: 240°

Longitude: 051°39'7"W

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 50 kts WNW

Air Temp: 4° C

Barometer: 1012 hPa

Continuing our passage from South Georgia to the Antarctic Peninsula, another sea day gave us the opportunity to rest, sift through photos and videos taken thus far on the voyage, and learn more about Antarctica via the onboard lectures and Citizen Science program.

After breakfast, we caught a first glimpse of the A23a Iceberg – a rather underwhelming name for the largest iceberg in the world. Though it looked unimposing on the radar screen, from the observation deck it appeared considerably more impressive. It was difficult to choose suitable words to adequately describe it. Unimaginably large seemed quite apt.

A23a detached from the Filchner-Ronne Ice Shelf in August 1986. It has been grounded for much of this time. This has prevented it from travelling more than a few hundred kilometres, but has also made it less susceptible to fragmenting.

In terms of size, it's fair to say that it's colossal – 3,900 square kilometres. That's around three times the size of New York City. It's estimated to weigh almost one trillion tonnes - a figure difficult to mentally envisage.

Once we turned around and departed the iceberg, it was time to settle into our sea-day routine. A watercolour session with Alasdair and Gabby before lunch was no doubt bursting with inspiration from the seemingly endless wall of ice we had all witnessed prior.

Ashley gave a fascinating lecture after lunch about all things *Greg Mortimer*. It was amazing to watch a time lapse of the building of the ship and see video of the heart of the ship, the engine room, a place normally out of bounds to guests. Evidently, learning more about the ship is something that everyone found fascinating, as the Q&A lasted longer than the presentation!

Afternoon tea provided a welcome interlude, before Lea talked about what lives below the surface in Antarctica.

After dinner, an auction was held in the dining hall to raise money for the South Georgia Heritage Trust. With the 'Voice of Poker', Expeditioner Lon McEachern as expert auctioneer, numerous items donated by the Trust went under the hammer.

Expeditioners got in the spirit to outbid each other for their preferred item. Popular items included a hip flask, and

a watercolour of Drygalski Fjord, painted by our very own historian, Alasdair.

A total of US\$2,490 was raised, some of which will go towards making the manager's office at Stromness structurally safe.

All in all, a day with a bit of everything. Beautiful sights, fascinating information, and fun in the evening!



Bransfield Strait | Curtiss Bay

DAY 14 | Wednesday 31 January 2024

Position at 0800 on 31 Jan

Latitude: 62°54.16'S

Longitude: 057°50.6'W

Course: 246°

Speed: 14 kts

This morning we found ourselves sailing through the beautiful Bransfield Strait. This water mass that runs through the Antarctic Peninsula and the South Shetland Islands welcomed us with very Antarctic-like weather: chilly, foggy and with some light snowfall.

During the morning on board the *Greg Mortimer*, we enjoyed great scenery cruising among some massive icebergs, with the Peninsula on our port side. After breakfast, Alasdair introduced us to some of the main characters of the heroic age of Antarctic Exploration. Otto Nordenskjold, leading the Swedish expedition, the French one by Jean Baptiste Charcot and the Scottish one led by William Speirs Bruce, who also established the first meteorological station in Laurie Island, which became the first base (renamed Orcadas Base by Argentina), and has been in continuous operation since then.

After a coffee break and some refreshments, we had some fun playing 'How Big Is It?'. We got the opportunity to find out how big are the most diverse kinds of things... from a whale's fins to Heidi's height. Team Orca was the winner.

After lunch, Ashley presented the plans for the afternoon during the precap, with some exiting Zodiac cruising ahead of us.

Just before heading outside, we had the GregX Talk session with six of our fellow Expeditioners, who shared some amazing experiences and ideas.

As we started to get closer to our destination, it was time to gear up and get ready. As soon as the *Greg Mortimer* found an anchor spot, we started to lower the Zodiacs to begin our activities.

Once in our destination, Curtiss Bay, the weather was ideal for a Zodiac cruise; no wind, good light, and amazing icebergs.

The activity guides got ready with their groups to enjoy a beautiful kayak and snorkelling afternoon at this stunning location.

Curtiss Bay is on the northern coast of the Antarctic Peninsula, only a few miles south of Trinity Island. It's surrounded by massive glaciers ending in spectacular ice cliffs towards the water. Impressive icebergs were scattered all over the bay, creating the perfect scenario for the cruise.

Air Temp: -4° C

Wind Speed: 22 kts W

Barometer: 1005 hPa

The icing on the cake was to encounter leopard seals resting on the ice, chinstrap penguins porpoising in the water and some lucky ones got to see a fin whale in the distance.

After we all came back on board, the great galley team offered a delicious dinner, as we started to head south to our next destination.





Neko Harbour | Jougla Point | Peltier Channel

DAY 15 | Thursday 1 February 2024

Position at 0700 on 1 Feb

Latitude: 64°48'7" S

Longitude: 062°39'94"W

Course: 117°

Speed: 8 kts

Wind Speed: 10 kts N

Barometer: 1005 hPa

Air Temp: -1° C

What an adventure-packed day in Antarctica!

This morning began at the infamous Neko Harbour, known for its particularly active glacial face. We were sure to keep a safe distance away! Paddlers, kayakers and snorkellers were all eager to get out into the serene landscape we were surrounded by. Setting off into the glassy, calm waters and brash ice as the snow closed in, they all disappeared into the distance.

The adventurous land dwellers were greeted by the charismatic gentoo penguins ashore. By this time the snow had truly set in to stay, creating a magical atmosphere, with giant snowflakes coating the landscape and penguins in yet another layer of snow on this frozen land. Everybody managed to get ashore and enjoy the company (and smell...) of the gentoo colony. What a brilliant way to start the day!

With a four-hour reposition to Port Lockroy, we all climbed aboard to tuck into another amazing lunch from our fantastic crew aboard. The highlight of our reposition being the Neumeyer Channel. The glassy, flat, calm conditions through this narrow passage provided magnificent reflections of the towering mountains above. How could this day get better?!

After transiting the Neumeyer Channel we ended up dropping anchor at Port Lockroy where paddlers, kayakers and snorkellers set out for another adventure exploring the area. Port Lockroy was surrounded by many nesting gentoo penguins literally at their doorstep. Some folks were even lucky enough to spot a Weddell seal perched on some snow. Another special place to paddle, snorkel, kayak or walk amongst the lovely gentoo penguins.

All aboard the ship by 6pm we headed in for our 6.30pm dinner. The day in Antarctica was already so amazing; however, our fearless Expedition Leader, Ashley, had a lot more in store for us on this day...

After getting our well-earned bellyful of dinner, there was no rest for the wicked... by 7.30pm our Expedition Team were already back down collecting Zodiacs and gearing up for the evening plans: a 6-nautical-mile Zodiac transit through the Peltier Channel.

What an experience! We were greeted with feeding humpbacks and, of course, the Hot Chocolate Zodiac delivering good vibes and the hottest hot choccy (and Baileys...) to warm our hearts!

Suffice it to say, Antarctica really pulled it off today and we all have earned our sleep, dreaming of our 4.30am start for the next day full of more fun-packed adventure...





Polar Plunge

DAY 16 | Friday 2 February 2024

















Recess Cove | Graham Passage | Hydrurga Rocks

DAY 16 | Friday 2 February 2024

Position at 1200 on 2 Feb

Latitude: 64°24'5" S

Longitude: 061°37'3"W

Course: 341°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 3 kts SW

Barometer: 997 hPa

Air Temp: 2°C

Although our watches told us that the hour was extraordinarily early, the sky was light and the day beckoned. Our (extra) early morning adventure was nothing short of spectacular as we embarked on a Zodiac cruise amid towering glaciers. The crisp, icy air added an extra layer of magic to the ethereal beauty that surrounded us. The Zodiacs weaved through brash ice, growlers and bergy bits - offering us an up-close view of the breathtaking blue-ice formations and the sheer grandeur of the Antarctic landscape within Recess Cove.

After our second 'coffee machine conga line' of the day, we headed into the dining room for some breakfast feasting, accompanied by the enthusiastic cheer-eliciting spectacle of breaching humpbacks. We were then invited to participate in an invigorating Polar Plunge at the entrance to Graham Passage - a courageous feat attempted by a record number of 47 participants. With adrenaline pumping and hearts pounding, these hardy souls plunged into the frigid waters, emerging with a mix of wide-mouthed grins (or grimaces) and delighted shrieks (or breathless gasps).

As we dried off and warmed up, the day continued to unfold. Humpback whales continued to be a star of the show, prompting frantic scuttling from port to starboard and back again with cameras in hand to marvel at these leviathans of the sea as they cavorted in the waters alongside the ship.

As the ship slowed and anchored just after lunch, we were greeted with a brilliant, sunny sky and the dazzling snowy peaks of Two Hummock Island as a picturesque backdrop. The rocky outcrops of Hydrurga Rocks were to be our playground for the afternoon - home to an abundance of wildlife, including a colony of chinstrap penguins, and a few Weddell and fur seals that were hauled out and resting on its shores. Skuas and kelp gulls performed graceful aerial displays in the sky above us, while the high-pitched trumpeting call of the chinstraps en masse pierced the otherwise serene surrounds.

Once back on board, the ship upped anchor and we set our course northward. The mountainous snowy spine of the peninsula continued to provide an immense and impressive scene as the sun lowered in the sky we shared the tales and adventures of our respective days, and celebrated our new Antarctic memories.



Half Moon Island | Whalers Bay

DAY 17 | Saturday 3 February 2024

Position at 1100 on 3 Feb

Latitude: 62°39'4" S

Longitude: 059°48'5"W

Course: 223°

Speed: 10 kts

Wind Speed: 4 kts NW

Barometer: 1007 hPa

Air Temp: 2° C

What a day! Overnight, we had steamed up the Gerlache Strait to the South Shetland Islands, a volcanic island chain a hundred or so nautical miles north of the Antarctic Peninsula. The morning's excursion at Half Moon Island beckoned – but with 30-knot prevailing winds and gusts up to 35 knots, it was a little too rough for a snorkel or paddle – but a bumpy Zodiac ride across the bay led to a landing site at the base of the Argentinian Camara Station. Here, Antarctica had one more surprise for us: the team had spotted an emperor penguin, high up on a ridgeline.

Emperors are the largest penguin (and bird!) in the world, standing up to one metre tall and usually only found deep in the Weddell Sea, Ross Sea and East Antarctica at higher latitudes, living in rookeries on the sea ice. During the Austral summer – if they don't breed – emperors are typically found out at sea. Our emperor was immature – and had come ashore to moult. We set off for a long walk along the ridgeline to see the emperor penguin, scrambling over the scree slope. Others admired the stunning views over Livingston Island and the chinstraps waddling up and down their highways.

Back on board, it was straight into our disembarkation briefing for the flight to Punta Arenas the following day, lunch and a quick siesta, before Deception Island. Located within the caldera of an active volcano, we navigated through the narrow Bellows and were greeted by a black, volcanic beach.

Whalers Bay is a haunting reminder of the human history of the South Shetlands and the Peninsula. In 1820, Nathaniel Palmer claimed that he saw the Antarctic continent for the first time in history through Neptune's Window; while it later turned into a major commercial operation for pelagic whaling in the first half of the 20th century. Following a volcanic eruption in the late 1960s, both the British base and what remained of the whaling operation were abandoned – leaving behind the remains of an aircraft hangar used to resupply British bases further down the Peninsula and the launch site of several Antarctic aerial expeditions, including Hubert Wilkins' first flight in Antarctica.

We climbed to the top of Neptune's Window while some also completed the 8-kilometre circuit to the top of Ronald Hill to overlook the caldera.

Back on board, it was time for the Captain's Farewell Dinner. We toasted a successful voyage.



Frei Station | King George Island

DAY 18 | Sunday 4 February 2024

Position at 1000 on 4 Feb

Latitude: 62°14'5" S

Longitude: 058°49'2" W

Course: 145°

Speed: 11 kts

Wind Speed: 5 kts SW

Barometer: 1008 hPa

Air Temp: 1° C

Disembarkation day at Frei Station, King George Island

The entire Aurora Team thank you for joining us on this adventure, and we hope to see you on the high seas again!



Kayaking Log

Kayak Guides: Wes McNeil, Gabe Vink Wackernagel, Gabby Bruce, Gus Wimberger and Martin Rickard

Number of Paddlers: 20

Total Paddle Outings: 11

Total Distance Paddled: 51.3 km

Paddlers:			
Andrew Bennett	Kean Booker	Annie Clark	Tami Brock
Jane Matthew	Gerard Sutton	Andy LeMessurier	Paul Westcott
Louise Hood	Gina Sutton	Doug Martyn	Lisa Kenyon
Alastair Hood	John Wilson	Ken Hillan	
Erin Booker	Dara Kretschmer	Duncan Ian Robertson	
	Bill Buchanan-Reeks	Ellen Urbani	

24/1/24, AM: Prion Island. Distance: 2.5 km

This morning we began our sea kayaking adventure near the swelly reefs of Prion Island. After towing away from the ship with blue sky, drizzle and cloud rolled over. We hopped out of the Zodiacs and into our kayaks for the first time. After a short briefing on the water, we paddled to the beach of Prion Island, where we were greeted by giant petrels, fur seals, elephant seals, gentoo penguins and king penguins. A cacophony of sounds emanated from the beach and the stench of hundreds of birds and seals did not go unnoticed. What a way to begin our adventure at the end of the world!

25/1/24, AM: Godthul. Distance: 4.8 km

Our next adventure on the water began directly off the stern of the ship on a calm morning. Taking in the glorious beauty of the bay and its steep, rocky peaks painted with curling and bending sedimentary strata, we paddled to a cove punctuated by the loud cries of fur seals. We made our way around the cliffy shores of the bay, paddles grabbed by the thick kelp forests underneath. Along the way we spotted king penguins, gentoo penguins, pipits, giant petrels, and elephant seals. Near the end of the bay was an idyllic waterfall with a backdrop of green mosses and a large, beached berg nearby. In the calm South Georgian sunshine, we all soaked in the moment during this unforgettable adventure.

25/1/24, PM: East Cumberland Bay East to Sandebugten. Distance: 5.2 km

At 5.15pm we embarked on our coastal paddle along the shore of East Cumberland Bay. The weather was spectacular, with day turning to dusk. To our left the sun lit up the tussock landscape with a golden glow. To our right the icy landscape of Mt Paget, South Georgia's highest peak with glaciers calving their way to sea, was a sight to remember. Six keen folks kayaked into the sunset with the company of wildlife and spectacular icebergs to navigate.

26/1/24, PM: Fortuna Bay. Distance: 6.8 km

As the morning sun faded behind the overcast afternoon, we towed our kayaks to the northwest corner of Fortuna Bay. We got in our kayaks and tucked behind sheets of kelp to find protection from the swell. We followed the coastline, finding glaciers, moraines, reefs and rocky caves. Partway through the paddle, and with the assistance with the wildlife, we all sang a birthday song for Gina! As we continued down the beach, we paddled with impressive rafts of king penguins just outside of the surf. We dashed across the back of the bay to spot a unique bergy bit before towing back to the ship.

27/1/24, AM: St. Andrews Bay. Distance: 4.2 km

Anchored in St. Andrews Bay, some Expedition Team members exclaimed that the sea was as calm as they had ever experienced there. We launched our kayaks off the stern of the ship and paddled to the nearest point, which was covered with bull kelp and penguins. Home to the world's largest king penguin colony, we paddled along the surfy shores of St. Andrews Bay, making sure to stop and bob in shock and awe at the sheer density of birds as far as our eyes could see. After paddling the whole shore and the reaches of the Buxton, Heaney and Cook glaciers, we returned to the ship via Zodiac.

27/1/24, PM: Larsen Harbour. Distance: 3.7 km

After our remarkable paddle next to the largest king penguin colony in the world, we headed to Larsen Harbour, a sheltered arm off Drygalski Fjord. Looking out across the fjord we were amazed with the beautiful oasis we stumbled upon. The flat conditions allowed us to launch from the marina and set off on our kayak excursion. We were able to explore more forests of kelp and admire the steep cliffs of the fjords. The sun was shining on us, and the water was like glass as we glided over and enjoyed the tranquillity of our unexpectedly calm conditions. We were lucky enough to spot a few Weddell seals, which are part of the northernmost breeding colony of these species! The kayak in Larsen Harbour was one to remember and an epic way to send off our amazing time in South Georgia.

31/1/24, AM: Curtiss Bay. Distance: 6.1 km

We spent a long four days at sea, but boy was the prize worth the wait. We pulled into Curtiss Bay in the afternoon and were immediately surrounded by ice and rock of all shapes and sizes. Our first paddle in Antarctica was like paddling through an ice museum, with brash ice, growlers, bergy bits and icebergs all around us. At one point we spotted our first penguin in Antarctica, hanging out on some of the ice. The faces of the glaciers snaked through the mountains and flowed straight into the bay, where we could hear evidence of their movement. Euphoric to be adventuring off the ship once again, we reluctantly got back into the Zodiacs to return to the ship.

2/1/24, AM: Neko Harbour. Distance: 4.2 km

This morning we had a paddle through brash ice into the fjord. The team all kept together and paddled at a good pace throughout the morning. At several points during the morning, we stopped to discuss ice conditions and other safety conditions we needed to consider, such as visibility and distance from active glacial faces in our kayaks. Then we used our imaginations and turned to face non-existent waves that could appear if the glacier were to calve near us. As the snow settled upon the water, it created a thick slurry of slush since the sea water was

not warm enough to fully melt it upon landing. We hopped back in the Zodiacs, changed into our Muck Boots onboard and cruised to shore to make a continental landing, woo! It was a special morning to kayak amongst ice, snow and then to walk amongst the gentoo penguins on the continent of ice.

31/1/24, PM: Jougla Point. Distance: 5.3 km

Our afternoon outing began off the shores of Port Lockroy. With the Fief Mountains of the Peltier Channel towering behind us, we paddled among rocky outcrops with gentoo colonies covering most of the rocks. Their presence was not only demonstrated through their vocal calls, but through the notable stink that filled the nose when downwind of the colony. We all made an on-water decision to nix a landing to opt for a longer paddle as we paddled out into the mouth of the Peltier Channel. The winds began to pick up as we crossed the mouth, so we allowed the winds to assist our paddling. After sailing downwind towards a gorgeous and massive iceberg, we packed up and cruised back to the ship.

2/2/24, AM: Recess Cove. Distance: 4.4 km

We woke up at the crack of dawn for our earliest outing and paddle of the trip. By 6am we were loaded up in Zodiacs and cruising towards shag-covered rocks near Recess Cove. The calm morning light filtered through the overcast morning as we paddled around the growlers in the brash ice. We spotted many shags, some fur seals, and a few Weddell seals as well. Near the end, we had a moment of silence from engines and machinery, although somewhat interrupted by nearby troublemakers the kelp gulls. As we paddled through the intertidal shallows, we spotted a lone Adélie penguin before making our way back to the ship for a post-kayak breakfast.

2/2/24, PM: Hydrurga Rocks. Distance: 4.1 km

Breezy winds and a crystal-clear blue sky greeted us at Hydrurga Rocks, a small collection of partially snow-covered islands with chinstrap colonies on them. We towed into the lee of one of the islands and started our kayaking outing. After being given the option to do a landing as well, we all decided to stay out on the water for as long as possible. We kayaked around the island as we spent time at the chinstrap penguin and shag colonies. Outside of the protected channels and bays, we bobbed and surfed in the light swell. To our west, Two Hummock Island's glacial cover sparkled in the antarctic summer sun's embrace. At the end, Gabe showcased his roll and gave us a wonderful history of kayaking. For our last outing of the trip, we had an incredible experience with the bluest of blues of the sky, water and ice.





Paddling Log

Guides: Wes McNeil, Gabe Vink Wackernagel, Gabby Bruce, Martin Rickard and Gus Wimberger

Number of Paddlers: 8

Total Outings: 5

Total Distance Paddled: 15.3 km

Paddlers:

Robin Irwin

Carol Irwin

Michael Kanovsky

Donna Kanovsky

David Warwick-Smith

Jodie Warwick-Smith

Janice Blocka

Peter Barnes

31/01/2024: Curtiss Bay - Bransfield Strait. Distance: 4.7km

The Antarctic Peninsula put on perfect paddling conditions for our enthusiastic group. Paddlers all the way from Canada and Australia finally took their first strokes on the calm, icy waters of Curtiss Bay. The light winds dropped completely and clouds lifted, allowing for spectacular views of the mountainous landscapes of the northern Antarctic Peninsula. Our small pod of five kayaks led by Gabe navigated through light brash ice, where by listening closely we heard the melting of thousand-year-old air bubbles popping. We took in the beauty of iceberg sculptures of all shapes, sizes and from opaque whites to deep transparent blues. We watched antarctic cormorants feed their fluffy brown chicks and a Weddell seal lazing on an ice floe. What an amazing paddle and everybody wanted to continue, but after 4.75 kilometres we reluctantly climbed back into the Zodiac with Gus and returned buzzing with energy to the ship to be the last ones back aboard.

1/02/2024: Neko Harbour - Antarctic Peninsula. Distance: 3.5km

Glaciated mountains surrounding us; clouds looming around the steep peaks of Neko Harbour. Gabe drove the Zodiac with kayaks in tow to a place where we shared the fiord only with gentoo penguins. Gus was soon guiding the team through brash ice and sharing his knowledge about this wintry world. As we paddled along it began to snow. Flakes danced by settling on our kayaks and turning the sea to slush. The team paddled a total of 3.5 kilometres, then we changed footwear and landed on the Antarctic continent, surrounded by penguins.

1/02/2024: Jougla Point - Port Lockroy. Distance: 2.8km

Our afternoon outing began with landing at Jougla Point. We observed gentoos doing penguin business. Walking among whale vertebrates was a stark reminder of the whaling days of the early 1900s. A little later we were paddling with Martin along the coastline and around the islands of the sheltered Port Lockroy. Was wonderful to observe penguins returning from sea, walking up to the colony to feed their chicks. With deteriorating weather we returned to comforts of the *Greg Mortimer*.

2/02/2024: Recess Cove - Gerlache Strait. Distance: 2km

The team geared up in drysuits at 5.45am. The calm waters of Recess Cove awaited us. We began our paddle through popping brash ice. Wes in lead, guided us to a small island full of life an antarctic shag colony, Weddell seal and even an Adélie penguin exploring waters further north than normal. Around Ice bergs with a beautiful backdrop of the glaciated mountains. Wes shared his passion of the transparent black ice, observing light twinkle through thousand-year-old ice. We paddled through shallow bays, where we could see the world below the surface. Eventually it was time to head back to the ship for breakfast.

2/02/2024: Hydrurga Rocks - Two Hummock Island. Distance: 2.3km

After exploring the chinstrap colony of Hydrurga Rocks, we hopped into our kayaks to explore the area from the water. The afternoon sunshine was glorious as we paddled ourselves in the lee of the wind. Two Hummock Island's glaciers towered to our west and sparkled in the sunlight. We paddled into a protected little channel and spent time with fur seals, Weddell seals and a lone gentoo penguin. In another protected bay we watched chinstraps in a colony as they hopped, napped and gave each other some love. The shag chicks nearby were fluffy and cute as well. Outside of the protected bay, we surfed through the swell until we found a calmer area where we were picked up to head back to the ship. It was a magical way to end our paddling adventure in Antarctica.





Snorkelling Log

Snorkelling Guides: Ania Baranek, Richard Devanney

Number of Snorkellers: 4

Total Outings: 7

Snorkellers:

Ali Ettediah

Simon Staddon

Cheryl Staddon

Carol Goss

25/01/2024, AM: Godthul – Cobblers Cove

Third time's the charm! After two not-so-stellar attempts at snorkelling in South Georgia, we finally found the perfect spot: a sheltered bay with glassy water, zero wind, and sunshine that could melt a penguin's popsicle. Our ship, nestled in the picturesque Godthul Bay on the north-east coast of South Georgia, was surrounded with dramatic mountains looming in the distance.

Our snorkel guides, Ania and Rich, zipped off in a Zodiac, leading the way to a hidden cove called Cobblers. On the way, we marvelled at a majestic iceberg floating at the bay's entrance, its crystal-clear sides shimmering in the sun. Rich expertly navigated the underwater kelp forest until we reached our snorkelling site.

Time to gear up! Ania, our snorkelling leader, briefed us on the buddy system and safety procedures. We plunged into the icy embrace of the water, feeling our dry suits transform us into sleek, aquatic superheroes. The next half-hour was a whirlwind of fin kicks, buoyancy checks, and playful chases with curious seal pups.

By the time we surfaced, grins plastered across our faces, we were still warm enough to do a pleasant Zodiac cruise on our way back to the ship. Exploring the hidden nooks of Godthul Bay, we knew this was just the beginning. It was amazing! We couldn't have asked for a better introduction!

25/01/2024 PM: Sandebugten, South Georgia

In the evening, we ventured out for a pre-sunset snorkel at Sandebugten. This was the final leg for the hikers who did the extended hike from Godthul, and our ship repositions to pick them up. The evening was much cooler than our warm afternoon in Cobblers Cove and it was only Ali who decided to join this snorkel session, but soon he was joined by Aurora's own five Expedition Team guides, who were very excited about snorkelling in Antarctica for the first time! We enjoyed snorkelling in front of some rocks on the beach, which was full of inquisitive fur seals. We kept our distance as they swam around in front of us. Four large skuas sat on the surface nearby, allowing us to observe them for a long time. The scenery opposite the beach was incredible, with clouds brooding over the mountains in dramatic fashion.

27/01/2024, AM: St Andrews, South Georgia

This morning, we approached St Andrews Bay, where the largest colony of king penguins in the world can be seen: 150,000 breeding pairs of king penguins were counted in 2021! This part of South Georgia is notorious for big swell, windswept beaches and difficult surf conditions to navigate Zodiacs in, but today, the water was glass-like still, offering perfect conditions to snorkel. We went on a short Zodiac cruise along the beach (it's 4 kilometres long!) to admire the king penguins first, scouting for a perfect spot to drop in the water. The water was milky blue, stained with the silica and sediments running into the ocean from the creeks from the nearby glaciers where the penguins moult, but that didn't stop us from jumping in. Even though there was no visibility in the water itself, it was absolutely extraordinary to watch (and listen to!) the king penguins from a close distance. Being in the water together with these fantastic creatures is something we will not forget easily! Ali took an amazing photo of the penguins getting into the water from a rocky shelf. After this outing, we called our group 'the aquatic meercats', as we spent more time standing in the shallow waters admiring the wildlife around us, rather than snorkelling. So now, we're looking forward to doing some actual polar swimming in the Peninsula!

27/01/2024, PM: Curtiss Bay (Peninsula)

It was a cold afternoon that welcomed us in Antarctica. We set off for a short Zodiac cruise with sunny skies and calm seas. Curtiss Bay was a perfect introduction to our polar adventures; we were surrounded by icebergs of all shapes and sizes as we slowly approached the shoreline. We found our way into a narrow strait, one side of which houses a small colony of shags. This was a perfect spot to get into the water for the snorkelling. The rocks underwater were very interesting, and there were some limpets scattered in the shallowest parts. A large crabeater seal was resting on the rocks, and seemed completely indifferent to us as we explored the waters within the strait. We snorkelled for approximately 20 minutes before heading back to the ship. A fantastic afternoon!

01/02/2024, AM: Neko Harbour

As we looked out of the window on this early morning, we realised we truly are in Antarctica: it was ice cold and snowing. Only the brave Ali decided to join our snorkel outing today, but soon he was joined by one of the Expedition Team, Liz Pope, who wanted to go snorkelling in Antarctica for many years. Susanne, Ali's wife, also kept us company on our private boat. First, we took our Zodiac to the Neko Harbour landing site, so that Ali and Suzanne could see this fantastic place, one of the most sought-after in all Peninsula. In the meantime, Ania, Rich and Liz went scouting, and chose the nearby beach for our snorkelling session that day. There were lots of gentoo penguins playing around. Liz and Ali got in the icy water, and they stayed there surprisingly long – it was an impressive 24-minute snorkel. Liz was lucky to see some penguins jumping in the water. We were so happy to make her wish come true!

01/02/2024, PM: Jougla Point

We landed at Jougla Point, close to Port Lockroy's British Base A, and spent some time on land. There is a large gentoo colony that we were able to walk around, which also has a lot of whale bones lying on the rocks. It's quite a loud place with all the gentoo calls, and the smell of guano was quite overpowering! Today, it was only Cheryl,

who ventured out to snorkel, but soon she was joined by our lead guide, Ania. We snorkelled very close to the landing spot. The water was very clear and there were a lot of limpets on the seabed. We had a couple of gentoos swimming close to us in the water as they went ashore or back out to sea. Ania and Cheryl took a fantastic photo resting on a small piece of ice, only a couple of cocktails were missing to make this a polar-perfect experience! It was a very relaxing snorkel in great conditions. The water temperature was approximately 2 degrees Celsius.

02/02/2024, PM: Hydrurga Rocks

Hydrurga means leopard seal in Latin, but contrary to the suggestive name, these fierce animals are rarely seen in the area. We were spoilt with yet another sunny afternoon as we headed away from the ship and landed close to a chinstrap penguin rookery. We spent approximately 40 minutes walking on the island before getting back in the Zodiac for a short cruise. We sat offshore and watched some fur seals on the rocks, large males, before they entered the water to feed. On the way to the snorkel site we saw a Weddell seal basking in the rocks. The snorkel site was a sheltered bay with a blue-eyed shags colony. It was enclosed by high-sided walls, on which large numbers of chinstrap penguins resided. We spent over 30 minutes snorkelling in the calm conditions, enjoying the underwater kelp and lying on our backs watching the penguins. A very memorable experience.





Species

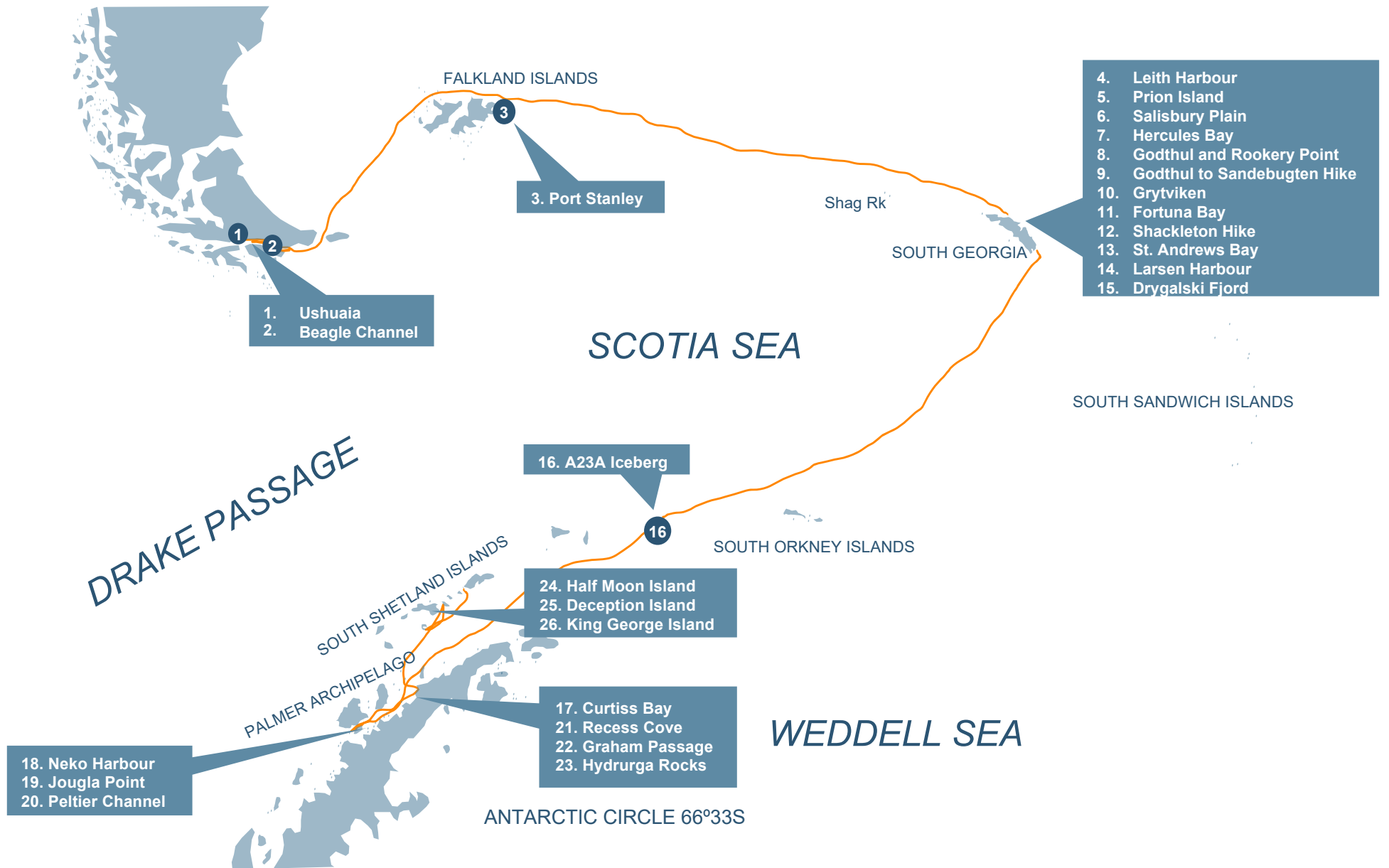
19 January - 3 February 2024

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 1 2 3

Species	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3
Subantarctic Shearwater					●											
Wilson's Storm-Petrel		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel				●	●	●										
Grey-backed Storm-Petrel		●														
White-bellied Storm-Petrel				●												
Common Diving-Petrel			●													
Imperial Cormorant		●	●													
Antarctic Cormorant														●	●	●
South Georgia Cormorant						●	●	●	●	●						
Snowy Sheathbill						●	●	●	●	●					●	●
Chilean Skua		●														
Brown Skua		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●				●	●	●
Dolphin Gull		●														
Kelp Gull		●				●	●	●	●	●					●	●
Antarctic Tern						●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●
South American Tern		●	●													
South Georgia Pipit							●	●	●	●						
Antarctic Fur Seal						●	●	●	●	●	●		●			●
Leopard Seal														●		●
Weddell Seal										●				●	●	
Crabeater Seal														●		
Southern Elephant Seal						●	●	●	●	●						●
Commerson's Dolphin			●													
Dusky Dolphin		●	●													
Peale's Dolphin			●													
Hourglass Dolphin					●											
Killer Whale (Orca)						●									●	
Antarctic Minke Whale														●		
Blue Whale						●										
Fin Whale						●						●	●			
Sei Whale		●	●													
Humpback Whale			●			●	●	●		●	●			●	●	●

South Georgia & Antarctic Odyssey

18 Jan - 4 Feb 2024





Expeditioners:

Gary Ahern	Annie Clark	Raymond Hogan	Hannah Lee	Betty Pow	Gerri Sticklan
Connie Ahern	Maria da Costa	Louise Hood	Andrew LeMessurier	Charles Pow	Gerard Sutton
Diane Alexander	Richard Dauphine	Alastair Hood	Ming Li	Tami Prock	Gina Sutton
Cheryl Alexander	Susan Dauphine	Michael Hooton	Doug Martyn	Matthew Robertson	Moira Taylor
Mindy Applegate	Downie Jocelyn	Carol Irwin	Trish Martyn	Duncan Robertson	Andrea Tofanelli
Fredric Armstrong	Robert Dunbar	Robin Irwin	Jane Matthew	Wesley Rosenblum	Amy Trewwhitt
Patricia Armstrong	Robyn Dunbar	Jones Cris	Lon Mc Eachern	Christine Sadler	Ellen Urbani
Peter Barnes	Ali Ettihadieh	Michael Kanovsky	Jr Lee Mc Eachern	Kelsey Simmons	Nancy Vanbeselaere
Francoise Baylis	Flack David	Donna Kanovsky	Jennifer Mc Nulty	Terry Scharg	Douglas Vanbeselaere
Carol Bell	Michael French	Dee Keating	Moira McKinley	Gary Scharg	Caroline Varley
Andrew Bennett	Patricia French	Brian Keating	Donald McKinley	Susan Schoneck	Adrienne Vukovic
Timothy Blaine	Kathleen Friedrich	Penny Kendall	Lawrence Morton	Ryan Shelhamer	Jodie Warwick-Smith
Janice Blocka	Lavier Gomes	Howard Kent	Suzanne Myatt	Jerry Sison	David Warwick-Smith
Kean Booker	Carol Goss	Lisa Kenyon	Maren Nelson	Barbara Slavin	Paul Westcott
Erin Booker	Dave Green	Claudia King	John Neville	William Slavin	Julie Westcott
Phillip Bower	Karen Hagedorn	Rebecca King	Debby Neville	Wendy Sorial	Sharon Williamson
Robert Breech	Sue Hands	Deborah King	Masao Okada	Rami Sorial	John Wilson
Breech Mai	Charles Hardin	Doug King	Michelle Otake	Cheryl Staddon	Joan Wong
Bill Buchanan-Reeks	Kathryn Hardin	Dieter Koenig	Mark Pearson	Simon Staddon	John Yoder
Robert Cammell	Stacey Harris	Dara Kretschmer	Sue Pearson	Marla Stark	
Jennifer Cammell	Lisa Hepps	Taylor Lawrence	Margaret Peck	John Sticklan	
Chitty Daniel	Kenneth Hillan	Thanh-Nhat Le	Suzanne Peeling	Sophia Sticklan	



Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: Ashley Perrin

Assistant Expedition Leader: Elena Wimberger

Onboard Expedition Manager: Kerry Lorimer

Historian: Alasdair McGregor

Marine Biologist: Lea McQuillian

Naturalist / Citizen Science Coordinator: Heidi Krajewsky

Geologist: Melina Pelzmajer

Lead Sea Kayak Guide: Wes McNeil

Senior Sea Kayak Guide: Gabriel Vink Wackernagel

Sea Kayak Guide: Martin Rickard

Sea Kayak Guide: Gabby Bruce

Sea Kayak Guide: Gus Wimberger

Lead Snorkel Guide: Ania Baranek

Snorkel Guide: Richard Devanney

Expedition Guide: Jack Alscher

Expedition Guide: Stephen Anstee

Expedition Guide: Liz Pope

Expedition Medic: John Barry

Photography Guide: Grant Thomas

Zodiac Manager: Nacho Marino

Zodiac Driver: Mati Jofre

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ana Prado Pardo

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Oleg Kapko

Chief Officer: Andrey Zakalashnyuk

Safety Officer: Sergeii Voina

Bosun: Francis Marvin Linga

Third Officer: Goncalo Alexandre Saraiva Aniceto Costa

Ship Doctor: Anzor Chomakhidze

Support Doctor: Julio Andres

Chief Engineer: Sergiy Melynk

Hotel Director: Pascal Joubin

Chief Purser: Pia Blanca Bangug

Executive Chef: Edgar Mangalinao

Head Waiter: Jemuel Alcantara

IT Officer: Ihor Yesmienieiev

Receptionist: Ana Gabriela Fernandez

Receptionist: Jonathan Valdez

Head Stateroom: Florente Lusomg

Able Seaman: Dan Well Danico

Able Seaman: Jufri Mujahid

Able Seaman: Nikola Georgiev

Able Seaman: Mark Christian Torero

Able Seaman: Joel Noble

Able Seaman: Roberto Ixtan Mejia

Deck Cadet: Giuseppe Guidice

Photography thanks to:

Grant Thomas

