

Antarctica – First Journey

The Traveller's Resource Guide

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First Edition



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Introduction:

“Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised”.

(Apsley Cherry-Garrard in “The Worst Journey in the World”.)

Everything you ever wanted to know...

The word “Arctic” is derived from the Greek word for “bear”, which is “arktos”. Early explorers and scientists, with limited knowledge, presumed that Antarctica must be the anti-Arctic and so arose the name “Antarctica” – simple!

Ice Cold Facts

Antarctica - Did you know?

- ▶ 99.6% covered by ice
- ▶ Ice is 4776 metres (15,522 ft) thick at its deepest point
- ▶ Highest winds ever recorded were 327 km/hr (196 mph) at Dumont d’Urville station (France) in July 1972
- ▶ Highest point is Vinson Massif at 4987 metres (16,200 ft)
- ▶ Range of Pack Ice is 4-22 million km² (1.56-8.5 million mi²)
- ▶ Approximately 70% of all the freshwater in the world resides as ice in the Antarctic
- ▶ There are no permanent residents in Antarctica

CHAPTER 1

GETTING READY

– BEFORE YOU GO

Wow! You're almost ready to go. What an adventure awaits you! You've thought about everything and now, as you prepare to finalize your packing, you are fearful that it won't fit in your luggage, that it will be too heavy for the plane and worse still that you will forget a key item.

It's difficult planning a trip in an area where few have been or where you can't simply ask your friends what to take, as most will never have been there. Few will even have thought about going! Your own life experience will be of little help as most people generally have a misconception about Antarctica – it's cold – very cold! Well, that's true to a degree, but not accurate. In Chapter 3, you will learn more about the weather, but suffice to say that there will be some blustery days, and there will also be some amazingly beautiful and warm sunny days. You must anticipate both when planning your wardrobe and your trip. Some of what follows in this chapter will be familiar to seasoned travellers, but please bear with me, as a refresher is always good - and besides some folks are new to travelling and its pitfalls!

To complicate it a bit, if you are stopping at a tropical destination, on the way there or on your return, you must add several items that will be of little value in the colder environs, but essential in the warmer ones.

“An Antarctic expedition is the worst way to have the best time of your life.”

(Apsley Cherry Garrard in “The Worst Journey in the World”)

CHAPTER 2 BEING HEALTHY, STAYING WELL AND AVOIDING INJURY

Hmmm, let's see... you've thought of everything and now you're ready to go... or are you? Keeping healthy is key to the enjoyment of your holiday and, while common sense may keep you from falling overboard, voyaging in Polar Regions will expose you to unexpected challenges. There may be stormy seas, slippery steel decks and shipboard obstacles. Narrow steep stairs with icy railings, a suddenly lurching ship, heavy doors or passengers eager to see wildlife will challenge your concentration and well being. Zodiac cruises, shore expeditions, grumpy seals and ill co-passengers may create opportunities for disaster. Read on to find out how you can be more aware of potential health problems and how you can stay healthy.



Typical infirmary on small ship

Everything you ever wanted to know...

What the heck is a bivi bag?

There are many types of sleeping bags out there, from the traditional fleece and down-lined ones, that sleep one or two (great for car camping but not backpacking), to mummy bags that hug your shape (good for cold weather travel) to a bivi bag. The latter is a lightweight shell that is water repellent and fits you like a glove. It is not lined and serves only to keep wind and water away from you. Think of it as a banana skin that protects you and your clothing from the elements.

Occasionally, you may choose to sit down to rest or observe wildlife, while out on the ice. If you make this choice, face away from the wind, select a sunny spot, keep your hat and gloves on and sit on your backpack (if you have one) but, at all costs, try to avoid sitting directly on snow or ice if possible.



CHAPTER 3

A LAND OF ICE AND SNOW

You are about to enter a landscape that is chromatically monotonous – shades of white, blue, grey and black will dominate your view as you sail the Polar Regions. It's not just about "ice and snow", however – that's way too simple! You will learn, as you travel, about different types of ice and see first-hand – weather at its best... and its worst. Whether you like it or not, weather will be your focus for many days to come. "How can it be this warm here?" "The sun is amazing!" "Whoa, look at the approaching storm!" "I'm cold, no hot!" You will see and experience it all...

To best experience this adventure, you must learn some of the weather and climate terminology. So here goes:

Advection Fog: When warm moist air (i.e. from South America) is transported over colder surfaces (i.e. ice and snow), the lower levels of the warm air are rapidly cooled and a blanket of fog is formed. This may be several hundred metres thick and cover large areas and is the most common type of fog you will encounter in the Antarctic.

Antarctic Circumpolar and Antarctic Coastal Currents: The interaction between the Antarctic Circumpolar Current (which moves clockwise) and the Antarctic Coastal Current (which lies off shore and moves counterclockwise) affects nutrient transfer and world climate.

“I find the greatest thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as is which direction we are moving. To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it, but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor”

(Oliver Wendell Holmes)

Crossing the Scotia Sea



Ice Cold Facts

*Will we see the Aurora Australis
while we're down there?*

Well, it's highly unlikely as these Southern Lights are visible only against night skies. Chances are it will be dark for only a brief period each night as you head south from Ushuaia. These lights are most frequently seen during the long dark Antarctic nights, not on summer eves.

Darn - what about the Southern Cross?

Sadly, same answer – look for it at night only ... maybe you'll get lucky and catch a glimpse of it near the horizon on a dark night ... maybe!