

We left on Saturday, January 15, 2005, and flew to Dallas Texas and then to Santiago, Chile. We stayed in Santiago for two days and then flew to Ushria, the southernmost city in the world, located at the southern tip of South America in Argentina. Total flying time was approximately 20 hours.

We then toured the Tierra del Fuego National Park and saw the southern terminus of the Pan-American Highway and the southern end of the Andes Mountain chain.

Later that afternoon we boarded the MS Endeavor, a 295 foot long ship with a reinforced hull that would go through ice four to six feet thick. We sailed down the Beagle Channel (named for the ship Charles Darwin was sailing on) into the Drake Passage and around Cape Horn to the Antarctic Peninsula. The 750 miles between Cape Horn and Antarctica are some of the roughest waters in the world.

Upon arriving in Antarctica we landed two to three times per day in zodiacs including our first landing at Aitcho Island, part of the southern Shetland Islands. We walked the island with one of six to eight naturalists on board the ship and saw numerous penguins, fur seals, Weddell seals, and elephant seals. We then sailed across the northern end of the Antarctic Peninsula into the Weddell Sea where Ernest Shackleton's and Nordenskjold's ships were entrapped in the ice and crushed. We stopped at Paulet Island and explored Nordenskjold's old hut. We also saw 100,000 pairs of three types of penguins (the Gintoo, Shin Strap, and Adelle).

We sailed south into the Weddell Sea and saw numerous icebergs to include two triangular tabular bergs three miles on a side which were part of the Larson ice shelf which had broken up. The ship went through the center of two of the bergs which were approximately 130 to 140 feet in height. The next morning we landed on an ice flow and were able for a short time to walk around being careful to avoid cracks, but were recalled to the ship as an iceberg and packed ice began coming close to the stern of the ship. We then turned north having come close to setting a cruise ship record for the farthest south in the Weddell Sea.

On our way back north we encountered a mother and calf Humpback whales who put on quite a show of flipping and rolling very close to the ship. Our next stop was Brown Bluff on the north tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, a 2,500 foot tall cliff. The naturalist yelled at Causseaux for climbing up a crevasse glacier to get a better photograph of an ice cliff. Holum did not participate in the climb and advised against it.

Our next stop was Deception Island a caldera of an ancient volcano. We stopped at an abandoned Norwegian whaling station and climbed to a gap in the volcanic wall known as Neptune's Gulch. The volcanic wall is being pulled apart by 2.5 centimeters per year so the gap may become much deeper soon. We toured the old whaling station and saw water boats which took fresh water to the whaling.

boats. Whale bones, a whaling cemetery, and the area of late 1960s eruption of a portion of the volcano. The ice was enclosed and covered with approximately three to four feet of ash.

The next day we encountered a family of seven Orcas, seal eating whales. The Orcas operated around the ice and had a gray and white covering and not black as around here.

We stopped at Devil's Island and Causseaux climbed an 800 foot high peak next to the water. We then went through the Lemaire Channel one of the most impressive, spectacular places in the world. The channel one mile wide is abutted by huge cliffs and glaciers on both sides with substantial ice in the channel. Unfortunately it snowed as we were going through the channel and we did not get to see the tops of the peaks. The larger cruise ship had to turn around in the channel due to the ice. However, we plowed onto Petermann Island an Oceanites research station involved in counting wildlife in the peninsula area. We carried two Oceanites staff on board of the ship and swamped them with two on Petermann Island. We had hoped to land on the island, but ice conditions prevented us from doing so. We also saw the Santa Maria, a small 30 to 40 foot sailing ship with six aboard near the Lemaire Channel. We later showed up an abandoned Argentine research station and were flying motorized hang gliders.

We went kayaking three different occasions around island, cliffs, and around ice bergs. The highlight of the kayaking was several times observing five to six penguins in a row heading directly at the kayak. We also saw a leopard seal, a viscous predator catching, killing, and eating penguins. This predator slams the penguin from side to side so hard that it separates the hide from the rest of the body.

We stopped at Palmer Station, a United States research station, and had a special tour and presentation because of parents of the station director were on board. We also stopped at Port Lockroy, a British research station with a post office and the only opportunity to obtain an Antarctic postmark. The post cards arrived a couple months after we mailed them. Toward the end of the trip we saw some phenomenal ice bergs and a Humpback whale laid around the boat four about 45 minutes sticking its head up to look us over approximately two feet from the side.

We then returned home across the Drake Passage and had more fun eating meals with dishes sliding all over the place. The dining room tables were bolted to the floor and the chairs chained to the floor.

The temperatures range from the mid 20s to mid 30s and a waterproof parka with fleece insert was included with the tour. We had to purchase knee high waterproof boots because on all zodiac landings we jumped in water approximately one foot deep to get onto shore. The food was excellent.

The boat also had large lounge/seating area where naturalist and historians made one or more presentations per day. A library on the top deck had numerous books on Antarctica and other subjects and was a nice place to watch the scenery during inclement weather. We had virtually full run of the ship to include the area where they ran the boat and also to the very tip of the bow of the ship. The cabins were very small and Causseaux's measured 80 square feet and Holum's 134 square feet. The twin bed was bolted to the wall and the desk bolted to the floor. The room had a porthole, but upon entry into the Drake Passage melted was bolted to the exterior.

The accommodations while not luxurious were comfortable. Those persons interested in an up close and personal experience with wildlife (a leopard seal hit one of the zodiacs), scenery, and exploration in a hands on experience should consider this cruise. Those who want a luxury cruise, view, scenery, and wildlife from a warm, comfortable distance should not. Lynn Blad Expeditions has teamed with National Geographic and now conducts National Geographic tours to the Galapagos, Central America, etc. Contact either Ev or Steve regarding information on the cruise. The 2006 cruises are probably already sold out. Reservations need to be made approximately one year in advance.