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The Antarctic Peninsula is an excellent introduction to Antarctica and its wildlife, and is the most popular trip to the Ice.

Cruises vary, but generally, starting from Ushuaia, Argentina, your ship crosses the Drake Passage. The duration of the crossing depends on vessel size and the weather – from as little as 1½ days, to as long as three or four days.

You might make your first landing at one of the South Shetland Islands. Popular stops include Deception Island, an active volcano with a hidden ‘amphitheater’, which is home to the largest chinstrap rookery in the Peninsula region, and Livingston Island, with its penguins and wallowing elephant seals.

Next, you’ll steam down to the Peninsula. You may take a Zodiac cruise in aptly named Paradise Harbor or along the rumbling glaciers above Neko Harbor, and head to the museum at Port Lockroy.

Homeward bound, keep an eye out for a glimpse of the fabled headland at Cape Horn off port side.
The Peninsula, South Georgia & the Falkland Islands

This trip includes the popular Peninsula region, home to loads of amazing wildlife and scenery, as well as stunning, historical South Georgia, with its Shackleton connections and huge concentrations of king penguins and fur seals. You may also visit the lonely South Orkneys, pass by Shag Rocks, and spend a few days in the fascinating Falkland Islands.

This route is increasingly popular, despite the greater amount of time it requires at sea. Departing from Ushuaia, Argentina, you may either head straight to the Peninsula and on to South Georgia (which has the advantage of following the prevailing westerly winds), or the route may be done in reverse (which means going against the westerlies, with often heavy head seas). Here, we’ll go with the flow: head south across the Drake Passage, stop in the South Shetland Islands, and then head on to visit the Antarctic Peninsula; see the Antarctic Peninsula itinerary opposite.

After leaving the Peninsula, head east (with following seas, resulting in a faster and more comfortable trip) to the South Orkney Islands, home of early sealers, whalers and bases – provided there’s time and the weather cooperates. Next, cruise past the lonely, wave-thrashed Shag Rocks while looking for their eponymous bird life and occasional groups of whales feeding in the krill-rich waters.

Your first South Georgia landing is likely to be at Grytviken, home to an abandoned whaling station, museum and Ernest Shackleton’s grave. You won’t be able to miss South Georgia’s spectacular wildlife – it’s everywhere! – but some of the highlights include St Andrews Bay and Salisbury Plain, where you can watch the antics of king penguins by the thousands. Offshore Prion Island in the Bay of Isles is an excellent place to spy on the endangered and magnificent wandering albatross roosting on their nests.

On the way back to Ushuaia, call in at the Falkland Islands, with its captivating wildlife and friendly folk. You’ll probably land at one or two of the outer islands, with their abundant penguins, seals and albatross, and spend half a day in the engaging capital, Stanley.
PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

Top: Taylor Valley, Dry Valleys (p97)
Bottom: Adélie penguins (p185)
This is Antarctica to another degree: cold and wind are magnitudes greater, tabular icebergs more abundant, wildlife scarcer. The Ross Sea area enjoys some of Antarctica’s most spectacular terrain, and as the explorers’ gateway to the South Pole, the region has the continent’s richest historic heritage: the huts of the British Antarctic Expeditions led by explorers Robert F Scott, Ernest Shackleton and Carsten Borchgrevink. This itinerary also calls in at the busy US and New Zealand scientific research stations and several of the wildlife-rich peri-Antarctic island groups.

Starting from an Australian or New Zealand port, spend a couple of days rolling across the Southern Ocean, getting your sea legs and watching the abundant bird life. Depending on your route (and the unpredictable weather), you may stop at either Macquarie Island, Campbell Island, or the Auckland Islands, all famous for their breeding seabirds and windswept aspects. After a cruise past the shudder-inducing icebound coasts of the Balleny Islands, try for a quick visit (if the wind allows) to Antarctica’s first buildings and an enormous adélie penguin rookery at Cape Adare. Turn to starboard and head south into the Ross Sea for a stunning view toward the floating, France-sized Ross Ice Shelf. You’ll pass Cape Washington, with one of the largest emperor-penguin colonies in the world.

Next, visit Ross Island, site of the Mt Erebus volcano, with its bubbling, steaming magma lake. If you’re fortunate – and the pack ice permits – you’ll hit the historic-hut trifecta, landing at Scott’s Discovery hut at Hut Point, Shackleton’s Nimrod hut at Cape Royds and Scott’s Terra Nova hut at Cape Evans, to which Scott and his men would have returned had they not perished on the way back from the South Pole.

Most cruises visit one of Ross Island’s human communities, the sprawling US McMurdo Station and/or New Zealand’s ecofriendly Scott Base for a look at Antarctic scientific research and a bit of shopping. A very few trips with helicopter support offer a quick excursion to the Dry Valleys, with ancient wind-formed ventifacts and bizarre lakes and ponds. Then it’s time to turn north, and return to warmer climes.
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

Alexis Averbuck

*Antarctica* Alexis has traveled and lived all over the world, from Sri Lanka to Ecuador, Zanzibar and Antarctica. In recent years she’s been living on the Greek island of Hydra and exploring her adopted homeland; sampling oysters in Brittany and careening through hill-top villages in Provence; and adventuring along Iceland’s surreal lava fields, sparkling fjords and glacier tongues. A travel writer for more than two decades, Alexis has lived in Antarctica for a year, crossed the Pacific by sailboat and written books on her journeys through Asia, Europe and the Americas. She’s also a painter – visit www.alexisaverbuck.com – and promotes travel and adventure on video and television.

Cathy Brown

*Argentina* Cathy is a travel writer (Lonely Planet, OARS, Luxury Latin America) and editor (Matador Network). She lives with her three kids in the Andes of Argentine Patagonia where she hikes, gardens, drinks Malbec, works with medicinal herbs and indigenous cultures, and is building a straw-bale house. She’s passionate about any adventure travel, which includes surfing, rafting, skiing, climbing, or trekking, and works closely with the Adventure Travel Trade Association.

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