



BIRDING CRUISE ANTARCTICA: EMPEROR PENGUINS AND THE WEDDELL SEA

14 - 24 NOVEMBER 2019



The undoubted highlight of this trip will be the chance to visit an **Emperor Penguin** colony.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: The itinerary is for guidance only. Unfortunately, programs may vary for reasons beyond our control (local ice, weather, and wildlife conditions). The final itinerary will be decided by the on-board expedition leader. Flexibility is vital for expedition cruises. If ice conditions allow and the route to Snow Hill Island is free of multi-year pack ice, you have the chance for ship-to-shore helicopter transfers to Snow Hill Island (45 minutes walking distance from the Emperor Penguin colony). If successful, this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and one that very few people ever get to experience. However, nature decides the final itinerary down here: Attempts to reach Snow Hill Island during the voyages of 2012 – 17 were not all successful. In 2013 and November 2017 conditions were favorable to land by helicopter on Snow Hill Island and to visit the Emperor Penguin colony.

This Weddell Sea cruise aims to give you the opportunity to experience one of the greatest wildlife spectacles that nature has to offer, a chance to visit an **Emperor Penguin** colony! Although sightings of Emperor Penguin are of course not guaranteed, it is most likely that this species will be encountered on the tour even if a helicopter trip to the colony on Snow Hill Island should not be possible. With the use of helicopters we will be transferred within walking distance of the colony, with plenty of time set aside to then enjoy the sights and sounds of the colony. There will also be other wildlife to be enjoyed while navigating to and from the Great White Continent. We should also encounter a number of other penguin species as well as **Antarctic** and **Snow Petrels** and various whale and seal species.



Tobogganing **Emperor Penguins** back from a hard day's fishing

Itinerary (11 days/10 nights)

Day 1: Departure from Ushuaia

We will board our vessel today in the afternoon from Ushuaia, the world's most southerly city. We then begin our exciting voyage south by passing through the picturesque, glacier-and-mountain-fringed Beagle Channel for the rest of the evening. In the various bays that line the coastline we may encounter a few more common coastal species such as **Dolphin Gulls**, **South American Tern**, and **Magellanic** and **Blackish Oystercatchers** feeding on the rocky coastline.

Days 2 - 3: South through the Antarctic Convergence

The next two days will be spent at sea, steadily passing through Antarctic's natural boundary, the Antarctic Convergence. We will spend as much time on the decks as the temperature will allow, waiting for seabirds and whales to pass us by. After crossing into the cooler, more productive Antarctic waters marine life should change fairly drastically. There should be good numbers of seabirds around, taking advantage of the massive quantities of plankton these waters have to offer. We can expect to find **Wandering**, **Grey-headed**, **Black-browed**, and the majestic **Light-mantled Albatrosses** as well as smaller tubenoses, such as **Cape**, **Blue**, and **Antarctic Petrels**, **Southern Fulmar**, and the tiny **Wilson's Storm Petrel**.



Antarctic Petrel will be another big target on this trip.

Days 4 - 7: Entering Antarctica

We may sail into the Weddell Sea through the beautiful Antarctic Sound. Here we can expect to navigate between massive tabular icebergs which have recently broken off the melting Antarctic ice shelf. This is when the search for the **Emperor Penguin** truly begins. We have a decent chance of seeing **Emperor Penguins** on ice flows in the area; however, the real advantage is the use of helicopters which (depending on conditions) will hopefully get us to the Snow Hill Island

colony. At the colony we will keep a lookout for **South Polar Skuas**, which predate on unguarded chicks and eggs. We may also enjoy scenic flights, and, if conditions allow, helicopter landings in locations otherwise out of reach this time of year. Ice flows should also be scanned for **Weddell** and **Crabeater Seals**!



Emperor Penguin chicks are incredibly cute — enough so to inspire a movie!

Some of the other helicopter flight options may include the following:

The west slopes of the Antarctic Sound – Although rarely seen from the air, the western side of the Antarctic Sound is certainly worth the flight. Expect to see lava flows, layered sandstones, glaciers, icebergs, and pack ice extending to the horizon.

Duse Bay – A helicopter flight may deposit you on a rocky hillock close to an old, abandoned refuge hut overlooking Duse Bay. There's still plenty of snow and ice around at this time of year; however, much of the walk will be over lichen-covered rocks of all different colors – making it rather beautiful.

Seymour Island – A helicopter trip over this rocky island should allow us to see many of the cute **Adelie Penguins** breeding in the area, as well as possibly **Emperor Penguins** on nearby ice flows.

We may also venture out on Zodiacs (conditions dependent, of course!) to explore other geological features in the area:

Devil Island – This small, one-and-a-half-kilometers-wide island is home to a huge colony of **Adelie Penguins** and also hosts **Subantarctic Skua**, **Kelp Gull**, and **Wilson's Storm Petrels**. We will keep an eye out for the reptilian-looking **Leopard Seal**, which lazes about on ice flows in the area. Devil Island offers a spectacular vantage point for hikers willing to make it to the top of the nearby hill.



Adeline Penguins will keep us entertained while out on the ice.

Brown Bluff – Perhaps the most scenic location in the entire northern tip of the Antarctic Continent. Its name is due to the rust-colored basalt rocks in the area. Here exists an even larger **Adeline Penguin** colony along with smaller numbers of **Gentoo Penguins** and nesting **Cape** and **Snow Petrels**.

Gourdin Island – More **Penguins** can be seen on this island, including **Chinstrap**, **Gentoo**, and **Adeline**. This is yet another landing option for your continuing Antarctic adventure.

Esperanza Base – This Argentine research base operates year-round and is another landing option.

Days 5 - 6: Snow Hill Island visit (Alternate program if the route to Snow Hill Island is free of multi-year pack ice – less than 50 % probability)

Helicopters provide an amazing advantage in reaching the Snow Hill Island **Emperor Penguin** colony. However, as always nature makes the rules in Antarctica. If conditions are favorable, we'll spend two days at the penguin colony. The helicopter operation takes a full day, and the flight duration is roughly 15 minutes. Each helicopter can accommodate four to six passengers per flight, and the landing site is carefully chosen so that the penguins are not stressed at all. Upon arrival at the landing site it is about a 45-minute walk to the colony. Please bear in mind that you are in the world's most remote area; there are unfortunately no guarantees. Conditions may change rapidly, which can have a profound impact on our helicopter operations. It is important to understand and respect this and realize that safety is our greatest concern, therefore no compromises can be made.

Day 8: Leaving Antarctica via Deception Island

In the morning, we'll sail to Deception Island for our final landing of the voyage, either at Pendulum Cove or Whalers Bay. While cruising between icebergs we will keep our eyes glued to the sea for sightings of whales, including **Killer**, **Humpback**, and **Antarctic Minke Whales**.



We should see good numbers of **Antarctic Minke Whales** among the ice flows.

Days 9 - 10: Back north through the Drake Passage

Heading back north through the Drake Passage we will keep a lookout for any seabird species we may have missed on our journey south a few days ago.

Day 11: Back to Ushuaia

Unfortunately every adventure must come to an end, and this one is no different. We will disembark at Ushuaia. But we will have gained some truly spectacular memories that will stay with us for a lifetime!

Duration: 11 days/10 nights

Limit: The group sizes of cruises are a function of the capacity of the ship, so our usual small group size policy naturally can't apply here.

Dates: 14 – 24 November 2019

Start: Ushuaia, Argentina

End: Ushuaia, Argentina

Price per person: Quadruple beds porthole – sharing US\$9,350
Triple beds porthole – sharing US\$11,350
Twin beds porthole – sharing US\$11,350, single US\$19,295
Twin beds window – sharing US\$13,550, single US\$23,035
Twin beds deluxe – sharing US\$14,100, single US\$23,970
Double bed superior – double US\$25,330, single US\$29,800

All cabins contain private shower and toilet, desk and chair, flat screen TV, telephone and Internet connections, hair dryer, and ample storage space.

Price includes:

All meals throughout the voyage aboard the ship, including snacks, coffee, and tea
All shore excursions and activities throughout the voyage by Zodiac
Program of lectures by noted naturalists and leadership by experienced expedition staff
Free use of rubber boots and snowshoes
Ship-to-shore helicopter transfers (with no specific amount of helicopter time guaranteed)
Luggage transfer from pick-up point to the vessel on the day of embarkation in Ushuaia
Pre-scheduled group transfer from the vessel to the airport in Ushuaia (directly after disembarkation)
All miscellaneous service taxes and port charges throughout the program
Comprehensive pre-departure material

Price excludes:

Any airfare, whether on scheduled or charter flights
Pre- and post-tour land arrangements
Passport and visa expenses
Government arrival and departure taxes
Meals ashore
Baggage, cancellation, and personal insurance (which is mandatory)
Excess baggage charges and all items of a personal nature, such as laundry, bar, beverage charges, and telecommunication charges
The customary gratuity at the end of the voyage for stewards and other service personnel aboard (guidelines will be provided)