



POLAR LATITUDES  
EXPEDITIONS™

# Antarctica: Your Expedition Guide

Antarctic Peninsula & South Shetland Islands



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# Welcome to Antarctica

You’re about to travel to the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands, a region of immense glaciers, sculpted icebergs, towering peaks, and some of the richest wildlife in the Southern Ocean.

During your expedition, you’ll experience this landscape up close: cruise through ice-filled bays by Zodiac, step ashore near penguin colonies, watch for whales from the deck, and explore places that few people ever have the opportunity to visit.

No two days here are quite the same. Ice, wildlife, and changing conditions all shape the journey, with your Expedition Team adapting each day to make the most of the opportunities the Peninsula presents.

This guide will introduce you to the landscapes, wildlife, history, and experiences that define the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands, along with practical insights to help you get the most from your time here.

We look forward to welcoming you on board.



# A Continent of Ice & Ocean

Antarctica is Earth's southernmost continent, covering around 14.2 million square kilometers. Almost 98% of its surface is covered by ice, creating a landscape of glaciers, mountain ranges, ice shelves, and vast expanses of frozen terrain. Unlike anywhere else on Earth, Antarctica has no country, capital, or currency.

Your expedition explores the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands, the region stretching north toward South America. The Peninsula itself extends for roughly 1,300 kilometers, with a mountainous backbone surrounded by deep channels, bays, glaciers, and islands.

## Exploration & Discovery

For centuries, Antarctica existed largely in imagination as the mysterious southern land shown on early maps. Captain James Cook became the first known explorer to cross the Antarctic Circle in 1773, but confirmed sightings of the continent did not come until 1820. The first undisputed landing followed in 1895, opening a new era of exploration that would later include names such as Roald Amundsen, Robert Falcon Scott, Ernest Shackleton, and Douglas Mawson.

## Antarctica Today

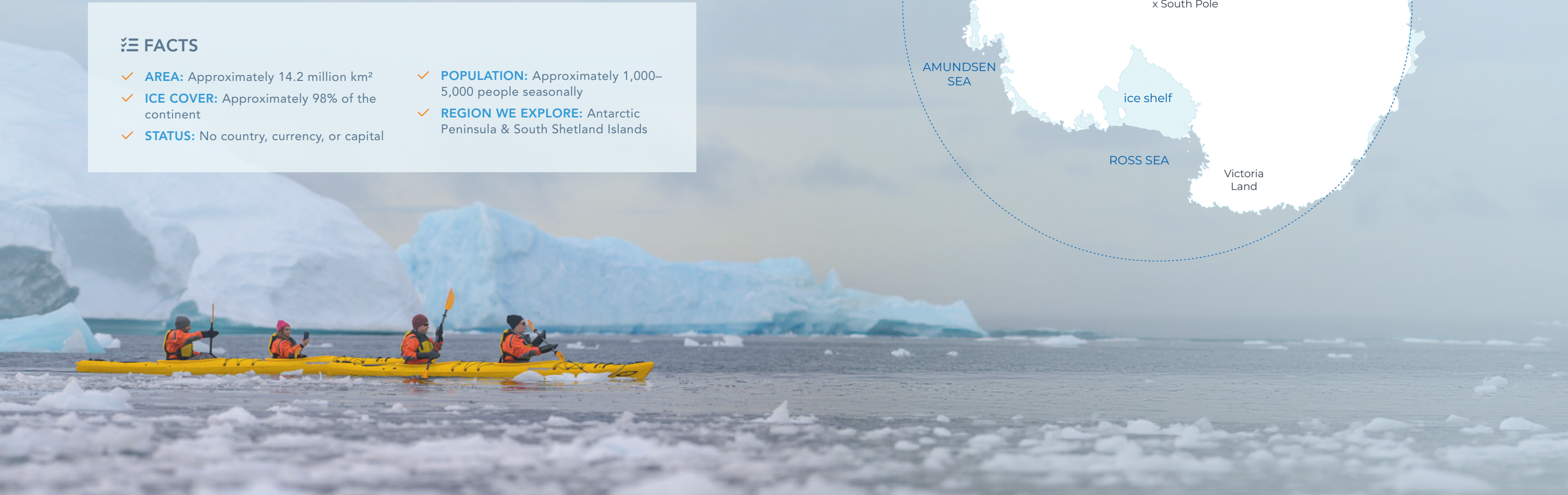
Today, Antarctica is shaped by international cooperation, scientific research, and environmental protection. The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959, established the framework for peaceful activity on the continent, while the Protocol on Environmental Protection helps safeguard its ecosystems and scientific value.

### FACTS

- ✓ **AREA:** Approximately 14.2 million km<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ **ICE COVER:** Approximately 98% of the continent
- ✓ **STATUS:** No country, currency, or capital
- ✓ **POPULATION:** Approximately 1,000–5,000 people seasonally
- ✓ **REGION WE EXPLORE:** Antarctic Peninsula & South Shetland Islands

## Where You'll Be Exploring

Your journey takes you through the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands, where towering mountains, glaciers, icebergs, and sheltered waterways shape one of the most spectacular landscapes on Earth. Each day brings a new perspective, from remote islands and sweeping bays to narrow channels surrounded by ice.





# Climate & Conditions

Antarctica is the coldest continent on Earth, but conditions along the Antarctic Peninsula during the austral summer are milder than many travelers expect. As the northernmost part of the continent, the Peninsula has Antarctica’s mildest climate, with temperatures along the west coast often rising above freezing during the summer months. The eastern side of the Peninsula is generally colder.

During the expedition season, coastal temperatures typically hover around freezing, although wind can make it feel considerably colder. Snowfall is possible at any time, and conditions can change quickly as weather systems move across the Southern Ocean. Long daylight hours are another defining feature of the Antarctic summer, giving you more time to experience the landscape and wildlife around you.

Sea ice also changes significantly with the seasons. As summer progresses, ice around the Peninsula retreats, opening access to waterways and areas farther south. Voyages toward the Antarctic Circle travel to approximately 66°33’ S, a region generally accessible during the southern summer as seasonal sea ice recedes.



|                        | OCT  | NOV  | DEC | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR  |
|------------------------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Antarctic Peninsula    | -3°C | -1°C | 2°C | 2°C | 2°C | 0°C | -2°C |
| South Shetland Islands | -2°C | 0°C  | 1°C | 2°C | 2°C | 2°C | -1°C |

# What to Expect on Your Expedition

Your days in Antarctica are shaped by the environment around you. While your voyage follows a planned route, your Expedition Team continuously assesses weather, sea ice, wildlife activity, and local conditions to make the most of each opportunity to explore.

Plans for the day are shared through briefings and onboard announcements, but flexibility is an essential part of expedition travel. A change in conditions may lead to a different landing site, a Zodiac cruise through ice-filled

waters, or time spent watching wildlife from the ship. No two days in Antarctica are quite the same.

Between excursions, there is time to relax on board, take in the scenery from the outer decks, and learn more about Antarctica through talks and daily recaps from your Expedition Team. These moments help bring context to the landscapes, wildlife, history, and science you encounter along the way.

## KEY EXPERIENCES

### ZODIAC CRUISING

Zodiacs are at the heart of Antarctic exploration, allowing you to reach places the ship cannot. You may cruise among icebergs, explore sheltered bays and channels, travel along glacier fronts, or observe wildlife from the water. Your Expedition Team will guide each excursion, helping you experience the landscape up close while maintaining a respectful distance from wildlife.



### WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Antarctica is home to an extraordinary concentration of wildlife, from penguins and seals to whales and seabirds. Sightings vary throughout the season and can never be guaranteed, but wildlife encounters often happen throughout the journey, both ashore and at sea. Your Expedition Team will help you identify what you see and understand the behavior and ecosystems of the animals around you.

### SHORE LANDINGS

Stepping ashore is one of the defining experiences of an Antarctic expedition. Landings may take you to penguin colonies, historic sites, viewpoints, or stretches of coastline surrounded by glaciers and mountains. Your Expedition Team will brief you before each landing and guide you ashore, with activities shaped by the location and conditions of the day.



## KEY EXPERIENCES

### TIME ON DECK

Some of Antarctica's most memorable moments happen between planned activities. Step outside to watch icebergs drift past, scan the water for whales, or simply take in the immense scale of the landscape. With constantly changing light, ice, and wildlife, there is almost always something new to see from the ship.



### CROSSING THE DRAKE PASSAGE

The Drake Passage marks the journey between South America and Antarctica. Sailing across this legendary stretch of the Southern Ocean is an experience in itself, with seabirds following the ship and anticipation building as you approach the Antarctic Peninsula. For guests traveling by sea, it is the unmistakable beginning and end of the Antarctic adventure.



### POLAR PLUNGE

Few experiences say Antarctica quite like taking the Polar Plunge. Step up, take a breath, and make the leap into Antarctic waters before returning to the warmth of the ship. It is brief, exhilarating, and often one of the most talked-about moments of the voyage.



## CITIZEN SCIENCE



Citizen Science turns observation into contribution. On voyages where projects are offered, you may have the opportunity to observe, record, and report natural phenomena, contributing data that can support scientific research in Antarctica. In a region where long-term field observations can be difficult and costly, even simple observations can provide valuable information.

Projects vary by voyage, and participation is optional. Your Expedition Team will explain any opportunities available, how you can take part, and how the information collected contributes to wider research.

# Biosecurity Guidelines

## Protecting Antarctica's Fragile Environment

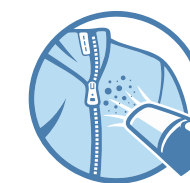
Antarctica remains one of the world's most pristine natural environments. Biosecurity measures help protect its ecosystems by reducing the risk of introducing non-native species or transferring organic material between sites.

As a visitor, you play an important role in protecting the places you explore. Before traveling and throughout your expedition, your clothing, footwear, and equipment should be kept clean and free from seeds, soil, and other organic material.

## BEFORE YOU TRAVEL



- ✓ Examine and thoroughly clean all clothing you plan to use ashore.
- ✓ Pay close attention to pockets, seams, Velcro fasteners, and footwear soles, where seeds and dirt can easily become trapped.



- ✓ Use a vacuum cleaner, brushes, and water where necessary to remove all visible dirt and organic material.
- ✓ Thoroughly clean day packs, camera bags, tripods, walking sticks and any other equipment you plan to take ashore.

## DURING YOUR EXPEDITION



- ✓ Follow all onboard biosecurity procedures before and after going ashore.



- ✓ Boot washing is mandatory before going ashore and again on return to the vessel, for every landing.
- ✓ Disinfect boots and equipment as instructed, allowing the disinfectant to dry between landings.



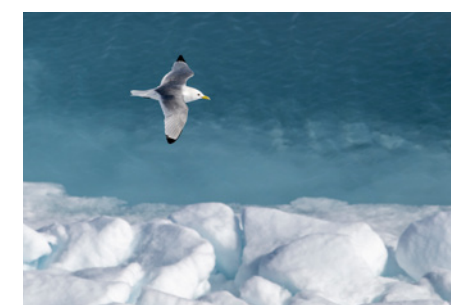
- ✓ Check clothing and gear after each landing for soil, seeds, feathers, or other organic material.



- ✓ Remove any organic material before the next excursion, and let your Expedition Team know if you are unsure whether anything remains.

### ? WHY IT MATTERS?

Even small amounts of soil, seeds, or other organic material can be carried unnoticed from one place to another. Following these procedures helps protect Antarctica's ecosystems and keeps each landing site as undisturbed as possible.



# Responsible Exploration

## RESPECT WILDLIFE

- ✓ Keep a safe distance from wildlife on land and at sea.
- ✓ Never feed, touch, or handle animals.
- ✓ Avoid approaching wildlife in ways that may alter its natural behavior, particularly during breeding or molting periods.
- ✓ Follow your Expedition Team's guidance at all times when observing animals.

## LEAVE NO TRACE

- ✓ Take all litter and personal belongings back to the ship.
- ✓ Never leave anything behind or dispose of waste ashore.
- ✓ Do not collect rocks, shells, plants, feathers, bones, or other natural objects.
- ✓ Stay on designated routes where instructed and avoid damaging fragile vegetation such as mosses and lichens.

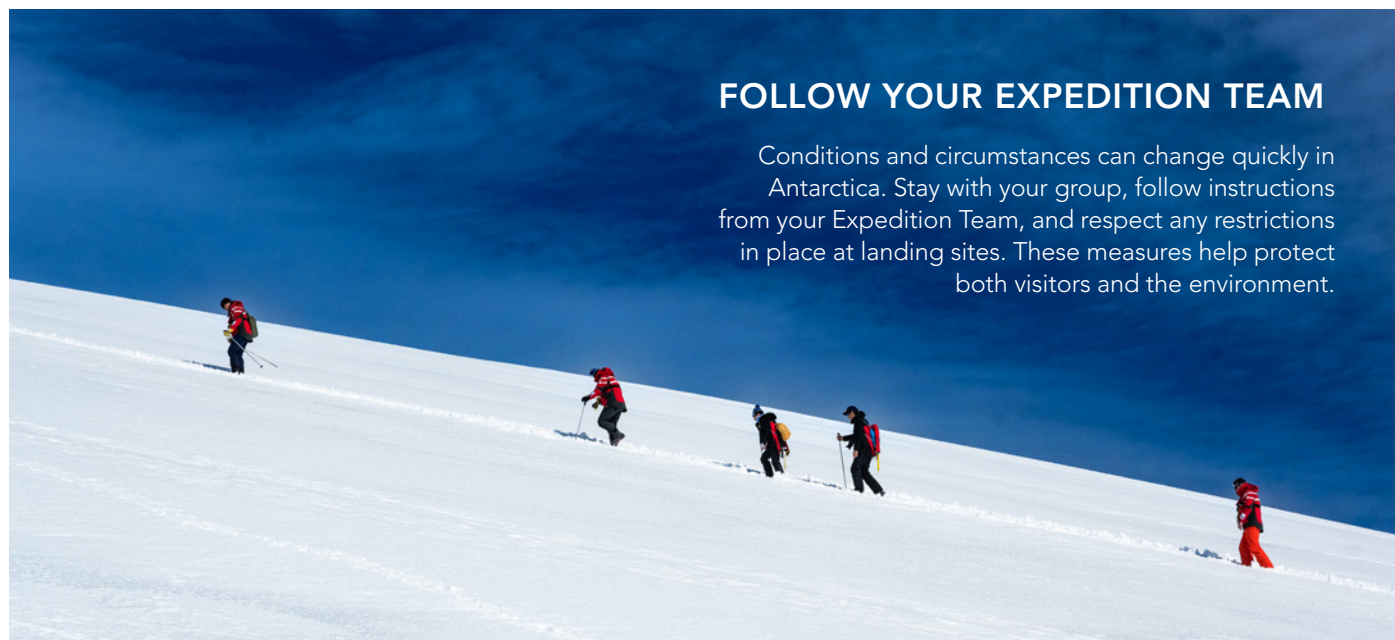
## RESPECT HISTORIC & PROTECTED SITES

Antarctica's historic buildings, monuments, and other protected sites are an important part of the continent's human story. Look, explore, and photograph responsibly, but never remove, damage, write on, or alter anything you encounter.



## FOLLOW YOUR EXPEDITION TEAM

Conditions and circumstances can change quickly in Antarctica. Stay with your group, follow instructions from your Expedition Team, and respect any restrictions in place at landing sites. These measures help protect both visitors and the environment.



## ? LEARN MORE

### [IAATO Don't Pack a Pest](#)

How to prepare clothing and equipment before traveling and help prevent the introduction of non-native species.

### [General Guidelines for Visitors to the Antarctic](#)

Essential guidance on protecting wildlife, respecting protected and historic sites, keeping Antarctica pristine and staying safe.

### [Reducing Waste Guidelines](#)

Practical guidance on reducing waste and your environmental impact during your Antarctic journey.

### [IAATO 2026–27 Avian Influenza Protocols](#)

Current guidance on helping reduce the risk of spreading avian influenza and protecting Antarctic wildlife.

### [Further Visitor Guidance](#)

Visit the IAATO Visitor Guidelines Library for current wildlife-watching and responsible-visitor guidance.



# Wildlife in Antarctica

Antarctica may look stark and empty at first glance, but its coasts and surrounding waters support an extraordinary concentration of wildlife. Penguins gather in noisy colonies, seals haul out on ice and beaches, whales arrive to feed in the Southern Ocean, and seabirds range across vast distances overhead.

For many guests, the first close encounter with Antarctic wildlife is one of the moments when the scale and remoteness of the continent suddenly feels very real.

## GENTOO PENGUIN

Gentoo penguins are among the easiest Antarctic penguins to recognize, with their bright orange bills and feet and the white patch sweeping across the top of the head. During spring and summer, they gather in busy colonies and build simple nests from pebbles, often stealing the best stones from their neighbors. Their constant movement, calling, and nest-building make a Gentoo colony one of the liveliest places you can visit ashore.



## LEOPARD SEAL

Long, muscular, and almost reptilian in appearance, the leopard seal is one of Antarctica's most distinctive predators. They are often encountered patrolling the waters around penguin colonies, where their broad jaws and powerful bodies make them formidable hunters. Yet despite their reputation, penguins are only part of the story - krill also makes up a significant part of their diet.



## CHINSTRAP PENGUIN

Named for the narrow black line running beneath the chin, Chinstrap penguins are unmistakable once you know what to look for. They breed in large colonies around the Antarctic Peninsula and nearby islands, where they build pebble nests and raise their chicks during the short austral summer. Their sharp calls and densely packed colonies can make them just as memorable to hear as they are to see.



## ADÉLIE PENGUIN

With a completely black head, white eye ring, and classic black-and-white plumage, the Adélie is perhaps the penguin that looks most like the traditional image of Antarctica. They are strongly associated with ice and are found only in the Antarctic region. Like Gentoos and Chinstraps, they gather in colonies during spring to build pebble nests and raise their chicks through the brief summer season.



## ORCA

At the top of Antarctica's marine food web is one of its most intelligent and impressive predators: the orca. Different types of orca inhabit Antarctic waters, each with their own social structures, prey preferences, and hunting techniques. Watching a pod move through the ice is one of those wildlife encounters that can stop an entire ship in its tracks.



## CRABEATER SEAL

A true Antarctic species, the crabeater seal is found only around the Antarctic continent. They are easy to recognize by their dog-like face, pale silvery coat, and the scars many adults carry from encounters with leopard seals. Despite the name, crabeater seals do not eat crabs at all - their specially adapted teeth are designed for filtering Antarctic krill from the water.



## HUMPBACK WHALE

Commercial whaling severely reduced humpback whale populations, but many have since made a remarkable recovery. Look for a blow on the horizon, a long dark back breaking the surface, or the unmistakable tail fluke raised high before a deep dive.



# We Look Forward to Welcoming You on Board

If you have any questions before your journey,  
our team will be happy to assist.

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