



Ice is nice

Cold-climate cruising is hotting up, says Jocelyn Pride.

As a young kid, holidays in cold places didn't factor in my world. Life was a beach. However, when I was 11, a large poster covered in penguins was delivered with our daily newspaper and immediately piqued my curiosity – where was this magical photo taken, and how could I get there?

Back then, a holiday to the frozen continent was about as likely as a family picnic on the moon, but that poster planted a seed. And as it turns out, I wasn't alone. Nowadays more travellers than ever are swapping their sandals for gumboots as the demand for expedition cruising, especially to the polar regions, soars.

"Cruising to cold-climate destinations is so much more accessible than in the past, and their popularity has really grown in response. Areas like Alaska and Norway have long been popular cruise destinations, but now we see increasing demand for other spectacular regions like Antarctica, Greenland, Iceland and Svalbard," says Joel Katz, Managing Director Australasia for Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA).

/ Animal attraction

Wildlife viewing is a magnet for travellers keen to give their toe-warmers a workout. Several decades after the penguin poster faded on my bedroom wall, I had my happy feet moment amid a cacophony of about 250,000 King penguins humming, honking, whistling, humming,

whirring and squawking at Fortuna Bay on South Georgia, a Subantarctic Island with one of the highest concentrations of wildlife on the planet. I was hooked.

As the breeding ground for king, Adélie, gentoo, chinstrap, emperor and rockhopper, penguins are the darlings of the southern waters and encounters on an expedition cruise are plentiful and treasured. Spoilt for choice, the passing parade of creatures also includes orca, leopard seals, humpback whales, crabeater and Weddell seals, and massive elephant seals in addition to superb seabirds such as albatross, gulls, terns and petrels.

At the other end of the world, the Arctic is home to a greater variety of species, however they tend to be more elusive. Even a glimpse of the region's apex predator (aka the polar bear), is enough to send the nerve endings into a spin. And then there's bearded seals with their coiffed curly whiskers, puppy-like harp seals, narwhals (known as the unicorns of the sea for their single pointy tusk), Arctic foxes, reindeer, and gregarious walrus who huddle up together along shorelines often poking each other with their tusks.

Lying in the 'warmer' subarctic zone, easily accessed by plane and with less likelihood of encountering rough water, Alaska is the perfect place for a cold climate cruise newbie. Twice the size of Texas, and with more wildlife than people, it's home to about 100,000 black

bears, 35,000 brown bears, and between 175,000 and 200,000 moose, in addition to wolves, caribou, sea otters, seals, Dall sheep and nine species of whales that gorge themselves silly on the nutrient-rich waters during the summer months, before migrating south to breed in warmer waters. A popular (and beautiful) Alaskan combo is to cruise the Inside Passage and add a few landlubber days in Denali National Park.

/ Ship mates

The vibe on expedition-style cruising is inclusive and generates a 'we're all in this together' feeling. From solos to multi-generational, couples, friendship groups, clubs – a love of nature is the commonality. Friendships made on expeditions often extend way beyond the waters sailed, and loyalty to a particular company is strong. There's a saying that you can see it in a person's eyes if they've been to a polar region and that certainly rings true. To be pared back and witness the circle of life in its rawest form is both humbling and uplifting.

/ Cultural connections

The Arctic and Antarctica are geographically poles apart, however both have a deep history in polar exploration when the race was on to be the first to reach the north and south pole during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



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Established in 1961, the Antarctic Treaty ensures the continent is used only for scientific and peaceful purposes. No-one lives there permanently, and no evidence of an Indigenous population ever existing has been discovered. In contrast, approximately 10 per cent of the four million people across the eight countries within the Arctic Circle belong to Indigenous groups such as Sami, Yupik, Inuit and Inupiat dating back thousands of years. With an international airport recently opening in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, and another two airports in other parts of the country planned to open within the next couple of years, exploring this magnificent country is getting a whole lot easier.

A thousand years in the making and rich in legends and sagas, Iceland is a go-to for expedition cruising and, like other Arctic countries, a brilliant place to marvel at the phenomenal aurora borealis.

/ Pack right

Cruise companies tend to put out packing lists for specific itineraries. No skimming – read and act on every word. If the company you're travelling with supplies or hires out the outer layer and rubber boots, lucky you. It saves a lot of angst, not to mention luggage space.

Expedition cruises (unless specifically stated) are a casual affair when it comes to onboard dress codes. For off-ship activities, layers are the key. Modern fabrics are scientifically researched to keep you toasty warm in cold climates. The layer against your skin is the most important as it manages sweat. It's worth investing in a couple of top-quality base layers (long and short sleeved) and a couple of pairs of long johns made of merino wool because they wick away moisture and don't retain body odour. Mid layers such as a polar fleece or light sweater on the top and track-type pants that are easy to bend in work as insulation, and the outer layer protects against snow and wind. If you have to buy your own, your outer layers (jacket and overpants) must be completely waterproof, and you'll need waterproof gloves (or mittens), neck gaiter, sunglasses, goggles, and the warmest and most comfy socks you can find.

Wonders of the wild

Clockwise, from above left: One of Svalbard's 3000 polar bears; Alpenglow, Denali National Park; penguins in Fortuna Bay, South Georgia.



Hot tips

• Be ready

Imagine the captain announces a pod of orcas swimming towards the ship, and you can't find your shoes, gloves, camera, etc? Store essentials in a specific spot, so you can grab and go without missing a trick.

• Be willing

At some point even a seasoned traveller is likely to be challenged on an expedition cruise, however it's also important to know your limits. Kindness goes a long way – offering someone a hand, sharing a story, helping with gear or just giving a thumbs up can often flip a 'can't do' into a 'can do'.

• Be flexible

There are no guarantees in nature, and safety always comes first. Maybe you won't see a polar bear in the Arctic or a leopard seal in Antarctica, but trust the expedition team to work within elements of the environment to make the best of every single minute. Expect the unexpected and you won't be disappointed.

• Be curious

Scientists conducting research are often on board as guides and presenters, and many companies also run citizen-science projects. Learning from the experts and engaging in projects such as counting birds, water-sample testing, shore clean-ups and micro-plastic studies, creates ongoing meaning to your expedition in addition to helping scientists solve problems.

• Be an ambassador

When Lars-Eric Lindblad led the first citizen voyage to Antarctica in 1966, he hoped experiencing a place first-hand would help people understand the importance of protecting vulnerable places. Now, more than ever, Lindblad's premise is at the core of life on Earth.



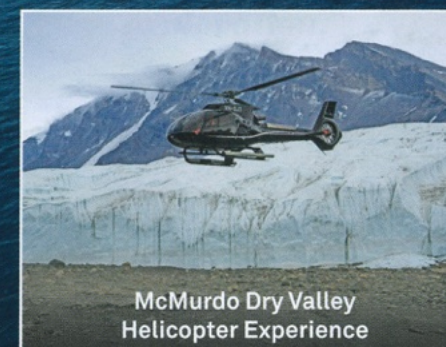
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