

INTREPID EXPLORER DONNA BEAUFOY SET OFF TO ANTARCTICA WITH EYOS IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE, WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE, AND DISCOVERED MORE THAN A TOUCH OF LUXURY THROWN IN FOR GOOD MEASURE

# WINTER Wanderland



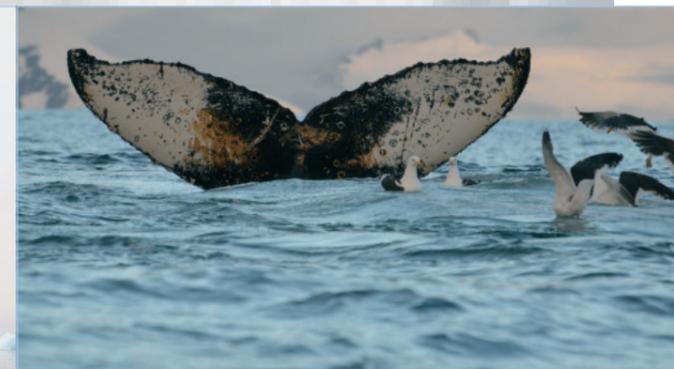
The pristine, icy seascape of the Antarctic might not be the first vision to come to mind when contemplating your next luxury cruise, but a charter into this remote wilderness is an adventure that should be on everyone's bucket list. Around 30,000 people travel to Antarctica annually on cruise ships, but if you want to get up close and personal with the wildlife, to be able to tailor each day's activities to your own taste, and to experience the genuine solitude of this vast icy horizon then a smaller charter is the only way to travel. Formed six years ago by experienced expedition leaders Rob MacCallum and Tim Soper, EYOS Expeditions specialises in luxury travel to wild, remote and culturally intact areas of the world, lead by skilled, knowledgeable and passionate expedition leaders.

Antarctica is the most challenging cruising ground for any expedition yacht, but I travelled in complete comfort on the *Hanse Explorer* with a small group of guests. Ice-classed and built to handle the most challenging waters, the *Explorer* is a 'go-anywhere'

yacht that is a firm favourite of EYOS Expeditions. Built for both tropical and polar waters, she carries two Mark-IV Zodiacs, which are used for landing on beaches, enabling you to explore penguin colonies, and visit research stations and historical sites. They also mean you are in the best position on the water to witness and photograph a humpback whale fluke.

Below decks, my ensuite cabin was spacious and comfortable. The saloon was the perfect place to enjoy a warming coffee or shot of Baileys over the glacier ice that we collected from the sea on our adventures earlier that day. Chef Luis Galigo catered for all guests' dietary requirements and preferences, providing an informal buffet breakfast, homemade soup and light lunches, freshly baked pastries and biscuits, and three-course dinners that any fine-dining restaurant would be proud to serve (which we washed down with a glass or two of refreshing Chablis!)

Antarctica's appeal to me was the opportunity to get up close to creatures that I had only previously seen on the television. Having the Zodiacs at our



disposal meant that the EYOS team could quickly respond to what nature threw at us, and our expedition leader's knowledge and experience got us closer, quicker to some incredible spectacles. On our first day on this frozen continent we came close to killer whales, and spotted one lone king penguin surrounded by hundreds of chin strap penguins and fur seals.

Adélie, gentoo, and chinstrap penguins all breed here, and we were fortunate to find many healthy colonies on our travels. As well as watching the chicks being fed, we also spotted a rare 'blonde' Adélie penguin. Each encounter was an incredible privilege, and our expedition leader Richard White was on hand to offer fascinating snippets of information. While penguins and seals dominate the land, the sky frequently fills with birds: Antarctic tern, kelp gull, brown skua, pale-faced sheathbill, Antarctic shag, snow petrel, Antarctic petrel and cape petrel all thrive in this seemingly inhospitable place.

On various days from both the *Hanse Explorer* and up close from the Zodiacs we were fascinated to observe how different whale species behave. A pod of killer whales with a calf cut through the icy water, and I was surprised to see they were discoloured yellow by a build-up of algae on the skin. They would soon journey to the warm waters off the coast of South America and return as clean as a whistle after sloughing off their outer skin. We witnessed the breathtaking spectacle of humpback whales circling deep underwater rounding up krill, forcing them up to the surface where the whales rose up out of the water open-mouthed to feed. We also spotted a lone minke whale, long and slender, swimming alongside us as I enjoyed freshly ground coffee on the bridge.

**ICE BREAKING**

We travelled on at an apparently leisurely pace, drinking in the vistas of rugged yet delicate icebergs through Fridtjof Sound, Mikkelsen Harbour and Gerlache Strait. Overnight we covered 100 miles, blissfully unaware as we slept the deep sleep of exhausted adventurers. Again the Zodiacs come into their own when exploring the craggy coastline of Spert Island, enabling us to pass through an archway of cliff rock – a truly exhilarating experience.

**HANSE EXPLORER**

At home in both tropical and polar waters, *Hanse's Explorer* is built to handle the most challenging of waters. Her steel hull means she can drive through pack and brash ice with ease, making her a true expedition 'go anywhere' yacht. The seven spacious ensuite cabins can be configured to either twin or queen accommodation, and the large lounge and dining areas are the perfect places to catch up with fellow guests at the end of the day.

- GUESTS:** 12
- LENGTH:** 47.76m (156.7')
- BEAM:** 10.40m (34')
- DRAFT:** 4.40m (14.4')
- TONNAGE:** 885
- CRUISING SPEED:** 11 knots
- MAX SPEED:** 13 knots
- RANGE:** 8,000+nm at 10 knots



**THE EYOS EXPEDITION LEADER**



So why EYOS? Well, that's simple – for the best. And our expedition leader, Richard White, was exactly that. A polar naturalist and lecturer, Richard is one of the best in his field and can spot a crabeater seal from three miles away! An avid ornithologist, Richard is renowned for being an outstanding guide and, as I witnessed first-hand, has an uncanny knack for spotting wildlife. His knowledge of everything polar, from ice flows to whales, was astounding and no question was left unanswered. With a leader like Richard you learn more about the wildlife and the environment than you ever thought possible.

Richard is just one of EYOS's team of highly experienced expedition leaders, whose role is to educate and enlighten as well as making you feel safe and secure in this alien environment. Because of the trust you have in your expedition leader you'll do things you never thought possible – I never anticipated kayaking in the Ferguson Channel on our approach to Paradise Bay, or taking the plunge into the freezing Antarctic sea in Neko Harbour.

Out on the water I was colder than I have ever been, and thankful for my layers of technical clothing, but nothing warms the cockles more than the delicious rum-spiked hot chocolate we all gulped down when back on board the *Hanse Explorer*. As we continued through the Lemaire Channel, Grandidier Channel towards the Ukrainian Vernadsky Research Base, we watched our yacht cut through the ice with ease. Travelling in the Austral summer you avoid the worst of the polar weather, and although I was always safe and comfortable on board, it was reassuring to witness her deal with this harsh environment with such ease! Ensclosed in the comforts below deck, it's easy to forget that this is a working yacht, built to withstand whatever this extreme environment throws at her.

From weather to wildlife, Antarctica is a land of extremes, a place that really does have to be seen to be believed. For me, this was a unique, awe-inspiring trip of a lifetime, and one that I would urge anyone and everyone to experience. ■



PACKING FOR THE COLD



To get the most out of your Antarctic adventure you need to be warm, dry and comfortable. The key to success here is layering – lots of thinner layers trap the heat more effectively than one or two thick ones.

Your base layer will be next to your skin; think technical thermal underwear! To keep fresh for longer look for fabrics rich in naturally antibacterial merino wool. Flatlocked seams will go some way to preventing any annoying itches and tickles.

Next up a fleece will lock in that warmth, and if it's super-cold a down vest will add warmth without bulk, meaning that your arm movement won't be restricted – essential if you need to be quick off the mark capturing wildlife on film.

Top everything off with a well-insulated, windproof and waterproof outer layer. Technology has come a long way, and warm doesn't have to mean bulky. My absolute best item of clothing on this trip was my Helly Hansen Sophie jacket (£220, [hellyhansen.com](http://hellyhansen.com)), which kept me warm and dry even when we were out on deck wildlife spotting in the falling snow!

Warm feet make a marked difference to your experience, so thermal hiking socks and sturdy boots are a must. I interchanged my hiking boots with fully waterproof muck boots when conditions dictated.

Lastly, comfortable waterproof trousers were a real luxury, ensuring that I could stay out in the cold as long as I wanted – essential when all the action is taking place on the ice.

PHOTOGRAPH LIKE A PRO

Amazing photo opportunities abound in Antarctica, so if you want to do more than capture memories, follow our top tips to take photographs you'll be proud to show off...

- Good quality SLR cameras are no longer prohibitively expensive and are worth their weight in gold. Even a basic model will enable you to use different lenses for different subjects. If you're going to invest, buy well in advance of your trip so that you have time to play around with it before you go.

- The Antarctic landscapes are stunning and horizons vast – a super-wide lens will help you do justice to these breath-taking vistas.

- A long lens and quality zoom will enable you to get virtually close up to distant wildlife.

- Remember to bring extra memory cards – you will take thousands of photographs! If you'd rather download and edit as you go, bring your laptop.

- Carry spare batteries close to your body because the cold temperatures can sap battery power.

- The Antarctic light is harsh, so a flash can help fill in any shadows.

- Keeping your gear in either a dry bag or waterproof bag is essential – a simple zip-lock plastic bag will do. Getting in and out of Zodiacs is easier with a small rucksack or specialised backpack.



FIND OUT MORE

To ensure that your expedition is run to the highest safety and environmental standards, EYOS Expeditions is a member of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators ([iaato.org](http://iaato.org)), and the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators ([aeco.no](http://aeco.no)).

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