

Expedition yacht  
Hanse Explorer  
docks in the ice in  
the Antarctic.

STORY DOMINIQUE AFACAN

# COOL ADVENTURES

A growing thirst for excitement is opening up the Polar regions – and ice-breaking superyachts are ensuring the journey is done in style

Once upon a time, owning a superyacht was a pretty predictable experience. Summers were spent in the Med, winters in the Caribbean. The average day might be spent lounging on deck, perhaps a lazy swim in the sea and then zooming over by tender to dinner on land. Not anymore. The past few years have seen a new type of owner emerging; one who wants to see more, do more, and who is no longer content with the idea of sitting at anchor in Monaco. Little wonder shipyards have begun to adjust their offerings and new exploration experts are emerging to lend a hand.

EYOS Expeditions is one such expert. Made up of a group of men who would intimidate James Bond – one piloted the vessel that dived to the deepest point of the ocean in 1960, another discovered a previously unknown Emperor Penguin rookery while circumnavigating the Antarctic, one even has a Polar landmark named after him – the company helps superyachts to plan, manage and operate expeditions to outlandish destinations.

At last year's Monaco Yacht Show they hit the headlines when they

revealed a new concept for a purpose-built ice-breaking superyacht, aptly named the SeaXplorer. It has since sold to an anonymous owner and is now in build, with more shipyards following its lead.

So what does the SeaXplorer have that existing yachts don't? The company's CEO Ben Lyons, himself a captain, explains, "It's a lot to do with how long the yacht can operate without the support of shore-side infrastructure. With SeaXplorer, we have 40 days of autonomy. That's comparatively quite a lot."

Given the remoteness of the Arctic and the Antarctic, this certainly makes sense. The polar regions are terrifyingly isolated; there's no marina waiting with fuel, fairy lights and a warm welcome. Other factors, like the ability to launch a tender at a moment's notice, might seem less critical, but as

PEOPLE ARE HAVING TO GO FARTHER FOR UNIQUE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES SHEPHERD LAUGHLIN

Lyons says, "If you see a whale, you're going to want to get in there with it right away." At least, adventure seekers will.

The SeaXplorer also has a dedicated "mud room", a transition area from outside to inside where you can shed your boots "full of penguin guano [pool] and change clothes. After all, this is still a multimillion dollar superyacht and nobody wants to make a mess. On the top deck, a fully enclosed helicopter hangar protects against weather conditions and the hull, crucially, is ice-breaking.

With all these dangers to protect against – Arctic weather conditions, icebergs to dodge, the lack of nearby rescue services – what on earth has driven this trend? Shepherd Laughlin, director of trend forecasting at JWT Intelligence, has an idea. "For the truly wealthy, hospitality at high-end resorts has become more professional and homogenised at destinations around the globe. So people are having to go farther for unique travel experiences than in the past. Add to this the sense that people want to see things 'before they change'. People interested in visiting the Arctic know that this is one of the

fastest-changing regions on earth, due to climate change. So they want to see it before it becomes unrecognisable."

As Lyons says: "More than any destination, Antarctica fundamentally changes people." He also cites Greenland, in particular the wonderfully-named Disco Bay, as equally compelling along with The Canadian Arctic, with its combination of local Inuit communities, polar bears and fjords. Norway, meanwhile, might be described as "exploration-lite" – there's no need for an ice pilot here, and you won't be seeing as much of the polar regions' otherworldly scenery, but there are fjords galore, hiking, heli-tours and even salmon fishing.

Whatever the destination, the trend is real and SeaXplorer isn't the only ice-breaking yacht on the block. Luna, a 115-metre explorer yacht originally

**BELOW LEFT**  
Zodiacs cruising among huge icebergs. There are 10 passengers in each Zodiac.

**BELOW RIGHT**  
The Enigma, one of the world's largest private superyachts, ploughs through Lemaire Channel, a strait off Antarctica.



PHOTOS: JUSTIN HIRSHMAN, REVEE/LOLUPE



The SeaXplorer from EYOS Expeditions can operate without the support of shore-side infrastructure for 40 days.

owned by Roman Abramovich, has just emerged from a five-year refit and is now preparing to make a round-the-world trip. Cloudbreak, a 72.5-metre explorer was delivered to its owner, a passionate heli-skier, earlier this year, and Ulysses, a 107-metre giant owned by a New Zealand billionaire is currently on the market, while the owner builds an even bigger version.

Unsurprisingly, the biggest adventure lies in getting permission to sail to these remote regions. EYOS Expeditions, who take care of that headache for owners, explains, "Legally, you can't just rock up – we require six months minimum submission for paperwork for the Antarctic. The Arctic is even worse – if you go through all the steps that are required, there are something like 30 different agencies to go through, and you have to get it translated into the local Inuit language."

Of course, as you cruise silently around ethereal icebergs, with seals, penguins and whales for company, and there's nothing to do but gaze in awe at it all from the deck of your luxury yacht, chances are, it'll all be worth it. **T**



**POLES APART**

How to choose between the Arctic or the Antarctic? Ben Lyons gives a quick breakdown. Arctic: "Large animals are in low numbers as opposed to Antarctica so there is more of a 'hunt' for wildlife here. You are looking for 'charismatic megafauna' – that lone bear walking across the ice or a walrus out on an ice floe. There are people in the Arctic-Canadian communities or Greenland – so the human culture is an important component. Some areas of the Arctic are also easier to reach. A trip to Svalbard, for example, is very easy – fly direct into Longyearbyen on a commercial flight and join the yacht 10 minutes later."

Antarctica: "There are teeming colonies of penguins here and massive tabular icebergs that can be up to 32 kilometres long. Expect a feeling of extreme isolation – humans have never lived here except in research stations, so it can feel very foreign or alien. The landscapes are mind-blowing with towering mountains and unbelievable amounts of snow and white. There's a real sense of having reached the end of the world."