

## **KAYAK EXPEDITION NOTES AND ITINERARY**

Antarctica is the most humbling and powerful place on the planet and to see it by kayak is an experience of a lifetime. Each day holds unexpected wonders, from encounters with whales to serene paddles through narrow fjords dwarfed by enormous icebergs. Join us as we paddle beside colonies of penguins and seabirds or past seals sleeping on ice floes. Your sea kayak will give you an intimate and unique perspective of Antarctica's stunning scenery and wildlife.

These notes will give you a brief idea of what you may experience on your voyage. We stress that this is an expedition style cruise and we do not have a set itinerary. Our actual program will vary to take best advantage of local conditions, spontaneous opportunities and wildlife. No two voyages are the same; there is always an element of the unexpected. This is true of course for the weather as well, which can vary from thick snow or sleety rain to brilliant sunshine. But, whatever the weather, your voyage will be full of wonderful surprises.

The *Polar Pioneer* carries a maximum of 54 passengers, of whom a small group of 8-12 may opt to paddle. We use the ship as a floating base camp and paddle at every opportunity. Our emphasis is on unique wildlife encounters, exploring pristine landscapes, visiting sites of historical interest and the occasional visit to scientific stations. Cruising in our own private group of paddlers, we generally visit the same sites as the other passengers but are more independent and may access areas not appropriate for zodiacs. If the ship's schedule allows, it may be possible to do an extended day trip, taking our lunch with us. Sea kayaking in Antarctica requires an adventurous attitude as the wind and elements play an important role.

In the last few years we have pioneered this style of travel in Antarctica and we are still very much in an exciting exploratory phase. There are magnificent opportunities for new discoveries, where paddling through a channel too narrow for the ship can take you to a whole new world - intensely quiet, dominated by ice. Zodiacs are available for extended shore excursions for those who do not wish to paddle on a given day.

### **EXPERIENCE REQUIRED**

Kayakers should have paddled before and be comfortable with the idea of paddling in cold water. You do not have to be an expert but should have an adventurous spirit and recognize that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. This should not be your first paddling experience. You need to be comfortable putting spray skirts on, ferry gliding and have practiced support strokes. Try to rent a kayak before leaving home if you would like some additional experience, or seek out a local operator for some paddling tuition. We could be paddling in winds and have little opportunity to instruct before our first paddle. We often begin our first paddling session from the shore and after that will be launching directly from the ship so you should be comfortable paddling on seas that could have a little swell. Generally the water surface ranges from glassy calm to a small wind chop.

Our paddling excursions will not involve camping out. However, during each voyage we plan to spend one night camping onshore, weather permitting, and this option is open to all passengers.

***We'd be happy to talk to you about your level of experience and may be able to advise you on how to obtain the necessary experience before your trip.***

***Please Note: Along with your voyage booking form we require all participants to complete our "Sea Kayak Booking and Experience Form" and return it to us immediately to secure your spot in the sea kayak group.***



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### ITINERARY

#### Day 1 – Embark Ushuaia, Argentina

We embark in Ushuaia, the bustling community that lays claim to being the world's most southerly town. Ushuaia sits beneath the spectacular mountains of Tierra del Fuego on the edge of the Beagle Channel. There are plenty of things to keep you occupied while waiting to board *Akademik Shokalskiy* at 4pm. You could take a trip to the Lapataia National Park by train or bus, or visit the small museum, which has informative displays about the original inhabitants and the current population of Tierra del Fuego.

Ushuaia is a duty free port with a reputation for its Argentine chocolates, cheap alcohol and leather goods and is a great place to buy souvenirs and presents. There are a host of excellent restaurants available whether for a quick coffee, or for a delicious meal of king crab or an Argentine barbecue.

Our competent Russian crew will welcome us aboard *Polar Pioneer* in the afternoon. Sailing down the Beagle Channel, we will settle into shipboard life and enjoy our first meal on board.

#### Days 2-3 – Drake Passage

Cape Horn, the most southerly point of the American continent, has stimulated the imagination of mankind since Sir Francis Drake inadvertently rounded it back in 1580. Some of us will approach this historic crossing with more than a little trepidation. But despite its reputation, there are many times when the Drake Passage resembles a lake, with lazy Southern Ocean swells rolling under the keel. On the other hand, we sometimes encounter rough crossings with large waves. The size of the waves and the force of the gale will take on gigantic proportions when related around the dinner table back home!

*Polar Pioneer* is not a luxury ship, she is homely and strong, built to be a research vessel and refitted to comfortable passenger standard in 2001. The mood on board is definitely casual. At sea we are totally self-sufficient. Our hearty meals are cooked by European, Australian or New Zealand chefs. The days flow by as we travel snugly in our cocoon. A favourite pastime on board is to stand at the stern watching the many seabirds, including majestic albatross and giant petrels following in our wake. They rise and fall skillfully, using air currents created by the ship to gain momentum.

During our Drake crossing, we will commence our lecture program about the wildlife, geology, history and geography of the Antarctic Peninsula. We will be given guidelines for approaching wildlife and talk about the implications of the Antarctic Treaty. Antarctica is a photographers' paradise, for the professional and amateur alike. There will be discussions about how to protect your equipment from salt water and tips about taking good pictures.

The sea kayakers will attend a briefing to distribute dry suits, pogies (paddling mitts for your hands), lifejackets, and dry bags.

Nearing the tip of the Peninsula towards the end of day three, excitement reaches fever pitch with everyone on the bridge watching for our first iceberg. The ocean takes on a whole new perspective once we are below the Antarctic Convergence and are surrounded by the surreal presence of floating ice sculptures. The memory of your first big iceberg sighting is likely to remain with you forever. As we approach the Peninsula the kayaks will be brought out of the hold and rudders adjusted for our paddling pairs. Depending on the weather, we will first approach Antarctica near the South Shetland Islands, entering Bransfield Strait either at the eastern end of King George Island or the western extremity of Livingston Island.

We may pass by historic Smith Island, which is the outer limit of the South Shetlands. If we have had a quick passage across the Drake we may be able to make our first landing / paddle on one of the South Shetland Group such as Deception Island or Livingston Island, in the evening of Day 3.

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### Days 4-9 – Antarctic Peninsula

A host of choices is now open to us, and depending on the ice and weather conditions, the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula is ours to explore. Our experienced leaders, who have made countless journeys to this area, will use this expertise to design our voyage from day to day. This allows us to make best use of the prevailing weather and ice conditions and wildlife opportunities. Because we are so far south, we will experience approximately 18 hours' daylight and the days will be as busy as you wish. There is plenty of time for sleep when you get home!

We are always keen to explore new territory, so if the opportunity arises, we will! These are "Expeditions of Exploration and Adventure" - who knows where we will go?

During this voyage, there will be an opportunity for the more intrepid to camp for a night on land. This will give you the chance to sample the style of adventure that Scott, Shackleton and other legendary Antarctic explorers experienced. Be comforted - our warm and cosy ship with its hot showers will be only a short distance away!

Once we arrive in the calmer waters of Bransfield and Gerlache Straits, we hope to go kayaking twice a day, spending as much time on the water as possible. We can get ashore by kayak or use Zodiacs (inflatable rubber boats). You will have been briefed on the workings of these sturdy craft and their use, during our Drake Passage crossing. Sometimes we will cruise along spectacular ice cliffs or encounter whales. In these situations we will appreciate the distinct advantage of being on a small vessel, which gives everyone the opportunity to experience these very special close encounters with wildlife.

For our paddling excursions we will choose between sheltered bays such as Paradise Bay, Port Lockroy and the Lemaire Channel. We would normally leave on a kayaking excursion immediately after breakfast or sometimes after lunch, returning to the ship for dinner.

Most paddles range from two and a half to four hours. We endeavour to have at least one extended paddle where we will be away from the ship for most of the day and generally meet the ship at a different location. The flexibility of kayaking with a small private group ensures unique and personal experiences with a magic of their own.

A sample of the many exciting places that we would like to visit follows:

#### **Hannah Point, Livingston Island**

Quite an unique landing place on the Peninsula – a tiny toe of land that is literally alive with wildlife. Here we will find two species of penguins breeding- chinstraps and gentoos. Sometimes there are also a few vagrant macaroni penguins nesting. It is not uncommon to find wallows of elephant seals that are 60 beasts strong. Giant petrels nest on the ridgeline. The vegetation consists of mosses, lichens and the only grass species that grows in Antarctica. All this is set against a stunning backdrop, underneath long black scree slopes at the foot of the mountains and glaciers of Livingston Island.

#### **Half Moon Island**

A wildlife rich island tucked into a neat bay, at the eastern end of Livingston Island. On a clear day the glaciers and mountains of Livingston Island dominate the scene. There is a large chinstrap penguin rookery tucked in between basaltic turrets coloured by yellow and orange lichens. Gulls nest on these turrets and there are often fur seals and elephant seals hauled out on the pebble beaches. At one extremity of the island there is a large colony of nesting blue-eyed shags. At the other end lies a small Argentine station that is sometimes occupied by scientists conducting research on the penguin colony and surrounding waterways.

#### **Deception Island**

Visiting Deception Island is like making a journey to the moon. We sail through the narrow opening of Neptune's Bellows to enter the flooded volcanic crater. Inside is an unworldly scene, virtually devoid of life. Glaciers flow down from the edge of the crater, littered by black volcanic ash.



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We can explore the lifeless remains of a derelict whaling station and a vacant British base, or climb to the rim of the crater. Steam rises from the shore indicating that the water is actually warm enough for a swim, for those who dare. Outside the crater, if conditions allow, we might land at Bailey Head to explore the enormous chinstrap penguin rookery that featured in David Attenborough's *Life in the Freezer* series.

### **Paradise Harbour**

A protected bay surrounded by magnificent peaks and spectacular glaciers. Rocky cliffs provide perfect nesting sites for blue-eyed shags, terns and gulls. The serenity of Paradise Harbour envelops us once the sound of the dropping anchor fades from our ears. This is a haven for whales and sometimes we meet humpbacks, orcas and minke, as well as crabeater seals, as we explore the bay in kayaks and Zodiacs. Imagine being so close to a whale that when he surfaces to blow, the fishy spray of his exhalation momentarily blurs your vision!

### **Lemaire Channel**

If the ice conditions allow, standing on the bow of *Polar Pioneer* and quietly moving through the narrow Lemaire Channel will be one of the highlights of our voyage. Cliffs tower 700 metres directly above the ship. The water can be so still that perfect reflections are mirrored on the surface. Often gigantic icebergs clog the channel, creating navigational challenges for our captain and crew, and may even obstruct our passage.

### **Hydrurga Rocks**

This group of low lying unprotected granite rocks protrudes from the sea, swept by ocean swells. At first these rocks appear uninteresting, but on closer investigation, calm channels lead to a hidden interior where Weddell seals are hauled out on protected snow beds and noisy chinstraps raise their families on rocky platforms. *Hydrurga* is Latin for leopard seal, and on occasions we see some skulking in the shallows. There are many places to simply sit and watch the rise and fall of clear green water and listen to the magic sounds and calls of the wildlife.

Other places we may explore around the Antarctic Peninsula are Petermann Island, Penola Strait, Neko Harbour, Andvoord Bay and Antarctic Sound. We may visit the scientific bases of Arctowski (Polish); Ferraz (Brazilian) or Vernadsky (Ukrainian). We may call into Port Lockroy, an historic British base that is now a museum and post office, Paulet Island, Elephant Island, Nansen Island, Cuverville Island, Aitcho Island or a variety of other surprises.

### **Days 10-11– Heading north**

It's time to farewell the Peninsula and head north into the Drake Passage. As we sail north, leaving the Peninsula, lectures and videos complete our Antarctic education. This is a time for reflection and discussion about what we have seen and felt, and the impact this voyage has had on our attitude to life.

### **Day 12 – Ushuaia**

During the early morning we cruise up the Beagle Channel, before quietly slipping into dock in Ushuaia about 7.00am. As soon as customs have cleared the ship we will be free to disembark. It's a busy time, with people saying farewell to our crew and to fellow passengers who have shared the intensity of exploring this magnificent white wilderness. We head off in our different directions, hopefully with a newfound sense of the immense power of nature.

### **THIS TOUR INCLUDES**

- Accommodation on board the *Polar Pioneer* and use of all public areas.
- All meals on board.
- All sightseeing, shore excursions, and Zodiac rides as required for the cruise itinerary.
- All port landing service charges imposed by local administrations and government authorities.
- Lectures, videos, slide and film shows on board.



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- Service of the vessel's expedition staff.
- Basic attention and treatment by the ship's medical staff.
- Pre departure information and briefing.
- The trip price comprises the voyage cost plus a surcharge for the kayaking option. This surcharge covers use of a drysuit, all your paddling and kayak equipment, and the services of a professional sea kayak guide.

**THIS TOUR DOES NOT INCLUDE**

- Air or land transportation to or from the ship.
- Excess baggage on any flights.
- Vaccination costs / passport / visa fees (if required), airport arrival/departure tax, government taxes.
- Items of personal nature, laundry, bar charges, wine, phone calls, cable / telex / fax charges, etc.
- Tips to on board service personnel.
- Any travel or personal insurances or emergency evacuation charges.
- Any hotels, meals, transfers or other services before or after the cruise.
- Any medication or treatments by the ship's medical staff other than basic day to day necessities.

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### SHIP DETAILS

#### ***Polar Pioneer***

*Polar Pioneer* was built in Finland in 1985 as an ice-strengthened research vessel. In 2001 she was refurbished in St Petersburg to provide comfortable accommodation for 54 passengers.

*Polar Pioneer* is not a luxury ship; she is homely and strong. The accommodation is simple yet comfortable and the meals are wholesome and uncomplicated. The mood on board is definitely casual. A small fleet of Zodiacs (rubber inflatable boats) with outboard motors enable us to travel from ship to shore.

Length - 71.6 metres, Beam - 12.8 metres, Draft - 4.5 metres, Displacement - 2140 tonnes, Cruise speed - 10-12 knots, Powered by - 2 x 1560 HP diesel engines, Chef – European, Australian or New Zealand, Captain & Crew – Russian.

General Facilities:- Bar/lounge/library area, Sauna, Laundry Service, Medical Clinic staffed by a doctor, Dining area, TV/Video (NTSC & PAL systems), Lecture room.

There are five classes of cabins on board the *Polar Pioneer*

- **Triple Cabins** have two lower bunks and one upper bunk, porthole, wash basin, desk, storage. Shower and toilet facilities located conveniently just outside the cabins.
- **Twin Share Cabins** have two lower bunks, porthole, wash basin, desk, storage. Shower and toilet facilities located conveniently just outside the cabins.
- **Twin Private Cabins** have two lower berths, two have upper & lower berths. All cabins have private bathroom (shower and toilet), window, desk, ample storage.
- **Mini-Suites** have one double bed and one fold down couch in separate sleeping areas, private bathroom, (shower & toilet), windows, desk, sitting area, refrigerator, TV and video facilities, electric jug. Two only.
- The **Captain's Suite** features a double bed in separate sleeping area, private bathroom (shower & toilet) forward and port windows, desk, large lounge and table area, refrigerator, TV and video facilities, electric jug. One only.

