

SOUTH GEORGIA AND ANTARCTIC PENINSULA (19 DAYS)

12-30 NOVEMBER 2012

KAYAK EXPEDITION NOTES AND ITINERARY

This amazing voyage combines the teeming wildlife of the sub-Antarctic islands with the awe-inspiring landscapes of the Antarctic Peninsula. 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 intimate and unique perspectives 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 feel comfortable paddling on seas that could have a swell of 1-1.5 metres. Generally the water surface ranges from calm to a small wind chop on a 1 metre swell.

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.



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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.

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 *Polar Pioneer* 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 and expedition staff 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.

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. 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.

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

Day 2 – At Sea

We will commence our lecture program about the wildlife, geology, history and geography of South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula. We will be given guidelines for approaching wildlife and talk about the implications of the Antarctic Treaty, as well as being briefed about using our Zodiacs (inflatable rubber boats) for excursions from the ship.

South Georgia and 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.

Day 3 – Falkland Islands

We visit an outlying island in the Falkland group, greeted onshore by a fascinating mix of sea lions, elephant seals, Magellanic penguins and water birds.

Day 4 – Stanley, Falkland Islands

Stanley features an excellent war museum, quirky post office, picturesque houses, welcoming shops and thoroughly British pubs!

Days 5-6 – Scotia Sea

We cross the Scotia Sea, entertained by our expert naturalist and historian and keeping watch for kelp-skirted Shag Rocks.

SOUTH GEORGIA AND ANTARCTIC PENINSULA (19 DAYS)

12-30 NOVEMBER 2012

Days 7-10 – South Georgia

South Georgia is a tiny speck in the South Atlantic Ocean, located in one of the most desolate parts of our planet. A 3000 metre high mountain range traces the spine of this long, narrow island. Between the mountains, shattered glaciers carve their way through tussock grass to the deeply indented coastline.

Though geographically speaking the island lies in the sub-Antarctic area, as do the islands of Macquarie and Heard, it has a climate more in keeping with the true Antarctic regions. This is because South Georgia lies wholly within the Antarctic Convergence.

South Georgia is a British possession, having been claimed and named for King George III on 16 January 1775 by Captain James Cook, who records in his journal:

"The wild rocks raised their lofty summits till they were lost in the clouds and the valleys lay buried in ever-lasting snow. Not a tree or a shrub was to be seen, no, not even big enough to make a toothpick. I landed in three different places, displayed our colours and took possession of the country in His Majesty's name under a discharge of small arms."

We have a number of days to explore the network of harbours along the northern side of this wonderful island. We combine the fascination of local history with wildlife havens by visiting the old whaling station at Grytviken. Nearby are enormous penguin rookeries in St Andrew Bay, Royal Bay, Gold Harbour and Salisbury Plain, to name just a few. This is expedition kayaking and our paddle options will be adjusted daily to suit the weather and sea conditions. We will have time to both paddle and wander on shore to best experience this wonderful place.

Some of the destinations we plan to visit in South Georgia are listed below:

Grytviken

Originally a Norwegian sealing and whaling station, Grytviken was finally abandoned in 1965. Here we must be careful to avoid stepping on sleeping elephant seals as we skirt the ruins of factory buildings. Peering into the past, we try to imagine what it was like when whale processing was in full swing. Abandoned ships lie sunken alongside old wharves, while pitted concrete walls remind us of the more recent Falkland's War, which started here.

Sir Ernest Shackleton died here from a heart attack during his final expedition on board the Quest on the 6th of May 1922. His body was laid to rest at Grytviken and we hope to make a pilgrimage to visit the cross his men erected in his memory, the grave looking out across beautiful Cumberland Bay.

St Andrews Bay

The sandy black beach is a resting place for hundreds of elephant seals that haul out on the shore to molt. Behind the beach, the sight and sound of tens upon tens of thousands of king penguins at different stages of the breeding cycle will be overwhelming. The glacial river that runs into the sea here will be alive with penguin chicks and elephant seal pups testing their aquatic skills. If we lift our gaze from the wildlife for a moment, we will glimpse the snow-capped peaks of some of the world's most spectacular mountains.

Godthul

Imagine indented bays lined with bleached whalebones, teeming with fur seals and with penguins just "hanging about". Here you have the opportunity to clamber through the tussock to a spectacular plateau offering magnificent views across the island and the waters beyond. A careful descent leads us to a magnificent Macaroni penguin rookery.

Prion Island

We will aim to visit Prion Island where we can sit quietly to watch serene wandering albatrosses sitting proudly on eggs or cute downy chicks. We may be blessed by the performance of an intimate courtship dance, or may witness a youngster being lovingly fed. We watch adolescents exercising their wide wing spans, trying to launch themselves into the air, as they realise that Mum and Dad will no longer feed them and they must leave the island in search of food.

SOUTH GEORGIA AND ANTARCTIC PENINSULA (19 DAYS)

12-30 NOVEMBER 2012

Other stunning wildlife destinations we may visit include:

Elsehul Bay	Royal Harbour
Cooper Bay	Drygalski Fjord
Larsen Harbour	Stromness
Salisbury Plains	Gold Harbour
Right Whale Bay	Possession Bay

Day 11 – At Sea

As we cross the Scotia Sea, watch for whales, sea birds and our first icebergs. We have time to reflect on South Georgia, learn about Antarctica and prepare for more landings.

Days 12-13 – South Orkney Islands

The ocean takes on a whole new perspective once we are surrounded by the surreal presence of floating ice sculptures. The memory of the sight of your first iceberg will remain with you forever. Today we hope to make landings and kayak on and around the South Orkney Islands. We may visit beautiful Shingle Cove on Coronation Island where we have our first view of Adelie penguins. Or we may visit the Argentinian station of Orcardas, where the remains of the 1904 Bruce Expedition hut can still be seen.

Days 14-16 – Antarctic Peninsula

We attempt to visit the South Shetland Islands before sailing overnight down Gerlache Strait. 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. As we are so far south, we will experience approximately 18-20 hours' daylight. There is plenty of time for sleep when you get home!

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). 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.

There are many exciting places we can choose to visit. A sample of these follows:

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.

SOUTH GEORGIA AND ANTARCTIC PENINSULA (19 DAYS)

12-30 NOVEMBER 2012

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 nest 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.

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.

Other places we may visit around the Antarctic Peninsula are: Pleneau Island, Neko Harbour, Andvoord Bay and Port Lockroy, an historic British base that is now a museum and post office.

Days 17-18 – Drake Passage

Time to head north into the Drake Passage. 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.

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. As we approach the tip of South America, our Captain may sail close to legendary Cape Horn, weather conditions permitting.

Day 19 – Ushuaia

During the early morning we cruise up the Beagle Channel, before quietly slipping into dock in Ushuaia at 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.
- Medical services. There is a resident medical officer and infirmary on board.
- 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.

SOUTH GEORGIA AND ANTARCTIC PENINSULA (19 DAYS)

12-30 NOVEMBER 2012

THIS TOUR DOES NOT INCLUDE

- Air or land transportation to Ushuaia, Argentina.
- Excess baggage on any flights.
- Vaccination costs / passport / visa fees (if required), airport arrival and departure taxes and 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.

SOUTHERN SEA VENTURES

HEAD OFFICE – SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

PO Box 641, St Ives, NSW 2075

Ph: (02) 8901 3287 Fx: (02) 8901 3297

International phone or fax inquiries: 61 2 8901 and the last four digits

Email: ssvtrips@southernseaventures.com

Website: www.southernseaventures.com

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12-30 NOVEMBER 2012

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.

