

Antarctica Expedition 2025

Travel report 10 February to 5 March 2025

Matt and Monika Grieder

We have shared a passion for travelling for over 30 years and have travelled to every continent. Now we are about to embark on a very special experience. We are travelling to Antarctica. This is a lifelong dream come true for us!



The ship

This year we are travelling on the LE BOREAL from the French shipping company Ponant.

The yacht impresses with more than just its size. With 132 outside cabins and suites, the 142 metre long yacht offers space for a maximum of 264 passengers who do not want to do without a high level of comfort.



Le Boréal facts and figures

Tonnage	10'944 BRT
Year of construction	2010
Length	142 Meter
Width	18 Meter
Geschwindigkeit	16 Knoten
Flag	Frankreich
Shipyard	Fincantieri - Cantieri Navali Italiani S.p.A
Number of decks	5
Passengers	264
Crew members	145
Restaurants	2
Pools	1
On-board language	Englisch, Französisch
On-board currency	US-Dollar, Euro

The route



Day 1: Monday, 10 February 2025

Overnight stay at the Hyatt Place Zurich Circle

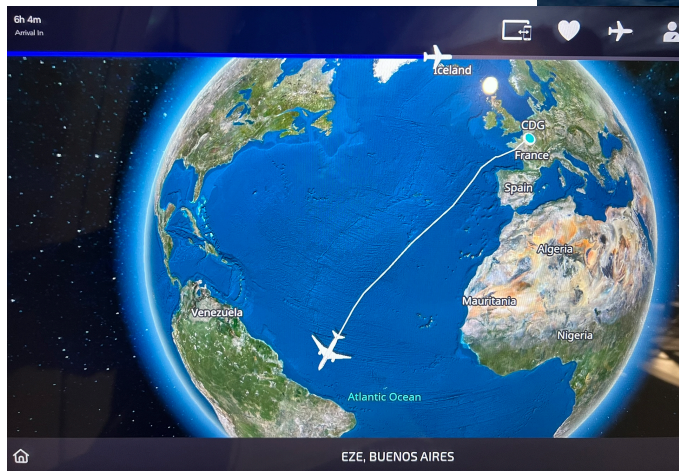
The departure with Air France from Zurich Airport via Paris to Buenos Aires in Argentina is shortly after 6 a.m. in the morning. That's why we decided to spend the night in the Circle at Zurich Airport. This makes the start of the holiday a little less stressful.



Day 2: Tuesday, 11 February 2025

Overnight stay at the Boutique Hotel Vaine in Buenos Aires

The alarm goes off at 4.00 a.m. and it's time to get up; 5.00 a.m. check-in and then a quick breakfast in the newly renovated Air France lounge. The plane is ready for boarding at 6.00 a.m. and we take off for Paris at 6.30 a.m. on the dot. Luckily we have already eaten a little something, because breakfast on the flight is rather inedible. Where has the real French baguette gone?



The lounge in Terminal L is huge and quite comfortable, but very busy. It's enough for a quick snack before we head to the gate, where an A350-700 is waiting for us. The welcome from the crew is super friendly and the seats are very cosy. The food on this 13.5-hour layover is sensational and more than plentiful. There is also enough space in the flat position and we enjoy a few hours' sleep. The time to Buenos

Aires, where we land punctually at 8 pm, 'flies by'... The immigration procedure takes 45 minutes with a long queue in the cow gate. But after just a few metres on the baggage conveyor belt, our luggage is loaded onto our small trolley and we go through customs, where everything has to pass through a scanner again.

We book our taxi in the arrivals hall and let the driver guide us through the crowd to his taxi. We arrive at our small but pretty boutique hotel Vain in the Palermo neighbourhood shortly before 10 pm. We don't miss the opportunity to walk to the Tres Monos Bar for a quick drink. It's supposed to be one of the 10 best cocktail bars in the world, which you wouldn't expect from this rather dingy-looking establishment. But the two cocktails were really very special and full of flavour.



Day 3: Wednesday, 12 February 2025

Overnight stay at the boutique Hilton Hotel in Buenos Aires

The next morning we take it easy and enjoy the well-assorted breakfast buffet and the flavourful and intense Argentinian coffee. We have ordered our UBER to take us to the Hilton Hotel at Puerto Madero at 11am. Here we receive a warm welcome from the Ponant crew and are finally provided with all the information we would have wished for before our trip, but what the heck, at least everything is well organised and runs like clockwork from here on.



In the afternoon, we arranged to meet up with our friends Albert and Angelina, our neighbours from Unterengstringen. As luck would have it, we are in Buenos Aires at the same time and set off for Antarctica on different ships from Ushuaia in quick succession. The piers at Puerto Madero offer a variety of bars and restaurants and, as always, we have a lot to

talk about. Time passes so quickly and we soon have to return to the Hilton Hotel, where the Ponant welcome dinner and around 140 other fellow travellers await us at 7.30 pm. The remaining 25 guests arrive late in the evening on the Air France flight from France.



Day 4: Thursday, 13 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

The alarm clock rings at 4am and calls us to an early breakfast at 4.30am. The night before at 10 p.m. we had to deposit all our luggage in front of the room ready for travelling. We only see it again at the aeropuerto in Ushuaia. With only small hand luggage, we board bus no. 2, which takes us to EZE International Airport. Once again, we have to queue endlessly for the security check before we finally take off at 8.30 a.m. on the Boeing 737 Max chartered by Ponant towards Tierra del Fuego and land in rainy Ushuaia after a flight of around 4 hours.

As the guests from the previous cruise are travelling back to Buenos Aires on the same plane we arrived on, the crew probably need some time



So the buses take us to a farm about 40 minutes away, where we are served a typical local lamb barbecue. Afterwards, once the rain has subsided a little, there is enough time for a short hike through the beautiful river landscape in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Then, at around 4.30 pm, we can finally board our ship Le Boreal, which will be our home for the next 16 days. The crew has organised and prepared the check-

in procedure perfectly, so that we can move into our lovely cabin 424 on deck 4 after a very short time.

Captain Mikaël Debien is already waiting for us at 3 pm for the official welcome on board and the most important information about our journey to Antarctica. He is expecting wind speeds of up to 50 knots and 3.5 metre high waves. It could be a pretty rough crossing.





For dinner, we chose the à la carte restaurant La Licorne on deck 2 and immediately made friends with the Filipino waiter Wilbert. The food is excellent and we enjoy being spoilt in this way once again.

Afterwards we return to our cabin, where we clear out the rest of our luggage and stow it neatly so that nothing can fly around in the swell.



Day 5: Friday, 14 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal



We had an excellent night's sleep and didn't really notice the storm. It was probably not quite as bad as predicted, but the stormy weather will stay with us for a few more days. Shortly after 7am, we head back to the La Licorne restaurant for a hearty breakfast. The first

presentation by the 14-strong expedition team is already scheduled for 9 a.m., with each member briefly explaining their specialism. From biologists to geologists, a vet and a former lawyer from the USA, many exciting professions are represented so that all topics can be covered well.

At 11 a.m. we can pick up our expedition parka in our size, which will keep us warm during the excursions in the Zodiac and which we can keep and take home with us after the trip. After lunch, at the table with a fun group from Australia, the captain explains the itinerary at 3 pm and gives us more information about the weather; it remains stormy.



Afterwards, the expedition leader Alis-sya gives us a briefing on the strict environmental regulations for behaviour on land. A lot is really being done to preserve this unspoilt biosphere in the future. We are really looking forward to the shore excursions in South Georgia and Antarctica.

At 5 p.m. Ilaria, the young cruise director from Italy, who started as a dancer with Ponant two years ago and has made a rapid career in the meantime, takes us on a tour of the entire ship, which is not too long due to the small dimensions of the very modern ship. There are currently 168 passengers and 156 crew on board, an unbelievable ratio of almost 1:1! A unique feature is that the bridge can be visited at certain times without prior notice. We've never actually experienced anything like it.



Of course, we don't want to miss the captain's reception with champagne and snacks, where we also have the obligatory photo taken with Captain Mikaël Debien himself. This picture and a large number of others can be viewed daily in the study and purchased for cash. Immediately afterwards, the first gala dinner is served in the dining room, where we are once again spoilt rotten. I wonder what our scales will say when we get home?

Day 6: Saturday, 15 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

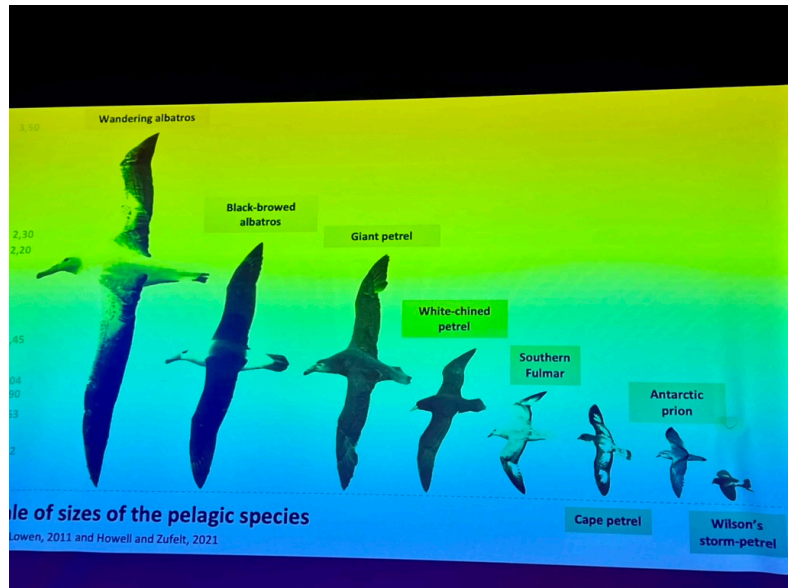
We had another excellent night's sleep. The gentle rocking of the ship lulled us into a deep and restful sleep. Nevertheless, shortly after 7am we are almost the first in the dining room for breakfast, where we are greeted from afar by our Filipino waiter Wilbert. He takes us to a super nice table right by the window. It's simply incredible what a few friendly words in Tagalog can achieve. He made a pretty white rose for Moni especially for yesterday's Valentine's Day, which now adorns our cabin.

At 9.45 am we get our expedition boots and then all our equipment that we want to wear or take ashore has to be carefully decontaminated. Nothing from the outside should be brought into this fragile environment, so we have to thoroughly vacuum our overtrousers, rucksack, hats, gloves, waterproof duffel bags and scarves and disinfect our boots, walking poles and camera tripod with chemicals. Now we are ready for our adventures, which are due to start the day after tomorrow. Until then, we can enjoy a few more lazy days at sea, filled with sleeping and eating.

In the afternoon, an exciting lecture by Deborah Pardo is on the programme. It was actually primarily about albatrosses, her area of specialisation, which she has been researching intensively for many years. However, her work and comprehensive statistics on



the threat to albatrosses enable her to make the link to environmental pollution, climate change and the threat to our habitat. She has given up her academic career in favour of public relations work and founded an organisation that raises awareness of the problem among the leaders of our society, a major but certainly thankless task in this day and age. Based on her statistical calculations, she assumes that by 2060 at the latest, the point will be reached where the balance on our planet will finally tip and the habitat on it will change fundamentally and permanently. Goodbye humanity!



Day 7: Sunday, 16 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

Today we are approaching A23A, currently the world's largest iceberg with a surface area of over 4,000 km², which is slowly drifting northwards. It is about 1/10 the size of Switzerland or the size of the island of Mallorca. It is feared that it could hit South Georgia in the foreseeable future and cause major damage to the wildlife there. The iceberg extends to a depth of over 400 metres below sea level and will run aground somewhere off the coast. Due to the sheer size of the ice, it will then form a huge barrier for penguins and seals to their food sources far out at sea, which could severely affect their



population.

The view of the ice carved by wind and waves is unique. We are also accompanied by dozens of whales, offering us an impressive spectacle. Unfortunately, I am far too slow with my photography to catch them. Moni was luckier. The broken-off parts of the large iceberg accompany us for





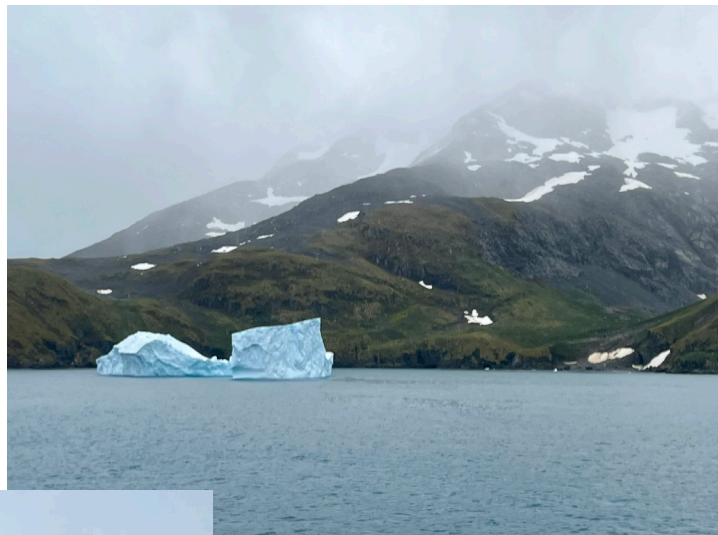
hours and offer a breathtaking sight in the sun. But it is bitterly cold and an icy wind is blowing, so we are glad of our warm parkas.

The presentation about the polar explorer Shackleton, who made several unsuccessful attempts to reach the South Pole and finally died of a heart attack on his fourth journey to Antarctica before arriving, was very interesting. His grave can still be visited today in the small village of Grytviken in South Georgia.

Day 8: Monday, 17 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

When we wake up at 6 a.m., we are already anchored off the coast of South Georgia in Hamilton Bay. Unfortunately, it is cloudy, quite chilly and rainy. Nevertheless, we are looking forward to our first sightseeing tour in the Zodiac along the coast. At 8.15 a.m., the blue group meets in the lounge to kit up and decontaminate. 10 passengers fit on each boat, which is piloted by



the naturalists. Our guide today is Deborah, who we already know from the albatross presentation, and she does a great job again. Unfortunately, it's overcast and raining lightly, but that doesn't dampen our excitement. We drive through between the

icebergs in the bay and then along the rocky coast. On the way, we are greeted by the first fur seals, which swim curiously around the boat and then dive underneath it. On the shore, the first Gentoo penguins look over at us curiously and numerous water birds circle around us in the



air. In the next bay we find a huge colony of king penguins - there must be well over a thousand of them standing around on the shore. Fur seals and young elephant sea lions frolic amongst them, lazing around and only occasionally lifting their heads to see who is passing by. All the animals here don't seem to be shy at all, as they don't recognize humans as enemies. The 75 minutes of the boat tour pass far too quickly and we return on board where we are greeted with a warming mulled wine.



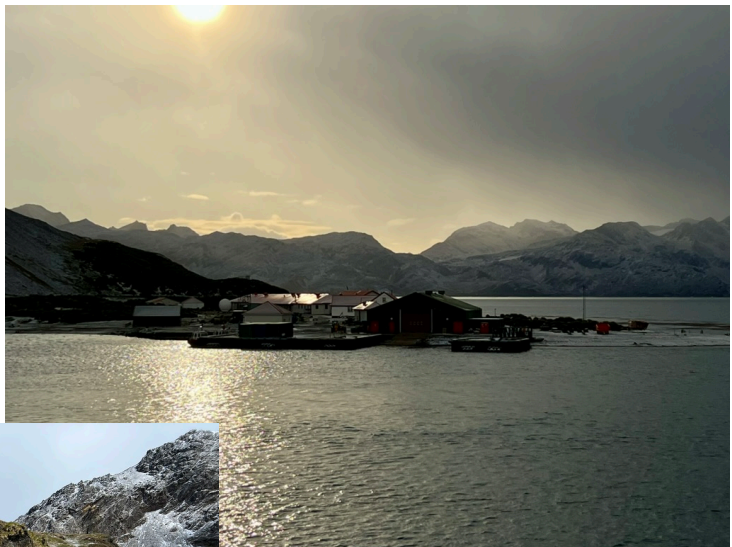
In the afternoon, the weather deteriorates further, fog rolls in and it starts to snow. Nevertheless, the trip through the Drygalski Fjord and the Cooper Passage is an impressive experience, which I enjoy at least in part from the treadmill in the fitness centre. Running with a view of rock faces, icebergs and seals swimming past is something very special. In the evening, the expedition team provides

an interesting update with the most important information about the day ahead.

Day 9: Tuesday, 18 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

Arrival in the bay of Grytviken at 6 o'clock in the morning. This is the site of the oldest whaling station in South Georgia and was the starting point for the first Antarctic expeditions at the beginning of the 20th century. The cemetery here also contains the grave of Ernest



Shackleton, one of the most famous polar explorers, who died of a heart attack on his last voyage on 5 January 1922 shortly before arrival. He was laid to rest in the church on the edge of the village, which was prefabricated in Norwe-gen and built by local labourers in a very short time in 1913, and then buried in the small cemetery 15 minutes' walk outside the village. His grave is still

visited by all travellers today. Real sailors follow the ritual of bringing a full glass of whiskey and pouring the first large gulp onto the grave in Shackleton's honour. Unfortunately, we forgot to bring whiskey and thus outed ourselves as landlubbers.



Grytviken practised whaling and processing from 1904 to 1968 and was expanded several times during this period. After whaling was abandoned, the buildings largely fell into disrepair and the huge steel structures of the factories are rusting away. Between 2003 and 2005, a major clean-up operation took place and the church, post office, museum and material store were renovated and can now be visited. There is also a research

station a little further away, but this is not open to visitors.

Hundreds of young fur seals cavort everywhere between the buildings, waiting for their mothers while they are out fishing, often for days on end. In between, king penguins pose for the tourists, while albatrosses munch on dead baby seals. If mother seals do not return, their babies



starve to death as they are only fed by their own mother and not adopted by others. This is where nature shows itself in all its harshness and life and death are sometimes very close together.

The second stop today is in the well-protected bay of Godthul. There used to be a floating whaling station here for several years, of which only a few anchor chains and two tanks remain today. First we take a short trip with the zodiac along the rocky coast where we





discover some breeding cormorants and a few Gento penguins. Then we make a stop at the pebbly beach, where a myriad of fur seal babies cavort again. A short walk takes us to a slightly elevated vantage point with a view of a small waterfall and a small stream in which three young seals are frolicking, a fun spectacle.

Day 10: Wednesday, 19 February 2025

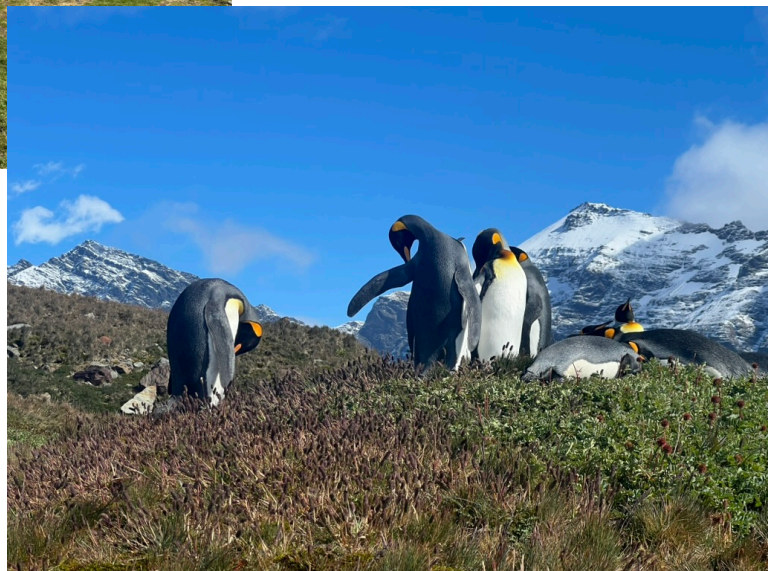
Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

Today is one of the absolute highlights on the programme: we visit the king penguin colony in Saint Andrews Bay. The weather couldn't be better and we can already see from the ship that the whole beach is teeming with penguins and we can hardly wait to get ashore when we can finally board our Zodiac at 9.30 a.m., which



takes us ashore in just a few minutes where we disembark amidst the penguins. We now walk a good distance along the coarse sandy beach before turning off onto green pastures and climbing a small hill. Proud king penguins walk around everywhere in smaller and larger groups and eye us curiously. They

come within 1 metre of the tourists. In between, there are countless young fur seals lying around and you almost have to be careful not to trip over them. The animals are very cheeky and want to play with the tourists, but there is a clear instruction not to approach them closer than 5 metres, but the seals are reluctant to comply with this



instruction. As they can also bite playfully and injure people with their sharp teeth, great caution is required and we scare away any overly cheeky specimens by clapping our hands from time to time.

The true size of the colony can only be recognised from the hill. Around 150,000 pairs of penguins are said to nest here, which means that a total of around 0.5 million birds live in this colony. The nesting grounds fill an entire valley from the beach to a glacier a little further down. It is truly unimaginable if you have not seen this spectacle with your



own eyes. Time passes far too quickly and after around 1.5 hours ashore we have to return to our ship, where another sumptuous lunch awaits us.



Another shore leave in Gold Harbour follows in the afternoon. Unfortunately, the sky has clouded over in the meantime and it has become noticeably cooler. But the penguin colony on the beach, although much smaller than the one in Saint Andrews Bay, is no less impressive. It is mainly king penguins that breed here, but there are also many gentoos. At one point, 15 huge male elephant seals lie in a



The penguin pairs only lay one egg at a time and then divide the time between them for incubation. They lay the egg standing on their feet and cover it completely with a belly fold. Incubation lasts between 52 and 56 days. Chicks that hatch early in the breeding season



heap. They are changing their fur and stay in the same place for around a month, only lifting their heads from time to time to see what is going on around them.



have a survival rate of around 70%, while those that hatch at the end of February have a survival rate of just 10%. Giant petrels are therefore tumbling everywhere among the penguins, hoping for a meal of dead penguins or baby seals. But even the remains of a dead elephant seal at the back of the beach do not spurn them. The natural cycle is omnipresent here.

Day 11: Thursday, 20 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

A heavy storm and high swell of up to 10 metres is forecast for today's sea day. There are significantly fewer passengers at breakfast, but some of the crew also make a rather pale impression. It's a good thing we took our seasickness remedy last night, so we can enjoy the



delicious smoked salmon and the other large selection at the breakfast buffet today.

During an exciting lecture in the afternoon, we learn a lot about the ownership of Antarctica and the regulations governing its administration. Based on the Antarctic Treaty, 8 states share the actual administration of the continent, which allows all of them to set up research stations everywhere and prohibits the exploitation of mineral resources as well as any military use. As the day progresses, the waves get higher and higher and so do the cancellations among crew and guests; self-service is the order of the day...



Day 12: Friday, 21 February 2025

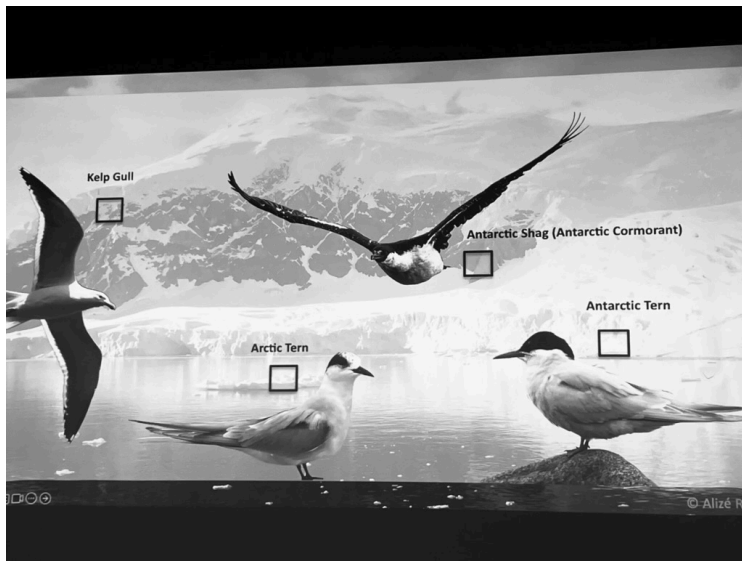
Overnight stay on Le Boreal

After a rather restless night, the wind and waves have subsided somewhat and at breakfast we meet some fellow travellers we haven't seen for two days. The density of vomit bags hanging from the handrails has also decreased significantly...

At today's exciting lecture, four of the naturalists report on their wintering on one of the sub-Antarctic islands belonging to France. You have to be a bit crazy to put yourself through such hardship for 18 months for a research project, for the sole purpose of collecting data that other scientists will later evaluate and analyse, and to garnish the merits with the publications. But when you see the marvellous pictures, you can understand the fascination of these people. Hats off!



After lunch, another decontamination session is on the programme. This is taken very seriously and is also randomly checked on the first disembarkation in the Antarctic. We were able to experience an example of the introduction of invasive species for ourselves in South Georgia in Saint Andrews Bay. There we discovered several flowering dandelion plants along the roadside, which really shouldn't be found in this area, but which spread very quickly due to their special flying seeds.



After this, ornithologist Alizée Rioud tells us about the bird species in the Antarctic. Here we will no longer find king penguins and albatrosses, which have their breeding grounds in South Georgia, but Gento, Adelie and Chinstrap penguins, which breed here in large colonies between November and March. During the remaining months, these animals are excellent swimmers and underwater hunters and live exclusively in the sea. We will also encounter skuas, prions and snow petrels as well as Antarctic

cormorants and seagulls, which have adapted to the special requirements of this inhospitable environment.

Day 13: Saturday, 22 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

This morning, Norwegian glaciologist George Stanley Cowie tells us about his speciality, the development of glaciers around the world. His experiences during the development of the foundations for his master's thesis are very impressive and you can sense his inner commitment and passion for this topic. In the centre of Antarctica, the ice cover over the continent is over 5000m thick and millions of years old. As it is very dry there, only a few millimetres of snow cover are added each year, so that the thickness of the ice hardly grows and the ice there moves very little. The situation is quite different on the coast, where the glaciers meet the sea. Here, the ice can move several metres a day, as there is hardly any resistance. His calculations and pictures of the rapid retreat of glaciers due to global warming are also impressive. Theoretically, the global sea level would rise by over 70 metres if all the ice were to melt. He assumes that the rise will be 1.5 metres by the turn of the next century. Even this would have fatal consequences for many countries at sea level, such as the Netherlands and the Maldives.

In the afternoon, we reach the first volcanic islands of the Antarctic Peninsula and a Zodiac excursion to Penguin Island is on the agenda. The weather is rainy and fog is rolling in from the mountains, so the planned hike to the crater rim unfortunately has to be cancelled. But there is also a lot waiting for us on the beach. We wind our way through the numerous adult fur seals, which feel a little disturbed by our presence, and reach the large





breeding colony of chinstrap penguins at the end of the beach, no doubt several thousand pairs breeding there again. In contrast to the king penguins in South Georgia, they build nests and lay up to 3 eggs, which the parents incubate alternately. In the meantime, the drizzle has turned to damp and clammy sleet and it has become noticeably colder. We are glad to be back in the warm ship after around 1.5 hours.

Day 14: Sunday, 23 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

We travelled a little further overnight and reached Edin-borough Bay on Livingstone Island. It is still cloudy and raining lightly. Nevertheless, the view of the ice and rocky coast is magnificent and we are looking forward to our Zodiac excursion. But first we have to get warm clothes on!



A unique landscape, alternating between ice walls from broken glaciers and huge basalt cliffs over 100 metres high, awaits us on our 1.5-hour tour along the coast. In the meantime, the rain has stopped and the sun is even shining in places. Our guide Martin Kluemper from Germany knows a lot about Antarctica and the glacier ice, and

he brings it across in a fun way. He has been travelling the world's oceans for many years and is spending the summer in Antarctica for the fourth time. He has also travelled by sailing ship off the coast of Guatemala and has been hiking in Japan, Greenland, Svalbard and Iceland. As he likes travelling



fast on the water, he is always assigned the slowest zodiac boat by the expedition leader Alisée. That's a life!



After a sumptuous lunch and some lazing around and enjoying the magnificent view, we continue at 14:15 with a briefing from expedition leader Alisée. We sail through the narrow Neptunes Bellows Passage, also known as Hells Gate or Dragons Mouth, into a volcanic caldera that lies beneath the surface of the water, where we head for Whalers Bay on Deception Island.

During the journey to the coast in the zodiac, the wind has picked up considerably and it has started to

snow. I don't miss the chance to climb up to the viewpoint. A strong wind is blowing up there and fog prevents any view. Skakelton must have felt something like this on his crossing of South Georgia, except that he couldn't get back to a heated ship for a warm shower after 1.5 hours.

Day 15: Monday, 24 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal



It got much colder again during the night and there is 15cm of snow on our small balcony as we head towards Palaver Point, where high, fog-covered mountains await us. The Zodiac brings us safely ashore after a few minutes and we climb the snow-covered slope up to the viewpoint over the bay. Small and medium-sized breeding colonies of chinstrap penguins, most of which are in

moulting season, are dotted all over the coves that surround the bay. In between, adult fur seals frolic and play exuberantly in the fresh snow. Further out in the bay between the ship and the landing site, several humpback whales cavort and blow into the air before diving back into the depths. In this wild and spectacular natural setting, you really do feel small and



insignificant as a human being. The snowfall has subsided somewhat and despite the cold, it's easy to stay here and the time on land passes far too quickly. Due to strong winds, we are unable to call at Charlotte Bay in the afternoon and our Zodiac trip is postponed to Graham Passage. In the meantime, there is even some sun in the sky and the icebergs around us glisten and sparkle. During lunch, a humpback whale even pops by and sweeps all the guests off their seats.



This afternoon's Zodiac trip is an absolute highlight. We are the first to join our guide Alex and are seated at the front of the boat. This gives us the very best view and allows us to take the best photos. And there are more than enough subjects. First of all, pictures of incredibly impressive ice formations in constantly changing shades of blue.

Then we encounter two adult humpback whales at a distance of perhaps less than 100 metres from our boat. We can watch them for quite a while and take



some great pictures, a very impressive experience! This day was really great!



Day 16: Tuesday, 25 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

Today you will go ashore in Neko Harbour, which was discovered and mapped by the Belgian Gerlache Antarctic expedition between 1897 and 1899. The name comes from a floating whale factory that was located here between 1911/12 and 1923/24 and processed captured whales into fish oil. Today there is still a small refuge here, built by the Argentinians in 1948, and hundreds of pairs of penguins nest on the flanks of the hill. You could watch the young penguins frolicking around for hours while they wait for their food-hunting parents. The parents recognise their young from the large crowd by their voice alone and come purposefully from the beach to feed them. To do this, they have to climb the steep ice flank of the hill and overcome some rocks, which is not always easy and can sometimes lead to funny situations.



Down in the bay, two young humpback males pass by and put on a real show with their tail fins sticking up as they defrost. The sun illuminates the slopes of the glacier field opposite and the icebergs in the bay create a totally surreal picture. Time passes far too quickly and we return to the ship for lunch. Today we are having sushi in the Antarctic. Nobody would have expected that.

In the afternoon, we head to Danco Island, where the next shore excursion is on the programme. The spectacular 1.5 kilometre long island with a shallow pebble beach is named after Emile Danco, a Belgian geophysicist who died during the Gerlache expedition between 1897 and 1899. The hike zig-zags through the snow- and ice-covered slope to the top of the island and back is quite strenuous and takes around an hour. But the effort is more than worth it. From up there, you have a



magnificent view over the whole island and the mainland opposite, as well as the passages in between. It is simply spectacular, even when the sun is no longer shining. On the way back, we keep coming across waddling parent penguins on their way back to the rookery on a small hilltop with their many young eagerly waiting to be fed. On the shore we can watch a whole flock of young Gentoo penguins, probably in the water for the first time, frolicking around like young animals experiencing snow for the first time, a marvellous spectacle!



Day 17: Wednesday, 26 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal



place. On one rock you can still recognise the tide markings from back then, which Charcot is said to have carved into the rock himself. I got the picture of the markings from the young French geologist 'Short-Fanny', who also works here as a naturalist. She has an incredible knowledge not only of rocks and tectonics, but also of the animal and

We travelled to Port Charcot during the night. Commandant Paul Charcot's French expedition spent the winter in this bay, which was barely sheltered from the wind and waves, in 1903/04. A pile of stones bearing the names of the participants still bears witness to this today.

As it is not possible for our ship Le Boreal to enter the bay today due to icebergs, we land on the opposite side of the island and climb the hill with the stone monument from the other side. Then it's down over a snow-covered ridge to the actual wintering place of Charcot's crew. As luck would have it, I have the beach all to myself for a while and can fully enjoy the tranquillity and magic of this

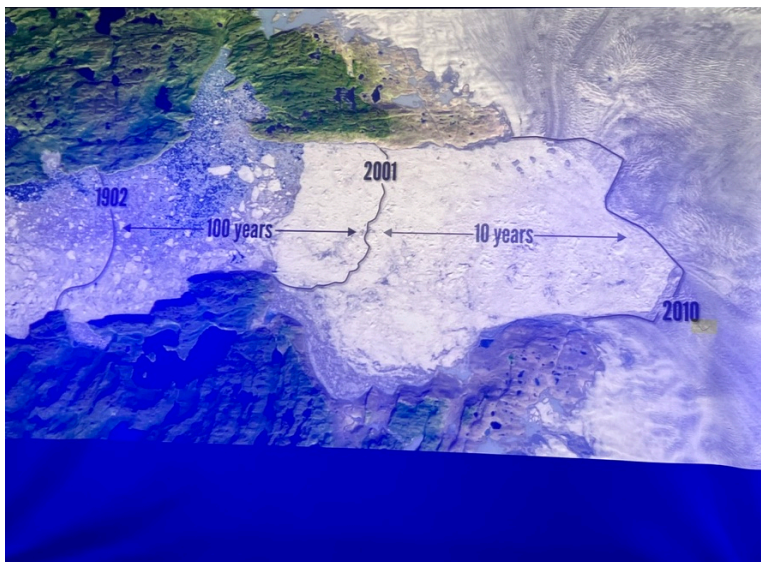




plant world. She passes this on to her guests with great dedication. It's funny that before becoming a naturalist, she had travelled on many Ponant ships with her parents since childhood and is probably the only naturalist to hold admiral status on this cruise line as a loyal customer.

On the way back to the jetty, we have a view of the other side of the bay, where penguins and whales gather together for a krill feast. There must be a dozen whales in the bay, and they keep turning up.

On the way back to the ship in the Zodiac, we make a short diversions to the next bay, where we are treated to something truly unique. A single king penguin has strayed here from South Georgia, a swimming distance of over 1,500 kilometres. Even our guides, some of whom have been travelling to Antarctica for over 8 years, have never seen anything like it.



The second half of the morning will feature a documentary by photographer James Balog, who has been documenting glacier retreat on Iceland, Greenland and Antarctica with photographs and film footage for over 20 years. He has spent a lifetime risking his health to use these images to impressively show how devastating the effects of global warming really are, but no one really seems to take this seriously.

The Zodiac excursion in the afternoon is another absolute highlight. First we pass an ice floe that a leopard seal and a crabeater seal have chosen as their resting place and share peacefully, although the latter is otherwise on the menu of the former, as its scars impressively show. We then pass several humpback whales, which put on a real show for us.



We continue through an impressive landscape of glacier-covered islands and impressive rock formations, which glow in the sunlight, back to our ship.

Day 18: Thursday, 27 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal



This morning is the last Zodiac excursion on the programme. We take a winding route through the iceberg landscape to the Ukrainian research station Vernadsky on the Kyiv Peninsula. Around 50 people work at the research station in the summer, of which around 12 to 15 also spend the winter here.

Nearby is the British base F Wordie House, built in 1947 and still in operation until the 1960s, which we can visit. Six people lived and worked all year round in the small premises, which have been renovated in the style of the 1950s, under the most basic of conditions. It's hard to imagine that today.





On the way back, we can watch a leopard seal chasing a penguin, a rather cruel spectacle similar to a cat playing with a captured mouse before it is eaten.

We return to the ship somewhat wistfully, and soon it's time to say goodbye to Antarctica and start the return journey back to Ushuaia via the Drake Passage. What kind of weather can we expect there?



Day 19: Friday, 28 February 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

So far, the Drake Passage has shown its calmest side: more Drake Lake than Drake Shake.

After a hearty breakfast, Sacha from Russia gives a very exciting talk about the race to the South Pole. After

Shakelton had already failed for the second time a few years previously, only around 90mi from the geographical pole, in 1911 two expeditions attempted to make the 900mi on the ice-covered continent, Terra Incognita, at the same time. How disappointed the Englishman Robert Scott must have been when he reached the longed-for goal on 18 January 1912 and discovered that Roald Amundson had already planted the Norwegian flag there on 14 December 1911, over a month earlier, and had cheekily left a letter to Scott congratulating him on his second place. Even worse, despite careful planning and preparation, Scott's entire team never reached the base camp in Rossbay and froze to death in a snowstorm that lasted for days, only 70mi away. Even today, a memorial erected 9 months later after their discovery commemorates the 5 brave men.

As we do every lunchtime, we go to the self-service restaurant on the 6th floor, where the attentive young waitress Mathilde from France is already waiting for us. She used to be a professional kick-boxer and lived and trained in Thailand for a while. However, she has now given up her professional career in favour of a restaurant career on the high seas. Her contract runs until June 2025, so she will be making the transatlantic crossing without guests and then the crossing to Bergen in Norway. It's always great to see young people who are so committed and dedicated to their work. She is sure to go very far!

In the afternoon, Martin Kluemper gives us an exciting insight into the largest marine mammals, the whales. His knowledge in this area is truly vast and he has acquired it exclusively through his own research. Not only do we learn about the evolutionary history and the training and functioning of the different characteristics of the various species, but we also find out how these impressive animals communicate or hunt together. This shows just how social and intelligent these marine mammals must be! Thank you very much for this fantastic presentation, Martin.

In the evening, the big farewell gala takes place in the La Licorne dining room with a 6-course menu, only the very best that the chef has prepared for us.

La Licorne		
Dîner de l'Au Revoir — Dimanche 27 Février 2025 Farwell Gala Dinner — Sunday, February 27 th 2025		
Menu classique—Classic menu		
Amuse-bouche Appetizer	Royale de foie gras de canard, granola caramélisé, émulsion amandes Duck foie gras royale, caramelized granola, almond emulsion	🍴🍷
Entrée froide Cold starter	Noix de Saint-Jacques marinées à crues, caviar Oscietre, Vinaigrette aux fruits de la passion Marinated scallops, Oscietra caviar, passion fruit vinaigrette	🍴🍷🍷
Entrée chaude Hot starter	Filet de Maigre grillé, bouillon safrané Grilled lean fish, saffron broth	🍴🍷🍷
Plat Main course	Homard et filet de bœuf cuisinés ensemble, Crique de pomme de terre, jus truffé Lobster and filet of beef cooked together, potato gratin, truffle jus	🍴🍷🍷🍷
Dessert Dessert	Chocolat, croustillant cacahuètes, sauce chocolat caramélisée Chocolate, crispy peanuts, caramelized chocolate sauce	🍴🍷🍷
Mignardises Sweet treats	Guimauve au citron, truffe chocolat, pâte de fruit framboise Lemon marshmallow, chocolate truffle, raspberry jelly	🍴🍷🍷

Day 20: Saturday, 1 March 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

Today is a quiet day. After our crossing, we stop in Port Williams in Chile around midday, where our ship needs to be refuelled after more than 3,500 nautical miles. The tanker Dona Ana from Valparaiso comes alongside and the loading process takes over 4 hours. We already know this from our stop with the Eclipse in mid-March 2020, when we got stuck on the ship

due to corona and had to continue our journey to San Diego. But the captain has to dig out his big wallet to pay for this refuelling today...



For lunch we meet up with Deborah Pardo from Marseille, who works on the ship as a naturalist. Her speciality is albatross research, but she has now greatly expanded her field of vision and is trying to raise awareness of global warming and the associated problems among political and business leaders by giving talks around the world. Discussing with her is super exciting and the time is far too short to answer all the questions and it would be great to meet her again on another occasion.



After another 3 hours sailing through the Beagle Channel, we reach our destination of Ushuaia at around 7 p.m., where after dinner we can take a few more steps through the small town and along the harbour promenade back to the ship before we have to put our packed luggage outside the door before going to sleep.

Day 21: Sunday, 2 March 2025

Overnight stay on the Le Boreal

After a last hearty breakfast, it's time to say goodbye to the ship and the excellent crew, who are all standing guard at the gangway, shortly after 8am. Now the sadness finally sets in!



As the flight to Buenos Aires doesn't take off until 1.30 p.m., a short city tour and another walk through the historic city centre are planned for the morning. Afterwards, we can enjoy some refreshments in a restaurant at the harbour at Ponant's expense before the bus takes us back to the small provincial airport.

During the flight, all the great and impressive experiences of this expedition trip to South Georgia and the Antarctic pass by in our minds once again. It really was a 'once in a lifetime' experience that can hardly be topped. We are so grateful that we were able to experience all this!



We say thank you from the bottom of our hearts to Mathilde, Deborah, Wilfried, Ilaria, Fanny and all the other great crew members on the LE BOREAL, who made this trip a unique and unforgettable experience. It was great!