

## Introduction to Antarctica



## A Guide to Expeditionary Voyages

# Antarctica

The immense ice-shrouded wilderness of Antarctica is a winter wonderland which defies our senses. Remote, inaccessible and harsh, yet utterly beguiling, long has Antarctica's incomparable scenery, exotic cast of wildlife and rich history beckoned the intrepid traveller.

Antarctica is said to be the coldest, driest and windiest place on earth, but this does an injustice to its compelling draw cards for the visitor, while ignoring the ability to experience this extraordinary region from the comfort of an ice strengthened expeditionary boat.

Steppes Travel was one of the first UK Tour Operators to offer holidays to Antarctica nearly ten years ago. Since then we've built an impressive reputation based on detailed first-hand knowledge and forged long-standing partnerships with all the leading small ship boat operators. Our main Antarctic specialists have over 20 years of Antarctic experience between them and have both visited the Peninsula.



From the spectacular ice-choked channels of the Antarctic Peninsula, to the stark beauty and historic huts of The Ross Sea, whether you want an express 'Fly & Cruise' or an extended voyage to cross the intangible Antarctic Circle, we have one of the broadest ranges of Antarctic cruises available.

## Expeditionary Voyages

If you think cruising is only about huge ships docking in small ports and disgorging thousands of passengers, then think again. Expeditionary voyages are everything traditional cruising is not:

- **Small boats** - We offer a comprehensive range of smaller sized boats, accommodating between 48 - 122 passengers providing a very intimate, personalised experience
- **Active** - Daily landings by zodiac allowing you to really experience Antarctica. Typically includes plenty of opportunity to spend time at penguin rookeries and walks of varying lengths
- **Educational** - All landings are accompanied by your expeditionary staff, in the evenings they offer a variety of lectures, providing a strong educational dimension to the whole experience.
- **Adventure options** - The more adventurous may wish to consider camping out on the continent for a night, exploring by sea kayak or diving beneath the chilly water, all offered on select departures

## Why Book with Steppes

### Knowledge and Experience

With extensive experience of offering polar trips, we provide unparalleled first-hand knowledge, including tips and useful pointers you just won't find in any guidebook or website.

- Friendly, helpful and objective advice, backed up by our years of experience
- Unrivalled in-depth knowledge of the boats, many we've either sailed on or personally inspected
- Invaluable advice on which are the best cabins and which to be avoided on each ship
- Adept at cutting through the bewildering maze of options and matching you to the right boat and cabin

### Peace of mind

Booking with Steppes Travel you can be assured your money is safe; we offer a fully inclusive service with flights and pre and post voyage accommodation, which will give you full ATOL protection. All our flight options also include complimentary airline failure insurance.

All the boats we offer are members of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and have agreed to abide by one of tourism's most conscientious codes of conduct.

# When to Go

The Antarctic summer season is quite short, running from November through to mid March. There are seasonal nuances and the timing of your trip may be influenced by what you are hoping to see:

## November (spring)

Early in the season you are likely to encounter larger amounts of snow and icebergs will be at their most spectacular. This is the time of year when courtship is in full swing and in the penguin rookeries you will see birds displaying and nest building. In South Georgia and the Falklands, the spring flowers bloom and the fur seals will also be courting. This is the ideal time to be visiting the Sub-Antarctic Islands for bird watching.

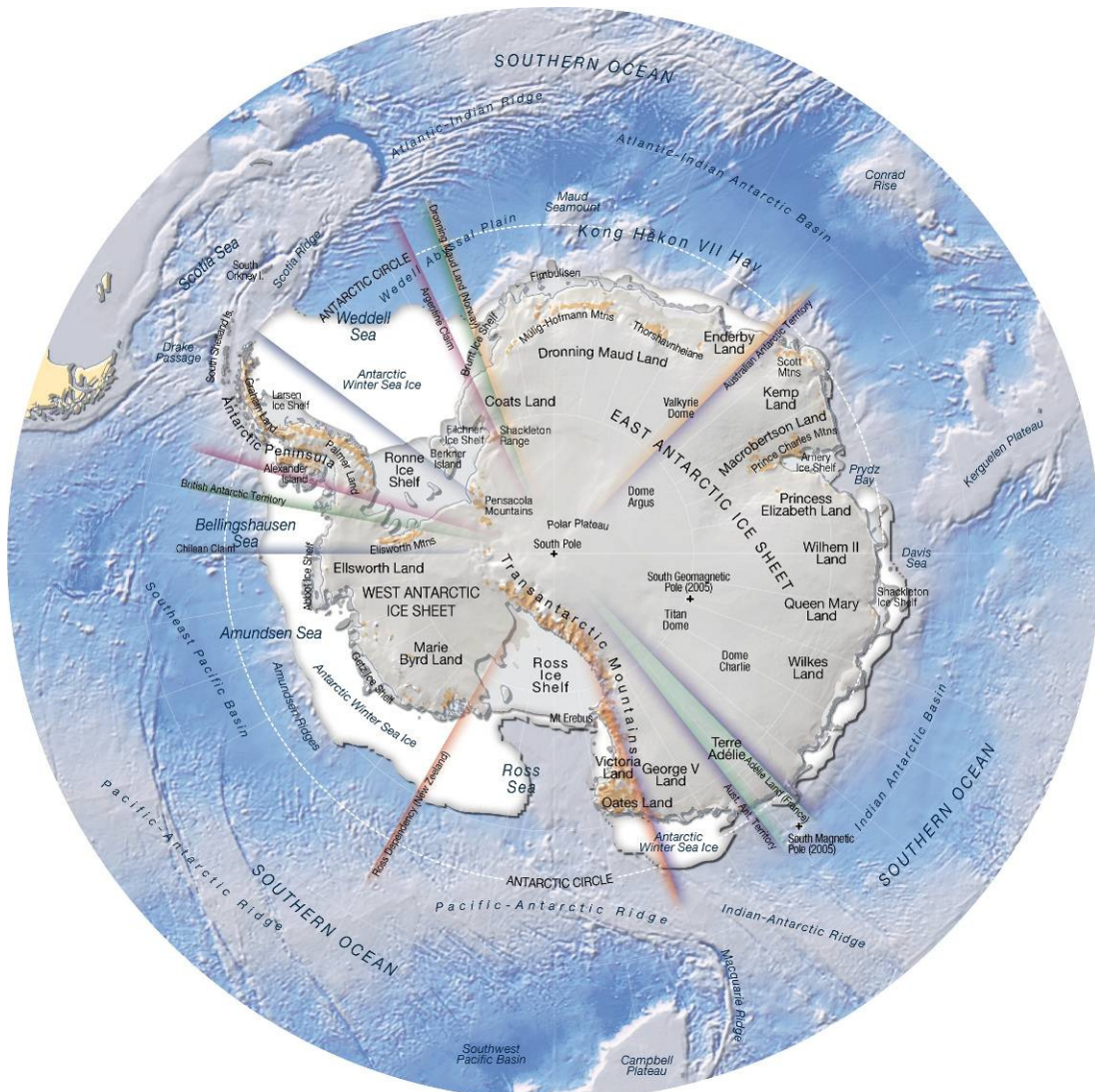
## December - January (mid summer)

This is when Antarctica is at its warmest and wildlife at their most active; you will also have the advantage of up to 24 hours of daylight. The penguin chicks in the more northerly latitudes hatch first with those on the peninsula mainly hatching around mid December. This is the height of the season and coincides with the highest cabin fares. Expeditions from Australasia to the Ross Sea and East Antarctica depart during this season.

## February - March (late summer)

These two months are traditionally known as the best for those interested in whale watching as they are likely to be seen in their most prolific numbers. The penguin rookeries will be busy with adult birds bringing in krill for their fast growing chicks, most of which will fledge in late February to early March. Leopard seal pups provide drama as they cut their teeth and hone hunting skills. By late summer the sea ice will have broken up making navigation further south easier, while the soft, low light can be ideal for photography.

# Map of Antarctica



## Life on board

There is no average day onboard an expeditionary boat as the day's activities will be very much determined by the prevailing weather conditions, ice and the wildlife encountered. Flexibility here is the key. If you are looking for a strict and structured itinerary then this is not the destination for you!



Early morning call is normally around 07:00 with an update on the weather conditions and the morning's anticipated excursion (landing). However the start of the day can be earlier, with an excited call of "whales spotted on the starboard bow" or something similarly enticing. Always be prepared to change quickly and have your camera ready for these occasions and you will be rewarded, no one will notice morning hair or odd socks pulled on in a hurry!

Breakfast is typically a buffet affair with a range of cereals, fresh fruit, breads and a cooked option. There will be a briefing regarding the morning excursion: what the options are, how long the zodiac cruise is likely to be and what the team hope you will encounter.

Standing at the top of the gangplank for the first time can be daunting, but you will soon learn to always keep one hand to rail, the sailor's grip and the step, step, sit shuffle, shuffle for a safe and quick entry into your zodiac.



Once in your zodiac you may find yourself cruising along the front of a magnificent glacier with birds swirling above your head and rafts of penguins porpoising alongside. Watch penguins, the clowns of Antarctica, gather on the ice edge plucking up courage to jump into the abyss, knowing there is a leopard seal patrolling below. When the penguins return, they gather under the surface before rocketing to the surface like little torpedoes and hurling themselves onto the rocks and ice, often landing in a comical ungainly heap.

On land, you may find yourself climbing up a steep snowy bank where you will be rewarded with a view far into the distance, over glaciers to snow capped peaks, while out at sea you watch a group of curious humpbacks as they circle your ship, wondering who these aliens are. Perhaps you will prefer to sit quietly on the edge of a penguin rookery and watch daily life unfold; they are never quiet with constant bickering and stone stealing for their nests going on.

Reluctantly, you return to the mothership by zodiac in time for a warming lunch. While you eat, the captain will be skilfully manoeuvring the ship to your next destination, ready for the afternoon's excursion. While the ship is repositioning, spend time out on the deck watching the elegant pintados glide on the updrafts created by your wake, or go to the bridge, which is often one of the best places to spot whales, where you can look at the nautical charts or just watch as the ship weaves between towering icebergs.



What will this afternoon's excursion bring? An inquisitive Minke whale diving beneath your zodiac or encounter a crabeater or leopard seal relaxing on a slab of ice? Maybe you will be lucky



enough to see an iceberg calving, one moment calm then the next with a great whoosh turning and rebalancing itself, exposing the beautifully ridged and rippled underside in blue hues you never knew existed. Alternatively you may encounter one of the Antarctic deep fogs, with icebergs looming out of the mist evoking thoughts of those who explored this region before Gortex and fleeces; many of the bays, glaciers and mountains around you are named after them.

After a good hearty three course meal, most passengers are ready to head for their cabins for an early night, while the hardier may have opportunity to forsake their cabin to camp out for a night on this great continent. An unforgettable experience!

# What Wildlife will I see?

## Penguins



These inquisitive, endearing birds can be found in huge numbers across the Antarctic continent and where you go will determine what species you will see. The Antarctic Peninsula harbours Adelie, Chinstrap and Gentoo in great numbers and Macaroni's in smaller numbers. Some of the penguin colonies number into the hundreds of thousands. You will have plenty of opportunity to visit these colonies and watch their clownish antics during the course of your voyage. In South Georgia and the Falkland Islands, you will encounter vast colonies of King Penguins, along with gaudy Rock Hoppers. If you visit some of the Sub Antarctic Islands you can see a

number of endemic species including the Snares Crested, Erect Crested and Royal Penguin.

## Whales

All whale species found in Antarctic waters migrate long distances to feed in the cold, nutrient-rich Southern Oceans during the austral summer before heading to warmer northern waters to breed and give birth to their young during the winter months. If you visit the Antarctic Peninsula you can expect frequent encounters with Humpbacks and Minke whales as they are often very curious of the main ship and also the zodiacs. You may also encounter Orcas (Killer Whales) that patrol the waters hunting seal pups and penguins. Southern Right Whales and Sperm Whales are visitors to the region, migrating south from Latin America and South Africa. On voyages with long sea crossing you may encounter Fin and Sei whales, and if you are very privileged a rare sighting of the largest species of all, the Blue Whale.



## Seals



Of the six Antarctic seal species, four are ice habitat specialists, breeding on the sea ice in spring. Leopard and Ross seals tend to be solitary, whereas Weddell and Crabeater seals form loose breeding aggregations. The Leopard Seal is Antarctica's top penguin predator, growing up to just over 3 meters. Antarctic fur seals and elephant seals are both found north of the pack-ice zone and breed in dense colonies on beaches. Here dominant males (bulls) maintain harems of females (cows) in territories. In constantly defending these, bulls will not forage at sea, relying instead on blubber reserves laid down in the previous winter. All seals breed annually and the timing of pup production and

associated behaviour is linked to habitat and ecology. Mating occurs after pupping, though a fertilised egg will not implant in the uterus until later in the year.

## Albatross & other Birds

For birders, other than the obvious penguins colonies, the islands around Antarctica offer some spectacular opportunities to get close to many species. The Wandering Albatross is the largest of seabirds, with a staggering wing span reaching 3 metres and a body mass of 8 -12 kg. They arrive in South Georgia in November to breed in loose colonies on flat grasslands. The chicks hatch in April and are reared throughout the winter, and then they fledge during November and December. The Falkland Islands are home to 65% of the world's Black-browed Albatross population, while South Georgia hosts Grey-Headed and the Light-Mantled Sooty Albatross. Petrels, Prions, Fulmars and Shearwaters constitute the majority of species that inhabit the region. You may also see Cormorant, Sheathbills, Skua and petite Arctic Terns who migrate from the Arctic each year, the longest migration of any bird.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **How cold will it be?**

Probably not as cold as you imagine as you will be travelling during the austral summer. There is very little change in temperature between day and night, which usually hovers around 0 - 5 degrees. The wind chill however can make this feel considerably cooler!

## **Do I need to purchase specialist equipment or clothing?**

The good news is that you don't need to spend lots of money on specialist equipment, but a good set of thermals will be a worthwhile investment. A good quality outer jacket and waterproof over trousers are also essential. On some voyages it's possible to hire jackets, and wellington boots are generally available on loan. Some vessels provide you with a complimentary expedition jacket.

## **How fit do I need to be?**

This is an active voyage involving walking excursions (not necessarily long, but over broken ground) and zodiac cruises. To be able to get the most out of your voyage you should be in good general health. In order to join the excursions, you must be able to get in and out of the zodiacs. Please note that none of these ships have an internal lift system between decks and stairs on ships tend to be steep. Each ship has a dedicated doctor on board who accompanies all excursions and is available on call.

Please be aware that in the case of a medical emergency, due to its geographical remoteness, helicopter rescue from Antarctica is not available. In an emergency, the ship would head directly for the nearest port, which could be up to 2 days sail away, from where a hospital transfer will be arranged.

## **Am I too old?**

The simple answer is 'No', there is no maximum age restriction, your health and general outlook on life being far more relevant criteria. Many of our clients over the years have been well into their seventies and eighties.

## **Is Antarctica suitable for children/families?**

Antarctica will undoubtedly make a lasting impression on a child; however we would discourage travellers under the age of 12. These voyages simply don't cater for children and don't offer any specific activities for children, child minding services, a child friendly food menu or smaller life preservers.

## **Do I need to worry about Sea Sickness?**

As you will possibly be crossing the Drake Passage twice you should anticipate potentially rough seas at some stage on the voyage. Should you be prone to motion or sea sickness, we suggest consulting your local pharmacy or GP for advice on anti-seasickness medication. 'How rough is the Drake Passage?' is an often asked question for many potential Antarctica travellers. It's a tricky one as the crossings can be anything from a millpond to a force nine hurricane, the latter being the less common. Ultimately it's down to a little luck, but most people find that their own experience wasn't as bad as they thought it would be. We can certainly help to hopefully reduce concern by recommending boats known for their stability. For those still worried, it's possible to avoid sailing the Drake Passage altogether by taking a 2 hour flight rather than undertaking a 2-day seas journey, see the Fly & Cruise option for details.

## **Single travellers**

As these voyages offer a collective experience in the company of like minded people, they're very well suited for single travellers. You have the option to either share a triple or twin same sex or to cover the supplement to secure your own cabin. If sharing, a cabin mate will be allocated to you by the boat operator.

## **Do I need to pack a jacket & tie/ cocktail dress?**

Dress code on board the boat is very informal and leans strongly towards the practical. When not undertaking excursions, people dress casually, even for dinner in the evenings. You may want a smarter shirt for the captain's dinner on the final night. The boat itself is always warm inside.

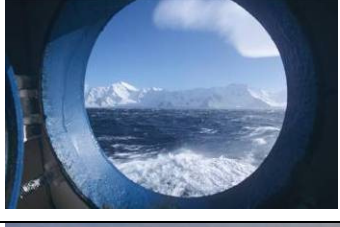
## **Can I contact the outside world?**

One of the great bonuses of travelling in this region is there is no mobile phone signal. If necessary it is possible to make outgoing calls by satellite phone and you can send and receive emails via the ship's email address, all of which is charged to your tab.

If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to give us a call, we would be delighted to help and assist you in making the right decisions.

## What are my choices?

Below is a brief overview of the Antarctica voyages we offer, for more detailed itineraries please contact us:

	<p><b>Classic Antarctica &amp; South Shetlands (10 - 12 days)</b></p> <p>A fantastic adventure encompassing the highlights of the Antarctica Peninsula, the most accessible part of the White Continent, which offers the best of Antarctica's dramatic landscape and wildlife in microcosm.</p>
	<p><b>Fly &amp; Cruise to Antarctica (5 days)</b></p> <p>Access Antarctica in just over 1.5 hours by plane from the toe of Chile, and avoid the +2 days by ship across the infamous Drake Passage - ideal for those either short of time or poor sailors!</p>
	<p><b>Crossing The Antarctic Circle (12 - 15 days)</b></p> <p>Of all the different trips to the Antarctic Peninsula this expedition offers the most time spent in Antarctica itself. Be one of only a small handful of people each year to cross the Antarctic Circle.</p>
	<p><b>Antarctic Peninsula, Falkland Island &amp; South Georgia (15 - 20 days)</b></p> <p>One of the world's greatest voyages combining the history and variety of The Falklands, the extraordinary density of wildlife of South Georgia, finishing with Antarctica itself as the 'jewel in the crown'.</p>
	<p><b>South Georgia Cruise (15 days)</b></p> <p>A rare South Georgia focused voyage offering extended time exploring this extraordinary Southern Ocean wildlife oasis. Ideally suited to the wildlife enthusiast or those who have previously voyaged to Antarctica.</p>
	<p><b>Ross Sea (29 days)</b></p> <p>The remote Ross Sea region of Antarctica is inaccessible but for two months every year when the ice thaws allowing access to five historic huts of some of the greatest polar explorers. Here you will have the chance to see Emperor Penguin colonies</p>
	<p><b>East Antarctica (25 days)</b></p> <p>Expedition to very rarely visited East Antarctica, "home of the blizzard" and Commonwealth Bay, with a visit to the remains of renowned explorer Douglas Mawson's hut.</p>
	<p><b>Sub Antarctic Islands (18 days)</b></p> <p>A journey to the rarely visited Sub Antarctic Islands, renowned as the 'Galapagos of the Southern Ocean', including Snares, Auckland, Bounty, Antipodes, Macquarie, Campbell and Chatham.</p>

# The Vessels

As your base and home for the duration of your Antarctic expedition, the decision on which boat to choose is a critical one. We have a wide choice of boats available from the basic through to the more luxurious. All these smaller ships are ideal for this type of polar expedition, offering an authentic, highly personalised experience for those people with an aversion to crowds, ably backed up by an exceptional expeditionary team and comfortable, homely accommodation. We have detailed knowledge of every boat, so do call us to talk through your options in more details.

## Spirit of Enderby



- Capacity of only 48 passengers
- Small and nimble, capable of reaching places many larger ships cannot
- Staffed by extremely knowledgeable personnel
- Offers a very authentic and personalised expeditionary voyage
- Strong naturalist and birding emphasis
- Offers voyages to the Far side of Antarctica

## Polar Pioneer



- Capacity 56 passengers
- A robust, homely vessel small enough to explore places beyond the reach of bigger ships
- Authentic, expeditionary ship with ice strengthened capabilities
- Refurbished in 2000 for private client travel
- Choice of 5 different cabins types from shared triples to the captain's suites, with choice of private or shared bathroom

## Ocean Nova



- Capacity 68 passengers
- A clean, airy, modern ship with crisp Scandinavian styling
- All cabins have twin lower berths with en suite bathrooms
- Spectacular glassed in observation lounge on top deck
- Zodiac platform at water level for easy transfer in and out of the zodiacs
- Dedicated single cabins

## Antarctic Dream



- Capacity 80 passengers
- A very comfortable and well-appointed ship, extensively refurbished in 2005 to high standards
- All cabins have an outside view, en suite bathroom and twin/ double beds
- First class onboard cuisine
- Jackets & Wellington boots provided as part of the cruise
- Airy dining room/ observation deck & dedicated lecture theatre

## Akademik Ioffe



- Capacity 96 passengers although designed to carry 112
- Exceptionally stable, quiet and manoeuvrable with a fast cruising speed of 14.5 knots makes her a good option for less confident sailors
- Authentic, expeditionary ship offering a high level of customer service
- A wide choice cabins types from shared triple to suite, with choice of private or shared bathroom, with generous deck space
- A range of adventurous activities on offer, with camping included

### Akademik Sergey Vavilov



- Capacity 109 passengers
- exceptionally stable, quiet and manoeuvrable
- Authentic, expeditionary ship
- Fast cruising speed of 14.5 knots
- Choice of 4 different cabins types from shared triple to suite, with choice of private or shared bathroom
- Spacious public areas and generous deck space
- Being very stable, a good option for less confident sailors

### Plancius



- Capacity 114 passengers
- Completely re-build & refurbished in 2009 as a comfortable expeditionary-style vessel
- Spacious observation deck with bar on deck 5 offering panoramic views
- Choice of different cabins types from shared quad to superior, all featuring a private bathroom
- Spacious public areas with two starboard gangways for swift zodiac logistics

### Kapitan Khlebnikov



- Capacity 112 passengers
- One of the largest and most powerful icebreakers in the world
- With 24,000 horsepower, a 45mm thick icebreaker hull, a displacement of 15,000 tons and the latest satellite navigation, this vessel can literally go anywhere
- 56 large and very comfortable cabins
- On board helicopters for flight-seeing excursions to inaccessible areas
- Theatre-style auditorium for Expedition Team presentations

### Sea Spirit



- Capacity 120 passengers
- All the comforts of home along with the amenities of a fine hotel
- All cabins have outside views, deluxe cabins & suites have balconies
- A selection of wines, beers, juices, and soft drinks included in the cost of your voyage
- Elevator and easy access to the Ribs make this an ideal choice for those a little less steady on their feet.

### Clipper Adventurer



- Capacity 122 passengers
- A very nicely appointed ship in the classic style of a traditional cruise ship with lots of varnished wood brass and wooden decks, while retaining a strong expeditionary feel
- Underwent extensive +\$10 million renovation in the late 1990's
- Choice of cabin types, all with private bathrooms
- Advanced communications and navigation equipment and state-of-the-art stabilisers

## Voyage Extensions

For those travellers wishing to make more of their time in South America or New Zealand (Ross Sea and East Antarctica), we offer a full range of tailor-made extensions. Please find a few suggestions below:

### Argentina

- Iguazu Falls, arguably the world's most impressive waterfall
- Trekking in Patagonia amongst the granite spires of Fitzroy
- Explore the cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires
- Experience the mountains of Argentina's forgotten North West



### Chile

- Trekking in Chile's Torres Del Paine National Park
- Visit Santiago's museums and Chile's wineland's
- Easter Island, a land of mythical Moai
- Visit another great desert the Atacama in Chile's far north



### Brazil

- Feel the buzz of Rio de Janeiro
- Chill out on one of Brazil's many beautiful beaches
- Visit the wildlife spectacles of the Pantanal & the Amazon



### Ultimate Wildlife Combos

- The Galapagos Islands with more playful, inquisitive seals and penguins
- Baja California a whale watching mecca for another seven species



### New Zealand & the Pacific Islands

- Self drive around the spectacular south island
- Take in one of the many classic multi day hikes
- Chill out on one of the Pacific Island

## Contact Us

If you want more information on any of the specific regions, advice on the style of vessel or wish to check availability please contact either **Sue** or **Alex** on **01285 880981** for more details



Having spent the best part of 5 years on my "gap year" working in travel seemed the natural progression. I am most at home travelling to remote wilderness areas of the globe. With a life-long passion for wildlife I love to get up close either by kayak or on foot and learn the local bushcraft skills. My travels have taken me to all seven continents. Most recently travelling to Antarctica, Spitsbergen and the Canadian High Arctic, sailing on the Amazon and Rio Negro along with whale watching in Baja California. I will be polar bear tracking in the Russian Arctic next.

Sue is Country Director for Steppes Voyages  
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Fostered by a childhood in the West Indies, the travel bug bit Alex early. Propelled by his enthusiasm for diverse cultures and hot food, he's travelled to over 50 countries across 7 continents, including both poles. Some of his most memorable recent experiences include dog sledding in The Arctic, kayaking in Alaska, snorkelling with whale sharks off Mexico and piranha fishing in The Amazon.

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