

INTERVIEW

Polar explorers Dr Scott Pallett and Bill Kwok will sail two research voyages to Antarctica on Scenic Eclipse II in January. **Alice Barnes-Brown** reports

Q. What do the Sentinel Expedition voyages hope to achieve?

SP: We are excited to have this opportunity to work with Scenic on a scientific expedition to east Antarctica. The study will help advance our collective understanding and ability to carry out genomic sequencing in remote environments. With our findings, we will be able to observe how climate change could influence antimicrobial resistance – one of the greatest health challenges of our time.

BK: One of the hopes for this expedition is that it sparks curiosity. We want to show that exploration and science are still very much alive and accessible.

Q. What are you most excited about?

SP: Our intended route will seek a novel way through the Transantarctic Mountains to the Polar plateau. It will complete a five-year body of scientific work and I am excited to make our own small contribution to the legacy of Antarctic exploration.

BK: I'm looking forward to following in the footsteps of historic explorers like Amundsen, Shackleton, Scott and Mawson – and at the same time, forging our own path.

Q. Will passengers be able to chat to you about your research?

BK: I'm sure I'll be spending a lot of time exploring the ship or kayaking around icebergs with other passengers so there will be plenty of time to connect. Plus, we can share stories over coffee or cocktails.

Q. What's on your packing list?

SP: What do you take on a cruise that has everything? I will be taking my copy of Sir Douglas Mawson's *The Home of the Blizzard* in the hope of some last-minute inspiration and advice from pioneering Antarctic explorers.

BK: Beyond the basics like clothes, food, skis, a tent and lab equipment, we're prepared for all kinds of situations. A special mention goes to our trusty Bluetooth speaker – music was a great distraction from the freezing cold in Greenland.

Q. Why did you choose Scenic Eclipse II for your research trip?

SP: From the GPS dynamic positioning system to measures for reducing noise and vibration, the features on *Eclipse* vessels are a real game-changer in limiting disturbance to the marine environment. And after a few weeks in the wilderness, the spa facilities will be great for recovery on our return journey.

BK: My teenage staff were giving me grief about how cruise ships cause damage to sensitive sea beds, so I was glad to let them know Scenic Eclipse II does not need to drop anchor. Plus, the onboard helicopters and submersible are next level.



Dr Scott Pallett and Bill Kwok



Scenic Eclipse II in McMurdo Sound, Antarctica; above, Bill Kwok (left) and Dr Scott Pallett