



Southern exposure

Sue Bryant channels her inner explorer with an Antarctica cruise on Hurtigruten's new hybrid-powered ship

Watching the sea freeze is a curious sensation. I stood on my balcony under midnight Antarctic skies and a bright half-moon watching circles of ice, called pancakes, slowly merge together.

In between them the black water was gradually taking on the texture of slush. My ship, Hurtigruten's *Roald Amundsen*, nudged across the bay so quietly I could hear the ice gently knocking against the hull.

The brand-new *Roald Amundsen* should be quiet. It's the world's first hybrid-powered expedition ship, named after the Norwegian explorer who, in 1911, beat Scott to the South Pole. I joined its first voyage in Antarctica to check out its green credentials, which are impressive.

Two enormous banks of batteries cut fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions by 20%. This doesn't mean it sails silently, but the batteries do ensure the engines run at maximum efficiency.

Computer-controlled 'dynamic positioning' meant

we didn't once drop anchor in Antarctica. Waste water is processed to the extent that it's drinkable – although nobody was offering to try. The laundry bags are made from upcycled hotel sheets, and crew uniforms from repurposed plastic collected by Spanish fishermen. In a recent review, more than 70 types of single-use plastic were ditched.

PASSAGE TO ANTARCTICA

A few days previously, we'd picked our way through the glacier-strewn fjords off the tip of Chile, heading out into the feared open sea of the Drake Passage, 500 miles of water between South America and Antarctica.

After a bumpy night, I woke to steely skies and scudding clouds, huge waves breaking over themselves. I downed a seasickness pill and distracted myself by watching the magnificent birds surrounding the ship – giant petrels and graceful wandering albatross, the latter with wingspans of up to eight feet. ➤



ROALD AMUNDSEN

Roald Amundsen is a classy ship, with soothing, Scandi-inspired interiors, all textures of granite, oak, birch and soft wools. A 57-foot-high screen showing HD images of nature dominates the atrium and there's an infinity pool on the aft deck and two big hot tubs. Other facilities include a small gym, a spa and a running track with outdoor gym equipment. The heart of the ship is the Science Centre, a multipurpose space used for reading, lectures, playing with the microscopes and consulting reference books.

On Deck 10, the Explorer Lounge has 180-degree views and, in the evenings, the vibe of a smart cocktail bar. There's an outdoor observation area on deck seven, and a sheltered viewing area with windows one deck below.

All cabins are outward-facing, and half have a balcony. If clients are in the market for a suite, point them towards the coveted aft Expedition Corner Suites on decks seven, eight and nine, which have a hot tub on the balcony.



ABOVE: A sea ice landing in Antarctica FACING PAGE: An Expedition Corner Suite on *Roald Amundsen*; the ship's Science Centre; a seal in Yankee Harbour PICTURES: Andrea Klaußner; Karsten Bidstrup; Hurtigruten; Shutterstock; Tillberg Design

LAND AHOY

In fact, the Drake wasn't too bad in the end, flattening out as the day went on. There was great excitement, nonetheless, when Captain Kai Albrigtsen announced that land was in sight: the peaks of Livingston Island, part of South Shetland, its snowy mountains a jagged white line on the horizon.

Our first landing was at Yankee Harbour for a short hike along a snow-covered spit on which elephant and Weddell seals lounged. The expedition crew marked out a trail through the snow, ending beside a colony of gentoo penguins, building their nests one pebble at a time, squabbling, waddling comically and surfing the snow on their bellies.

Because *Roald Amundsen* is one of the bigger ships operating in Antarctica, carrying 500, we landed each day in five rotating shifts. The downside of this is that you may not get ashore till evening. But as it turned out, this proved a coveted time slot for photographers, as the slow Antarctic sunset suffused the mountains with a soft, salmon-pink tinge, ideal for photos.

At Brabant Island, mountains, some of them 8,000 feet high, tower in every direction, their peaks and ridges softened by snow. There was no landing here;

Roald Amundsen's secret weapon is Blueye, an underwater drone, which beamed back mesmerising images of penguins zipping like bullets through fronds of kelp

instead, we were taken on an ice safari on the ship's rib boats, picking their way around giant bergs, getting up close to the occasional snoozing seal and often being escorted by curious penguins.

Orne Island, our next stop, is part of the Antarctic peninsula (as opposed to South Shetland), so I could say I'd actually set foot on Antarctica. Here, we puffed our way up a steep snow slope for the most dazzling vistas of rock spires and towering glaciers.

Back on the beach, the expedition crew launched *Roald Amundsen's* secret weapon: not a helicopter or submarine like some rival lines, but Blueye, a £7,600 underwater drone, which beams real-time images back to the ship. Mesmerised, we watched footage of penguins zipping like bullets through fronds of kelp.

ONBOARD GAMES

You may only go ashore once a day from *Roald Amundsen* but there's plenty to do on board, from drinking booze-laced hot chocolate in the hot tubs to admiring the views from the glass-walled sauna, or attending talks on whales, explorers and geology.

Several citizen-science projects run on board. Every day, I'd join Becky, the ship's ornithologist, to identify and log seabirds in an app. I also went out on a rib boat with marine biologist Allison Cusick, who is running a project, FjordPhyto, for her PhD, collecting and examining phytoplankton. You can later admire your water samples under microscope in the ship's Science Centre.

There are optional activities too, from kayaking to snowshoeing. A lucky few won the lottery to spend the night camping on the ice (for a hefty £532), but camping was

cancelled as the designated site was too clogged with sea ice.

Evenings on *Roald Amundsen* are informal and low-key. Dining ranges from classy, Norwegian-inspired dishes in Lindstrøm – allocated to suite guests, with anybody else allowed to eat there for €25 a head – to lavish buffets of seafood and roasts in Aune, the main dining room.

You can also eat with members

of the 19-strong expedition team in Fredheim, a cosy cafe serving spring rolls, burgers and waffles. Listening to the stories of the team over dinner is a lot of fun; their tales of mountaineering in Antarctica and retracing Shackleton's precarious sea passage really encapsulate the essence of this exciting and innovative ship. **TW**

BOOK IT

The Antarctica season runs from November to March. **Hurtigruten** offers a 17-night trip on *Roald Amundsen* from Punta Arenas to Antarctica and the Falklands, departing November 20, from £6,328, including one night in Santiago and domestic flights; international flights are extra. From April, Hurtigruten is changing the pricing structure of its expeditions, so wine and beer with meals, as well as gratuities, will be included, as will an excursion in every port that's not an expedition landing. Every guest gets a Helly Hansen jacket and water flask to keep. Rubber boots, mandatory for landing in Antarctica, are provided and Wi-Fi is free. hurtigruten.co.uk

ADD-ONS TO ANTARCTICA

Atacama Desert: For clients looking to extend their Antarctica expedition, suggest exploring the sand flats, geothermal springs and hippy vibes of San Pedro de Atacama, which also offers some of the world's finest stargazing.

Chilean Lake District: Alternatively, Chile's lake district is a beautiful region of blue lakes, forests and towering volcanoes, ideal for hiking and cycling.

Santiago: The Chilean capital is a good base from which to explore the winelands of nearby Casablanca valley and Valparaiso, an edgy, quirky port town with some of the world's most impressive street art.