

White diamond

Sixty years since Lars-Eric Lindblad led the first 'citizen explorers' expedition to the Antarctic, **Jane Archer** asks the experts how to sell the frozen continent

Antarctica is the crown jewel of expedition cruising; an experience like no other," says Bernie Carter, international sales chief for Atlas Ocean Voyages. He's not wrong. I am at Half Moon Island, a rocky isle in the South Shetlands archipelago. The sky is blue, the sun is shining and it feels so warm – or rather, not quite as freezing cold as I'd expected – I could have shed one of my six layers.

It's very different from this morning at Yankee Harbour, barely five miles away, where it was snowing, the beaches were clogged with ice and the wind cut right through those of us mad enough to go ashore.

That was almost everyone on *Fram*, the HX Expeditions ship I'm travelling on, because adventure is what the Antarctic is all about.

It hardly matters that it's well below freezing when we are going ashore in inflatable Zodiacs to watch penguins waddling about and sea lions lolling in the snow.

Active sorts (not me!) are snowshoeing and kayaking, while a privileged few camped ashore one night and got back on board next morning with tales of going to sleep to the sound of a whale splashing about in the bay.

WHEN IT STARTED

It was exactly 60 years ago that Swedish explorer Lars-Eric Lindblad first led an expedition to the White Continent, bringing 57 intrepid travellers to the Antarctic on January 23, 1966. Fast forward to 2026 and about 40 expedition ships sail there in the southern hemisphere summer, between November and March. ➤

HX Expeditions' *Fram*
by Cuverville Island

PICTURE: Jan Hvizdal

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | ANTARCTICA



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions passengers admire a minke whale in Paradise Harbour; Atlas Ocean Voyages' *World Navigator*; landings in Antarctica are closely controlled **PICTURES:** Michael S Nolan; Pia Harboure/Atlas Ocean Voyages; Steve Dunlop; Simon Harvey Photography



SELLING TIPS



"Don't just sell Antarctica once. Lots of our guests return time and again to experience its different seasons."

Danielle Bates, head of sales UK, National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions



"People are scared by the concept of Antarctica and an expedition, but it can be soft adventure or active depending on what appeals."

Nathaniel Sherborne, senior vice-president and managing director EMEA, HX Expeditions



"Learn everything you can about Antarctica from the expedition lines and Clia. And

don't be afraid of the price – sell the experience."

Bernie Carter, international sales, Atlas Ocean Voyages



"Some clients are concerned about sailing across the [frequently choppy] Drake Passage. If so, offer a fly-cruise."

Edwina Lonsdale, owner, Mundy Cruising

National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions alone has four, Ponant has the same, while HX and Silversea have three each. Other ships are operated by Seabourn, Atlas Ocean Voyages, AE Expeditions, Scenic, Quark Expeditions, Viking and many more.

If it sounds a lot, remember most hold no more than 200 passengers. In the 2024-25 season, only 80,434 people stepped ashore in Antarctica (and another 36,769 visited on sightseeing-only cruises), according to the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

WHY ANTARCTICA?

National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions head of UK sales Danielle Bates describes Antarctica as a bucket-list experience and often one where people first 'discover' expedition cruising. "It's all to do with the wonder of seeing orcas, penguins and the pristine, stunning glacier scenery," she says.

HX's Nathaniel Sherborne, senior vice-president and managing director for the EMEA region, likens Antarctica to a safari. A cruise is the only way to travel and a comfortable way to see so much wildlife, he explains.

WHO TO TARGET

Mundy Cruising owner Edwina Lonsdale says more of the agency's Antarctica clients are coming up to retirement and want to "stop adding to the bucket list and start doing".

"Communications [now] are much better [in Antarctica] so they can travel and work," she notes. "They start with a 'never cruise' mindset but get drawn in and end up taking expedition cruises to, say, the Arctic, Galápagos and Raja Ampat in Indonesia."

Carter says Atlas's Antarctica passengers are curious travellers and include families aged from eight to 80 who share a sense of adventure. It's a similar picture at HX. "We had someone celebrate his 100th birthday in

Antarctica," recalls Sherborne. National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions, meanwhile, has Explorers in Training programmes on selected Antarctica cruises that teach youngsters everything from driving Zodiacs to collecting and analysing plankton.

WHAT TO SELL

There's a wide choice of cruises to the Antarctic but none are quick or cheap. Swan Hellenic has sailings starting from nine nights, from £7,700 for an Antarctic Wonders: Round-trip from Ushuaia itinerary on December 4.

HX's shortest trip is a 12-day Highlights of Antarctica cruise, also a round-trip from Ushuaia, which leads in at £7,966, departing October 30, including a pre-cruise night in Buenos Aires, return flights from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia, and drinks, tips and Wi-Fi on board.

Silversea's fly-cruises spend six days in Antarctica and cost from £11,600, departing November 25, including pre and post-cruise nights in Santiago and Punta Arenas (the latter to be replaced with Puerto Williams in late 2026), return flights to Antarctica, drinks, tips and Wi-Fi.

Quark Expeditions has two 14-day Weddell Sea expeditions from Ushuaia in November to (hopefully) see emperor penguins at Snow Hill, where a huge colony resides. Prices, from £20,369, include internal flights from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia, drinks and Wi-Fi.

Seabourn, HX and Atlas are among several lines with voyages of 18 to 23 nights combining Antarctica with South Georgia and the Falkland Islands.

National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions' 22-day Antarctica, South Georgia and the Falklands cruise, departing October 30, costs from £13,399 including drinks, tips, Wi-Fi and 60th anniversary savings of up to 20% to celebrate 'the expedition that started it all'.

"It makes our incredible journeys more accessible than ever before," says Bates. **TW**