



## Weddell Sea – In search of the Emperor Penguin, incl. helicopters

*Searching for the elusive Emperor penguins*

Dates:

21 Nov - 1 Dec, 2025

Tripcode:

OTL23-25

Duration:

10 nights

Ship:

m/v Ortelius

Embarkation:

Ushuaia

Disembarkation:

Ushuaia

Language:

English, Chinese, Bilingual

# Itinerary

## PLEASE NOTE:

All itineraries are for guidance only. Programs may vary depending on ice, weather, and wildlife conditions. Landings are subject to site availabilities, permissions, and environmental concerns per IAATO regulations. Official sailing plans and landing slots are scheduled with IAATO prior to the start of the season, but the expedition leader determines the final plan. Flexibility is paramount for expedition cruises. The average cruising speed of our vessel is 10.5 knots. If ice conditions are favorable and the route to Snow Hill Island is free of multi-year pack ice, you have the chance for ship-to-shore helicopter transfers to Snow Hill Island (roughly 45 minutes walking distance from the emperor penguin rookery). If successful, this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But please remember that nature writes the final itinerary out here: Attempts to reach Snow Hill Island during the voyages of 2012 – 19 did not always succeed. However, in 2013, 2017 until 2019, 2022 until 2024 conditions were favorable to land by helicopter on Snow Hill Island and to visit the emperor penguin rookery.

A true expedition, our Weddell Sea cruise sets out to explore the range of the Emperor Penguins near Snow Hill Island. We will visit the area via helicopter and see a variety of other birds and penguins including Adélies and Gentoos.

### Experience the bird's-eye-view of Antarctica: -

Experience the bird's-eye-view of Antarctica! Our helicopter capability on m/v *Ortelius* gives you the rare chance to see the famed emperor penguin rookery south of Snow Hill Island, numbering around 4,000 breeding pairs. Heavy ice may prevent entrance to this area from the Weddell Sea, and ice at the rookery itself might break up and start to melt earlier than expected. With this in mind, the aim is to stop the vessel between the Antarctic Sound and James Clark Ross Island, close to the ice edge, and find emperor penguins on their way to open water. The thrilling helicopter flights make this search possible, enabling you to land in locations otherwise inaccessible this early in the season.

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### Day 1: End of the world, start of a journey

Your voyage begins where the world drops off. Ushuaia, Argentina, reputed to be the southernmost city on the planet, is located on the far southern tip of South America. Starting in the afternoon, you embark from this small resort town on Tierra del Fuego, nicknamed “The End of the World,” and sail the mountain-fringed Beagle Channel for the remainder of the evening.

### Day 2 - 3: Path of the polar explorers

Over the next two days on the Drake Passage, you enjoy some of the same experiences encountered by the great polar explorers who first charted these regions: cool salt breezes, rolling seas, maybe even a fin whale spouting up sea spray. After passing the Antarctic Convergence – Antarctica’s natural boundary, formed when north-flowing cold waters collide with warmer sub-Antarctic seas – you are in the circum-Antarctic upwelling zone. Not only does the marine life change, the avian life changes too. Wandering albatrosses, grey-headed albatrosses, black-browed albatrosses, light-mantled sooty albatrosses, cape pigeons, southern fulmars, Wilson’s storm petrels, blue petrels, and Antarctic petrels are a few of the birds you might see.

### Day 4 - 7: Entering Antarctica

You may sail into the Weddell Sea via the Antarctic Sound. Here huge tabular icebergs herald your arrival to the eastern side of the Antarctic Peninsula. During this part of the cruise, the search is on for emperor penguins. Using both the vessel and helicopters, there’s a good chance you’ll find them. You might also enjoy scenic flights, and if conditions allow, helicopter landings in locations otherwise out of reach this time of year.

Helicopter flights are a true trip changer, and may include:

**The west slopes of the Antarctic Sound** – The western side of this area is only rarely seen from the air, though the landscape is truly worth the flight: Layered sandstones, lava flows, glaciers, icebergs, and pack-ice extend as far as the eye can see. There are often individual emperor penguins and Adélie penguins on the ice floes, as well as kelp gulls, skuas, and various breeds of petrel. Jagged mountain peaks stab through the snow, and enormous walls of ice lie shattered on the slopes below.

**Duse Bay** – A soaring helicopter flight may deposit you on a rocky hillock close to an old refuge hut overlooking this bay. There's still a lot of snow and ice this time of year, but much of the walk in this location is over frost-shattered rock covered with lichen of all shapes and colors.

**Seymour Island** – This is where the Swedish Antarctic Expedition of 1901 – 4 wintered under harrowing polar conditions. Sedimentary rock, fossils, and expansive views define this location.

If conditions allow for deeper ventures into the Weddell Sea, Zodiac trips may include:

**Devil Island** – Home to a large colony of Adélie penguins, this island offers a magnificent vantage point for hikers willing to foot it to the top of the hill. Melting ice sometimes forms a waterfall dropping from the cliffs close to Cape Well-met.

**Brown Bluff** – Maybe the most scenic location in the entire northern tip of the Antarctic Continent: sheer canyon walls, fallen boulders, beautiful volcanic creations capped with ice. A large Adélie penguin rookery lives here, with gentoo penguins and nesting snow petrels also to be found.

**Gourdin Island** – Chinstrap, gentoo, and Adélie penguins love this island, which is yet another landing option for your continuing Antarctic adventure.

**Esperanza Base** – This Argentine research station, which operates year-round and is one of only two civilian settlements in Antarctica, could serve as an alternative landing site.

### **Day 8: Drake via Deception Island**

In the morning, you sail to Deception Island for the last landing of the voyage, either at Pendulum Cove or Whalers Bay. Conditions on the Drake Passage determine the exact time of departure.

### **Day 9 - 10: Familiar seas, familiar friends**

Your return voyage is far from lonely. While crossing the Drake, you're again greeted by the vast array of seabirds remembered from the passage south. But they seem a little more familiar to you now, and you to them.

### **Day 11: There and back again**

Every adventure, no matter how grand, must eventually come to an end. It's now time to disembark in Ushuaia, but with memories that will accompany you wherever your next adventure lies.

### **Day 5 - 6: (Alternate program if the route to Snow Hill Island is free of multi-year pack ice – less than 50 % probability)**

Helicopters provide an advantage in reaching the emperor penguin colony, but our ability to use them depends entirely on ice, sea, and weather conditions.

If conditions are favorable, we will visit the colony. If conditions are exceptionally favorable, we will attempt to visit more than once. Helicopter operations take a full day, and flight duration depends on local conditions.

Each helicopter can accommodate 4 – 5 passengers per flight. The landing site is carefully chosen so that the penguins are not disturbed.

Upon arrival to the site, we will walk to the colony. This may take up to 45 minutes and can be challenging in places. Please keep in mind that you are in the world's most remote region, so there are no guarantees: conditions may change rapidly, which can impact on helicopter operations. It is important to understand and respect this fact. Safety is our greatest concern, so no compromises can be made.

We aim for all groups to spend an equal amount of time at the colony. The time at the colony (and the time to get there from landing site) will often vary, however, due to local conditions and flight times.

### **Included in this voyage**

- *Voyage aboard the indicated vessel as indicated in the itinerary*
- *All meals throughout the voyage aboard the ship including snacks, coffee and tea.*
- *All shore excursions and activities throughout the voyage by Zodiac.*
- *Program of lectures by noted naturalists and leadership by experienced expedition staff.*
- *Free use of rubber boots and snowshoes.*
- *Ship-to-shore helicopter transfers (with no specific amount of helicopter time guaranteed)*
- *Luggage transfer from pick-up point to the vessel on the day of embarkation, in Ushuaia.*
- *Pre-scheduled group transfer from the vessel to the airport in Ushuaia (directly after disembarkation).*
- *All miscellaneous service taxes and port charges throughout the programme.*
- *Comprehensive pre-departure material.*

### **Excluded from this voyage**

- *Any airfare, whether on scheduled or charter flights*
- *Pre- and post- land arrangements.*
- *Passport and visa expenses.*
- *Government arrival and departure taxes.*
- *Meals ashore.*
- *Baggage, cancellation and personal insurance (which is strongly recommended).*
- *Excess baggage charges and all items of a personal nature such as laundry, bar, beverage charges and telecommunication charges.*
- *The customary gratuity at the end of the voyages for stewards and other service personnel aboard (guidelines will be provided).*