

# WILD & INSPIRED

*Penguins, seals and scenic treats of all shapes and sizes await to greet you at the remote Subantarctic Islands during one of the world's most incredible ocean voyages.*

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The ship creaks like an ancient galleon. It groans as its bow plows into troughs, grumbles as it rises on crests, and squeaks when sideswiped by freak waves that tackle port and starboard like rogue players on a washed-out sports field. Waves smash my porthole, reminding me that the mighty Southern Ocean is only a pane of glass away. An earlier comment from the ship's Education Manager, Sarah Tranmer, leaps to mind: "The ocean reminds you who is in control."

An expedition to the Subantarctic Islands is one of the world's most extraordinary ocean voyages. Each year, a mere 2000 travellers leave the port of Bluff to explore the remote, rugged islands south of New Zealand and Australia.

My dark and warm cabin is a chamber for an orchestra of sounds accompanying every pitch and roll of *Heritage Adventurer*, a ship custom-built in Finland for polar exploration. As we leave Bluff and cross Foveaux Strait, there is a 4m swell, which is good, I'm told, for a summer crossing.

"Is your mother a woman?" This is Cheli Larsen's cheeky reply at the evening briefing when asked if we would experience more high seas. Larsen is the Expedition Leader, a towering presence with a quick wit and commanding knowledge of our destinations. The end message is: don't expect a millpond and hope it's not the Drake Passage on a bad day. It's the Southern Ocean and the forecast is for mixed moods.

## IN THE SNARES

I'm one of 137 guests on the Galapagos of the Southern Ocean expedition with Heritage Adventures, a 12-day voyage that visits the Auckland Islands, Campbell Island

### This page:

Macquarie Island boasts many cute king penguins.

### Opposite page:

The southern royal albatross also makes the Subantarctic Islands its home; Explore Musgrave Inlet and its spectacular sea caves and other attractions.



### BOOK NOW

For the adventure of a lifetime, the Galapagos of the Southern Ocean: New Zealand and Australia's Subantarctic Islands expedition departs on 22 November, 2024, 18 December, 2024, plus 26 November and 31 December, 2025. The purpose-built *Heritage Adventurer* welcomes 140 expeditioners for comfortable and spacious voyages.



and The Snares in New Zealand waters and Macquarie Island in Australian territory.

The sound of silence wakes me. The night's orchestra turned out to be an excellent sedative, but come dawn, the clatter of the anchor heralds our arrival in The Snares, and no one sleeps through it. My wave-pummelled porthole frames a view of North East Island, the northernmost point of The Snares, named in 1791 by Captain George Vancouver of *HMS Discovery*, who correctly noted they were a shipping hazard. The thoughtful name remains a handy hint on today's shipping charts.

We load into Zodiacs to explore the coastline. The Snares are the only place we can't land on the trip; the island group is free from pests and vermin and has only been permanently inhabited by four stowaways dumped from a sealing ship in the mid-1800s. It is one of the most pristine islands on the planet and a precious member of New

Zealand's Subantarctic World Heritage Site. There is no need to land. The view from the water is magical. Formidable granite cliffs, hundreds of metres high, are slicked green with lichen, the shoreline sloshes and slurps with forests of bull kelp and the ocean tricks the eyes; what appears to be wind buffeting the water is suddenly a raft of seabirds that take flight as we near.

Crested Snares penguins, perhaps dreaming of flight, 'porpoise' – dive then propel skywards – savouring, I imagine, those magical airy moments. Sooty shearwaters are black blankets hugging the sea, petrels swoop and plunge, and New Zealand fur seals and sea lions flop on rocks as we float through tunnels and into caves that are glistering with greens and golds.

Black and white is the next colour palette. Fondly known as 'The Penguin Slide', the steep, smooth cliff is a Subantarctic version of the Gold Coast's Wet'n'Wild ... except that entry, etiquette and exit are entirely



unsupervised! It's a hectic scene as thousands of penguins waddle up the slope to the forest, bicker for prime position on the foreshore and scan for sharks perhaps, before launching into the surging kelp as it rises and falls.

## SHORE LEAVE

My hiking gear is cleaner than the day I bought it. Tweezers have plucked every foreign fibre from Velcro; a vacuum has sucked every speck of dirt from backpacks; and a wire brush scrubbed my boots brighter than factory new.

We're going ashore on Enderby Island, the northernmost of the Auckland Islands, 500km south of Bluff. Biosecurity is a tedious process, but no one wants to be a human wheelbarrow loaded with nasties – soil, seeds and pathogens – offloading them where they would wreak havoc.

I tiptoe my clean boots along a boggy track to the beach, leaping to grassy tussocks that look dry, to discover they're not. I resort to



### A RARE PRIVILEGE

The Subantarctic Islands are afforded the highest conservation status and access to these islands is by permit only. On these journeys Heritage Expeditions offers you the unique chance to explore, photograph and understand these wonderful places in the company of knowledgeable and passionate guides.

stomping along like a kindy kid. We have the day here. The go-getters head off on a 10km round trek of the island; some opt for a shorter boardwalk to the Northern Cliffs, and many choose the 50/50 option that starts with a coastal Zodiac cruise, gourmet lunch on the ship then a shore landing. That's me. And what rewards!

From the Zodiac, we see hoiho, the endangered yellow-eyed penguin, one of the rarest penguins in the world. Rockhopper penguins bounce from boulder to boulder, and we scan the kelp to spot the vulnerable Auckland Islands teal. Apologies to birders, but I've never heard so much hooaha about a flightless bird whose only party trick is to tiptoe across kelp and try not to be seen. We see six, so they're not even good at it. Yet their cute factor is 10/10.

Sandy Bay is squirming with hundreds of Hooker's sea lion: the rarest and most endangered sea lion in the world. I wince to watch predatory skuas peck the flippers of nursing pups, the bulls too busy



patrolling their harems to care. What is unexpected is the sight of these enormous pinnipeds roaming the coastal meadow like cattle – their blubbery bodies lurching high above the shrubs and tussocks – while others snuffle and snuggle in the megaherbs, the giant wildflowers that flourish in the Subantarctic Islands.

## WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER

You can wear the world's best thermals yet still be outdressed by a 'naked' penguin. Four million gentoo, king, royal and rockhopper penguins on Macquarie Island have the dress code nailed. We're in Australian Subantarctic waters now, halfway between Tasmania and Antarctica, so remote yet unbelievably noisy. Getting away from the chaos of city life doesn't always mean serenity.

The shore landing is akin to walking into a mixed martial arts fight. Southern elephant seals throw their weight around, rearing and rebounding off each other in a battle to be boss, younger males rumbling in the shallows. Meanwhile, a rookery of 40,000 royal penguins in the dunes squawk, bray and honk like a rowdy crowd and king penguins on the beach sound off like party hooters.

The 5m wildlife rule applies, and while we try to keep our distance, it's impossible to not have close encounters on this feathery, blubbery 'highway'. It's an immersive 'surround sound' experience unlike anything you will encounter on continental Antarctica.

The North Cape of Campbell Island is shrouded in mist which rises like a theatre curtain, allowing us to view thousands of Campbell and grey-headed albatross nesting on the cliffs. An hour later, it's a very different scene in Perseverance Harbour, where there is nothing but the world's loneliest tree, a 9m-tall Sitka spruce, the only tree for 222km. After a week in the Subantarctic wilderness, surely I'm not the only one to envy its glorious isolation.

Our ship is on course back to Bluff; we're used to the high seas now, but I know, more than ever, that the ocean is always in control. Sarah Tranmer's parting words are just as poignant as her first: "You will be wild, inspired, and overwhelmed, and you will go home with a full heart. And you will have a new respect for this other world that exists with very minimal human effort."  [heritage-expeditions.com](https://heritage-expeditions.com)