Icebreakers in Antarctica

Folks who brave the rough seas on a voyage to Antarctica are kind of nutty. Getting to know them is almost as fun as spying penguins and whales.

By KAREN CATCHPOLE • Special to the Star Tribune

You won’t find this information front and center in your Antarctic tour company’s brochure. Even if perfect weather enables all of the scheduled shore excursions, you will still spend 90 percent of your trip on board the ship in a confined space with a bunch of complete strangers.

It’s got the makings of a season of “The Real World.” Fortunately, your fellow humans can be a highlight of your Antarctic adventure. I traveled on the first sailing of the 2010-11 Antarctic travel season (which runs from early November through May) aboard the M/V Antarctic Dream and was surprised to discover that my shipmates were not the well-heeled-but-dull older travelers I’d expected based on the fact that these trips are pricey and sometimes involve the word “cruise.”

Stacey Richman of New York City brought a Snoopy snow cone machine in hopes of making an icy treat with ancient ice.

I shouldn’t have been surprised. Antarctic tour companies are reporting a trend toward younger passengers. Nadia Antetomaso, a guide with GAP Adventures, says the company has noticed the shift over the past few years. Some of that is driven by price — GAP Adventures and Antarctic Dream trips tend toward the more economical end of the Antarctic travel spectrum, which typically ranges from $3,500 to $6,000 per person for 11- to 35-day trips.

Whatever the reason, many of the passengers on my sailing were in their mid-40s or younger and most of them were hilarious companions. First, we survived the Drake Passage together. Then the real fun began.

Antarctica continues on G6 ▶
Breaking the ice in Antarctica

**ANTARCTICA FROM QI**

Drake Passage, the narrow strait separating South America from Antarctica, makes the site to the south pole. It's the Drake Passage is the narrowest point of the southern ocean, where the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans meet. The passage is named after the explorer who first sailed through it, Captain James Cook. The water is incredibly cold and the winds are fierce, making it a dangerous passage for ships.

**SAILING TO ANTARCTICA**

When to go: The Antarctic travel season runs from early November through May. The weather is coolest and the sea ice is least likely to interfere with the journey in the southern hemisphere, where the oceans are exposed to the full force of the southern wind. The best time to travel is during the spring months, when the weather is calmer and the ice is thinner.

**Getting to port:** Most ships to Antarctica depart from Ushuaia, Argentina, the southernmost city in the world. We flew there on LAN Airlines (www.lanair.com), and the tickets were cheaper. We flew there on LAN Airlines.

**Dealing with the Drakes:**

While there is anecdotal evidence of something interesting in the Drake Passage, the passage is not known for its calm seas. The water is often rough and the winds are strong. The Drakes, as the passage is known to sailors, can be very dangerous. The passage is infamous for its strong winds and rough seas, which can make it a challenging passage for ships.

**The Penguin chicks**

Two very common species of penguins, the Adelie and the Emperor, are found in Antarctica. The Adelie penguin is smaller and more colorful than the Emperor penguin. The Adelie penguin is found on the coast of Antarctica, while the Emperor penguin is found further inland. The Adelie penguin is known for its pink feet and orange beaks, while the Emperor penguin has black and white feathers.

**The Gentoo Penguins**

The Gentoo Penguin is the most common species of penguin found in Antarctica. They are known for their bright red beaks and orange feet. They are often seen swimming or walking on the ice floes in the southern ocean. They are also known for their loud calls and their ability to dive deep into the ocean.

**New York City museum that looks like the kind of would-be tourist who is planning on taking a trip to an Antarctic cruise.**

**Jane Goodall**

A famous primatologist, Jane Goodall is known for her research on chimpanzees. She was the first person to observe chimpanzees in the wild, and her work has been influential in understanding the behavior and social structure of chimpanzees. She is also known for her advocacy for the protection of chimpanzees and other primates.

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