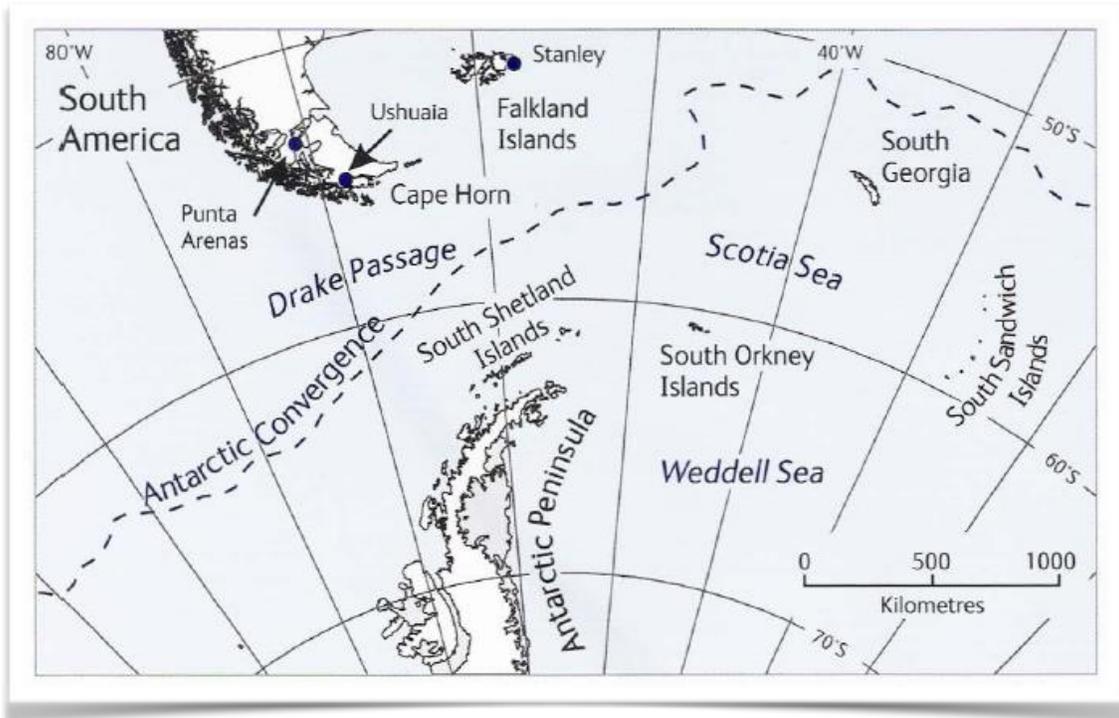


Antarctica's White Wilderness

December 21-29, 2019



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M/V Corinthian

Captain:	Denis Radja
Chief Officer:	Josip Brkic
Ice Pilot:	Davor Zecevic
Chief Engineer:	Igor Balic
Hotel Manager:	Robert Szymkowiak
Doctor:	Marvin Gutierrez Lopez
Chef:	Newton Fernandes
Restaurant Manager:	Chennakesavan Marimuthu

OAT Trip Leaders:	Maria Copello
	Elisa Rodriguez
	Lucas Bogani
	Chino Spinetta

Expedition Leader:	Claudia Roedel
Assistant Expedition Leader:	Diego Punta Fernandez
Expedition Team:	Dani Catania
	Duane Griffin
	Vicki Beaver
	Ken Wright
	Iggy Rojas

Saturday, 21 December, 2019

Ushuaia, Argentina

We boarded the M/V Corinthian on a windy afternoon in Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world and home to 70,000 people living on the shores of the spectacular Beagle Channel.

After checking into our cabins we gathered in the Discovery Lounge for the Mandatory Safety Drill, where crewmembers helped us don our life jackets and assemble at our lifeboat muster stations.

We reconvened in the lounge for a Welcome Embarkation Briefing. Hotel Manager Robert Szymkowiak explained how the ship was organized from the hotel side and Expedition Leader Claudia Roedel introduced the key truth of expedition cruising in the world's most remote and unpredictable environment:

There is no Plan B.

Whatever we do on any given day is the best possible option Antarctica presents, so whatever we do is *always* Plan A!

The Beagle Channel

The Beagle Channel is a strait in Tierra del Fuego on the extreme southern tip of South America, partly in Chile and partly in Argentina. It is named for the ship captained by Robert Fitz Roy that carried a young Charles Darwin through these waters in 1834. Surrounded by spectacular mountains cloaked with forests of southern beech on their lower slopes, this highly productive waterway teems with marine wildlife. Kelp Gulls, colorful Dolphin Gulls, Southern Giant Petrels, Peale's and Dusky dolphins, South American Sea Lions, and occasionally Humpback and Sei Whales.

17:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 54° 48' S

Longitude: 68° 12' W

Wind: 20 knots

Sea state: 1 meters (3 ft)

Sky: Overcast

Temperature: 52° F (11° C)



Next up was the Captain's Welcome Cocktail Reception, where Captain Denis Radja introduced his fellow officers and the hotel and galley teams. Then we headed down to the Restaurant on Deck 2 for a delicious dinner as we navigated down the scenic Beagle Channel.



Sunday, 22 December, 2019

Drake Passage

Our first night at sea started a bit rough with waves of 15 feet, but in the early hours of the morning we had smoother seas and good enough conditions for us to move around. Ken Wright, our onboard ornithologist started the day announcing a delay on the start of his presentation, as we had albatrosses following the ship. We gathered on deck 5 aft for wildlife viewing.

Once the albatrosses left the vicinity of the ship, Ken led the day's first Learning and Discovery activity with a presentation on seabirds before heading back to deck 5 aft for more wildlife viewing.

Up next Iggy Rojas presented an Introduction to Antarctica continuing our Learning and Discovery program for the morning. Iggy gave us a brief overview of Antarctica's geology, geography, and history.

After lunch we reconvened in the Discovery Lounge for Diego Punta Fernandez's presentation "Photography Tips for Antarctica," which would prove to be especially valuable for protecting cameras and improving the quality of countless photographs taken over the following days.

07:30 Position and Weather

Latitude: 56° 47' S

Longitude: 64° 36' W

Wind: 18 knots

Sea state: 3 meters (10 ft)

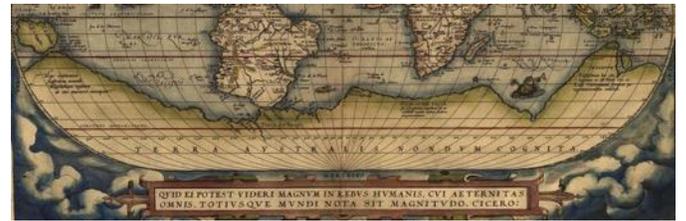
Sky: Overcast

Temperature: 50° F (10° C)





Ending our Learning and discovery day of activities Duane Griffin, our Historian, presented *Groping Towards Antarctica*. Tracing the evolution of ideas about Antarctica from the ancient Greeks through Captain Cook's voyages, Duane argued that this history was more a process of groping in the dark than enlightened discovery, eventually getting it right, mostly by being wrong.



Our last meeting was for our daily recap and briefing led by Claudia, the Expedition Team and the Trip Leaders for a look ahead to tomorrow and additional opportunity to learn more about Antarctica as we continue our journey South.

Next up in the Learning and Discovery series was Marine Mammal Biologist Vicki Beaver's lecture, Marine Mammals: Whales and Dolphins—Ushuaia to the Antarctic Peninsula, an introduction to the ecology of the remarkable animals inhabiting the Drake Passage and our destination. She pointed out that blows or movements in the water may indicate marine mammals' activities. These are happy indicators of recovery from the Southern Ocean's extreme exploitation.

We also had the opportunity to visit the bridge and learn about *Corinthian's* navigation center.



The Antarctic Convergence

The Antarctic Convergence is an oceanographic feature where cold, dense, southerly water meets and begins mixing with the warmer and less dense water from the north. Nutrients brought to the surface feed phytoplankton, the basis of the marine food chain. The Convergence is consequently an area of great biological productivity and diversity.

Sea surface temperature typically decreases more than 5 °Celsius when crossing the meandering boundaries of the Convergence, which often results in fog in the area.

Monday, 23 December, 2019 Drake Passage & Melchior Islands

Our morning started right after breakfast with Claudia's mandatory IAATO Presentation and Zodiac Briefing on the regulations and codes of conduct to be followed during our visit to Antarctica, as well as instruction on Zodiac safety procedures and the tag board system we use to keep track of travelers on board and ashore. The latter is especially important, as it is the key to maintaining Corinthian's perfectly unblemished record of returning from Antarctica with exactly the same number of passengers she had on departure.



The initial Plan A for the day was for the briefing to be followed by biosecurity inspections and boot distribution, but the Southern Ocean was particularly lively, with 10' to 15' swells crossing from our port stern quarter making movement around the ship difficult. The rough conditions persisted and Plan A continued to evolve through the course of the day. In the end, Plan A-4 for the rest of the day included the Expedition Team's Geologist, Dani Catania giving a presentation on Antarctica's Geology, lunch, ample time to rest, and then Claudia's briefing, where she announced that we would arrive in the Melchior Islands in time for a post-dinner Zodiac cruise.

07:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 61° 57' S

Longitude: 62° 57' W

Wind: 20 knots

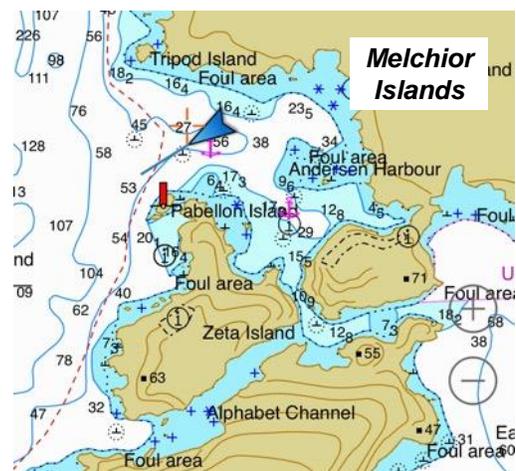
Sea state: 3 meters (10 ft)

Sky: Foggy

Temperature: 41° F (5° C)



We gathered the bar with all the equipment we would be wearing or carrying ashore for biosecurity inspection, a precaution necessary to avoid the contamination of the Antarctica environment with species alien to the continent we could inadvertently be carrying from elsewhere. We then signed the Biosecurity Declaration and received the warm and comfortable boots we will use on our trips to shore.



After an early dinner, we donned our gear and headed to the marina for our first true Antarctic experience, Zodiac cruising in the Melchior Islands.



A quick ride from the ship brought us to a beautiful iceberg where five Gentoos were resting and digesting bellies full of krill, the small, shrimp-like, phytoplankton-eating creatures that are the essential first link in most Antarctic food chains.



We then proceeded to a narrow channel between two of the Melchior Islands. Pack ice blocked the western leg of the channel, and several Weddell seals and a pair of crabeater seals were hauled out it. Like the Gentoos, they seemed inert, but metabolically they were furiously converting krill into blubber. Above us, a massive tower of ice, riven by intensely blue cracks and crevasses, though clearly stable, leaned ominously outward from the glacier face and towards the channel.



Antarctic Cormorants zoomed overhead while three of their tribe contested the snow slopes on either side. Traversing eastward down the channel, we saw kelp gulls and Antarctic terns nesting on the cliffs just above our heads, while a pair of Brown Skuas kept watch from the rocks at the top. Further down the channel, two Chilean yachts had taken refuge in the protection of the islands. We returned to the ship, where Robert and his excellent galley and restaurant team met us with warm towels, cups of hot broth, and sandwiches, capping off a fantastic first Plan A day in Antarctica.



Tuesday, 24 December, 2019

Danco Island & Neko Harbor

We all enjoyed another good sleep in calm seas and awoke to a tranquil sea in the Errera Channel. Although clouds obscured the mountaintops around us, we had fine views of hanging glaciers and steep cliffs rising out of the sea. Given the lack of wind, it should be a perfect morning for a landing on Danco Island and our much-anticipated POLAR PLUNGE!!!!



Once ashore, we were given an hour to explore the beach, spend some time in the designated Silence Spot or hike up a snowfield to reach a Gentoo Penguin colony, where one can gain a more expansive view of the Errera Channel. The hike offered an opportunity to warm up and procrastinate the inevitable dip into the coldest ocean in the world.



07:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 64° 48' S

Longitude: 62° 52' W

Wind: 6 knots

Sea state: Calm

Sky: Foggy

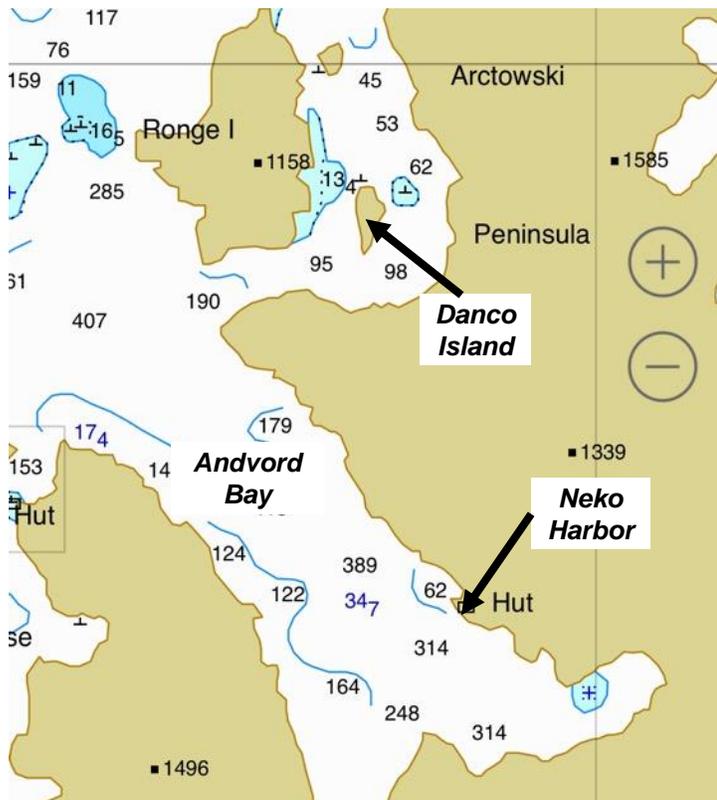
Temperature: 35° F (2° C)

Once back to the landing site, the braver guests stripped down to their swimsuits (or approximation thereof) and entered the bone-chilling waters of Antarctica! The Polar Plunge was enjoyed by many folks who were quickly brought back to the ship. Back on board the plungers enjoyed hot showers to help restore their body temperature.



Captain Denis and his crew navigated back out the Errera Channel and slowly towards our afternoon excursion. Meanwhile the exceptional Corinthian galley team prepared another scrumptious Christmas Eve buffet lunch, greatly enjoyed by all.

By about 2:00 pm we were navigating through brash ice in Andvord Bay. Rimmed by precipitous hanging glaciers and steep mountainous terrain this is among the most spectacular pocket of paradise on the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula.



Some of us climbed further to a rock outcrop that afforded a grand view of the bay and a heavily crevassed tidewater glacier, rife with deep blue fissures. Nearby a pair of nesting Brown Skuas were incubating their eggs.



We continued to a little alcove in the back of Andvord Bay known as Neko Harbor. Here we clambered back into our trusty zodiacs and headed for a continental landing on a boulder-strewn beach. A large gathering of Gentoo Penguins were resting on the beach, as were three sleeping Weddell Seals! Numerous photo opportunities were had at this pristine site. For the more adventurous folks we offered a hike up the snowfield to get a better view of the surrounds. Penguins are certainly not adverse to hiking up snowfields either. We carefully crossed one of their "highways", a two-foot deep rut in the snow linking the upper nesting colony with the beach.

Back on board we had our standard briefing for tomorrow and some recap of today. And we then headed down for a tremendous Christmas Eve Dinner. After dinner we were summoned back to the Lounge for some Christmas carols sung by our crew. They gave us all a gift and we headed back to the Bar for more Christmas cheer.



Wednesday, 25 December, 2019 Lemaire Channel & Torgersen Island



Merry Christmas to all! The serenity of Antarctica is evident everywhere, but especially so in Lemaire Channel, a scenic narrow passage separating the Antarctic Peninsula from Booth Island. This waterway is often of plugged with ice so thick, it is impossible for cruise ships to safely navigate. Today however, ice conditions allowed us to cruise into the channel and through a myriad of brash ice, bergy bits and some icebergs. We observed several Crabeater Seals and a lone Weddell Seal resting on ice floes.



07:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 65° 00' S

Longitude: 63° 49' W

Wind: 3 knots

Sea state: Calm

Sky: Overcast

Temperature: 34° F (1° C)

About halfway through the channel the ice became too thick to continue so the Captain fired up the bow thrusters and pivoted the ship 180 degrees and we headed back north. Here we reached our southernmost position at 65° 04' 15'' South, 63° 56' 28'' West. This is comparable to the latitude of Fairbanks, Alaska in the northern hemisphere. We thank the Captain and his crew for making this scenic passage.



We departed the Lemaire Channel we had a last view of the twin peaks at Cape Renard, known as Una's Peaks. We continued on a northward course into Bismarck Strait and then sailing westwards towards to Arthur Harbor.





After a delicious surprise deck lunch prepared by our excellent hotel department, we headed out through the brash to Torgersen Island, home to several hundred pairs of Adélie Penguins. They offered us wonderful views as they walked or tobogganed to and from the sea. Some even launched themselves off the rocks in their ritualized plunge that resembles a more of a belly-flop than a dive.

If this wasn't enough, we found a female Elephant seal resting on the beach. Then we encountered two Crabeater Seals resting on a glacial blue bergy bit that was to later break apart throwing the seals back into the sea! Further in from Torgersen is another low lying snow-free island that attracts a diversity of wildlife. Here we saw nesting Kelp Gulls with their distinctive black backs and bright yellow, about a dozen molting Southern Elephant Seals and many pairs of nesting Southern Giant Petrels! Some of the petrels were entirely white. This is a special morph that represents about 10% of the Antarctic Peninsula breeding population and genetically controlled.





The real show began when we returned to the ship where three Humpback Whales were gorging themselves on krill. It was unbelievable how oblivious they were to the ship and our presence. They were employing multiple feeding strategies to gather mouthfuls of krill, including bubble netting and lunge feeding. The latter is particularly striking as the whale rises from the depths and takes in a massive gulp of krill-laden water causing its throat to expand and revealing pink skin between the ventral pleats.

What a tremendous sight to behold. Humpbacks are the largest animal to frequently use the nearshore waters of the Antarctic Peninsula. Their populations have significantly recovered from depletion during the Whaling Era.

After dinner Maria and the other Trip Leaders invited well-travelled guests into the Lounge for the 7th Continent Quiz. And so another great day winds down to the music of Saul in the Bar.



Thursday, 26 December, 2019

Brown Station & Port Lockroy

Light snow flurries throughout the morning gave a new Antarctic mood to our previous days. We arrived at Paradise Bay, named for the spectacular mountain scenery that surrounds its waters. Today this view was eclipsed by clouds and snowflakes creating mystery in its cloaking.

We boarded the Zodiacs and headed for our second continental landing at Base Brown - a small seasonal Argentine research station. After ascending the concrete steps that lead to the Base we were greeted by the resident personnel and welcomed to visit their small museum and view their buildings. The expedition team marked a route up the perennial snowfield behind the Base to a nice viewpoint on a rocky outcrop above the station.

07:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 64° 52' S

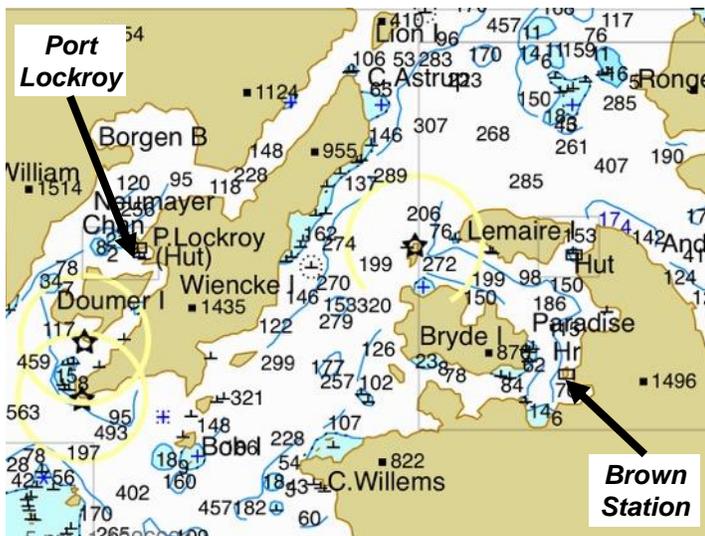
Longitude: 62° 51' W

Wind: 1 knot

Sea state: Calm

Sky: Overcast

Temperature: 41° F (5° C)



After this morning excursion, we clambered back into the Zodiacs for a bonus side tour to a nearby Antarctic cormorant colony on the rocky cliff near the station. Their columnar nests made of mud and scavenged kelp and miscellaneous materials seemed to defy gravity on the near vertical rock face. Many of them had very large, fluffy black chicks. Once all were back on board we began the 3-hour navigation to our next destination - Port Lockroy.





In the afternoon, the wind had picked up a little more than our flat calm morning, but the jaunt by Zodiac to the Base was a short one. We visited the museum, sent postcards, got our passports stamped, and purchased a few souvenirs.



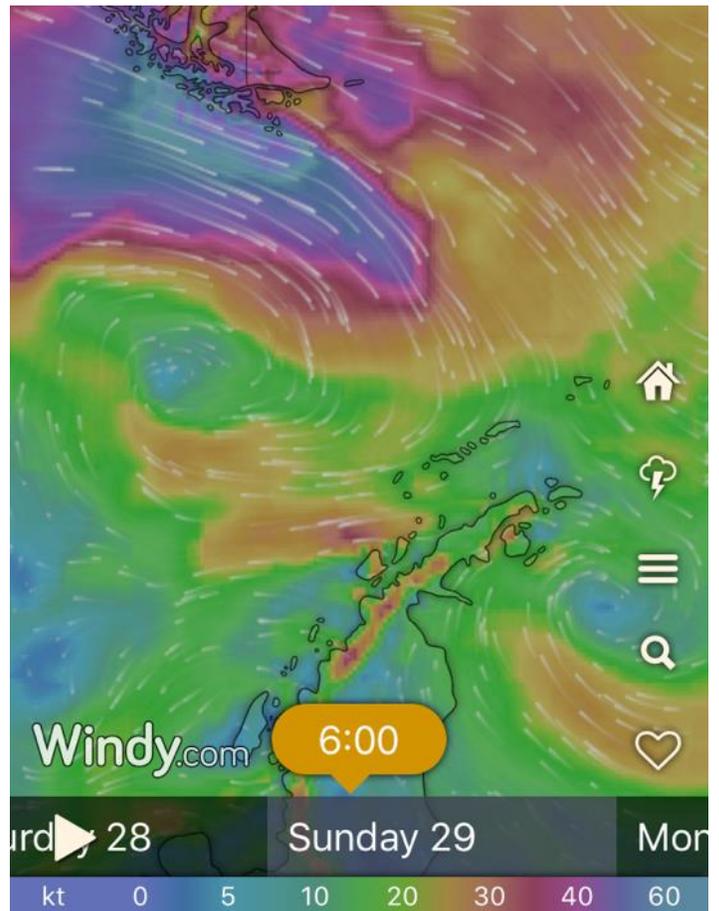
Outside, we were able to get some very close views of the Gentoo penguin adults and a few tiny, just-hatched chicks. They were nearly oblivious to our presence, with some of them walking right in the middle of the path. It was a fantastic experience to be amongst wildlife that had so little fear of us. Snowy Sheathbills were also all over the island and we were able to get close views of them.



Back on board and just before Recap, Hotel Manager Robert treated us to open bar, again!, and we all gathered around for a fun Blue and White celebration in the spirit of the White Continent.

During the Recap and Briefing Claudia prepared us with a weather update. There was a very large storm heading on a collision course with our path batch across the Drake Passage. Because of this, Claudia and Captain Denis made the decision to do our final activity earlier in the morning than originally planned. That's just how expeditions happen. Things change and we adapt.

After dinner the Trip Leaders threw a Polar Plunge Party in the Bar, and most got an early night's sleep for the final day's ventures.



Friday, 27 December, 2019

Whalers Bay, Deception Island

Ensuring that we would have our final landing in Antarctica, the Captain arrived at Deception Island in the midst of the Bransfield Strait bright and early. Well, early anyway. At 6am the M/V Corinthian navigated through the narrow opening of Neptune's Bellows, (the passageway into the caldera). But not so bright. The day mirrored the dark history that besieged this volcanic caldera over the last two centuries.

Deception Island, part of the in the South Shetland Islands chain, is a very rare geological phenomenon - a flooded volcanic basin known as a caldera, reminiscent of Santorini but with a little more snow and ice. A caldera is defined as a volcanic crater that has a diameter many times that of the vent and is formed by collapse of the central part of a volcano or by explosions of extraordinary violence.

In Whaler's Bay, just inside Deception Island, lies the site of the Antarctica's main whaling hub. Here, the British and Norwegians processed an estimated 86,000 whales from the Southern Ocean. Much of the infrastructure remains, though in a very dilapidated state from the years of abandonment as well as from ash and mud slides from eruptions.

06:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 63° 00' S

Longitude: 60° 31' W

Wind: 10 knots

Sea state: Calm

Sky: Overcast

Temperature: 35° F (1° C)



We dropped Zodiacs one last time and were soon ashore, standing on a beach strewn with black lava. A monochromatic landscape lay before us. At our landing site was a large rusting hulk of a dry dock that once hoisted ships up from the water so their hulls could be reached.





We had plenty of time to walk the entire length of the old whaling station and take in its mystique. Among the historic artifacts were wooden whaling boats used to collect snow from the glacier to be melted to run the boilers that rendered whale blubber to oil. Buildings, whale oil tanks, fuel tanks, boilers and the old airplane hanger stood ghostly on the landscape. We wandered among them, careful not to step on the green moss revegetating the rocks, or to get too close to the nesting Kelp gulls.

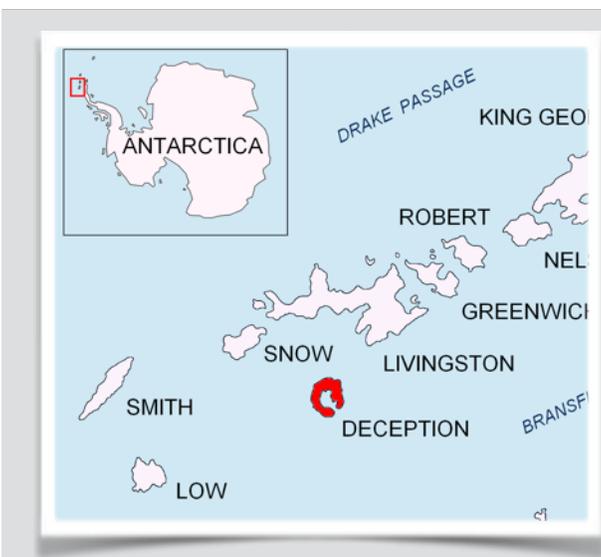
All were back to the ship by 9am, the anchor was quickly retrieved and the Captain directed the Corinthian onto the best heading to avoid as much of the pending storm as possible.

Before lunch the Trip Leaders invited all to the Bar for the Sir Edmund Hillary Club Cocktail Party and drinks were half price.



After lunch we continued with our Learning and Discovery Activities. At 2:00 Vicki gave a presentation on the seals of Antarctica, and at 4:00 the Trip Leaders shared a talk entitled “Who we are”, an enlightenment on Argentinians, their customs and immigration history.

After Recap and Briefing and dinner, we relaxed to Saul’s sweet sounds of Saul or retired to our rooms early and let the rolling waters of the Drake Passage lull us to sleep.



Deception Island 62°59' South, 060° 34' West

Deception Island is an active volcano located in the South Shetland Islands. This area was discovered by William Smith and Edward Bransfield in 1819. Deception Island has a long and dark history of sealing and whaling, and a continued history through most of the 20th century as a British research station. Two volcanic eruptions at the end of the 1960's concluded the occupation of the station and destroyed all of the buildings and other structures at the site.

Recently, at least 18 species of moss and lichen which have not been recorded elsewhere in the Antarctic have been discovered here, two of which are endemic.

Saturday, 28 December, 2019 Drake Passage

Many of us had a rough night as we sailed through the stormy Drake. At seven in the morning Claudia made a general announcement advising about the sea conditions, the movement of the ship and the outer decks being closed due to the high seas and strong winds.

Our Learning and Discovery Activities started normally, but we were kindly reminded to be careful when moving around. Duane started the presentations covering the history of the final mapping and discovery of Antarctica, and the very interesting “Hollow Earth” theory.



After the end of the presentation we were allowed to go out on deck to enjoy wildlife watching and fresh air. We saw several birds, among them Giant Petrels, Black browed Albatrosses and Wandering Albatrosses.

We went back inside to learn more about the wildlife we encountered during our Antarctic journey with Ken and the presentation “Birds in Tuxedos: Penguins of the Antarctic Peninsula.”

07:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 58° 22' S

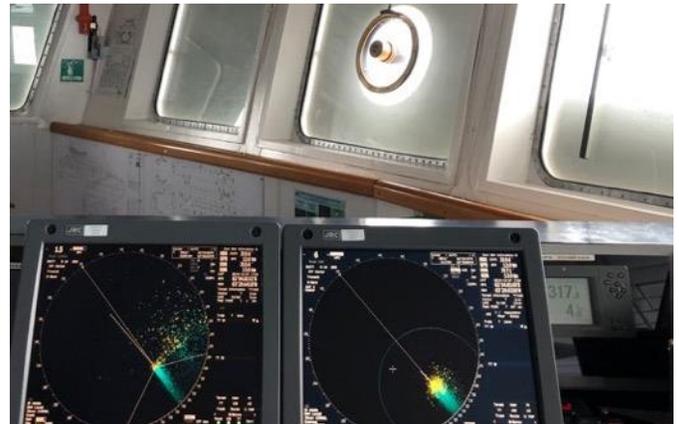
Longitude: 65° 31' W

Wind: 31 knots

Sea state: 5 meters (15 ft)

Sky: Overcast

Temperature: 43° F (6° C)



After lunch we had the option to watch a documentary accompanied by popcorn in the lounge, or play a few games with the Trip Leaders in the bar.

Our last Learning and Discovery activity was our recap and briefing. With the end of the journey coming close, our Hotel Manager Robert explained the procedures necessary to facilitate the check-out of the ship. As we finished dinner we reached protected waters near the Beagle and in spite of the strong winds, the ship was not rocked by the waves and we had a quiet night to sleep.



Sunday, 29 December, 2019 Beagle Channel

Early morning Corinthian reached the anchorage area near the Argentinian pilot station to wait for our pilot, who assists the bridge team with the navigation of the Beagle Channel towards the last port of call of our adventure, Ushuaia.

Learning and Discovery started soon after breakfast with presentations about the several citizen sciences projects that we can participate

07:00 Position and Weather

Latitude: 54° 59' S

Longitude: 66° 50' W

Wind: 25 knots

Sea state: Calm

Sky: Partially Clouded

Temperature: 52° F (11° C)



We went back out on deck 5 to enjoy sunshine and more views of Albatrosses and Cormorants before joining the Trip Leaders to Learn and Discover the traditional Argentine costumes as we “Share your Mate”.

Our final recap and disembarkation briefing joined the Expedition Team and Trip Leaders under Claudia’s leadership to say farewell and recall our adventure together in the White Wilderness, with inspiring words of the team and a pleasant surprise, a slide show with images and videos taken during the trip by the Trip Leaders and edited by Elisa.

Afterwards, we had additional group briefings and more time to spend on deck.

Captain invited us at the end of the day to celebrate the end of our journey and soon after dinner we were underway towards the port of Ushuaia.



Monday, 30 December, 2019 Ushuaia

Today, we parted ways from our Antarctica family. We shared incredible moments in one of the more remote corners of the world. As the buses departed from the pier we bid our final farewell to the crew and staff of Corinthian.

06:00 Position

Latitude: 54° 48' S

Longitude: 68° 12' W



In behalf of the entire crew of the Corinthian, we want to wish you safe travels and continuation of your adventures. We hope that the memories of this journey stay with you for a long time and that it becomes a truly unforgettable travel experience to share with friends and family for many years to come.

WHITE WILDERNESS

21 to 30 Dec 2019

