

The Ultimate Antarctic Adventure

Breathtaking landscapes, awe inspiring wildlife encounters and endless tranquility on an unfathomable scale, and that's just the tip of the iceberg...

Few people get the opportunity to experience Antarctica, but even fewer get to experience the seventh continent quite like this. EYOS Expeditions set the bar when it comes to Antarctic exploration, with a team of experienced individuals behind them and the best vessel for the job, there are limited places in the Southern-most waters and in fact the world that can't be reached by the impressive Hanse Explorer and her incredible crew.

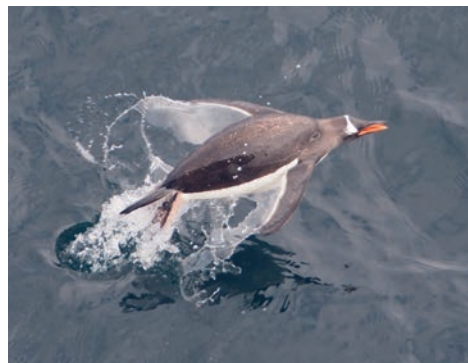




The last true wilderness on earth that remains uninhabited by human life - other than those conducting research in the sparsely situated bases across the continent - is precisely that, a wilderness. Only accessible through select airports or via ship across the Drake Passage, a notoriously uncomfortable stretch of water running between South America and the Antarctic that takes two days to cross, you would be forgiven for taking the two hour flight from Punta Arenas, Chile. However, this is not without its problems. One thing that becomes immediately apparent before you even lay eyes on the seventh continent is just how remote and unpredictable it really is. You could find yourself staying in Punta Arenas for longer than first thought thanks to a shift in the weather at the other end.

Planning is essential for any expedition, but on a trip to Antarctica, planning will only get you so far, the rest is in the hands of an undeniably beautiful mother nature.

Waiting in line at Punta Arenas airport - as soon as the weather allows - to board a plane dressed in penguin decals heading to Antarctica is a surreal experience. It could only be made more so by a large group of individuals waiting for another aeroplane dressed in running gear with Antarctic marathon logos proudly displayed. It certainly adds to the intense anticipation as to what exactly should be expected



on reaching King George Island in the South Shetlands at the end of the flight, but nothing will ever prepare you.

On arrival, landing on a perfectly manicured gravel runway, we wait patiently alongside the parked 'penguin plane' for the following flights to land before being allowed to walk back up the runway to start the real adventure. At the end of the airstrip, we are welcomed by a man who was to become influential beyond imagination.

Spending most of the year on board private vessels around the world as an expedition leader, Richard White has one of the sharpest eyes for spotting wildlife and an engaging abundance of knowledge that he is keen to share. Throughout the coming week he would prove to be exceptionally experienced in the field and demonstrate the ideal working relationship with the yacht's Captain in order to achieve things other ships and expeditions could only dream of.

A short walk from the airport finds us at the shoreline and offers a first glimpse of the wilderness beyond and home for the next week, Hanse Explorer. A brief introduction to our lifevests and favourite new toy, the zodiac, and we are on our way across the calm waters of the bay to step aboard Hanse for the first time. Once aboard, the steward team immediately step in to help in any way they can and take care of

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the now unnecessary outerwear that was essential just moments before. When sufficiently undressed, we are guided us upstairs to luxurious cabins which will play host to little more than sleeping and storage throughout the expedition as there is already far too much to be seen outside.

The yacht immediately gets underway, heading out into the Bransfield Strait and south towards Half Moon Island in the South Shetlands. Due to the weather conditions, 7 days of potential sailing was reduced to 6, so in order to maximise the potential distance that could be covered heading down the Antarctic Peninsula, there was no time waste. It is important to remember that what goes down has to eventually come back up for the return flight to civilisation, limiting just how far South you are able to venture, but nothing could prepare us for what this yacht was capable of.

Fortunately, little time was given to thinking of the return journey as we are politely informed that the first meal on board is ready. A freshly prepared gourmet buffet is waiting in the dining room which features wall-to-wall windows allowing you to soak up the surroundings whilst enjoying a delicious selection of food. Following lunch there is no time to contemplate and digest both the meal and the truly breathtaking landscape as we venture into an area of beautiful, huge icebergs with spectacular juxtaposing features, our first look at penguin life alongside the yacht and a chance sighting - thanks to Richard - of a killer whale pod. Before having time to register just what is happening, the zodiacs are in the water and we are just a matter of meters from the most prolific killers in the sea.

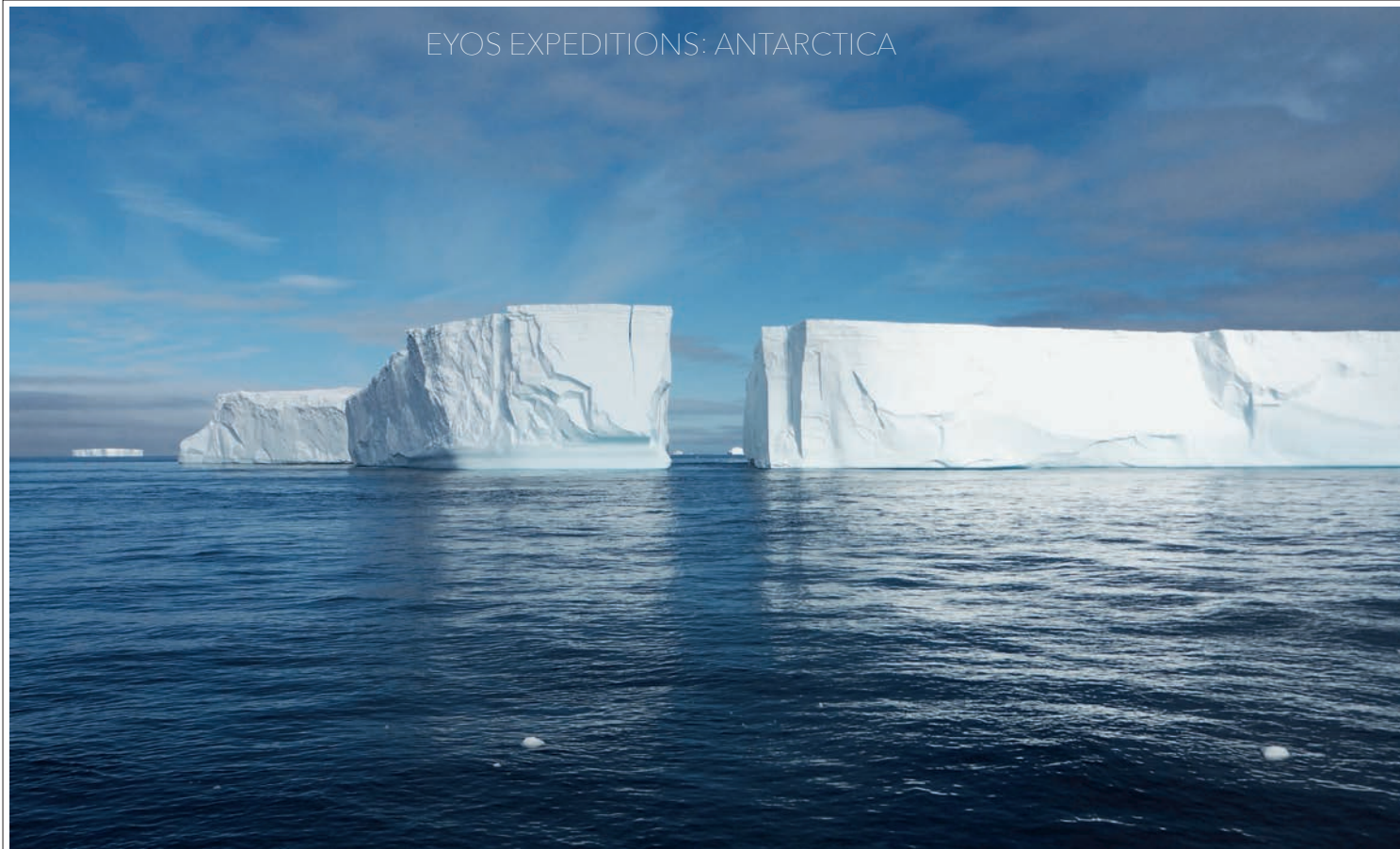
After what felt like hours, but was in truth just 40 minutes, we are back on Hanse continuing towards Half Moon Island taking in the incredible array of icebergs along the way. Intense flashes of unnatural blues burst into view as the light reflects off of these magnificent structures, each with unique features and every one as exciting as the last. Meandering through the vast icy expanse, we arrive in Menguante Cove to disembark on our first landing on Half Moon Island. This small, rocky outpost is home to an equally small Argentine base, a healthy population of chinstrap penguins and just one misguided king penguin standing proudly on the beach. The island is recognised as an Important Bird Area

(IBA) and it is clearly evident to see why once ashore. Not just a safe haven for approximately 2000 breeding pairs of chinstrap penguins, but also home to a number of sea birds including south polar skuas, kelp gulls and the small, beautiful, but incredibly feisty Antarctic terns.

As you move closer towards the penguin colony, the inevitable smell thickens in the air and it is, at first, unpleasant. But before too long, your nose adjusts and attention shifts to the fact that you are surrounded by some of the most intriguing, comedic animals on the planet. Designed wholeheartedly to be expert swimmers, they are surprisingly agile on land, managing to climb to incredible heights up steep rocky inclines and control their decent back down again. Completely unphased by human presence, they are inquisitive and engaging, some even going as far as to take a peck at the strange rubber things on our feet - an essential pair of waterproof boots.

As dusk eventually begins to set in, we return to the yacht to end what has only been the first afternoon of a six day adventure. Reflection on the day offers the first, startling indication of the scale, diversity and unpredictability of this place. There is no doubt in anyones mind that this metaphorical iceberg is 99 percent underwater and we haven't even seen the 1 percent above it yet. A brief discussion with Richard and the Captain - Jens Köthen with 8 years experience at the helm of Hanse Explorer and a thirst for exploration - reveals the overnight plans...heading to Antarctic Sound in search of some 'big' ice (in case we weren't impressed already). The small passage connecting the Bransfield Strait and the Weddell Sea should prove more than up to the challenge. ►





Awakening on the first morning in Antarctica there are plenty of thoughts running through your head. 'What are we going to see today?'; 'What an amazing afternoon we had yesterday.'; and 'How can there be anything more amazing than getting that close to killer whales?' all pass through at record pace as I have already glanced out of the window to see the most gigantic piece of floating ice (pictured above, *partly*) you could ever imagine - and this was still not the biggest around, by a long way. Our first taste of tabular icebergs and it was impressive to say the least. Towering way over the yacht and stretching inconceivable distances, these ice monsters are the result of carving from enormous ice shelves. One such event in 2000 saw an area 180 miles by 22 miles separate from the Ross Ice Shelf releasing over 3 trillion tonnes of ice into

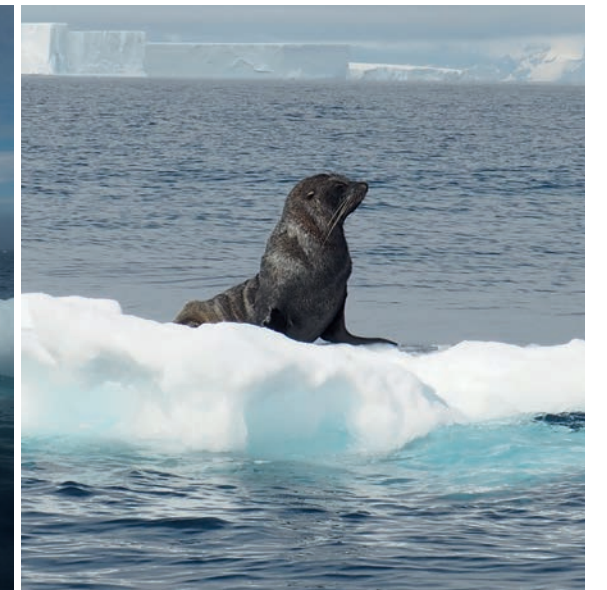


the Ross Sea. These were understandably minute in comparison, but offered up a terrifying realisation of just how small we are. Observing the ship from our zodiac as it was dwarfed by these stunning and disturbingly peaceful giants, we are once again on the receiving end of some good fortune.

From the outset, Richard had made us very aware that spotting killer whales in such a large expanse is, although regular, certainly not guaranteed. So when a second pod on only our second day surfaced in front of us, we all began wondering if he was simply trying to boost moral. Nevertheless, we took advantage of the situation and followed - at a reserved distance as to not disturb the majestic beasts - for as long as possible before they disappeared below the crystal clear waters. Little did we know at this point that it would be our last encounter of the trip.

Not to be disheartened, the journey continued to our second landing and penguin colony, this time a mix of gentoo and adélie penguins in the IBA of Brown Bluff on the northeast of the Antarctic Peninsula. This bared more significance than the last landing as this was our first chance to genuinely walk on Antarctica and stake an official claim on visiting the seventh continent. Before reaching the shore however, there was plenty to see in the water.

This is a substantial site with around 20,000 pairs of adélie and 550 gentoo, and with chicks still reliant on their parents for food, the waters surrounding the colony are brimming with life. Leopard seals patrol the shoreline hoping for an easy meal as older chicks begin to leave the nest and large groups of penguins can be seen flying through the water on their way out to sea or returning from a successful hunt. It is very easy to spend hours amongst the penguins despite the smell and we made the most of the visit which brought our second day to a successful close. We continued southeast just breaking into the Weddell Sea before turning back



through Antarctic Sound for an overnight journey 150 miles south along the peninsula to reach Mikkelsen Harbour and the breathtakingly stunning Spert Island. Home to large remnants of the whaling era, Mikkelsen Harbour is now visited by swathes of fur and weddell seals along with playing host to a substantial gentoo penguin colony. After a short visit, we continue to Spert Island which presents yet another facet of Antarctic geography.

Tall rocky faces pierce through the dark blue waters creating a maze filled with hazardous obstacles...icebergs. Some remain stills as a result of either grounding on the rocks beneath or getting stuck between two of these monstrous structures. Others move and sway in the turbulent waters, unpredictable and deadly if you happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Luckily we had experts on hand to guide the zodiacs safely through this wonderful labyrinth whilst desperately attempting to take everything in.

Following the exciting morning excursion, we hop back aboard Hanse to continue our journey south entering the Gerlache Strait which separates the Palmer Archipelago - featuring Anvers Island with its 9,055 ft peak, Mount Français - and the Antarctic Peninsula. The scenery in every direction is incredible and the gradually setting sun only enhances the experience, but there is something even more spectacular in these waters. Scores of humpback whales emerge from the dark blue abyss. The yacht finds itself in the midst of a krill feasting frenzy, so what better idea than to leave the safety of the ice-grade vessel in exchange for a humbling ride in a now very small zodiac.

There is no need to attempt to get close to these animals, they are not in the slightest phased by our presence and in fact begin to move closer and closer towards us as they feed on an evidently abundant supply of krill under the surface. Truly awe inspiring





and unlike anything I have ever experienced, there are not enough words in the English language that could possibly justify it. Resting in the middle of such a large body of relatively calm water, watching countless humpbacks diving and feeding with such an amazing backdrop and nothing but the occasional blow of air and deep rumble to disturb the silence is nothing short of magical. Hours pass by as we continue to enjoy the company until eventually, the light dims and we reluctantly return to the ship to process the events of the day. Everyone will be sleeping well tonight.

Understanding that this was the third of six nights on board, meant that we would soon be forced to consider turning back, but thanks to the expertise and determination of Jens and Richard, that wasn't going to be the case. A pre-bed recommendation of getting up at the earliest opportunity indicated that we were in for another treat in the morning. Overnight the crew sail Hanse down to Lemaire Channel and at first light we are on the approach in the most tranquil waters you could imagine.

This steep cliff sided passage is 7 miles long but just 1 mile wide, and full of icebergs. A challenge for any ship to pass, but one that



Hanse Explorer and her crew are not only ready for, but relish. We slowly progress through the eerily peaceful chasm, spotting wildlife as we go. Now in crabeater seal territory, it begins to become clear that they are the most populous of all seal species with groups on every other piece of floating ice big enough to support them. Then, the faintest puff of water breaks the surface followed by a distinctive, slender dorsal fin which could only belong to a minke whale. Despite the relatively small scale of the channel in relation to the region, it is packed full of wildlife traveling up and down the peninsula.



Once through to the other side, the whole ship takes a minute to appreciate and marvel over the sheer beauty that this part of the world possesses. Thankfully there is no rush to move as breakfast is served, instead we can all enjoy the view through the windows as we indulge in an equally impressive selection of pastries, hot and cold breakfasts and fresh fruit.

We take a short trip from Lemaire Channel to a secluded and indescribably remote Ukrainian base. Originally established by the British Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey as Base F in 1947, the main hut named "Wordie House" after Sir James Wordie, a member of Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition who visited during its construction has been restored and is now an Historic Site. The base moved to the present site in 1954 and was renamed Faraday Station in '77 in honour of British scientist Michael Faraday. Ukraine bought the base for a symbolic one pound and took over the operation 1996. Today, Vernadsky Research Base is still manned by a team of Ukrainian scientists who spend twelve months at a time conducting meteorology, upper atmospheric physics, geomagnetism, ozone, seismology, glaciology, ecology, biology and physiology research. The team are incredibly welcoming and more than happy to show us around their home, from the research facilities to the infamous 'Faraday Bar' which was crafted during the British occupation. Now offering a minimal menu of simply vodka, it is clearly a welcome change of pace for the Ukrainian team as we join in international celebration of this amazing location.

Once the vodka is finished, the postcards sent - yes you can send a letter to a loved one, even from Antarctica - and the tour completed, we jump back in our zodiacs and head across the water to Wordie House. Offering a small insight into the living conditions of explorers of old along with original produce, equipment and facilities, this site is not only protected, but reserved for the few fortunate enough to reach it. An eye-opening reminder of the lengths that the first pioneers went to in search of answers in an unknown world and a stark contrast to the luxurious expedition currently being undertaken.

Keen to maximise the distance we are able to travel south before having to head back up the Antarctic Peninsula, we are hurried back to the ship to continue our quest...to reach the Antarctic Circle. Located at a latitude of 66°33 46.6 S, the captain did his best to reach the unreachable given the available time and we had to settle for 65° 47.7 S, still a considerable distance from the elusive line.

On a longer expedition or at least having the full week to utilise, there is every chance Hanse would have reached the circle and provided an experience even fewer get to enjoy. There was however a silver lining. Admitting defeat, the captain decided to show off this impressive ships capabilities. Smashing through large pieces of sea ice, it was clear to see that Jens and his crew enjoy and are well versed in what this vessel can do. After a brief spell of sharp handling and precision ice breaking, we are told to head to the wet room and prepare to disembark on the zodiacs once more. Without any indication as to the purpose, everyone is ready in a matter of seconds - so experienced at getting in and out of the zodiacs after just four days of 'training' - and we are on our way.

A very short, slow trip and we arrive at our destination - a substantial piece of sea ice that is floating just in front of the ship. Following an initial assessment of the ice's suitability, we step out of the zodiacs and on to a floating piece of ice in the middle of Granddier Channel. Proving to be the ultimate consolation prize, it would also signify the furthest south we would manage to reach. Once everyone had successfully photographed every possible angle of the ice and Hanse in the background it was back to the zodiacs. In a matter of seconds of us getting off of the ice, we get to enjoy Hanses power and her captain's incredible control up close, as she crashes through the same sheet we were standing on just moments before.

As we begin our ascent back up the peninsula, heading north through Lemaire Channel, we get to enjoy a spectacular sunset, a fitting end to yet another exhilarating day. At this point, it seems as though there will be nothing left to see as we will simply be passing back through old ground, but that couldn't be further from the truth. In many ways, the best was yet to come. ►



The following morning we wake in one of the most suitably named places we have come across, Paradise Harbour. Blissfully tranquil, it is the ideal spot for a morning kayak. Drifting around this magnificent bay, there are huge grounded icebergs that appear to move as the wind blows the inflatable kayak along and vast ice cliffs surrounding the crystal clear water. With no wildlife close enough to hear and a distinct absence of any man made noise, it is peaceful beyond imagination and quite literally silent. The perfect place for reflection both visually and figuratively as the mirror-like waters reflect every detail of the icy sculptures above.

Unfortunately, silence never lasts and we find ourselves at a small penguin colony nesting atop a tiny island in the bay, although one could argue that the sound of penguins in their natural habitat isn't so much of a disturbance as a delight to hear. Regardless, the zodiacs return and we head off in search of some glacial carving. The ideal spot in a secluded cove surrounded by overhanging icy towers provided yet more opportunity for some peaceful reflection but unfortunately denied us the opportunity to experience any serious carving in the short time we were able to wait.

Thankfully it wasn't too long before we reached our second stop of the day which would open our eyes to an incomprehensibly astounding landscape. Neko Harbour is home to a large colony of gentoo penguins who nest high up on a rocky outcrop and it is clear to see why. The views are simply astonishing and impossible to process. Not only is the water perfectly still, but the sun is so intense that there is no need for a hat, gloves or even a coat. Every way you look from the impressive viewpoint offers something different but equally spectacular. Heading out of the bay you have views in the distance of Anvers Island and the enormous 9,000 ft

peak which looks minuscule from here and back towards the land, huge glaciers force their way down towards the sea with gigantic blocks of ice precariously positioned, ready for collapse. Across a small inlet is a rocky, snow covered mountain which gives way to a sizeable avalanche, throwing a huge cloud of ice into the air it is a harsh reminder of the areas instability.

On returning to the yacht, we are informed that now was the time to don the swimwear and prepare as best you can to indulge in the 'polar plunge'. It is fairly self explanatory, but for those wondering, it is a case of throwing oneself in the water - recorded at -0.5C at the time - from the back of the ship and attempting to get back out as quickly as possible with a warming glass of vodka and preheated onboard sauna waiting for you on the other side. Some will choose not to partake in such a crazy notion, but it's not every day you get the opportunity to say you have 'swum' in the Antarctic. Thankfully, the blistering sun was still out - unsurprising given the incredibly long days - so it didn't take much to warm up afterwards.

It was then time to say goodbye to this oasis of the south and head further north overnight to Charcot Bay. There was an added treat on the way as we passed back through the Gerlache Strait to find a significant number of humpback whales still enjoying the abundance of krill in the area. In the morning of our last day, we arrive at Charcot Bay to find yet more incredible scenery with wide spanning glacial ice cliffs hanging from spectacular rock formations and water as still as we had seen yesterday. Simply breathtaking and as exciting as the first day. More close encounters with humpbacks in our zodiac ensued before returning to the yacht for lunch and our last journey to our last landing of the trip.

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Astrolabe Island would set the scene for our departing visit and it would not disappoint. As we get closer and closer to the rocky island in the zodiac it becomes apparent that there is a very large volume of fur seals both on the beach and swimming along the shoreline. The waters edge is alive with the fluid motion of these elegant animals swimming and the beach is full of fur seals both big and small practicing their technique for the next mating season. There is an intense atmosphere despite being the off season and it

is hard to find a patch of water not currently featuring a seal or penguin. We meander around the small rocky islands in search of a more suitable landing sight but can only find a small protruding rock that is currently uninhabited by seals. A brief step ashore secures the last landing of the trip and it is time to return to the yacht for the final time.

Throughout the trip you are welcomed back aboard with a warm cup of cocoa - spiked with a little rum if requested - and waited on hand and foot by an incredible steward team. Every meal is beautifully presented and delicious thanks to the incredible chef who is able to manage the kitchen whilst accommodating for last minute changes in schedule when a killer whale decides to show up. And everything on the yacht runs seamlessly thanks to the experience, respect and understanding that Jens possesses.

There are many reasons why EYOS Expeditions choose to charter Hanse Explorer year after year, but to truly appreciate every one of them, you will have to experience it for yourself. They offer numerous charter yachts for Antarctic expeditions, all more expensive and luxurious than Hanse, but if you were to ask Richard, Jens or even the CEO of EYOS Expeditions, Ben Lyons, each would tell you that if you are looking for the ultimate Antarctic expedition, there is only one yacht that you should consider.

Undoubtedly worthy of the phrase 'trip of a lifetime', this is more than just ticking off a destination on your bucket list, it really is an experience that will make you reconsider your thoughts on the world.

What to Pack...

Immaculator Parka
£325.00 from
The North Face.
thenorthface.co.uk



Wayfarer Pant £65.00 and XA Pro3D GTX
£110.00 both from Salomon. salomon.com

Mrs White's Absolute
Gentleman Protective
Barrier Cream
£20.00.
roullierwhite.com

Classic Ultra High
Boots £90.00
from BOGS.
bogsfootwear.co.uk

Emergency Night Mission
£15,340 from Breilting
breilting.com

19 Degree Aluminium, Short
Trip Packing Case (55l)
£945.00 and Extended
Trip Packing Case (84l)
£995.00 from TUMI.
tumi.com

Commando Half Hose
Wool Rich Socks £8.00
from HJ Hall. hj.co.uk

