

A Trip to Argentina and Antarctica by Maree Papworth



In Dec 2019 my husband Greg and I set off on an adventure to **Antarctica**.

We flew from Melbourne via Santiago, Chile to **Buenos Aires**, Argentina.

Buenos Aires is a city that we have visited often, enjoying the Art Deco architecture, atmospheric old coffee houses, the warmth of the people, delicious steak and red wine meals, colourful street markets and the obsession with Tango.

On our first visit in Dec 2001, we were caught up in a revolution. The country's economy was in a sharp decline. Restrictions were in place regarding the amount that locals could withdraw from the banks and this amount was so limited that many could not pay rent, bills or buy enough food for family.

One night, we were locked into a restaurant while noisy protesters marched by and women stood on balconies beating saucepans with large spoons. On reaching the city centre, some protesters became violent, damaging shop fronts and vehicles. As a result, the inner areas of Buenos Aires went into lockdown. Fortunately, we had seen most of the city sights, including the magnificent Teatro Colon, before this occurred.

Argentina had 4 presidents in 4 days.

This experience has not deterred us from returning many times.



Puerto Madero Buenos Aires



Decorative features on buildings and lamp posts



Obelisco de Buenos Aires in
the Plaza de la Republica

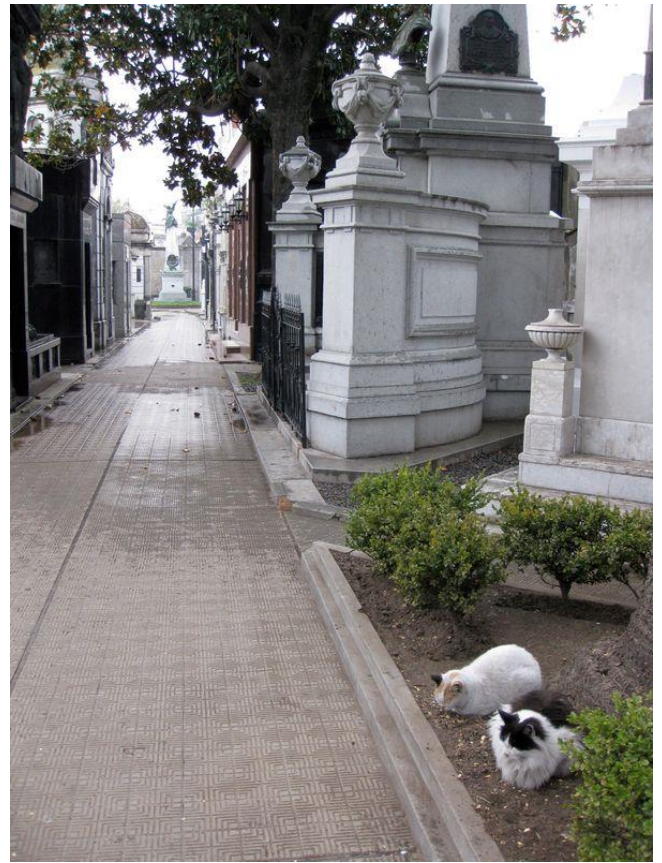


Casa Rosada, presidential palace



Street scenes, one of a multitude of dog walkers





Mausoleums in Recoleta Cemetery



Colourful La Boca area near the Riachuelo River

From Buenos Aires we flew south to Bariloche airport in the **Patagonia** area and stayed a few days at **Arroyo Verde** (an estancia owned and run by family friends). Greg enjoyed flyfishing (catch and release) in the crystal-clear Traful River while I enjoyed exploring the amazing rugged but picturesque area. www.estanciaarroyoverde.com.ar



AND THEN -

Continuing south we flew to **Ushuaia** to board the Greg Mortimer ship for our **Christmas in Antarctica** cruise.

The town of Ushuaia has the mountains of Tierra del Fuego to the north and sits on the edge of the Beagle Channel.



The township of Ushuaia and the Greg Mortimer at dock

Once on board ship, the safety briefings, lifeboat drill and vacuuming of Expedition Gear began. All the clothing that we intended to wear onshore had to be free of anything that might contaminate the environment.

On returning to the ship after kayak or zodiac excursions, boots must be disinfected, with backpacks, hiking sticks and camera equipment cleaned.

Ships are banned from discharging any oils, bulk chemicals or garbage in Antarctic waters. Sewage and food waste are passed through on-board treatment plants. Waste generated by scientific research stations is packaged and shipped out of the region.

As we sailed through Drake Passage near the South Shetland Islands, we sighted our first iceberg.



Awesome and larger than our ship.

Flying overhead were majestic albatrosses and giant petrels.

Preparing for zodiac trips was a physical challenge for our age group. This usually required 4 layers of clothing: thermals, tights, two pair woolen socks, thick pants and waterproof overpants. On the upper body: thermals, woolen layer, gloves, beanie or cap and polar fleece jacket. Over all this went the provided 3-in-1 waterproof polar jacket and enormous rubber boots. Add to this camera, binoculars, sunglasses, water bottle and hiking stick. Getting dressed for these excursions was a great physical effort.

My arthritic joints cause restrictive movement at the best of times so once attired with all these necessities I felt like an overstuffed teddy bear.

However it was well worth the effort and we stayed warm and dry.



Launching a zodiac

Regulations require that only 100 people (often divided among several landing points) can go ashore at any time. Visitors must stay five meters away from wildlife, including penguins, although due to their curiosity the penguins do not seem to observe this rule.

Our first landing was at Cierva Cove in Hughes Bay on Graham Land on the Antarctic Peninsula.

Here we encountered gentoo and chinstrap penguins, a distant elephant seal and many crabeater and fur seals.



Front of glacier



Chinstrap penguins



Chinstrap penguins



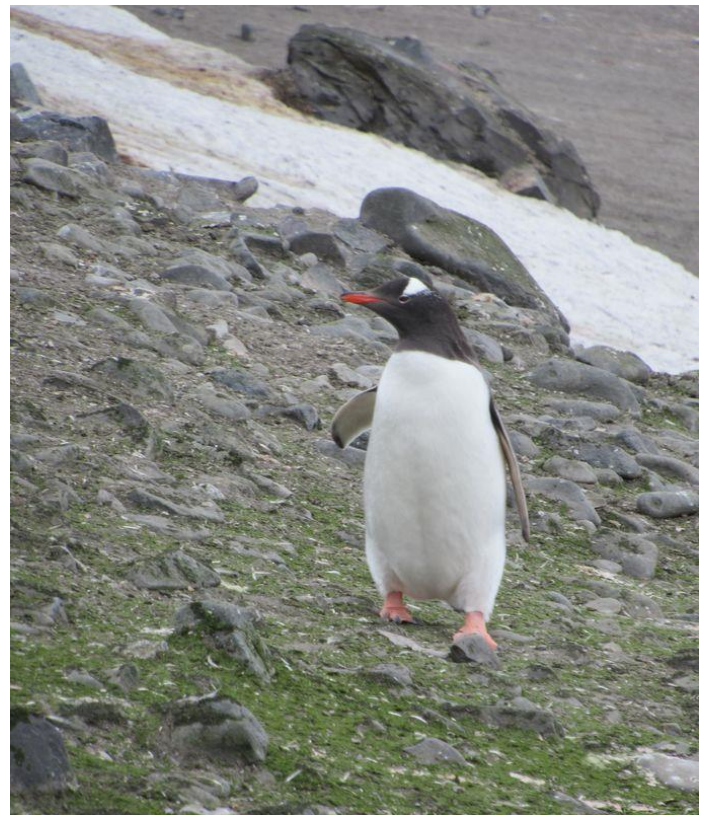
Elephant seal

On board the education program included talks, lectures and films from members of the Expedition Team, experts in their fields. We learnt about the wildlife, exploration history, the Antarctic Convergence the Antarctic Treaty, photography, glaciers and more.

Some titles –“Oceanography & Biology of Antarctica”, “Ice is nice, Ice caps & Icebergs”, “A History of the Antarctic Treaty”, “A Day in the Life of the US Antarctic Program” (this one from a team member who had twice spent 6 months at the US base.). We heard about penguin calls from the advisor on penguins, their behaviour and communication for the making of the film *Happy Feet*.



Fur seals



Gentoo penguin

We have now set foot on seven continents!



Seals enjoy hitching a ride on the floating ice



Red buildings, Argentinian Base still operating



Intrepid kayakers

During our voyage we visited places such as Portal Point, Useful Island, Cuverville, Pleneau, Neko Habour, Port Lockroy, Elephant Point and Deception Island. We sailed through Drake Passage and Lemaire Channel.

We observed an abundance of birdlife (albatross, gulls, petrels, skuas), penguins (gentoo, chinstrap, adeli), seals (elephant, leopard, weddell, crabeater, fur), whales (orcas, minke) and dolphins.

Port Lockroy, originally a British Base on Goudier Island, has been restored and retained as a museum and post office. A postcard sent from here will reach its destination via the Falkland Islands and the UK.

A team of five spend 5 months sharing quarters in a nissen hut. As well as manning the post office/museum they observe the penguins, how they meet, find a mate, build a nest, hatch and dispatch their chicks.

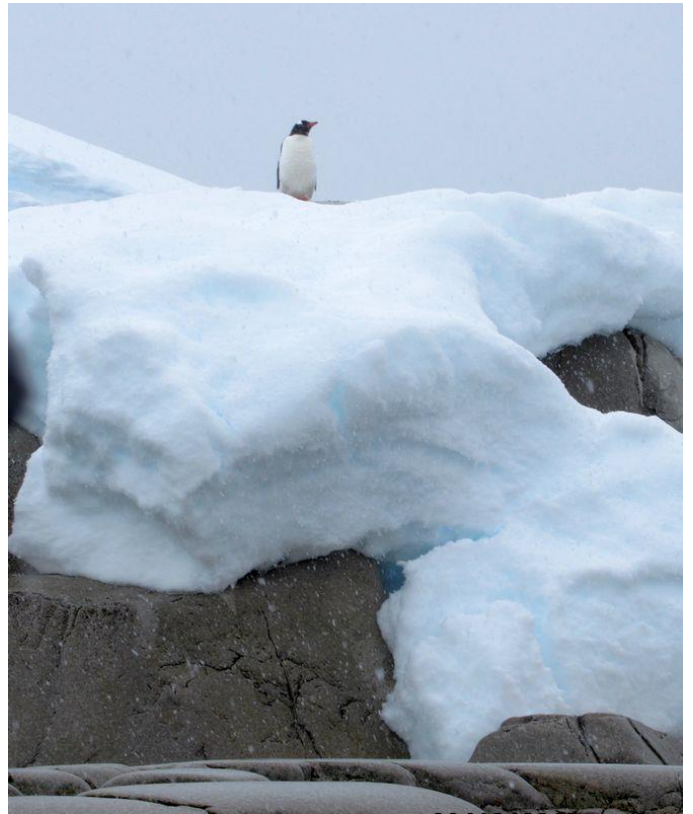


Living quarters at Port Lockroy





A wonderland of ice

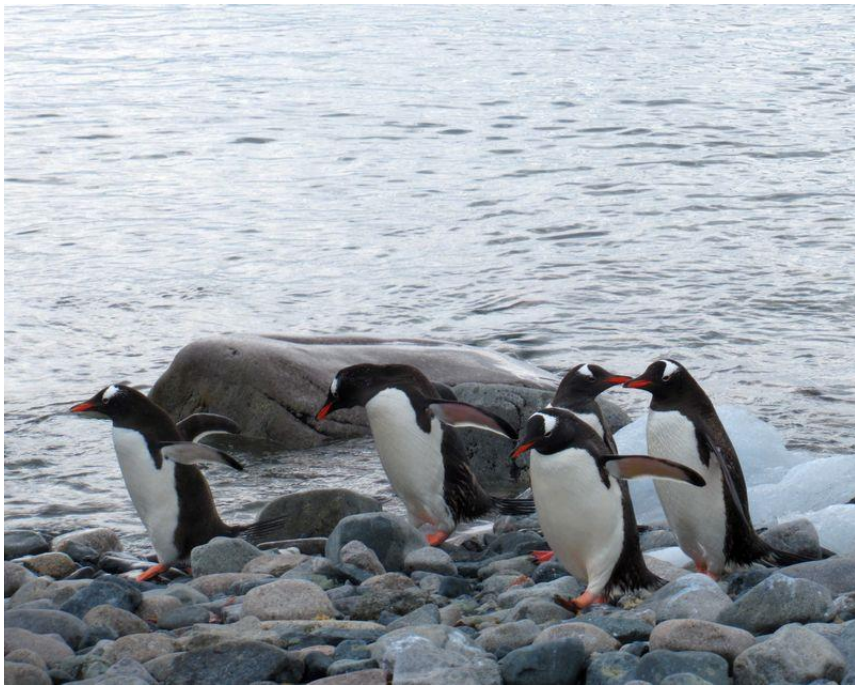




Slippery landings.

Every day more and more birdlife, seals and whales.





Gentoo penguins



We learnt that the mother seals feed their babies for one month until they are big balls of blubber and then all the mothers take off leaving the babies to fend for themselves. It takes about another month, after living off the fat reserves, before the little ones teach themselves to swim and fish. This one spotted our friends rubber boot and approached looking for affection and food.



A minke whale playing near our ship as kayaks and zodiacs are launched

Christmas Day was filled with the usual abundance of wonderful food. It was also the day of the Polar Plunge which we were happy to watch.



On our third last evening before returning north via Drake Passage we encountered some very rough seas. During dinner a sudden lurch sent crockery and glassware flying. Our treasured ship the Greg Mortimer had hit an uncharted reef. Fortunately no-one was injured and the damage was minimal but it did mean a hurried trip up Drake Passage to Ushuaia for repairs.

And so began the trip home with one night in Buenos Aires and another in Santiago Chile where due to local unrest we were not allowed to stray far from our hotel. Not a problem, after our exciting, **once in a lifetime trip to the southern continent** we relaxed before the long flight home.



I (Maree Papworth) hope you enjoy sharing just some of the thousands of photographs taken on our trip.