

Canadian

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# TRAVEL **55** YEARS PRESS®

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**SMALL  
GROUPS,**



## **BIG EXPERIENCES**

**Collette Finding New Ways To Stand Out From The Competition**

**A**s Collette's vice-president Canada, Ron Lonsdale tells it, Canadians are excited to be able to get back out and explore the world and he's confident that while there have been 'rumblings of a recession ... the pandemic was an eye-opener for a lot of travellers ... and we don't foresee [them] electing to give up on life changing experiences that they've been saving up for, for quite some time."

# Exploring Antarctica with Ineke Brinkman Aboard Silversea Endeavour



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INEKE BRINKMAN

“Will you do it?” a strapping young New Yorker asks me in the Santiago de Chili hotel’s fitting room for our Silversea Expedition to Antarctica.

Joshua, a computer wizard, is here with his brother and parents, celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. The 20-something man refers to the Polar Plunge off Silversea’s Endeavour. I am all for it, give him a high five and we have a covenant. In the following days our foolish idea spreads like wildfire. When the day comes, 51 people dive into the Antarctic/Southern Ocean’s frigid waters. Refreshing to say the least. When I am pulled out of the sea onto the Zodiac, being wrapped in towels and cheered on by the bystanders I jump into the hot tub.

I continue to pinch myself, realizing how lucky I am to be given the opportunity to fly 1,028 km south (460 nautical miles) from the gateway to Antarctica over the Drake passage to the Tetiente Rodolpho March Martin Base on King George Island. Antarctic Airways’ boarding passes were distributed one day later than scheduled, because earlier the King George Island military authorities declared that the runway did not have the 300 metres required visibility for landing.

Silversea takes the necessary precaution by bringing guests from all over the world into Santiago de Chili for an overnight; then charts them to Punta Arenas for another hotel stay before flying the Antarctic Bridge to King George. A responsible thing to do, as the weather is unpredictable. Best is to leave itineraries at home and be flexible.

During the extra day in Punta Arenas, we visited the El Stanzio horse ranch and sheep farm. Along the way we find the Andean Condor nesting places in rock piles’ cavities and tall cliff caves. The Chilean’s national bird has a huge up to 3.2 metres wingspan. We also went to see the Noa Victoria



Museum at the shores of the Strait of Magellan. There is a display of legendary vessels used by Patagonian and Antarctic Explorers. Amongst them is a reproduction of Charles Darwin’s HMS Beagle.

The next morning, we are shuttled to the airport from the downtown P. A. Cabo de Hornos Hotel to catch our flight to K.G. The crew manages to serve us, within the 90-minute flight, a hot meal complemented by a Calafate Mousse made with Patagonia’s legendary berry. The Andes mountainscapes, lakes and glaciers draw our eyes to the windows.

Already dressed in the complimentary Silversea red parkas and waterproof pants, we find knee high Zodiac boots in the pre-ordered

size underneath our seat. Shoes go into the Silversea backpacks. We are in awe how the cruise line thought about absolutely everything and is so efficient.

Upon landing, guests who disembarked the inaugural Nov. 19 Silver Endeavour sailing, waive us smiling welcomes from the Frei Departure Lounge steps. Nearby we see the small Holy Trinity Church, a Russian Orthodox Church, the only one staffed year-round by an Orthodox volunteer Priest. Several other countries have research stations on King George in the South Shetland Islands.

Mini-buses take us in no time to the beach where we get into zodiacs and within minutes we reach the Silver Endeavour. A 210-person crew welcomes the second inaugural group of adventure travellers to the Edge of the World. Later on, we learn that this journey’s 164 passengers represent 15 countries, David, my partner is the only Canadian, I travel on a European passport, along with gentlemen from Belgium and Italy. We hear a lot of Spanish and English around us.



**“WHEN THE DAY COMES, 51 PEOPLE DIVE INTO THE ANTARCTIC/SOUTHERN OCEAN’S FRIGID WATERS. REFRESHING TO SAY THE LEAST. WHEN I AM PULLED OUT OF THE SEA ONTO THE ZODIAC, BEING WRAPPED IN TOWELS AND CHEERED ON BY THE BYSTANDERS I JUMP INTO THE HOT TUB.”**

We are so excited to be in Antarctica; we sit on 200 years of Antarctic history, a peaceful territory claimed by France, Chile, Argentina, UK, Norway, Australia and un-claimers all having their own research stations, some of which are populated year-round by tiny hardy crews. We are on the frozen continent managed by 12 nations, amongst whom are New Zealand, Belgium, USSR, Japan, South Africa. The Southernmost continent and site of the South Pole is virtually uninhabited, measures 1.5 times the size of the USA. It is the land of superlatives with the highest elevation on the southern edge of the earth, at a latitude of 50 to 60 degrees south, pending who you ask.

The sun never sets in summer and never rises in winter. It is the driest continent with an average of less than two inches of annual precipitation. Antarctica is the coldest, highest, driest and windiest continent, consisting of 98% ice; the thickest part being up to four kilometres deep. Antarctica represents 90% of the world's ice and 70% of the freshwater volume. Its highest point – Vinson Massif - stands at 4892 metres.

Marine life is visible from outer space. 400 million tons of Antarctic krill can be found in the Ocean and is the primary food source for the krill/crab-eater seals. The Weddell seals eat penguins. There are white fin, humpback, and mink whales; there are eighteen species of penguins; they spend 70% of the time in the water. There are Chinstrap Gentoo and Adelie penguins crowding the South Shetland Islands; King, Macaroni and Emperor penguins can be found in the north.

Within five months after purchasing the Crystal Endeavour the Royal Caribbean Silversea group took out the casino, the helicopter bay, made some other modifications, added new signage and aptly calls this Ultra-Luxury ship the Silver Endeavor.

The Silversea Team designs itineraries under the name Antarctic Bridge, connecting the South American Continent to Antarctica.

Godmother Felicity Aston christened the ship on its maiden voyage on Nov. 19. The 45-year-old British Explorer became the first woman to ski solo across Antarctica in 2012, and is the first person to traverse the continent by muscle power alone. Her predecessor and fellow country man, James Cook, was the first ever explorer who crossed the Antarctic circle in 1773.

The Silver Endeavour has cutting edge navigation and exploration technology, including a remote gimbal camera system, which can capture high quality images from five kilometers distance. The spacious all-suites ship has a 1:1 crew to guest ratio. She has the gadgets and toys that represent luxury: walk-in closet with lots of storage, large shower with separate entrance to toilet; a desk, refrigerator, a good size balcony, binoculars etc. Dining options are in The Restaurant; the Grill, the Terrazzini and the exclusive La Dame, the only dining venue that carries a surcharge. The onboard expedition team consists of biologists, naturalists, marine scientists and guides who share their vast knowledge of the land with the curious travelers. They conduct destination debriefings and briefings on the upcoming port calls. The activities that are published in the Daily Chronicles. Expedition triumphs entertainment. Talented Sergei sings and plays some after dinner dancing tunes, then there are some quizzes and games for guest get-togethers.

The first night we cross the Bransfield Strait, waves rock us to sleep; upon waking we are surrounded by glaciers in the Gerlach Strait. The dramatic golden lights are breathtaking. The icebergs have unique textures, shapes and patterns, natural arches, and no two are alike; there are vast flat tabular icebergs and monoliths, all different in size and colour.

The day after, the Neptune Bellows wait us at sunrise; we are surrounded by surreal inhospitable stark mountains, lava, black sand and a variety of stones into Port Fisher. Captain Niklas Peterstam maneuvers and circles around rocks to reach the narrow Strait that brings us to the 10,000-year-old collapsed volcano caldera on Deception Island that saw its last eruption in 1971 and is due for another one.

We are in Antarctica for only 4 nights and use our time to the max. Dressed in dry suits, booties and life vests, we daily gather in the mudroom and pending upon the ocean swells, we go kayaking, slip into zodiacs and go on wet landings to hike, find and photography Leopard and Elephant seals, Gentoo and Chinstrap



SILVER ENDEAVOUR			
VOYAGE EV221128005			
KING GEORGE ISLAND			
KING GEORGE ISLAND			
4 DAYS			
3	Antarctic Peninsula ANT...	Thu, 01 Dec	
	South Shetland Islands A...	Fri, 02 Dec	
4	-2 °C   0 °C	Clear	6AM 12PM 6PM
VOYAGE EV221203006			
KING GEORGE ISLAND			
KING GEORGE ISLAND			
6 DAYS			
1	King George Island ANTA...	Sat, 03 Dec	5:30 AM - 6:00 PM

penguins.

Polar Plunge aside, my very best experience was kayaking. Being in a world with few humans; in a two-person kayak, soaring birds, beautiful skies and surrounded by towering icebergs and floating ice, is indescribable. There is no place on earth that can compare. Still and sacred moments in this remote space supersede every travel experience I ever had before.

David Suzuki coins it when he says: "Nature is a web and we are just one strand."

Will I do it again? In a heartbeat!

Sail on over to [www.silversea.com](http://www.silversea.com) for more.

The best time to visit Antarctica is November-March

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