



FEBRUARY 3, 2023 / BY TOBY SALTZMAN / [BLOGS](#) [FEATURED](#)

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ANTARCTICA EXPEDITION LEADER MARIEKE EGAN

A suspenseful breeze blew south of the Antarctic Circle as *Silver Endeavour* passengers watched the advance expedition guides navigate their Zodiacs through rapidly moving ice. The boats were seeking a safe landing on Jenny Island that would take us up close to the colony of elephant seals lounging blissfully on the icy beach. Icebergs and growlers lodged against the shoreline, forcing guides to return to ship without stepping ashore, and I recalled Marieke Egan’s polar mantra: “In Antarctica, Mother Nature dictates. Humans obey.”

As expedition leader of Silversea’s new PC 6-rated ice-class 1A polar vessel, Marieke had briefed passengers well on the spontaneous nature of authentic expedition cruising. By now, halfway through this maiden voyage – and on the first ship of the season to venture so far south – we understood flexibility is key. Antarctica weather is unpredictable, with rapidly changing winds and sea-ice conditions, and shifting ice at landing sites. We had already experienced guided kayaking safaris and scenic Zodiac tours that weaved through ice floes up to snowy mountains thriving with gentoo or chinstrap penguins, so we grasped Marieke’s confidence in the highly experienced, 20-member expedition team – including scientists, historians, and post-graduate ecologists and environmentalists. By now, we were accustomed to the loosely described itinerary that followed Marieke’s instinctive intuition for the best place to be, any day, any time. And we felt totally inspired by her positive attitude to nature’s surprises: “The Antarctic never ceases to amaze. You never know what you are going to get, but whatever you get is fantastic.”



Kayaking in Antarctica | Photo: Toby Saltzman

With guides back on board, Marieke announced, “You’re about to experience true expedition cruising. We’ll sail further south into Marguerite Bay, a protected place few people have ever seen, and no one has been this season.” As if on cue, Captain Peterstamm skillfully began maneuvering the agile *Silver Endeavour* on a new course to Pourquoi Pas, a protected island. Once there, the expedition team chiseled steps in the ice for a safe landing, and cut walking paths through deep snow that would not interfere with the penguins’ “highways.” Having never seen humans yet this season, the animated Adelie penguins scurried forward curiously, extending flippers as if in fond embrace. It was hard to tell who felt greater joy, the humans watching the Adelies’ comical antics, or the Adelies indulging in the unabashed pleasures of spring courtship. Later that afternoon, when waters calmed, we returned to Jenny Island. The expedition team set forth with indomitable spirits, determined to give passengers the sensational experience we had earlier anticipated. Some stepped into frigid water at the rocky shore, and some physically pushed floating ice aside to create a safe approach to a ridge overlooking the elephant seals.



Penguins in Antarctica | Photo: Toby Saltzman

Back on board *Silver Endeavour* that evening, exhilarated passengers gathered for Marieke’s briefing for the next day’s expedition to Neko Harbour – renowned as a protected bio-diverse habitat for birds, primarily penguins. She thanked the guides for their valiant efforts, explaining it was their decision to attempt another landing on Jenny Island. Passengers cheered as individual guides took bows.

Early at breakfast the next morning, I asked Marieke how she motivates the guides’ perseverance to please passengers. Drawing on her BA in Social Educational Care Work and certification as a Strategic Life Coach Practitioner, she explained that she works to make each team member feel valued and inspired, cultivating a psychological safe space where they can thrive. “As we saw at Jenny Island, the team worked so well together to overcome challenges to create a great day for the guests, they applauded themselves and their morale grew,” she said. Now they want to do that again.”



Photo of Marieke Egan | Photo: Toby Saltzman

And so they did, every day of the Antarctica expedition. By journey’s end, we all knew; when Nature’s chill forces a spontaneous change of course, the journey can turn more spectacular than ever anticipated, and deliver experiences beyond our dreams.

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2 comments

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