

Our Own Private Antarctica

A chartered ship is the most comfortable way to explore frigid waters.



MY FRIEND MICHAEL REICHMANN, a professional photographer from Toronto, had chartered a small ship that would set sail for Antarctica. The voyage was designed with serious photographers in mind, and the adventure had been sold out for more than a year. I'd missed out on the invitation the first time around, so when a last-minute cancellation created an open slot, I jumped at the opportunity. I sent my check for \$14,500, and on February 6, about 45 of us gathered at the Buenos Aires airport for a flight to Ushuaia, Argentina, the southernmost town and airport in the world.

From Ushuaia's airport it was short ride to the port, where we boarded the *Professor Multanovskiy*, a 235-foot Russian research ship that had been converted to carry passengers on Antarctic expeditions. We were greeted by a Russian crew of 20, a German chef, and six staffers from Quark Expeditions, the company that had arranged the charter. The ship

was comfortable, the food was good, there were open decks for taking in the views, and Zodiac boats let us explore tiny coves and land on frozen beaches.

We sailed 3,200 nautical miles in 20 days. We visited South Georgia, an island about 1,200 miles east of Ushuaia. From there we continued south, through the latitudes known as the furious 50s, to the South Orkney Islands and the Weddell Sea. We cruised past dazzling icebergs the size of Manhattan; I never knew ice could be so beautiful. We were treated to a wildlife spectacle like no other—elephant seals, albatross, humpback whales, and penguins in many varieties. With so much to see and so little time to take it all in, lack of sleep was the biggest challenge. In hindsight, the solution is obvious: I've already booked a return trip for January 2009.

—RICE JACKSON