Antarctica, The Falkland Islands and South Georgia Tour Report 2022

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The 2022 Wild Images tour to Antarctica was the culmination of joy and huge relief where, after being isolated from the rest of the world due to covid, excited Wild Imagers gathered in Ushuaia in anticipation of their once-in-a-lifetime trip to the Great South, that much longed-for destination for any photographer, the incredible Antarctica. The excitement in the lead up was palpable. Even as a leader who has been there many times, the feeling of heading to Antarctica fills me with awe and wonder. I know it well and here I was, feeling like it was my first ever trip. Antarctica does that to you. Once it is in your blood, it stays forever, and the wonders of visiting linger for much longer than any discomfort of cold and seasickness, of the great sea crossings. Antarctica is one of the world's most spectacular photography destinations and it doesn't matter what she throws at you in terms of weather or conditions, her world will leave you breathless with beauty.

Sadly, this trip was tragically cut short before we reached Antarctica. The start of the 2022 season to Antarctica was mired in terrible weather that featured large storms and heavy seas. As we left South Georgia, one of the passengers on the ship (not a member of our group) fell, hit his head, went into a coma and died as we were sailing back to Stanley in the Falklands after a medical emergency had been declared on board. It was a huge tragedy to everyone on board and stopped us from actually reaching Antarctica proper.

So I am splitting the report into the locations we visited and the highlights we experienced in each. For the guests who travelled with us on this cruise, they did manage to see some of the most extraordinary sights that any visitor can experience in South Georgia and the Falklands. Despite the weather that caused the accident, paradoxically we managed landings on three massive King Penguin colonies in South Georgia and we visited wonderful places like New Island and Saunders Islands in the Falklands. We also were blessed to enjoy a sunrise landing at Gold Harbour and a near sunset landing at spectacular Salisbury Plain, both of which are virtually never possible on standard cruises. In this respect we were so incredibly blessed with being in these places when the light was glorious.

Tierra Del Fuego

For the guests who opted to extend our trip by a day, spending some time wandering around the Nothofagus woodlands, lakes and mountains of rugged Tierra del Fuego was a good chance to whet our appetite for bird and landscape photography. Being on foot on stable ground also allowed me to spend time with my guests seeing how they shoot and offer some gentle advice on how they might get the best out of the situations we were going to be presented with.

I was one of the drivers into the park that day and, after clearing our entrance and deliberately taking a detour from the crowds of day trippers to the park, we arrived at a pretty pebbled beach where our target was to find the resident Blackish Cinclodes that often hangs around the wooden pier.

As we alighted from the car, a flock of Austral Parakeets flew over our heads. Unlike the parrots of the tropics with their wild and vivid plumage, Austral Parakeets are more subdued in colour. Yet, if you look at them you can see some lovely touches of red in their wings and tails, lending them an almost classy appearance. For a while we watched them feeding in tall trees which made them a bit hard to photograph, before we wandered down to the beach to find the Cinclodes. We were with a group of birders from Birdquest so thankfully a recording of calls was with their leader Pete and within a few minutes of playback, we had a cinclodes literally flitting around our feet. From there it went up on to the pier and got so excited about us being there that it actually did a display from the top of the flagpole flying the Argentinian flag. A patriot Argentinian cinclodes!!!! After laughing at him for a while we hopped back in our cars and drove to a nearby lake side Nothofagus forest that we knew was a good hang out for our target species of the day, the Magellanic Woodpecker. These large and gregarious woodpeckers not only respond well to calls but they are spectacular in appearance with the males sporting a chiseled red head crowned with a small crest. The females are a little duller with black heads, but both are unmistakable in this realm

and within ten minutes we found an extremely obliging male woodpecker flying around our group. In the end I'm not sure who was more curious about our visit – him or us. What is for certain was that our group was completely enthralled by this bird flying around so close to us.

We decided to leave him alone and take a walk along the lake where we saw some Great Grebes building a nest. The wind then picked up and it was horrendous doing a lake walk when the howling wind whipped the waters of the lake into a frenzy and made it hard to hear birds we wanted to photograph. Deep in the woods we found a relatively calm stand of wild Trilium flowers which gave us a great opportunity to test depth of field and composition of flower photography. Our target wildlife, however, was conspicuously absent so we moved on to another location near the sea coast of Tierra Del Fuego.

It was on our short walk here that we found some very amusing Austral Pygmy Owls, Elenia, Sierra Finch, Rayaditos and Chestnut-collared Sparrows. We did try to find a tapaculo here but had no success. In an area of dead woodlands we photographed a lovely Striated Caracara sitting on a bare branch with some flowering Chilean Fire Bush in the background. As we were doing so, the birders in our crowd were being entertained by a White-throated Tree Creeper. I had actually seen their bird crossing the flooded woodland and suggested that they might want to try and call the tree creeper out to the dead trees to get a better view and photographs. Amidst calls from some that they never go into that environment and that it would be a waste of time, I convinced their leader to try anyway and he did. Within seconds we had a fantastic tree creeper on a dead tree right in front of us, allowing us all to have superb views and the best photographs that either leader had ever taken of that bird! Maybe photographer guides aren't so useless to birders after all? We walked down to the sea and then returned along the same path to our cars. It was time for lunch!

Shortly after lunch in the park, we stopped to photograph some Black-necked Swans on the lake before leaving the park in the mid-afternoon.

Our first stop back in Ushuaia was a spot that is home to the White-throated Caracara, the least known of all caracara species. I'd visited this spot before and the birds were quite distant. This time was no different so we went down to a river mouth on the coast and enjoyed some incredible photographic opportunities with Ashy-headed Geese, Black-faced Ibis and Magellanic Snipe before wrapping our shoot up for the day.

What an incredible kickstart to the trip!

Faro Les Eclaireurs and Sea Lion Islands

On th emorning of our cruise departure day we had a lot of wrapping up to do to prepare for our late afternoon departure of the ship so we dropped all of our luggage off at the terminal and went out to a small group of islands in the Straits of Magellan, the Faro Les Eclaireurs and the Sea Lion Islands. These rocky islets are home to breeding colonies of Magellanic Terns, fur seals, Imperial Shags and a lot of other wildlife including gulls, sheathbills, geese and, oddly, a potential future split of Blackish Cinclodes. These delightful little birds live on Faro Les Eclaireurs and can be lured out to the boat by playing a call. If they flit over, however, they benefit from a little drink as our bird guide, Pete, poured some drinking water into a dish for this bird, who relished the rare opportunity to have a drink of fresh water!

Visiting these islands gave us a great opportunity to start practicing our photography at sea and we had such lovely weather we all found it hard to go back to Ushuaia.

Waiting for us there, however, was the rest of our group and, after a small lunch in town, we went down to the boat and met up with everyone else to get settled into our cabins.

That afternoon, after all of our mandatory safety briefings, we set sail for Antarctica. Motoring down the Straits of Magellan we were blessed by calm seas and a beautiful sunset which, sadly, transmogrified by the evening into a fairly large swell.

We were to be at sea for a day before reaching the Falkland Islands and we were saddened that around a third of our group spent the day being seasick due to the rolling waves.

For those of us who weren't, we enjoyed a day of watching the trailing seabirds from the back of the boat while taking photos of them in lovely light as the usual ship followers like Giant Petrels, albatrosses and White-chinned Petrels flew around us.

The Falkland Islands

Much to the relief of the people who had been ill, we arrived at the Falklands at sunrise of the following day.

As we sailed into the western islands of the Falklands the fauna started to change and we were delighted to be followed by a mixed pod of Peale's and Commerson's Dolphins as we approached West Point.

The closer we got to the islands, the more abundant the life became and we rounded West Point with its pounding seas breaking over the base of the cliffs, complete with Black-browed Albatrosses braving these terrible winds and spray to go to and from their colony at West Point.

Grave Cove

Our first stop in the Falklands was Grave Cove which is home to two large Gentoo Penguin colonies, one at the beach where we landed and the other at an ocean-facing white-sand beach on the opposite side of the island.

As we landed I was amused to watch two Johnnie Rooks arrive at our lifejacket bags and inspect us as new arrivals on their island. Known to be predators of penguin chicks, we needed to be careful not to disturb the penguins at their colonies as many of the Gentoos had extremely small, young chicks beneath them and, left unattended, these chicks would have made an easy meal for a Johnnie Rook!

For a while we stopped at the first colony we saw before taking off on foot over the island to the more distant colony. On the way we saw Upland Geese with goslings and also Yellow-billed Teal with ducklings in a pool in the paddock of the island.

It was at the most distant beach, however, that the true wonders of wildlife confronted us. Here we had numerous opportunities to wander around the Gentoo colony and watch penguins coming and going from the sea to the colony. At the water's edge we had fantastic opportunities to photograph in-coming penguins as they splashed and dived in the surf.

Further along the beach we got photos of Dolphin Gulls, a sheathbill, a Crested Duck foraging for good in the kelp and also cinclodes scouring the kelp for insects.

Just near the rocks we found a pair of Falkland Islands Flightless Steamer Ducks with their duckling that they shepherded out to sea when we arrived.

As we were preparing to leave the beach and go back to the ship we enjoyed watching a pair of Commerson's dolphins playing in the waves.

West Point

After enjoying a lunch on the ship we made the short sail around to West Point, home to a nesting colony of Black-browed Albatrosses and Rockhopper Penguins.

I've been to West Point numerous times before but I always love going at this time of the year because the land owners have planted Gorse around the farm buildings and it is always in flower in November.

While some of us opted for the lift by car up to the colony (around 2km walk), I decided to lead the charge up the hill with the staff and in the end I was only around three minutes slower than those who went by car!

We arrived at the seabird colony on a beautiful sunny afternoon.

West Point is always a bit difficult for photography due to its location. The albatross colony sits in a bowl of land facing out to sea. Around its periphery are huge clumps of Poa Tussock which make it difficult for birds to be in clear sight and also for photographers to move around to get a better angle. Despite this, though, if you know it as I do, there are spots that are better for photos and also it's often just a matter of waiting for the birds to move into the right spot.

We spent time photographing albatrosses on their own, preening and doing courtship displays with each other. The Rockhoppers amused us all with their bossy personalities and wild gyrating and singing of courtship also and we all spent way more time there than we thought we would just surveying this incredible world of breeding birds.

For the guests who opted to walk back to the landing site, they had the opportunity to photograph some lovely scenery, very tame Johnny Rooks, a few pairs of Upland Geese and their goslings and finally we looked around the vivid yellow flowers of the Gorse for birds like Austral Thrushes and Meadow Larks, both of whom make lovely photography subjects.As we approached the landing cove, there was a lovely pair of Kelp Geese enjoying the afternoon sun and these were the last birds we photographed before we returned to the ship.

Stanley and Gypsy Cove

After the accident at South Georgia, we arrived back in Stanley at sunrise. It took a while for some necessary formalities to take place but we went ashore in the morning to explore the town. After a group lunch at the local pub "The Globe" we all boarded mini buses and drove out on a stunning sunny day to Gypsy Cove. Gypsy is one of the nicest beaches on the island with its great swathes of white sand, crystal clear turquoise sea and, at this time of year, stands of beautiful wild gorse in flower. We walked the coastal route looking for the beach's colonies of nesting Magellanic penguins and we spotted quite a few in their burrows, in the tussock and down on the beach. As we photographed them on the white sand we saw a few Peale's Dolphins swimming just offshore but it was the funny activities and afternoon bathing of the penguins that really stole our hearts.

Returning to Stanley some of us stopped back at the Globe for a quick drink or two before we returned to dinner on board the ship and a quiet night in calm seas.

Kidney Cove

This morning we arranged a special excursion to a couple of remote Rockhopper Penguin colonies at Kidney Cove. It was a bit of planning exercise as everyone had to be transported out there in separate 4WD vehicles driven by locals. Our driver was Lynda, a 7th generation Falkland Islander who regaled us with many stories about life on the island, how people live, the challenges they face, what it was like on the Falklands during the war and how that war changed the way the Falklands was run forever. Sprinkled amongst all the information was a lot of good humour and laughter and my group, in particular, loved having her as our driver.

The drive out to Kidney Cove was slow, over peat bogs and rocks but we finally made it to the penguins in a bout of cold rain. This weather came and went but none of us seemed too worried about it all when we saw the spectacular coastline and had curious Rockhopper Penguins approaching us to see who these new bipeds were in their world

Offshore a couple of Sei whales were spotted by our group.

Although the main birds at the colony were Rockhopper Penguins, there was also a sizeable colony of nesting Falkland Island Imperial Shags. Joining them, we saw Kelp Geese and their goslings, a Brown Skua, numerous Turkey Vultures, Dark-faced Ground Tyrants and even Macaroni Penguins and a Northern Rockhopper!

The antics of the penguins kept us all amused to the point where none of us wanted to leave. We did stop and take some scenic shots of the cliffs, the rock arch island nearby, and the penguins coming and going from the sea.

After that we had to make it back to Stanley for lunch. Amidst more laughter, with Lynda we were quite taken aback to see a whole cow carcass hanging from a crane. When I asked why, I realised before it was even explained to me, that the meat has to be hung for a week before it was sold, so, given the lack of flies and carnivores in the Falklands, the farmer simply hung it out from his crane.

Avian highlights from our return trip included Chestnut-fronted Dotterell, Variable Hawk, White-cheeked Grebes and Falkland Islands Flightless Steamer Ducks. Arriving back at the pier to take the zodiacs back to the boat we were briefly joined by a curious Antarctic Fur Seal who jumped onto the pier to watch us board and then jumped off again just as we left.

Lunch on board was a good chance to thaw out and get dry after a cool, windy day ashore.

After lunch, we left Stanley, and after sailing past Cape Pembroke the terrible weather returned. We spent the afternoon again in a raging sea with a 55-knot wind blowing, hopeful that this would abate by the time we arrived in the West Falklands the following day.

New Island

As it turned out our worries about the weather completely subsided when we sailed into the small bay of the Settlement on New Island in extremely calm conditions. New Island is the most remote of all the Falklands inhabited islands. It has some of the most incredible

scenery and the largest concentrations of wildlife in the archipelago.

We went ashore at Coffin's Harbour, home to a small community and a lovely rustic museum fashioned out of the buildings in the former whaling station. To reach it we had both Peale's and Comerson's dolphins racing the zodiacs, and our landing was right next to a shipwreck with elaborate woodwork which proved it was obviously quite an expensively made vessel in its day. Now it sits, acting as a nesting site for Striated Caracaras, in a bay of turquoise waters and white sand. At low tide, you can visit the wreck on foot.

After a briefing ashore, a few guests went into the museum before we split into people who went for a short walk to a Gentoo colony near the settlement houses and the rest who decided to cross the 'neck' of the island to a dramatic, west-facing colony of Black-browed Albatrosses, Falklands Imperial Shags and Rockhopper Penguins. When we got there, we spotted a Brown Skua pair who were actively hunting the colony for Rockhopper eggs and chicks. Although macabre, watching these two ambush nesting penguins for their lunch of prey was quite something. We first saw them arguing over an egg, and later in the day, we saw them thieving chicks by completely overpowering their parents on the nest. It was almost like they were acting in unison.

This large colony was separated in two by a rocky headland, and as we wandered from the main 'bowl-like' colony, through the tussock to the other side, we were astounded to see a second colony around the rocky cliffs of a narrow gulch. Watching the birds coming and going from such a beautiful place was incredibly spectacular. It also allowed us to watch Rockhoppers coming ashore in an almost washing machine foam of the sea. The whole scene was difficult to leave, but we had to meet up at the museum for lunch. Then our groups were separated into three – one to stay in the area we were in during the morning, the second to do a middle-distance walk to another sandy beach and a third group to do a longer walk over Rookery Hill to a distant colony of South American Fur Seals.

To reach the fur seal colony we had to hike over fields dotted with the burrows of over 2 million Slender-billed Prions, so it was a bit of a single-file hike through a minefield of bird nests. I sat and tried to imagine what it must be like at dusk when so many birds came into nest. How magical it must be to see the island at that time of the day and listen to the calls of so many prions! At one point we spotted a Striated Caracara carrying off a young prion to eat and later in the hike we watched another chasing a Slender-billed Prion in flight. It seems that caracaras are the main enemies of prions on the island.

The fur seal colony was in another dramatic cliff location on the island's western side. The South American Fur Seal is an entirely different animal from the aggressive Antarctic Fur Seals we'd met elsewhere on the trip. Instead of harassing outsiders, these guys were solitary, quiet, timid and able to climb large mountains to rest and breed!

As we finished the long walk, a few of us diverted to visit the Settlement colonies one last time, and we saw the same skuas still hunting Rockhopper chicks right in front of us.

Our walk back to the boat was over short grass, tussock and beautiful fields of cushion plants like mosses, lichens and flowering shrubs past numerous nesting pairs of Upland and Ruddy-headed Geese. What an earthly paradise on such a stunning sunny day!

Arriving back at the beach, the tide had gone out, so we could visit the shipwreck and capture a few last-minute photos of the tideline birds, including Kelp Geese and Magellanic Oystercatchers. It was a magical end to our exploration of this stunning, remote island in the Falklands.

Saunders Island

We pulled anchor off New Island and set sail to one of the most stunning sunsets we'd seen on our cruise. A slightly clouded red sky was adorned with numerous flying giant petrels and, finally an unusual 'green flash' for this latitude. After the sun disappeared, the sky turned all shades of purple and pink before a large full moon rose behind us. The skies were mesmerizing, and I think all of us were sad when night fell.

During our overnight sail, our calm conditions continued and shortly after sunrise we landed ashore on another beautiful island called Saunders. We anchored in a place called "The Neck" and were greeted by a local who had lived on the island for six generations. This was another extraordinary landing with two sandy beaches separated by a narrow isthmus of land that was home to colonies of Gentoo, Magellanic and even King Penguins.

It was quite hard to break away from watching and photographing the antics of all the penguins, but the more energetic people in our group did a long walk over a hillside to a Rockhopper colony and then further to two stunning colonies of Black-browed Albatrosses, the

furthest of which was truly breathtaking.

From the walk over the hills, we spotted a pod of pretty Comerson's Dolphins surfing the crystal clear waves and leaping out from the same

Reaching the furthest albatross colony, we were surprised to see that we could almost sit right next to birds on the nest. Occasionally one would fly over our heads like a small plane. You could feel the wind in its wings as it soared above. We could also watch these beautiful creatures maintaining their nests, doing courtship displays, clumsily landing ashore and simply sleeping on their elegant mud nests.

As a tour leader, I always find it hard to leave albatross colonies. They are such wonderful, charismatic animals to commune with.

I guess it's never a wrong internal question – do I stay with the elegant albatrosses? Or return to the clown-like penguins to watch them?

Walking back down to the beach, we passed nesting Magellanic penguins, stands of native sea cabbage and an artistically arranged skeleton of a Sei Whale that the locals had laid out on the grass next to a dolphin skeleton.

From there, we walked down to the beach that stretched to a gorgeous headland quite some distance away. The beach had a few groups of Magellanic, Gentoo and King Penguins resting, swimming and preening in the early morning sun. Sadly, we also found a few dead birds in the low-slung dunes at the back of the beach which could be just a part of colony attrition, we didn't know. We spent some time photographing these birds, and then gently wandered back to the landing beach, past a rather nervous, nesting Magellanic Oystercatcher, the King Penguin colony and several colonies of boisterous Gentoo Penguins with quite mature chicks.

The usual predators were hanging around the Gentoo colonies, like skuas, Turkey Vultures and caracaras, however, we were surprised to see the Gentoos also harassing a Dolphin Gull wandering through their nesting area. Perhaps the Dolphin Gull is also no friend of Gentoo chicks?

Finally, we returned to the landing beach where large groups of Gentoos were porpoising towards the beach through the water and comically landing ashore.

We thanked the land owner and said our farewells before boarding the zodiacs back to the ship. Saunders was another stunningly beautiful island of the Falklands with breathtaking vistas and numerous wonderful birds.

Carcass Island

Our second landing of the day and our last on the Falklands was at Carcass Island, home to an incredibly special little bird called the Cobbs Wren, probably one of the rarest wrens in the world. These funny little wrens with their unusually long bills were seen within minutes of our landing, making all of our birding guests (and us leaders) breathe a massive sigh of relief!

After being momentarily entertained by those and some very tame Blackish Cinclodes on the beach, we made the short walk over the tussock and grasses to the stunning white sands of Leopard Beach.

Of all the places you can do photography in the Falklands, Leopard Beach would have to be one of the most incredible highlights.

With pristine white sands, crystal clear waters and numerous birds the photography subjects are abundant and beautiful. We were mostly amused by swimming and loafing groups of Gentoo and Magellanic penguins here. Further down the beach, however, we saw Kelp Geese and a lovely pair of Falkland Island Steamer ducks with a group of around six adorable ducklings swimming close to the shore. Sadly as one of the chicks dived, it was nipped by a penguin and then predated upon by a Brown Skua right in front of some of our group members! Yikes! It was a surprising turn of events after being confronted with such a sweet scene!

The avian predator action continued down the beach with a pair of Brown Skuas engaging in a mid-air fight with each other over prey. Closer to the penguin communities a small group of giant petrels were arguing and feasting on a fish that they had caught.

Our attentions return to the numerous opportunities we had to photograph penguins in the surf and although we were briefly distracted by a very tame, visiting Striated Cararaca, it was great to spend time perfecting our birds in action shots, ensuring we had the right aperture and shutter speeds in particular to capture the action.

Towards the end of our stay on Carcass, the staff almost had to force us off the beach. We did the walk back over the neck past nesting Magellanic and Gentoo penguins plus a number of Upland Geese. We spotted Sedge Wrens, Austral Thrushes and a lone Crested Caracara on our way.

Arriving back on the beach we enjoyed our last few minutes photographing more Cobbs Wrens, Blackish Cinclodes, sleepy Magellanic penguins and a Magellanic Oystercatcher feasting on the remains of a dead crab.

En-Route to South Georgia

Our first day at sea towards South Georgia was, once again, a little rough. With fewer seabirds around it gave me an excellent opportunity to meet with my photographers and talk to them about photography in Antarctica while undertaking a review of the work they shot on the islands the previous day.

The Wild Images trip to Antarctica is always timed well and for this reason alone, I love these trips. It allows me the time to spend with my guests so I can review techniques, cast an eye over their existing photographs and give people a few ideas of situations to avoid and how they might think differently about their work in the days to come.

So our day at sea was well utilised and, in between photography discussions, gave us all a bit of a much-needed break before our coming days in South Georgia.

Sadly the sea conditions strengthened that night and our next day at sea was spent mostly indoors doing bio-security as all of the doors to the outside decks were shut and the decks were off limits. This restricted our activities to the bridge which has never been optimal for photography.

It was quite a shame as the weather was lovely, and it would have been great to be out the back of the boat photographing the assembled prions, storm petrels, petrels and albatrosses. This morning we saw our first Grey-headed Albatrosses, Atlantic Petrels and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses of the trip. For the early risers, we got a couple of hours outside watching and taking photos before the decks were closed.

The rest of the day was spent ensuring everything we were taking ashore in South Georgia was free of mud and grass seeds.

By the third day we reached Shag Rocks in the morning, just after breakfast. We had some feeding Fin Whales this visit and the usual assembly of breeding Imperial Shags, an adult Grey-headed Albatross and two Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses. Conditions for photography at the rocks weren't excellent, but we managed to capture some lovely landscapes as we passed them by.

The rest of the day was at sea, again towards South Georgia, in a mix of cloudy and sunny conditions. We saw our first Snow Petrel and Blue Petrels on our final day of approach. The number of porpoising sea lions was growing, and we spotted what might have been a pod of Long-finned Pilot Whales towards the end of the afternoon.

As usual, the assortment of oceanic wildlife was terrific as we headed further south, but the excitement began to build as we got closer and closer to South Georgia.

South Georgia

We arrived at South Georgia in a stiff forty-knot wind which forced us to abandon our 'Plan A' landing at Right Whale Cove, which is home to a colony of seals and breeding King Penguins.

Prince Olaf Harbour (Zodiac Cruise)

'Plan B' was then activated. We sailed around the north coast of South Georgia to Prince Olaf Harbour, home to an abandoned whaling station and wrecked coal carrier, all beautifully located at the base of a soaring conical snow-capped mountain. We decided to do a zodiac cruise here and enjoy our first views of Antarctic Fur Seal colonies, the occasional elephant seal, giant petrels, South Georgia Shags and our first sightings of South Georgia Pipit and South Georgia Pintail, both moving between the seal colonies and lines of kelp adorning the shoreline. There was some stunning geology here, with lines of pushed-up rock covered in vibrant yellow lichens. Dotted between the rocky outcrops were large stands of Poa tussock that sheltered individual fur seals. We had some exciting behaviour here, including a young male Elephant Seal arguing over territory with an adult male Antarctic Fur Seal. There was a giant petrel bathing in front of one

fur seal colony, and we saw the usual fighting, yawning and bathing seals near the shoreline.

Both species of iconic Antarctica kelp were growing at Prince Olaf Harbour and amongst the macrosystis kelp were large forests of Dervillea ribbon kelp. It's always good to check the latter out for animals within it as it can make for beautiful images – even if we needed to stay away from it due to the threat of entanglement from our zodiac outboards! We lingered at the old whaling station photographing the buildings, boiler tanks and fantastic scenery before a fur seal dived around the back of our boat like a farewell party as we left the harbour.

Salisbury Plain and Bay of Islands (Boat cruise then Landing)

Lunch was at sea en route to Salisbury Plain, the misty snow-capped peaks of South Georgia passing us by as we ate.

We spent the afternoon cruising in the Bay of Islands towards the glacier at Rosita Bay and rocky islets with nesting Wandering Albatrosses. The wind was too strong to land at Salisbury Plain when we arrived (as in blow you off your feet strong) earlier, but later in the afternoon, a quick landing was possible before a later dinner. It was our first chance to visit one of South Georgia's iconic giant King Penguin colonies, meet some adorable Elephant Seal pups and some not-so-adorable Antarctic Fur Seals, also with their pups. The odd aggressive charge from the fur seals didn't take away any of the magnificence of this landing and to be there in such amazing light was a true highlight of our time on South Georgia.

St Andrews Bay (Landing)

We woke up to superb weather at St Andrews, with glassy ocean conditions. We were greeted by diving King Penguins and the usual vandal raiders of Sheathbills landing on the ship and ripping the insulation off the pilot lights. They also had a fondness for landing on our zodiacs and attacking the mooring ropes. It was beautiful to see the peak of Nordenskjöld above St Andrews being crowned by lenticular clouds creating a storm off the northern peak. This was a particular science nerd type of photo where you had to be into cloud forms to know how problematic lenticular clouds can be in the weather!

We finally had breakfast and went ashore, and as usual, St Andrews was a glorious variety of experiences that included lots of elephant seals, marauding Antarctic Fur Seals, nesting Brown Skuas (some with chicks that even still had their egg patches), loads of King Penguins everywhere, an albino fur seal, timed exposures of seals and penguins in the river we had to cross – so many things.

For the first time, we were allowed to walk to the far lake, which had pools surrounded by King Penguins whose reflections in the pools were lovely. It was also very dramatic up there, with lines of penguins sitting at the base of an active, calving gravel glacier.If you are a photographer, it is difficult to know where to start. It was like a smorgasbord of photographic opportunities that felt overwhelming at times. I encouraged the group to go back to the beach and enjoy photographing the penguins in the surf, the giant petrels wandering around the seals, and the enormous elephant seals snorting sand on the beach.

What a wonderful morning!

Godthul (Landing)

Beautifully, as we left the bay, our boat was entertained by the arrival of three Humpback Whales who swam and dived beneath us for a while before bidding us farewell before we sailed towards our afternoon destination, the narrow bay of Godthul.

As we dined on lunch, we sailed around to Godthul, home to a former sealing colony and several colonies of Gentoo Penguins. To reach the latter we had to scramble up a hillside in steep clumps of tussock, but our reward was more extensive than previous years' Gentoo colonies, complete with young chicks, thieving adults and lots of rain and grey sky!

Returning to the beach, we saw fighting weaner Elephant Seals in the water and a gargantuan male yawning before the weather forced us to return to the warmth of the boat and dry out our gear to prepare for the following day.

Hercules Bay (Zodiac Cruise)

An early start in the mist and clouds of northern South Georgia, soon gave way to a beautiful sunny morning as we sailed to our first destination, Hercules Bay, home to a stunning waterfall and a small colony of Macaroni penguins. We anchored up here in the relative calm of the bay to eat breakfast, surrounded by stunning geology formations in the cliffs and a large waterfall. What an incredible

location!

We did two rounds of zodiac cruises at Hercules, each cruising the shoreline visiting colonies of Macaroni Penguins, wading pools for baby seals, numerous caves and grottoes. Sadly, the light was really too bright for photography but the sun was out and at least we enjoyed nice views of sheathbills, Kelp Gulls, Antarctic Terns, a pipit and several King and Gentoo Penguins. There were quite a few fur and elephant seals present on the beaches and in the caves.

On a brilliant, sunny South Georgia day we then set sail for Grytviken.

Grytviken (Landing)

The sun continued into the afternoon as we went ashore at Grytviken, ran the gauntlet of marauding fur seals and made our way up to Shackleton's grave, where we toasted one of the world's greatest explorers and possibly the most famous adventurer of Antarctica. Spending an afternoon at Grytviken always allows for some much-needed wanders on still land (for those who have been seasick on the boat) and, for photographers, allows a chance to explore some grunge-type imagery of the old whaling station. This year quite a number of Antarctic Terns had decided to nest in the old whaling station, and I also found a large male fur seal sauntering in the ruins. We stopped to photograph fur seals, tern chicks, pintail pairs in pools, elephant seal pups and some adorable newborn fur seals. Finally, we visited the church and the museum, where we did some souvenir shopping before returning to the boat for a barbecue dinner on the back deck.

Thinking that the fine weather might continue, I encouraged my guests to have an early night to be up for sunrise the following days. I think some of them heeded the early night advice, but sadly, I was the only one up at 3am to catch it.

After an extremely early start, we were rewarded with a lovely sunrise which wasn't quite strong enough to illuminate the snow-capped peaks, but the fingers of light on the sea horizon were still stunning.

Gold Harbour (Landing)

The wind and ocean swells were quite strong until we reached the lee of the island near Gold Harbour. I held my breath and kept my fingers crossed that we could make a landing and was thrilled to hear the cackle of the radio from Ali on the shoreline saying it was OK to get everybody up and go ashore.

As usual, Gold Harbour was stunningly beautiful with incredible numbers of tame elephant seal pups, skuas displaying, and loads of King Penguins. In the early light, we watched penguins coming and going from the beach. Many of us had extremely tame elephant seal pups approach us, chew on our pants, try to knock us over and play-bite us. A group decided to raid our equipment on the beach, creating an elephant seal carnage where young pups had lolled over to inspect our bags and lie on them.

I've loved elephant seal pups since I first visited Antarctica 17 years ago, and that love has never died. I found myself wishing I could stay there all day cuddling and talking to these funny little guys around my legs.

While we were there we heard a pair of Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses calling from the cliffs behind the beach, but after searching for them, we couldn't find their nest.

Sadly the ship had to close the landing and get everybody back for breakfast but what a morning! I don't think any of us ever wanted it to end!

Cooper's Bay (Zodiac Cruise)

Our run of calm weather continued and on our last zodiac cruise at South Georgia we visited Cooper's Bay, home to colonies of both Chinstrap and Macaroni Penguins. While these colonies were our main targets we were sent off from South Georgia with a bang after seeing four different penguin species on this cruise – Gentoo, King, Macaroni and Chinstrap! What a stunning place with layered geology and an abundance of wildlife.

We saw almost a full suite of South Georgia creatures here including Southern Elephant Seals, Antarctic Fur Seals, the four penguins, White-faced Sheathbills, South Georgia Pipit, South Georgia Pintails, Kelp Gulls, Brown Skuas, Southern and Northern Giant Petrels on a carcass and finally calling Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses to serenade our cruise.

At the Chinstrap Beach in Cooper's Bay, we turned the engines off for short time to listen to the amazing ocean swell washing the smoothed boulders in the surf.

Drygalski Fjord

We ate lunch as the boat steered its way through a near 60 knot wind towards Drygalski Fjord. Sadly the weather conditions didn't allow us to enter so we set sail for Antarctica.

It was that evening that one of the passengers of the ship fell and died so we went back to the Falkland Islands where we spent three days exploring the islands before sailing back to Argentina.

It takes a day to sail back to Ushuaia from the Falklands and typically this is a resting day where we return our boots and other rental gear, settle our onboard bar bills and do our packing.

For most of the day we enjoyed calm seas and some of our guests spent time outside trying to photograph the ship following seabirds and a pod of Long-finned Pilot whales. The captain made good speed while the weather was calm as the winds were expected to increase later.

As we neared the coast of Chile, our final farewell was with stunning views of the islands of southern Chile before we entered the Beagle Channel for an overnight sail into Ushuaia.