



Adventures in Antarctica



An iceberg in Antarctica's Mikkelson Harbor

For Indagare's Colin Heinrich, what began as a trip to visit his seventh continent became an unexpectedly emotional journey to a disappearing world.

I travel on autopilot sometimes. I don't mean to. But sometimes we move through the world so quickly that it's impossible to take it all in beyond an "Oh, wow," before the next revelation hits, and so the memories that stick out most are singular moments that break through the static. For me, it usually happens when there's something momentous going on, like watching lions hunt giraffes in Botswana or my first kiss under the Eiffel Tower. But sometimes the moments I remember most aren't the ones that I'd expect. Sometimes they're the calm transitions of time, when I can stop and smell the roses, like the simple act of driving a manual car along the twisting roads of the Catalonian coast or sipping beers on the beach at sunset in Melbourne.

When I went to Antarctica, I expected it to lean more toward those momentous times. I wanted to lie on the snow while curious baby seals clambered over me, and I spent the days leading up to the trip trying to imagine what it would be like for our Zodiac to surf

the wave from a glacier calving right next to us.

See, I didn't really know much about Antarctica. Up until last year, Antarctica really only represented the stroke of a pen checking off the seventh continent in my portfolio of travel bragging rights, some amorphous idea of a destination so distant and hostile that people only visited when they had nowhere else to go. I filled that tabula rasa with the grandiose expectations of YouTube highlights and *Planet Earth* documentaries.



A Zodiac heads toward Deception Island. Courtesy Indagare's Colin Heinrich

I was traveling to the Last Continent aboard the *Quark World Explorer*, riding its maiden voyage from Ushuaia, Argentina, at the tip of South America through the Drake Passage to subantarctic islands like Deception and King George, then along the Antarctic Peninsula through the Lemaire Channel, then back up to Ushuaia. The whole trip would take around two weeks. The *World Explorer* is a luxury boat holding 150 or so passengers, and it's focused on conservation in a time and region that sorely needs it. It runs on high-grade fuel and solar energy and turns all of its waste into biochar, minimizing its footprint as much as possible.

I had a few singularly thrilling moments during my trip. On one Zodiac cruise through Mikkelsen Harbor, we came across a crabeater seal sunning itself on an ice floe. As we approached, it awoke and charged the boat with the kind of false bravado you'd expect

from somebody playing an intense game of basketball, but who really wanted to go home and eat dinner 30 minutes ago. It was warm that day, by Antarctica standards. The ice shone with the glimmer of its own impending disappearance. Earlier in the day, we had hiked to the top of a hill that was covered in deep snow and a growing penguin rookery, and the warmth was such that we all stripped off our heavy outer parkas and watched as our base layers steamed in the sun.

Those were thrilling moments for me, but by no means were they the most memorable.

The most memorable moment was one of those quiet, introspective times that strike when the sun is near the horizon and there's no one else around. It was our first day in Antarctica. Our first full day—we had already spent two days crossing the Drake Passage, where any direction led to a flat horizon and the ink-black sea met a gray sky often cloudy enough to make the dividing line a muddled fuzz like TV static. So when I awoke at 4 a.m., the boat no longer rocking in a furious ocean, I headed on deck to take a peek.



A penguin at Mikkelson Harbor. Courtesy Indagare's Colin Heinrich

The top of the *Quark World Explorer* has a jogging track that runs the full circumference of the ship. There's a nearly 360-degree view of the surroundings from there. And on this morning, after two days of gray skies and bitter winds, the sun was

out, and the sky was free of clouds. The low sun cast scattered orange light across the ice, which only made it look all the brighter. Glaciers tumbled into the ocean from the tops of the most pristine mountains I had ever seen. Icebergs sat unmoving in water so clear and deep that their blue bellies were visible for dozens of feet down until they disappeared into the darkness. I had never witnessed anything like it, and I may never again.

It wasn't a thrilling moment. But very few things have actually moved me to tears, and as I sat surrounded by the splendor of Antarctica, I felt a deep upwelling of emotion in my throat. Who knows how long Antarctica will remain in this state, but it's worth a visit while it's there.

Antarctica: The Indagare Way



A group excursion. Courtesy Indagare's Colin Heinrich

Colin's advice for anyone looking to make the journey.

Moment to Remember

My first time seeing penguins swimming alongside the boat was very memorable.

Favorite Activity

Camping on the continent itself and falling asleep to the sound of the calving glaciers.

What to Pack

A waterproof case with a lanyard for your phone. The weather can change in an instant in Antarctica, and the Zodiac cruises mean you could get wet or drop your phone easily if you're snapping photos or video, especially if you're operating with heavy gloves on.

Insider Tip

Crossing the Drake Passage really can be a monster of an undertaking. While Antarctica is absolutely worth the trouble, those who have difficulties with seasickness may want to explore itineraries that fly over the Passage and begin the cruise at King George Island.

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In October-November 2021, travel aboard the newest boat in the Antarctic tourist fleet, the Quark Ultramarine, on an 11-day trip featuring the very best of the White Continent. Conquer the Drake Passage; explore majestic natural environments by Zodiac and on foot; experience penguins, whales and other wildlife; and enjoy talks on history, biology and glaciology by onboard polar experts. Additional activities include camping on the continent and flying in a helicopter over one of the last great landscapes on earth. As an Indagare Impact Journey, this trip is designed with environmentalism in mind. All carbon emissions are avoided where possible and offset where not, and amenities on board the boat are focused on a zero-waste philosophy without sacrificing luxury. For more details about this Impact Journey, contact insiderjourneys@indagare.com to be the first to know when the trip is released.

- Colin Heinrich on May 12, 2020

