

Darwin's Route

Day 1 – Ushuaia

Check in at the Australis travel center at Juan Manuel de Rosas 160 Street in downtown Ushuaia between 10:00 and 17:00 (10 AM-5 PM) on the day of your cruise departure. Board the M/V Ventus Australis at 18:00 (6:00PM). After a welcoming toast and introduction of captain and crew, the ship departs for one of the most remote corners of planet Earth. During the night we traverse the Beagle Channel and cross from Argentine into Chilean territorial waters. The lights of Ushuaia disappear as we turn into the narrow Murray Channel between Navarino and Hoste islands.

Day 2 – Cape Horn and Wulaia Bay

By early morning, Ventus Australis is cruising across Nassau Bay into the remote archipelago that includes Cape Horn National Park. Weather and sea conditions permitting, we shall go ashore on the windswept island that harbors legendary Cape Horn (Cabo de Hornos). Discovered in 1616 by a Dutch maritime expedition -- and named after the town of Hoorn in West Friesland -- Cape Horn is a sheer 425-meter (1,394-foot) high rocky promontory overlooking the turbulent waters of the Drake Passage. For many years it was the only navigation route between the Pacific and Atlantic, and was often referred to as the "End of the Earth." The park was declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2005. The Chilean navy maintains a permanent lighthouse on the island, staffed by a lightkeeper and his family, as well as the tiny Stella Maris Chapel and modern Cape Horn Monument. Sailing back across Nassau Bay, we anchor at fabled Wulaia Bay, one of the few places in the archipelago where the human history is just as compelling as the natural environment. Originally the site of one of the region's largest Yámana aboriginal settlements, the bay was described by Charles Darwin and sketched by Captain FitzRoy in the 1830s during their voyages on the HMS Beagle. This area is also renowned for its mesmerizing beauty and dramatic geography. After a visit to the Australis-sponsored museum in the old radio station -- which is especially strong on the Yámana people and European missionaries in the area -- passengers have a choice of three hikes (of increasing degrees of difficulty) that ascend the heavily wooden mountain behind the bay. On all of these you will be strolling through an enchanted Magellan forest of lengas, coigües, canelos, ferns, and other endemic fauna to reach a panoramic viewpoint overlooking the bay. Before leaving Wulaia Bay, drop something into the wooden mail barrel inside the museum -- letters or postcards meant to be hand delivered by future travelers -- an ancient mariner tradition revived by Australis

Day 3 – Pia Glacier and Garibaldi Glacier

Casting off from Wulaia Bay, we retrace our route to the Beagle Channel and sail westward along the southern edge of Tierra del Fuego into a section of Alberto de Agostini National Park called Glacier Alley or Avenue of the Glaciers. Flowing down from the Darwin Mountains and Darwin Ice Sheet are a number of impressive tidewater glaciers, most of them named after European countries -- Holland, Italy, Germany, Spain and France. In amongst this frozen league of nations we enter the narrow Pia Fjord and board the Zodiacs for a shore excursion to Pia Glacier. No one knows for certain how the hulking glacier got its feminine moniker, but one theory says it was named for princess Maria Pia of Savoy (1847-1911), daughter of the Italian king. After disembarking we take a short hike to gain a panoramic view of the spectacular glacier, which extends from the mountaintops down to the sea or a longer much more difficult walk up a lateral moraine of the old Pia Glacier. Making our way further west along the Beagle

Channel, we enter another long fjord and drop anchor near Garibaldi Glacier for another shore excursion. Garibaldi is one of only three glaciers in Patagonia gaining mass rather than staying the same or slowly shrinking. This time we hike through virgin Magellanic forest to a glacial waterfall, a towering wall of ferns and moss, and spectacular viewpoints looking down on the glacier and fjord. The walk is demanding -- very steep, negligible trail, rough footing -- and not for everyone. For those who choose to stay onboard, our captain will point the bow towards the beautiful sky blue Garibaldi Glacier so everyone can enjoy the panoramic view from the upper decks

Day 4 – Agostini Sound, Aguila Glacier and Condor Glacier

Early in the morning, we will sail through the Cockburn Channel and enter Agostini Sound. From there it is possible to see the glaciers that descend from the middle of the Darwin Mountain Range -- some of them reaching the water. This morning, we will disembark and go for an easy walk around a lagoon, which was formed by the melting of the Águila Glacier. We will reach a spot right in front of that glacier with stunning views. In the afternoon, we will approach the Condor Glacier via Zodiac -- and hopefully see some of the abundant Andean Condors in the area. Day 4: Agostini Sound – Águila Glacier – Cóndor Glacier

Day 5 Magdalena Island & Punta Arenas

After an overnight cruise that takes us back into the Strait of Magellan, we anchor off Magdalena Island, which lies about halfway between Tierra del Fuego and the Chilean mainland. Crowned by a distinctive lighthouse, the island used to be an essential source of supplies for navigators and explorers and is inhabited by an immense colony of Magellanic penguins. At the break of dawn, weather permitting, we go ashore and hike a path that leads through thousands of penguins to a small museum lodged inside the vintage 1902 lighthouse. Many other bird species are also found on the island. In September and April -- when the penguins dwell elsewhere -- this excursion is replaced by a ride aboard Zodiacs to Marta Island to observe South American sea lions. After a short sail south along the strait, disembarkation at Punta Arenas is scheduled for around 11:30 AM.

Board at 6 PM. After a welcoming toast and introduction of captain and crew, the ship departs for one of the remotest corners of planet Earth. During the night we cross the Strait of Magellan and enter the labyrinth of channels that define the southern extreme of Patagonian. The twinkling lights of Punta Arenas gradually fade into the distance as we enter the Whiteside Canal between Darwin Island and Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego.

*Camera extension poles are prohibited on Magdalena Island

Day 6: Ainsworth Bay - Tuckers Islets

By dawn the ship is sailing up Admiralty Sound (Seno Almirantazgo), a spectacular offshoot of the Strait of Magellan that stretches nearly halfway across Tierra del Fuego. The snowcapped peaks of Karukinka National Park stretch along the north side of the sound, while the south shore is defined by the deep fjords and broad bays of Alberto de Agostini National Park. We go ashore at Ainsworth Bay, which harbors copious bird life and a colony of southern elephant seals which can sometimes be spotted from the Zodiacs. Two guided excursions are available: one is along the edge of a stream, peat bog and beaver habitat to a waterfall-and-moss-covered rock face tucked deep inside a pristine sub-polar forest; the other is a more strenuous hike along the crest of a glacial moraine. Both afford views of Marinelli

Glacier and the Darwin Mountains. Leaving Ainsworth Bay behind, we sail west along the sound to the Tucker Islets. After lunch, we board the Zodiacs again for a close-up view of the Magellan penguins that inhabit the tiny islands. More than 4,000 penguins use Tucker as a place to nest, give birth and nurture their chicks. Many other bird species also frequent the area including king cormorants, oystercatchers, Chilean skuas, kelp geese, dolphin gulls, eagles and even the occasional Andean condor. In September and April -- when the penguins live elsewhere -- this excursion is replaced by a short walk to a glacier at nearby stunning Brookes Bay.

Day 7: Pia Glacier - Glacier Alley

Overnight we sail around the western end of Tierra del Fuego via the very narrow Gabriel Channel, Magdalena Channel and Cockburn Channel. After rounding the remote Brecknock Peninsula, Stella Australis tacks eastward and enters the Beagle Channel again. By morning we are entering Pia Fjord and boarding the Zodiacs for a shore excursion to Pia Glacier. After disembarking we take a short hike to gain a panoramic view of the spectacular glacier, which extends from the mountaintops down to the sea or a longer much more difficult walk up a lateral moraine of the old Pia Glacier. No one knows for certain how the hulking mass of snow and ice got its feminine moniker, but one theory says it was named for Princess Maria Pia of Savoy (1847-1911), daughter of the Italian king. Back onboard the ship, we continue east along the Beagle Channel through an area called Glacier Alley. Living up to its name, the passage features a number of impressive tidewater glaciers flowing down from the Darwin Mountains and Darwin Ice Sheet on the north shore. Most of them named after European countries -- Holland, Italy, Germany, Spain and France.

Day 8: Wulaia Bay - Cape Horn

During the morning we will be sailing through Murray Channel, going ashore at historical Wulaia Bay, originally the site of one of the region's largest Yamana aboriginal settlements. Charles Darwin landed there in 1833 during his voyage on the HMS Beagle. This area is also renowned for the mesmerizing beauty of its vegetation and geography. We will take an enchanted walk through the Magellan Forest of lengas, coigües, canelos, ferns, and other endemic vegetation, to reach a panoramic viewpoint. In the afternoon we will go South through Nassau Bay to reach Cape Horn National Park, where, weather permitting, we shall go ashore. The legendary Cape Horn was discovered in 1616 and is a sheer 425-meter (1,394-foot) high rocky promontory. For many years it was an important navigation route between the Pacific and the Atlantic, and is referred to as the 'End of the Earth'. The park was declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2005.

Day 9 - Ushuaia

Arrival in Ushuaia, Argentina's most important city in Tierra del Fuego, and the southernmost city in the world. Disembarking is scheduled at 8:00 a.m.

IMPORTANT: The itinerary of the 8-night route, Ushuaia - Punta Arenas - Ushuaia repeats excursions on days 2 and 8 landing on Cape Horn and Wulaia Bay.

Reverse Itinerary

Day 1 – Punta Arenas

Check in at 1385 O'Higgins Street (Arturo Prat Port) in Punta Arenas between 13:00 and 17:00 (1-5 PM) on the day of your cruise departure. Board the M/V Stella Australis (6 PM). After a welcoming toast and introduction of captain and crew, the ship departs for one of the remotest corners of planet Earth. During the night we cross the Strait of Magellan and enter the labyrinth of channels that define the southern extreme of Patagonian. The twinkling lights of Punta Arenas gradually fade into the distance as we enter the Whiteside Canal between Darwin Island and Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego.

Day 9 – Magdalena Island Punta Arenas

After an overnight cruise through Magdalena Channel and back into the Strait of Magellan, we anchor off Magdalena Island, which lies about halfway between Tierra del Fuego and the Chilean mainland. Crowned by a distinctive lighthouse, the island used to be an essential source of supplies for navigators and explorers and is inhabited by an immense colony of Magellanic penguins. At the break of dawn, weather permitting, we go ashore and hike a path that leads through thousands of penguins to a small museum lodged inside the vintage 1902 lighthouse. Many other bird species are also found on the island. In September and April -- when the penguins dwell elsewhere -- this excursion is replaced by a ride aboard Zodiacs to Marta Island to observe South American sea lions. After a short cruise south along the strait, disembarkation at Punta Arenas is scheduled for around 11:30 AM.

*Camera extension poles are prohibited on Magdalena Island

IMPORTANT: The itinerary on the seven-night Punta Arenas-Ushuaia-Punta Arenas cruise repeats excursions on days four and six (landing on Cape Horn and Wulaia Bay)

* In September and April, the Tucker Islets excursion is replaced by a short walk to a nearby glacier at Brookes Bay.

*** In September and April, the Magdalena Island excursion is replaced by a ride aboard Zodiacs to Marta Island