

Patagonian Explorer

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