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EXPEDITION SPECIAL



According to *Cruise Trade News*' recent Annual Report, nearly a quarter of all respondents (23 per cent) say an expedition cruise is at the top of

their travel bucket list in 2025, ranking higher than river and small-ship cruising.

It was no surprise to see the sector track so highly with UK consumers considering the fact that more than two-thirds of Expedition Cruise Network members – which includes the likes of Albatros Expeditions, Atlas Ocean Voyages and Swan Hellenic, as well as more than 1,300 trade associates – experienced a rise in bookings for the first half of 2024.

The factors driving this demand for exploration travel is precisely what we've attempted to map in the pages of our latest Expedition Special. On page six we speak to a British family who embarked on a cruise to the Galápagos Islands with HX to better understand what a voyage to the enchanting archipelago entails. Meanwhile, Andy Harmer OBE gives us the play-by-play of his first-ever polar region cruise.

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NEED TO KNOW



AN ALASKAN QUEST

Seabourn has confirmed *Seabourn Quest* will sail its inaugural season in Alaska from May to September 2025. The 458-guest ship will offer 18 seven-day itineraries between Vancouver in Canada's British Columbia and Juneau in the US state of Alaska. A collection of optional expedition-style adventures will also be available. Ventures by Seabourn excursions will include kayaking around Hubbard Glacier, hiking the Rainbow Trail to Rainbow Falls and travelling on inflatable Zodiac boats through Tracy Arm Fjord to Sawyer Glacier, or Dawes Glacier on Endicott Arm.



TYING THE KNOT

Swan Hellenic has responded to an increase in popularity of weddings-at-sea with two new packages designed to help lovebirds take romance to new heights.

The line's new Love Aboard offering comprises two bookable options: Two Hearts at Sea, which is designed for smaller groups, and All Aboard for Love, for larger parties.

The first offering, Two Hearts at Sea, includes priority check-in, a

couples' spa treatment and beauty salon sessions before the ceremony. A non-denominational commitment conducted by the captain is also included, plus a keepsake certificate and professional photographs.

The couple will also receive a bottle of Champagne and a wedding cake for up to six people, a private dinner with the captain and a Champagne breakfast in bed, all for £3,000.



'Year of the travel agent'

Atlas Ocean Voyages will focus on growing its relations with the UK travel trade in 2025 with a raft of new incentives and training tools. Having spent the majority of 2024 building the brand's reputation amongst consumers in the UK, this year the expedition cruise line will turn its attention to the travel agent community. Atlas Ocean Voyages' international sales lead Bernard Carter recently outlined plans to introduce a new trade portal which will feature training modules, marketing tools and brand information.



HX UNVEILS NEW LIVERY

HX Expeditions has introduced a new fleet livery as it looks to differentiate from its sister brand Hurtigruten.

The move follows the initial HX launch in December 2023 and signals the final stages of the firm's rebranding after it separated last month from its Norwegian coastal sister company.

The new palette takes inspiration from marine wildlife with colours such as pearl, sand and arctic white, so guests won't get confused in places like Norway where the two brands co-exist.

The red and black branding previously used by the Hurtigruten Group have long been associated with Hurtigruten, which will continue to use those colours and will remain unchanged.



Did you know?

The Galápagos consists of 73 islands and islets

Paradise found

Few destinations are primed for adventure quite like the Galápagos Islands, as one family discovered on an expedition cruise

AS TOLD TO **JACK CARTER**

A living laboratory of captivating wildlife, volcanic landscapes and luxuriant coral reefs, an expedition to the Galápagos Islands is like stepping through a portal to another world. This blissfully isolated chain of islands 965km west of Ecuador has retained its natural beauty because getting there is an adventure in itself.

Just ask Emily, Susie and Hetty Walker Smith who, along with Hetty's fiancé Tony, embarked on an 11-day cruise with HX onboard *Santa Cruz II*. *Cruise Trade News* caught up with the family to learn more about their expedition to this enchanting archipelago.

GETTING THERE

Some 6,118 miles separate the Galápagos Islands from the UK, with all routes going through Quito or Guayaquil in Ecuador. While there's no getting around the journey to South America, many cruise itineraries allow guests time to acclimatise with a short stay on the mainland.

Hetty: After a 12-hour overnight flight from London Heathrow to Bogota, Colombia and

a two-hour flight to Quito, Ecuador, we were exhausted and desperately hungry by the time we arrived. HX sent an air-conditioned car to take us from the airport to JW Marriott Quito, which had a beautiful atrium, where staff gave us locally grown roses on arrival. We felt disorientated on that first day, but sampling local cuisine in the hotel restaurant Raices rooted us in the destination. I had avocado ceviche, which is unique to the Andes region of Ecuador.

Emily: We visited Quito's main square, which has beautiful colonial architecture. From there we could see the mountains and an 18th-century angel statue overlooking the city.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

The most volcanically active area on the planet, a remarkable 97 per cent of the Galápagos Islands are designated as a national park. The landscapes, which vary from pristine beaches to verdant highlands, have been eulogised in travel guides and TV documentaries for decades, but nothing compares to seeing it in the flesh.

LEFT The marine iguana, just one of the many species found only in the Galápagos Islands



Tony: My only knowledge of the Galápagos was from David Attenborough documentaries and I didn't expect it to look as incredible as it does on TV. It totally surpassed my expectations. As soon as we arrived in Baltra, we saw iguanas wandering around and Galápagos finches flying overhead. It was teeming with life.

Susie: Blue-footed boobies, sea lions, pelicans and frigatebirds greeted us. There was always something to see.

Hetty: We were in expedition mode the second we stepped onto the ship, with Zodiacs ready to take us on our first excursion to Dragon Hill on Santa Cruz Island. We saw two flamingos posing

right in front of us, a rare Galápagos hawk and a green fly catcher that nearly landed on our guide's shoulder.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

From chummy sea lions to giant tortoises, the diversity of wildlife found throughout the Galápagos' 73 islands and islets is what makes it such an enchanting destination for cruise-goers. What often surprises visitors most, however, is how comfortable the animals are around their guests.

Tony: One of my favourite moments happened by accident. Susie and I went on an excursion to observe marine life inland. On the way back, we got trapped in the middle of an enormous pod of dolphins which leapt out of the water alongside us. That was a proper once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Emily: The birdlife on Genovesa Island was mind-blowing. We walked up to a rocky plateau where an enormous colony of exotic birds greeted us. Red-footed boobies, great frigatebirds, storm petrels; I've never seen so many birds in my life. The fact that they weren't disturbed by our presence shows what a good job the naturalists do to create these experiences in a way that works with the wildlife.

Susie: On the fourth day we sailed to

Fernandina which has an enormous population of fluorescent marine iguanas. Our guide told us that after they forage for seaweed in the sea, they cook it in their stomachs while lying on hot rocks in the sun so they can digest it. I also learned that swallowtail gulls are the only birds of its kind that feed at night. When we went on the ship's observation deck in the evening we could hear them clicking, which was the sound of them echolocating for squid.

Hetty: Deep-sea snorkelling around the Devil's Crown near Floreana was my highlight. It used to be an island but now it's just a ring of jagged rocks jutting out of the ocean where a massive current swirls you around like you're in a washing machine. The second I jumped into the water I saw five reef sharks, a giant shoal of fish and a green sea turtle.

LIFE ONBOARD

A cruise to the Galápagos Islands isn't all about the spectacular wildlife, with lines like HX offering an enriching onboard lecture programme for those eager to learn more about the region.

Tony: Every day the crew or expedition team gave talks covering everything from the human history of the Galápagos to HX's conservation efforts. I attended a seminar run by the onboard



Did you know?

97% of the Galápagos Islands are designated as a national park

“The second I jumped into the water I saw five reef sharks, a giant shoal of fish and a green sea turtle”

photographer who taught us how to take photos on our phones. I learned that you should train your lens on an animal, then when it moves, take a burst of photos rather than trying to get one perfect shot. That way you capture the energy in the picture.

Emily: One of my favourite rituals was gathering with other guests for pre-dinner cocktails and canapés at sunset on the sun deck at the back of the ship while the HX team revealed what we would be doing the following day. It was an opportunity to share our experiences,

like snorkelling with hammerhead sharks or seeing giant tortoises on land. The communal feeling it conjured with the other guests was one of my happiest memories of being onboard.

SAILING WITH EXPERTS

HX's team of guides and naturalists, many of whom grew up in the Galápagos, are present throughout the expedition, ensuring guests get a full understanding of the region's wildlife and landscapes.

Emily: Without the guides there is no trip, because they're the ones who connect you to these amazing places. They know the wildlife and landscapes better than anyone. There were 88 passengers onboard and the crew made everyone feel special. The ship's expedition leader even organised a birthday cake for my sister.

Susie: I was concerned about our ship's environmental impact as the region is such a fragile place. Having heard about HX's sailings to Svalbard, I knew the line would ensure we didn't do any damage. In fact, us being there helped the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Boat trips can lead to unexpected encounters with dolphins; the unmistakable male frigatebird; sea lions are a regular sight in the archipelago; the Galápagos hawk is an icon in this part of the world; the Walker Smith family relished their time onboard

expedition team gather data and record wildlife observations, which helps preserve the sites.

Hetty: Despite growing up in the Galápagos, many residents only ever see the island they live on. I loved how most of our HX guides, like Andreas the photographer, were local. It was wonderful to see his amazement matching our own. 📍

Get on board

HX's 11-day Galápagos Islands' Nine of the Best Isles itinerary aboard *Santa Cruz II*, return from Baltra via Fernandina, Santa Cruz, Floreana and Santiago, departs on 14 October 2025, from £6,939pp, including flights from Quito and Baltra, and Baltra and Guayaquil. travelhx.com



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SHIP OF THE MONTH

SEABOURN VENTURE

S seabourn's first ultra-luxury, purpose-built expedition ship, *Seabourn Venture*, launched in 2022 and is sister ship to *Seabourn Pursuit*. Both vessels carry two custom-built submarines, as well as an impressive 24 Zodiacs, eight double sea kayaks and a 24-strong expedition team. The ship also offers enhanced Wi-Fi connectivity courtesy of SpaceX's Starlink, providing guests with a more reliable connection in remote locations. Between August and October 2026, *Venture* will offer six new voyages, ranging from eight to 24 days, traversing the historic routes of The Northwest Passage and Canadian Arctic before sailing south to explore the Caribbean, South America and Antarctica.



1 Cabins

Luxury-minded guests are spoiled for choice onboard, with deluxe rooms ranging from Veranda Suites and Penthouse Suites to the two-storey Owner's Suite. Each offers a living space with a private veranda, stocked bathroom, queen-sized bed and walk-in wardrobe.

Fast facts

264
guests

132
suites

24
Zodiacs

2
submarines



2 Discovery Centre

A space for learning, each day the ship's expedition team hosts lectures, briefings and presentations in the Discovery Centre, while a 2.5-metre-high screen showcases a variety of destination footage to whet the appetite of even the most experienced explorer.



3 Constellation lounge

As the highest indoor viewing lounge on the ship, the Constellation Lounge is the go-to spot for an espresso martini and uninterrupted views of the night sky. In the day, floor-to-ceiling windows give guests the chance to spot killer whales, penguins and sea lions in Antarctica.



4 Spa

After a day of exploration, travellers can head to the spa for a range of treatments, such as massages, facials and sauna sessions. Guests will also find a well-equipped gym with ocean views and personal trainers on hand for added support.



5 The Restaurant

Travellers can dine when and how they please in the ship's main dining room, The Restaurant. Dishes include grilled fillet of beef tenderloin with roasted potatoes and bearnaise sauce, as well as flash cooked fresh salmon with white and green asparagus.



6 Excursions

Venture's PC6 ice-strengthened hull with advanced manoeuvring technology allows it to access the furthest reaches of the Arctic. All shoreside trips, like the 90-120-minute Zodiac tours and guided hikes, are included in the cruise price.

Antarctica

THE WORLD'S



END

Travellers willing to brave the elements on an expedition cruise to Antarctica are in for the most exhilarating journey of their life, writes **Vivian Vassos**



We're at an impasse. I'm standing on a narrow path that's freshly carved from ice and snow. Three metres ahead, a Gentoo penguin is facing me down. He's perched on the edge of the path, summing me up.

"This wasn't here when I crossed this way before," he seems to say. A few dozen of his pals are behind him, waiting for him to make up his mind. He takes one last look, hops over the path and continues to the water's edge, where 20-odd seals are sunning themselves. The rest do the same. I'm frozen. Not by the temperature – though it is chilly – but with awe by what I've just witnessed, up close and personal.

POLE DANCING

This is Antarctica, where penguins always have the right of way, and where mind-blowing experiences happen

every day. I'm on a repositioning cruise on Silversea's *Silver Endeavour*. Repositioning means taking a one-way trip, where ships 'reposition' due to the changing season, say from the Mediterranean in summer to the Caribbean in winter. In *Silver Endeavour's* case, it's sailing one way from Puerto Williams in Chile to King George Island, an archipelago off the coast of the Antarctic continent proper.

It means crossing the Drake Passage – which has a reputation among cruise-goers due to its notoriously stormy conditions – but I'm all for it. Guests on Silversea's Antarctica Bridge fly-cruise itinerary have flown from Santiago to Puerto Williams then over the Drake, before boarding the ship on King George Island for the season's inaugural sail.

EXPEDITION READY

The 200-passenger *Silver Endeavour* cuts through the waves of the Drake like a knife through butter. The ship is a luxe

masterpiece; its public spaces are warm and inviting, with plenty of natural light to take in views of ice cliffs dotted with hundreds of penguins, bobbing blue-white icebergs and whales starboard side.

Expedition voyages can be unpredictable, as my sudden acquaintance with my penguin friend can attest to. Weather is the main culprit, however; regardless of the cruise line, a ship's expedition team weigh up opportunities to make a landing every morning. They zip over to land on inflatable Zodiacs, make a safety assessment and carve out the least impactful trails before allowing anyone else to disembark.

GEAR UP

The ship is so comfortable I feel like I needn't leave it at all. And when I do, it's surprisingly physical work, but worth it. When my group is called to explore, we layer up – the line recommends wool base layers and a fleece; thermal



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Silver Endeavour's Zodiacs add to the adventure; there's lots of space onboard to relax and take in the scenery; guests can enjoy breathtaking views of ice cliffs and sweeping skies; Vivian Vassos gets suitably layered up for an excursion; the sight of a humpback whale is truly exhilarating

How to sell Antarctica

Bernie Carter, sales lead,
Atlas Ocean Voyages

"When you count the number of people that have been to Antarctica, it's still a minute percentage of the global population. However, over the last five years, it has become so much more accessible. Over the past two years in particular, there has been a surge in interest in Antarctica thanks to nature documentaries and travellers looking for more from their holidays.

"These people want to learn about the region's rich history, see the eclectic wildlife and follow in the footsteps of intrepid explorers. But they want to do so in a way that doesn't harm the environment. Atlas' credentials in this area are second to none. We have jet propulsion systems and Rolls-Royce engines, as well as geo-positioning technology which removes the need for an anchor, mitigating the damage caused to delicate underwater environments.

"Antarctica is the perfect option for well-travelled guests, who might have done the Chilean fjords, Alaska or the Galápagos. It's about pitching the destination to the right customer – and preferably to ones who don't mind a chillier holiday."

“This is Antarctica, where penguins always have the right of way and where mind-blowing experiences happen every day

underwear doesn't hurt either. Then it's down to the locker room to don the waterproof parka, waterproof trousers and knee-high wellies we're given for the duration of the sailing.

Once we're dressed from head to toe in woolly hats, sunglasses, waterproof gloves and a scarf, we pop our phones in waterproof bags. Being hands-free and waterproof is important, as we need to grip the sides of our Zodiac as we bounce over waves, getting sprayed en route. One last thing: we rinse our boots in disinfectant before and after landings so we leave nothing on land and don't bring anything back.

The weather allows us to sail beyond the archipelago to the continent itself. As I climb the path, I realise this is my seventh, the last continent on my list. I am an explorer, like those who came before me, and I luxuriate in this feeling. Suddenly, the weather turns and we return to the Zodiacs; the expedition leader informs us that we may have to go back to King George a day early. This is Antarctica after all; unpredictable and yet, magic. ●

Get on board

Silverseas' six-day King George Island roundtrip itinerary aboard *Silver Endeavour* via Antarctic Sound, Antarctic Peninsula and the South Shetland Islands departs on 13 November 2025, from £13,600pp. silversea.com

Atlas Ocean Voyages' seven-night King George Island Roundtrip itinerary aboard *World Voyager* via Antarctic Sound and Antarctic Peninsula departs on 2 December 2025, from £16,930pp including a charter from Punta Arenas and one night in a hotel pre- and post-cruise. atlasoceanvoyages.com



In the know

After embarking on his first cruise to Antarctica in November, CLIA UK's **Andy Harmer OBE** reveals why the destination left such an impression

What surprised you most about the Antarctica? I was fortunate enough to sail with Quark Expeditions on 21 November, where after a day exploring the amazing 'frontier town' Ushuaia, I embarked on a nine-night voyage to the Antarctic Peninsula.

I considered myself to be quite knowledgeable about Antarctica cruises. The expedition lines do a great job about talking about the destination and the experiences available, but it still 'grabbed me' in a way that I didn't expect.

The Zodiac trips and the landings were a definite highlight, but so were the lectures by the expedition team who really brought the destination to life. Before we set foot on land, the expedition leader told us to take a moment when ashore and really breathe the experience in. This is an experience unlike anything else I've had before, and it was well worth savouring every second.

What were your first impressions of the ship? The ship [Quark Expedition's *World Explorer*] was incredibly welcoming and a real home away from home, as so many of the expedition ships are, offering amazing in-room facilities and great dining, including an indulgent afternoon



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Penguins are always a highlight on an Antarctic cruise; Andy Harmer savoured every second of his voyage; an expedition trip gets you up close to the breathtaking scenery

a family with two young children, plenty of couples, and a few older parents travelling with a grown-up child.

This is a trip for people from all backgrounds, ages, interests and budgets and at all stages of life. Don't restrict yourself and 'talk' expedition whenever possible.

tea service. The stars of the show were Quark's expedition team members, who were friendly and very knowledgeable. They clearly enjoyed sharing their expertise with the guests.

What was the absolute highlight of the voyage? It's difficult to choose just one. The first landing ashore made me feel like a true explorer while my first sighting of the penguins was a real treat.

However, a memory that will stay with me forever was waking up early on day two of the Drake crossing and heading up to the observation lounge where I was joined by a few members of the expedition team. We stayed out there for hours spotting birdlife and seeing our first iceberg. It was then we saw the first signs that we were close to the Antarctica peninsula.

What advice would you give to agents eager to pitch Antarctica to their clients?

I was really taken aback by the variety of guests onboard – lots of solo travellers of all ages,

How will the CLIA Expedition Showcase in July help the trade? We couldn't be more excited to offer an event in Svalbard. This is a truly historic moment, with delegates getting the chance to visit six expedition ships, engage in learning and business sessions, plus the chance to explore an incredible destination. Our intent is to bring expedition cruising to life to help agents at various stages of their journey grow their sales in this sector. ●



“

The first landing ashore made me feel like a true explorer while my first sighting of the penguins was a real treat

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