

TRAVEL

Rockhoppers greet the new year

Editor's note: This is the second of a two-part story on an unusual Christmas trip to Antarctica. Chris Lillesand lives in Rochester Hills.

BY CHRIS LILLESAND
SPECIAL WRITER

Dec. 26: We cruised down the Gerlache Straits to Paradise Harbor. A Minku whale kept us entertained as we anchored. Minkus are the smallest of the Baleen whales at 10 meters and 8-metric tons (doesn't seem so small). Typically, they escaped the whale slaughter because of their small size.

The Chilean Research Station (Gonzalez Videla) located in Paradise Bay graciously invited us to visit.

Because they couldn't handle everyone at the same time, half the group went out in Zodiacs to see the glaciers and the other half went to the research station. Then we switched. I was in the first Zodiac group. The clear blue skies and icy white and blue glaciers were fantastic, and to top it off, there was a baby leopard seal sunbathing on a small iceberg.

We were able to silently float over to the ice and observe the seal from less than 10 feet away. His deep black watery eyes saw us, but since seals don't know natural predators in their environment, he wasn't concerned and just lay there for our pleasure. Leopard seals don't have ears. They can weigh anywhere

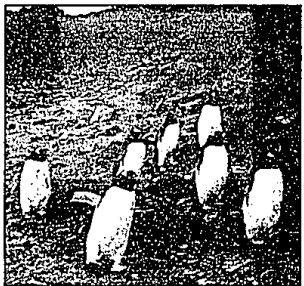
from 660-990 pounds.

When we were done cruising, we went over to the orange Chilean Research Station. The Chileans invited us into their "house" and even had a few items for sale (postcards, T-shirts, etc.) Outside, the Gentoo penguins had built their nests all around the building as well as out onto the rocks. Blue-eyed shags (or cormorants) were also nesting with their young birds interspersed amongst the penguins. As we ate lunch, the captain cruised to Neko Harbor in Andvord Bay.

This is our big opportunity to put our toesies on the Antarctica Continent. Previous to this we have been on surrounding islands. An emergency hut set up by the Argentinians was located in Neko Harbor and it was interesting to take a look inside at the bunka, food, etc. If one uses anything from the emergency huts in the Antarctica, they must either replace what is used, or let that government know so they can replace it.

After we were all on board we headed down the Neumayer Channel towards Port Lockroy, a United Kingdom research station on Wiencke Island. The hotel staff arranged an outdoor barbecue on the back deck for dinner complete with picnic tables. A wonderful array of barbecue type foods (chicken, salmon, salads, and potatoes) awaited us.

Bath time:
These Gentoo penguins waddle down for a bath at Hannah's Point.



Royal crown: The Rockhoppers are distinguished by their handsome crowns. This fellow was on the Falklands Islands.

Dec. 27: Port Lockroy was restored by the UK-Antarctic Historical Trust in 1994. The first post office was set up in 1944 and re-opened in November 1996 under the supervision of the Deputy Postmaster in Stanley.

Dec. 28: We arrived at Mikkelsen Harbor via the Bransfield Straits this morning. As we walked on Trinity Island, we saw Gentoo penguins and Weddell seals.

Dec. 29: Our first Zodiac trip of the morning was to Penguin Island in the South Shetland Islands. So named because of the penguins. I didn't get this logic at all since all of the islands have had penguins, but so be it. Penguin Island has a dormant volcano, which provided us with a nice two-mile walk.

Dec. 30: We are on the return trip through what is now known as Drake Lake. A much calmer passage. During the day we had a lecture on the Falkland Islands war and a film about early Antarctica explorers. Jason Roberts (expedition staff) shared his nature film on Arctic polar bears with us.

Dec. 31: A restful day to read and watch the scenery. Galley

tours were given and Clipper Chippers were available. I was there.

We anchored at a camp on New Island in the West Falkland Islands around 3 p.m. There is only one city in the Falkland Islands and that is Stanley. The rest of the settlements are called camps.

After dinner, we took the Zodiacs over to New Island and hiked to a Rockhopper penguin rookery. We could hear them long before we could see them. When we arrived, 100,000 Rockhopper penguins, talking a mile a minute greeted us. The total number of Rockhopper penguins in existence is 5 million.

Rockhopper penguins are able to climb steep slopes by using their beaks and claws to hang. They are agile rock hoppers (hence the name).

The staff threw a wonderful New Year's Eve party for us complete with streamers, hats, and noisemakers. They even had a little stereo with dance music, so we could dance in the New Year.

Jan. 1: We had an early Zodiac departure today to West Point Island, which is where Allen White's (expedition staff) family lives. This was our one and only dry landing! Except it was raining, so I guess we got wet from the top instead of stepping in it.

Jan. 2: Port Stanley, Falkland Islands. We disembarked the Clipper Adventurer and boarded buses for our quick city tour and ride to the Mount Pleasant Airport and Military Base.

JanChile Air flew us to Santiago.

January 3, 1999 - Santiago is surrounded by the Andes Mountains, which made for wonderful scenery. At mid-night, my flight left for Detroit, which was under a few inches of snow after the big storm. It was colder in Detroit than it had been during the whole trip to the Antarctic!

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E.T. EXTRAORDINARY TRAVEL



CAROL GEIS

Ah, June...a time to celebrate. Graduations. Weddings. Father's Day. Yikes! What gifts to give these loved ones? How about a gift of travel...and some treasured memories?

FOR DADS

Give Dad the romance of 1940s and 50s luxury rail travel. It's the American version of the Orient Express - the stuff of fiction and fantasy - but this time taking him (and Mom) to places unreachable by car to enjoy the scenic beauty and culture of our country and Canada. In nine separate itineraries, the American Orient Express tours the "Antebellum South," "National Parks," "Canadian Maritimes" - or a "Trans Canada Rail Journey." One of the tours, titled "Origins of Jazz and Blues," starts in Chicago and heads south to Missouri to the birthplace of composer Scott Joplin. Then on to Memphis and Big Easy, New Orleans. Luscious menus reflect each local cuisine. Call (630) 663-4550 and buy Dad a trenchcoat and sloped felt hat.

FOR GRADS

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FOR "WEDS"

Instead of another silver carafe, how about the bridal party chipping in to send the "newbies" on a really economical bicycle tour of Ireland. For only \$670 (double occupancy, of course) the Mr. and Mrs. will spend 7 days pedaling the West Cork coastline to County Wicklow - about 20-40 miles per day, at their own pace, with a self-

guided itinerary. (No annoying 7 a.m. group rides!) The price includes bikes, luggage transport to each of the guest houses on the route and breakfasts. Tours run April through the end of September. Air travel not included (but they still have all of that wedding money!) Forum Travel International (925) 671-2900.

FOR BARD BUFS

If there's a Shakespeare lover on your list, you could always give tickets to the Stratford Festival in the storybook Canadian town of the same name. But maybe your honored "Friend of Will" would like to try a new venue this summer. The cities below host extremely popular festivals - great to combine with a business trip or visiting family, especially with those cheap summer air fares.

■ Atlanta: Georgia Shakespeare Festival, June 11-Aug. 15 (404) 504-3400 for information or Box office at (404) 263-0020

■ Near Chicago: Illinois Shakespeare Festival, in Bloomington (about 125 miles southwest of Chicago) Info: (809) 438-7314 Box office: (309) 438-2535

■ Shakespeare Santa Cruz (California) July 15-Aug. 30 (831) 459-2139

■ Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, (July 28-Aug. 29) in a spectacular mountain setting (775) 832-1616 or 800-747-4697

OR FOR BIRD BUFS

For a more tranquil treat, wrap up a week of birding - or paddling, hiking or biking with the nation's best naturalists from the Audubon Society. The trips are in Maine, Connecticut, Minnesota or Wyoming, using rustic lodges or tents on land owned or maintained by the Audubon Society. Some trips are already sold out, but for \$700-800 dollars for the entire week, it's worth a call - if only to plan ahead for next Father's Day. (203) 869-2017.

Carol Geis is vice president for marketing and center planning for the Taubman Co. She coordinates international tours and marketing for the company. She is also on the board of the Travel Industry Association.

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