

Itinerary Homeward Bound

INTRODUCTION

The following is a draft itinerary for the Homeward Bound Project departing Ushuaia, 2nd December 2016, returning 21st December 2016.

This describes the passage of the ship, not the course content (leadership, strategic and scientific). It should be remembered that Antarctica is the chosen back drop to this major global leadership initiative for women and our primary focus is that participants arrive back into Ushuaia (21st December 2016), with a profoundly elevated insight into their leadership capability, the skills to design and execute strategy, and plans for collaboration as women working towards a sustainable future.

The entire learning focus will be framed by the Antarctic experience. Everything we do, everything we see, all the places we land, the people we meet, the animals we watch, all the discussions between us, the vision and values we focus on, the leadership and strategic content that we will guide you through, is all about our role in a sustainable world.

View the itinerary through this filter and, if possible, imagine a better backdrop for Homeward Bound than Antarctica.

We can't.

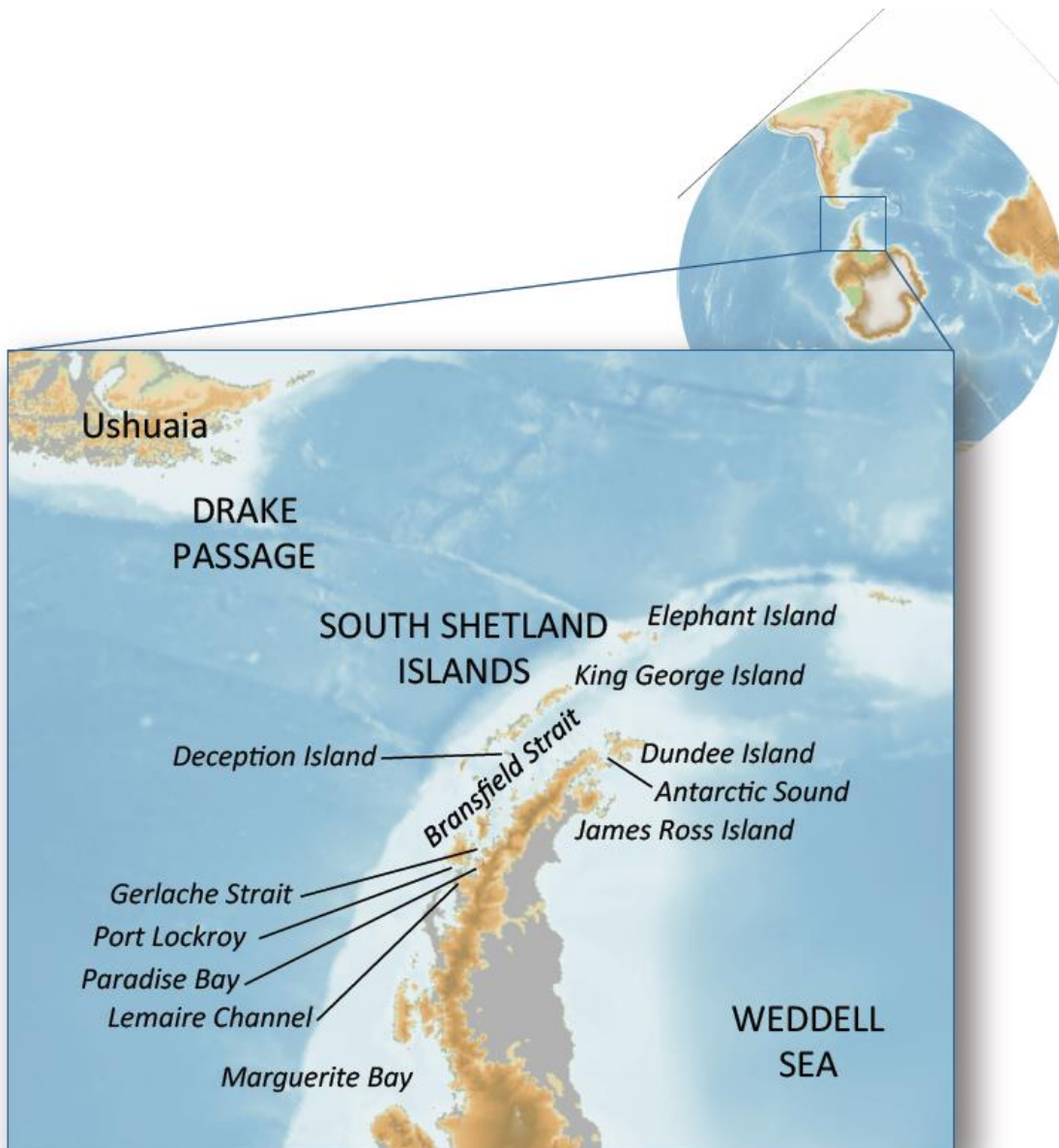
The Homeward Bound Team

(All photos by Mary-Anne Lee)

THE ITINERARY

Note: travel details will be provided significantly closer to the date of departure.

Please note that this itinerary is not prescriptive. It all comes down to daily mix and match. It is important not to have an expectation that you will be at a particular point in time on a particular day. The expedition leader will make a call, with a keen understanding of the outcomes of the Homeward Bound experience.



Departure from Ushuaia

Ushuaia is nestled under the mountains of Tierra del Fuego by the famous Beagle Channel, and has become the preferred departure point for Antarctica. It is indeed a tourist town, but that should not sell it short. It is something of a cowboy town, with abundant accommodation (which you should investigate in the next few months) and many good restaurants.

We suggest you arrive up to 48 hours prior to our departure time. We are advised that people who acclimatise to the time difference suffer less from sea sickness (there is clearly an odd correlation). Note that international flights come in directly to Ushuaia. It is not difficult to organise travel to this destination, and you will find abundant accommodation locally.

The Beagle Channel

We will leave from what is known as the long finger wharf. We leave in the evening, after attending Customs formalities. We go down the Beagle Channel for 4 - 6 hours, a beautiful channel, with Argentina on one side, and Chile on the other. Very quickly, the magic of what we are departing for will become apparent. Soon it will be time to go to bed!! Just as we are nestling down, we head out into open water. Right hand turn, head for Antarctica.

Drake Passage

Note: This will take two days as opposed to the estimated 6-8 days had we departed from Hobart.

The waterways can change very quickly. Although the Drake Passage doesn't have a great reputation (yes, 2 days to manage sea sickness, take those pills, get out on deck, breathe fresh air, get our sea legs), there is a far greater chance of good weather than the popular image suggests.

The swells will change a fair bit, as weather moves across the Drake Passage, and is squeezed out the east, the boat moves constantly, and between those bullets there is good weather.

Overnight we will pass Cape Horn (Cabo de Hornos), making a bee line for the very northern tip of the Peninsula.

The Drake is a magnificent beast, so alive, and the transition from almost tepid air of South America, to Antarctic air, is very rapid. "You are really zinging on the Drake Passage, it's really exciting" says Greg Mortimer, expedition leader.

By the end of the first day at sea we cross the biological boundary of Antarctic, which is called the Antarctic convergence. This is the line which defines Antarctica in the ocean, the boundary between the warmer northern oceans and the colder southern water.

We pass through that convergence and the sea water temperature drops several degrees.

What you see initially in the Drake Passage are the birds of the south - petrels and albatross - they follow the boat, it's magnificent.

There will be a lot going on, as people are getting used to being on the ship, and the ship getting used to its passengers. The temperature will be getting colder. In fact, it almost feels like you are in Antarctica and it can come as a surprise.

You are now in water cold enough to support icebergs so we may start to see these anytime. We will start to see the cetaceans – whales and dolphins. It's early summer, the Antarctic has shaken off winter and spring. Everything is coming to life, and although there is likely to be heavy snow on the land, at the same time any exposed rock has a creature on it, wanting to breed! It's that time of year - abundant nesting birds and breeding seals are taking up every available inch.



Elephant Seals at South Shetland Islands

Elephant Island

This is our chosen first land fall, it's extraordinary how large it will feel in front of you, a towering island, with hanging glaciers, pouring ice into the sea; an amazing array of wildlife on and around it, surrounded by vast ocean. Shackleton landed here, at Point Wild, and when you see it, you will ponder at the skill at leadership of this man.

If not racked by big waves, we will land, and see the tiny plinth of land that Shackleton landed on.

(Our expedition leader took 7 goes to land there the first time he went).

If the sea is too rough, there are other possibilities in the lee of the island where we can land.

This is the northern most of the South Shetland Islands, an extremely important chain (archipelago), the northern boundary of the Antarctic land mass and the edge of the Antarctic continental plate. On the Drake Passage side of this there is a huge ocean trench where the floor of the Southern Ocean slides under Antarctica - continents colliding.

The South Shetlands are crucial for many reasons – not least their political value and proximity to the continent – and so are the most populous (in terms of people). Very interesting to see and an important context for the leadership content of Homeward Bound, ensuring all of us are clear on the challenges of long term decisions between people who are politically motivated often with short term thinking.

King George Island

There are two bays on King George Island. Bases in Maxwell Bay alone include those belonging to Chile, Russia, Argentina, China, Uruguay, Korea and others with bases. Admiralty Bay is home to bases belonging to Brazil, Poland, Peru, Argentina and others.

We will land at either Maxwell Bay or Admiralty Bay (pictured below).



Note: This landing is an example of where you will be tasked to find out as much as you can, informally, from the people walking around (as part of the leadership work we will be doing on board). The obvious questions are around living and working in this space, the less obvious are about what works/doesn't work, and who makes the big decisions, and how connected the people there are, and whether or not they feel heard, what they think are the big issues and why.

Antarctic Sound

We now travel south to Antarctic Sound, this is now full blown Antarctica, the most northern tip of the Antarctic landmass. It is incredibly beautiful, majestic, almost impossible to imagine, piedmont glaciers, pouring down into Antarctic Sound. We have travelled across the Bransfield Strait to get here and all of a sudden, we are in shallower water, on the Antarctic Shelf.

Note: At this time of year, in the Bransfield Strait, there is likely to be a lot of whale action; the big baleen whales are feeding during summer.



Killer Whale

By the time we've travelled across the strait, the experience changes completely, we are in the Antarctic Sound, which is the key hole to get to the Weddell Sea, the start of the mass of ice and ocean on the eastern side of the Antarctic Peninsula.

The Weddell Sea

The Weddell Sea is choked with ice and is forbidding and unforgiving AND very exciting. It has an enormous gyre, a clock wise rotating current, like a big stomach turning constantly, and much of the ice in the Weddell Sea, spews out through the Antarctic Sound, so there are often towering icebergs in this area.

The outcome is uncertain because of the movement of that ice. Ideally we will go into the ice as much as we can in the Weddell Sea, and there are a number of islands that are worth visiting - biologically, historically, and politically - all very important.

Note: As a result of the movements of water and ice, the water is very nutrient rich, so there is massive penguin activity in those waters.

This area has been subject to a range of critical expeditions (including Shackleton and the Swedish expeditions) which have shaped the world's interaction with Antarctica. Islands include Seymour Island, James Ross Island, Paulette Island, Dundee Island and Joinville Island, Danger Island - and all of these are options to visit, ice dependent.

Note: In the last 5 - 10 years, an undersea volcano was found on the edge of the Weddell Sea; this is a very important and recent scientific discovery, which is to say there is much more we don't know about this area than we do.

A 'problem' of these islands, particularly Paulette and Devil Islands, at this time of year is that there are so many penguins it's difficult to land - they are cheek and jowl down to the water line.

Deception Island



Now we go back across the Bransfield Strait to Deception Island, one of the more southerly of the South Shetland Islands. It is a dormant volcano. We can take the ship through a collapsed side of the volcano, and go into the centre of the crater (and it's vast). Inside that crater there is a natural harbour in the caldera, which was the home to the first land based whaling stations in the late 1800s and the remnants of those whaling stations are still there.

"It is an unbelievable how people react to the caldera and its surrounds", says Greg, "People's reactions are really polarised to this place - either with it or against - black and white, snow plastered against volcanic ash no matter your emotional response, it's an incredibly compelling space".

Around the edges of the crater there is steam rising from volcanic activity, and dotted around the crater are small scientific stations - the remnants of a British station and active Spanish, Chilean and Argentinian stations.

On the outside edge of the crater is the place that David Attenborough made very famous in the Life in the Freezer series. There is an image from the air, of him standing in a sea of penguins, on what is called *Baily Head*. It's a very difficult place to land, but if we can, we will do so. It's a treasure, one of the treasures of Antarctica generally.

Gerlache Strait

Now we head south into the Gerlache Strait. One of the 2 - 3 most beautiful places in the world, part of a mountain chain that makes up the Antarctic Spine, with a huge amount of glacial activity.

The Antarctic Peninsula is a continuation of the Andes, and the young mountains are draped in very complex glaciers, pouring into the sea, into Fjords, bays and narrow water ways. This is one of the sites in Antarctica you will not forget easily.

Generally, the land form changes dramatically over very short distances on the Peninsula, so we can put our noses in and out of bays, depending on the wind, and find shelter. It also has a relatively mild Antarctic climate. It gets 2 - 4 metres of snow fall each year, which is why there is so much ice moving around in the Gerlache Strait.

The days are made up visiting bays, finding places we like with a lot of wildlife, either landing or cruising around - all decided at the time, weather and ice dependent.

We are now at close quarter with Antarctica, a unique feeling inherent in the Antarctic Peninsula environment - intimate.

It is otherwise so vast - this intimate experience is quite unusual.

We will see other ships in this area, but likely only a small handful, moving around, all shapes and sizes, in a big area so there is a sense of community rather than crowding. We are at a point in time where tourism is not creating an environmental problem yet, but you will see the importance of maintaining the wilderness in this context, which is part of your challenge on this trip.

We may visit Hydrurga Rocks, Charlotte Bay, Ererra Channel.

Note: Each of these stops will be crafted with the science and leadership component. Whilst we will all be Antarctic visitors, we intend to ensure each space we visit is a conversation about leadership and our role, the science involved and action that's needed. The focus will be the planet as much as Antarctica.

Lemaire Channel

The southern end of the Gerlache Strait is the Lemaire Channel, one of the more photographed and visited parts of Antarctica because it is so beautiful. It is only 10 kms long and about half a mile to a mile wide. It is extraordinary, with big cliffs coming out either side.

This takes us to a very different part of Antarctica.

We pop out the southern end and we are now on a high and brassy flank of the Peninsula where that intimate feeling of the Gerlache Strait changes, and you get a better sense of the scale of Antarctica, and the size of the mountains.

This is an amazing transition. Imagine a big mountain range tumbling into the sea, the ice is moving around like a giant jigsaw puzzle. These are mountains that are 3 - 4,000 metres high, coming straight out of the sea, capped by the polar ice cap. You will come to understand this is a narrow and flat feature of ice, which is the start of the polar plateau. We are now seeing the start of the nascent polar plateau, going to the heart of Antarctica, the transition of the young Andean mountains into the ice cap (remembering the pole is at 3,400 metres).

Our intention and aim is to go as far south as we can, as far as the ice will allow, hopefully to Marguerite Bay, and possibly Adelaide Island. This is an area where you run out of people and scientific stations, getting to the edge of the map.

At this point, we really don't know what is going to happen. There are a large array of potential places where we can poke our noses, not highly chartered, not lots of ice information, this is where we will explore and see what can make of it.

Port Lockroy/Neumayer Channel

Near Anvers Island is a very beautiful, much visited Antarctic site. The British very sneakily set up a formal post office here - red box, permanently manned during the summer. It has curiously become a magnet for visitors, an odd and easily recognisable symbol in an otherwise wild and remote part of our world. It also enabled the British to establish a very strong claim of state. It was built in the Second World War, and ostensibly was a listening post for German submarines. The UK Antarctic Heritage Trust has recently refurbished the post office.

Paradise Bay

This is a quintessentially important Peninsula experience. It is very sheltered, we will be surrounded 270 degrees by a ring of mountains. It has Chilean and Argentinian bases and it is famous for its natural beauty, and so of course, is a much visited place. There are vessels constantly going in and out of Paradise Bay at this time of year.



Paradise Bay

From here, we head back to the Drake Passage, and our return to Ushuaia – wiser, inspired, bonded, skilled, individually and collectively, the intent of Homeward Bound's ten year vision, of 1000 women collaborating globally, well and truly launched.

Our future in your hands.

