

ANTARCTICA CALLING!

A 11-day trip to the South Pole to an ice-crowned continent in December sounds like an experience of a lifetime!

-By Aruna Rathod



One of the most memorable birthdays that Vasim Shaikh, Managing Director, The Q Experiences had was in the Antarctica! Last year, the young travel enthusiast was on an expedition to this ice covered continent. On January 13th, his birthday, a beautiful surprise awaited him. An unscheduled stop in the ocean by the kind captain, a recce of a glacier by the expert team and a champagne birthday party on ice for everyone – memorable indeed!

For Shaikh, travel is an emotion. “I have always been surrounded by maps and globes. Till date I have visited 40 countries and having seen some of the most amazing cities and lived some heart-warming experiences. It is my wish to take people to these experiences,” he says with passion. After his amazing encounter with Antarctica, Shaikh decided that The Q Experiences must introduce this experience to more people and he curated a 11- day trip to that frozen domain ruled by penguins, whales and seals.

“From December 9th, we sail to the ice crowned continent. Only 200 people can be accommodated on the ship,” he informs. While

the ship promises five-star luxury on board, the visits to the regions are packed with adventure. Shaikh adds, “We are further refining this trip to make it memorable for our clients by having an exclusive Indian menu besides global cuisine!!” To ensure a superior gastronomic experience for the travellers, Atul Kochhar Indian Michelin-starred chef will be on board curating the finest of Indian regional cuisine. In addition, the team of a catering centre of excellence run by Alain Ducasse Enterprise will also be on board to enhance the global cuisine. The buffets each day will be of a different theme.

What makes the Antarctic Region most alluring is that it is completely bereft of human habitation. “No one belongs to the Antarctic region. Just whales, a variety of seals, penguins and birds,” informs Shaikh. Known as the White Continent, the Antarctic Peninsula is covered in ice and snow, huge icebergs and an amazing range of wildlife and aquatic animals like seals, penguins, cormorants and whales.

GETTING TO THE ANTARCTICA

You need to fly to Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, from where a flight will take you to Ushuaia, the city on the edge of the world. From India, the preferred airlines to reach Buenos Aires would be Emirates or Qatar Airways for minimum layover time.

“I would say this trip doesn’t require one to be supremely fit, and as for the cold temperature, the ship provides travellers with boots and parka. One can carry thermal wear, socks, and waterproof pants to beat the cold. At times, the strong winds add 5 degrees to the temperature. I would say it’s easier than Leh Ladakh,” adds Shaikh.

The voyage to Antarctica will on “The Great Majestic Explorer” – a sleek, gorgeous ship flying the Flag of India. 460 feet of utter luxury, it has 132 elegant staterooms and suites, complete with interiors designed by the French designer – Jean Philippe Nuel.

It’s a green vessel that moves at 16 knots per hour, (30 kmph), and every effort is made to conserve the environment. Shaikh is proud to say, “We are the first company to charter this vessel. Indians are still being educated about a trip to the Antarctica. This ship has been sailing for four years now, made in Italy and owned by a French company. The actual capacity of the ship is 264 but we take just 200 people.”

Once the ship reaches the Antarctic region, the captain anchors the ship 200m away from land and a team of experts does a recce before you proceed to disembark and explore. At every stage, experts will guide you and show you sights you had only dreamt of previously. While Antarctica gets 24 hours of sunlight during summers which is from November to March, you will follow Argentinian time on the trip and there is a full schedule chalked out for each day and the body gets used to it.



Vasim Shaikh on his travels and curated moments on planet Earth

“The world is incomplete without a trip to the seven continents,” believes Shaikh. Besides exploring the world, he is passionate about photography, he documents his travels.

His wish list: The Canadian Arctic region is one of the places he wants to go and walk with the polar bear.

Memorable event: Floating in the Dead sea

Memorable moment at the Antarctica: I was so touched when I went hiking with one of the researchers and she found a strand of hair in the ice, she picked it up and kept it away in her handbag, paying respect to the pristine environment!

About Q and specialised travel

At The Q, personalized travel is the focus. They believe that no two itineraries can ever be the same, which is why their team of specialists customizes unique travel experiences for each one essentially leading to our brand message of ‘Luxury Travel Reimagined’. The company was founded in 2012.

Think soaking in the hot-water springs of frozen highlands in Nordic Island of Iceland, exploring Botswana’s lush Okavango delta or taking in the surreal landscape of Patagonia in South America on horseback, a journey into the surreally beautiful coastal desert of Namibia in Africa, visiting Churchill the land of Polar Bears and Beluga Whales in Canada or a country in a wineglass in Europe.



WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE TRIP

Day 1-3: You set sail from Ushuaia -the City at the Edge of the World. You will be sailing through the confluence of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans, known as The Drake Passage for two days and nights. This 800-kilometre wide passage between Cape Horn and Livingston Island is the shortest crossing from Antarctica to any other landmass. Look out for whales, dolphins and seabirds including giant petrels and other petrels, albatrosses and penguins.

Day 4: You will get your first experience of magnificent glaciers, rising slowly from the waters at Neko Bay and Paradise Bay. Marching towards Port Charcot & Port Lockroy on Day 5 & 6, you will explore the stunning ice-covered rocks -a haven for the avid wildlife enthusiast. The port has a museum, a little store and post office from where you can send a postcard to your friends and family.

Day 7: Exploring Deception Island - a place steeped in history and home to the largest colony of Chinstrap Penguins in the Antarctic Peninsula. You will witness the breathtaking sight of over 100,000 pairs of penguins at play along with Elephant seals and Fur seals.

Day 8: Sailing through the quietest places on earth- The Weddell Sea, you will get a chance to actually sight The Lord of The Weddell Sea- The Weddell Seal himself.

Day 9 & 10: You will hit land, crossing the Drake Passage

once more, make your way back to Ushuaia and civilization.

Day 11: Return, ship docks and the journey to Majestic White Continent will come to an end.



UNKNOWN FACTS ABOUT VISITING ANTARCTICA:

- The Antarctic Circle rings the southern part of the globe and Antarctica is the fifth largest continent.
- At least two active volcanoes exist in Antarctica. The highest, Mount Erebus (12,448 feet; 3,794 meters) boasts a permanent lake. The other lies on Deception Island, off the Antarctic Peninsula. Although eruptions in 1967 and 1969 damaged science stations there, the island remains a popular stop-off for tourists, who can bathe in the water warmed by the volcano while surrounded by ice.
- Its freezing cold in Antarctica the year round, the coldest temperature ever recorded here was minus 89 degrees Celsius!
- Nobody lives in Antarctica. In January 1979, Emile Marco Palma became the first human to be born on Antarctica. Since then, only ten other people have been born on the continent.
- Antarctica is only accessible by small sailing boats or motor vessels; no more than 100 people can land on the Antarctic Peninsula at any given point of time.
- There are no time zones in Antarctica, hence it's always zero o' clock in Antarctica.
- During the summer months, experience 24 hours of daylight. In December, when the ship starts to sail, it will be summer in Antarctica

If you throw boiling water into the air in Antarctica, it will instantly vaporize. Most of the particles will turn into steam while others are instantly converted to small pieces of ice.

