

Antarctica – The Experience

I climbed a snow capped mountain through a penguin rookery of approximately 250 000 penguins and then slid on my bum nearly all the way down the other side into a derelict research station in an active volcanic crater and then swam in the thermal springs of the crater. That was one day.

I went scuba diving in zero and sub zero waters and returned in one piece and warm. I now do know that it's true. If you can dive Melbourne waters, you CAN dive anywhere else in the world. I also managed to hook up with a good buddy that made the gig seem like I was just diving along with Rohan back home. That was good. Plus it was with one of the best dive operations I reckon I have seen.

My first landing after crossing The Drake Passage made me think of watching all of those nature shows on television and seeing penguins fight over stones as they tried to build nests – and then how I have actually stepped INTO the television and was there with the penguins. And I was ! I could get to within maybe 2 or 3 metres away and they would simply continue as though I wasn't even there.

I went to a Ukrainian Research Station that is credited with discovering the hole in the Ozone Layer and met a Marine Biologist who dives in Antarctica in Winter in a Wetsuit (that put me back in my place thinking I was doing something extraordinary by diving in Summer in Dry Suit). I went to an Argentinean research Station and Port Lockroy, the British Station to post letters, only to find the post office shut. Doh ! But that was an excellent dive spot too.

I had The Start of Summer gig, sharing it with 2 others on board also celebrating their Birthdays on The Start of Summer with 50 plus other people also in Antarctica. Another night we had a BBQ and a mini Rave Party on the back of the ship with the Russian crew showing some wicked moves to Russian Hip Hop and Club music with the ships deck becoming the make shift dance floor. The feeling was of sharing the night with friends in a relaxed atmosphere and it felt like home until I looked around and really took note of where I was. On the back of an ex Russian Research Vessel, surrounded by ice-bergs, in Antarctica, watching a beautiful yellow sunset on one side of stern and ice slopes with bright blue highlights on the other.. That was an amazing experience and realisation.

I camped on an island in only a sleeping bag – in the ice and snow. That was a great night and time as I woke up and had to shake about 3cm of ice off my bag before I could get dressed to go back on board the ship.

We tried a few times to party till dawn, but the sun never really set for there to be a night, and therefore a dawn... But we gave it our best shot all the same. Same as I wanted to go for a night dive, but it never really ever got dark enough. Doh !

We got to see Cape Horn while it was clear as we were coming back. The meeting of the Pacific and the Atlantic it's been the scene of many a wreck over the years. Apart from the significant impressive landmark that is The Cape, we also the lesser known but no less dangerous landmarks of : 'Oops!' and 'Oh Fuck!' Also the cause of many a tragedy I'm sure...

I met so many people including world renowned photographers (marine and fashion) artists, travel agents from Australia (Kenji Antarctic Snorkeler in Cairns who absolutely loved 'Penguins' and Pat Mangan who does tours of The Kimberley's and Africa. Got me thinkin' already) and England and people from industry and science (including a fella from CSIRO who used to deal with TRL when it did time standards and one of the chiefs of BHP from Newcastle) and even the

head of the Maritime Museum in Sydney (Mary-Lou Williams) and her sisters (What a laugh they were). So next time you're up there, drop in and tell her Lance – The Antarctic diver and photographer sent you. I know I will be. I met people starting their careers and people at the end and well beyond the end of their careers met heaps of people from Sydney so next time I'm up that way Bec and Simon, we have heaps of new people to meet, OK ! I met some great Russian crew and staff on the boat – oops ! Ship and would love to have been able to spend a bit more time with them too. Everyone was great value and I don't reckon there were any duds at all. Either that or the Animal Magnet went on holiday too.

The pace was full-on and the food was great. The Drake Crossing slowed some appetites but apart from that, everyone's appetite was working overtime. I was stocking up for the rest of the trip. Plus, you seemed to burn a hell of a lot of energy just doing stuff on board. Scuba Diving, landings, walking, photographing and whale watching certainly made for a healthy appetite.

Would I do it again ?? Next time, it's with someone for sure. Solo is good, but it's definitely something that good to share...