

From the National Geographic Explorer in Antarctica



Antarctic Circle & Detaille Island

We were awoken this morning to be told that we were only a few miles north of the Antarctic Circle. This imaginary line is very important for many on board to cross. It makes one a true adventurer to have crossed the circle. We also awoke to the realization that it is Christmas Eve. Many of the crew on board celebrate Christmas on the twenty-fourth, so this evening is going to be a celebration as well. We soon crossed the circle to cheers from those standing on the bridge and the ship carried on below the circle to our stop for the day.

Detaille Island (at 66°52' S) is the site of a hut built by the Falklands Islands Survey for the International Geophysical Year. Studies at Base W, as it was known, centered on the geology and meteorology of this area. The hut was used from 1956 to 1959 and then was essentially abandoned due to its isolation from other stations.

The weather was allowing us the joy of a White Christmas. Perfect snow fell from the dark grey sky all day. Paths were made in the newly fallen snow on shore to allow access to the hut. Rooms inside were left just as they were when the building was abandoned. Boots were lined up ready to be put on, warm coats hung from hooks on the walls, pillows and blankets were still in the bunks and tins of food were lined up in the cupboards. It seemed rather eerie but at the same time was fascinating to look around.

Outside again the weathered grey boards making up the outside seemed to fit perfectly into the snowy landscape. People walked to the other side of the small island to get a look at the nesting Adelle penguins on the hilltops of the far shore. From this vantage point could be seen the many blue icebergs that were quite spectacular floating in the currents around the island.

Zodiac cruises that circumnavigated the island stopped at several icebergs that had full open archways and amazing tropical blue water below. The white snow proved to be an excellent contrast to make the icebergs look more blue; photos were tempting everywhere for those with cameras.

The fresh snow on the ground proved to be rather tempting for many as well. The occasional snowball flew through the air to land at the back of an unsuspecting victim. Snowmen were erected to stand sentinel on the highest point, staring out to sea. The anchor was lifted in the afternoon once all were aboard with rosy cheeks and the feeling that it had been a nice snowy Christmas Eve day.

The ship continued cruising south, as far as the ice would allow. 67° 09' South. Well below the circle. Cruising through the snowy mountain peaks in the perpetual sunshine of the far south, everyone was able to appreciate how lucky we are to be spending our holidays in such an amazing place.

Jen Labrecque, Expedition Staff

