



Expedition on ice

Icebergs, penguin colonies, remote locales - Jeni and Max Zuber's Antarctic cruise was certainly not for the unadventurous.

words Susan Lang-Lemckert

Le Boréal

"On the first morning we saw a penguin colony we were told numbered about 150,000, and we thought that was amazing ... until the next morning, when there were about 450,000 – though I didn't count them all," he laughs.

"And although you're advised not to go within a certain distance of these creatures, if you sit down on the sand, they'll come up to you to investigate ... and the seal pups will even nuzzle into you."

As well as the special care that must be taken when venturing into such a pristine and isolated locale, external factors can sometimes necessitate unexpected itinerary changes.

"This was not just a cruise, it was an expedition," Max recalls. "After all, you're going to a remote part of the world – the climate is extreme, and you can encounter rough seas or bad weather – so sometimes the captain has to make decisions for your safety."

Being a brand new ship (this was its first voyage to the Antarctic), *Le Boréal's* design incorporates the latest environmentally-friendly features including its propulsion, fuel type and an extensive system of recycling programs.

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– MAX ZUBER



Exploring aboard the tender

Icebergs have suffered decades of bad press since the *Titanic's* tragic demise ... but one of the frosty monoliths provided the glorious setting for Jeni Zuber's most memorable experience on the Antarctic cruise she took with husband Max.

"Walking on the iceberg with about 20 penguins was very special indeed," she says. "I got very emotional when I first saw them. They're very inquisitive as to who are these people walking around in the red jackets.

"And some of the reflections [on the water] we saw as we were going through were so fantastic, it's difficult to express just how beautiful it all was."

This unforgettable holiday experience on the *Compagnie du Ponant's* mega-yacht, *Le Boreal*, was not only a celebration of Max and Jeni's 40th wedding anniversary, but also a unique opportunity for them both to see the Antarctic's native wildlife at close range.

"I'm a vet," Max explains, "so seeing the animals in their natural habitat, with virtually no fear of mankind, was a real highlight. Our trip went from Buenos Aires to [the island of] South Georgia, which I'd thought would be a secondary destination, but when we got there we saw the most amazing proliferation of wildlife.

"We toured the engine room with the Chief Engineer, who'd been involved with the original design and construction of the ship," Jeni says, "and he told us this is one of the most 'green-friendly' ships currently operating."

"There was also a strong emphasis on environmental protection from the guides on the ship," adds Max, "who were zoologists, botanists, etc ... most of them had PhDs, and many had 'over-wintered' at the French base on the Antarctic, and their knowledge of the bird and animal life there was incredible."

The level of service from all crew members was also a highlight for Jeni, who was delighted that 'they always had smiles on their faces'.

"And the range of services available to passengers was fantastic – there was a gym, a hairdresser, beautician, a very good library, live shows and movies ... absolutely anything you could want," she says.

"I could easily go again," says Max. "It would be good to see some other areas of Antarctica."

However, Jeni sees it differently.

"You could do exactly the same trip again and you wouldn't be bored – I'd be more than happy to repeat the experience."

In the meantime, Max and Jeni have other holiday plans.

"Visiting Chiva Som in Thailand, taking a cruise through Europe to Budapest, and cruising to the Bay of Fires in Tasmania are on my 'bucket list'," says Jeni.

"In the immediate future we're off to Falls Creek, then to Fiji for a 60th birthday celebration," adds Max. "That's the limit of my horizon at the moment." ●