

THE FALKLANDS AND PATAGONIA

whales, albatrosses and penguins, in the remote South Atlantic



Rockhopper Penguin

At Bird Holidays, we are always looking for new and innovative itineraries and

with this trip to the Falkland Islands, we

believe we have found a winner. For someone wanting to get away from it all, the Falklands are up there among the remotest places on earth. But with a fish and chip shop, a blue police telephone box, and a lot of battered old Land Rovers, one would be forgiven for thinking this was a village on the Scottish West Coast in the 1950's. With islands glowing yellow with flowering gorse, deserted white sandy beaches that stretch for miles, and a turquoise-blue ocean, visitors say the Falklands are more British than Britain - except here there are penguins. With three quarters of the world's Black-browed Albatrosses, this is most definitely not the UK!

In the unique and varied habitats influenced by the South Atlantic's weather, we can look forward to a warm welcome from the locals. Part of its charm lies in its inaccessibility and, by using an expedition cruise ship, we are able to visit uninhabited places that have no roads or landing strips.

We start on the northern Patagonian coast at the Valdes Peninsula; a place made famous by David Attenborough's film of an Orca riding the surf to grab seals on the beach. At this time of the year these apex predators will have moved south and may be waiting for us around the Falkland Islands. As we head south, we pass through waters that hold Southern Right Whales. Once at the Falklands, we will cherry-pick the best places to enjoy the wildlife. Carcass, Saunders, Bleaker, Sea Lion and New Islands are perfect spots to visit penguin and albatross colonies. From here we head to Ushuaia, crossing the feeding grounds of Wandering and Royal Albatrosses before entering the Beagle Channel to visit Tierra del Fuego. With outstanding views of iconic birds in stunning landscapes and endless photographic opportunities in the freshest of fresh air, this trip promises to be something very special.

ITINERARY

VALDES PENINSULA, NORTHERN PATAGONIA

From the UK, we fly through Buenos Aires to Trelew near the Valdes Peninsula for two nights. Offshore is the mating ground of the Southern Right Whale where we take a boat trip to see them. South American Sea Lions, Olrog's Gulls and Cayenne Terns feed in the surf. Coscoroba Swans can be found on lagoons near town along with several other waterfowl that include three species of South American coot. We have the chance to see all four of the world's steamer ducks, and this area is the only place to find the range-restricted Chubut Steamer Duck. The area attracts raptors

including Southern and Chimango Caracaras, while Cinereous and Long-winged Harriers quarter the flat Patagonian steppe inhabited by Lesser Rheas and Elegant-crested Tinamou.

There is a whole range of Patagonian birds, Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Patagonian Canastero and Chocolate-vented Tyrant being a small sample. On the evening of day four we will board the Ortelius, our home for the next ten days.

AT SEA

Our first two days will be spent at sea as we pass through feeding grounds for Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, as

well as Grey-headed, Black-browed and Wandering Albatross. As we near the Falklands we are joined by groups of delightful Pintado Petrels, while Slender-billed and Antarctic Prions test our identification skills. Black-bellied Storm-petrel is the smallest seabird here and we may be escorted by bow-riding Hourglass Dolphins.

WEST FALKLAND

The islands off the north-west comprise some of the most rugged and beautiful parts of the archipelago. We plan to be one of the few groups to visit Steeple Jason. It holds the largest Black-browed Albatross colony, with 70% of the world population: that's over 100,000 birds! Together with masses of Rockhopper Penguins, this is a truly spectacular place.

Carcass Island is rat free, allowing native vegetation and wildlife to thrive. The endemic Cobb's Wren frequents the rocky shoreline and huge stands of native Tussac Grass have been able to re-colonise much of the island. This provides nesting sites for Magellanic Penguins as well as small birds such as Grass Wrens and Blackish Cinclodes. Breeding waterfowl include the Ruddy-headed Goose, while freshwater pools attract Silvery and White-tufted Grebes. Around the settlement, ornamental cabbage palms and cypress trees provide an almost tropical feel. This attracts the ubiquitous Black-chinned Siskin and Correndera Pipit. Upland and Kelp Geese breed on rocky outcrops.

On Saunders Island we enjoy our first Gentoo and King Penguins. Falkland Skuas and Jonny Rooks patrol these colonies in the hope of snatching an egg. Next we visit Volunteer Point, a growing colony of King Penguins. With only a handful when Phil first visited in the 1990s, there are about 1500 now. With a year round breeding season, we expect to see eggs, chicks and displaying adults.

PORT STANLEY AND EAST FALKLAND

From Volunteer Point, our ship moves past Gypsy Cove to drop us off at Port Stanley for an afternoon stroll. Here we can see the Governor's house, have a pint in the local pub or maybe do a spot of shopping before returning to the ship.

The plan for the following two days is to visit Bleaker, Sea Lion and New Islands. Sea Lion Island is well known for its pods of Orca that patrol the landing beaches. There are Rufous-chested Dotterels and Two-banded Plovers here, while King Cormorants nest. The Falklands hold the world's largest population of Gentoo Penguins and so we are sure to get great photographic opportunities. Ruddy-headed Geese, Chiloe Wigeon and a range of plants that even include orchids are found on Bleaker. New Island is well known for its Southern Fur Seals, and like all islands here, there are Long-tailed Meadowlarks, Magellanic Snipe, Snowy Sheathbill, Red-backed Hawks and many other birds.

Finally the time will come to leave and, as we cruise away we can enjoy close-up views of Southern Giant Petrels. The next day will be spent at sea. Being close to Antarctic waters, we hope to see thousands of seabirds that feed in these waters including Northern Royal, Southern Royal, Grey-headed, Light-mantled Sooty and the awesome Wandering Albatross.

USHUAIA, SOUTHERN PATAGONIA

Entering the Beagle Channel, we dock at Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego. The shoreline attracts South American Terns, Dolphin Gulls, White-rumped Sandpiper and Blackish and Magellanic Oystercatchers. Wildfowl include Patagonian Crested Ducks and Chilean Teal. After breakfast on the boat, a walk in the southern birch forests should yield bird flocks containing Thorn-tailed Rayadito, White-throated Treerunner, White-crested Elaenia and Magellanic Woodpecker.

We shall spend one night in Ushuaia, maximising viewing opportunities, before flying back to Buenos Aires, where we will spend our last night before our flight home.

CLIMATE AND PACE

In Valdes and the Falklands we can expect sunny but often breezy days, but with a chance of rain. Ushuaia is highly variable (four seasons in one day can include sun, wind, rain and snow) with daytime temperature of typically ten degrees. Excursions are made using Zodiacs on days when not travelling at sea. The expedition staff will usually offer a choice of activities to suit all paces. You can spend time just sitting, walking or photographing, within certain guidelines, if you prefer. Basic fitness is required and there is some optional uphill walking.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full-board accommodation is provided, with two nights at the Hotel Libertador, Trelew, nine nights on the Ortelius, one night at the Hotel Tolkeyen in Ushuaia and one night at the Hotel Lafayette in Buenos Aires. Our ship is the 116 passenger Ortelius, part of a fleet owned by Oceanwide, a Dutch expedition cruise company. All hotels are of a good standard. All rooms and cabins have an en suite bathroom. **Please note:** The itinerary is flexible and dependent on weather and other factors. The daily itinerary will be decided by the expedition leader and ship's captain and Bird Holidays has no direct control over this.

PRICE INCLUDES

All excursions with Bird Holidays leader and expedition staff, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 27th, ending with breakfast on 9th), soft drinks at meal times, onshore transport and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flights from London Heathrow to Buenos Aires using the scheduled services of British Airways. Outbound flight departs late evening, arriving back in the UK early morning. Domestic flights are with Aerolineas Argentina. **Domestic flights from Manchester and other UK airports are available on this tour. See booking form for details.**

15 nights including two overnight flights:	26th Oct. to 10th Nov. 2018
Principal leader:	Phil Palmer
Maximum group size:	12 clients with one leader and expedition staff
Cost with discount (if you book before 13th July 2018):	£7880 per person sharing in a twin cabin (with porthole)
Full Cost:	£8030 per person sharing in a twin cabin (with porthole)
Cabin with window:	£400 supplement per person
Deluxe cabin:	£720 supplement per person
Superior cabin:	£1490 supplement per person
Single supplement:	please phone
Deposit:	£2000 per person