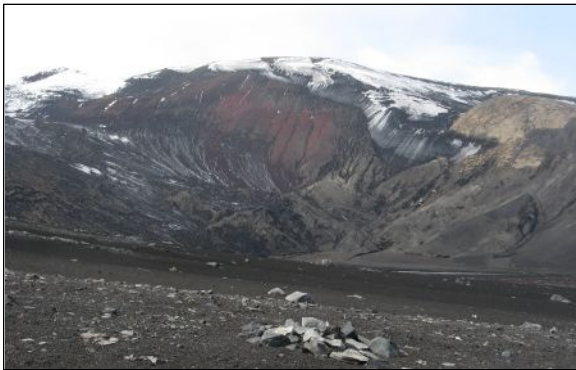


Antarctic trip diary, Part 2

1/1/07

It just keeps getting betterer and betterer. Yesterday afternoon we arrived in Antarctic waters for our first stop, Deception Island, which is an active volcano. We had to squeeze through a very narrow gap to get into the harbor. The crew dug a pit on the beach near the water and you could see steam rising from the heated water. For those who were adventurous enough, you could go swimming in Antarctica! First you jump in the bay for 5 seconds to get numb and then you jump into the hot water pit to restore circulation. And what do you get for this daring stunt? A guaranteed seat on the next Cirkel boat going back to the ship; the rest of us have to wait in line. And you get a certificate attesting to the fact you went swimming in Antarctica.



I keep wanting to call Deception Island Desolation Island as it would be more descriptive. It has an active volcano event every couple of years so the bare land is mostly cinders and the glaciers are sooty like 3 day old snow in Rhode Island. But there are some colors on the cliffs, mostly yellows and reds, which represent different degrees of oxidation of the volcanic ash which spewed it there.



Speaking of oxidation (nice segue) the remains of equipment from a whaling station built around 1900 are there. Nice rusty tanks, pipes and heat exchangers that were used for processing whale oil. Also on the island is a galvanized steel aircraft hangar built by the British around 1960 and abandoned after a volcano destroyed part of the base in 1967. They were all in surprisingly good condition, from a corrosion point of view, which attests to the relatively mild corrosiveness of the area (low temperature and humidity).



Last night was our New Year's Eve party. Early evening entertainment was sightings of humpback whales; first a mother daughter feeding pair then three additional animals. Seeing them up close and personal is an unforgettable experience. Later, passengers and crew all gathered on an outside deck and, at the stroke of midnight, lit the sparklers we had been given and toasted in the New Year with champagne while the ship's horn gave out with an almighty bellow. Whether it was in honor of the

occasion or because we were so far south, it never got darker than a medium twilight last night. This is definitely the way to properly welcome in the New Year.

