

### Antarctic trip diary, Part 3

1/1/07

This morning was a landing on Culverville Island which has a huge colony of Gentoo penguins. The best way to visit Culverville is to find a rock and just sit, taking in the incredible beauty of the area and watch the antics of the penguins as they scurry about doing whatever is important to them. They are completely oblivious to people. When you go up a rise to the right of the landing area, you can look down into a small cove with lots of floating ice. It is the colors that are so impressive - deep turquoise in the ice crevices, pink snow from the algae, pure white from other snow, slate gray sky. It is sensory overload.

On the trip back to the ship, the crewman took the scenic route through an iceberg field. You can feel the cold flowing off them and are overwhelmed by the sculpted texture of the ice surfaces and the many pure shades of blue.

Early in the afternoon, we passed our sister ship, MS Nordkapp, in a scenic narrow channel bordered by high cliffs and glaciers. We pulled up aside each other about 50 feet apart and each captain tried to out-toot each other with the ship's horn playing various riffs which echoed off the cliffs. Meanwhile, passengers and crew are yelling and waving to each other across the gap. Then some crewmen from the Nordkapp launched their rescue boat from the other side of the ship and started hot-dogging up the gap. When two Viking ships meet in Antarctica, anything can happen.



Later this afternoon, we went ashore at Neko Harbor which allowed us to set foot on the Antarctic mainland for the first time. The continent collectors must have been delighted; for the rest of us, it was yet another breath-taking landing. But this one was a bit more special because we were actually on the Antarctic continent itself. More Gentoo penguin rookeries, a couple of blasé Weddell seals ignoring all of us while they napped, and an optional hill to climb that you could come down as though you were riding a luge, but without the luge (we passed up this wonderful opportunity).



Instead, we spent some quality time just sitting on a rock halfway up the hill, looking across a cove at the wall of a glacier and watching it calve. At this site, the staff warns you not to stay at the waters edge as a large berg will get you very wet from the resultant tsunami. A couple of weeks ago, two of the Cirkel boats were beached by the wave from a large berg calving. It sounds like a rifle shot when the berg separates. After a great afternoon, we headed back to the ship for a late supper.



Tomorrow, we go to Paradise Bay and Lemaire Channel, also known as Kodak Alley because of its scenic beauty. After what I've seen so far, it's hard to believe it can get any better, but then again, I also thought that yesterday! This place is magical and I fear that any moment the alarm will go off and I will realize that I have just been dreaming. But I hope not ...