

Punta Arenas - Punta Arenas (3 nights)

M/V Via Australis

Excursions per trip: 5



Day ①: Punta Arenas

Day ②: Brookes Glacier – Ainsworth Bay

Day ③: Almirantazgo Bay – Parry Glacier

Day ④: Magdalena Island* – Punta Arenas

* In September and April, this excursion is replaced by a ride aboard Zodiacs to Marta Island



Day 1: Punta Arenas



Check in at the Australis pier at 1385 O'Higgins Street (Arturo Prat Port) in Punta Arenas between 13:00 and 17:00 (1-5 PM) on the day of your cruise departure. Board the M/V *Via Australis* at 18:00 (6 PM). After a welcoming cocktail reception hosted by the captain and his crew, the ship departs for one of the remotest corners of planet Earth. During the night we cross the Strait of Magellan and enter the labyrinth of channels that define the southern extreme of Patagonian. The twinkling lights of Punta Arenas gradually fade into the distance as we enter the Whiteside Canal between Darwin Island and Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego.

Day 2: Brookes Glacier and Ainsworth Bay



By dawn, *Via Australis* is cruising down Admiralty Sound (Seno Almirantazgo), a spectacular offshoot of the Strait of Magellan that stretches nearly halfway across Tierra del Fuego. The snow-capped peaks of Karukinka Natural Park stretch along the north side of the sound, while the south shore is defined by the deep fjords and broad bays of Alberto de Agostini National Park. Dropping anchor in Brookes Bay, we launch into the first of our shore landings. Divided into two parts by a rocky promontory, Brookes Glacier stretches along a broad front, its pale blue facade topped by a stark white crown that flows down from the Darwin Ice Sheet. This very active glacier calves frequently, falling ice that creates mini tsunamis called pressure waves. Our landing is along a dark-sand beach spangled with ice chunks and glacial erratics (boulders). Continuing along the sound, we sail into Ainsworth Bay. Created by the retreat of Marinelli Glacier over thousands of years, Ainsworth is a textbook example of glacial geography and a brilliant introduction to the flora, fauna and geology of the Magallanes region. The bay was named for a British seaman who died on nearby Isla Dawson while serving aboard HMS *Adventure* in the 1820s during the first Beagle Expedition. In addition to copious bird life, the bay harbours a colony of southern elephant seals which can sometimes be spotted from the Zodiacs. Two guided excursions are available: one is along the edge of a stream, peat bog and beaver habitat to a waterfall-and-moss-covered rock face tucked deep inside a pristine sub-polar forest; the other is a more strenuous hike along the crest of a glacial moraine. Both afford views of Marinelli Glacier and the Darwin Mountains.

Day 3: Parry Fjord and Admiralty Bay



Early the next morning we drop anchor near the mouth of Parry Fjord, one of the deepest indentations of the Tierra del Fuego coast and a place with an eerie end-of-the-earth feel. The fjord is named for Sir William Edward Parry (1790-1855), the famed British polar explorer. On board the Zodiacs, we motor to the far end of the fjord to view an amphitheatre of unnamed glaciers. All four glacier types are in evidence here: tidewater, valley, hanging and renewal. The fjord is often shrouded in clouds and mist, a microclimate caused by its proximity to the Darwin Mountains. One of the few colonies of leopard seals outside of the Antarctic inhabits the fjord and they can sometimes be seen swimming amongst the icebergs.

By mid-afternoon the *Via Australis* has moved into Admiralty Bay at the eastern extreme of the sound. If the tides and weather are right, we make a Zodiac landing on a beach near the mouth of the river

inside Karukinka Natural Park, a private reserve owned and managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society. A path leads through sub-polar forest to a glacial waterfall and an area that's gradually being reshaped by beavers. A colony of around a hundred elephant seals frequent this area.

Day 4: Magdalena Island and Punta Arenas



After an overnight cruise across Admiralty Sound and back into the Strait of Magellan, we anchor off Magdalena Island, which lies about halfway between Tierra del Fuego and the Chilean mainland. Crowned by a distinctive lighthouse, the island used to be an essential source of supplies for navigators and explorers and is inhabited by an immense colony of Magellanic penguins. At the break of dawn, weather permitting, we go ashore and hike a path that leads through thousands of penguins to a small museum lodged inside the vintage 1902 lighthouse. Many other bird species are also found on the island. In September and April -- when the penguins dwell elsewhere -- this excursion is replaced by a ride aboard Zodiacs to Marta Island to observe South American sea lions.

After a short cruise south along the strait, disembarkation at Punta Arenas is scheduled for around 11:30 AM. * *Camera extension poles are prohibited on Magdalena Island.* *