

2013 Antartica Packing List

Below is a list of items that should be considered for a trip to Antartica. They are in no particular order and the data is mostly gleamed from reading different websites over the past few months.

The extremely cold and windy conditions of Antartica make clothing considerations very important. Layering is essential to keeping the body, especially the extremities, warm, comfortable, unrestricted, and perspiration-free. Assembly of the following suggested clothing items should begin well in advance of a trip to Antartica in order to ensure proper fit and comfort.

- Foundation (base) layer. This is the first layer next to the skin so it should be soft, comfortable, and able to quickly wick away perspiration. Includes a thermal or capilene long-sleeved top and long underwear of the same material.
- Insulating layer(s). These are the most variable and can be layered on as necessary. These are usually made of fleece, the modern alternative to wool.
- The outer or shell layer. This top layer needs to be windproof, but not necessarily waterproof, as there is no rain at Antarctic temperatures. The outer shell should either be made of natural down lining or synthetic materials. This jacket or coat should always have a hood attached. Examples include: polar parka, windproof jacket, or a Gore-tex jacket.
- Wool cap and insulating headband.
- Gloves or mittens with high wrist cuffs.
- Insulated high boots. These need to cover the ankles.
- Wool or synthetic fleece scarf.
- Thick, warm wool socks.
- Thick warm pants. Made of moleskin or synthetic material like fleece.
- Sunglasses and/or goggles. Antarctic summers can be intensely bright.
- Waterproof jacket (supplied by Mountain Travel-Sobek)
- Rubber boots (see additional notes enclosed)
- Waterproof pants (good quality)
- Socks - heavy wool or synthetic blend (2 pairs minimum)
- Gloves or mittens (ski type)
- Comfortable walking shoes or running shoes
- Thermal, wool, or synthetic underwear, medium or heavy weight (2 sets)
- Hat (warm) - wool, pile or synthetic blend and/or balaclava
- sun hat or visor
- lightweight pants, for men & women
- underwear, regular everyday type
- swimsuit (optional - for sauna on ship or swimming in Antartica)
- shorts (optional some people find the ship warm and wear shorts)

Bring casual and practical attire for your trip that can be worn in layers, including:

TOP LAYERS:

- Parka/Coat: Light-Mid Weight, waterproof/breathable shell jacket (roomy enough for a fleece mid-layer)
- Fleece Jacket: 200-weight fleece or performance mid-layer for the colder days
- Baselayer Top: Merino wool, silk, or polypropylene underwear is highly recommended
- Tops - Other: Comfortable cotton or similar for general everyday use on board and while in transit

BOTTOM LAYERS:

- Shell Pants: Light-Mid Weight waterproof/breathable shell pants (roomy enough for a base-mid layer)
- Mid-Layer Bottom: 100-200 weight fleece or performance layer
- Baselayer Bottom: Merino wool, silk, or polypropylene "long-johns"
- Bottoms - Other: Casual pants or jeans for general everyday use on board and while in transit

HEAD, HANDS, & FEET:

- 2 Hats: One warm hat that covers your ears, and one thinner liner-cap for warmer days
- Mittens and Gloves: Thin liner gloves under warm mittens works best. Bring extras
- Stockings: Merino wool works great! 3-4 pair of mid-weight tall socks. High enough to avoid chaffing
- Boots: Mid-height waterproof, insulated boots, such as Bogs

TRAVEL GEAR:

- Bathing Suit: Some trips offer a "cool dip" option, some have pools
- Sunscreen/Lipbalm: Antarctica is the driest and sunniest continent on earth
- Motion Medication: Across the Drake Passage can be "bumpy"

SHORE GEAR:

- Day/Back Pack: Sturdy day-pack for extra clothes, camera, water, etc.
- Sunglasses: All that snow is extremely bright. UV protected is a must
- Camera: With lots of batteries, extra storage, consider a backup camera
- Binoculars: You may not get close enough to pet the wildlife
- Wildlife Guide: To identify all the wildlife you'll see

OTHER:

- Dress Clothes: While in transit, also some cruises offer a "formal dinner night"
- Zip-Lock Style Plastic Bags: For anything you just can't get wet but want ashore

Other essential items:

- Camera with several lenses, film
- Filters (Polarisers, UV etc)
- Camera Bag (small one for boat and large one for travel)

- Binoculars for wildlife viewing
- High SPF sunscreen
- Lightweight, waterproof daypack
- Luggage
- Spare batteries
- Swiss Army pen knife, optional
- Seasickness prevention medicine

- first aid kit, including prescription medications
- toiletries
- wash cloth (optional)
- address book
- quality sunglasses or high-altitude sunglasses or Solar Shields
- spare eyeglasses or contacts (if you use corrective lenses)
- sun-blocking lotion (SP15 or higher)
- sun-blocking lip care (SP15 or higher)
- Woolite to hand wash underwear and socks
- camera & lenses
- film
- extra batteries
- film shield bag
- voltage converter & plug adaptor kit (ship is 220v and takes 2 round prong plugs)
- binoculars (with good strong distance viewing, not opera glasses)
- reading material
- writing material
- Mountain Travel-Sobek baggage tags, with cabin number
- soft-sided suitcase or duffle bag
- daypack
- Tripod/monopod/wimberly head/Sidekick
- Intervalometer
- Cable release
- Flashgun + batteries
- Hand warmers - for camping

Essential items for your Zodiac excursions

- Polar parka

It must be water resistant because Zodiac rides can be splashy. For safety reasons, it must be a bright color (red in most cases). Note: Some ships give you one free. You get to take it home.

- Woolen or fleece sweater

Don either a turtleneck sweater or a crew neck one supplemented by a neck gaiter (it works better than a scarf). For extremely cold days, you might wish to wear a thin sleeveless sweater

underneath your bulkier sweater.

Thermal underwear

Wear it directly over your skin. Get both tops and bottoms. Bring 2 pairs*.

Trousers

Put them on over your thermal underwear. Wool or corduroy are good bets. Pack 2 pairs*.

Waterproofed outer pants

Wear them over trousers. Good grade ski pants will do.

Thermal socks

Pull them on over your bare feet. Bring 2 pairs*.

Woolen socks

Choose heavy and (preferably) full-length ones. Wear them over your thermal socks. Take 2 pairs*.

Rubber winter boots

The preferred choice is knee-high Wellingtons. They are essential for an Antarctica cruise because you make wet landings. Most Antarctica cruise ships lend you a pair of Wellies for the duration of the cruise.

Winter gloves

Ski gloves work. The main point is your gloves should be well-lined and have water-resistant exteriors. Also bring a regular pair of warm gloves for casual deck use. They will also serve you as a backup should your Zodiac pair get soaked.

Winter hat

It can be a wool or fleece ski cap that can be pulled down over your ears. Alternatively, wear a winter hunter's cap with ear flaps. Also pack a long-billed baseball cap for shading your face during deck barbecues.

Polaroid sunglasses

Antarctica snow and ice are glaring - and ultra-violet rays are intense, so wear sunglasses with large polarized lenses. They should provide UV protection and cover the complete eye area. Wrap-around sunglasses are best because they protect your eyes from the low-angled Antarctica sunlight.

Swim suit

Pack one if you plan to swim in the thermal-warmed waters in Deception Island - or in the ship's pool (yes, some people do it).

Camera equipment checklist

Memory/film

Bring plenty. Estimate how many photos you think you will take, then double that number.

Battery

They lose their charge quickly in the cold. Always carry a fully charged backup when you are on a Zodiac excursion. You don't want to miss the shot of a lifetime.

Battery charger

It's essential if your camera uses rechargeable batteries.

Voltage converter

If you have a 110-volt-only charger, you need a converter to use the ship's 220-volt electricity.

Photo gloves

Ski and other thick gloves can make it difficult to manipulate the dials and buttons on your camera. Some photographers carry special gloves with finger holes. They temporarily don them (or at least the right hand glove) when a photo-op calls for frequent lens or camera-setting changes.

Small, lightweight backpack

If you bring on Zodiac expeditions a large camera and interchangeable lenses, you must wear a lightweight backpack when boarding and getting off a Zodiac. Reason: For safety's sake, both your hands must be free - and a camera or binoculars must not be dangling from your neck.

Note: Some ships give a free backpack.

Outboard motor fumes

Try to avoid the rearmost Zodiac seats, which are next to the motor. The exhaust can be unpleasant to some people.

Photography Equipment

1. Camera

DSLR v Point and Shoot?

DSLR for most activity and keep a Point and Shoot handy for Zodiac rides ins etc. Maybe keep camera and lens around neck under jacket for ride in also just in case.

Backup camera?

Plan for the worst and hope for the best. There are no shops in Antarctica, so avoid the potential heartache of returning home without any photographs by packing a backup option. If you are shooting with a DLSR, a second body that uses the same lenses is a good idea. A point and shoot is also useful as it can sit in your jacket pocket during zodiac rides just in case a whale comes out of the water in front of you when your main camera is safely packed away in your waterproof bag!

The GoPro was a popular camera with kayakers and worth considering if you are adding some adventure options to your itinerary.

2. Lenses

One of the highlights of Antarctica is the diversity of your surroundings: sweeping landscapes, icebergs of all shapes and sizes and wildlife on the ground, in the sea and in the air. If you shoot with a camera with changeable lenses, you will want a variety of lengths to capture this diversity at its best. For example:

Wide-angle lens for those sweeping landscapes
Mid-range/standard lens for general use
Telephoto lens to capture wildlife from a distance.

My Packing List

I packed the following lenses to use with my Canon 7D:

10-22mm wide-angle lens

24-105mm mid-range lens

100-400mm telephoto

My Verdict

Whilst I found myself using the 24-105mm and 100-400mm the most, I still found the 10-22mm essential for capturing the vast landscape and some of the large icebergs in Pleneau Bay. I was happy with all three lenses and would pack the same again.

There was a 600mm and a 800mm lens on board that found themselves in as many photographs as they took but the 100-400mm was probably the most popular amongst the DSLR photographers. I found this perfect for capturing wildlife.



3. Storage

Memory Cards

Everything I read about photographing Antarctica before I left included one consistent piece of advice: bring more memory cards than you think you will need...and you will use them all.

And it's true!

Laptop?

A laptop is not only a useful tool to backup your photos, but it allows you to organise and improve your images along the way. Having my laptop let me spend time on the ship critically reviewing my images in Lightroom, get advice from other photographers onboard, identify what I was doing wrong and use the wealth of available wildlife and landscape subjects to try again.

Backing up

Having a backup camera avoids the potential disappointment of not being able to take

photographs. Having a backup storage option avoids the potential disappointment of losing them once you've taken them. I backed up my photos after each landing and at least once a day, on both my laptop and a portable hard drive. I also carried a USB stick 'just in case'.

My packing list

Memory cards – three times more than usual!

Portable hard drive

Laptop

USB stick

My verdict

You need at least one backup storage option and back up on a regular basis.

There were three shared computers on board that could be used to transfer photos onto a USB for those who didn't have their own laptop. But there were some photographers who didn't bring a laptop and regretted it. It really comes down to personal taste and how you like to spend your spare time, but a laptop for me was essential.

4. Camera Bags

As you are planning your trip, you will find yourself asking: how do I carry my equipment on the plane without incurring excess baggage charges? How do I keep it safe from salt spray (or capsizing!) whilst on the zodiac? How can I carry my equipment on shore so that it is both comfortable and accessible? I read so many different pieces of advice on this subject that I realised it really just came down to personal preference. But two key pieces of advice include:

- Don't check in any camera equipment on your flight, it is just too valuable to risk. Store your camera and lenses in your carry-on bag, find out the baggage limits before you fly and be prepared to pay excess charges if you need to.

- Bring a waterproof bag to store your camera during the zodiac rides to and from the ship.



My Verdict

I'm yet to find that perfect camera bag, but I was happy with my Lowepro Slingshot during my

Antarctica trip. I've since changed to a Lowepro Pro Runner which I would also have been happy with in Antarctica. Although wheeled carry-on cases are easier to drag around airports, a backpack is the best option as you need your hands free for the zodiac rides to and from shore. The waterproof covers that come with the Lowepro bags proved adequate for the majority of the zodiac rides, but we experienced relatively calm conditions. I had a dry bag in which I placed my camera bag for zodiac rides to and from landing sights and this gave me piece of mind during our first Falkland Island landing when a lot of water came into the zodiac. One of the challenges for photographers heading to Antarctica is the carry-on allowance on local airlines who fly to Ushuaia. I was prepared to pay excess if I had to, but my luggage was never weighed and I never had an issue.

Other considerations / tips:

Tripod

I kept changing my mind about bringing my tripod and in the end I left it home – and I didn't regret it. The light in Antarctica is incredible and a tripod is not much use on a moving ship. The only people I saw using one were those who were shooting video.

The weather

There are two key risks to shooting in sub-zero temperatures:

1. Cold weather can reduce the normal life of a battery

...and you will be taking more photos than you normally do. To avoid the flashing battery icon appearing just as a penguin appears in front of you, take spare batteries. I carried one in the warmth of my inside jacket pocket and left one in my cabin. I found myself continually charging batteries.

2. Returning to the warmth of the ship after being outside in the cold can cause the chilled camera to get covered with condensation

This didn't appear to be a major problem on our expedition, but wrapping the camera in a plastic bag or towel whilst outside and then letting it warm slowly inside before unwrapping it, can help combat condensation if it is an issue. Ziploc bags are also useful to have in your pocket in case it rains in the Falkland Islands or to avoid water spray during zodiac cruises.

Filters

A polarising filter can help cut down the glare off the snow and water and increases the intensity of the sky, so it is useful but not essential. I had one with me but didn't use it very much, although this varied between other photographers on board.

Cleaning Cloths

The same cleaning equipment you would carry on any trip should be fine for Antarctica.

My Packing List

Camera & Lens

Canon 7D

Canon 7D (backup body)

10-22mm wide-angle lens

24-105mm mid-range lens

100-400mm zoom lens

Panasonic Lumix point-and-shoot

Accessories

Polarising filter

Memory cards (lots)

Two spare batteries and battery charger

Laptop, portable hard drive and USB stick

Memory card reader (for both my SD and CF cards)

Cleaning fluid and cloths

Bags

Lowepro SlingShot 302 AW

Sealline Boundary Drybag

Ziploc plastic bags

What I left at home:

Tripod

ND & Grad filters