



Heritage Expeditions

Antarctica • Western and South Pacific
Subantarctic Islands • Russian Far East

EXPEDITION DOSSIER
22ND JULY – 5TH AUGUST 2019

ACROSS THE TOP OF THE WORLD

TO WRANGEL AND HERALD ISLANDS

This unique expedition crosses the Arctic Circle and includes the isolated and pristine Wrangel and Herald Islands and a significant section of the wild North Eastern Siberian coastline. It is a journey only made possible in recent years by the thawing in the politics of the region and the retreat of summer pack ice in the Chukchi Sea. The very small distance between Russia and the USA along this border area was known as the Ice Curtain, behind which then and now lies one of the last great undiscovered wilderness areas in the world.

The voyage journeys through the narrow Bering Strait, which separates Russia from the United States of America, and then travels west along the Chukotka coastline before crossing the De Long Strait to Wrangel Island. There we will spend four to five days under the guidance of local rangers on the nature reserve. Untouched by glaciers during the last ice age, this island is a treasure trove of Arctic biodiversity and is perhaps best known for the multitude of Polar Bears that breed here. We hope to catch many glimpses of this beautiful animal. The island also boasts the world's largest population of Pacific Walrus and lies near major feeding grounds for the Gray Whales that migrate thousands of kilometres north from their breeding grounds in Baja, Mexico. Reindeer, Musk Ox and Snow Geese can normally be seen further inland. A visit to massive bird cliffs on nearby Herald Island is also planned. The 'mammoth steppe' vegetation complex, a rich and diverse relic from the Pleistocene epoch nurtures over 400 plant species and never fails to astound visitors with its sublime beauty. The number and type of endemic plant species, the diversity within plant communities, the presence of relatively recent mammoth tusks and skulls, a range of terrain types and geological formations in the small geographical space are all visible evidence of Wrangel's rich natural history and its unique evolutionary status within the Arctic.



The human history of Wrangel Island is fascinating on its own. Highlights include a 3,400 year old Paleo Eskimo camp in Krassin Bay, controversy over discovery and ownership of the island, the amazing story of the survivors of the *Karluk*, Ada Blackjack the heroine of the island, the Soviet occupation and militarisation and more

recently, the establishment of this world class nature reserve. A host of similarly enthralling stories hail from several optional landings along the northern coasts of Chukotka. Our expert expedition team will take you on guided walks, Zodiac cruises and provide lectures to help you better understand and appreciate this unique High Arctic landscape.

ITINERARY

NOTE: You can join this expedition either in Anadyr or in Nome, Alaska. Those starting in Nome will fly by a Heritage Expeditions charter flight to Anadyr and will join the ship and the expedition members who have travelled direct to Anadyr.

Day 0: Nome

Those departing from Nome, Alaska, should arrive in Nome before midday and preferably the previous night.

On arrival, you should check in with Bering Air at the Nome Airport who will have details of our charter flight. During this flight you will cross the International Date Line, arriving into Anadyr on Day 1 of the expedition. You will clear Russian Customs and Immigration.

Day 1: Anadyr

All expedition members will arrive in Anadyr; depending on your time of arrival you may have the opportunity to explore Anadyr,



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the administrative centre of the Chukotka region, before getting to know your fellow voyagers and crew on board the *Akademik Shokalskiy*. If flights have been on time we plan to depart Anadyr this evening. As we depart you are invited to join the captain, officers and the expedition team on the bridge. The Anadyr estuary is renowned for its Beluga Whales.

Day 2: Anadyrskiy Bay and at Sea

As we sail across Anadyrskiy Bay towards the Bering Strait there will be introductory lectures, an introduction to the staff and ship and a series of compulsory briefings and drills. There will also be a chance to relax or enjoy some 'birding' with our naturalists and/or settle into ship life and for many of you adjust to the time changes.

Day 3: Lavrentiya and Cape Dezhnev

We arrive in Lavrentiya Bay this morning to visit the Chukchi Region's administrative centre of Lavrentiya. The place takes its name from James Cook, who landed here on St. Lawrence's Day in 1778. We will explore the township and have the opportunity to view the mythical figure 'Pelikan', a Chukotkan sculpture which is said to have special powers, we will also visit the local museum which displays an interesting insight into Yupik and Chukchi cultures. There may be an opportunity to view Chukchi song and dance and to interact with the locals.

Sea conditions permitting, we will land at Cape Dezhnev this afternoon. The north-eastern most point of the Eurasian continent, it is sometimes possible to see the coast of America from this remote and lonely outpost. It is also an historic landmark named after the Siberian Cossack, Semyon Dezhnev, who in 1648 became the first European to sail from the Arctic to the Pacific.



© L Whitehouse

A steep scramble from the beach brings you to an abandoned Border Guard base, a monument to Dezhnev and another to all the sailors who have sailed these seas. Cape Prince of Wales in Alaska lies 89km across Bering Strait.

Day 4: Kolyuchin Inlet and Kolyuchin Island

Kolyuchin Inlet is so huge that it is visible from satellite photos; this inlet contains vast numbers of waterfowl and migratory waders. We concentrate our visit on Belaka spit near the mouth of the inlet. It is a wild, desolate landscape that is strangely beautiful. We search the dunes and tidal areas for birdlife including Emperor Geese and Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Gray Whales frequent the area and are sometimes spotted feeding only metres offshore.

Later today we will arrive at Kolyuchin Island; this small island was once an important Russian Polar Research Station and one of a number dotted across the Arctic. Sadly with the collapse of the USSR there was no money to maintain them and they were abandoned; the buildings are derelict but the wildlife the men studied are still there. Near the abandoned station at the north-western end of the island are some of the most amazing bird cliffs in the Arctic; puffins, guillemots, gulls and cormorants can be observed and photographed from just metres away.

At the south-eastern end of the island there is a prominent walrus haul out, if the animals are present it is one of the easiest places to observe them and get some good photographs.

Day 5: At Sea

We continue our journey north across the Chukchi Sea, there should be sea ice to negotiate our way through as we get closer to Wrangel Island; this may offer our first opportunities to see Polar Bears, seals and walrus on ice. In preparation for our arrival at the island tomorrow there will be briefings and lecturers.

Days 6 to 10: Wrangel and Herald Islands

Ice and weather conditions permitting, we will spend the next few days on Wrangel Island and if possible we will also include a visit to nearby Herald Island.

Wrangel Island is one of those islands that you have to visit to

appreciate. The earliest human occupation is dated 3,200 years BC and it has been established that they were seasonal hunters from Siberia. The island's presence was speculated about and marked on maps by early Russian explorers but it wasn't until 1849 that it was 'rediscovered' by the British. A Canadian expedition attempted to establish a permanent settlement and claim the island for Canada; they were evicted by the Russians who claimed the island.

Today it is a Russian Federal Nature Reserve of international significance and importance. A lot of its significance lies in the fact that it is a major Polar Bear denning area. In fact it is sometimes referred to as a Polar Bear maternity ward on account of the large numbers of pups born there. It is also the last landfall for migratory species flying north. Each summer thousands of birds migrate here to breed, including Snow Geese, Snowy Owls, skuas, Arctic Terns, Ross's, Sabine and Ivory Gulls.

There are many landings that we can make to search out wildlife, wild flowers and Arctic landscapes. Polar Bears will be high on our list of animals to see and with a little patience we should be rewarded with a number of encounters. Musk Oxen and reindeer were introduced to the island in 1975 and 1948 respectively, though reindeer numbers are low. We also have a chance to visit Dragi Harbour where the survivors of the Karluk which was crushed by ice in 1914 scrambled ashore and lived until they were rescued. If ice conditions permit, we will explore Herald Island to the east of Wrangel Island.

Day 11: At Sea, Bering Strait and North Siberian Coast

As we sail south there will be opportunities to download memory cards, share conversations and recap on our time at Wrangel Island.



We will pass the Diomed Islands, sometimes called Tomorrow Island and Yesterday Isle because they straddle the International Date Line. Here Russia and America are separated by only 2.3 nautical miles of ocean. We will remain in Russian territory as we cruise south past the islands.

In 1867 when the USA purchased Alaska from Russia the new boundary was drawn between Big (Russian) and Little (USA) Diomed Islands. This makes Big Diomed Island Russia's eastern-most possession. The island was originally inhabited by Yupik Eskimos but after World War II the native population were relocated to the mainland. Today there are no permanent residents but the Russians maintain a Border Guard station there. It is an important island for birdlife with good numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes, Common and Brunnich's Guillemot and Horned and Tufted Puffin. If the Border Guards grant permission (we have applied for it) we will Zodiac cruise the coast near the station, the bird numbers in this region are spectacular, especially puffins.

We continue along the North Siberian Coast, although well mapped and charted, there have been very few Expedition Cruises and consequently there is a lot of scope for expedition landings. Depending on weather and sea conditions we will attempt an expedition landing today. There are several choices, at Cape



Vankarem there is a seasonal large walrus haul out, the animals may or may not be present. The area around the Cape is bounded by narrow sand ridges with numerous coastal lagoons and inlets; nearby there is a small Chukchi village whose residents still make their living hunting walrus, seals and whales. There is another smaller Chukchi village called Nutepelmen which is situated on a spit at the entrance to Pyngopikhin Lagoon, further west of Cape Vankarem.

Day 12: At Sea and Masik Village

This afternoon we plan to visit Masik Village, an archaeological site at Mechigmen Bay which is part of Beringia National Park. This site consists of subterranean dwellings, food caches and possible ceremonial structures where materials used in construction were whale skulls, ribs and jawbones.

Day 13: Yttygran, Nuneangan and Arakamchechen Islands

Yttygran Island is home to the monumental ancient aboriginal site known as Whale Bone Alley. Whalebones stretch along the beach for nearly half a kilometre. There are many meat pits used for storage and other remains of a busy whaling camp that united several aboriginal villages at a time. In one location, immense Bowhead Whale jawbones and ribs are placed together in a stunning arch formation.

Gray Whales are frequently seen around the island. After landing at Whale Bone Alley we will take the Zodiacs on a whale-watching excursion. We will also cruise close inshore of neighbouring Nuneangan Island (Bird Island) where a large number of seabirds nest.

On nearby Arakamchechen Island there is a prominent walrus haul out; if the animals are present we will land and walk across the tundra to view them from the cliffs.

Day 14: Preobrazheniya Bay

Today we will be in the vicinity of Preobrazheniya Bay where there are some outstanding 'Bird Cliffs' which we will Zodiac cruise, the rock faces, ridgelines and soaring granite spires are home to an abundance of bird life. Species that can be seen include Common and Thick-billed Murres, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Least and Crested Auklets, Vega Gulls and Arctic Tern. Both Horned and Tufted Puffins are normally in vast numbers stretched along cliffside grasses.

This evening join the staff for an expedition recap and a disembarkation briefing, and then simply relax as we sail across Anadyrskiy Bay towards Anadyr. Tonight we will enjoy a farewell dinner to celebrate our journey.

Day 15: Anadyr

After breakfast it will be time to say our farewells. There will be a complimentary transfer to the airport or to a hotel of your choice.

Those returning to Nome will join a charter flight that will depart Anadyr around midday and, because of the International Date Line will arrive back in Nome on the evening of the previous day. However, we strongly advise that you do not book any onward travel from Nome until the following day to allow for possible delays in the charter flight. Those returning to Moscow can either be transferred to the airport or hotel in Anadyr, depending on their flight times.

Note: During our voyage, circumstances may make it necessary or desirable to deviate from the proposed itinerary. This can include poor weather and/or opportunities for making unplanned excursions. Your Expedition Leader will keep you fully informed.

DATES

Voyage #1906
Nome to Nome
21st July to 4th August 2019

Voyage #1906
Anadyr to Anadyr
22nd July to 5th August 2019

PRICES

Heritage Suite **\$14,500 pp**
Has a large lounge area, a separate bedroom with double bed and private bathroom. Large forward and side facing windows.

Mini Suite **\$13,650 pp**
Has a separate bedroom with a double bed, lounge and private bathroom. Large side facing windows.

Superior Plus **\$13,125 pp**
Has two lower berths and private bathroom. These cabins have windows.

Superior **\$12,075 pp**
Has one bunk (one upper and one lower berth), and private bathroom. These cabins have windows.

Main Deck **\$11,025 pp**
Has two lower berths and washbasin. The nearby showers and toilets are shared with other Main Deck cabins. These cabins have a porthole.

ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Private charter flight Nome to Anadyr to Nome **\$2,000 pp**
Local Payment **\$500 pp**
(All prices are per person in USD)

PRICE INCLUDES

Pre/Post cruise transfers, all on board ship accommodation with meals and all expedition shore excursions.

PRICE EXCLUDES

All items of a personal nature, laundry, drinks, gratuities. International/domestic flights, visas and travel insurance.



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EXPEDITION DOSSIER

WRANGEL ISLAND

OVERLAND TRAVERSES



In co-operation with the Wrangel Island Nature Reserve we are excited to offer a limited number of seats on a very special Overland Traverse through the heart of this incredible landscape.

For curious explorers who join us to circumnavigate Wrangel Island, there is no reason to just wonder what lies beyond the coast, over the crest of the hills and mountains. The High Arctic environment that very few people will ever experience is now accessible and exclusively available to passengers travelling with Heritage Expeditions on all 'Across the Top of the World' expeditions.

We are offering a limited number of seats on some very special 3-day (2-night) Overland Traverses. Transport is by a six wheel Russian built Tundra vehicle brought to the island in 2010. Each traverse is led by rangers from Wrangel Island.

We have been operating these traverses since 2011 and those who have been lucky enough to participate literally 'raved' over their experiences. Numbers are strictly limited; we encourage you to book early to avoid disappointment.



NORTHBOUND ITINERARY

Day 1: Doubtful Harbour

On arrival at Doubtful Harbour, Wrangel Island, the Overlanders will go ashore where we will spend the afternoon and evening exploring the area including the nearby spit known for large haul outs of walrus. We will also visit Devil's Creek, the only archaeological site on the island where remains of a Paleo-Eskimos summer camp were discovered recently. The overnight accommodation will be Wrangel Ranger huts at Somnitelnya.

Day 2: Somnitelnya

Departing Somnitelnya, the traverse travels north firstly over the southern tundra slopes climbing gradually to a mountain pass through the Somnitelnie Mountains. A steep descent takes us to a tributary of the Mammoth River, the longest river on the island. In the evening we will enjoy a walk on the tundra slopes with possible sightings of Snowy Owls, Lemmings, Arctic Foxes and a huge variety of High Arctic plants. We will be staying overnight at the Peak Tundra hut, a field hut for studies of the Snow Geese nesting nearby.

Day 3: Academic Tundra

After breakfast we continue down the Tundra River to the Academic Tundra, an extensive area that makes up over half the island. There are opportunities to see amazing fields of wild flowers, Musk Ox, and potentially reindeer, although numbers have been greatly reduced by recent harsh winters. We will return to the ship at midday near the Drum Head Mountains (also known as the Dream Head Mountains) on the north coast of the island.

Northbound and Southbound options available. Southbound itinerary will operate in reverse to the above itinerary.



PRICE

Cost per person (USD) **1,450 pp**

PRICE INCLUDES

Transport, accommodation (basic field huts) and meals. Please note this is in addition to the cost of the cruise.

PRICE EXCLUDES

Travel insurance, gratuities and other items of a personal nature.

This Wrangel Island extension is an optional activity and conducted in conjunction with our voyage but independently operated by the Park Rangers. It is subject to minimum numbers, reserve regulations and weather and ice conditions. Participants should be aware that there is no discount or compensation for missed landings that the main expedition makes possibly including Herald Island while they are participating in the extension.