



COOL ENOUGH... even for a teen

Trailblazing south to Antarctica is the ultimate travel destination to wow and inspire troublesome teens – and an incredible adventure for parents, too. Words: Sarah Tucker

Travelling to the South Pole in the footsteps of Shackleton, Edmonson and the ill-fated Scott, has all the makings of an unmissable adventure. With this in mind, I took Tom, my hormonally charged 15-year-old, to the fringes of the Antarctic continent.

We boarded the *Vavilov* – a compact Russian scientific research ship, able to navigate the fjords and inlets larger ships can't reach – in the Argentinian town of Ushuaia and steamed south. Mid-afternoon on our second day, we spotted our first iceberg off the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula; like an epic Henry Moore sculpture, marooned in turquoise waters.

Each day we'd leave *Vavilov* and get up close to this 'frozen planet' in Zodiacs or kayaks. On Christmas morning, we landed on Deception Island, a live volcanic spit of land and the most extraordinary place I've ever visited.

A former whaling station, crooked, old buildings and oil containers stood out against the white background like

sleeping giants. Invited to swim in the waters off the beach, only the 20 or so teenagers (part of a college party) and a few mad 40-somethings jumped in – and they loved it.

Meanwhile, polar biologists Paula and Michael were there to observe and count penguins. We were privileged to see chicks hatching, including adélie, gentoo and chinstraps, and one lone macaroni penguin – like an adorable character from *Happy Feet*.

Although there's no wi-fi or internet access onboard (yes, they will have to go cold turkey from Facebook), we found the characters onboard were as big as the icebergs out at sea. Sunniva Sorby, for example, was in one of the first all-women teams to reach the South Pole by sled (no dogs) 20 years ago. She captivated the group of 80 passengers in her presentation, with each enthralling story of near-death.

Antarctica is the ultimate travel adventure and truly one of the coolest places on earth. Even for a teenager.

HOW TO DO IT

Best for: Ages 13-17.

The details: Travel with One Ocean Expeditions (oneoceanexpeditions.com) and Round The World Experts (roundtheworldexperts.com). The next Christmas trip is 20 to 28 December 2014. Prices from \$7,395 (£4,358) per person sharing a twin cabin. Flights not included. Ground arrangements were organised by Aliwen Incoming (aliwenincoming.com) and Los Cauquenes Resort and Spa (loscauquenes.com) in Ushuaia. If you can, spend a few days in Buenos Aires as a stopover before flying onto Ushuaia – where you should ideally book a night in case of flight cancellations.