

Falkland Islands

— Splendid isolation —

It may be remote but the Falkland Islands are far from dull, thanks to its prolific wildlife. But that's not the only draw, discovers **Laura Gelder**

Split into two main islands, the Falklands archipelago lies in the South Atlantic, about 300 miles east of South America's Patagonian coast. The landscape is often stark, rugged and severe, but the culture is decidedly British.

Visitors can reach the Falklands on the weekly LAN Airways flight, via Chile, or a charter flight operated twice-weekly from RAF Brize Norton in the UK by the Ministry of Defence.

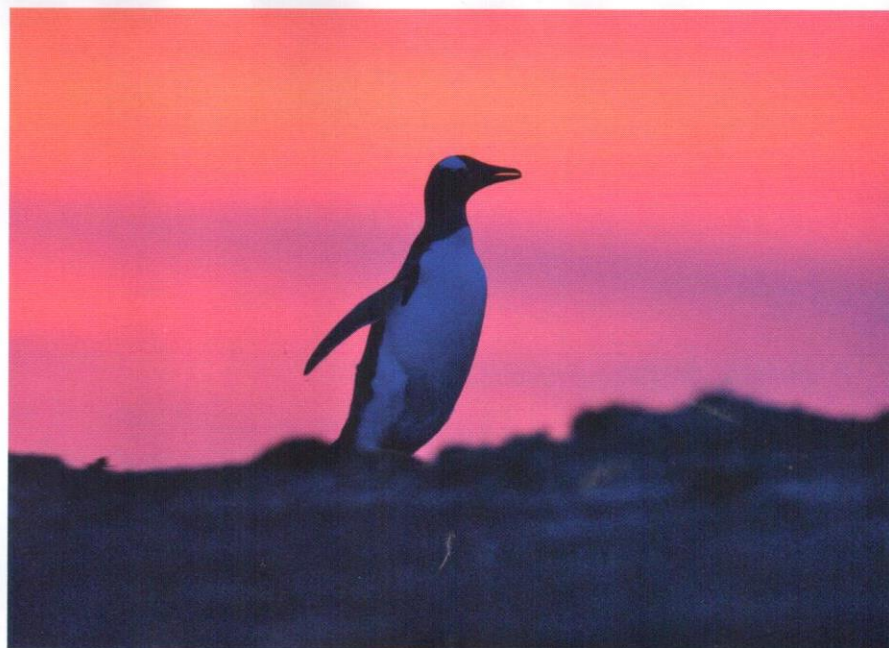
A South American or Antarctic cruise is an increasingly popular way of visiting the islands and news that expedition cruise company One Ocean is now operating Antarctic cruises starting or ending in the Falklands has opened the door for add-on stays in the islands.

The Falklands is quite rightly sold for its huge variety and density of wildlife – elephants seals, sea lions, rare birds of prey, albatross and 770,000 penguins, to name but a few. But if you are struggling to articulate the Falkland Islands experience, read on for our top five.

PENGUINS GALORE

These lovable but flightless birds are without doubt the star of the show – and there are five species which nest annually on the islands.

One of the most popular is the king penguin. These are found everywhere but by far the best



place to see them is at Volunteer Point on East Falkland, where their vast numbers add up to quite a spectacular sight.

The comic gentoo penguin is much more widespread and because they nest on low ground they are more accessible to visitors (they are also one of the few breeds to remain during the winter).

Other species include the photogenic rockhoppers, the fiery crested macaroni penguin and the burrowing magellanic penguin.

OTHER WILDLIFE

Twitcheers will be in heaven in the Falklands. Over 200 species have been recorded in the islands including two endemic: the Cobb's wren

and Falklands flightless steamer duck. Over 70% of the world's black-browed albatross population resides in the islands and many other rare species inhabit the archipelago, some classified globally as 'threatened' or 'endangered'.

West Point island is famous for its vast numbers of black-browed albatross which nest on its spectacular cliffs.

The most coveted mammal for wildlife watchers is the elephant seal, but sea lions and fur seals are also seen and the leopard seal is an occasional visitor. Male elephant seals return early in the summer and are a spectacular sight when battling to establish territories at the start of the breeding season. The hairy, black pups are born mainly during October.

Fourteen species of cetaceans have been recorded in the waters of the Falkland. Peale's and Commerson's dolphins are frequently seen along the coast, often following boats. Killer whales are also regularly observed, particularly near large seabird and seal colonies. Sightings of whales usually occur in the summer months, whilst dolphins can be seen year-round.

OUT IN THE COUNTRY

Everything outside of the capital, Stanley, is referred to as 'camp' by the locals, a term derived from the Spanish word 'campo', or countryside. Accommodation in camp ranges from tents and self-catering farms to lodges – which offer the

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“A walk around the capital, Stanley, reveals a fascinating maritime history that spans back to the 17th century”

Previous page: a penguin at sunset and Cassard House on Bleaker Island. This page, left to right: The shipwreck of the Lady Elizabeth; a striated caracara swoops; a ruddy-headed goose

best standard of comfort. Each lodge has its own distinct character and intimate atmosphere, ensuring sociable visitors meet other travellers as well as local characters. Often, guests will eat meals and take expeditions together.

The Islands' main tourist lodges are located at Port Howard, Darwin, Pebble Island and Sea Lion Island. Self-catering accommodation can be found at a selection of holiday cottages on island farms, and several locations in East and West Falkland. Stanley's principal hotels are The Malvina House and Waterfront Hotel.

UNIQUE HISTORY

The first landing on the islands is attributed to the British Captain John Strong, at Bold Cove, Port Howard on West Falkland in 1690.

A walk around Stanley will reveal a maritime history that spans back to the 17th century and signs point out the many shipwrecks which litter the harbour. History buffs can visit the Falkland Islands Museum in Stanley, to see how life in the Falklands has changed over time. Further out, Darwin and Port Egmont are good for those with an interest in early settlements. Darwin, Fitzroy and Goose Green have memorials of the 1982 war between Britain and

Argentina. Port Howard and San Carlos have museums with artifacts from the conflict and North Arm has a history museum

Falkland Island Holidays, a Destination Management Company (DMC), has announced that Darwin House Lodge near Goose Green will now run tailored history tours in the area. The company also offers a seven-night battle tour taking in Darwin, Goose Green, San Carlos, the HMS Coventry Memorial at Pebble Island, Mount Harriet and Argentine and British cemeteries.

FALKLAND FLAVOURS

Home grown is the order of the day in the Falklands, which is renowned for the quality of its lamb, mutton and beef, all of which is reared on the wide plains of the islands

Top local seafood includes mussels, scallops, local sea trout, Atlantic rock cod (locally called mullet), squid and Patagonian toothfish, often served in brochettes. Other local specialities are upland goose paté and diddle-dee berry or Teaberry jam.

Make sure your clients book in for a 'smoko'. Originally meaning a fag break, the phrase is now used to describe tea. Falklands hosts pride themselves on home-made cakes and biscuits. ■



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