

## To The End Of The World!

THE NEW STELLA AUSTRALIS CRUISE SHIP OFFERS ADVENTURE SAILINGS TO PATAGONIA

By Carrie Buckle, Vacation Agent Magazine, September 2011

For travelers seeking a once-in-a-lifetime adventure-cruise through nature at its most sublime, the new *Stella Australis* offers sailings through the remote wilderness of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. The 210-passenger ship made its maiden voyage at the end of last year. On the four-day journey from Punta Arenas in Chile to Ushuaia in Argentina, guests are likely to encounter penguins, elephant seals and native forests, as well as views of the ancient ice of the Darwin Range glaciers.



Launched in 2010, *Stella Australis* was commissioned to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of adventure-cruise specialist Cruceros Australis. The ship offers modern and comfortable amenities for the active traveler, as well as spectacular scenery, which makes this cruise exceptional. The staff is extremely knowledgeable about the region, and they impart their insights in an engaging way. The ship allows small groups to experience one of the few unspoiled destinations on the planet. Here's a day-by-day rundown of the cruise.

**Day 1: Punta Arenas.** Guests check-in at the Australis Cruceros office in Punta Arenas between 1:00 pm. and 5:00 pm., and then board the ship at 6:00 pm. Once settled into their cabins, they're invited for cocktails in the Darwin Lounge on Deck 5. They're welcomed by the captain and introduced to the officers and expedition teams. Safety instructions are given and then the ship sets sail for Punta Arenas, a city that was founded in 1848 and is located on the coast of the Strait of Magellan. Punta Arenas is the capital of the Magellan and Chilean Antarctic region, with a population of around 133,000. Shortly after setting sail, guests can enjoy a welcome dinner in the



Patagonia Dining Room. Following dinner there's a briefing in the Darwin Lounge on the navigation route.

**Day 2 : Ainsworth Bay to Tuckers Islets.** At dawn, the *Stella Australis* makes its way through Almirantazgo Sound and then sails to Ainsworth Bay in the Alberto De Agostini National Park. Visible in the distance is the Marinelli Glacier, which descends from the Darwin Range ice field.

For early risers, there's a coffee in the Sky Lounge on Deck 5, and then breakfast is available from 8:00 am. To 9:00 am. After receiving instructions on disembarking at Ainsworth Bay, guests put on life jackets and

climb into Zodiac boats. Once on shore, they can spot colonies of elephant seals that have chosen to breed here. There's the option of a short walk across the marshy landscape to a Magellan forest to observe a beaver dam. When they return to where the Zodiacs are docked, they're greeted with hot cocoa or Johnnie Walker whisky with glacial ice. Lunch on board the ship consists of a buffet with both salads and hot dishes.



In the afternoon, the ship arrives at Tuckers Islets. Since this is a fragile ecosystem, guests usually circumnavigate the main islets in Zodiacs for around an hour. They have the rare opportunity to observe a colony of Magellanic penguins that in spring usually arrives here to breed.

On another islet on the southwest part of the Whiteside Channel, guests can often see a cormorant colony, dolphin gulls and chimango caracaras, as well as many other bird species. For those who are interested, there is a "birds of the Patagonia" lecture in the Darwin Lounge in the evening. Then after dinner, there's entertainment such as bingo night. Prizes can include penguin souvenirs from the gift boutique.

**Day 3: Pia Glacier.** Guests awake to views of the Ballanero Channel on the southern coast of Tierra del Fuego, and then the ship enters the O'Brien Channel. After breakfast, there is a lecture on "Discovering Tierra del Fuego". Later in morning, guests can experience an optional visit to the engine room. Following lunch, they disembark near the Pia Glacier. There are often mini-icebergs floating in the water. If they so wish, they can take a short hike up a hill and stop to take photographs of the panoramic view over the glacier. Alternatively, they can sit on the huge rocks at the foot of the glacier and enjoy a quiet moment. The ship then continues sailing through the northwest arm of the Beagle Channel, named by the English captain Robert FitzRoy in 1830 in honor of his ship. Sailing through Glacier Alley is a memorable experience where guests can see the Romanche, Germany, France, Italy and Holland glaciers. In the early evening there's a briefing about disembarking at Cape Horn the following morning and the dinner. Afterward, there's a lecture on animal life and then a documentary screening.

**Day 4: Cape Horn to Wulaia Bay.** The ship sails through the Murray Channel and Nassau Bay, and approaches Cape Horn at dawn. Cape Horn, a mere 425-meter high rocky peninsula, was discovered in 1616. Famous for being an important navigation route between the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans, it's known as "the end of the Earth". Weather permitting (the waters can be choppy) guests have the opportunity to disembark in a Zodiac boat. On arrival at Hornos Island, they can climb a steep, 160-step wooden walkway to the Cape Horn Memorial. Then they can walk to the other side of the island to a lighthouse and a tiny wooden church.

Once back on the ship, guests can warm up with a hot breakfast while watching the waves crashing outside. After lunch, there's a "Darwin in Patagonia" lecture. The captain talks about historic Wulaia Bay which the ship visits that afternoon. Rich in folklore, Wulaia Bay is where one of the region's largest Yamana aboriginal settlements was once located. English Captain FitzRoy and Charles Darwin made contact with them when they landed in 1833 during the voyage of the HMS Beagle.



Disembarking at Wulaia Bay, guests can visit an old naval radio station built in 1930, which Cruceros Australis has turned into a museum to educate its passengers about the area's heritage.

Guests then get the chance to trek through a Magellanic forest abundant with native ferns. Sitting at a lookout point overlooking the breathtaking scenery is a perfect end to an incredible trip. Following a farewell dinner in the evening, there's champagne, a raffle of the ship's flag and an auction of the navigation chart used on the crossing to Cape Horn.

Day 5: Ushuaia. Having navigated a total of 586 nautical miles during their Stella Australis adventure, guests disembark after breakfast at the Argentinean city of Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world. Located on Tierra del Fuego, the city has a population of around 65,000. It was founded in 1884 and was one of the first meeting points of the Yaghan inhabitants and the Anglican



missionaries. If they have time, guests should visit Tierra del Fuego National Park, one of the most well known parks in Argentina.

The *Stella Australis* itself is a comfortable and intimate ship with a gross tonnage of 4,500 and a passenger complement of a little over 200. Following is a roundup of the ship's features.

**Accommodations:** The ship has 100 cabins. Ninety-six are 16.5 square meters, and four superior cabins with larger beds measure 20.5 square meters. The décor is modern, with a fresh palette of blue and white. Cabins feature picture windows (of varying size depending on the room category), independent climate controls, bathrooms and satellite phones. Guests can choose between a cabin with a double bed or two twin beds.

**Public Spaces:** There are three lounges, including the Yamana Lounge, which has a bar and game room. There is the Sky Lounge on Deck 4 and the Darwin Lounge on Deck 5, as well as a fully equipped gym. All

lounges feature picture windows with great views, as well as modern audiovisual equipment for educational presentations.

**Dining:** The ship's main restaurant, the Patagonia Dining Room on Deck 1, serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. Dinners are a-la-carte, while lunches and breakfast are buffet-style. The varied menu includes a mix of international cuisine and regional specialties, as well as Chilean and Argentinean wines.



**Excursions:** Daily excursions are offered via Zodiac boats and guests are accompanied by expert guides. To complement these outings, guests can attend fascinating presentations (in both English and Spanish) on the region's flora, fauna, wildlife, geography, glaciology and history. The cruise is suitable for all ages, from babies to seniors, as all the excursions are optional.

**Rates:** Prices range from \$1,498.00 to \$3,685 per person, cruise only, for four nights, inclusive of accommodations, all meals, selected beverages during open hours, shore excursions and on board entertainment...Children of all ages are permitted on the cruise. Those between four and 12 get a 50% discount if sharing the cabin with an adult.