

THE STORY THAT FOLLOWS IS NOT JUST THE STORY OF A SAILOR WHO IS WRITING NEW CHAPTERS IN THE HISTORY OF BLUEWATER NAVIGATION BUT IT'S ALSO THE TALE OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP: THE ONE BETWEEN SKIP NOVAK AND MARCO ALBERTI, THE GENERAL MANAGER OF THE SOUTHERN WIND SHIPYARD.

SOUTHERN WIND  
SAILING ACADEMY

INSPIRING BLUEWATER  
ADVENTURES FOR  
SOUTHERN WIND  
SAILING ACADEMY

# SKIP NOVAK

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Born in **1952**, he is best known for his participation in four Whitbread Round the World Yacht Races since **1977**.

**1979** - Winner of the Parmelia Race from Plymouth to Freemantle, Australia, skippering the Independent Endeavour.

**1985/86** - Skipper of Simon Le Bon's Drum in the Whitbread Race, coming third.

**1987** - Wishing to combine his mountaineering skills (New Zealand and the Alps, expeditions to East Africa, Sikkim, Nepal, Patagonia, South Georgia and Antarctica) with sailing, he built the expedition yacht Pelagic in Southampton.

**1997** - Co-skipper with Bruno Peyron of the French catamaran Explorer to a sailing record in the Transpac Race from Los Angeles to Honolulu.

**1998** - Co-skipper on Explorer with Bruno Peyron, breaking the sailing record from Yokohama to San Francisco.

**2001** - Co-skipper on the 33-metre French catamaran Innovation Explorer to a second place in the millennium non-stop, no limits circumnavigation The Race.

**2002/03** - Project manager of the construction of his new Pelagic Australis, a 23-metre purpose built expedition vessel for high latitude sailing in order to augment the charter operations of the original Pelagic.

**2015** - Awarded the prestigious Blue Water Medal from the Cruising Club of America for his lifetime of voyaging to high latitudes.

**2016** - Awarded the prestigious Tilman Medal for his lifetime of leading sailing to climb expeditions in high latitudes from the Royal Cruising Club in the UK.

Skip sits on the Panel of Experts that vets expeditions to South Georgia on behalf of the South Georgia government. He is also on the Executive Committee of IAATO (International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators).



We meet our dear friend Skip Novak, one of the world's leading experts in Antarctic and around the world racing, at the pizzeria Nonna Lina in a green and leafy neighbourhood in the heart of Cape Town. Marco Alberti, General Manager of the Southern Wind Shipyard, is also with us.

Skip and Marco are two very different men who share a common passion for sailing and the sea. Last winter they sailed with their families from the Falkland Islands all the way to Tierra del Fuego following the values and the philosophy that lie behind the Southern Wind Sailing Academy, whose mission is: "to provide tailored learning-to-sail experiences with the support of the most reliable and experienced instructors." Skip Novak is surely one of those instructors.

"I dreamed about visiting Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia having passed them by many times during Whitbread Round the World Races," says Novak. "My passion turned into a business, but it is still a passion. I suppose my biggest accomplishment and pleasure has been taking many people, including old friends, down to the places I love so we can share the experience. The most recent group of friends was Marco and his family."

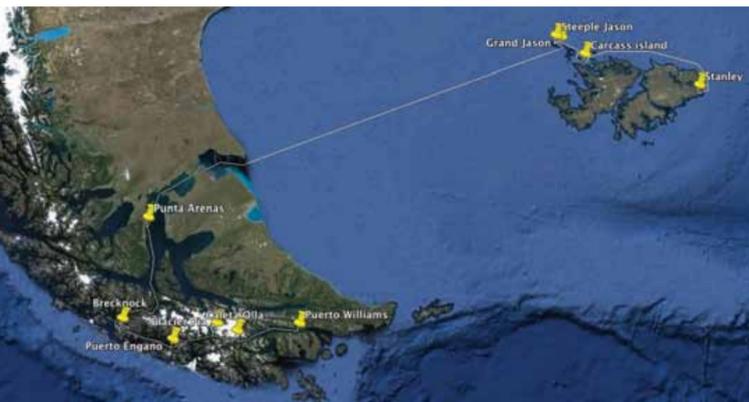
Marco Alberti recalls: "It all began with a gift I received for my 50th birthday from Skip and his wife Elena, both good friends and die-hard sailors. The gift was an invitation for me and my family to come for a cruise in the Falkland Islands and Tierra del Fuego on board Skip's boat, the Pelagic. My idea was to give our children Livio, aged 15, and Gita, aged 9, a totally new experience in exploring a wild region by sailing boat. Safety was naturally very important, and that's where Skip comes in." Safety is one of the core concepts behind a successful expedition and it's the main theme behind Novak's expedition philosophy, both on land and on the water. "Sailing in and around the Southern Ocean, including the Falkland Islands and Tierra del Fuego can be risky," says Novak. "Needless to say, it's a windy place with volatile weather in general; the climate is cool to bitterly cold which has a physical as well as a psychological effect on crews. The key here, unlike on the race course, is to be conservative, take your time for all manoeuvres, think of what can happen and how to mitigate any problems."

Marco tells us about the calm determination with which Novak led the expedition, a mindset that was fundamental for the crew, half of



which was made up of children: "Everything aboard was done following set precautions. When we left the boat to go ashore, for example, we'd leave a safety barrel stocked with food, a stove, a first aid kit, a shelter, an Iridium phone and VHF radio and other supplies in order to be able to survive ashore in relative comfort for at least two days - just in case we had trouble getting back to the boat."

**"MY BASIC PHILOSOPHY WHEN SETTING OFF ON THIS TYPE OF EXPEDITION IS ALWAYS THE SAME, BE IT WITH MY CHILDREN OR WITH CHARTER GUESTS: NO MATTER THE LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO SAIL SAFELY."**



**ITINERARY**

**1 - Stanley (Falkland Islands)**

A community of hard-core sailors congregates here before heading off to the more distant areas of the Southern Hemisphere.

**2 - Carcass Island (Falkland Islands)**

The bare windblown hills and rocky mountaintops of Carcass Island, home to elephant seals and an important bird area, are similar to some of the more desolate areas of Scotland.

**3 - Jason Islands (Falkland Islands)**

Two of the islands have been bought by a New York philanthropist who has donated them to the Wildlife Conservation Society. The Jason Islands are home to the largest colony of albatrosses in the world.

**4 - Punta Arenas (Chile)**

Punta Arenas, where time seems to have stopped in about 1950, is the capital of Chile's southernmost region, Magallanes and Antartica Chilena. Expedition boats and cruise ships take turns provisioning here by berthing along a single long dock.

**5 - Peninsula Brecknock (Chile)**

A spectacular bay with a big waterfall fed by melt from snow-capped mountain peaks.

**6 - Seno Pia, Beagle Channel (Tierra del Fuego, Chile)**

Seno Pia is a bay in the Beagle Channel. There is an immense glacier with a palette of colour shades ranging from transparent white to deep sky-blue.

**7 - Caleta Olla (Tierra del Fuego, Chile)**

The ground here looks soft and mossy. Land and water merge in grey and misty air accented by splashes of strong colour. The indigenous Yamana people used to chip their arrowheads out of the basalt they found on this beach.

**8 - Port Williams (Chile)**

Founded in the 1950s as a base for Chile's navy, the Univeesidad de Magallanes has a centre here and the town hosts scientific expeditions that study the Antarctic and the Tierra del Fuego.

What can a person who is setting off to sail in these wild, infrequently visited waters expect? "We have an itinerary of course, but a big part of what we 'sell' if I may use that word, is uncertainty: we never know if we can follow the route that we planned. Everybody has to buy into the project with an open mind. Philosophically, I have no interest in repeating things so I encourage my skippers to try new anchorages and new passages. That keeps the crew interested and fresh and our clients feeling they are part of the 'edge' that I spoke about."

"We ran out of water, for example," says Marco, "so we changed route to go into a bay where a waterfall ran straight into the sea. Skip anchored the boat with the bow towards the cliff face and we tied up to some trees. Some gymnastics were required, but it was great fun. Using a hose and funnel we filled our 500-litre water tanks. Fresh water seemed like such a precious gift, just pouring down like that from the mountain. We cleaned the boat and washed a lot of clothes, while the kids were either paddling around in our kayak or learning how to drive the dinghy. It wasn't a planned part of the trip, but it was a special day."

One of the main challenges, for an "adventure manager" like Skip Novak is to find the way to get everyone aboard involved in daily tasks. It can be difficult both from a risk and from a diplomatic point of view. "We don't force the issue, but the ethos on board is full participation to each one's ability. That means sailing the boat, standing watches, supporting mooring procedures, cooking and cleaning. One of my goals with charter guests is for them to feel they have truly contributed to the expedition. This is not lip service. What we do requires the combined efforts of everyone on board, certainly in a physical sense!"

**"ALL THE CHILDREN LEARNED HOW TO HELM THE PELAGIC, HOW TO TRIM THE MAINSHEET, HOW TO READ A COMPASS AND HOW TO KEEP AN EYE ON THE RADAR," SAYS MARCO PROUDLY.**

Marco's wife Bettina adds: "Life on board was tight, but manageable. As a family we could close a cabin door behind us and if one of us needed to opt out for a while it was possible. I had feared claustrophobia but as the intimacy grew between our two families I actually enjoyed the closeness of living on top of each other. It was nice to watch the kids become more creative in the absence of their electronic devices."

It's getting late, but we can't help asking one final question: for how much longer will Skip be sailing and having adventures in these seas? He smiles from under his moustache and says, "My enthusiasm has never waned. So I suppose as long as the body holds out!"

