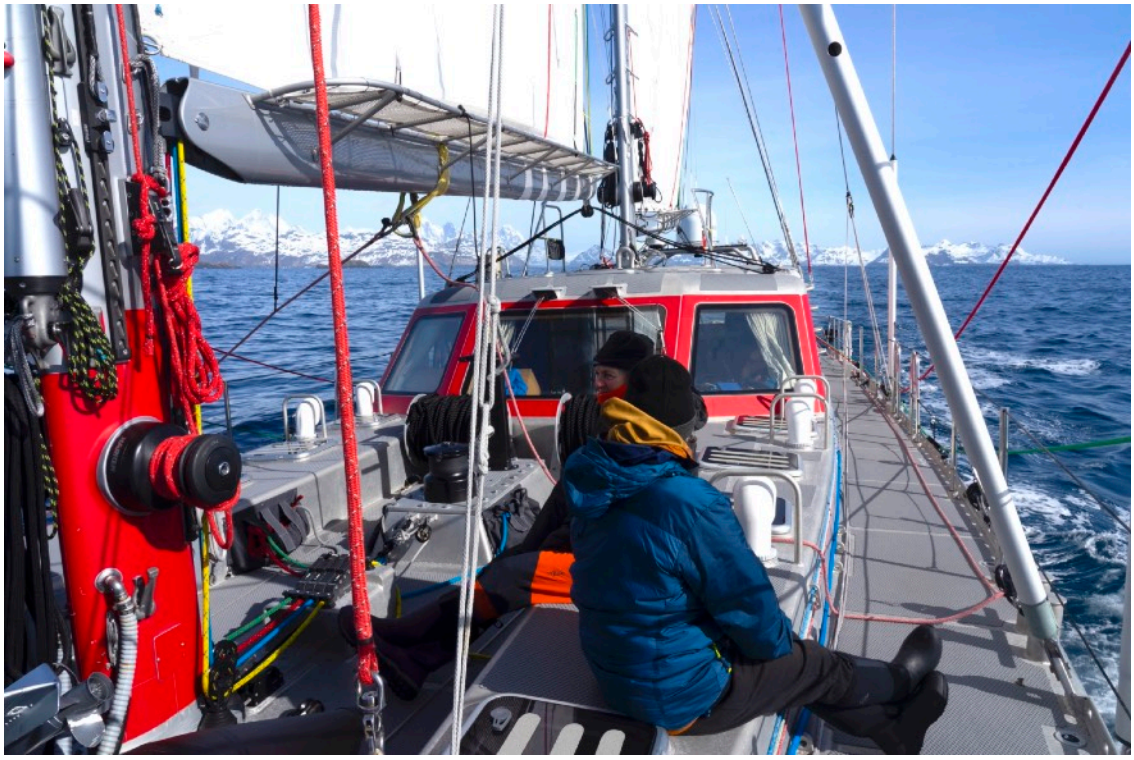


A yacht-based expedition to
South Georgia
August 29 – October 3 2026

Sailing to South Georgia
to explore the island's unique
wildlife, polar heritage and spring skiing.

The old whaling station at Grytviken.

SOUTH GEORGIA ADDICTION

This will be my thirteenth visit to South Georgia. I first went there in 1989 as co-leader of the Southern Ocean Mountaineering Expedition. I then returned in 2000 to take part in the IMAX film 'Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure' with Reinhold Messner and Conrad Anker. Then, starting in 2008, I did a series of ski-mountaineering expeditions based on Skip Novak's *Pelagic Australis*, and more recently *Vinson of Antarctica* and her sister ship *Amundsen*, several of them led jointly with Skip. Most of these expeditions included an extended camping trip, often including several days tentbound during blizzards; and it always struck me that often the best part of the trip was getting back to the comfort of the boat and using it as a base for walks ashore and day ski trips, without all the hassle of carrying heavy camping equipment. So that is the plan for 2026 – a series of day excursions from some of the most beautiful anchorages in the world. There are eight places available for anyone who shares my addiction to wild glaciated mountains rising straight out of the Southern Ocean. Non skiers are just as welcome as experienced ski mountaineers.

ACTIVITIES ON OFFER

This is an opportunity to experience ocean sailing on a superlative vessel, with an extremely experienced skipper and crew. Guests are encouraged to help with sailing the boat, regardless of previous experience, and everyone does watches during the voyage from the Falklands to South Georgia, which usually takes four or five days.

Compared to many yachts operating in the Southern Ocean, the Pelagic vessels are extremely spacious and well equipped. Everyone gets his or her own comfortable bunk in a heated cabin. Communal areas include a large, warm, dry pilot house on deck, and below deck a large saloon, library and galley with room to sit everyone round the dining table.

Taking in a reef off the south coast .

Cumberland West Bay from the summit of Narval Peak.

The desalinator insures enough fresh water for everyone to have regular hot showers and the boat is equipped with daily internet access. There is a large stock of both preserved food and fresh meat, cheese, fruit and vegetables on board, plus plentiful stocks of soft drinks, beer and wine. Although the crew are always excellent cooks, guests are encouraged to help with cooking too.

Ski ascent above Ocean Harbour and feeding time at St Andrews's.

This is will be our floating base camp once we get to South Georgia, taking us to a series of beautiful anchorages. Unlike passengers on large cruise ships, we have the chance to go ashore frequently and spontaneously, to a huge variety of sites. Arriving in early spring, we will probably be the only people on the island, apart from a handful of British Antarctic Survey staff at the King Edward Point base next to Grytviken. However, many of the migratory birds and mammals *will* already have arrived for the start of the breeding season, including the immense bull elephant seals, returning after nine months away sat sea.

For experienced skiers, South Georgia offers fine off-piste skiing at the seaside, with penguins, seals and albatrosses for audience. Needless to say, there are no ski lifts, so we have to climb – usually on skins – to earn our descents. On five previous September expeditions we have nearly always been able to ski right from the beach. However, it may be necessary on occasion to carry skis for the first few hundred metres over snow-free beach and tussock grass. Most of the proposed journeys are on ice-free parts of the north coast. However, some excursions may take us on to glaciers, where we will travel roped. One or two excursions will include a mountain summit.

The mountains around Possession Bay.

Because much of the north coast is not glaciated, it is safe for non-skiers to go for quite adventurous walks, using snowshoes if necessary. Many, many happy hours can be spent at places like St Andrew's Bay, just standing and watching the elephant seals, fur seals, petrels and penguins. And everyone will have a chance to visit the old whaling station and museum at Grytviken

Skiing up Narval Peak above Grytviken.

Cobblers Cove.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SKIERS

On an ideal day, on the easiest slopes, with a well-packed snow crust, we could find short descents equivalent to a simple red run in the Alps. However, conditions on South Georgia are often not ideal and we will be skiing in remote mountain country, where the only rescue service is what we provide for ourselves. So anyone wishing to take part needs to be a competent black run skier and have **ski touring experience**. You need to be totally familiar with climbing on skins, use of avalanche transceiver, and basic climbing with ice axe and crampons.

REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-SKIERS

If you have no skiing experience – or no desire to ski – this is still a wonderful way to see South Georgia. Apart from good health and a willingness to live for four weeks at fairly close quarters with up to thirteen people, no special qualifications are required. Pelagic crews are aways extremely experienced and pride themselves on organising interesting shore trips. The only equipment you will need – apart from a camera with many Gigabytes of memory – is standard cold weather protective clothing and warm boots. (Pelagic Expeditions provides foul weather sailing gear). If you sign up for the expedition I will send a full kit list and can advise you about helpful suppliers.

Windy conditions in the Salvesen Range.

THE BOAT

The new 77ft vessel *Amundsen* is identical to *Vinson of Antarctica*, which was based closely on Skip Novak's famous *Pelagic Australis,* purpose-built for expedition support work, with ample storage space for mountaineering and ski equipment, comfortable accommodation, a large convivial

Vinson of Antarctica.

saloon with internet communications, excellent galley, lavish larder and well-stocked wine cellar. The shallow draft also enables her to anchor or tie up in very shallow waters sometimes inaccessible to other boats. The powerful twin motors ensure that return passages are always completed to schedule, and no-one misses vital flights home.

For more information on the fleet, please visit www.vinsonofantarctica.org

Dawn in the Bay of Isles.

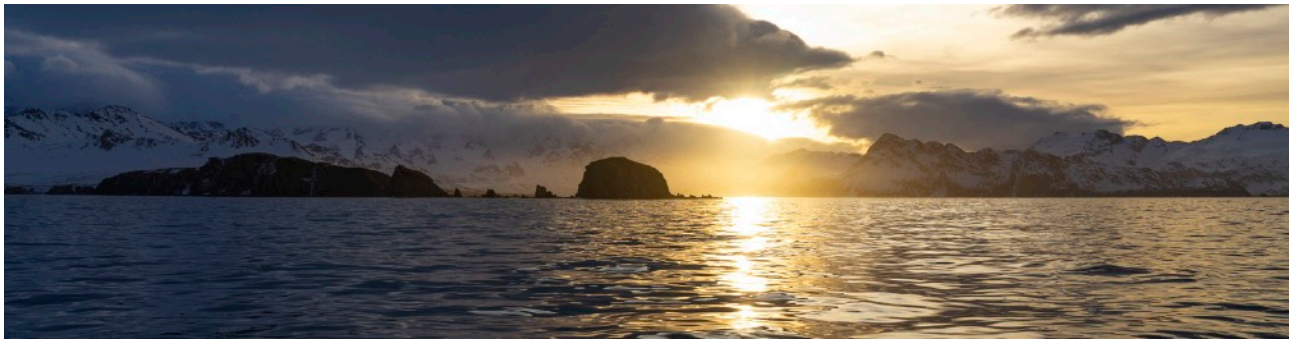
WEATHER AND CONDITIONS

South Georgia, like the British Isles, has a fickle climate, dictated largely by the prevailing westerlies, in this case blasting clockwise round Antarctica. It is quite a blowy place, famous in particular for the katabatic winds which sometimes funnel down off the glaciers to whip up the waves in the most sheltered anchorages. Which is why it is so reassuring to be in a large, robust, well heated vessel, with powerful twin engines and a hugely experience crew to operate her. Despite all that, during twelve expeditions to the island the weather has never stopped me from carrying out our programme (or at least a modified version of our programme). I have spent many happy afternoons sitting on the beach in warm sunshine. During our 2022 ski tour we enjoyed a week's continuous fine weather, with perfectly frozen snow glittering under blue skies. In 2016, after an initial four days blizzard, we enjoyed ten days continuous high pressure over the island.

Iced in at Grytviken. Swimming at Grytviken.

EXPEDITION TIMETABLE

This is only a **very rough guide** to our schedule, based on previous experience. The exact programme we eventually follow will probably be quite different, depending on weather, and on the composition and ambitions of the party. This is merely a suggestion of possibilities, based on what has worked well on six previous expeditions. At some point we are obliged legally to tie up at Grytviken for our official registration; everything else is flexible. Amongst the possibilities listed below, are sections of the famous traverse made by Ernest Shackleton and companions in 1916.



Sailing home from St Andrew's Bay to Cobblers Cove.

This is a chance to get a first hand glimpse of the terrain they travelled through. However, the more time we spend at that northwestern end of the island, the less time there will be to explore what are to my mind even more tempting areas further south. Either way, we will definitely at some stage liaise with Skip's party which will be operating from the other boat. Nearer departure time, I will probably draw up a revised timetable. But that will almost certainly be revised again once we get to South Georgia!

Aug 29 Arrive in Stanley and board the Pelagic vessel.

Aug 31 Sail from Stanley.

Sept 5 Likely arrival on South Georgia. Anchor at Elsehul at northwest end of island.

Sept 6 Visit seals and penguins on Elsehul beach. Walk/skin up Hope valley to

Fur seal watching over Elsehul. Walking up Hope Valley (taken in late October when there is less snow).

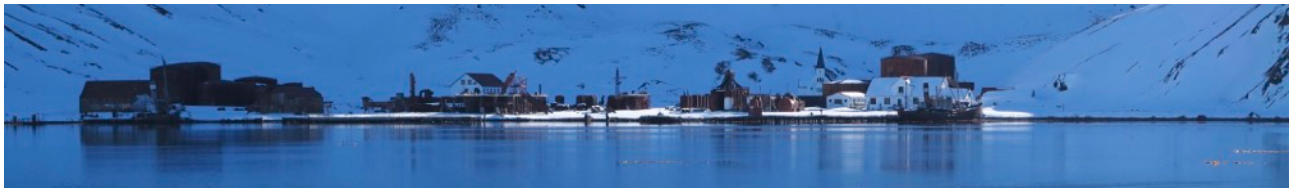
snow peaks and introductory skiing.

Sept 7 Sail east to Bay of Isles and visit albatross colony on Prion Island and/or King Penguin colony at Salisbury Plain. Continue east to anchor in Possession Bay.

Sept 8 From Possession Bay skip up Purvis Glacier, cross col to Shackleton Gap and descend to pick-up in Assistance Bay. Sail to Fortuna Bay.

Sept 9 From Fortuna Bay, ski up Turnback Glacier to Fortuna Glacier, joining the Shackleton Traverse, crossing Breakwind Ridge back to Fortuna Bay.

Dawn in Fortuna Bay and skiing over Shackleton's last pass to Stromness.



Grytviken.

Sept 10 Ski final section of Shackleton Traverse from Fortuna Bay Stromness. Sail from Stromness to Grytviken.

Sept 11–12 Based at Grytviken. Registration and inspection with Government of South Georgia. Visit whaling station museum. Possible ski tours to Maiviken, Echo Pass, Narval Peak and Mt Petrel.

Ski above Grytviken and Shackleton's grave.

Sept 13 Sail round Barff Peninsula to anchor in Cobblers Cove. Afternoon ski above the cove.

Sept 14 Sail to Ocean Harbour. Ski up Black Peak and descend to Cumberland East Bay. Back to Cobbler's Cove.

Sept 15 Sail to St Andrew's Bay to visit the world's biggest King Penguin colony. If conditions are suitable, anchor overnight in St Andrew's Bay.

Sept 16 Early start to ski up Cook Glacier and attempt second ascent of Mt Fagan, Before skiing back down to St Andrew's Bay.

Going ashore in Ocean Harbour and skiing down Black Peak.

Icebergs off King Haakon Bay.

Sept 17– 25 Further ski tours at northwest end of island.

Sep 26 – Oct 1 Window of opportunity for return voyage to Stanley, departure date depending on weather forecast.

Oct 2 Farewell dinner with crew in Stanley.

Oct 3 Transfer to Mt Pleasant Airport for flights home.

St Andrew's Bay.

THE LEADER

Stephen Venables has been climbing for over 50 years and has made first ascents all over the world, including a new route up Mount Everest without supplementary oxygen, and six previously unclimbed summits on South Georgia. He is a past president of both the Alpine Club and the South Georgia Association and has published eleven books about his mountain travels. In the far south he has made one expedition to Tierra del Fuego, five to the Antarctic Peninsula and twelve to South Georgia. This will be his sixteenth expedition with the Pelagic fleet.
www.stephenvenables.org

Please note that although Stephen Venables has extensive experience leading polar ski-mountaineering groups, he is not a certified mountain guide. If there are more than three or four skiers in the party, he will be assisted by another experienced ski-mountaineering leader.

Price: £22,000 per person

This is a special group expedition rate based on a party of 8 paying members for 35 days on board the new Pelagic 77 boat.

Included:
Thirty-five days charter.
All food, soft drinks, wine and beer on board and ashore in Antarctica.
Specialist foul weather gear on board.
Communal climbing and safety equipment.

Art installation on the Esmark Glacier.

Not included:
Travel to and from the Falkland Islands.
Food and accommodation en route to the Falklands (probably three nights in Santiago).
Final night dinner ashore in Stanley.
Insurance.
Personal clothing and equipment. (Full equipment list provided on signing up for expedition).

Booking conditions:
Your contract will be with Pelagic Expeditions, and the payment schedule is:

On booking:	£8,000
1 March 2026:	£7,000
1 July 2026:	£7,000

For full terms and conditions see the Pelagic website: www.pelagic.co.uk

I do hope that you will be able to join us on this wonderful adventure. And please get in touch if you would like to discuss our plans in more detail.

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For detailed specifications and the full story of the Pelagic fleet, visit http://www.pelagic.co.uk and www.vinsonofantarctica.org