

GOING PLACES

JOHN GOONEY



HAPPY FEET IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS



If you'd asked me 12 months ago where I would most like to spend a free Tuesday, I would not have chosen the Falklands. Sure, I knew they were somewhere south on the underside of the world. And I knew there'd been a war. But I didn't know these rugged, rocky, wind-swept islands on the edge of the tempestuous Southern Ocean are home to more than a few British, Scottish and Kiwi expats. And I didn't know this chilly spot is penguin-paradise ...

Fortunately, the decision to visit the Falklands was made *for us* when we booked a cruise around South America, because that particular Tuesday turned out to be fully fantastic and utterly unforgettable!

To put it all in context ...

We'd flown several days earlier from Auckland – across the Pacific and over the snow-capped Andes – to Buenos Aires, Argentina's Spanish-flavoured 'tango-town' (pop. 13 million). From there, we sneaked a detour north into the thundering mists of eye-popping Iguazu Falls. Then it was back to Buenos Aires and our waiting cruise-ship.

The Falklands Islands were stopover #4 on a three-week adventure that would eventually take us around legendary Cape Horn (at the very tail-end of the continent) ... then up through the awesome Chilean Fjords ... until reaching Peru and Machu Picchu (Lost City of the Incas).



We sailed all night to reach the Falklands (a remote archipelago of two main islands plus 776 smaller bits). And, when we dropped anchor out from Port Stanley in the bleak grey dawn, I couldn't help wondering why humans would want to live here.

Charles Darwin felt the same when he arrived on the *Beagle* in 1833: "*The whole landscape had an air of extreme desolation ...*" But as we Kiwis chugged to shore aboard our ship's orange life-boats, a big sign 'Welcome to the Falkland Islands' greeted us, and the colourful Stanley township took on an olde-worlde character of its own.

Our transport that Tuesday morning – a genuine London double-decker bus – reminded us that we were on British soil. And, from our top-deck seats, we were soon eyeballing the town's significant buildings, landmarks, museums and shipwrecks – plus learning some essential Falklands history: like the 11-week war in 1982 that put these



BEFORE YOU GIVE SOMEONE A PIECE OF YOUR MIND, MAKE SURE THERE'S ENOUGH TO GO AROUND.



islands on the front page and cost 900 Argentine and British lives.

Our guide for those two informative hours was a New Zealander (surprise, surprise) – as was the lady co-ordinating our afternoon wildlife trip! And, following lunch (fresh-caught-fish and chips at the quaint old Victory Tavern), we careened off across private farmland in bucking, bouncing, lurching Land Rovers.

Our destination? A penguin colony, where 1000 pairs of Gentoos penguins nest on lumpy peat beside a sandy beach.

What can I say? They were GORGEOUS! Most of them were teenagers, we were told ... busy moulting as they stood, rank upon rank, face-on to the stiff breeze ... or flopped down asleep on their plump white tummies. Far from being scared of us two-legged mammals, they were curious as – waddling up boldly, looking at us sideways, pecking our hands, sniffing our cameras and begging to be photographed.

Most of the adult birds were out at sea, apparently, filling up on fish for their hungry brood. But, here and there, we saw parents regurgitating gooey treats into open waiting beaks, and the

occasional babysitter with a chick tucked under her feathers.

King penguins – a taller, more regal variety with brighter orange colouring – have their own breeding grounds further around the coast. But a few of these beauties could be seen amongst our cuddly Gentoos. And down on the beach we spotted some Magellanic penguins (smaller with black beaks) splashing in the shallows.

It was MAGIC, I tell you! I felt like David Attenborough at a *Happy Feet* launch! And if it wasn't for the biting wind and the potent stink of penguin-poop (and the fact that the ship might leave without us) I could've stayed for hours.

Finally, reluctantly, I was lured into the nearby Sea Cabbage Café for some hot-chocolate and home-made cake. And as we bucked, bounced and lurched our way back across the rocky, boggy landscape to Port Stanley (and our centrally-heated cruise-ship), the sun went slowly down over the faraway Falkland Islands. ❁

ARE DESTINATIONS LIKE THIS ONE IN SOUTH AMERICA ON YOUR 'BUCKET-LIST'? WELL, JOIN JOHN & ROBYN COONEY ON THEIR MIDLIFE MADNESS CRUISE IN JAN/FEB 2013 – PHONE 0800 277 477 OR VISIT WWW.JOHNCOONEY.CO.NZ.



Join Grapevine's John & Robyn Cooney for 25 stunning days on this grand cruise-adventure

MIDLIFE MADNESS IN SOUTH AMERICA

JAN/FEB 2013

featuring a luxury cruise on the 5-star *ms Veendam* ... with stopovers in Buenos Aires, Iguazu Falls, Montevideo, Falkland Islands, Ushuaia, Punta Arenas, Puerto Montt, Valparaiso, Santiago ... plus Cuzco (Peru) & Machu Picchu

phone 0800 277 477 – roger.glynan@lionworld.co.nz