



YET ANOTHER WILD SOUTH AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Happy Feet in the Falklands

YOU'VE HEARD OF THE **FALKLANDS** – RIGHT? AND you know there was a war – right? But did you know that these rugged, rocky, wind-swept islands are home to more than a few British, Scottish and Kiwi expats? And did you know that this chilly spot is also a **penguin-paradise**? Prior to our previous South American cruise, we knew little about the Falklands. But we such had **a fabulous, unforgettable day** out there on the edge of the tempestuous Southern Ocean that we can't wait to do it again next year ...

We'd sailed all night to reach this remote archipelago (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 ashore, a big sign 'Welcome to the Falkland Islands' greeted us, and colourful Stanley took on an olde-worlde character of its own.

Our transport that 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: in particular, the savage 11-week war in 1982 that put these 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 **Gentoo penguins** nest on lumpy peat beside a sandy

beach. What can I say? They were GORGEOUS! Most were teenagers, we were told ... busy moulting as they stood face-on to the stiff breeze ... or flopped down asleep on their plump white tummies. And far from being scared of us, they waddled up boldly, looking at us sideways, pecking our hands, sniffing our cameras and begging to be photographed. The adult birds were mostly 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 – taller, more regal, 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! 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) we could've stayed for hours.

Finally, reluctantly, we were lured into the nearby **Sea Cabbage Café** for some hot-chocolate and home-made cake. And as we bucked, bounced and lunched our way back across the rocky, boggy landscape the sun went slowly down over the faraway Falkland Islands.