



Another battle with cancer hasn't slowed Wendy Chioji down. She recently went on an expedition to Antarctica, which was the seventh continent she has visited.

ANTARCTICA BY SAILBOAT

Wendy Chioji's Latest Adventure Takes Her to the Earth's Southernmost Continent. Here's What She Discovered!

BY WENDY CHIOJI

When my friends, Laura and Fede, asked if I wanted to sail on their 66-foot Ocean Tramp from southern Argentina to Antarctica, I was all-in. I had to do some logistical juggling with my clinical trial requirements, but I gave an equivocal “yes” pretty quickly.

It would be my seventh continent to bag, and getting there by sailboat would make the trip even more epic. I get outrageously seasick just watching sailing videos, but I'd deal with that later. This was the opportunity of a lifetime.

I had all the gear I needed from my Mount Kilimanjaro climb (another Great Adventure), and I found a 77-year-old travel companion, Heike, who said, “yes” more quickly than I did.

We were a crew of eight from the U.S., South Africa, Australia and France. Plus there was Captain Fede along with Laura, our expedition leader, and just as importantly, Miguel, our cook.

Our Frenchman was a scientist trying to find out if whales have a sense of smell. His experiment encompassed alternately throwing out krill (whale food) and clay to see if the whales responded. We got to help by tracking whales and birds, taking photos, flying the drone with the Go Pro and more.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, the seasickness. I did hypnotherapy and acupuncture. I had prescription patches and

bands and ginger candy and Zofran. But I was sick as a dog for three straight days sailing south.

The Drake Passage is often called the world's worst; it's the meeting place of the Atlantic and the Pacific, and it's a pretty violent get-together. I don't think they like each other much.

I didn't see much of the Drake from my bunk, with my eyes closed. A few times, I almost saw the floor, suddenly, when a particularly violent pitch of waves forced me to jam my feet into the ceiling. (Addendum: A \$6 box of Dramamine kept me upright and feeling mostly fine on the even rougher return trip. Go figure.)

When I came out of my seasickness coma, I was rewarded with some of the most stark yet beautiful vistas I have ever seen. Seeing the South Shetland Islands around Antarctica and the continent itself was like looking at another planet. Towering glaciers; dangerous but gorgeous icebergs.

Everything was white and blue and gray and black — even the animals. We were delirious to see our first seven gentoo penguins (like the ones on *Happy Feet*) playing on an iceberg. In the next three and a half weeks, we'd see tens of thousands of them. No exaggeration!

Traveling by sailboat was a terrific choice. We were nimble and spontaneous. We anchored in safe harbors around the islands and



Wendy and her traveling companion, 77-year-old Heike, stand on an ice floe alongside the *Ocean Tramp*, their sailboat home for more than three weeks.

offshore every night, changing plans if ice or weather presented challenges.

Because we were small, we were allowed to disembark at research stations, at a Chilean Naval Base (the one that sent out a ship to rescue Shackleton's men from Elephant Island no less!), and at colonies of gentoo and chinstrap penguins.

We anchored on a huge ice floe and jumped down to play and take pictures. We stopped in the Penguin Post Office on the continent to send postcards and buy \$65 ski hats made of wool, silk and possum hair. (Expensive, but super warm and soft!)

During our 25-day trip, we admired dozens of humpback whales as they ate and dove. We laughed at penguins as they played and fed their new babies and stole rocks from each other's nests.

We admired lumpy elephant seals, crab-eater seals that don't eat crabs, moony-eyed Weddell seals (which are my new favorite, even though I hadn't previously really given much thought to the fact that there are different kinds of seals), and a

dreaded leopard seal.

Leopard seals are the kind in *Happy Feet*. They eat penguins after slamming them around until they turn inside out. (What's black and white and red all over? Ugh.)

There was a huge learning component to the trip. We got a pretty deep education about Antarctic animals, especially whales. We learned about the long history of people in Antarctica. It's not just a snowy wasteland; there was a huge (gross) industry of whaling and seal hunting as far back as the 19th century. Explorers made history here repeatedly.

We also learned that 10 seconds in the frigid water meant skinny people would shiver for approximately five hours after. And your body doesn't know when to sleep when it's light for 24 hours. And whales will show up around the ship just as you've laid down or jumped into your 90-second shower.

This was the trip of a lifetime. I saw things and learned things that I didn't even know that I was missing in my life. I spent

a week with some of the most interesting, diverse and adventurous people I've ever met. I suppose that goes without saying, on a trip like this.

Not only is it Antarctica, it's Antarctica by sailboat. Before we left there were times, I won't lie, when I thought it was going to be too long, too far, too much of a hassle. But as (almost) always, the reward was immeasurable. It was an incredible adventure in a lifetime of incredible adventures.

As my new friend, Adam (who quit his job to travel the world. He's in Year Two) from Rhode Island said many times during our trip, "You can't shoot a moose in a lodge." *Get out there and find the moose.* But shoot him with a Nikon. Live fearlessly! ■



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 Visit GrowingBolderMagazine.com for a link to Wendy's blog where you can read much more about her adventures, in Antarctica and beyond, and see her gorgeous photos and videos from the trip.

Wendy saw some incredible sights in Antarctica, including magnificent icebergs (top); chinstrap penguins, leopard seals and elephant seals (center); and gentoo penguin colonies (bottom).

