



Antarctica

with Richard Beattie on *Big Fish*

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As *Big Fish* ghosted in the 24-hour daylight along the straits, fjords and glaciers of the ice-filled Antarctic Peninsula last January, it was impossible not to be overwhelmed by the relentless and eerie beauty of such a foreign landscape. The silence had a way of magnifying the visual splendour of this remote and rarely visited part of our world.

Our planned 10-day trip to the Antarctic aboard 45 metre *Big Fish*, the first launch from Aquos Yachts, was an adventure in every sense of the word. Together with family and close friends – including five of our children, Ken, Sam, Lucy, Olivia and Elli, aged 12 to 14 years – we visited several penguin colonies and saw colossal whales. We witnessed predatory leopard seals in the water gracefully chasing their next penguin meal and resting their slender, almost reptilian-looking, bodies on the ice. We also saw their more blubbery cousins – Weddell seals, elephant seals and fur seals.

Our stops included a visit to the Palmer Research Station, speaking with scientists about their work and their findings in the rapidly changing Antarctic environment. My family and friends felt honoured to be witnesses to sights and experiences so few people will ever see and enjoy, and to be able to offer them to our children.

One of the unusual aspects of our visit to Antarctica

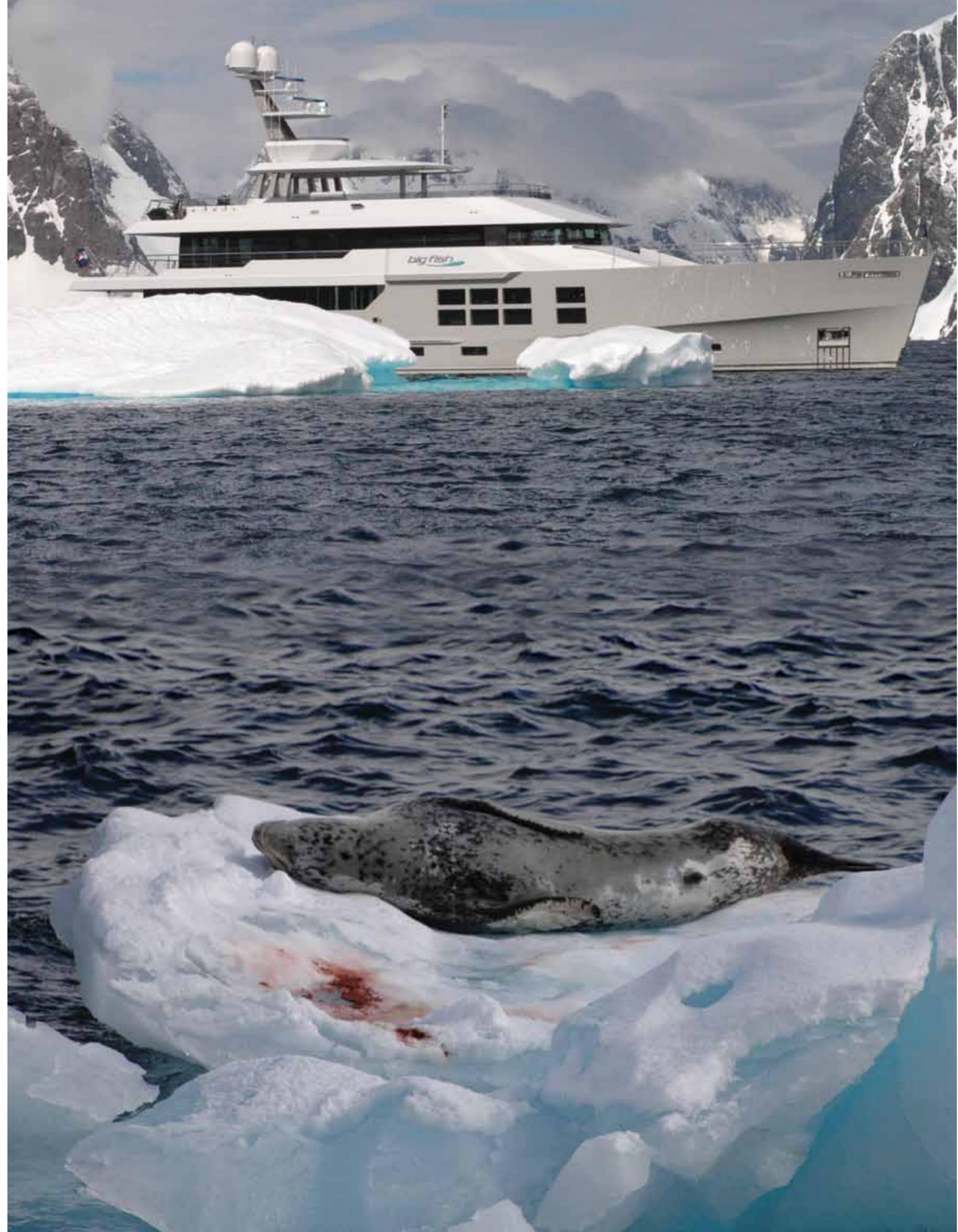
was our decision to charter and use *Big Fish* on a fly-in, fly-out basis. Most luxury mini-liners, as well as the one or two 'quasi-yachts' that operate in this region, make their guests endure the gut-wrenching two-day crossing from Ushuaia, the most southerly port in South America, to the Antarctic Peninsula. In January, the calmest month of the year in the infamous Drake Passage, the average sea state approaches 4.9 metres. Even the most hardened sailors and mariners can succumb to severe cases of seasickness here.

So we arranged through our expedition organiser to fly guests from Punta Arenas, Chile, to the country's military airstrip on Prince George Island via a jet charter company that ferries scientists and visitors to and from the peninsula. The biggest advantage of this mode of transport, besides avoiding the rigours of the Drake Passage, is adding four days to time on station in the Antarctic in which to enjoy its wonders. The added cost of chartering a jet was a small price to pay for avoiding seasickness, minimising wear and tear on the yacht, and adding precious days to our itinerary.

Our voyage, like any to the Antarctic, required extensive – and expensive – planning, permitting and outfitting. Our permit required us to hire both an experienced ice pilot as well as a qualified expedition



Watching penguins 'fly' through the air, and getting up-close-and-personal with them in their rookeries were top trip highlights (top, middle and below left), while a leopard seal was observed basking in the sun after his last meal only a stone's throw away from *Big Fish* (right)



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leader. Since the season is short in the Antarctic – from late December to early February – we had to commit to hiring our pilot and guide long before our charters were booked. Guides and pilots are not only essential but few and far between, and can add immensely to the safety and enjoyment of the Antarctic experience.

Besides the human resources necessary to a successful voyage, it takes painstaking work on the part of the captain and expedition planner to obtain the necessary permits. We also invested in survival suits for crew and guests. Thankfully, these were never needed, except for the day we all decided to take a plunge in the frigid waters of the Antarctic Sea!

From a technical point of view, *Big Fish*, which is for sale as well as charter, required a number of modifications to make the voyage. For one, engine block heaters were installed on the main engines to ensure their flawless operation. Since it is considerably more expensive and time-consuming to add these after the fact, my advice to anyone considering cruising in either high or low latitudes is to have their main engines delivered with this option.

One of *Big Fish's* most important assets – her massive bow tender bay – turned out to be a godsend during the Antarctic expedition. We were able to use it for stowing all manner of



A restored research station in Port Lockroy reflects its historical role as an Allied research and listening post for the Southern Ocean during the Second World War with old dogsleds adding to the ambiance (left)



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wet equipment and extra stores, and for housing space when additional crew were required.

While *Big Fish* is not ice-classed, her steel hull is very strongly built. Captain Winston Joyce-Clarke, *Big Fish's* extraordinarily capable skipper, took pains to contact all major systems suppliers to ensure the boat was capable of operating both safely and comfortably in ice and in frigid weather. After 2,250 nautical miles of cruising in the Antarctic, Captain Joyce-Clarke donned a dry suit and personally inspected the yacht's bottom. He reported that he didn't find 'so much as a dent or a nick on the bottom, running gear, props or stabiliser fins'.

One item of concern was being able to heat the boat adequately. *Big Fish*, like most private yachts, is built to enjoy tropical or temperate weather conditions. While the reverse-cycle air-conditioning system was capable of handling the colder climate (with the help of some portable electric heaters), there was concern about overheating the yacht's massive entertainment system servers, including her wonderful 7.6 metre high video wall in our central stairwell. The cooling system for the servers had to be isolated from the boat's usual cooling/heating

system to ensure that the servers could be cooled while the rest of the vessel was being heated!

Other modifications were made to various hull seawater intakes to make sure that small pieces of ice did not clog the inlets.

Only a handful of people have ever had the opportunity to enjoy the solemn beauty and majesty of the Antarctic from the deck of a luxurious private yacht. My friends, my family and our charter guests will never forget this once-in-a-lifetime experience. [bb](#)



Amidst whales and penguins (above) the expedition team stake their claim in Port Lockroy. Owner Richard Beattie is second from left

CRUISING ADVICE

Owner Richard Beattie and his captain have offered to provide any *Boat International* reader with advice and recommendations on cruising the Antarctic.

CONTACT:

www.aquosyachts.com or
www.mybigfishcharters.com