



Whaler chaser off Mertz Glacier. Japan, Norway and other countries are killing whales every year commercially for domestic and export consumption so... stop eating whale meat!

WHALE WARS

Our seasoned deep-south sailor is caught in the thick of the whaling wars in Antarctica

Permits to do anything are a fact of life these days and Antarctica tops the list if you want to sail south in a yacht or ship. I have sailed there virtually every season since 1993. But it is not an easy place to get to, beyond the Furious Fifties and Screaming Sixties, travelling to Antarctica. Still, it is a right of passage that everyone, from early explorers to modern-day adventurers, should endure. You enter the realms of what is effectively another planet, a land of ice and pristine harmony, the last great

wilderness on earth and the only continent where man does not belong and where the human race has not evolved. That is Antarctica. Over the past five years, I have been leading voyages to Antarctica with 100 passengers onboard the five-star Expedition ship *MV Orion*. Marble bathrooms, fine dining and 24-hour room service are a far cry from my first visit onboard *Buttercup*, my 50ft solo around-the-world racing yacht, with 200 teddy bears in tow.

The experience for the guests onboard *Orion* is life changing. We make landings in the most amazing places and see things that you cannot see in the books and documentaries. Antarctica is bigger than that and you simply have to be there to appreciate it. I believe in Antarctic tourism because every visitor becomes an ambassador and in the long-term will become the only voice fighting for its survival against mining and all those other things we do to use up this world. And that

includes whales... Our permits provided by the Australian Antarctic Division to visit Antarctica ensure we have a less than negligible impact on the environment. They also require us to report all shipping activity we encounter, in case we come across any illegal or unregulated fishing activity. A year before, we actually did report an illegal fishing vessel that was ultimately apprehended and prosecuted.

In January this year, we were ship-cruising the tip of the Mertz Glacier, which extends 40nm out to sea from the Antarctic Continent. There was brilliant sunshine and it highlighted the fields of floating pack ice and giant 'bergs' surrounding the glacier, painting a picture that became a magnet. I asked the Captain to stop the ship and we set off in Zodiacs to cruise among it, listening to the silence and talking to the crab-eater seals, the Adelie and emperor penguins resting on the ice, as snow

petrels flew beside us. Even by Antarctic standards it was a big day. That evening, the dining room chatter was elevated. Everyone was on a high. In the middle of it, the captain informed me there was a ship up front about 45

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minutes out, so I finished dinner then wandered up to the bridge. **CAUGHT IN THE ACT** When I opened the door into the bridge and looked out, a tingle ran through my spine. I felt like the American admiral who had just come across the Japanese battle fleet! There they were — the Japanese whaling fleet! Just a few miles away.

For a moment I was lost for words. The magnitude of this chance meeting hit me! I was wondering what the Japanese captains were thinking and why they let this happen. There were about to be 100 silent witnesses to their actions. We had become their worst nightmare! There were five ships: a fuel tanker and what I thought were four whale chasers, one on the horizon. The tanker had been resupplying the others in the calm weather with huge fenders over the side. All were stationary except for one chaser on the horizon, five miles out, which turned into the sun and steamed away. We made one polite VHF call to the tanker with no response. None had their

