

UNSEEN FIORDLAND STEWART ISLAND & THE SNARES

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

1 March 2024 - 8 March 2024



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Day 1

Queenstown

1st March

Arriving in Queenstown, from all around the globe, we settled into our accommodation for the evening alongside fellow adventurers. Later that evening we met up to enjoy a welcome dinner where everyone became fast friends and we met some of our Expedition Team for a brief introduction and welcome speech outlaying the adventure awaiting us.

Day 2

Queenstown/Bluff

2nd March

This morning, we spent the day exploring the remote alpine adventure town of Queenstown. Soaking in the views of this bustling tourist destination, we enjoyed shopping and picked up any last-minute items for the journey ahead.

We departed Queenstown via a scenic bus transfer and arrived at Bluff in the afternoon to meet *Heritage Adventurer*. After the mandatory lifeboat drills, we settled into our cabins and explored our new home away from home. It was then into the Observation Lounge to meet the fabulous Expedition and Hotel Team looking after us on this journey and learn more about life on board *Heritage Adventurer*. Heritage Expeditions owner Nathan Russ welcomed us with and gave a more detailed overview of our upcoming Unseen Fiordland, Stewart Island & The Snares voyage. We then enjoyed the first of many delicious dinners while *Heritage Adventurer* made the short journey down to Stewart Island to anchor. To cap off the first night on board, Glenda gave an interesting lecture on Stewart Island/Rakiura, from the viewpoint of a local, and prepared us for our exciting day of adventure exploring Ulva Island, Stewart Island and the quaint town of Oban. After an exciting first day of travel and learning, we settled in for an early night, eager to get our voyage underway.



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Day 3

Ulva & Stewart Islands

3rd March

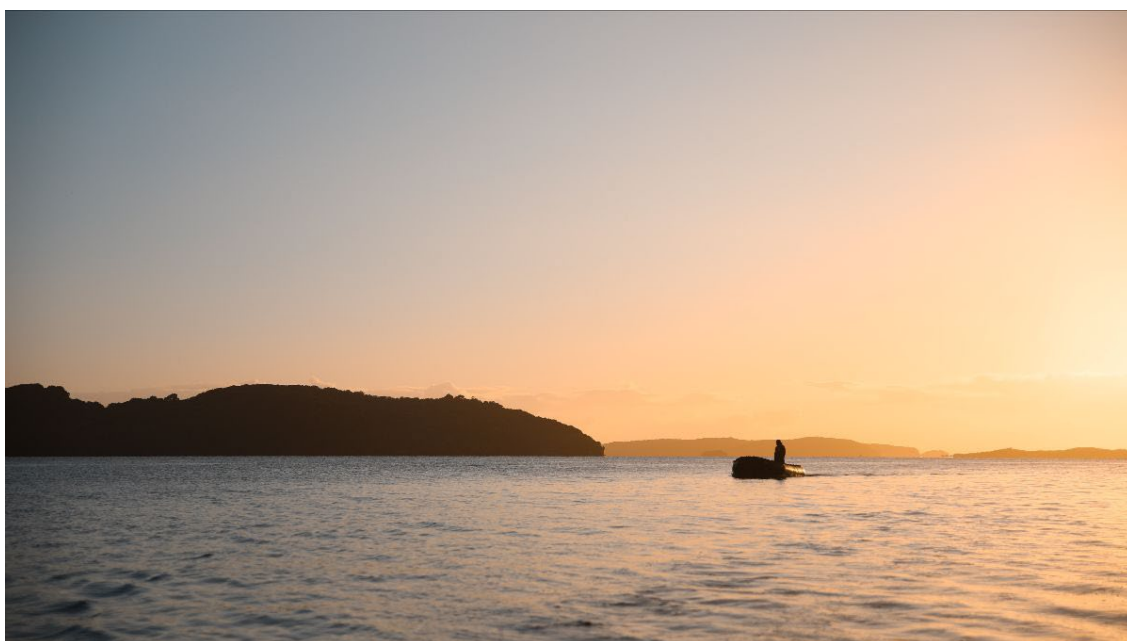
After our first night on board *Heritage Adventurer*, we were ready to begin our adventure. We got off to a fabulous start as we enjoyed a delicious buffet breakfast before our first taste of Zodiac cruising en route to Ulva Island, where light morning rain greeted us as we arrived at the jetty by Flagstaff Point. It was a magical morning exploring the primordial beauty of Ulva Island, near Stewart Island. We had three ways to explore the island at our own pace on a short, medium or long walk.

Trekking through the lush ancient forest was like being transformed into a land undisturbed by time. Towering Totara, Kauri and Rimu trees created a thick canopy, with rays of sunlight barely breaking through. It was amongst these trees where the true magic was, a symphony of bird song that played like a harmonious orchestra. Saddleback, Bellbirds, South Island Robin, Kākā, Red-crowned Parakeets, Fantails and more were heard and seen. Protected from predators, these birds were curious and friendly, with South Island Robin fluttering to our feet as if we weren't even there. The first of the long walkers were treated to a rare and amazing sight, a Southern Brown Kiwi/Tokoeka. Nestled in the bush, we watched in awe as the Kiwi swiftly moved through the undergrowth in search of food. Hidden by roots and foliage, it was hard to photograph, but a special moment for all as we observed the New Zealand national bird in its natural habitat. Interestingly, Stewart and Ulva Islands are the only places in the world where you can observe Kiwi during the day!

Our journey around Ulva Island saw us arrive at Sydney Cove, home to some snoozing New Zealand/Hooker's Sea Lions. A juvenile male popped out of the water to greet us, much to the delight of everyone at the beach. Ensuring to avoid to give these animals their space, we returned to our landing area near Flagstaff Point for a Zodiac cruise back to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch.

In the afternoon, we had the opportunity to explore Stewart Island, New Zealand's third-largest island. Zodiac cruising to Kaipipi Bay, we arrived at Oban via a two-hour hike along the North West Circuit Track, a short walk over the hill or a shuttle. Those choosing the walk over the hill stopped by the recently refurbished Observation Deck, which provided stunning panoramic views of the nearby islands. Walking through the quaint streets, the area was alive with birdlife. Before long, we arrived at the main township of Stewart Island, Oban. Immersed in nature, and rich in history, Oban was a delight to explore. The Jade Carving Centre and the recently refurbished Stewart Island Museum were a highlight and showcased the past and present influence of Te Ao Māori on the island.

It was then a short Zodiac ride back to the comforts of *Heritage Adventurer*, where we enjoyed the Captain's Welcome Cocktails and had a chance to meet some of the other fabulous crew looking after us on our voyage.



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Day 4
Dusky Sound
4th March

After being gently rocked through the night by the swells of the Southern Ocean, we awoke to a calm and tranquil morning as *Heritage Adventurer* anchored in the shelter of Fiordland at Dusky Sound. After a delicious breakfast and coffee to refuel, our action-packed exploration of Dusky Sound was ready to begin.

This morning's adventure was to Pigeon Island and a Zodiac cruise of Facile Harbour. At Pigeon Island we learned of the heroic conservation efforts of Richard Henry, who tirelessly worked for seven years transporting Kākāpō and Kiwi to the nearby Resolution Island from the mainland for seven years in the 1890s. We visited the site of his camp and the remains of the enclosures where he would keep the birds awaiting transport to the island. The flurry of birdsong from New Zealand Fantails, South Island Robin, Bellbird and others marked the importance of Richard Henry's work and all that he had done for New Zealand conservation. Unfortunately, during his time here, he encountered Stoats swimming between islands. This was a grim realisation that these invasive predators could swim between islands and thus made him think that all his work relocating native birds was ineffective. It was only long after his death that this vital work was truly appreciated, and his restoration spirit lives on.

Zodiac cruising through Facile Harbour, we learned about the wreck of the *Endeavour* and the possibility of New Zealand's first case of insurance fraud as the vessel shipwrecked at a nearby beach. This shipwreck also brought to shore the first European women and children to New Zealand shores. This incredible history was reinforced through the towering granite mountains surrounding us that had risen through activity in the tectonic plates, expertly narrated by our Expedition Team.

Back on board, *Heritage Adventurer* repositioned near Earshell Cove. We had three options to choose from, a Zodiac cruise alongside the vast islands of Dusky Sound, a Zodiac cruise and hike to a nearby waterfall or stay on board to relax and enjoy the documentary on the history of Dusky Sound. It was a fantastic experience exploring Earshell Cove as we soaked in the local history of Māori settlers, learned of the impact of introduced pests and gazed at the stunning islands that were bursting with plant life. A solitary Little Blue Penguin swam by the Zodiac cruisers, which provided fantastic photo opportunities.

Warming up back on board *Heritage Adventurer* we enjoyed delicious BBQ on the back deck. Enjoying a smorgasbord of meat and salads, including a Cauliflower Poodle, we ate our lunch with jaw-dropping views of Dusky Sound around us. If that wasn't enough, a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins were spotted playing at a nearby island.

To top off this fantastic Fiordland day, we anchored near Anchor Island for either a two-hour trek around the island or a Zodiac cruise exploring the surrounding area and Luncheon Cove. This afternoon, we experienced four seasons in one day, or five minutes, as the sun turned to rain, which turned to hail, which turned to sun again in a matter of moments. All the while a New Zealand Falcon soared overhead, and birdsong filled the air. Those opting for the Zodiac cruise had a fabulous encounter with New Zealand Fur Seals, Oystercatchers and Spotted Shags which were lounging on a small island of rocks, seeming to be on friendly terms. We learned of the fascinating history of Anchor Island, where New Zealand's first boat and house were built in 1792 at Luncheon Cove by former crew of the *Britannia* who were dropped off here and lived on the island. Those choosing to explore Anchor Island trekked natural paths over tree roots and foliage, experiencing something similar to what the first settlers of the islands did all those years ago.

To end the night was another delicious dinner while anchored near the dramatic Cascade Falls and a presentation on the history of Dusky Sound and Fiordland from Lou Sanson.



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Day 5
Dusky Sound
5th March

Our Unseen Fiordland, Stewart Island & the Snares voyage saw us spend another day in the Dusky Sound. To start the morning, we immersed ourselves in early New Zealand history at Indian Island and Astronomer's Point. These locations were both significant landmarks in Captain Cook's early explorations of New Zealand. At Indian Island, also known as Mamaku Island, we learned of Cook's first encounter with Māori, where he met the inhabitants of the island on his second voyage to the region in 1773. This sparked an exchange of gifts and grew into an ongoing alliance.

Navigating some testing terrain, we visited the historic pits on the top of the island as Lou described what life may have been like for the Māori inhabitants here and the significance of the encounter.

After a short Zodiac ride through stunning Fiordland scenery, we arrived at Astronomer's Point, another site rich in history. This is where *HMS Resolution* was moored for 6-weeks after their voyage in the Southern Ocean. Here they rested, repaired and recovered, brewed the first beer, went botanising to discover and catalogue many new species, and cleared an area of bush to make astronomical observations that confirmed the accuracy of James Harrison's chronometer. Thanks to the efforts of astronomer William Wales, this was the first accurately recorded position of New Zealand.

After a leisurely afternoon on board, we enjoyed a tranquil Zodiac cruise around Sportsman Cove, aptly named as Captain Cook would spend time shooting birds here. Back on board the comforts of *Heritage Adventurer*, we enjoyed a scenic ship cruise through Acheron Passage. Stunning would be an understatement. Waterfalls flowed from all sides, and the towering mountains of Dusky Sound shined in the afternoon sun. Stacking behind each other as if afterimages, they glowed with hues of purple and blue. This was all expertly navigated by the team through the PA, and we immersed ourselves in the jaw-dropping environment that surrounded us.

Following our journey through the Acheron Passage, special guests Tā Tipene O'Regan and Professor Atholl Anderson gave an impassioned talk on the early Māori history of Dusky Sound and Fiordland. It was an absolute privilege to listen to these inspiring men, as they gave insight into the Māori history of Fiordland and the early encounters between Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Māmoe and recounted personal stories.

After another delicious dinner, Genevieve gave an interesting lecture on the make-up of the Fiordland forest, and we went to bed dreaming of Fiordland.



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Day 6

Doubtful Sound

6th March

We awoke today as *Heritage Adventurer* cruised into the Milford Sounds just before sunrise. Perched on the deck and observation lounge, we soaked in the snow-capped mountains basking in the rising sun. It was an immersive experience, as the expedition team provided insightful commentary about what we were witnessing and the history of the area.

We were met with incredible views one after the other, as our Captain expertly navigated us close to towering waterfalls along the way. After witnessing the breathtaking beauty of the sounds, we enjoyed a panel discussion of the Māori history of Fiordland and the South Island with Tā Tipene O'Regan, Atholl Anderson and Lou Sanson. This was met by great respect and admiration on board, with a powerful waiata and thank you shared by some of the guests.

After some lectures on board, we Zodiac cruised to Deas Cove for a short walk and were greeted by a horde of hungry sandflies. The towering granite landscape and flat land proved a stark contrast to the islands we had explored previously in the Dusky Sound. Deas Cove was alive with fauna and flora, with Dragonflies darting and a collection of weird and wonderful plants and bushes. The area experienced a landslide in 2003, which wiped out most of the surrounding nature and presented a unique opportunity for the forest to reestablish itself. It was fascinating seeing the signs of life anew, and the resilience of wildlife as plants and trees began to grow.

We were reminded of Fiordland's testing conditions by a short journey through varying terrain on the way to the Department of Conservation Deas Cove Hut, used by hunting and fishing parties. After visiting the hut, we headed around the cove, down a path to a spectacular beach where nature was abundant with curious Weka, Variable Oystercatchers and a plethora of flowering plants and bushes.

Back on board *Heritage Adventurer*, we prepared for our next adventure as we passed through a beautiful channel near Bauza Island, aptly named The Gut. Those opting for the optional scenic helicopter ride departed. For the rest of us, it was either a three-hour long walk to Gut Hut (affectionately named the gut-buster), or a scenic Zodiac cruise exploring The Many Islands and Bauza Island in the Dusky Sound. The Zodiac cruise provided a feast for the senses, as we marvelled at the abundance of Fiordland. The near vertical fiords of Doubtful Sound were starkly inhospitable compared to our time in Dusky, and this was reinforced by the reduced signs of wildlife. Zodiac cruising alongside them reminded us of the brutality of nature and the testing conditions faced by early explorers of the area, and the fortitude of nature as trees towered above on the steep mountain sides.

To finish the night, we enjoyed presentations from Lucy, Phil and Glenda on their conservation work in Fiordland.



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Day 7
The Snares Islands
7th March

After departing Doubtful Sound, we journeyed south towards The Snares Islands. *Heritage Adventurer* delicately glided through the motion of the ocean, and we enjoyed a welcome sleep-in. To start the day, Lou gave us an introduction of what to expect with his presentation on The Snares Islands.

The Southern Ocean lived up to its reputation with 70-knot winds and showers, and the planned Zodiac cruise at The Snares Islands was unable to go ahead. However, the rain stopped, the mist lifted, and the sun shone through as we enjoyed a scenic ship cruise around this rugged terrain. The lush vegetation stood strongly against the barren rocks, and an abundance of birds like you've never seen before soared in the open waters and nested on the island. Standing on the outer decks with cameras and binoculars ready, we keenly observed White-capped Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Fairy Prions, Sooty Shearwater, Common Diving Petrel and more. The scenes unfolding in front of us were made clearer by the insightful commentary from the Expedition Team through the PA system.

Sailing close to the rocky landscape we spied Snares-crested Penguins lounging on the rocks and navigating the famous 'penguin slide'. We watched stunned as nature in its purest form played out in front of us.

Heritage Adventurer headed north for our return to Bluff, and we enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea. John gave a humorous and interesting talk on the shipwreck survivors of the Snares Islands and Nathan gave an impassioned speech on the history of Heritage Expeditions, before the Captain's Cocktails thanking all the wonderful crew who made this journey so spectacular and a fantastic slideshow from Tamzin. We then enjoyed one final dinner together where the chefs continued their delicious run of form, with most choosing to indulge in lobster.

The bar was alight with conversation and laughter as the realisation of the end of our voyage began to settle in, one more drink was enjoyed, and we reminisced on this life-changing experience.

What a way to end our Unseen Fiordland, Stewart Island and The Snares voyage!



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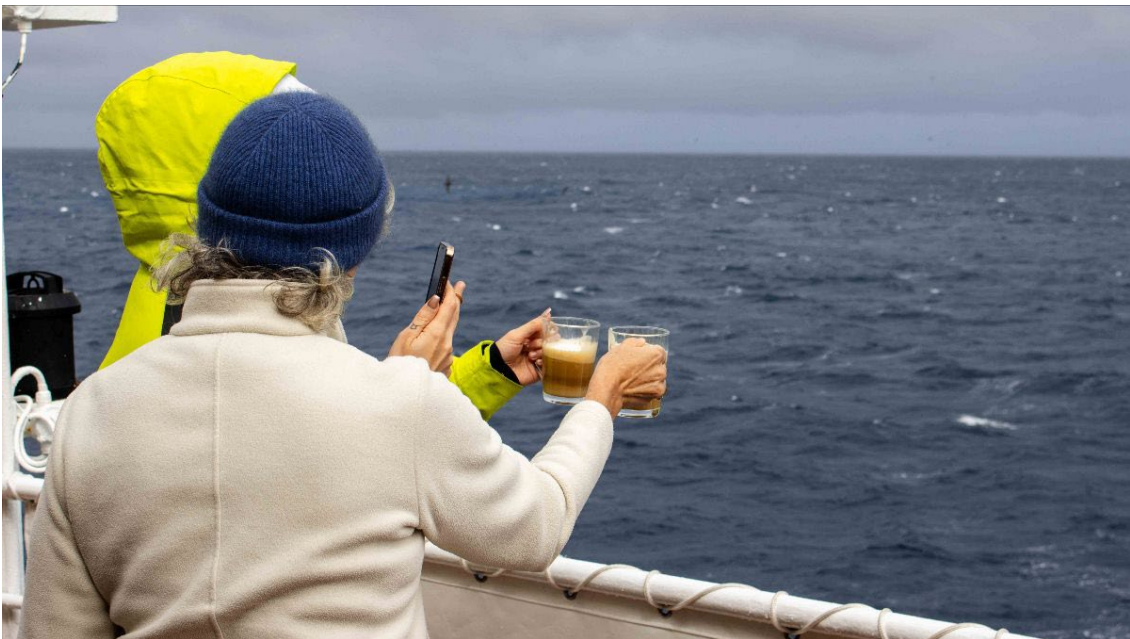
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Day 8

Bluff

8th March

After enjoying one last delicious buffet breakfast, we exchanged contact information and said our final goodbyes to the new friends we had made on board. One final walk down the gangway and wave goodbye to the Expedition Team and crew we set off to our next destination, ablaze with adventure and a newfound appreciation for New Zealand's wild and beautiful backyard.



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