

# Drake Passage, Beagle Channel

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Beagle Channel.



Charting our way home.

Our final day at sea is bittersweet. The crackling call of the chinstrap penguins is so fresh in our minds. The leopard seals who seem to be in every harbor and inlet should be showing up anytime now. However, today is not the same as so many recent days. Today the sun shines brightly. Today the wind has a comforting warmth. The views from the decks hold the landforms of Tierra Del Fuego. Today we see green leaves again.

Where will we travel next? How can we make this magic continue? The answer to both questions was provided by our photo instructor, Rich Kirchner, in his presentation, "Great Escapes".

Our undersea specialists gave a talk about the gear used to create those fabulous videos we have grown accustomed to seeing. Underwater lights protrude from the camera housing looking like antennae of a giant swimming ant. The weight alone of all of that gear gives one second thoughts about ever attempting a cold-water dive.

Out on deck dusky dolphin could be seen riding the currents created by our bulbous bow pushing through the water. Six then two then five dolphins take turns darting in and out of the front of our ship splashing the water's surface when they come up to breathe.

Undersea sounds of marine mammals were the topic of a presentation given by Dr. Conor Ryan. It makes one wonder if the dolphin we saw are communicating while dashing at our bow.

Our rental boots are returned, our bags are slowly getting packed and we are saying good bye to our new friends.

Captain Martin Graser gave a gala Farewell Party. As always, he engaged our attention with information about the ship and the details of our journey. Our last fantastic dinner of the trip was offered by our gregarious hotel crew.

The Beagle Channel is smooth and carries little wind. Black browed albatross follow our ship on a graceful glide that swings widely from port to starboard.

For three weeks we have responded to the ship's terminology. Meet on the aft 300 level or humpback whales off the port bow. Port, starboard, aft and bow will no longer be part of our daily vocabulary. How strange to leave a place of magic and the phrases that governed our behaviors there. We have learned to pay close attention to the freshening winds, to watch how the breezes take off the tops of the waves. We have learned to watch every step ahead or behind us so as not to accidentally step upon a penguin chick. We have granted penguins the right of way, over and over. These bits of consciousness are not as useful for our lives at home but they come back when you least expect them. Maybe a grandchild's toy behind you will bring back the clear impression of a Gentoo chick at Port Lockroy sleeping on the walkway. Or maybe while you wait at a traffic crosswalk, you will suddenly expect to see an Adelie penguin in a penguin highway walking by. It doesn't matter where you go your memories will travel with you. Fair winds and following seas to you dear fellow travelers.

## About the Author

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### **Marylou Blakeslee** · Naturalist

For the past 20 years, Marylou Blakeslee has traveled the world sharing her love of wild places. She lectures on a number of topics from the bears and wolves of the Arctic, to the leopard seals and whales of the Antarctic, as well as the turtles and fishes of the Great Barrier Reef