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HOW TO GET YOURSELF TO ANTARCTICA

An article on ice camping in Antarctica by the same writer was published on December 1, 2017. This write-up, the concluding part of the series, focuses on the different ways in which travellers can get to Antarctica

ATIQA NADIAH ZAILANI

Many people think of Antarctica as this far away, impossible-to-reach place, accessible only virtually via repeat viewings of Happy Feet and Happy Feet 2, but that's not true. Trust me, if I can get myself there, you totally can too (but hopefully with less vomiting).

In a nutshell, there are five ways to get yourself to Antarctica:

Be a student taking a course on Antarctica that includes a study visit

A number of universities offer courses on Antarctica that includes a visit to the continent as part of the academic endeavour, including the University of San Francisco and Dartmouth University in the USA, as well as the University of Canterbury in New Zealand.

Cost: Most expensive option as it includes a semester of college. Somewhere around USD 30,000.

Pros: You will become an expert on Antarctica at the end of the course

Cons: May be too much of an investment of time and money if you're only looking to have fun

Work as an Antarctic researcher or crew

A free and potentially money-making way is to work as a researcher on Antarctica. Plenty of research is being conducted on the continent, and if you happen to have the right background and the right skills, this could be a viable way to go. The National Science Foundation of America regularly funds expeditions to Antarctica.

Even if you are not scientifically-inclined, you can apply to work as a crew member—somebody needs to cook and clean, even in Antarctica.

Cost: Can range from being free (but you may have to pay for personal expenses) or profitable (depending on what job you end up taking)

Pros: These scientific expeditions tend to take months, which gives you plenty of time on Antarctica

Cons: Not a holiday because you're essentially working. Also, you may not want to be freezing in Antarctica for that long...

Work as crew on Antarctica-bound ships or planes

Similar to the above, you can also find employment as a crew on a ship or plane that make trips to Antarctica. There are a variety of roles, from specialised ones like lecturer, professional kayak instructor, professional mountain climbing instructor, doctor, pilot, or general ones like cook, housekeeping staff, dishwasher, etc.

Cost: Can range from being free (but you may have to pay for personal expenses) or profitable (depending on what job you end up taking)

Pros: You get to be on a comfortable tourist boat for next to nothing

Cons: Not a holiday because you're essentially working. Depending on the role you take up, you may not get the chance to do preferred activities like going to shore as priority goes to the passengers.



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A cheaper way to gain passage on an Antarctic-bound ship is to simply arrive at one of the departure ports (like Ushuaia) and keep an eye out for last-minute deals.

Be an artist or a writer and produce an Antarctica-inspired piece of art

Grants are given out to qualified artists and writers who are producing a work of art or a novel about Antarctica—the most well-known programmes are the Antarctic Artists and Writers Programme by the National Science Foundation of America, and the Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship by the Australian Government.

Cost: Can range from being free (but you may have to pay for personal expenses) or profitable (depending on how you use your grant!)

Pros: You'll get to unleash your artistic creativity on a fascinating continent and get paid for it!

Cons: Not a holiday because you're essentially working. If you are not a citizen of the countries in which the grants are offered, you are out of luck, no matter how artistic you are.

Be a regular tourist

Forget college courses, research work and grant applications - go to Antarctica the same way you would go to Thailand or the Bahamas: as a camera-totting, wide-eyed tourist.

Cost: Can range from USD 4,000 to USD 20,000

Pros: You get to pick when and how you get to Antarctica and enjoy your holiday like a normal tourist

Cons: Will likely be the most expensive trip of your life

Most of the options above require specific skills or circumstances and are out of reach for the average person—the most accessible option for the likes of regular people like me is to pony up the money and be a tourist.

For this reason, the rest of this post will go into the details of going to Antarctica as a tourist.

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Touristing in Antarctica

As a tourist, you can choose to either sail or fly to Antarctica from any of the common departure points (Ushuaia in Argentina, Cape Town in South Africa, New Zealand or Australia).

Ushuaia is the closest to Antarctica and tends to offer cheaper trips; however, the other departure points may be cheaper to get to depending on where you are from. It may not make sense to fly across the world to Argentina if you're in Malaysia, especially since Australia and New Zealand are more accessible.

There are a variety of options, depending on: how long you want to be there, where in Antarctica you want to go, and how much you are willing to pay. Naturally, trips involving flights are a lot more expensive, but that means you get to skip the long days spent sailing and getting seasick.

Some trips are easy-going, mostly consisting of Zodiac cruises and some shore-landings. Some trips are adventure-focused, and offer additional options like kayaking, mountain-climbing and scuba diving. Some even offer helicopter rides to the interior of Antarctica (i.e. the South Pole), if you and your wallet are up for it.

HOT SPRINGS

TAKING THE WATERS SOAKING IN HOT SPRINGS AROUND THE WORLD

A dip in the mineral-rich waters of hot springs has long been regarded as the ultimate source of relaxation. Here are five of my favourite hot spring soaks from around the globe.

SAMAI HAIDER

It was perhaps Jane Austen that first introduced me to the therapeutic benefits of bathing in thermal waters—a concept which my teenage self found archaic and strange. As I grew older (and travelled wider), I realised bathing in hot springs is fairly common the world over. The instant I stepped into my first hot spring, I understood why. The almost unbearably warm waters cocooned my body and I felt my muscles unwind. I closed my eyes. It was sublime.

I do not know whether the mineral-rich waters are actually beneficial for one's health, nor do I care, to be honest. It's the pure relaxation that I'm after. Here are five of my favourite hot spring soaks from around the globe.

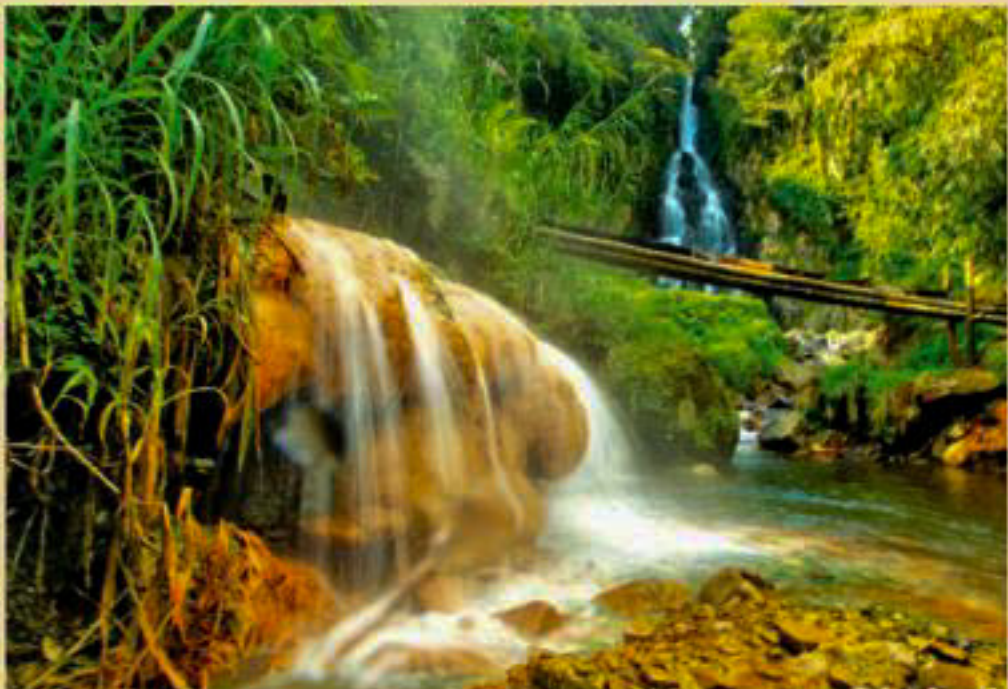
Thermae Bath Spa - Bath, England

Best for: Reliving history
Bath, home to the only natural thermal springs in Britain, is where Austen would retire to take the waters. The Thermae Bath Spa is located right next to the Roman baths, where millennia

before us wealthy Romans stretched out in communal baths, shrouded by the steam rising up from the water. Soaking in the warm waters of the rooftop Thermae Bath Spa, with the ochre spires of Bath Abbey as the backdrop, it is easy to imagine the sheer indulgence that has been enjoyed by generations.

Blue Lagoon – Grindavik, Iceland

Best for: Surreal scenery
The mere mention of thermal springs brings Iceland's Blue Lagoon to mind—its turquoise waters and rocky



Pemandian Air Panas Soa Mengeruda

slopes making for an alien landscape. This famous hot spring is actually a run-off from the nearby Svartsengi geothermal power plant. This rather off-putting bit of information is easily forgotten upon entering the immaculate spa, and more so, because of the surroundings. It feels even more surreal when you are submerged in the heated pool, drink in hand, with only your head exposed to the freezing cold.. Spa-goers are encouraged to lather themselves with the silica mud and the vision of their white, mud-caked bodies add to the otherworldly experience.

Peninsula Hot Springs - Mornington, Australia

Best for: Stunning sunsets
Located 90 minutes from Melbourne, the Peninsula Hot Springs in Mornington is a nature lover's delight. Rocky pools of steaming spring water lie scattered amidst the Australian bush. Visitors are able to walk around in the bush, hopping from pool to pool, taking in the breathtaking surrounds, accompanied by nature's soundtrack of



PHOTO: COURTESY

Blue Lagoon

gurgling springs and birdsong. I highly recommend timing the visit for sunset. The hilltop rock pool affords a 360 degree view of the valley. Lulled by the warm spring water, watching the green pastures set aflame by the setting sun—the hot springs in Mornington will certainly take your breath away!

Miyamaedaira Onsen - Kanagawa, Japan

Best for: Delicious local food
Food is perhaps not what comes to mind when thinking of hot springs or onsens (Japanese bath houses), but most of the decent onsens have some of the best local fare on offer. The Miyamaedaira Onsen, located about a 40-minute drive away from Shibuya, Tokyo, is a local favourite and unlikely to be found on tourism websites. I was introduced to this shrine for relaxation

by my Couchsurfing host. The *onsen* has a number of bedrock pools and wooden tubs to soak in, some overlooking the hills beyond. As with most Japanese innovations, this *onsen* was beautifully designed and everything a visitor could need is provided for—from robes and towels to soap and food. It has a fully functioning restaurant serving up local favourites. They serve the most refreshing cold *soba* and the silkiest *chawanmushi* (savoury egg custard)—the perfect way to cap off a relaxing day.

Pemandian Air Panas Soa Mengeruda-Bajawa, Flores, Indonesia

Best for: A soak off the beaten path
Set amidst lush tropical brush on the Indonesian island of Flores, about 40 minutes away from the town of Bajawa, these hot springs are far from the beaten tourist trail. Local families can be seen picnicking under wide banyan trees, a handful venturing into the turbid waters cascading down rocky outcrops. The pool located under a canopy of trees, their roots forming the banks, has hot water bubbling straight from the ground. Once in the pool, surrounded by foliage, it feels a world away from civilisation.

Samai Haider is a writer, traveller, artist and economist. Read about the fables of her foibles here in Star Weekend.

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When to go

The visiting season for Antarctica only opens in the southern summertime, namely November – March. The appropriate time to go largely depends on what you want to see or get out of the experience.

For a pristine, fresh and clean Antarctica... go in November or December, just when the season is starting. Being one of the first there means you get to see the continent in its undisturbed and unspoiled state. It will likely still be snowing, so you will see nothing but white for the entire duration of your trip. You will get moody and monochrome pictures, but it will be very peaceful.

However, being early means you will miss out on seeing some of the animals (like certain types of penguins and whales). The Emperor penguins, for example, are still waddling over from the interior and will not reach the shore until much later in the season. Some areas may also be blocked off by ice that have yet to melt, which may limit the places you get to visit.

For slightly warmer conditions and a chance to see



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For a pristine, fresh and clean Antarctica... go in November or December

almost all the penguin types and whales... go in February or March, when the penguins frolic close to shore and a sighting of whales is common. The sky will likely be blue and sunny, resulting in more cheerful pictures. You will also be able to access places that were previously difficult to reach due to the ice.

However, coming late in the season means you will be arriving to muddy shores that have been trampled upon by hundreds or thousands of people before you. The place will also be swarming with ships and humans, which means you may see more of your own species than any other.

Antarctica may not be a typical tourist or holiday destination for most people, but that's exactly why it's worth visiting. I had the time of my life, and so will you. Plus, it's getting easier and easier to reach the 'bottom' of the world, and what with all this climate change going on, it may not be around for very long...

What are you waiting for?

Atiqah Nadiah Zailani is a Malaysian professional aspiring for a balanced, sustainable life by living well with less, who solves problems and gets things done for a living. The article was first published on her website <https://atiqahnadiah.wixsite.com>

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