



RUSSIA'S RING OF FIRE

KAMCHATKA, THE COMMANDER
AND KURIL ISLANDS

EXPEDITION DOSSIER
15 – 28 JUNE 2022



Heritage Expeditions

Antarctica • Western and South Pacific
Subantarctic Islands • Russian Far East



© C Collins



Commander Islands Reserve © G Jones



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The Pacific Ring of Fire manifests itself in numerous places on the rim of the Pacific Ocean – but nowhere more dramatically and spectacularly than in the Russian Far East. Here the Pacific plate subducts under the North American plate and the resulting volcanic and geothermal activity has built a unique and amazing landscape. Upwelling from the deep trenches formed by this action and currents around the many islands creates perfect conditions for seabirds and cetaceans. Consequently, this area is one of the richest in the world both in terms of the number of species, which can be seen, and their sheer abundance. For many, the undoubted highlight is the auks, and during this voyage it is possible to see up to 14 species including Tufted and Horned Puffins, Parakeets,

Whiskered and Rhinoceros Auklets, as well as Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots. Other seabirds regularly encountered include Laysan Albatross, Mottled Petrel, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Red-faced Cormorant, Red-legged Kittiwake and Aleutian Tern. For those keen on cetaceans we can reasonably expect to see Fin, Sperm, Humpback Whales as well as Orca (Killer Whale), Baird's Beaked-Whale and Dall's Porpoise.

The region's human history is equally interesting and fascinating. The original settlers were the Ainu and Itelmen. They were displaced with the arrival of the Cossacks in the 18th Century after the Explorer Vitus Bering put the region on the map. The Soviet empire encompassed the region and at the height of the Cold War, Russia's formidable Pacific Fleet was based here. The secrecy surrounding the fleet resulted in the region being 'closed' even to Russians who were required to get special permits to travel to and within the area. It is only now, three decades since Perestroika, people can travel relatively freely here, although there is still very little in the way of infrastructure for visitors.

The region we explore on this expedition falls into three quite distinct and unique geographical regions: the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Commander Islands (the western extremity of the Aleutian chain of islands), and the Kuril Islands. Each region is very different, has its own story and, in many cases, localised plants and birds. Join us as we go in search of those people, plants, animals and birds that make this part of the Pacific Ring of Fire so special. Guests have the option to join in Japan or Russia.



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ITINERARY

Day 1: Otaru, Japan

Our expedition begins in Otaru, a port city in Hokkaido known for glassworks, music boxes, sake distilleries and picturesque Otaru Canal flanked with shops and cafes built within repurposed 1920s warehouses. Make your way to the designated meeting point for your transfer to *Heritage Adventurer* (times and meeting point will be confirmed with your voyage documents) where the captain and expedition team will be waiting to welcome you aboard. After clearing Japan Customs and Immigration, join the expedition team in the Observation Lounge or up on the Observation Deck as we set sail for Sakhalin Island. Once clear of the harbour there will be an introduction to the staff and ship, and a series of briefings. However we'll aim to keep these as short as possible to allow you ample time to settle into your cabin and get out on deck to look for seabirds.

Day 2: Sakhalin Island, Russia

We arrive at the Port of Korsakov on Sakhalin Island where we will clear Russian Customs and Immigration before setting sail for Kunashir Island. We will also pick up any guests joining the voyage here. If the weather is favourable we should get great views of Tyatya Volcano, which at almost 1,819 metres dominates the landscape.

Day 3: Kunashir Island

Today we have an early morning beach landing planned at Kunashir Island, the largest in the Kuril chain, to explore Kurilsky Reserve alongside local rangers. The reserve covers the northern and southern portions of the island with 70 per cent of it forested. Species we could encounter here include Latham's Snipe, Oriental Turtle-Dove, Oriental Cuckoo, Japanese Bush-Warbler, Eastern Crowned Warbler, Narcissus and Brown Flycatchers, Siberian Stonechat and Long-tailed Rosefinch. Overhead and along a nearby river, we should find good numbers of White-tailed Eagle. We will also be on the lookout for two special species that occur in the reserve, namely Blakiston's Fish-Owl and Crested Kingfisher.

Day 4: Iturup Island

If conditions are suitable we will enjoy an early morning Zodiac cruise looking for the Spectacled Guillemot and the Long-billed Murrelet. Today we plan to board the Zodiacs once again for the short ride to the community of Kurilsk where local buses will take us into the volcanic highlands of Iturup. Passing through some spectacular scenery as we steadily climb up towards the Baranskiy volcano, there may be an opportunity to soak in natural hot pools high in the mountains. The higher altitude and different vegetation gives us an opportunity to look for a range of new birds including Eastern Buzzard, Japanese Robin, Grey-bellied Bullfinch, Siberian Accentor, Pine Grosbeak and Kamchatka Leaf-warbler. On our return to Kurilsk there should be an opportunity to explore the village or explore the coastal habitats of Iturup with your naturalists including a Zodiac safari. Both Russet Sparrow and Chestnut-cheeked Starling are known to occur here and, depending on the tide, we may also find a good selection of gulls; there is often a good-sized roost here that can include Black-tailed, Slaty-backed, Glaucous-winged, Glaucous and Black-headed Gulls.



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Day 5: Simushir and Yankicha Islands

After an early breakfast we plan to board the Zodiacs and cruise into a vast flooded caldera at the northern end of Simushir Island. Only a quarter of a century ago this was the location of a top secret Soviet submarine station where hundreds of mariners were based. This haunting reminder of the Cold War has now been completely abandoned and we can wander around what remains of the base, which is steadily being reclaimed by nature. Within the stunning setting of this huge caldera, we can expect to find a good range of species with one of the most common birds likely to be the spectacular Siberian Rubythroat which can often be seen singing from the tops of scrubby bushes. Eurasian Nutcrackers also breed on the island and other species we have a good chance of encountering include Arctic Warbler, Brown-headed Thrush, Pine Grosbeak and Japanese Grey Bunting.

Over lunch we plan to cruise to Yankicha Island, the summit of a submerged volcano. Invariably this is one of the highpoints of the entire voyage as the number of alcids breeding here is truly incredible. Subject to weather and sea conditions, we will use the Zodiacs to circumnavigate part of the coastline and then enter the flooded caldera. The concentrations of Crested and Whiskered Auklets here are simply spectacular and we can also expect to get great views of Brunnich's and Common Guillemots and both Tufted and Horned Puffins. We should also see the snowy race of Pigeon Guillemot. While inside the caldera we will pass the breeding colonies of Crested and Whiskered Auklets and are likely to also find Harlequin



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Ducks. We also stand an excellent chance of seeing Arctic Foxes that can be pretty inquisitive as they patrol the auk colonies looking for their next meal. As we return to the ship in the late evening many of the alcids will be returning to their colonies. Being surrounded by clouds of birds darkening the sky is an experience you will never forget.

Day 6: Ekarma and Onekotan Islands

This morning we expect to be off Ekarma Island which, like so many of the islands in the Kuril chain, is an active volcano. The island is home to hundreds of thousands of breeding Northern Fulmars and we plan to Zodiac cruise along the coast enjoying the multitude of birds. Other species that breed here include both Tufted and Horned Puffins, we may even see some of the island's resident Peregrines hunting alcids.



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This afternoon we plan to make a landing at the northern end of Onekotan Island from where it is a relatively easy walk to Black Lake. Our walk will take us through stunted areas of Siberian Stone Pine, Dwarf Birch and Polar Willow. At the time of our visit conditions should be spring-like and, as we make our way to and from the lake, there should be plenty of wild flowers in bloom including the possibility of some stunning orchids. On the lake a selection of wildfowl can usually be found including Greater Scaup and Goosander, while in the scrub we will be looking out for Buff-bellied Pipit, Brown-headed Thrush, Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler, Siberian Rubythroat and Pine Grosbeak. On the beach where we land, and throughout the walk, there is extensive evidence of fortifications built by the Japanese during World War II. The Russians defeated the Japanese in the closing days of the war and although the islands have been considered Russian territory ever since, Japan still disputes Russian ownership of some of the Southern Kuril Islands.

Day 7: Atlasova Island, Second Kuril Strait Plich'i Rocks

This morning we will arrive at Atlasova Island. On the shore near our landing site are the remains of a Gulag and some

small marshy ponds where it might be possible to see Long-toed Stint and other waders. On some nearby low cliffs there is a colony of Red-faced Cormorants and, out in the bay, there is a chance of finding Harlequin Ducks, Black and White-winged Scoters, Greater Scaup, Eurasian Wigeon and Falcated Ducks as well as Pacific Sea Otters.

We then plan to sail through the Second Kuril Strait between Shumshu and Paramushir Islands on route to Ptich'i or Bird Rocks where Alaid, the tallest volcano in the archipelago with an elevation of 2,340 metres, can be found. The plan is to Zodiac cruise the wildlife rich Ptich'i Rocks where an abundance of birds, seals and Sea Otters reside at these fascinating formations. Sea Otters were hunted to almost extinction in Russia, but now number back to almost two-thirds of their historical range. Harbour and Larcha Seals are often seen here as well as a healthy population of Tufted Puffins.

Day 8: Bukhta Russkaya, Kamchatka

If the weather is fine, fantastic views of the many snow-covered volcanoes that dominate the southern part of the peninsula greet us as we sail up this fiord. Bukhta Russkaya is an isolated fiord roughly 150 miles north of the



southern tip of Kamchatka. Near the entrance there have been sightings of both the Long-billed Murrelet and the endangered Kittlitz's Murrelet.

We plan to make a landing at the head of the fiord where the birding can be very rewarding with many species singing and Lanceolated Warbler, Brambling, Common Rosefinch, Oriental Greenfinch and Rustic Bunting among the possibilities. We will need to exercise care as brown bears are not uncommon here. We also plan to Zodiac cruise the entrance to the fiord where there is an excellent chance of observing Sea Otters, Larcha Seals, Steller Sea Lions and Orcas.

Day 9: Zhupanova River, Kamchatka

We anchor off the mouth of the Zhupanova River where we will Zodiac cruise up the river for several hours looking for birds and other wildlife. The combination of smoking volcanoes and mile upon mile of untouched forest make this area very special, but it is also home to some exceptional wildlife including a high density of Steller's Sea Eagles. There are usually several massive stick nests immediately adjacent to the riverbank and, consequently, we have an excellent chance of getting some exceptional views of

this majestic raptor. There should be plenty of other wildlife too. Species we have seen on previous occasions include Pacific Diver, Falcated Duck, Wood Sandpiper, Aleutian Tern, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Arctic Warbler, Willow Tit and both Yellow-breasted and Rustic Buntings.

Day 10: Olga Bay

Olga Bay is a part of the very large Kronotskiy Reserve, which also includes the world-famous Valley of the Geysers. The habitat is quite different to what we will have been experiencing before with lush Kamchatka forests coming right down to the beach line. There is a possibility we will see brown bears and other forest fauna, as well as multiple bird species that live in this habitat. The seas around Olga Bay are frequented by large numbers of Gray Whales that are usually quite friendly to the visiting boats, if the conditions are right we will take a Zodiac whale-watching cruise. The rising volcanoes in the background here provide a beautiful setting to explore real Kamchatka wilderness.

Days 11 to 12: Commander Islands

The Commander Islands form the western extremity of the Aleutian Islands and are the only islands in the chain that belong



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to Russia. They are named after the legendary Danish explorer Commander Vitus Bering who discovered the islands when he became the first European to sail between Asia and North America. Unfortunately Bering's ship was wrecked and he died here along with many of his crew, though little evidence of their time on the island remains, except for a simple tombstone marking Bering's grave.

During our two days in the Commander Islands we plan to visit both Bering and Medny, but our first stop will be at the village of Nikolskoye on Bering Island. While ashore we will have the opportunity to visit the small museum (one of the few places in the world to have a skeleton of the Stellar's Sea Cow). There is also some excellent birding to be enjoyed here. Along the shoreline there are often hundreds of Glaucous-winged Gulls as well as smaller numbers of the far more localised Red-legged Kittiwake. We should also see both Rock Sandpiper and Mongolian Plover (or Lesser Sand Plover) here, as well as both Lapland and Snow Bunting which invariably show very well. We should also have an opportunity to explore an area of tundra behind the village where the highly-prized Pechora Pipit is known to breed.

All landing sites in the Commander Islands are weather dependent, so our precise itinerary will vary depending on the prevailing conditions. Possible sites include a colony of over 2,000 Northern Fur Seals where we should also see Steller Sea Lions and as many as 200 Pacific Sea Otters. There are also several sites where Zodiac cruising can be highly productive and it is possible to get close views of Red-legged Kittiwake, Parakeet Auklet, Horned Puffin and Pigeon Guillemot (a very different-looking race to the birds in the Kuril Islands).

We also plan to ship cruise along the southern coast of Bering Island as this is a superb area for seabirds and cetaceans. We could potentially see Short-tailed, Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, Mottled Petrel, Red-legged Kittiwake, Least, Parakeet and Whiskered Auklets and Horned and Tufted Puffins. This area is also renowned for cetaceans including Sperm, Humpback, Northern Minke, Baird's Beaked Whales and Orca.

Day 13: At Sea

We have a day at sea as we cruise across the Kamchatka Trench towards Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy which is located

at one of the greatest natural harbours in the world, Avacha Bay. These waters are renowned for cetaceans as the trench borders between two major tectonic plates creating deep canyons where these animals feed. Blue, Fin, Humpback, Sperm and Baird's Beaked Whales have all been recorded here, as have Dall's Porpoise and Orca, so there is real potential for some great cetacean sightings. There will, of course, also be birds to watch. Look out for Red-legged Kittiwake, Tufted Puffin, Ancient Murrelet and Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel.

Day 14: Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy

This morning we arrive in the historic city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, it will be worthwhile watching from one of the many vantage points as we sail into Avacha Bay. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy is the main city of the Kamchatka Peninsula and the capital and administrative centre of the region. This city and the surrounding areas offer a great amount to see and explore. We encourage you to take a few extra days after the expedition to explore this amazing area, ask us about post travel opportunities here. After a final breakfast, a coach will transfer you to a central city point or the airport.

Note: During our voyage, circumstances may make it necessary or desirable to deviate from the proposed itinerary. This can include poor weather and/or opportunities for making unplanned excursions. Your Expedition Leader will keep you fully informed.



HERITAGE ADVENTURER

Heritage Adventurer is a true pioneering expedition vessel of exceptional pedigree often referred to as the 'Grande Dame of Polar Exploration'.

Purpose built for adventure in 1991 at Finland's Rauma shipyard and specifically designed for Polar exploration, *Heritage Adventurer* (formerly known as *MS Hanseatic*) is 124-metres long, boasts the highest passenger-ship ice-class rating (1A Super) and an impressive history of Polar and remote region exploration making her perfect for Heritage Expeditions signature experiential expedition travel.

Originally designed to accommodate 184 guests, we now welcome just 140 expeditioners to create a spacious, comfortable on board experience and continuation of the exceptional, personalised expedition experience synonymous with the company. While a fleet of 14 Zodiacs ensures

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And should you require a little R&R, unwind in the library, pool, gym, hot tub, sauna and steam room, indulge in some retail therapy or find a quiet place to enjoy a coffee or cocktail from the café and bar.

DATES

Voyage #HA220615
Otaru to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy
15 – 28 June 2022
Sakhalin to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy
16 – 28 June 2022

PRICES

Heritage Suite \$21,950 pp*
 Located on Deck 6, Heritage Suites are an expansive 44m² and feature large double panoramic windows, king bed, large living area with a sofa, coffee table and chairs and grand marble bathroom with a double basin, bathtub and shower, large writing desk, floor to ceiling cabinetry for storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Worsley Suite \$15,950 pp*
 Located on Deck 6, Worsley Suites are a spacious 22m² and feature large panoramic windows, king or two single beds, comfortable chaise-style lounge suite, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Superior Single \$15,540 pp*
 Superior Single Cabins on Deck 5 are a spacious 22m² and feature large panoramic windows, king bed, comfortable lounge, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Superior Triple \$10,450 pp*
 Superior Triple Cabins on Deck 5 are a spacious 22m² and feature large panoramic windows, two single beds and one Pullman bed which folds down from the wall, comfortable lounge, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Superior Deck 5 \$12,950 pp*
 Superior Cabins on Deck 5 are a spacious 22m² and feature large panoramic windows, king or two single beds, comfortable lounge, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Superior Deck 4 \$12,450 pp*
 Superior Cabins on Deck 4 are a spacious 22m² and feature large panoramic windows, king or two single beds, comfortable lounge, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Main Deck Single \$14,940 pp*
 Main Deck Single Cabins on Deck 3 are a spacious 22m² and feature two porthole windows, king bed, comfortable lounge, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

Main Deck Triple \$9,950 pp*
 Main Deck Triple Cabins on Deck 3 are a spacious 22m² and feature two porthole windows, two single beds and one Pullman bed which folds down from the wall, comfortable lounge, writing desk, private en-suite with shower, ample storage and a flat screen entertainment system.

* The price listed includes the local landing fees of \$500 (All prices are per person in US\$).

PRICE INCLUDES

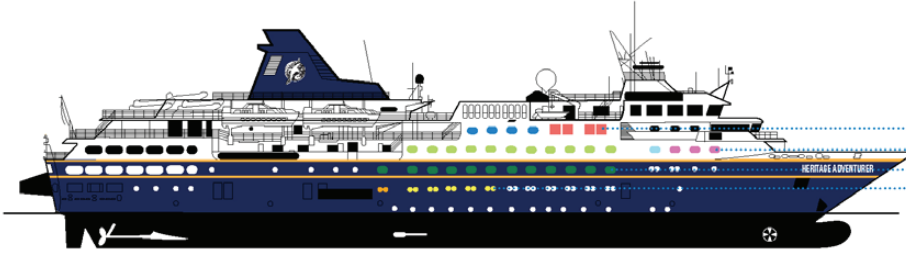
Pre/post cruise transfers, all on board ship accommodation with meals and all expedition shore excursions.

PRICE EXCLUDES

All items of a personal nature, laundry, drinks, gratuities. International/domestic flights, visas and travel insurance.

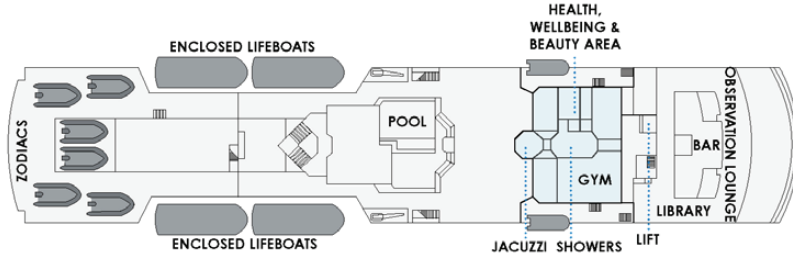
1/30/2021

Heritage Adventurer Deck Plan

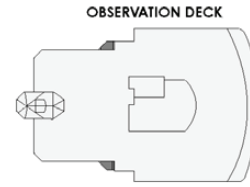


DECK 6: SUITES ● WORSLEY ● HERITAGE
 DECK 5: ● SUPERIOR ● SUPERIOR TRIPLE ● SUPERIOR SINGLE
 DECK 4: ● SUPERIOR
 DECK 3: ● MAIN DECK TRIPLE ● MAIN DECK SINGLE

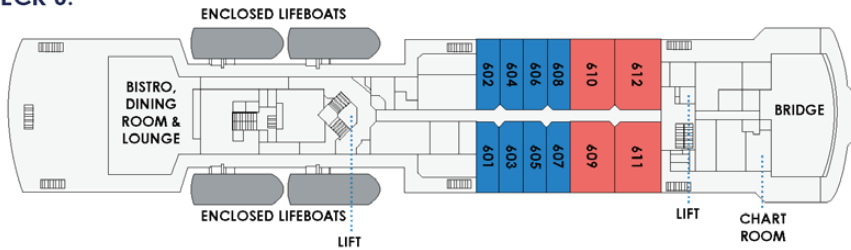
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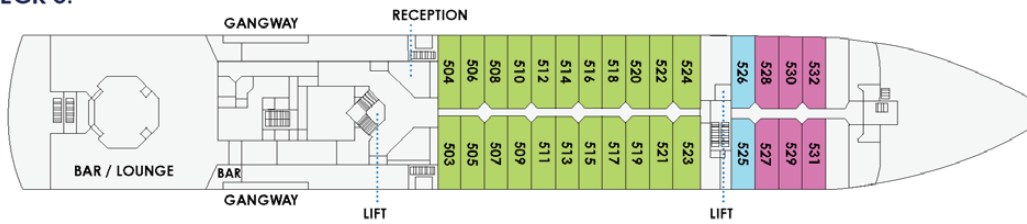
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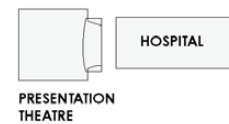
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DECK 3:



DECK 2



SUITE CATEGORIES

- HERITAGE SUITE
- WORSLEY SUITE
- SUPERIOR SINGLE
- DECK 4 SUPERIOR
- SUPERIOR TRIPLE
- MAIN DECK SINGLE
- MAIN DECK TRIPLE
- DECK 5 SUPERIOR



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