

FREEZE FRAME

A GUIDE TO PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE POLAR REGIONS

Ten Tips from Sue Flood

Whether you're a professional photographer, or simply want to take home a few snaps to show friends and family, your Quark expedition to the polar regions will offer a wealth of photographic opportunities – stunning scenery, a variety of exciting wildlife encounters, and don't forget your fellow travelers and the expedition vessel itself. With twenty-four hours of daylight on many of the trips you can be photographing at all hours of the day and night if you want to!

I've made over 25 voyages to the Arctic and Antarctic, and enjoyed some outstanding photographic experiences. Here are my top ten basic tips to help you make the most of your Quark adventure. They're written with digital photographers in mind – although many tips apply to film cameras as well.



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 Sue Flood is a professional photographer and wildlife filmmaker, represented by Getty Images. After 11 years with the BBC Natural History Unit, working on series such as 'The Blue Planet' and 'Planet Earth' she turned freelance in 2005. In 2008 she won the Art Wolfe Best of Festival award in the International Conservation Photography Awards, and the Silver medal of the Royal Photographic Society. She was also a finalist in Travel Photographer of the Year, and Wildlife Photographer of the Year. Sue has had over 25 trips to the polar regions. www.sueflood.com

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TIP 1: PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT – KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT!

Whether you're treating yourself to a new camera for your polar voyage, or bringing one that you've been using for a while, be sure to familiarize yourself with your camera and accessories before leaving home, so that the functions are second nature. You don't want to be fiddling with dials and buttons when you've got a penguin chick pecking at your boot, watching a humpback whale breaching, or marveling as a polar bear stalks a seal close to the ship!

Even if you do end up using old faithful "Auto" for most shots, there will be occasions when you want to photograph things in less than ideal conditions – low light dawns, fast moving animals for example – and at those times it's useful to know what other settings can do on your camera, so that you can use your aperture priority, shutter priority or manual settings, where appropriate.



The beauty of digital means you can practice with all the settings very easily, with instant feedback on what they all do.

Bring your camera manual along on the trip, then it'll be easier for our Expedition Team to help with any questions you may have.

TIP 2: BRING THE RIGHT KIT, INCLUDING SOME HANDY EXTRAS – AND LOOK AFTER IT.

No matter what camera system you have, whether a simple “point and shoot” or a top of the range digital body with several lenses, some spares and accessories are really useful.

- A backpack or waist-belt bag to carry and protect your camera equipment. Some manufacturers make well-padded waterproof bags, which are useful for Zodiac trips ashore, or for putting down on the snow. Or you may like to consider a simple waterproof ‘dry bag’ or float bag. You can buy these online at Quark’s Gear Shop. www.quarkexpeditions.com/gear. I also bring a disposable shower cap, as it can be useful for providing a cheap, easily accessible cover for the camera and lens when there is spray around.
- A lens cleaning kit comprising a soft cloth, blower brush and lens cleaning fluid. Lenses and bodies often get water or spray or snow droplets on them and are worth cleaning often.
- Spare memory cards – you’ll take many more shots than you ever thought possible! And it’s a good idea to be able to back up your cards, whether onto an external hard drive or your laptop – or both, if you want to be extra safe.
- Spare camera battery – the cold does reduce their normal life. It’s a good idea to keep a spare in an inside pocket where it’s kept warm by your body heat.
- Be sure to check what type of plug sockets are on board and bring a suitable adapter so you can power up your battery charger.
- If you do bring a camera with changeable lenses, then the useful lengths are a wide angle – 16-35mm – for capturing the vast and lovely landscapes, and even close animal encounters if you’re in the Antarctic. A mid-range zoom (I use a 24-105mm and also a 100-400mm with my Canon 1DS II camera) for images of distant animals. You may like to consider bringing a spare camera body in case of disasters. I always do.



This shot of Emperor Penguins at Snow Hill was taken on an inexpensive point and shoot.

- A polarizing filter helps cut down glare off the snow and water, and increases the intensity of blue skies.
- A tripod can be useful, but not essential (see later tips for avoiding shake).

When you’ve come back to your cabin, be sure to clean any salt spray or dirt off your camera and check for dust. Do NOT be tempted to touch your sensor. There are specialist cleaning brushes but I would personally recommend getting it professionally cleaned, rather than trying to do it yourself when you’re at sea.

If you have been outside for some time in the cold, and then come inside to the warmth of your cabin, your chilled camera will get covered with condensation. To prevent this, simply wrap your camera in a plastic bag or towel while you’re outside, then let it warm slowly in the cabin before unwrapping.

TIP 3: GOOD SHOTS START WITH WARM CLOTHING.

Good shots are always easier if you're comfortably warm yourself. Wear the right clothing for the conditions, and this means layering your clothing so you can take off or add an extra layer as appropriate. Of course, the conditions vary from day to day. At the Snow Hill Emperor Penguin rookery I've had some days when I was simply wearing a t-shirt and ski pants, and others at minus 18C (minus 0.4F) when I wore my warm jacket, ski-pants (salopettes), ski mitts and balaclava! Even a single day can change from clear blue skies and calm, to cloudy with snow flurries.

Quark will supply you with a detailed clothing list, and with a warm parka (except on *Lyubov Orlova*) and boots, but keen photographers may like to pack a couple of extra items.

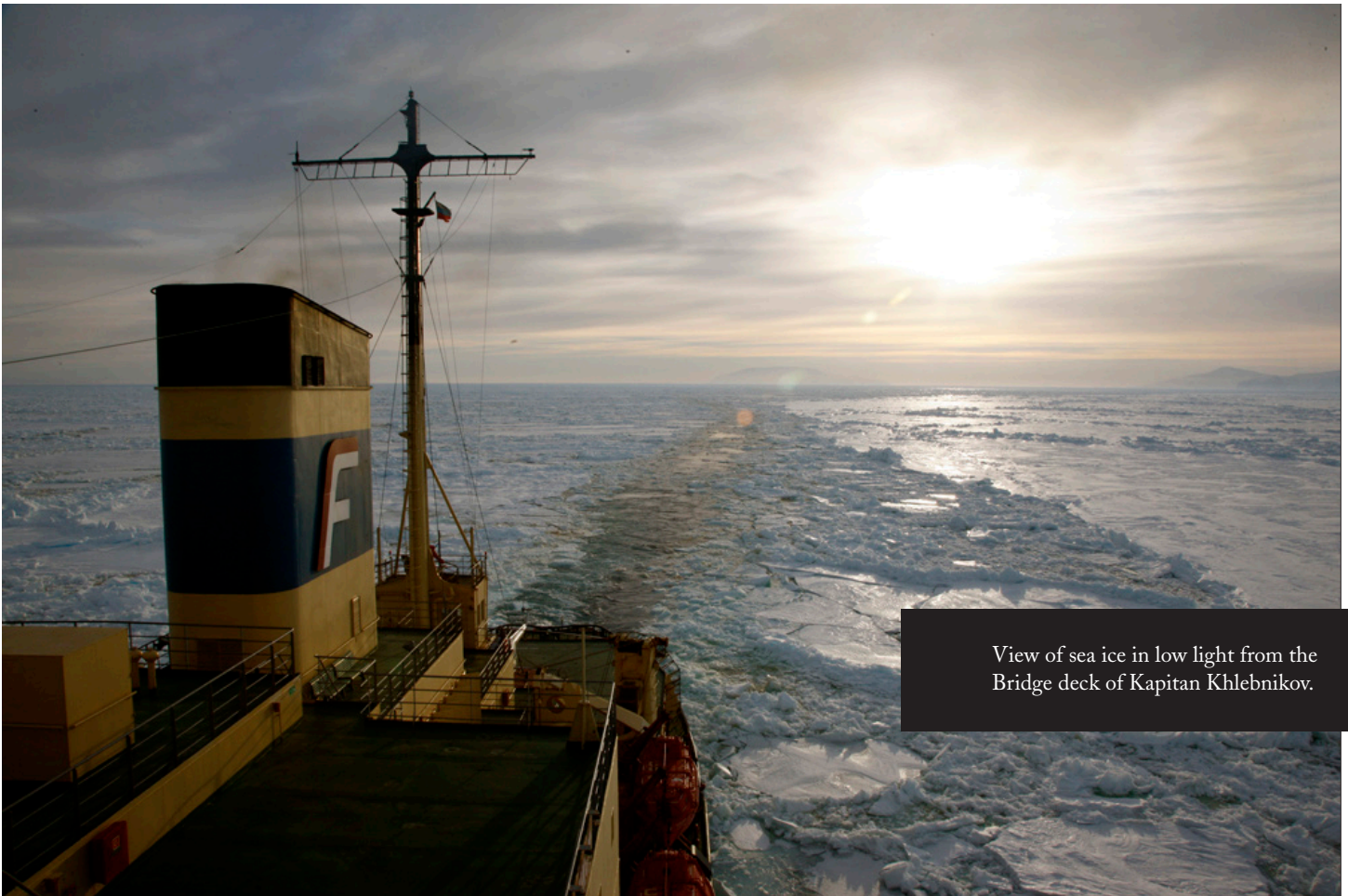
A thin pair of windproof gloves, which I wear under my padded ski gloves, make working the camera controls easier but still keep my hands warm. When it's warmer, then "fingerless" mitts are good, the kind that basically keep your palms and back of your hands covered but leave the fingers free. Any good outdoor shop sells them. When it's very cold my windproof balaclava keeps my face warm.

Be prepared to kneel or even lie down on the snow or ground, so have waterproof pants, which you don't mind getting dirty!

Polarized glasses are also very useful if it's a bright, sunny day. They really help cut down the glare off the snow and water and can be useful as a prop in photos!

Kapitan Khlebnikov reflected in polarized goggles.





View of sea ice in low light from the Bridge deck of Kapitan Khlebnikov.

TIP 4: ALL ABOARD!

Your photographic opportunities start as soon as you're on board. Don't wait until you see ice and animals, there are great photos all around you, whatever the weather. Friends and family always want to see the ship that's been your home during your Quark voyage!

Use your vessel to provide a good vantage point. Seabirds often follow in the wake of the ship, and the Flying Bridge can also be a great spot for watching and photographing seabirds or polar bears, or getting shots of the bow as it breaks through the ice. If you're able to get out onto the sea ice then the vessel makes a great subject, especially with people or penguins to give a sense of scale.

Look beyond the wildlife and scenery – patterns of the ice and water can also produce fascinating pictures.

TIP 5: COMPOSE YOURSELF.

When we look at a photo, some are simply more pleasing to the eye than others. That's the magic of composition! It's a huge topic but one very handy concept is the "rule of thirds". For example, look at this shot of passengers cruising along the edge of the Drygalski ice tongue. The Zodiac is positioned about 1/3 from the right hand edge and bottom of the shot, the sea level comes about 1/3 up the shot. It's pleasing to the eye. And the Zodiac gives a great sense of scale.



Similarly with the polar bear out on the sea ice with the glacier in the background – again it's that rule of thirds.



Other points to be aware of:

- Is your Horizon straight?

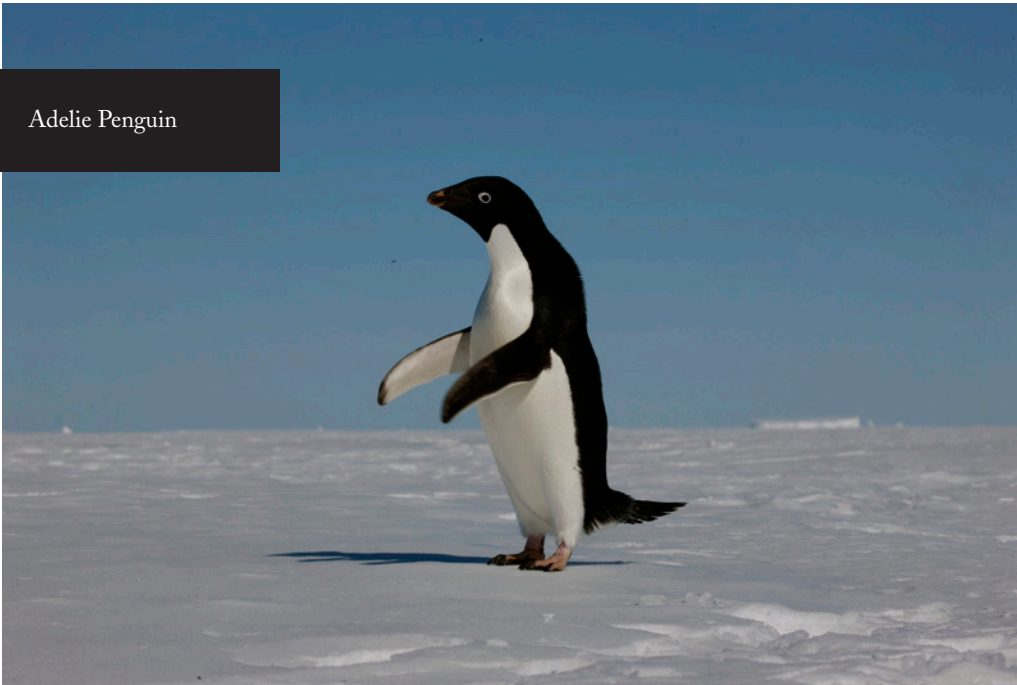


- If you're taking a shot of someone on board ship, guard against that mast growing out of their head! Have you chopped them off at the ankles? Would it look better if you simply moved in closer so they were bigger in the frame? Or should you turn the camera on its side instead of holding it horizontally?
- If you're taking a shot of an impressive landscape then, if possible, include animals or people in your shot to give a sense of scale.
- Don't be afraid to experiment with composition – again, with digital it's easy!

TIP 6: THE LOW DOWN – THE EYES HAVE IT.

It's not always possible, but pics of animals often work best when you get down to the same eye level as your subject. It makes the shot more intimate and appealing, it catches the character of the subject too. And it's why the pros always seem to be wearing trousers with dirty knees!

Adelie Penguin

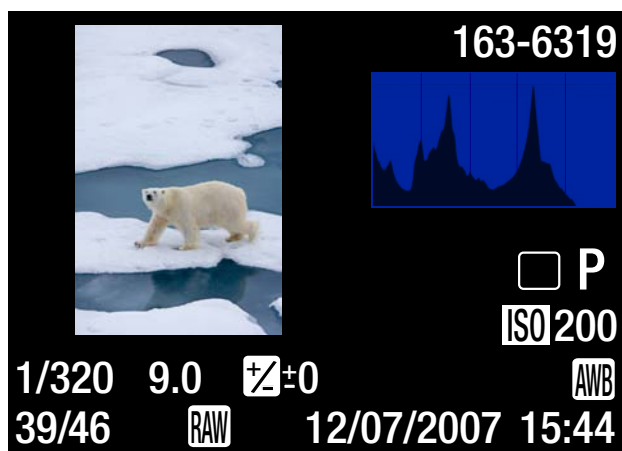


TIP 7: NORTHERN (AND SOUTHERN) EXPOSURE.

Metering systems on digital cameras usually give great results most of the time, although snow and ice can make it tricky. Many point and shoot cameras now have a setting for snow, so you simply turn your dial to the snow setting and the camera will expose the image accordingly.

Use your histogram to check your exposure (nearly all digital cameras have these).

The histogram is simply a chart which shows the range of light and dark tones in your shot. The left hand side of the chart shows the dark areas, the right hand side the light areas, and the middle of the chart shows the mid-tones. For a well-exposed shot which doesn't have overexposed or underexposed areas you should have a peak in the chart in the middle. Some cameras will have "blinkies" in the picture when you review your shots. These flashing areas indicate where the picture is too bright (overexposed) and so it might mean you need to change your settings and use exposure compensation. Learn about this from your manual before you leave home!





TIP 8: READY, STEADY, SHOOT!

Unsharp pictures happen for three reasons: the camera isn't being held steady enough; the subject is moving too fast and so is blurred; or the picture just isn't in focus.

Cameras with autofocus settings are usually very good. In normal operation, they lock on to whatever is in the middle of the frame, so just keep your subject there and the focus should be sharp.

For birds in flight, or animals on the move, use a fast shutter speed. Say more than 1/250 of a second. That will freeze the movement. It may be you have to come out of auto-mode and on to a setting where you control the shutter speed to ensure you keep the speed up.

Wobbly camera holding is the most common reason.

A tripod is the complete answer, but there are other ways to ensure that you don't suffer from wobbly-vision. If you're standing on a moving ship, keep your feet apart and keep your arms and elbows tucked into your body to help steady the camera. The ship's handrail also makes a convenient rest. If you're on shore or sea ice, try crouching down and resting one elbow on your knee for support. This is much steadier than shooting from a standing position. You can also lie on the ground and prop yourself up on your elbows for steady, low angle shots – great for penguin rookeries!



TIP 9: PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE!

Always be on the look out for that special moment – whether it's animal behavior, a person's reaction, or simply great light conditions. Quietly wait for the right moment to press the trigger, rather than rushing around and trying to cover too much ground in too short a period. It's often worth waiting in one spot and really looking around you for the best shot.

Be on the lookout for unusual shots and anticipate what's going to happen next so that you can capture something more interesting. An elephant seal having a scratch is probably more interesting than one simply lying there!

On a recent Ross Sea voyage, I saw a group of Emperor Penguin chicks making their way up an icy slope. I realized that they would have to jump off or turn back when they got to the top, so I waited for the right moment and was rewarded with a mid-air jump!

TIP 10: WELFARE OF YOUR SUBJECT.

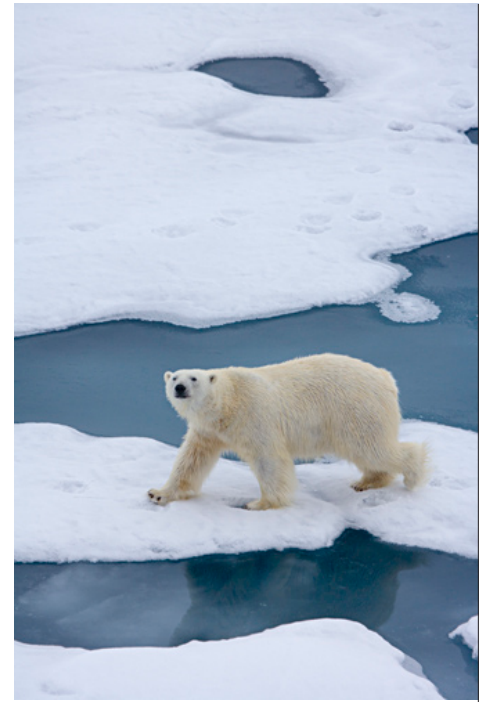
We've all heard "Take only photographs, leave only footprints." This is especially important in the pristine polar environments. Many Antarctic species show a wonderful curiosity. Penguin chicks and their parents, are usually as interested in you as you are in them, and this can make for some great photos. But be sure to follow the IAATO guidelines, which Quark's Expedition Team will tell you about before going ashore.

Respect the wildlife that you're photographing. You'll get a much better results if you let the animal come to YOU. If you sit down quietly, at some distance from a penguin rookery you'll often find yourself surrounded by curious chicks. Move slowly and quietly and give way to the animals. You're in their home, so treat them with the respect they deserve and you'll be rewarded with those wonderful wildlife encounters that you'll never forget!

[Enjoy your photography!](#)

By sitting quietly and patiently for over an hour, these passengers were rewarded with a fabulous wildlife encounter, as the chicks got closer and closer!





PUT YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE!

The polar regions are a natural destination for photographers of all levels. To learn more about photographic opportunities in the Arctic or Antarctica, call 1-800-356-5699, +1-203-852-5580 or email enquiry@quarkexpeditions.com.

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