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Cruises

# I Took a Luxury Cruise in Antarctica with my Teenage Son and This Is What it Was Like

*This luxury Antarctica cruise is truly a choose-your-own-adventure kind of experience.*



Judy Koutsky | April 15, 2022



Photo: Scenic Luxury Cruises and Tours

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When I told people I was returning to Antarctica after my first visit two years ago, they were excited. When I told people I'd be taking my 13-year-old son, they were surprised.

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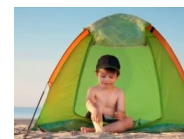
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Truth be told, so was I.

I'd wanted to take him on my previous trip, but I thought missing two weeks of school was too big of a price to pay. But just a few months after I returned from my first trip to Antarctica, COVID-19 upended the whole world—including schools—and now missing two weeks doesn't seem so crazy anymore.

So, when I had a second chance to take my son to Antarctica, I didn't pass it up.

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## Multigenerational Cruising in Antarctica Onboard the Scenic Eclipse



 Scenic Eclipse and penguins in Antarctica (Photo: Scenic Luxury Cruises and Tours)

My home for two weeks in Antarctica was the [Scenic Eclipse](#), a luxury expedition yacht with all the bells and whistles (and the once-in-a-lifetime bucket list price tag that entails). My son Jack was the only passenger under 20, but there were plenty of groups on [multigenerational family](#)



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[vacations](#) (grandparents, parents, and “kids” in their 20s and 30s). Jack never felt weird being the only one his age—if anything he felt like a rock star, since everyone knew his name.

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The nice part about an Antarctica cruise is it's a choose-your-own-adventure kind trip. You can be as active or passive as they want. And the passengers onboard the *Scenic Eclipse* ran the gamut in terms of activity level.

## Helicopter and Submarine Excursions from the Scenic Eclipse



📷 Helicopter onboard the Scenic Eclipse luxury Antarctica yacht (Photo: Scenic Luxury Cruises and Tours)

The *Scenic Eclipse* is currently the only ship in Antarctica that offers both helicopter and submarine excursions.

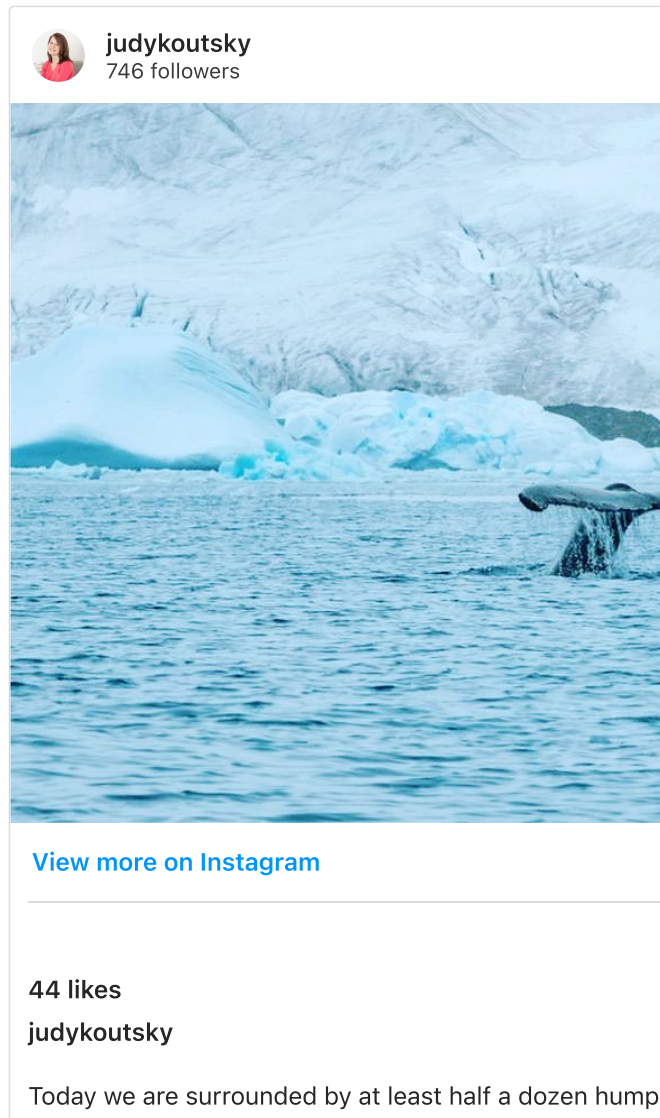
As a family travel journalist who frequently travels with my kids, I've gone on many helicopter tours with Jack over the years, but nothing compared to flying over the glaciers and icebergs on the white continent on a helicopter excursion.

We could see penguin colonies, leopard seals, whales spouting water, and ice and snow for miles—and we were fortunate enough to sit in the front seat where the views are unsurpassed. The helicopter excursion is one of the most

popular excursions onboard. In fact, some passengers on my cruise enjoyed it so much they booked it again.

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Next up for us was the submarine. That's right: submarine! The *Scenic Eclipse* is the only ship in Antarctica with a submersible. It's called the *Scenic Neptune*, and the experience was very intimate (there are only six passengers, plus the pilot). In my travels I've only been in one other submarine, and that was with 50 other people, so this was a very different experience.



One person in our group warned the pilot that he was prone to claustrophobia. However, the submersible's massive glass windows really did make it feel like we were in the water ourselves—as opposed to being in a machine—and that made a big difference in helping with the natural feeling of claustrophobia in what might otherwise feel like a very enclosed space.

We witnessed plenty of sea life and it gave me a new appreciation and awareness of the interconnectedness of our oceans.

## SUP and Kayaking Excursions from the

## Scenic Eclipse

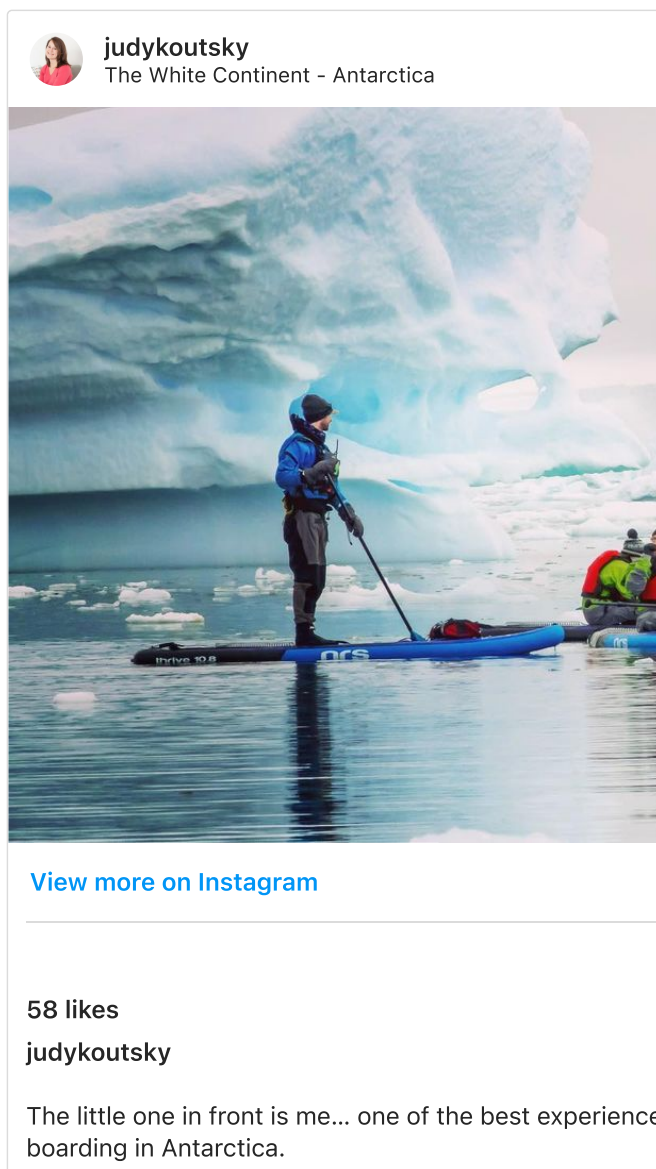


📷 Kayaking in Antarctica is one of the many activities onboard the Scenic Eclipse (Photo: Scenic Luxury Cruises and Tours)

Jack and I love active adventure, so we are no strangers to kayaking and SUP, but doing these activities in Antarctica was a completely new experience for both of us. When we were kayaking, we were able to get within feet of icebergs and fur seals. A group of penguins showed off their porpoising skills (the act of swimming quickly in and out of the water to get air, almost jumping through the waves).

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I'll admit, I was hesitant to do the standup paddle boarding (Jack was all in). While I had done SUP dozens of times in warmer locales like [Mexico](#), [Caribbean](#), [Florida](#), and [The Maldives](#), I wasn't sold on doing it in cold Antarctic water. But I guess you could say that was extra motivation to not fall in.



Jordan, our guide, was not only knowledgeable about Antarctica but also very supportive of our group—those who'd never done SUP, those who were terrified of falling in, and those seasoned pros who had no problem keeping their balance.

Truthfully, doing SUP in Antarctica with the whales spouting a short distance away and passing a sleeping seal on a floating ice sheet really drove home the fact that I was in such a remote and amazing destination. Being on the water—not in a kayak, but a SUP—gave me such great perspective of the landscape surrounding me.



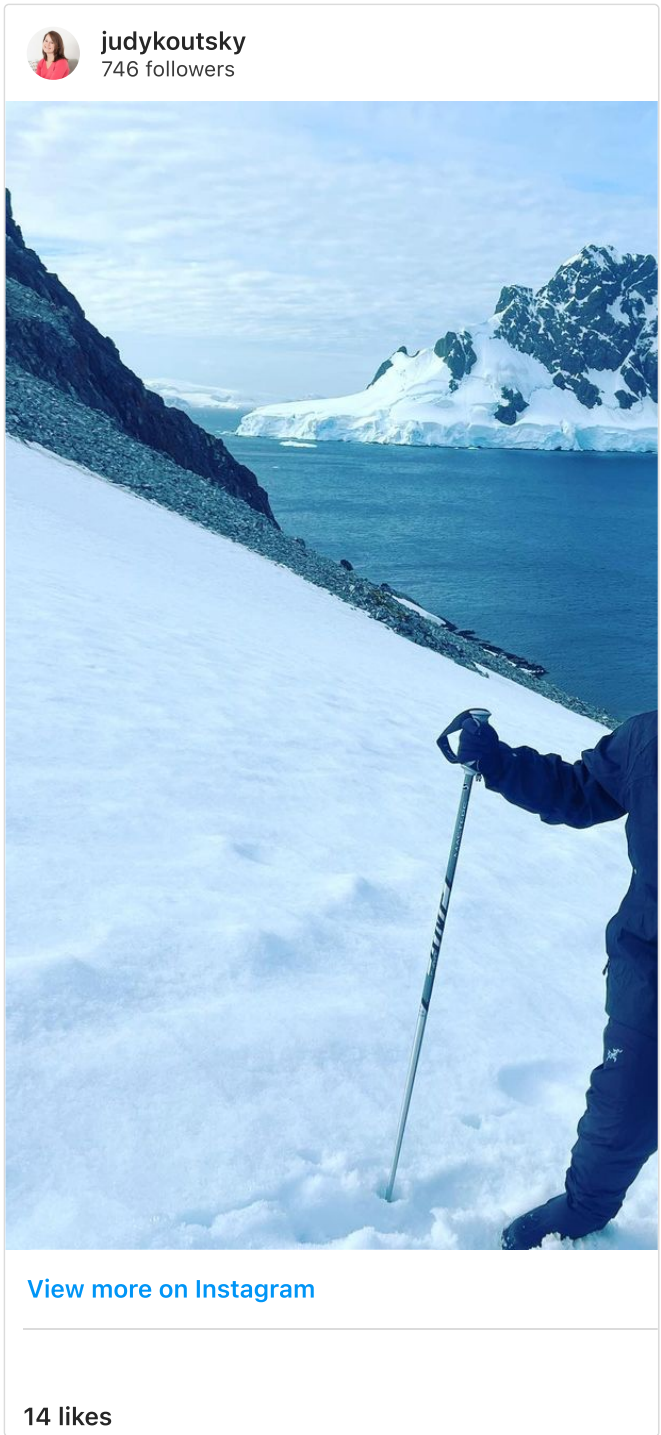
Jack loved it so much that he signed up to do SUP each day.

## Hiking in Antarctica



📷 Hiking in Antarctica (Photo: Scenic Luxury Cruises and Tours)

The helicopter and submarine excursions were once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and kayaking and SUP were a great way to really interact with Antarctica's wildlife, but it was the landings that made me realize that we were walking in the footsteps of great explorers like Shackleton.



Hiking up craggy cliffs to get the best views, walking among chinstrap, Gentoo, and Adelle penguins—we realized how lucky we were to explore a continent so few people ever get to visit. I'll admit, on some of the more strenuous hikes, I let Jack go solo to the top while I enjoyed the scenery from the midway point.

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There were always expedition guides from the ship keeping an eye on Jack, so I knew he was safe. The passengers and guides were a little community all looking out for each other.

## The Ultimate Luxury Antarctica Cruise Perk

It wasn't lost on Jack that the *Scenic Eclipse* is a luxury ship. There were seven different dining venues (including sushi and a French bistro), a full-service spa (we both enjoyed massages), a gym, and three outdoor Jacuzzis. But it was the private butler that Jack loved the most.

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French fries at 10:00 p.m.? You betcha. A Shirley Temple after returning from an excursion? No problem. Freshly baked cookies right when we felt the urge for something sweet? Of course. Our butler did it all—he made our dinner reservations, helped us with any questions we had, and made sure everything was seamless.

Sailing Antarctica onboard the *Scenic Eclipse* was like traveling with a personal assistant—one who usually knew what we wanted even before we wanted it.

## Taking the Polar Plunge

If you're going to journey all the way to Antarctica, it's only right that you do the polar plunge. I *didn't* do it my first time, but this time I was all in. Why? Because for the rest of our lives, Jack and I can say we did the polar plunge together in Antarctica.

Teenagers are always embarrassed of their parents, but I think this is one story we'll both be proud to tell our friends.

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Judy Koutsky

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Judy Koutsky is an award-winning writer and editor whose work has appeared in more than 30 publications, including Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, Redbook, Parents, WebMD, Prevention, and Scholastic.



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
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“How early should I get to the airport?” Over the years, I’ve found there are essentially two camps when it comes to this question: those who live for the adrenaline rush of making a run for it through the terminal and those who make a point of arriving comfortably early.

But how early you should arrive at the airport isn’t that cut-and-dried. A lot of factors come into play, like the time of year, when your flight departs, if you’re checking a bag, if you’re flying domestic or international, and if you’re [flying with kids](#).

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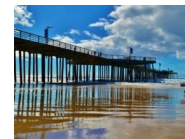
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Here's everything you need to know about how early to get to the airport so your [family vacation](#) doesn't run into turbulence before you even leave the terminal.

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## How Early Should I Get to the Airport for a Domestic Flight?



📷 Woman in airport terminal looking at arrivals and departures board (Photo: Shutterstock)

Domestic flights generally allow more wiggle room for arrival times, since there's less paperwork and you may be flying out of a smaller airport. But the general rule for domestic flights is to arrive one to two hours ahead of time, especially when traveling with kids.

“We tend to arrive two hours early, just so we're not completely stressed out,” says [Lindsey Daigle](#), a travel photographer, blogger, and mother of six. Daigle's family travels by air at least once a month. “With younger kids, it takes more time to go through bags and through security. And with kids, you just never know when someone's going to decide that that's the

moment they have to eat something or go to the bathroom.”

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When determining how early to get to the airport, another factor is how busy the airport tends to get—and whether that may lead to congestion in security and other checkpoints. Some of the [busiest domestic airports](#) include Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago O’Hare, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Denver. Airports that serve any of the top [family vacation spots in the U.S.](#) also tend to be busy. If your flight takes off from a busy airport, you may want to build in more of a buffer.

Even veteran travelers experience delays when they don’t expect them. “I’ve flown in and out of Jackson Hole several times this season, and I’ve arrived much earlier than usual because they’re just so understaffed,” says Regan Cleminson, a.k.a. [The Venture Travelist](#), a veteran travel blogger. “You would think that because the airport is so small, it’s a breeze, but especially with more gear like my ski bags, you do have to get there earlier.”

If two hours seems like it’s too early to get to the airport for you and your crew, there are a few ways to expedite the process.

- Prep your family ahead of time for what to expect.
- Check in online.

- Sign up for [TSA PreCheck](#) or other security services like [Clear](#) that let you bypass lines.
- Know what can and can't be brought through security, especially liquids like formula, [breast milk](#), and other [baby travel essentials](#).
- If you can swing it, invest in premium seats which usually have shorter check-in lines.

“It definitely varies based on your home airport and the time of day you're flying,” says Willis Orlando, a Senior Product Operations Specialist at [Scott's Cheap Flights](#). “If you're flying first thing in the morning or late at night, you can cut those numbers down a bit, but I'd still give myself two hours because you don't want to get caught in a long line or something unexpected.”

## How Early Should I Get to the Airport for an International Flight?



📷 Arrive at the airport about 2-3 hours before an international flight (Photo: @edric via Twenty20)

For international flights, arrive at the airport about 2.5 to three hours ahead of time. That may feel like an eternity for some travelers, but international flights require more paperwork, passports have to be checked manually, and you're more likely to [check luggage](#).

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You may also find more crowds at the airport at unexpected times. Flights to Europe from the East Coast often mean taking a red-eye flight regardless of airline, which contributes to a rush of people checking in at the same time.

Of course, COVID-19 guidelines have added even more complications. “The biggest disruption is at the check-in counter, where staff have to enforce COVID-19 documentation rules to enter,” says Orlando. “Airlines are trying to do more online, but nobody’s gotten it right yet.”

## Arrive at the Airport Earlier Than You Think You Need to



📷 Family at the airport (Photo: @vinnikava via Twenty20)

Ultimately, how early to get to the airport comes down to your own comfort level when it comes to managing your travel anxiety. You know your own family better than anyone. If your kids take forever to put on their socks and shoes in the morning before school, you’re probably going to

need to arrive at the airport earlier than you think.

### **KID-FRIENDLY FLIGHTS: [4 Best Airlines for Families in the U.S.](#)**

Not all airlines are created equal when it comes to smooth check-in processes, either. Many are experiencing staffing shortages, and that can add up especially if you're going to be checking bags, [travel strollers](#), or car seats.

"You can't discount the staffing issues at airlines and at airports," says Orlando. "During the holidays, wait lines were very, very long, partially because of staffing shortages, but also because the new staff wasn't up to speed yet."

"Budget airlines in particular can be much more chaotic," notes Cleminson.

## **What to Do if You're Running Late to the Airport**



📷 Standing in line at the airport (Photo: @Leo via Twenty20)

First, know that not every flight leaves on time. According to the [U.S. Bureau of Transportation](#),

nearly 25 percent of all flights are delayed or canceled because of the airline, weather, security, or other reasons. So even if you're cutting it close, don't panic.

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"If you've arrived at the airport and there's hope that you can still catch the flight, there are a few things you can do," says Cleminson. "First, go straight to the front of the line for check-in and explain your situation as politely as you can to the person working at the front. If there's no one there, stand in the premium lane and explain your situation when you're called up."

And as a last resort? "Ask the people in front of you if you can move forward," advises Cleminson.

It may be embarrassing, but it sure beats missing your flight.

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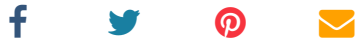
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Always in search of adventure, Kayla Voigt hails from Hopkinton, Massachusetts, the start of the Boston Marathon. You can usually find her at the summit of a mountain or digging into a big bowl of pasta. Say hi on Instagram @klvoigt.

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