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Things that the continent of wind and ice taught me

Written and photographed by Kyung-Nam Koh

Taking a Walk in Antarctica



Introduction

In 2006, Kyung-Nam Koh spent a year at King Sejong Station in Antarctica. This book is a reflection on his experience of life in that unique environment.

A Dictator in Antarctica

A blizzard is an intense snow storm with wind at a speed of over 13 meters a second and visibility dropping below 200 meters. When a blizzard occurs, even warmer temperatures on a thermometer become meaningless. All outside activities are suspended, and darkness fills the world.

A Way of Life in Antarctica

The most commonly seen living creatures near King Sejong Station are penguins. There is a penguin village nearby where thousands of penguins live together. These penguins must be vigilant against skuas, an Antarctic bird which will tear a baby penguin to pieces to feed its young. Baby penguins also die by freezing to death and even in some cases by being crushed to death in their nests. When this happens, because decomposition is inhibited by the intense cold, the dead penguin's remains dry up and become part of the nest. Thus death in this stark landscape helps life to continue.

Superb Views of Antarctica

If you look all around in Antarctica, there is only ice. Ice is not static but flows slowly over many years. This huge flow is called a glacier. When the glacier reaches the sea, the front part breaks away. This leaves a cross-section at the end of the glacier called an ice cliff. If the glacial mass that broke away is big, it is called an iceberg. If it is small, it is called an ice floe. Even one small lump of ice floating in the ocean contains thousands of years of time. Standing in front of it, one is struck by how short a human life span seems in comparison.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my beloved, dearest friend **Louisa Frank** for being on this exciting journey with me.

In addition, my special thanks to Prof. **Kyungran Park**, **Wonbo Kim**, **Jaewon Kim**, and **Larry Crist** for their thoughtful, meaningful input throughout the course of the T&I program and this translation.

I also would like to give thanks to the author and my cousin, **Kyungnam Ko**, for allowing me to do this project. Finally, last but not least, I want to say how much I appreciate my family's support and encouragement.

• Author's Introduction

Kyung-Nam Koh was born in Seogwipo City, Jeju Island in 1974 and grew up near waterfalls and the ocean. When he entered Seoul National University College of Medicine, he became curious about the drama club and ended up joining the club and directing Shakespeare and Borchert. He wrote columns for music magazines such as *Coda Classics*, *Stride*, and *Gramophone*. Koh became a pediatrician, wanting to understand the meaning of the different sounds of children's crying. Yet, he still gets nervous when children begin crying. He led a tranquil life but one day he awoke without a sense of purpose and felt lost. Then, suddenly, he decided to go to Antarctica. Koh spent a year as a medical officer at King Sejong Station, located at the end of the earth, Antarctica, surrounded by boundless oceans and gigantic ice. He returned home in 2007. Koh was a runner-up in the 2007 annual spring online literary contest in the digital camera essay section hosted by Chosun Ilbo, one of the major newspapers in South Korea. His work also received the highest honor in the Hanmi Essay Literature Contest. *Taking a Walk in Antarctica* is the outcome of the speculation of one soul fighting against loneliness in the continent of wind and ice. For the first time, the author experienced the mystery of Mother Nature and a sense of awe toward life in the unknown territory where time has been frozen for thousands of years. The touching moments were captured by the shutter of his mind, and the result is this beautiful book.

For everyone who dreams of Antarctica, and for every living creature that breathes in Antarctica, pray for peace for the ice and the oceans in Antarctica for all time.



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A Prologue



Sometimes I staggered,



and sometimes I stopped.



Being infected with the virus called everyday life, I was lukewarm about everything.



I wanted to find myself.



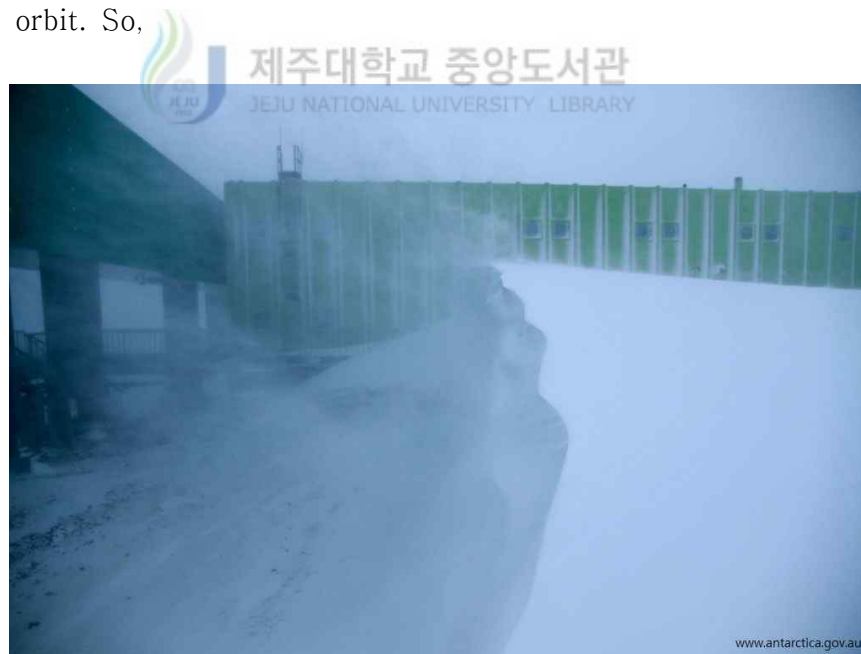
Just at that moment, I saw the announcement for recruits for King Sejong Station.



Many thoughts crossed my mind, and...



I, who avoid adventures and do not like traveling and moving, decided to leave my orbit. So,



to the land where the temperature is minus 40 degrees Celsius with fierce winds,



where even the sun is frozen up,



and where Seoul is very far away, I came...

A Day



8:00 a.m.

When the sun rises, clouds and sky are ablaze beyond ice cliffs.

The forest fire covers a snow mountain.

The ruddy smoke spews from ice cliffs.



The mornings of Antarctica are filled with fire and ice.
Even the sun cannot beat the ice.
Nor does the fire ignite the ice, going out soon.

11:00 a.m.

The air is cold, but the sun in Antarctica is stronger than anywhere else.
Just a little further up in the sky, the sun spews a cold light like an
incandescent lamp that lights a freezer.

4:00 p.m.

The sun in Antarctica gets tired easily. In the afternoon, it scatters golden powder between the mist and the clouds.

6:00 p.m.

Then...the sun goes down. Batteries are easily discharged in Antarctica. The sun with a dead battery cannot melt even a small ice floe in the ocean.



In the wintertime, a day in Antarctica lasts about 4 hours. The sun rises around 10 o'clock in the morning and crawls low along the horizon and goes down around two o'clock in the afternoon. In other words, it is like dusk falls right after the sunrise. A day only consists of sunrise and sunset...It is lonely and beautiful.

In the summertime, the sun is up no less than 20 hours, which means a day in summer in Antarctica is the same as three days elsewhere: In Antarctica, it is as if one day begins at two in the morning when day breaks and ends after breakfast, a second day lasts until lunchtime, and a third day until sunset. Thus, I did three days worth of work each day in the summer. Ideally, for the first, I read or write; for the second, I go out to an ice floe for exploration work; for the third, I could listen to all of Beethoven's 9th symphony while taking a stroll on a beach.

Even if a person decides to do something but cannot keep the resolution longer than three days, in Antarctica only one day, in fact, has passed by. Therefore, it seems as if Antarctica's summer is like a person who lives three times longer and thus gets three times older in this season.



A day that begins with fire ends with fire.

Darkness rolls in at full speed, turning the clouds that cover the sky and lake red. Unrealistic beauty is difficult to deal with in my right mind.

Blizzards

In contrast to Seoul which is regulated by days and time, Antarctica is regulated by wind and snow. All daily tasks and activities start with considering wind and snow conditions. For instance, a blizzard, an intense snow storm with wind at a speed of over 13 meters a second and visibility dropping below 200 meters, is the dictator of life in Antarctica. When a blizzard occurs, people are unfailingly bound hand and foot. A blizzard freezes all of time and space.

Even if the temperature falls below zero to 40–50 degrees Celsius (104–122 degrees Fahrenheit), it is not a big deal if there is no wind. However, in a blizzard with wind at a speed of 20 meters a second, even warmer temperatures on a thermometer become meaningless.

During a ground blizzard, when the wind continues to blow, the snow piled on the ground rides on the wind and fills the earth and sky. No one can distinguish things just a few meters ahead, nor can a person stay balanced in such a strong wind. Exposed skin can get frostbitten within a few minutes.

In 1913 Captain Robert Scott's British Antarctic expeditionary force froze to death just 18 kilometers away from a food warehouse because they couldn't move an inch for a few days due to a blizzard. Several decades ago, a crew member from the Japanese Showa Station went outside and disappeared during a blizzard. His corpse is alleged to have been found just a few kilometers away from the Station. He was wandering for a while and lost his life as he couldn't find the Station right in front of him.

On the day a blizzard occurs, all outside activities are suspended. The darkness fills the world, and the dreadful noise of the storm shakes King Sejong Station. Even knowing that no accident will happen if they stay in the Station, people inevitably become terrified in the presence of such a fearsome force.

I could say that for me the cold was no problem at all in Antarctica; being alone was much more difficult. I felt a sense of pressure that I needed to cope with everything by myself when potential risks became a reality, and all sorts of stray thoughts about myself that unceasingly passed through my mind...Complex ideas, like a snowstorm created by a blizzard, shook my mind. When this happened, I had to reduce the space between the thoughts by giggling while watching a drama, clicking the shutter thoughtlessly, or loitering near other crew members.

Every once in a while, well...the loneliness, the emptiness...Such feelings come over me. When this happens, I can't seem to get anything done due to the thought that I would like to go back to Seoul. If I deliberate about these feelings, I realize I felt the same way, too, when I was in Seoul.

I ponder what I did when this happened to me in Seoul...I borrowed comic books or went to a bookstore called Kyobo to buy a couple of new books and to browse new music at a place called Hottracks in the bookstore; then, I ate buckwheat noodles and nibbled on cheese cake for dessert at the Coffee Bean and came back home to sleep when I got tired. My answer to the question if I felt better by doing such things is of course NO. This is why I still feel lonely even though I came to Antarctica.



As the vigorous blizzard rages, I listen to Mozart's Requiem or the requiem of Jan Dismas Zelenka in order to escape the noise outside. However, even when *Dies irae* blared out, the music could not beat against the noise of the blizzard; even *Flammis acribus* froze because of the snowstorm. I couldn't help but shiver, sitting crouched on a chair because I wasn't able to prevent the fearful chill surging up from the floor even after increasing the radiator temperature to its maximum.

There had been moments like that in Seoul when I couldn't get anything done — moments when I sat absent-mindedly in front of a computer while watching a street through which cars and people swept like a blizzard. Suddenly, it struck me what the 'blizzard' really was which bound my hand and foot in Seoul and Antarctica. It was not what I saw blowing in front of my eyes; it was in my mind.



Just as I watch a blizzard outside the window, I quietly look into my mind where a snowstorm is blowing. I don't have to get nervous because of the fact that I cannot get anything done. Nobody can stand against a blizzard. Peace comes about once I admit Force Majeure while watching the blizzard that fills my mind.

I felt that I must not stop even for a moment when I was in Seoul because looking around me, no one stayed still. It seemed that I would soon fall behind if I stopped, even for a moment. That's why I tried really hard to move forward when it was so difficult to take one step due to the storm in my mind.



Life gets much simpler in Antarctica. Everyone has to rest when a storm hits. There's no other option. However, you need to keep looking up at the sky so as to be able to run out as soon as the weather becomes fine.



Seal Sleeping Pills



A sleepy weddell seal came back with a full stomach after diving below 600 meters into deep, dark water. Sleepiness around the eyes of a weddel seal drunk with sleep is highly contagious. If that sleepiness could be extracted, it would be the best cure for insomnia. A hard day brings sound sleep.

Four Seasons

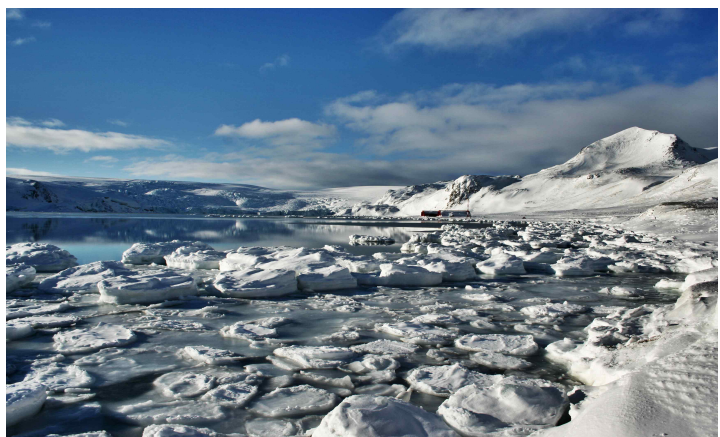
When I came to Antarctica for the first time, it was not unfamiliar. That was because in front of King Sejong Station, there was the sea. When I was a child, my house was near the sea. The sea has memories, yearning, and shame. While walking along the beach in Antarctica, I went back to my childhood days, and my heart ached with cold whenever it happened. Even before my body was chilled, my heart became cold at the Antarctic beach where chilly wind moved around making a thundering noise like a motorcycle gang.

Some people may think that it is always winter in Antarctica; however, four seasons exist in the Antarctic ocean, too. Of course, there are no flowers and autumn leaves. Water, ice, and sunlight fill the Antarctic ocean with the seasons.



In autumn, the night ocean of Antarctica is peaceful. The sky gets sweetly colored like orange marmalade; the sea turns a soft coffee color.

In early winter, the ocean begins to freeze. As it turns into thick ice soup, round pieces of ice start to appear here and there in patches. These patches are called “Pancake ice.”



In winter, the ocean becomes a gigantic ice field. The pieces of ice connected like jigsaw puzzles occupy the sea; and ice floes line up and stand guard. The Station is completely isolated in winter since there is no way to cut through these ice formations to set a boat afloat.

In spring, I go to the ocean for cherry-blossom viewing. When the ocean melts, a host of ice floes come in flocks from somewhere, and the spring ocean of Antarctica is filled with pinkish ice blossoms that sparkle in the sun.



The summer ocean is blue. The sea where ice is melted is filled with the reflection of the blue sky. The sea becomes a huge blue decal.

Mysteriously, Harshly

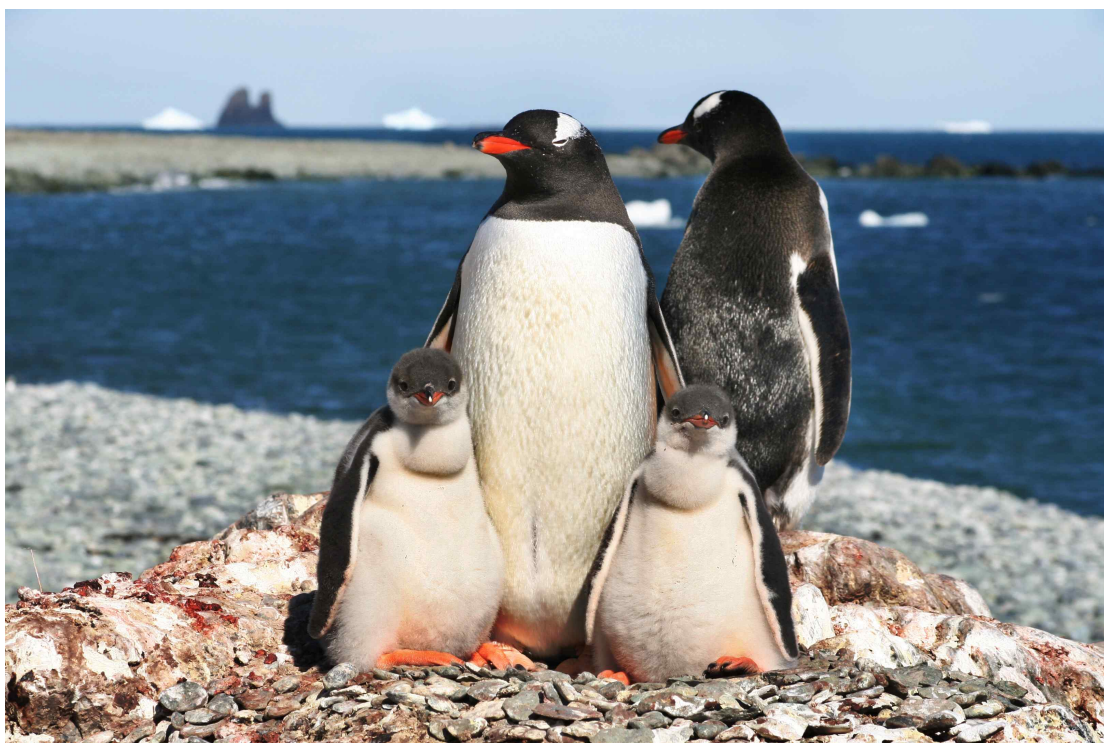
On the day an exceptionally strong wind blows, I shiver for a moment at a small, slight sound of crying.



In December in the northern hemisphere, cold winter winds sweep through, but in December in the southern hemisphere, summer starts in earnest. The spirit of life comes even to the solidly frozen continent.

Penguins that have returned to their habitat start a new life cycle. The male climbs onto the back of the female, and at the very moment when their genitalia touch, they reach a brief and fierce climax.

The incubation period of gentoo penguins and chinstrap penguins is about 35 days, and females and males sit on the eggs by turns. In contrast, it is the role of male emperor penguins to incubate the eggs.



One of two adorable penguin brothers that have miraculously grown after treading through the knife-edged cold of rushing snowstorms would be able to hold out for only a couple of months. The way nature deals with life in Antarctica is not only mysterious but also harsh.

Compared to winter which is a harsh, prolonged season for living creatures, spring, which is generous to life, is short. This is why life in Antarctica is mysterious.

It is known that currently 18 species of penguins exist on earth, and five types are mostly observed in Antarctica. Among them, there is only one species that lays eggs and raises their chicks on ice. That is the emperor penguin. It was, as a main character, actively engaged in the animation titled *Happy Feet*.

It can be said that an emperor penguin is a solitary exception that nature allowed to thrive in this barren land. Its life cycle consists of a miraculous maternal instinct and an unimaginable inefficiency. Most penguins lay eggs in the spring and raise their chicks in the summer whereas emperor penguins come into the middle of the continent in the fall and lay eggs in May or June just before winter. Females head to the ocean after laying eggs in order to hunt for food; while waiting for them, the males eat nothing, sitting on the eggs for two months. During all that time, the males' weight drops by half. If the females cannot come back, the new-born chicks will die of hunger.

I wonder why on earth emperor penguins reproduce in such an inefficient way under such extreme conditions, when they could lay eggs at the seashore in warm spring weather where it is easy to find foods.

Perhaps, thanks to these choices, emperor penguins have been able to successfully keep the species going because no one else could survive in the area. Emperor penguins do not have any competitors since no others want to occupy this kind of harsh land. It is the emperor penguins' blue ocean strategy¹⁾ to preserve the species, choosing the winter of Antarctica full of wind and ice.

1) *Blue Ocean Strategy* is a book published in 2005. Based on a study of 150 strategic moves spanning more than a hundred years and thirty industries, the authors argue that companies can succeed not by battling competitors, but rather by creating "blue oceans" of uncontested market space.



The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda described the black and white color of penguins as day and night. If Neruda saw the penguins running around in Antarctica, he would have phrased it differently: The black and white of penguins are the dark ocean and the white ice.

Holding onto Life

Even the irony that thousands of penguins are attacked and killed by a few skuas, always in the same way, is one of the mysterious rules that makes this ecosystem work.

The simplicity of black and white solely exists in Antarctica: the dark ocean and the white ice, black and white colors of penguins, and the long nights and days. Life and death in Antarctica are also clearly divided into the simplicity of black and white. An ambiguous gray color has no place in this extreme environment. In Antarctica, it is a rule of nature that any wound leads directly to death. Human beings may be the only animal here that can live with injury.

It would be great if a high fence existed between life and death, but in fact, there is only one fine line, and thus young life can easily be dragged into the sphere of death. Baby penguins full of the warmth of life suddenly are turned into a chunk of meat by the attacking skuas looking for food.

Skuas are quick, clever, and heartless. The mother penguin perceives this tragic attack and chases away the skuas, but it is too late. The mutilated baby penguin lies buried under the snow.

You may dislike the skua that tore the baby penguin to pieces, but a mother skua is able to feed her young after preying on a baby penguin, and the baby skua is lovely as well. In addition, as a further justification of skuas, baby penguins die in other ways. Many baby penguins freeze to death, and they are even crushed to death in their nest which is often too small to

incubate two baby penguins if the mother isn't careful. A dead baby penguin dries up as it is and becomes a part of the nest since a corpse hardly decomposes in Antarctica. After baby penguins are deceased, they become food for baby skuas or a part of the nest for their surviving siblings. Thus, death in this stark fashion helps life to continue.



A Penguin, Flying



Trusting that the Land Will Take Care of Everything

On a fine day, after finishing my daily work, I went to a penguin village and silently watched penguins, and the scene warmed my heart.

Baby penguins sleep, trusting that the land will take care of everything. They get peace and rest from the land. Perhaps this is the elemental image of sleep that nature intends as a gift for all creatures.

They sleep without alarm clocks. Their sleep is undisturbed by the alarm on cell phones. It seems as if people are more tied to time by dividing time.

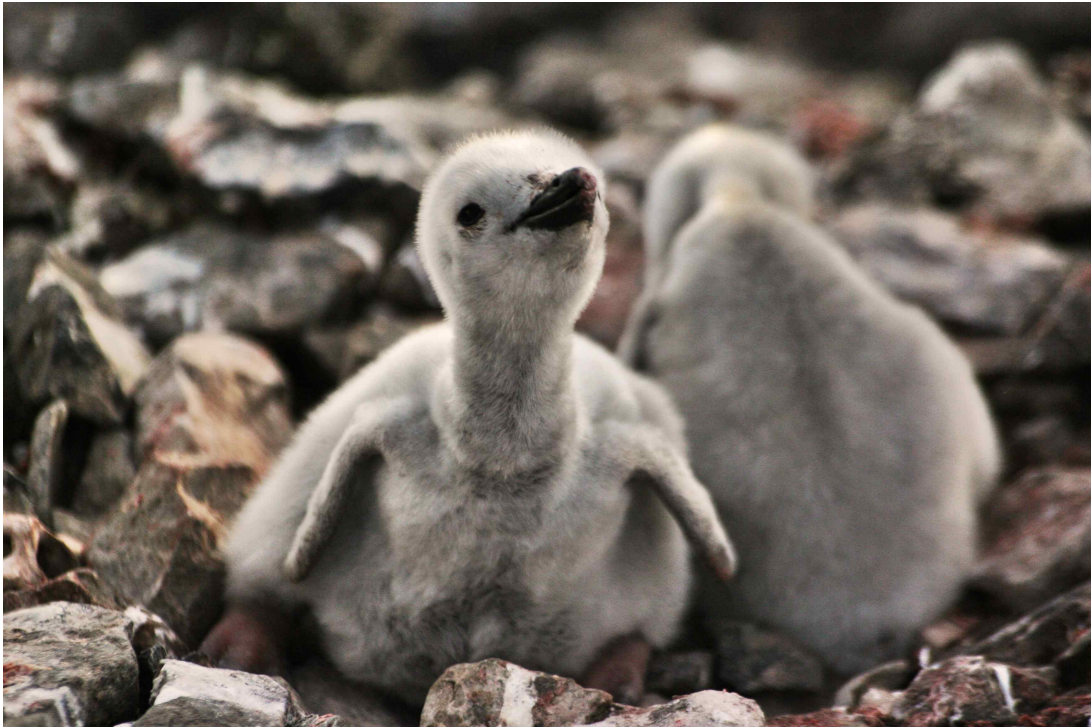
When baby gentoo penguins grow up to a certain point, they form a nursery in order to avoid the attack of skuas while their mothers are off feeding. They look so adorable, like big gray clouds of cotton, swarming around in groups or taking a nap all together. They are perfectly peaceful, trusting that the land will take care of everything.



Penguins just look like humans when they walk upright. I wonder if these guys are part-timers wearing penguin costumes at an amusement park.

The chinstrap penguins' town is way more boisterous. I found these penguins very off-putting at first because they look fierce, have a sharp temper, and are noisy. However, I now miss the fuzzbuzz of chinstrap penguins. This might be because I am now addicted to the fierce daily life of the city that once made me sick to think about.

Now, here I am in Seoul **10,712 miles (17,240 kilometers)** away from the penguin village, yet in my mind I am still hanging around the penguin village.



I was without doubt the child bird
there in the cold archipelagoes
when it looked at me with its eyes,
with its ancient ocean eyes:
it had neither arms nor wings
but hard little oars
on its sides:

—from *Magellanic Penguin* by Pablo Neruda

There I either began a new life, being a baby penguin or waited for the
next life, being a mere bag of penguin bones.

What Human Hopes Mean to Nature



© Alexander Turnbull Library | Captain Robert Falcon Scott (seated centre) at his last birthday dinner during the British Antarctic Expedition, June 6, 1911

I accidently found a picture of Scott²⁾ while skimming through books about Antarctica, Scott who had gotten cold in the blizzard during the hot competition with Amundsen to conquer the South Pole. In this picture, Scott and his comrades are enjoying the festival for celebrating the winter solstice when the harsh winter of Antarctica begins in earnest.

In Scott's journal, the winter solstice festival on June 22, 1911, when the picture was taken, is described in detail. On this day, they cut a huge cake and popped open the champagne, eating seal soup, and various kinds of puddings, pies, and roast beef. They got excited seeing pictures taken in Antarctica displayed in a series of slides and were moved by the marvelous aurora that surrounded their camp. It was a boisterous, fancy feast, as he noted in his journal: "If good will and happy fellowship count towards success, very surely shall we deserve to succeed."

2) Robert Falcon Scott, (June 6 1868 – c. March 29 1912) was a UK Royal Navy officer and explorer. In the so-called Race to the South Pole, Scott led a team, only to find that they had been preceded by Roald Amundsen's Norwegian expedition. On their return journey, Scott and his four comrades all died.

It was the last festival, however. Nine months later, he wrote in the land of death where the blizzard raged: "I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far. It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more. For God's sake, look after our people."

I wonder what made their expedition, which had kicked off with confidence and hope, end in this brutal tragedy.

Amundsen was practical and thorough in everything. He was so thoroughgoing that he even came up with the idea of shooting sled dogs to death in order to feed other dogs when the load was lessened. In contrast, Scott often made poor decisions because of his sense of honor and ideals. For instance, Scott himself insisted on driving the sled loaded with hundreds of pounds of mineral specimens even to the point where he was near death. The things that drove Scott to his end were not mere stones but rather human values. Scott had the undaunted fighting spirit of a British soldier, a traditional gentleman's honor, and a passionate scholastic spirit, but they did not stop blizzards.

Scott's picture taken at the winter solstice festival only contains the hopes of Scott and his colleagues; it does not foreshadow any sense of tragedy. Hope is specific to humans; it doesn't carry any weight with Mother Nature. Thus, human hope cannot be a variable for success in Mother Nature's presence. Nature harshly swept away the solid hope for success...My heart is aching.

A Nap-disrupter



The Biological Cycle

When I called home, my mother used to tell me,

“I knew you would call me today. You appeared in my dream last night.”

I thought that she dreamed of me on Fridays expecting I would call her next day or so because I mostly called her on weekends. For awhile, I had to call her off and on because of the bad Internet connection, but she always said something similar.

“Actually, you appeared in my dream last night...”

Then suddenly, I realized this: she dreamed of me every single day, and that was why she said to me that I appeared in her dream the night before whenever I called her.



Baby penguins spread out with all their might to gobble up food that a mother penguin spits out. It is an instinct of life that reaches out for survival. It is that instinct that makes the tiny gray clouds of fur overcome the extreme cold and hunger. Bodies are humble, but instincts are great.

Even after finishing molting, a young penguin keeps pestering its mom for food without realizing that it can swim to catch prey on its own. The mother penguin is on the run here and there to drag her young out to the ocean. Once in a while, people could see a mother still feeding her offspring when it is even bigger than she is. The young penguin cannot be parted from its mom even though it looks as if it has grown up enough to go out to the ocean by itself.

I am also afraid of going out to the ocean although I finished molting such a long time ago. A penguin's continued dependence on its mother, in apparent disregard of its mother's wishes, parallels mine, which might be a basic element of the biological cycle.



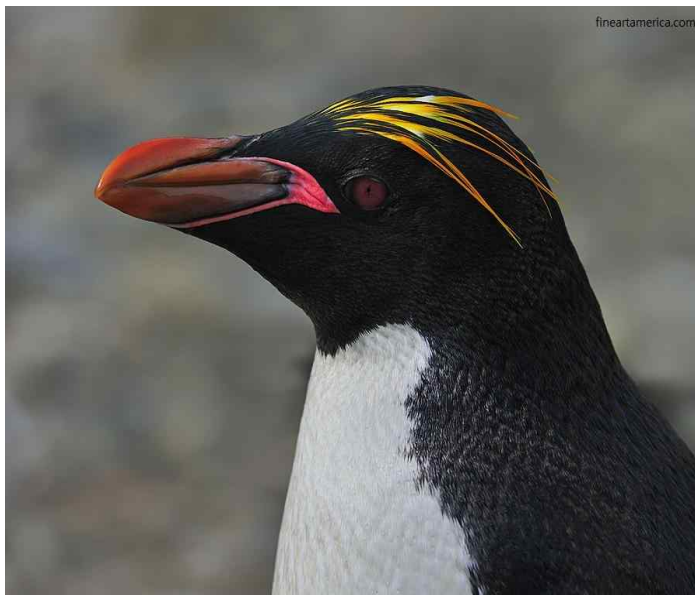
A Penguin Class

Well, let's do art play from now on. First, all you need is black paint. If you paint the face and back black, you have an adelin penguin. It looks as if it put on a hood.



This time, we need an eraser. If we erase around the mouth of the adelin penguin, a strap appears on its chin, which turns it into a chinstrap penguin. Chinstrap penguins are very feisty. They hardly back off even when people approach.

Now, it is a gentoo penguin. Draw a white dot above each of adelic penguin's eyes and color its beak bright vermilion. Gentoo penguins are definitely the cutest. They are curious and easily frightened. When gentoo penguins are far away, they quietly come closer while looking surreptitiously at the people; however, if the people come near, they run away in a hurry.



Away from Antarctica, penguins become more colorful.

Macaroni penguins remind me of tropical birds because they have bright orange-colored eyebrows and thick orange beaks.



Despite looking similar to an emperor penguin, a king penguin got the name "king" because of its smaller size. I wonder what kinds of evolutionary demands have created such a beautiful golden pattern on the nape of this bird. It is probably a golden sunset reflected on white ice and black sea.

My Wing

I lived without thinking about birds when I was in South Korea. Rather, I forgot that birds could fly. This is because half the birds in Seoul are pigeons that have forgotten how to fly, and the other half is found in restaurants, either fried chicken with sweet chili sauce or braised spicy chicken with vegetables. I met real birds in Antarctica. In fact, I did not merely meet them but lived together with them.

Strolling along the beach, I run into so many birds: skuas, terns, petrels, and cormorants. As we realize restriction after experiencing freedom, we can appreciate being confined in a continent of ice while seeing the birds—birds that soar up in the sky out of an ocean filled with floating ice. Obstacles on the ground do not mean anything to them. Birds become air and wind. Until then, I hadn't realized how marvelous flight is, being restricted by the ragged life of a land creature bound by gravity...

Birds can fly across an ocean full of floating ice. Penguins go underwater to cross the ocean, which seems as if they are flying under the icy sea. A penguin's wings that look useless become great motors in the ocean.

Entering medical school, I dreamed of being a perfect doctor likely to appear in an animated film. However, the reality of working in a hospital was tough. In the surgery department, I wasn't able to endure long surgeries that lasted several hours. In the internal medicine department, I had a hard time looking at old, ailing bodies. In the psychiatric clinic, I was often overwhelmed by the abnormal psychology of patients and wasn't too passionate about studies in basic medicine. The reason why I chose pediatrics was that children make my heart flutter. I can feel my heart

beating fast when I see children's large eyes and small gestures.

Everyone has his or her own wings. I have neither the huge wings of a giant petrel nor the strong wings of a tern. My wings are the small flutters of my heart that I feel in front of children. Like a penguin's wings that seem shabby yet become strong motors in the sea, my fluttering heart will be the driving force that powers me through the harsh ocean of medicine.

When a skua hits me with its chubby body, it feels like getting hit by a basketball. At first, I hated skuas which attack people with screaming cries anytime without warning. Only later did I realize that these apparent suicide attacks and desperate cries were actually the instinctive actions of a mother trying to protect her eggs. Skuas also like to steal the eggs of other birds. The mother's instinctive love and mean attacking behavior are two sides of the same coin.



Skuas disappear when winter comes, and my feeling of regret is beyond description. When winter ends, they come back to the Station without exception. The skuas' return means that one year has passed. It means I have to leave here and go back to a world of hustle and bustle.

White feathers, a lean body, a red beak...“Antarctic terns” are beautiful. Don't judge everything by appearance, however. Unlike their neat appearance, they have a fiery temperament, so there is a big commotion when passing through their habitat. Since several Antarctic terns rush in at once, even skuas cannot cope with them, though skuas are much bigger.

It is not easy to distinguish between the feathers of Arctic terns in breeding season and those of Antarctic terns because they look almost the same. However, their way of life is totally different.

Arctic terns fly all the way to Antarctica from the Arctic, seeking summer when winter starts in the northern hemisphere.

These small birds fly around the earth every year and travel more than one million kilometers in their lifetime.

They spend most of their life of 20 years in the air. For Arctic terns, flying is not the means of shifting their location but a way of life in itself, a life where movement is the same as settlement.

Most birds leave Antarctica when winter starts, but there is one type of bird that is the exception. These birds are white and chubby and have the nickname of “Antarctic pigeon.” Their official name is “snowy sheathbill.” They are called “sheathbill” because their bills look like a sheath. They live by eating the solids mixed in penguin feces around penguin villages in the summer, and they come near the Station to find food scraps in winter when the penguins are away. They prefer running to flying and are not afraid of people.

Giant petrels are two meters long, huge birds when spreading their wings. They are like hyenas that eat the corpses of penguins and sea leopards. Although it is frightening to see them eating a dead seal with the blood on their faces, they are affectionate mothers when they are with their chicks.

It is not hard to see cormorants in South Korea, and they live in Antarctica as well. The name of the cormorants dwelling in Antarctica is “Antarctic shag.” Their head is black and their chest is white, and they seem like flying penguins when seen from a distance. So, don’t be alarmed when you think you are seeing penguins flying when you come to Antarctica. It is the cormorant.

In Antarctica, there are seagulls like those commonly seen along the seashore of South Korea. The name of the Antarctic seagulls is “kelp gull.” Their yellow bills and grey wings are beautiful. The kelp gull’s status is ambiguous. They cannot beat the big skuas and are often chased by terns which are small but fly about in flocks. In order to survive in Antarctica, kelp gulls need to eat less menacing food—fish, mollusks, crustaceans, other kinds of birds, and even their own chicks or eggs.



Indomitable Plants

Even though most of the Antarctic continent is covered with polar ice caps, the snow melts away and bare ground is revealed in coastal regions when summer starts. The land of Antarctica is bleak. However, green, which is the color of life, permeates these coastal regions even with the harsh barren ground. Most of the plants in Antarctica are lower-order plants such as lichens and bryophytes. During the winter, such plants maintain a minimal metabolism while covered by thick snow and protected from severe storms and intense cold. They start to come alive again in the summer. For these sorts of plants, time flows differently than it does for humans. They repeatedly go dormant and revive, year in, year out and only grow a few millimeters over many years.

An often observed lichen species in Antarctica, *usnea aurantiaco-atra*, dries up completely in the cold, arid winter. It is as if they choose a short period of death when they can no longer bear the agony. When spring comes, the snow melts away, creating moisture to revive *usnea aurantiaco-atra*. It stretches its sucker out in all directions in order to grasp life. They live for generations, persistently clinging to the ups and downs embedded in the life and near death cycle.

Deschampsia Antarctica is often called “Antarctic hair grass.” There are only two kinds of plants that can blossom in Antarctica. *Deschampsia Antarctica* is one of them. Unlike moss that grows in crevices between rocks or pebbles, hair grass subsists by taking root in the ground. Recently, the number of *deschampsia Antarctica* has risen continuously as the temperature near King Sejong Station has increased and as the frozen land has melted

accordingly. More green is penetrating into the white continent. Green, the color of life, is gradually threatening the life of Antarctica.

Antarctica is one of the driest regions on earth. The temperature is so low in the interior of the continent that there is little moisture, and the annual precipitation is less than five centimeters because it never snows there. Therefore, the area where plants can form a colony in Antarctica is less than one percent of the whole area. Antarctica is in fact a snow-covered desert. As an oasis is more marvelous the bleaker a desert is, so growing plants are more amazing in an infertile environment like Antarctica.

The land of Antarctica is covered with rocks and pebbles, except in the areas where lichens grow. Stones in Antarctica are harshly broken by wind and ice. Firm rocks also crack into plates as water which has leaked into the crevices freezes.



A relationship between people is like that, as well. Even in a firm relationship, if a small crack is caused, water can leak into the crack. Then, the relationship can split just as freezing water ultimately cracks rocks when the ordeal of severe cold weather strikes.

A geographical feature of “patterned ground” is observed on the flat land near a glacier. Repeated freezing and thawing of moisture in the soil forces larger pebbles toward the surface as the smaller pebbles settle underneath. To put it simply, honeycomb patterns are formed comprised of pebbles. Ice and water make rocks into pebbles and pebbles into patterns. Nature provides the ordeal, and the ordeal engraves a pattern on the land.

There is a lonely, stony mountain, called a "nunatak," on the icecap. A nunatak is a lonesome survivor of glacial erosion. The snow doesn't pile up around a nunatak because it has been steeply sharpened by wind and ice, and the surrounding land has been deeply carved out. The peak surviving through this ordeal is sharp like a long-standing yearning. The stony mountain has heart-achingly survived. Now and for all future time, even wind, ice, and snow avoid this lonely, stony mountain.

As I walk along the beach in the wind, dust is rising. The Antarctic flora and fauna have been weathered by wind and have become dust. Weathered dust of old whalebones, rough pebbles, and green moss flies in the wind and enters into my respiratory organs. I am also weathered by that wind, and my somatic cells slightly peel off and blend into the dust of Antarctica. I breathe Antarctica in this way, and Antarctica breathes me in the same way.



Softly



Memory of the Earth



Everyone who sees an ice cliff once will have a piece of everlasting ice in their heart.

The ice cliff flows into the sea, embracing time. The ice cliff is the outlet of time. When I stand in front of it, the decades of expiration of my body seem particularly short. A short expiration date is the evidence of life. When extinction occurs, my body will be returned to icy blue time.



After looking closely at the **ice cliffs**, it is hard to be impressed with anything else.



The distant vista of Marian Cove* looks like a giant red bean paste sherbet bowl³⁾ —dark ocean, shiny white ice floes, and golden dressing spread out above it.



*Marian Cove is a small round cove formed along the northeastern seashore of King Sejong Station.

3) Patbingsu (literally a red bean paste sherbet) is a popular Korean dessert.



Huge glacial flows formed over millions of years make deep cracks called a crevasse. A crevasse is the evidence that glaciers have survived for many years. I feel dizzy when I stand in front of a crevasse. This is because of the deep darkness that seems as if it would swallow everything with the weight of time.

Deep folds contain the memory of the earth...Distant darkness inside a rough, deep crevasse. However, in reality the icy walls of a crevasse are not sentimental. In 2005, two Argentine expedition members fell into one of the crevasses and lost their lives. Ultimately, we had to come back as soon as we got to where the icy walls start.

Ice is not static but flows slowly over many years. This huge flow is called a glacier. When the glacier reaches the sea, the front part breaks away. This leaves a cross-section at the end of the glacier called an ice cliff. If the glacial mass that broke away is big, it is called an iceberg. If it is small, it is called an ice floe. Even one small lump of ice floating in the ocean contains thousands of years of time. Past time that has been trapped in a glacier finally returns to the present as the glacier melts into the ocean.

Glaciers vary in shape. Not only gigantic shapes like Magritte-style shoes but also table-shaped glaciers are floating around. Last year, a glacier that looked like the Sydney Opera House floated down here. It seemed as if Mozart's opera floated out when I was watching the stage made of ice.



A coastal ice cliff looks like a cross-section of muscles where blue blood flows. Ice cliffs consistently play a variation on blue light. The reason why ice cliffs seem blue is that they diffuse the blue region of the visible spectrum and bounce it outward. In fact, being blue is to reject the blue light. Everything under the sun expresses itself by the light that it refuses

to take.

Standing in front of ice cliffs, I can feel the power of the glaciers that are pushing behind. A sense of weightiness seems as if it would pour down at any moment and smash everything. A great deal of time is contained in the glacier.



Two days before leaving Antarctica, I made my last visit to Marian Cove. Normally, as I walked along the beach, rugged mountains blocked the way. Yet on that day, the water had drained away, opening a path to the inside of the cove. Over the year of my stay in Antarctica, I had never been that deeply into the inside of the cove. Ice floes were living in groups there. Finally, Marian Cove was showing me the ice floes that it had embraced.

Moving naturally, ice floes clustered together and then scattered like a Schubert sonata. They were singing along with the melodic lines of the right hand, and then went heavily silent with the rough trills of the left hand. If there is music close to eternity, that would be Schubert. There was

Schubert, and there were breathtakingly beautiful ice floes.

Then, Borges came into my mind.

"I should like this moment to last forever," I murmured.

"`Forever' is a word forbidden to men," Ulrike said.

— from *Ulrike* by Jorge Luis Borges



One day after returning to South Korea, I listened to Schubert thoughtlessly in the subway. All of a sudden, the surroundings changed into an ice cave and ice floes swept into the subway. Music can revive space and time from the past. However, the more music is heard, the weaker the connections get. As time goes by, ice floes flowing along with a Schubert sonata would gradually turn back into cars that fill the streets of Seoul.

Clicking the Shutter Constantly

In the morning, I saw mists rolling in above the ocean full of ice floes. It was so beautiful that I clicked the shutter constantly. I sent the pictures to one of my buddies via email, and he asked “How do you feel when you see such scenery with your own eyes?” I wondered how I had felt...I was always thinking about something when taking pictures: How can I compose the picture; what about lighting and exposure... Ah, a seagull is flying, I need to take a picture quickly...I saw this scenery with my own eyes, though I can't remember how I felt. Only pictures are left. I wonder why I could not peacefully breathe in the scene at that time.

I always suffered from greed that made me want to have something. I thought I could empty my mind in Antarctica, but here I keep clicking the shutter because of greediness that made me want to own every sight I saw. I look at the pictures carefully. Ice floes gleaming icily, mists soaring up from the ocean, a faint sign of sunrise, seagulls splitting the air...

I want to recall the mysterious ocean on that morning, but only pictures are left. Pictures take away memory and only leave the evidence of the memory.

Getting Lost



An Epilogue



Summer has returned to Antarctica. Now, I have to go back to the winter of the northern hemisphere.

10,712 miles (17,240 kilometers) to Seoul...

Some streets in Seoul came into my mind on weekends even though I was down here at the end of the earth: theater posters blowing like fallen leaves in Dae-hak Street, books hot off the press piled up like freshly baked toast in every bookstore, a noisy lobby in the Sejong Center for the Performing Arts which will soon have a concert, soju⁴⁾ that my friend and I drank with sausage stew when the breeze became cold, alleys near Gwanghwamun

4) Soju is Korean distilled liquor.

Gate...

If I had known how much I would miss these things, I wouldn't have come this far away.

When I go back to Seoul, I will miss the bitter winds, the blue ice floes, and the sound of penguins' crying here.

Maybe I will sometimes take out my polar survivor suit that I have worn here and put it on for no reason.

And...One day in winter, walking along the street at Gwanghwamun Gate, I will think of winter in Antarctica when my colleagues and I passed by a huge ice floe in the face of a razor-blade-sharp wind. Then, my heart will flutter, and I will plunk down at a street corner as I long unbearably for Antarctica.

When that happens, what can I do to get back to my daily life except wait for that memory to fade in the years to come like an old picture.

Appendix: The Way to Antarctica

- Through the Korea Polar Research Institute (KOPRI)

There are some people who wonder if they could ever go to Antarctica in their lifetime, but the way to go to Antarctica is surprisingly simple. The most typical way is through the Korea Polar Research Institute (KOPRI). If interested in Antarctica, you should frequently visit the KOPRI's website (www.kopri.re.kr). There you can get information about Antarctica and the variety of opportunities available.

One way to experience Antarctica is to be one of the wintering staff members at King Sejong Station. Yet, not everyone can be one of those winterers with the intent to experience Antarctica because the purpose of an Antarctic wintering team is neither traveling nor exploring but conducting research and maintaining the Station.

The wintering team consists of 17 staff members. A leader and a general affairs secretary are selected from KOPRI, staff members in charge of weather are chosen by the Meteorological Administration and medical officers by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Three researchers are selected from KOPRI, and graduate school students are chosen to study various fields, including biology, geology, the upper atmosphere and atmospheric science. The rest of the staff is selected through open recruitment, including those in charge of telecommunication, machine equipment, plumbing and electrical installation, heavy equipment control and maintenance, electricity generation, maritime safety, and cooking.

The announcement for recruits is released in March or April. The service

period is about 13 months from January to February of the next year.

Many people pay a visit to King Sejong Station during the summer period (November to February). Research teams from the Korea Polar Research Institute and domestic and foreign universities conduct research while staying here for one to two weeks or sometimes more than a month. In addition, reporting teams from broadcast and newspaper companies, and security teams from government agencies make visits to Antarctica.

Even if you don't qualify for the purposes listed above, there is another way to visit King Sejong Station through experience programs. Currently, there are two kinds of Antarctic experience programs. One is the Arts Support Program aimed at painters, photographers, and authors; the other is a program for science teachers and university students majoring in natural sciences or engineering. The announcement is released in September or October, so keep an eye on the website. In addition, there is a range of information at an online cafe⁵⁾ (cafe.naver.com/poletopole2). However, King Sejong Station doesn't have any programs related to traveling and sightseeing.

- **Through Travel Agencies**

When I told people that I was going to Antarctica, they said "How lucky! Isn't that a place where we cannot go even if we have the money?" That's wrong. It is definitely possible if you have money. Every year about 20,000 tourists call on Antarctica through a variety of tour packages. I am a little wary of talking about Antarctic tourism for I don't know much about it

5) An online cafe is an open social gathering which enables people to create a community group that matches their personal interests.

since I didn't go to Antarctica through one of these tour packages, and the increasing number of Antarctic tourists is one of the main threats to the ecology of Antarctica. However, I will briefly mention this information since it is already available.

A visit is usually made during the Antarctic summer from November to February because transportation is cut off when winter starts. In the United States, a company named Adventure Network International (ANI, www.adventure-network.com) has the Antarctic tourism program, and in South Korea, a tourism agency called Shoestring (www.shoestring.co.kr) has the program. There are diverse travel products including a walking tour to the geographic South Pole using skis, a tour to reach the summit of Vinson Massif which is the highest mountain of Antarctica, and a tour to go to the geographic South Pole by airplane. Usually, it takes about two weeks and costs approximately 30,000–40,000 dollars which amount includes only the money spent in Antarctica. I myself have never been near the geographic South Pole, so I don't know much about it.

If you want a less rigorous and more economical program, look at the Antarctic cruise tour. Cruises depart from Ushuaia, which lies at the tip of Argentina. They travel along the Antarctic coasts and visit some Antarctic research stations. It costs about 4,000 dollars.

There is a two/three-week long South American travel program which squeezes in an Antarctic visit. Even if you visit Antarctica for one day/two nights in the summer, you would see a few penguins and with a bit of luck, you might see a couple of sea leopards, which means that at least you could say you had set foot on Antarctic land.

In addition, a host of foreign travel agencies have a great choice of Antarctica travel products using planes and cruise ships. It is not hard to get such information online.

- **Just Go For It**

You can just go backpacking without a travel agency. Actually, South Korean backpackers came to King Sejong Station in 2000 and in 2001. If you want to go to Antarctica without help from a professional travel agency, you should make elaborate, detailed plans and good luck should follow.

Above all, you need to know the following fact: Under the "Antarctic Activities and Antarctic Environmental Protection Act" enacted in 2005, it is necessary to get permission from the minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea to conduct Antarctic activities, including scientific study, expeditions, and tourism. Thus, if you want to go to Antarctica, you'd better check decrees at the website of the government legislation service center (www.lawmaking.go.kr) of the Korea Ministry of Government Legislation.

Even if you get permission for Antarctic activities, you must make arrangements with the Korea Polar Research Institute in advance if you want to visit King Sejong Station. During the summer time, the Station is very busy conducting all sorts of research activities and there are not enough accommodations. As a result, it is difficult to receive unexpected visitors.

There is one more thing that you need to keep in mind before traveling. In summer, it is hard to see the amazing scenery that has appeared in BBC

documentaries. Do not expect too much because you will probably come back, having merely watched a couple of penguins.

There are two points of departure for Antarctica: one is Punta Arenas in southern Chile, and the other is Ushuaia in the southern part of Argentina. If you want to use an airplane, go to Punta Arenas.

Since there are no direct flights from South Korea to South America, you need to stop over in Los Angeles or New York in order to get to Santiago, Chile. It takes about 12 hours to the United States from South Korea; about 11 hours to Santiago from the states; and about five hours to Punta Arenas from Santiago. People usually use LAN (www.lan.com) for flights to Chile.

The Chilean or Uruguayan Air Force C-130 transport plane is usually used to go to the Chilean Frei Station in Antarctica from Punta Arenas. You must make arrangements with the Chilean or Uruguayan Air Force in advance in order to use this transport plane. The Korea Polar Research Institute makes reservations with the cooperation of embassies because it is hard for an individual to make a reservation personally.

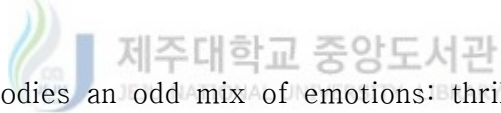
You can also use a small light airplane operated by a commercial airline called DAP (www.aeroviasdap.cl). It costs about 2,500–3,500 dollars. When you plan the trip, you should make sure that you will have enough time to spare in Punta Arenas and that you reserve a return flight that you can change as schedules for flights to Antarctica change frequently.

For those who enjoy a unique way of travel, I would recommend using a transport ship. There are agents, including Agunsa (www.agunsa.cl) and Ultramar (www.ultramar.cl), but it is not easy to book since they are not

tourist companies but distribution companies.

You don't need to worry about room and board in Antarctica. Upon arrival at the Chilean Frei Station, you can find a hotel right next to the airport. Of course, you'd better make a reservation in advance. They use the US dollar and the Chilean peso and speak Spanish but can understand English a little. Information about the Chilean Antarctic station is available at www.zonaantarctica.cl.

You need to become familiar with Punta Arenas to have a bond with Antarctica. Punta Arenas used to be an important port city that linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but decline set in with the advent of the Panama Canal. Punta Arenas is a faded city with a mixture of the prosperity of the past and the decline of the present.

Punta Arenas embodies an odd mix of emotions: thrill and fear before going to Antarctica and relief and regret when leaving Antarctica. So, my colleagues and I call Punta Arenas a hometown in our hearts.


Cabo de Hornos is the superlative hotel in Punta Arenas. The price of a room per day is over 100 dollars. Tierra del Fuego and the Savoy are good hotels with reasonable prices under 100 dollars. It is not hard to find cheaper accommodations, as well. It is also nice to visit the Torres del Paine National Park, which is the pride of Chile.

You may not be able to go to Antarctica even if you arrive in Punta Arenas. Don't be too disappointed. You can purchase various kinds of Antarctica souvenirs. Think that you have been to Antarctica by buying penguin key chains or Antarctica t-shirts.

Beautiful pictures and prose from a country of blizzards, glaciers, and penguins...

This book vividly contains the vast and fantastic scenery of Antarctica. I was so happy seeing marvelous, beautiful scenes which were like a mixture of reality and unreality. I was deeply moved at the symphony that was played by birds, animals, plants, and unpredictable nature in Antarctica. The author's writing with deep, firm thoughts and dramatic or calm pictures swept into my heart like a blizzard and drove away the lonesomeness of life and the fatigue and weariness of daily life at once. I want to keep this book by my side and skim through it again this summer.

Hyeonrim Shin (poet, photographer)



The moment I pronounced the word “Antarctica,” cold, desolation, penguins, and the last moments of Scott and his comrades coursed through my mind. However, the author shows there is a daily life in Antarctica, too. I think in Antarctica he achieved the romance that all travelers desire, which is immersion in a different culture and way of life. Those who embrace a hopeful dream in their hearts, develop your desire with this book.

Mungeun Gang (High school teacher, travel writer)

The art of light and color created by the vast Antarctic scenery is the best. We want to give a high mark to the pictures that show the marvelous oceans, the variation of color from ice cliffs, and the four seasons of Antarctica.

—Review from the 2007 annual spring online literary contest in the digital camera essay section hosted by Chosun Ilbo