



As pure as it gets

With blue icebergs, penguin colonies and untouched peaks, Antarctica has become the subject of countless photographic books. But this one stands out from the crowd

Anyone who has been to Antarctica always says how hard it is to describe its mysticism and harsh beauty to others. Even when they pull out their photos, they know that these don't even come close to capturing the essence of the place.

I've never been to Antarctica, but I've seen more than my fair share of (admittedly beautiful) books filled with posing penguins and cracked ice sheets. This book has those too, but Dutch photographer Thijs Heslenfeld has succeeded where I feel others have failed.

Cold isn't a sugar-coated portrait of the continent; it looks bleak, capricious and genuinely wild. As Heslenfeld himself puts it: 'In Antarctica life is as normal as death. Baby penguins are born in a nest built from the remains of a whale. An old, blind petrel is slowly dying while a seal gives birth just a few yards away... It became clear to me that the beauty of life can only really be experienced if you're prepared to accept death being part of it.'

This is not to say that *Cold* is not a beautiful book, as it most certainly is. But it captures the danger and harsh

realities of life in Antarctica. This is probably down to the fact that Heslenfeld didn't board a scientific research ship or a plush tour vessel. He opted to join the crew of the *Europa* – a slightly battered Dutch barque, built in 1911 – on which he was expected to assist with navigation, hoist the sails and climb the mast at night for iceberg watch.



Between Heslenfeld's unique photos of life on and off deck, Captain Klaas Gaastra (who looks exactly as a captain should) writes the ship's log, an engaging record of the expedition's near-misses, whale encounters and ventures ashore. As I say, I've never been lucky enough to go to Antarctica, but after seeing this book, I feel I've got a little bit closer.

Lizzie Matthews

COLD – SAILING TO ANTARCTICA

Thijs Heslenfeld (Oost West Thijs Best)

£24.50 from Stanfords; €34.50 from www.cold-the-book.com

WIN! WIN! WIN! We have three signed copies of *Cold* to give away to *Wanderlust* subscribers. For details, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions

MY FAVOURITE TRAVEL BOOK

Robert Macfarlane



ARCTIC DREAMS (1986)

Barry Lopez

“ I picked up my first copy of *Arctic Dreams* in a secondhand bookstore in Vancouver the summer I turned 21. The book – which was a policy-influencing bestseller in America – describes Lopez's journeys in the Arctic, but also meditates on the complicated relationship between human and natural behaviour in that fragile region.

I carried it with me while I walked 130km along the Pacific rim coast of Vancouver Island, reading it each night by waterfalls or on beaches strewn with silvered driftwood. The book's audacious mixture of tones – travel, anthropology, lyrical description, hard ecological science – astonished me. It seemed so.... 'disobedient' to the normal laws of travel writing. By the time I reached Tofino beach, my copy was so beaten up by sea-water, sand and hard reading that I had to get another one. Ten years on, and I'm onto my fourth copy. It's the book that's most influenced my own style. I return to it for some reason every month or so. ”

Robert's bestselling *The Wild Places* is now out in paperback (Granta, £8.99)

