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PRESS RELEASE

KAPITAN KHLEBNIKOV OPENS ANTARCTIC CRUISING FROM HOBART

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The powerful Russian ice-breaker Kapitan Khlebnikov has arrived in Hobart from its home port in Vladivostok to begin the first Antarctic voyage for tourists this Sunday, 25 November, further highlighting the importance of Tasmania as a major drawcard for Antarctic tourism.

Spokesman for Quark Expeditions, operators of the Kapitan Khlebnikov, Rod Ledingham says the ice-breaker will be carrying 95 passengers on the first of three voyages to the Ross Sea. " This is a particularly important cruise to visit the large Emperor Penguin rookeries near Coolman Island and Cape Washington before the break-up of sea ice, which usually occurs before Christmas."

"On the way the ship will visit Macquarie Island, while the return journey will be via Campbell and Auckland Islands."

"This voyage will take 23 days with the Kapitan Khlebnikov back in Hobart on the 19 December for Christmas before setting a course south for the second voyage on December 27 visiting The Dry Valleys and a number of bases including McMurdo (US), and Cape Adare, site of the largest Adelie penguin rookery in Antarctica," said Mr Ledingham.

"The final voyage from Hobart on 20 January next year will also take in visits to a number of historic huts such as Shackleton's and Scott's. The Kapitan Khlebnikov will also travel to the Bay of Whales in the Ross Ice Shelf. This is also the area where Amundsen set off to the South Pole, and where the largest ice berg seen this century was carved recently. Polar scientists mapped the massive ice berg as 295 kilometres long and 37 kilometres wide.."

"It is also where the ice-breaker created Antarctic history last year by travelling further than any other vessel."

Mr Ledingham says bookings are still available for the second and third voyages from Hobart in late December and January. The Kapitan Khlebnikov has been operating mainly from the Port of Hobart for Antarctic cruises since 1992-93. The vessel is well equipped for flight seeing and sight seeing, carrying two helicopters and 6 x 20 foot zodiacs to ferry passengers ashore.

Quark Expeditions are a member of the Tasmanian Polar Network whose aim is to gain greater recognition for the role the Antarctic plays in the State's economy, together with the Government's policy on the Antarctic and Southern Ocean.

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