Isolation Salvation: Top 10 Polar Films to While Away the Hours

As we navigate through the challenges of self-isolation the world over, patience and a maintained sense of calm become invaluable tools to help us adapt to the new normal. IAATO polar field staff are already well equipped to manage long periods exploring the remote polar regions without the company of family and friends, so we look to them for advice on how to keep our minds busy and relaxed during lockdown.

Today, like many of us at home, polar field staff are lucky enough to have access to one particular outlet that wasn’t an option for early explorers like Scott and Shackleton; the ability to get lost in a great movie.

So, get the popcorn out, let the dog on the sofa and get ready for a dose of escapism as we run down our top ten list of polar movies.
Happy Feet, 2006
If you’re looking for a feel-good film to keep the kids entertained during lockdown, animated movie Happy Feet, following the story of little Mumble, is the film for you. When Mumble realizes his terrible singing voice isn’t as good as his penguin friends, he goes on a journey of discovery realizing he has a special talent all of his own.

Shackleton, 2002
Starring Kenneth Branagh and following the story of Shackleton’s extraordinary 1914 Endurance expedition to the South Pole, this film will keep you on the edge of your seat as you follow Sir Ernest and his 28-man crew’s epic journey to safety.

The Great White Silence, 1924
This full-length documentary from expedition photographer and cinematographer Herbert Ponting explores the ill-fated British Antarctic Expedition led by famed explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott as he set out to lead the first party to reach the South Pole in 1910. Photographic techniques are interspersed with shots of wildlife, Antarctic landscapes and the Terra Nova making its way through the ice pack to great effect in this early documentary.

Penguins, 2019
A heart-warming coming-of-age story, Penguins follows the triumphs and hardships of Steve, an Adelie penguin, as he makes a nest, finds a life partner and starts a family during the Antarctic springtime. Perfect for a Sunday afternoon with the family.

March of the Penguins, 2005
Narrated by the inimitable Morgan Freeman, and captured by adventurous film maker Luc Jacquet, this beautifully shot documentary film follows emperor penguins on their annual journey to traditional mating grounds. A voyage made each Antarctic summer, March of the Penguins provides a fascinating insight into one of the continent’s most enigmatic species.

Frozen Planet, 2011
Taking us on a journey to both the northern and southern hemispheres, and narrated by the legendary Sir David Attenborough, the acclaimed BBC docu-series Frozen Planet, brings polar wildlife into the home as it explores the magnificent animals and birds of the Arctic and Antarctica. Created with the support of IAATO member operators and field staff, this holds a special place in our hearts.

Antarctica: A Year on Ice, 2013
Filmed from the perspective of those working to keep Antarctic stations running, this full-length documentary, captured across a full year in Antarctica, provides unprecedented access to what it’s really like to live and work on the white continent, as well as never before seen footage of the long, dark Antarctic winter.
Penguins of Madagascar, 2014
From the makers of Madagascar, this hilarious family movie follows four cheeky, super spy penguins as they join forces with undercover organization, The North Wind, to defeat their nemesis Dr. Octavius Brine. Voiced by a host of Hollywood stars, the quick quips from these cheeky little chaps make great watching for adults as well as kids.

Amundsen, 2019
Detailing the life of explorer Roald Amundsen, the first to reach the South Pole, this beautifully filmed movie depicts Amundsen’s intensely driven nature as a polar explorer and his lifelong commitment to discovering the world’s farthest unchartered lands.

The Thing, 1982
Set on an Antarctic research base at the beginning of the southern winter, Kurt Russell leads a team of polar researchers as they struggle to contain an alien life form taking over the bodies of unsuspecting hosts in this classic 1982 sci-fi horror. Top tip, best to skip this one if you are currently overwintering on the white continent – one of our colleagues can attest that it will make for an anxiously long season!

Happy viewing!

Why not join the conversation on Facebook and tell us which movies would make your final cut?