

Dressing for Extremes: Life at Princess Elisabeth Antarctica Station

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Preparing for Antarctic conditions requires meticulous planning, according to Henri Robert. All clothing—from thermal underwear and balaclavas to down jackets and waterproof trousers—is selected in advance at the IPF’s Cape Town office. The dry climate aids insulation, but the wind is the greatest challenge, turning even moderate temperatures dangerously cold. To stay safe and productive, researchers layer long johns, shirts, jumpers, insulated ski jackets, and trousers, complemented by specialized boots capable of withstanding -30°C. Accessories such as merino wool socks, sunglasses to block intense sunlight, and high SPF sunscreen protect against sunburn and ice crystals forming on eyelashes.

Life inside the station contrasts sharply with the outside; it is warm, humid, and entirely powered by renewable energy, creating a “bubble” that isolates scientists from everyday concerns. Returning to Belgium after the season brings a jarring shift, dubbed the “Antarctic blues,” which Henri Robert alleviates with traditions like visits to thermal spas. His experience underscores the careful preparation, resilience, and respect for the environment required to thrive at the world’s only zero-emissions Antarctic research station.

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