

Icebreaker sets sail on China's 34th Antarctic expedition

China's research icebreaker Xuelong set sail from Shanghai early Wednesday beginning the country's 34th Antarctic expedition.

A team of more than 300 will make the 164-day trip of 37,000 nautical miles. They are expected to return to Shanghai in April next year.

The icebreaker will arrive in New Zealand to stock up on supplies in around 18 days. It will then sail south to the west coast of the Ross Sea, where researchers will conduct preliminary work on China's fifth station in the Antarctic, one of the key objectives of this expedition.

The fifth station will be a year-round research station able to independently carry out multiple scientific investigations in the Antarctic.

According to Yang Huigen, who leads the expedition team, researchers will also conduct other tasks during the trip such as observations of land, ocean, atmosphere, ice shelf and biology, establishment of an observation and monitoring network in the Antarctic, and survey of marine environmental protection.

Xuelong, whose name means snow dragon, is currently China's only polar icebreaker in service. In October, it completed the country's eighth Arctic expedition.