

Alaska Script

One - Alaska Opening, Trip Overview + Seattle

Opening

There is travel leaves you feeling powerful, in control of your own destiny. There are places in this world that, once traveled to, provoke within you an innate sense of your own strength and purpose. Alaska, is not one of those places. This is a land where imposing snow capped mountains dwarf everything in sight. Where verdant forests of hemlock and spruce paint vast swaths of earth in emerald. Here, unyielding glaciers carve out the landscape, and abundant wildlife inhabits nearly every inch of land and sea. Alaska is simultaneously serene and invigorating, tranquil and aggressive. There are few travel experiences on this planet that can compare. This, is the great Alaskan cruise.

Itinerary Overview

Our flight to Seattle was the beginning of a weeklong voyage that will go down in memory as one of the greatest travel experiences of my life. After spending a day exploring some of the most famous sights in Seattle, along with our friends Ben & Emily, we boarded the Norwegian Bliss for a 7-night cruise along Alaska's southeast coast. From Seattle, we first made our way to Juneau, Alaska's capital, where we road bikes past mountains and got up close and personal with Alaska's most accessible glacier, the Mendenhall Glacier. From Juneau we made our way to Skagway, where enjoyed a journey on the White Pass Railway before embarking on an epic 7 mile mountain hike. We then spent an entire day cruising Glacier Bay National Park, which offers some of the most spectacular glacier viewing in the world. Our last two stops included a day in Ketchikan, a port with small town charm and lots of native history, where we explored via sea kayak, and finally we spend small amount of time in Victoria, BC - just enough time to grab a drink, before making our way back to Seattle, which is where we find ourselves tonight, at the beginning of our journey.

Fun Fact: The name of our exact itinerary is called the "7-Day Awe of Alaska with Glacier Bay from Seattle". There are over 20 cruise lines that offer cruises to Alaska and there are nearly as many ports of call.

Seattle Overview

I always suggest flying in at least one day before your cruise departs. Luckily, most cruise port towns are great places to visit, Seattle being one of the best! With only about 36 hours in Seattle, we knew that we had to make the most of every minute. Everyone I know that has visited Seattle says the same thing - they wish they had more time to explore Seattle. We knew that we wanted to visit the world famous Pike Place Market, we had to make it to the

Space Needle, we wanted to do a haunted underground tour through the city's expansive tunnel system. - you know, all the touristy things one does when in Seattle! We had a jam packed itinerary for our one full day, we had to hit the ground running, which meant - coffee, and lots of it. Luckily, Seattle is a town that knows how to make a good cup of Joe! Yes yes yes, we all know about the Green Java Overlord, and we'll get there...

Fun Fact: When possible, it's always a good idea to arrive a day early for your cruise. This can help overcome any jet lag, and if there are any flight delays it gives you some wiggle room. You don't want to fly in the day of your cruise departure sailing date, have your flight delayed by a couple hours, and see your cruise ship sailing off into the distance once you get to the port! Plus, many cruise port cities like Seattle, New Orleans, Miami and more are worth a visit in themselves!

Top Pot Coffee

...but there are other wonderful places to grab some delicious black gold. One of them has been a Seattle staple since 2002, and by some miracle provided by the caffeine gods, it was mere steps from our apartment...

***Starbucks Reserve Roastery**

Once properly caffeinated and sugared up we set off for the first stop on our whirlwind tour of the Emerald City: The Starbucks Reserve Roastery. Located just nine blocks from the original Starbucks in Pike Place, The Starbucks Reserve Roastery in the Capitol Hill neighborhood opened in 2014 . Immediately upon entering all your senses come to life. The smell of freshly brewed coffee washes over you in a wave of warm olfactory delight, while your eyes drink in the visually striking design of the space. A curated collection of coffee curiosities (sorry, I love alliteration) fill the gift shop. Stroll around and you'll find the beautiful, classically designed Princi ovens, baking delicious artisanal breads and pastries. Truly a delight for the eyes, the nostrils and the tastebuds! A clacker board overhead previews information about what's being roasted and which drinks you can try at one of the many coffee bars scattered throughout the roastery. The Starbucks Roastery essentially elevates coffee to a high art form, and watching the baristas make coffee here is just as much a performance as it is a tasting experience.

Fun Fact: The enormous copper cask is actually perforated so that light shining through it illuminates a world map across the Roastery floor.

Fun Fact: While this is the first Starbucks Reserve Roastery, there are now six locations all over the world. Other locations include Shanghai, Milan, New York, Tokyo & Chicago.

***Pike Pace Market**

Overall Market

Now that we were properly double caffeinated, we bade a fond farewell to the Starbucks Roastery, ran a few laps around the block, and then headed for our next mark, the world

famous Pike Place Public Market! Of all the major sites in Seattle on our list, this was the one I was most excited to visit! The Pike Place Market dates from 1907, and it's one of the largest and oldest markets in the US. Hundreds of farmers, artisans, chefs, craftspeople and small businesses are located within the sprawling nine acre historic district.

Fish Throwers & Crab Meat

Located right under the iconic "Public Market Center" sign is one of the most recognizable stalls in the entire market: the Pike Place Fish Co! They have been a Seattle institution since 1930, serving some of the finest, freshest seafood around. But what they're most famous for, is their fish throwing skills. The guys can sling a salmon, toss a trout, or lob a cod 20 feet without losing a single slippery scale. And I don't know about you, but I just feel like fish tastes better after it's flown through the air multiple times into the hands of a Seattle fish monger.

Fun Fact: The Pike Place Fish Co is on a mission: to provide world famous customer service, sell the finest, freshest seafood available, and they have a commitment on 100% sustainability, adhering to the highest standards of marine stewardship. They also ship fish anywhere in the US!

Determined not to leave this place empty handed, Ben asked one of the fish mongers what would be good for us to try right there in the market! We settled on some King Crab Legs. After it was weighed, they split it open for us and handed it over. We snapped a few quick pics with our crustaceous snack, and we dug in - and I gotta tell you, in all my years of eating crab legs, I've never had better or fresher. It was a symphony the tastebuds: delicate, salty, and packed full of flavor. My mouth is watering literally just thinking about it!

Pike Place Urban Garden

Making our way past the famous fish flingers, we hang a left and find ourselves in a quiet pocket of the market known as the Pike Place Urban Garden. This is a beautiful 2,000 square foot vegetable and herb garden right in the heart of the market! After putting our temporary stamp on the place in chalk, we took a load off and enjoyed a relaxing few minutes in the sunshine, something Seattle doesn't see a whole lot of. The garden is run entirely by volunteers, and all produce grown is donated to the Pike Market Senior Center and Food Bank. And not only is the garden itself beautiful, the patio provides commanding views of Elliott Bay where you can catch a glimpse of ships lazily making their way around the water, and capture a great view of the Seattle Great Wheel. Next time you're in the Market, do yourself a favor - take a break, and find your way to the garden and see what's growing!

Walking Montage

After the Urban Garden we spent about an hour meandering through market, drinking in the ambiance and immersing ourselves in the experience. The market is feast for the senses - sights, sounds, smells & tastes culminate in an experience that is unforgettable. We walked through the many food stalls and shops, stopping to enjoy some of the freshest produce one can find. We strolled past colorful flower vendors, marveling at the rich colorful hues in the bouquets. We then took a trip down the Lower Post Alley to explore the markets and shops

on the lower levels, stopping, of course, to see to see the famous gum wall (which...is a thing for some reason).

Fun Fact: In 1971, the City of Seattle made the Pike Place Market a historic district to protect and preserve the market and its buildings for generations to come.

Fun Fact: On the lower levels shoppers will find quaint specialty shops, peddling jewelry, books, collectables and more.

Original Starbucks

Back on the surface level, we roamed around some more. Vagabonds with no real plans in place, we soaked up what we could with our short amount of time. Eventually, we made our way further northwest on Pike Place, searching out the original location of what is now the world's largest coffee chain. You know the place - the place where your friend that wears a beret sits writing his screenplay sipping on a \$7 latte even though he can't afford a second pair of shoes. The place where your favorite fall flavor infused beverage started its pumpkin infancy. Yes, the one and only Starbucks started right here in the Pike Place Market in 1971. Now by this point the four of us had enough coffee we could have made James Bond's favorite drink just standing still, so we didn't opt to go in, but it was very cool just being in the presence of caffeine greatness.

Fun Fact: Starbucks is the largest coffee chain in the world, by far, with nearly 31,000 locations. It's followed distantly by other major chains like Dunkin Donuts, which has about 10,000 locations and Tim Horton's which has about 4,300.

Walking From Pike Place to Teriyaki to Space Needle

Next up on our "must-do" list was a visit to the Seattle Space Needle. Now, travel writers love to call nearly every city a "walkable city". Seattle is not what I would call a "walkable city" - that being said, we walked everywhere! Yeah, in this one day we walked well over 10 miles. To be honest though, I'm not convinced that it wasn't faster to walk anyway - Seattle is seemingly endlessly under construction, or stuck in a traffic jam. Anywho....where was I? Oh, yes - we were all getting a bit peckish and Ben had heard that Seattle was famous for its teriyaki, so on our way to the Space Needle, we stopped for a bite of lunch.

Teriyaki to Space Needle

Our hunger satiated, we continued our journey to Seattle Center, and the Space Needle!

Fun Fact: Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks, Costco, Expedia & Boeing have all called Seattle home.

***Space Needle & Seattle Center**

Without a doubt, the most iconic building in Seattle is the Space Needle. Standing 605 feet tall, for 50 years it has been a defining landmark, identifying the Seattle skyline at a mere glance. A one minute elevator ride takes you to the top of the spire, where the observation deck provides 360 degree views of the city. The Space Needle is in the heart of Seattle

Center, an area also home to the Museum of Pop Culture, the Children's Museum, the Chihuly Garden and the Pacific Science Center. We decided not to venture to the top of the Space Needle this time because we knew we wanted to visit another landmark with commanding views of the city later in the day, the Smith Tower. But that just means we'll need to come back to Seattle and visit the top next time!

Fun Fact: The Space Needle was built for the 1962 world's fair. In 2018, a 100 million "Spacelift" on the Space Needle completed. The observation deck now features multi-level floor to ceiling glass panels, and is home to a first of its kind rotating glass floor.

***Underground Walk + History of Seattle + Pioneer Square**

Venturing back across the city, we make our way to Pioneer Square, a neighborhood that marks the birthplace of Seattle, settled in 1852. It is here we experienced one of the most interesting and most unusual attractions in Seattle - Bill Speidel's Underground Tour! After a brief introduction to the town's history from our tour guides, we were lead down below street level, to a series of interconnected tunnels that mark the original "ground floor" of the city. In 1889, the Great Seattle Fire burned down the entire town. A veritable tinder box made entirely of wood, it was leveled in a span of about 24 hours. Luckily, the town's economy was doing well, and things were quickly rebuilt...1 - 2 stories ABOVE where the town's original streets once stood. For a time, the lower street level remained open, with the actual street paved one floor above the shop's entrances. However, there were no sidewalks on either side of the road, which meant that if one wanted to cross the street, they would have to climb a ladder, walk across the street, and descend another ladder. Once sidewalks were finally in place, most merchants moved their businesses up to the new "ground level" on the second floor. Some businesses, however, continued for a time to use the lower, now underground storefronts. Skylights were added to the sidewalk above to provide light to the tunnels below. While over time the tunnels began to deteriorate and were largely deserted, of course, as one would expect, they found a new life during prohibition! Almost as if they were built to run bootleg hooch and hide speakeasies, these tunnels a a flurry with activity in the 1920s! Then, they largely went abandoned once again until 1965, when Bill Speidel began taking intrigued tourists down to explore. Most of the tunnels are still closed, but a small portion has been made accessible for the public, giving anyone with a love of history a chance to step back in time, to visit a city entombed, a time-capsule waiting to be discovered once again.

Fun Fact: Long before Microsoft, Starbucks and Boeing, in its infancy, Seattle started as a logging town. Lumber was accessible and inexpensive, which is why it was used to build nearly every building in town - but unfortunately, it was also combustible. Later, the big business became outfitting miners during the Klondike Gold Rush.

Merchants Cafe - Seattle's Oldest Restaurant

After getting our subterranean fill, we decided to stop across the street at Merchant's Cafe, billed as Seattles Oldest Saloon, established in 1890.

The Smith Tower Observatory

To cap off our jam packed day in Seattle, we sauntered to the Smith Tower, just down the road in Pioneer Square.

Once the highest building west of the Mississippi River, Seattle's Original Skyscraper feels like it's ripped directly from the 1920s, complete with Otis elevators run by uniformed operators.

What a way to end an absolutely incredible day in one of the greatest cities in America, Seattle! Friends, craft cocktails and tasty bites, served with a view.

Ending

So how does one see all of Seattle in just one day? The answer is simple - you can't. I can't wait to get back to Seattle. Seattle is an amazing city! Water, mountains, and forests surround the city, providing amazing vistas at nearly every turn. The only trick is to find enough time in between rain showers to enjoy it. Yes Seattle is Famously gray and rainy, and I understand that sometimes people find it hard to sleep here, but if it's good enough for Frasier Crane, it's good enough to me! Today we hit up the touristy side of Seattle, that fact seems irrefutable. It's like going to Paris and seeing the Eiffel Tower. But I can't wait to come back and explore more of what this city has to offer!

Two - Embarkation & At Sea

Fun Fact: You'll either need to print out your boarding documents before leaving home, or, if you are on a more tech savvy cruise line, you may be able to show your boarding pass via their app.

Bliss in Brief (Clear Skies Ahead)

After dropping off our bags and quickly getting through the check in process, we were ready to board the ship. Waving goodbye to Seattle, we stepped onboard our floating home for the next week! Our ship for this Alaskan voyage is the Norwegian Bliss, one of the newest ships in the Norwegian fleet. Elegantly decorated while still warm and inviting the Bliss is one of the finest ships sailing the seas today. It's also the first ship that was built specifically to take in the spectacular vistas of an Alaskan Cruise. With many areas of the ship featuring massive floor to ceiling windows and plenty of outdoor spaces on deck, it was designed to give you a deeper connection to nature! This 170,000 ton behemoth has everything! Theaters & entertainment areas, restaurants, bars, clubs, shops, pools and hot tubs, adults only areas, kids only areas, a casino, a spa, an ice cream shop, a laser tag arena and an onboard go cart track! In short, if the Norwegian Bliss doesn't have it - you probably don't need it. Today's modern ships truly are like floating cities. It's like checking into a resort and waking up in a new city every day! And one of the best parts about cruising is that you can do as much or as little as you like! Want to relax in a hot tub, enjoy the spa, or curl up with a good book on deck watching the awe-inspiring views of Alaska slowly drift by? You can do that! Want to race go-carts, or take a terrifying drop over the side of the ship on one of the water

slides? You can do that too! You get all of this while exploring incredible destinations worldwide, and you only have to unpack once. Getting to visit extraordinary places like Alaska during the day, all while having wonderful entertainment and dining onboard in the evening, is a pretty sublime way to spend a week. Our first day on the ship was an entire day at sea, which gave us a great opportunity to explore much of what the Norwegian Bliss has to offer!

Fun Fact: Norwegian Bliss' sister ship is the Norwegian Joy, onboard which you can find many of the same amenities.

Fun Fact: Many cities and towns in Alaska's southeastern panhandle can only be reached by air or by sea. There are no roads! So for many people, an Alaskan cruise is the only way to visit these stunning places!

In addition to making show reservations, if you haven't already booked your shore excursions, dining reservations, or spa treatments, your embarkation day is the best time to do that! However, most cruise lines will let you do that weeks or even months in advance. Since popular shore excursions will sometimes sell out, it's definitely a good idea to reserve as early as you can!

Bars Onboard

After getting our shore excursions settled away, of course, our first stop is at the bar (I mean, it is a vacation after all). There is certainly no shortage of options for alcohol onboard a cruise ship. The Norwegian Bliss boasts over 10 bars, with everything from specialty mojitos and high end whiskey tastings, to laid back places like the District Tap. We opted for a drink package, which can be a good deal or a waste of money depending on how much you drink. Be cautious however, and keep an eye on your onboard account! If you don't go with a drink package, they can feel like they're free as you charge them to your room...that is until your bill comes at the end of the voyage!

Taste & Savor

Drinks in hand, it was now time for lunch! There are several complimentary restaurants onboard, including Taste and Savor, (which are basically the same restaurant, just two different names), The Manhattan Room, which is only open for dinner, & The Local, which is pub food, and it's open 24/7. Those are all a la carte options, and then up on Deck 16, you'll find the Garden Cafe, which is buffet style.

Fun Fact: With no dress code, Norwegian Cruise Line has shed what many saw as the "Stuffy" atmosphere of cruises in the past. Most of the time, "Resort casual" is a good oPro Tipion!

Room Tour + Haven Rooms

Pro Tip: I always recommend getting a balcony room for several reasons, but especially for an Alaskan Cruise! There is so much amazing scenery at all times of the day and you can view it right from your room!

Fun Fact: There are a large variety of onboard accommodations available to choose from! With options ranging from an Inside Stateroom, to Oceanview, to Balcony, to Mini-suites, to Haven rooms, you'll find one to fit your style and your budget!

Pro Tip: Mid-ship cabins typically feel less movement than staterooms that are further forward or aft.

(Show footage of the Haven area on Epic) For those in the mood for some serious pampering, there is The Haven. The Haven area is tucked away at the top of the ship and is only accessible by private keycard. Haven staterooms all come with a personal certified butler and concierge, and they also have their own pool area, bar and even their own restaurant exclusively for Haven guests.

Pro Tip: Onboard the Norwegian bliss there is also a private, two story Observation Lounge just for the Haven guests called the Horizon Lounge.

Fun Fact: Alaska is the westernmost state in the United States AND the easternmost! The Aleutian Islands cross the international date line, making it both!

Entryway & Chandelier

One defining feature of many Norwegian Cruise ships is their massive atriums with over-the-top glass chandeliers. While Norwegian Cruise Line has taken much of the “stuffiness” out of cruising with no formal attire, no set dining times, and so on, there are still features, such as these chandeliers that give their ships a touch of elegance and class. This chandelier, designed by Preciosa, is fully programmable in terms of colors, transitions and so on. Therefore, thousands of combinations are possible, meaning a new light show can be created every evening! Every time you walk by, the chandelier will look different from the last time you saw it!

The Garden Cafe

The next morning, we visited the Garden cafe for breakfast! Whatever you're craving, this place probably has it, and it's all complimentary! They serve breakfast, lunch and dinner, and they have a myriad of options to choose from! There are stations for freshly made omelets, soups, waffles, Asian cuisine, burgers, salads, ice cream, and more! Even better, the floor to ceiling windows all around provide spectacular ocean views from nearly every seat.

Getting Around

When getting around the ship, remember that the fish in the carpet are always swimming forward, toward the bow, and if you get lost, you can always use one of these touch screens to pull up a map of the ship!

Card Room & Library

Once we were done losing terribly at trivia, we hopped over to one of our favorite spots on the ship, the Card Room and Library, a quiet place to relax, play a game, or pick out a book to read during your cruise!

I don't remember exactly who won this game, but....since I'm the one doing the VoiceOver, I'm gonna say I did.

The Race Track + Laser Tag

Ladies & Gentlemen, start your engines! The Norwegian Bliss has a two-level onboard racetrack on the top deck, the first of its kind at sea! These go carts can reach an impressive speed of 30 miles per hour and each round lasts about 8 minutes. On top of having an onboard racetrack, there is also a laser tag arena on the top deck. Both are an additional fee, and require advance reservations, but where else can you get these kinds of thrills with these ocean views? As the saying goes...when in Rome!

Fun Fact: Racing sounds are piped in through your headrest so you feel like you're driving a real go cart, but these carts are completely electric and silent, meaning that there's no smell of gas and no noise disturbance for other guests on the ship!

The Slides, Pools & Decks

While the decks, slides and pools are more popular during the Bliss's winter cruises in the Caribbean, there is still a lot of fun to be had even while in Alaska! Those with the fortitude enough to brave the Ocean Loops slide get a thrill as the floor drops out from under them before being wooshed over the ship of the ship not once, but twice! For those seeking a slightly more tame ride, there's the Aqua Racer, a larger, colorful tube slide where you can even go tandem if you so wish! In addition to the water slides on deck, there are multiple pools & hot tubs, a kid's Aqua Park, a couple bars, ping pong, a stage for band to plays, a giant movie screen, and more! You can also just relax poolside, drink in hand, or if you're a real go getter, you can do the onboard Running Track. Apparently, Ben and I were either brave enough (or maybe foolish enough) to try Ocean Loops, so we changed into our bathing suits and got in line!

The District Tap

The District Tap is a laid back pub that is a beer lover's delight! They offer over 50 bottled and 24 draft beers, which rotate regularly, so you never know what you'll find! It's got an easy going atmosphere, and in the evenings it turns into a piano bar! We spent a lot of time in the District Tap, partially because we all like beer, partially because we all like piano bars, but mostly because it was just an enjoyable place to relax and unwind! On our cruise there were several local craft beers featured from Alaska, Seattle, & Oregon, along with other more famous options that will surely appease the beer drinker in any travel party!

Restaurants + Le Bistro

In addition to the many complimentary restaurants onboard, there are also several Specialty Restaurants available! Specialty restaurants do cost extra on top of your cruise fare, but in my experience the upgraded food is typically worth it! There are some wonderful restaurants that offer everything from fresh seafood to steaks, and from hibachi style to Italian! Many of these places also offer a more immersive atmosphere, elevating your entire dining experience. We chose the "Specialty Dining Package" as one of our "Free at Sea" options,

so these were all included in the cost of our cruise fare, one of the many reasons Norwegian Cruise Line is one of our favorites!

Pro Tip: Specialty restaurants are a nominal fee unless you choose the “Specialty Dining Package” as one of your “Free at Sea” options. Although not required, reservations are recommended for Specialty Restaurants.

Tonight we’re having dinner at Le Bistro, the French inspired restaurant that offers incredible food, and elegant atmosphere, and very attentive service. Le Bistro features French favorites like escargot, coq au vin, and creme brûlée, and as you would expect at any great French restaurant, they have an extensive wine list. Le Bistro is a formal dining experience one of the only places on the ship that has a dress code - albeit not a super strict one, but it’s fun to dress up and enjoy some of the finest food on the ship at least one night on your voyage!

Fun Fact: For most rooms onboard, Norwegian Cruise Line has a fixed service charge of \$14.50, per person, per day. This automatic gratuity can be paid before your cruise or it will be added to your onboard account. This takes care of your room steward and your wait staff.

After Dinner

After dinner we moseyed around the ship, took in some entertainment, and then ended our night with some late night dancing in the piano bar with the musical stylings of Beau Tahana in the The District Tap.

Three - Juneau

An Alaskan cruise is one of the most awe-inspiring travel journeys one can ever hope to experience. In the southeast region of the state lies Alaska’s panhandle, consisting of a narrow strip of land along the western coast of Canada and hundreds of islands jutting out into the Pacific Ocean. This remote area has only three cities that are connected to the main continent by road, Therefore, if you want to visit the spectacular towns nestled within verdant rainforests along this narrow stretch of water, mountains and rugged wilderness, you can only get there by air or by water. That’s why cruising is the most ideal way of seeing this area of Alaska. The scenic waterway between the island and the mainland is known as the Inside Passage, a relatively calm route through protected waters that stay tranquil and provides cruise ships with an amazing view.

Pro Tip: Alaska cruises come in two basic forms - round-trip (typically beginning and ending in the same city, generally Seattle or Vancouver) or a one-way “cruisetour”, which includes both a cruise and a land voyage. These typically start or end in Seattle or Vancouver, but go all the way to Seward or Whittier (the seaports for Anchorage). This is a good choice if you want to explore Alaska by land before or after your cruise, and visit other areas of Alaska by train, such as Denali National Park.

Fun Fact: While Anchorage is Alaska’s largest city, Juneau is the second largest city and the state capitol.

Pro Tip: One of the hardest things about going on an Alaskan cruise is trying to figure out what to pack. There is one rule - think like an onion and layer up! Wear thin, light things on the bottom layer, so if it gets hot you can breathe - the other layers should aim to keep you dry and warm. In Alaska the temperature and weather can change to rather extremes in the course of one single day. Be sure to pack binoculars, and don't forget your passport, even though you may be an American citizen.

How Shore Excursions Work

Once off the ship you'll find organized chaos. In the all commotion you'll see tour operators with large signs try to wrangle their groups for the day, while busses hiss and sputter and tourists wander around with confused looks on their faces. Most official shore excursions meet on the ship, so if follow closely with your group you shouldn't have any issues. I nearly always recommend booking excursions through your actual cruise line. While official shore excursions are almost always more expensive than ones you may be able to find locally, they do offer a few benefits for the price that make them worth it for me. Tour operators will be well vetted & insured, and most importantly, they will be in contact with your ship if they're running late. If you're off on your own or with a different tour, the ship will leave without you.

*Also have a team of dedicated help on the ship

Pro Tip: You don't have to book any excursions at all. If you would prefer, you can simply get off the ship and explore on your own! Some of the more popular shore excursions will sell out even months in advance, so it's best to book online as soon as you're able. If you book your cruise through a travel agent they can help walk you through the process and even book them for you!

In Juneau, two of the most popular excursions are dog sledding on top of a glacier (yeah, you heard me right!), and this - the Mt. Roberts Tramway. Cruise ships dock right by the tramway, which takes passengers on a 6 minute ride up a steep incline 1,800 feet of the nearly 4,000 foot mountain for a panoramic view of the town.

Fun Fact: The tramway is operated by a local Alaskan Native company, Goldbelt Incorporated. Many of the tram's operators are Alaskan Natives that will gladly educate you about their history and culture as you ascend the mountain. At the top, you can take in a film about the Tlingit way of life, explore a Sky Bridge, and go on a scenic walk - including a 5 mile round-trip hike to the Mt. Roberts's 3,819 foot summit.

For our time in Juneau we've opted instead for another popular excursion - a trip to Alaska's most accessible glacier, Mendenhall Glacier. We're doing so via bike & brew tour. It begins with a bike ride around some of more off the beaten path areas of Juneau, then we have two stops at the Mendenhall Glacier, and we end with a local beer tasting. Back at the port, we were loaded onto a bus and shuttled away while our tour guides gave us an overview of Alaska's second city.

Bike & Brew Tour

After gearing up and getting a quick safety speech we're off. We ride our bikes past neighborhoods and down winding streets, mountains in the distance at nearly every turn. We stop every so often when the occasional teachable moment presents itself.

Fun Fact: Juneau is not your average state capital. It is geographically isolated, not connected by road to the outside world - the only way to access it is by air or by sea.

We slowly make our way to the first of two stops at Mendenhall Glacier, enjoying a laid-back pace as we go. Once there, we dismount and round the corner, ready for our first up-close views of the Juneau Ice Field and the colossal natural wonder - a sight that can render even the most verbose among us, speechless!

Fun Fact: Alaska is the largest state in America. At over 665,000 square miles it is more than 2 times the size of Texas and 3 times the size of California. Despite its size, it has fewer people per square mile than almost anywhere on earth.

Mendenhall Glacier

Although glaciers are abundant in southeast Alaska, only a few are as accessible as Mendenhall Glacier. Mendenhall Glacier is located about 12 miles outside Juneau, and it is one small fraction of the Juneau Icefield, a 1,500 square mile expanse of snow and ice that's home to about 40 other large glaciers. Standing back and trying to drink it all in, you realize that there are few places as astounding and overwhelming in the world. Guests can almost walk right up to the glacier from the Visitor Center to get up close and personal with this frozen wonder. One marvels at the staggering shades of blue display, while huge chunks of ice calve into the small lake. Due to climate change, like many other glaciers throughout the world, Mendenhall is retreating at an accelerated and potentially irrevocable pace. Only 15 years ago, Mendenhall extended out into this water, and now it only takes up a small chunk of real estate along the edge. It compels us to consider the connectedness of nature and humans. Alaska is home to nearly 100,000 glaciers, and there are several ways of getting a more in depth education. Helicopter and sea planes are a popular way to get a bird's eye view of the ice fields, further helping us realize the vast scale of this imposing type of environment. In many places these aircraft will actually land and do a guided walking glacier trek. Not only are glaciers entire ecosystems in their own right, they also contribute vast volumes of freshwater to both land and marine environments. By grinding down mountains into fine particles, glaciers provide our oceans with a variety of vital nutrients including nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon, all of which contribute to the marine food chain.

Fun Fact: Glaciers are blue because the ice has become so incredibly compressed and dense that they absorb every other color of the spectrum except for blue.

Mendenhall Glacier Visitor's Center

A great place to learn more about glaciers and their affect on our lives, is by heading to the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor's Center. Here you can take in some spectacular views of the "river of ice", and learn more about it with enriching exhibits, and 15 minute movie called "Landscape of Change". There are hands on experiences for all ages, interactive exhibits,

and a bookstore. Here you can learn more about why glaciers are so incredibly important and why we need to protect them, not just for their own sake and the sake of those animals that call this type of ecosystem home, but also for the entire planet's wellbeing. No matter how you spend the rest of your time in Juneau, be sure to carve out some time explore Mendenhall Glacier.

Fun Fact: Alaska is home to 12 of the 13 tallest mountains in the United States, and it's home to the highest mountain in North America - Denali!

The Alaskan Hotel and Bar

The Alaskan Hotel & Bar is the oldest operating hotel in Alaska, dating back to 1913, when it was built by four men in less than six month's time during Alaska's Gold Rush! Rated one of the best bars in America by Esquire Magazine, after a major renovation in the late 70s, it has been lovingly restored to its 1913 glory and appears practically unchanged from 100 years ago.

The Red Dog Saloon

After the Alaskan Hotel we make our way to another famous Juneau institution, the Red Dog Saloon. Arguably the most famous bar in Alaska, this watering hole opened in 1890. During the summer months the Red Dog Saloon is so popular that you often have to wait in a queue to get in. Once inside nearly every surface is cluttered and covered in stuff. A thick layer of sawdust coats on the floor. Graffiti, dollar bills, business cards, taxidermied animals and even a pistol that once belonged to Wyatt Earp all clamor for space, hanging on every inch of wall.

Fun Fact: Wyatt Earp failed to reclaim his gun after checking it in at the U.S. Marshall's Office on June 27, 1900.

Is it just me, or is there something about saloon doors that just make you feel like an outlaw when you bust through them?

Fun Fact: In 1906, Alaska's capital was moved from Sitka to Juneau. The city once prospered as a mining town, but these days cruise ships, the government, fishing are the biggest employers.

Four - Skagway

The further north you go, the bigger the mountains that reach into the sky. Overnight we've made our way from Juneau to the northernmost place on our journey, Skagway! Today, we've booked a double excursion - a trip on the White Pass Railway, and a Wilderness Hike up to the Laughton Glacier.

When you sign up for a shore excursion through the cruise line you'll be given a ticket. That ticket has a lot of information including (using arrows to point to ticket) where your tour is meeting, the meeting time, the date, and important information about your chosen excursion, such as passport requirements and physical constraints. Today, we're meeting in the Bliss Theater, as indicated on our ticket. Generally you'll somewhere on the ship and disembark as a group. They will call your excursion and you'll head out.

Of course, if you're not doing a shore excursion through the cruise line, you're free to disembark as you please.

Boarding the Bus & Train + White Pass Railway

From our cruise ship terminal we board a bus and are taken to the White Pass Railroad for the first part of our journey DEEP into Alaska's wilderness. One of the most difficult aspects of traveling on an Alaskan cruise is deciding what to pack, since weather can run the gamut from warm and sunny to freezing snow and rainy. This hike was particularly hard to pack for, but luckily, Packer Expeditions, the operator of our tour, provided us with everything we needed - waterproof clothing, hiking gear, and even food. So we were free to set out on our voyage in search of nothing but excitement and discovery!

While today the White Pass & Yukon Route operates merely as a tourist attraction, the story of the this railroad is the story of gold. In July 1897, miners arrived in Seattle with tons of it. The news electrified the nation and within weeks, tens of thousands of men & women steamed north towards Skagway. There they would start their harrowing 600 mile journey to the Klondike gold fields. Construction of this 110 mile narrow gauge railroad began in 1898 to make the journey to through White Pass easier. Nowadays, it's more of a leisure experience than a practical one, and we were simply enjoying the spectacular views. And then, seemingly out of nowhere, in the middle of the vast expanse of wilderness and mountains, our merry little cohort of hikers were told to get off the train.

Fun Fact: The White Pass and Yukon Route climbs from sea level in Skagway to almost 3,000 feet at White Pass Summit in just 20 miles!

The Hike

To say we were a trepidatious about what we had gotten ourselves into would be an understatement. But once we were geared up and on the trail, the fresh forest air deep in our lungs, we knew this was going to be an experience we would never forget!

Fun Fact: Our guides were incredible! They were personable, very knowledgable about the environment and were always happy to provide an impromptu lesson on what we were seeing.

Once we were about halfway up the mountain we found a flat spot and stopped for a lunch break. We were then supposed to turn around and begin our trek back. But Ben, ever the explorer, persuaded a few of the guides to take a small group of us further up the mountain.

So while some of the group turned around and headed back after lunch, a few of the more adventurous explorers continued on up the face of the mountain to get a closer look at the awe-inspiring glacier. The terrain became more treacherous, more rugged, and steeper, but the views it afforded were well worth the effort.

The phrase “breathtaking views” is far overused by travel writers. Everything from the rolling hills of Ireland to a highway overpass in Toledo seems to offer “breathtaking views”. However, in this instance I can assure you, there is no better phrase to encapsulate the views we found on this hike. And did I mention it was 7 mile hike that took several hours? That means not only was it breathtaking, but it was indeed breathtaking.

Tongass National Forest

The Tongass National Forest is the largest national forest in the country, covering over 17 million acres. Scattered throughout this temperate rain forest you’ll find dozens of cabins just like this one, perfect for campers and backpackers to provide some shelter from the elements. The accommodations vary depending on the cabin, but they all come with a few things in common - spectacular views, fresh air, and a chance to escape the hustle and bustle of modern life.

Train Back to Skagway

As the song says - She’ll Be Coming Round the Mountain When She Comes! The train rounded the corner, and we loaded up to head back into Skagway.

Fun Fact: Construction of the White Pass Railway was finally completed in 1900. Unfortunately, that also coincided with the faltering of the gold rush. So for 70 years the railroad hauled ore and concentrates to Skagway. In 1982, it closed down. Then, in 1988, with the cruise line industry bringing larger crowds to Skagway, the railroad was refurbished and has been hauling passengers ever since.

Of all the things we did in Alaska this trip, this was my favorite. Nothing I show you here can begin to compare to being there. Everyone should experience this kind of hike at least once in their life. It was the most expensive excursion we booked...

After our seven mile mountain trek, we felt we deserved an ice cold beer, so we stopped at a few breweries as we headed back to our ship.

Skagway + Overview & History

In its day, Skagway was a scrappy little town. Today, it’s an amazingly preserved artifact from North America’s biggest and most storied gold rush! While many of the buildings are recreations, Skagway is still the most authentic “gold rush” towns. OH! Is that another place for a beer?

Fun Fact: While raw frontier towns had largely been abandoned in the lower 48, Skagway was still very much a free for all. Lawlessness was rampant, liquor abounded, and prostitution flourished in houses of “negotiable affection”. This type environment attracted misfits seeking their fortunes, further exacerbating the area’s chaotic atmosphere.

Fun Fact: Skagway and Haines are the only two towns in Alaska's southeast panhandle that have roads to the "outside".

The Manhattan Room

Back on the ship, we're having dinner in The Manhattan Room, one of the main dining rooms onboard the Norwegian Bliss, and a staple on many Norwegian ships. Dinner is a great way to catch up on the events of the day, all while we head to our next port overnight. Oh! And look! There's more alcohol!

Fun Fact: Norwegian Cruise Line has no fixed dining times or pre-assigned seating, so you're able to eat when you want, wherever your palate leads you! Reservations can be made, but are not required.

Hot Tub Night + Spice H2O

While there are several hot tubs on deck, we opted for the ones in the far aft of the ship in the Spice H2O area. Spice H2O is an adults only area that includes two hot tubs, a bar, a lounging area, and a water feature for cooling off on those hot Caribbean days. Obviously, that last part is not a huge selling point for Alaskan cruises, but you know what is? Sitting in a hot tub with views like this:

Beau Tahana

And of course we ended our nights with the musical stylings of Beau Tahana in the The District Tap.

Five - Glacier Bay

Opening

Before you even arrive, you sense it. A change in the air. You begin in the modern age, at the inlet, floating by new lush forests, but as we venture further into the bay we travel back in time, back to the ice age. As the ship slowly carves its way through icy water, you get the feeling that you are Jack, climbing the beanstalk into the land of giants. Aquamarine waters are filled with icebergs the size of a small car. They lazily float by, watching you as drift into their domain. The exploration of glaciers in Alaska is one of the greatest travel experiences in North America, and nowhere allows you to do that better than here. This is World Heritage site, an immersive natural lab, a United Nations Biosphere reserve, a national park, and most importantly, a spiritual homeland for Tlingit natives. Here you'll find countless species of plants and wildlife, placid and serene waters, soaring mountains, and earth shaping rivers of ice. This is Glacier Bay National Park.

Opening Sequence, Part 2

Overnight we've sailed from Skagway to Glacier Bay National Park. Early in the morning, we dressed and headed to the bow of the ship to get some of our first views of the glaciers. Glacier Bay isn't like other ports, in the fact that it's not really a port at all. Cruise ships generally spend 8-10 hours in Glacier Bay sailing around the serene waters, but you don't disembark. Ships will get close to the glaciers for observation by passengers from the deck, but you'll remain on the ship all day. If each port in Alaska is a show, Glacier Bay is the most exclusive ticket in town. Only a two large ships are allowed in Glacier Bay each day, and competition between cruise lines for entry permits into the park is intense. So make sure your itinerary has you going to Glacier Bay! As you get closer, flocks of guests rush to get a front row seat. From far off, it's hard to tell the immense scale of these mountains of ice, but as you get closer you begin to understand their awesome powerful size. Everyone clambers to get a selfie in front of the glacier, because as the age old question goes - If a glacier calves into the water and no one is around to take a selfie in front of it, did it happen?

The first glacier we see is Margerie Glacier, which is a tidewater glacier in the western arm of Glacier Bay. Just over 250 years ago, Glacier Bay was all glacier and no bay. Back then, a massive river of ice, roughly 100 miles long and thousands of feet deep occupied the entire bay. Today, that massive glacier is gone, leaving behind fewer than a dozen tidewater glaciers. Ships must travel 65 miles into the long finger like inlets before they can see the ones left behind, sequestered to their own alcoves. They flow from the mountains to calve into the sea, inviting us to slow down and breathe deeply the cool of the ice age air. These mammoth glaciers stand as sentinels, ever changing their faces, observers to the passage of time as they retreat into the distance.

Fun Fact: Definitions: A tidewater glacier is a glacier that reaches all the way to the sea.

Calving is when chunks of ice break off from the end of the glacier and fall into the water.

Fun Fact: Comprised of 3.3 million acres, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve is a part of the 25-million acre World Heritage Site - one of the world's largest protected natural areas - designated by UNESCO.

Breakfast & Starbucks

Since the regular complimentary onboard coffee is...palatable at best, (brown flavored water comes to mind) it's worth the extra stroll and fee to get to the full service Starbucks onboard. Trust me on this one - you're going to want better coffee.

Back Out on Deck

While in Glacier Bay, there are several places on the ship to find some incredible views. We head back out to the lower decks, but we could just as easily have found spectacular views on the top deck, from the balcony in our staterooms (which I HIGHLY recommend for an Alaskan Cruise), or from the Observation Lounge on the 15th floor - one of the highlights of sailing to Alaska on the Norwegian Bliss. We spent most of our day in Glacier Bay outside on the lower decks because the weather was comfortable, and there was plenty of seating. The ship provided binoculars but I definitely recommend bringing your own binoculars as well, just in case there is a line. Although there are over 1,000 glaciers in Glacier Bay, you'll likely see four to five tidewater glaciers. Some of the most frequently viewed are the Margerie,

Reid, and Johns Hopkins glaciers. Ships generally linger in front of each glacier to give guests plenty of time to admire their incredible beauty. While glaciers are obviously the star of the show in Glacier Bay, there is so much more to see here! As the glaciers have retreated, young new forests now cloak parts of the land with incredibly rich green hues. The biodiversity here is a dream for naturalists and scientists. Flora and fauna are abundant, and while we visitors appreciate them for their aesthetic beauty, there are lots of specialists who study here. We have learned a lot from Glacier Bay about animals and plant life, and a lot about climate change. Here in Glacier Bay some glaciers are retreating and some are advancing, but overall the accelerated melting of ice in modern times is a dramatic and persistent reminder of large potentially disruptive shifts underway from our warming climate. Being in such close proximity to Alaska's melting glaciers helps us form that personal connection to climate change. While we are lucky enough to enjoy these beautiful mountains of ice, it's important to think about the future, and to ask ourselves how Glacier Bay may change even in our own lifetime. We need to ask ourselves what we can do to help preserve this breathtaking environment for future generations of humans and animals. It entices us to take a moment in which we do nothing but attempt to focus on, what could be, the waning years of the glaciers as we know them.

*Fun Fact: Other glaciers you may see include the Lamplugh, Rendu, Grand Pacific and McBride glaciers. One of the glaciers is named after the naturalist John Muir, who wrote *Travels in Alaska*, and was one of the region's first proponents.*

Fun Fact: Your cruise experience in Glacier Bay will vary depending on the size of your ship. Large ships will generally stay a bit further away from the glaciers, but provide a better overall view. Some smaller ships and specialty tours will even lay anchor and provide their guests with kayaks that they can use to get even closer to the calving glaciers.

Wildlife Segment

Glacier Bay is a great place to see a ton of wildlife, provided you're not me! Seriously, I kept missing them this entire trip. My travel companions would see, say, a giant brown bear foraging for food, and I would turn around to see it for a split second just as we rounded the corner, barely catching a glimpse before they disappeared from view. In Glacier Bay you can find seals, whales, bears, otters, eagles and more! So keep your eyes peeled and your binoculars at the ready, and hope you have better luck than me!

Fun Fact: Alaska has the highest concentration of brown bears and bald eagles on earth!

The Observation Lounge + National Parks Stamps

After a few hours of glacier viewing outside on deck, we made our way to inside to Deck 15 and the Observation Lounge. The Norwegian Bliss was built specifically for Alaskan cruises, and while part of the year is you'll find this ship in the Caribbean, Alaska is where the Bliss truly shines. That's mostly because of this area right here. The Observation Lounge was made to provide breathtaking views of glaciers and mountains in Alaska. It covers the front 3/4 of the ship, and it includes tons of seating areas, buffets, bars, and often there is live music as well. It's a great place to relax with a book, grab something to eat, play a board game or simply stare out the windows at the scenery as you float by. But what really makes

it spectacular are the towering, floor to ceiling windows that provide 180 degree views at the very front of the ship.

National Park Rangers

To enhance our experience while in Glacier Bay, National Park Rangers board the ship early in the morning to answer questions, give announcements over the loudspeaker, and provide insight and perspective into what we're seeing with commentary throughout the day. They also teach classes in the main theater throughout the day, lecturing about the park and the environment, they talk about what it's like to live in Glacier bay, and what to look for while you're here. Then, at the end of the day, they disembark, climb back into their own boat, and sail off into the sunset like super heroes!

Coco's Ice Cream Parlor

As the ship left Glacier Bay behind, we decided to leave our waistlines behind and head to the ice cream parlor for milkshakes!

These are not your momma's milkshakes! These over the top concoctions are monster, behemoth milkshakes with enough calories to feed a small army. Don't let the cute, pastel colors and quaint 1950s style decorations fool you. This place may give the impression of a charming little ice cream parlor, but make no mistake...these things are not for the faint of heart. This is less about indulge your sweet tooth and more about inducing a sugar coma. But boy oh boy, do they hurt so good!

The Cavern Club

For our evening entertainment, we're starting out at the Cavern Club. The Cavern Club is a recreation of the famous Cavern Club in Liverpool, where countless famous bands and musicians have performed - names come to mind like Stevie Wonder, The Who, The Rolling Stones, Adele and of course, The Beatles! In the ship's version, they offer a nightly Beatles cover band that takes you through the decades of Beatle music night by night!

Dinner at Q

Dinner tonight is at Q, a Texas style smokehouse that serves authentic Texas barbecue, mouth watering ribs, chicken & brisket. All the meats are smoked over hickory and oak wood, so the meat is infused with delicious flavors. And while you eat, you can jam to your favorite country music from a live band!

Beau Tahana

And of course we ended our nights with the musical stylings of Beau Tahana in the The District Tap.

Six - Ketchikan & Victoria

Ketchikan Overview

Overnight we've sailed through calm Alaskan waters from Glacier Bay National Park to Ketchikan! Upon waking, we step outside into the early morning sun to see that we have a spectacular birds eye view of the downtown area right from our stateroom balcony! Ketchikan is visually striking. Speckled throughout its lush green backdrop are vivid dots of colors, scattered throughout the town like brightly colored children's building blocks! Boats of all shapes and sizes putter their way through the harbor while we stand several stories above, breathing deep the fresh salty air, looking down on the scene like we've stepped into a live movie set. But Ketchikan is far from a facade - this is a town with stories to tell. It has an incredibly rich Alaska Native culture, with thousands of years of history! In more recent times, at the turn of the century it was a boom town, and during prohibition its red-light district was home to many speakeasies and more than 30 brothels. Today, however, we're looking past the city and its history, and delving into nature on a sea kayak adventure.

Fun Fact: Ketchikan bills itself as the "Salmon Capitol of the World", although the salmon industry here has dwindled in recent decades. At one time, the salmon and timber industries employed many residents but now, with dramatic rise of cruise-ship tourism, many people work in the travel and tourism industries.

Our Sea Kayak Adventure

We're picked up right from the dock and taken by shuttle to our shore excursion. Ketchikan has so much to offer! This is home to the famous Creek Street, a historic area of Ketchikan where you'll walk along a boardwalk and see houses supported by stilts. It's also home to other the Saxman Totem Park, and the famous Great Alaskan Lumberjack Show, all things we'll have to hit up next time we're in town! This time around, we're heading out of town to explore the great outdoors! We are driven to the headquarters of Southeast Exposure, the operator of our tour. Once there we gear up and are then taken by boat to Tatoosh Island, a small island northwest of downtown (show map). Once there, we'll slide into our kayaks and discover unparalleled coastline, crystal clear waters, and all kinds of wildlife. We're lucky because we were here on a beautiful clear sunny day! Ketchikan is notorious as one of the rainiest places in the world. On average it receives 140 - 160 inches of rainfall annually, so be sure to bring rain gear.

Pro Tip: Waterproof bags and phone holders are always a good idea when doing water-based excursions.

FF: We saw over 10 bald eagles in just a few hours of kayaking! Bald eagles build the largest nests in the world - the largest to date ever found weighed nearly 3 tons!

In the Woods After Kayaking

Sometimes when we travel it's hard to put into perspective how extraordinary it really is. I specifically remember standing in this lush green forest and thinking to myself how lucky I

was to be in Ketchikan, in Alaska, with friends, exploring places I never thought I would be able to see in my lifetime. I think it's important to take a moment like this every time we travel. Take a deep breath and experience entirely where you are. Envision yourself on a map. Try to give yourself some perspective and have a quiet moment of reflection. Think about your place in the world. Those of us able to travel are indeed the luckiest people in the world, and it's important to understand how truly fortunate we are.

Lunch Back on the Ship at the Local

On this day, we were back on the ship by 12:45PM, so we ate a quick bite at The Local, one of the complimentary restaurants on board that offers pub grub.

Dinner at Teppanyaki

For dinner tonight, we're eating at Teppanyaki, a Japanese Hibachi restaurant onboard the Norwegian Bliss.

Sitting around a shared table with other guests, your meal is made right in front of your eyes in a most entertaining fashion. From onion volcanoes to the throwing of the shrimp into someone's mouth, Teppanyaki is half meal, half show, and the chefs here are just as skilled with food as they are with a funny gag.

Rice, noodles, eggs, steak, chicken, and fish are all on the menu, and everything is served family style, so be sure to come hungry!

After Teppanyaki

It's the final day on our Alaskan cruise, and today we're stopping in Victoria, British Columbia. I woke up early to try and soak in the last of our mountain views. Fog gave the entire scene a haunting aura. We don't dock until the evening, so we've got most of our day to enjoy the Bliss one last time.

Entertainment on Board (Theater, Social, Onboard Games & Shows, Casino)

One thing that's never lacking on a cruise is the amount of entertainment. We've spent a lot of time on our cruise enjoying the various shows and entertainment onboard. In the main atrium you'll find all kinds of trivia, game shows, demonstrations, fun competitions and music throughout the day into the evening. The main theater onboard is The Bliss Theater. Each evening you can find a new show here - from big Broadway hits like Jersey Boys, to the Beatles tribute band, an original show called Havana, and even crew member talent show. This is also where they hold a crew member appreciation on the final evening where guests can show their thanks for the hard work the crew has done to make their vacation special during their cruise!

There is also a casino and a spa, as well as other entertainment venues like Social, which hosts a myriad of events - from stand-up comedy, to dueling pianos, and in the evening to transforms into a nightclub.

678 Ocean Place | Shops & Waterfront

Since we don't dock in Victoria until late in the evening, this was a great day to enjoy 678 Ocean Place! Located on decks 6, 7 & 8 (hence the name 678 Ocean Place), this is three decks of bars, restaurants, casino gaming, entertainment and shopping. In the shops you'll find generally high end brands of perfumes, alcohol, and sunglasses that are a bit too rich for my blood, but they are duty free, so if you're in the market for watch that costs more than my monthly mortgage payment, then you just may have found the right place. What is nice, however, are the shops that sell ship specific and location specific merchandise, so you can pick up that last minute Alaska souvenir, and some merchandise if you want to rep the Bliss!

Outside, you'll find the Waterfront! The Waterfront is a quarter mile of shops, bars and restaurants and more! They have everything from ice cream shops to cigar lounges. There are plenty of places just to sit and relax and watch the beautiful landscape drift by! Many of the restaurants have both indoor and outdoor seating, so be sure to let them know your preference when you check in! While this area is a bit better suited for the ship's time in the Caribbean, in the summer months on an Alaskan cruise, it's a great place to sit outside and enjoy the views and the weather!

Kids Onboard

We decided not to bring our daughter on our Alaskan cruise, but for those that do bring their kiddos along, there are tons of spaces onboard just for kids! There are specially designated areas for kids and teens, and even for little ones ages 6 months to 3 years. And the best part - kids programs are all complimentary!

Victoria

Due to an old maritime law from 1886, almost all Alaskan cruises have to stop in a foreign port. The good news is many cruises stop in the beautiful city of Victoria! The bad news is they only give you like 2 hours. But we're determined to make the most of it! We walked to the downtown area, known as the Inner Harbour, and simply strolled around! We stopped in at the The Fairmont Empress hotel. Originally opened in 1902 by the Canadian Pacific Railway, its grand chateau style hotels that you'll find in many Canadian cities. The hotel provides a spectacular view of the Inner Harbour, and so we decided to hop inside for a drink and some appetizers.

From there, we only had a little bit of time to explore the immediate area, stop in one more bar, and then it was back to the ship, and overnight, we made our way back to Seattle to end our incredible Alaskan journey!

Fun Fact: Other major attractions in Victoria include the beautiful 55-acre Butchart Gardens and the Craigdarroch Castle.

Closing

In the course of our lives we can only hope to have a few travel experiences so immersive, so awe-inspiring, and so life-changing. It's not very often that we can travel and enjoy such a wide array of experiences. Captivating cities, breathtaking adventures, indulgent cuisine,

spellbinding history, wonderful entertainment, and rugged, unspoiled nature, all made better when sharing it with friends. Alaska provides an endless display of natural beauty if only you listen to the call of the wild. This is truly one of the greatest travel experiences one can have in North America, and indeed, the world. This is Alaska, the great American cruise.

The End

General Alaska + Random Fun Facts & Pro Tips (Not Used)

- One third of Alaska is above the Arctic line, where temperatures can get -50 below. In some parts of Alaska, during the summer they will have nearly 24 hours of sunlight!
- Bring a real watch and set it to the ship's time! Don't rely on your smartphone's clock. As you disembark the ship at each port of call you'll see the sailing times and the "back onboard" times - be sure your watch is set to the ship's time and BE BACK BY THAT TIME! The ship will leave with or without you! Don't be at the dock by that time - be on the ship by that time! Plan for delays! Passengers who miss the boat have to pay their own way to the next port.
- In Alaska, more people have pilot's license than driver's license!
- Other popular ships cruising to Alaska include the Norwegian Joy, Royal Caribbean's Ovation of the Seas, and the Disney Dream.
- Every port of call has tacky tourist shops, so buyer beware! To ensure authenticity, buy items tagged with the state-approved "Authentic Native Handcraft of Alaska" or "Silverhand", or look for products with the polar bear symbol indicating that the products were made in Alaska.
- There are 229 federally recognized native tribes in Alaska, and five major indigenous groups.
- In Alaska, there are more caribou than people & they have no skunks or snakes!
- 1/2 of U.S. National Park Land is in Alaska. In Alaska, rainfall is measured in feel, not inches!