

## **Cruising to Alaska** **by Dana Ailer**

Alaska is the United State's last wild frontier. It offers wildlife and geographic features that aren't available anywhere else in the country. Polar bears, lynx, fjords, and glaciers are some of the state's unique offerings. Admiring the rugged Alaska coast from a cruise ship is the most accessible way to see the untamed areas of this amazing state. While travelers could chose to see the wilds of Alaska by train or bus, neither of these will provide the level of luxury and convenience that is found on a cruise ship. If you have ever visited Alaska by air, you know how time consuming and tiring it can be. Imagine instead enjoying the relaxation and luxury onboard a cruise ship as you are ferried from location to location. These cruises offer so many interesting ports and activities that it's the ideal way to experience Alaska. Seeing the majesty of Alaska from the deck of a large ship gives visitors a perspective on the vast scale of the place that isn't possible from the ground.

Cruise ships that travel to Alaska offer balcony staterooms, which ensure each guest will have their own private unobstructed view of the breathtaking scenery. While you're not enjoying your own personal view, the ships offer gourmet restaurants, casinos, boutiques, and spas. There are activities for the whole family with the ships' child and teen centers and various nighttime shows and entertainment for grown-ups.

Many Alaskan cruise options are available from several different cruise lines, providing access to much of Alaska's 34,000 miles of shore line as well as the length of the Inside Passage which runs from the Canadian border all the way to the Gulf of Alaska.

Alaskan cruises typically feature at least one day spent viewing a glacier up close. Watching huge columns of ice slide into the sea from the lofty heights of the deck of a large ship is an entirely unique experience and not one you can have from land or from a small boat. Some people enjoy the encounter so much that cruise companies offer Alaska Glacier Cruises which feature several days floating among the ice giants.

Alaska's capital, Juneau, is only accessible by air or sea, so arrival by cruise ship is the only way many people are able to enjoy this vibrant city. Likewise, many of the other destinations available on an Alaskan cruise are not easily accessible by any other means. Nome, a port available on many cruises and the historic finish of the 1,049 mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, is also accessible only by air and sea, and presumably, dogsled.

Cruises offer a unique opportunity to visit some of Alaska's historic costal frontier towns like Sagway and Ketchikan. Called "the roughest town on earth" during the Klondike Gold Rush, Sagway is now home to the Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park. There you can still enjoy old time saloons and shows featuring Sagway's favorite outlaw, Soapy Smith. Ketchikan is home to the world's largest collection of totem poles. Also the salmon capitol, Ketchikan visitors are invited to try their hand at fishing.

If you would enjoy the opportunity to see some of Alaska by train, many cruises offer day trips which allow passengers to see some of the back country from the comfort of White Pass and Yukon Rail Road's vintage parlor cars. Constructed during the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, the narrow gauge railroad gives visitors breathtaking views of glaciers, waterfalls, mountains, gorges, and tunnels.

You might also choose a more heart-racing adventure such as racing a dogsled ride, taking a guided mountain bike tour, kayaking a wild river, or viewing the Juneau Ice Fields from a helicopter. Because all of these adventures have been selected and endorsed by the cruise line, you can be assured of the quality and safety of each experience.

Enjoying everything that untamed Alaska has to offer, then returning to your ship for a gourmet meal, and then to your well appointed stateroom for a good night's sleep is certainly the most relaxing way to experience this unique state.