

Discover the HEART OF ALASKA



The *Midnight Sun Express* features "Ultra Dome" ceilings for dramatic views of Alaska's interior.

Purchased for a mere 2.5 cents an acre, it's safe to say "Seward's folly" was a sound investment. Alaska has developed into one of our nation's most cherished tourist destinations and the *pièce de résistance* for cruise enthusiasts. But the question is, how does one experience the true grandeur of the "Great Land" (it's approximately one-fifth the size of the U.S.) without spending about a decade here? We found the solution with Princess Cruises' "Heart of Alaska" cruise-tour. The trip combines an adventurous six-day land tour of Alaska's vast interior with a luxurious seven-day voyage through the breathtaking Inside Passage.

Alaska's Interior – the Famed 'Bush Country'

BY NINO

Our southbound journey begins in America's most northern city, Fairbanks. During the summer months, the sun shines nearly 24 hours a day, leaving ample time to take a riverboat discovery tour, or enjoy two of Alaska's most treasured diversions – fishing and gold panning.

From Fairbanks, we head into Denali National Park aboard a deluxe train, the *Midnight Sun Express*. With its outside observation deck and "Ultra Dome" ceilings it's really the perfect way to take in the dramatic views and witness the abundant wildlife that calls this massive expanse home.

During the land-tour, guests stay overnight in five exclusive Princess wilderness lodges, strategically built to show off Alaska's most impressive panoramas. One of the most spectacular is the Copper River Lodge. Just miles from the Wrangell St. Elias National Park, the lodge is perched on a bluff and features awe-inspiring views of some of the highest peaks in North America.

To enhance the Alaskan experience, Princess offers once-in-a-lifetime excursion opportunities throughout the trip. For example, in the quaint town of Talkeetna, nestled in the shadow of Mt. McKinley, you can board a helicopter or float plane for a flightseeing tour. Back in town, be sure to stop by Café Michele's, which serves delicious Alaskan cuisine with a French twist.



Princess guests stay in five exclusive wilderness lodges.

Other exciting excursions include a visit to the Iditerod headquarters, for an in-depth look at the world's most famous dog sled race. The historic tour of the Kennicott Mines near Copper River and the scenic catamaran sail from Valdez to Whittier are also excellent choices, but the great thing is, you really can't lose no matter what you choose.

The Inside Passage

BY DAVID GAWKOWSKI

A cruise through the Gulf of Alaska and the Inside Passage reveals an eventful natural and social history. It's a seven-day glide through the tranquil glacier-carved waterways of Glacier Bay and College Fjord with stops along the way in the delightful towns of Skagway, Juneau and Ketchikan.

MY VACATION OF A LIFETIME – SO FAR!

Editor's note: When seen through the eyes of our youth, even the most seasoned traveler can appreciate certain things usually taken for granted. Here are some thoughts on Alaska from 14-year-old Josh Angert.

This summer I traveled to Alaska with my family; as a 14-year-old, I experienced more things in one week than I could ever have imagined.

Out of the many excursions I enjoyed, one stood out as the most exciting – kayaking from the lower part of Shoup Bay to Shoup Glacier. I had never kayaked before, and we saw ice calving from the glacier and thousands of birds called kittiwakes on the rocks and floating ice. At day's end, we jumped into Shoup Bay's frigid waters for an "Alaskan experience." When we climbed out, there was a hot tub awaiting us.

This was definitely the most exciting vacation I have ever had and I can't wait to return some day.

— JOSH ANGERT

On board Alaska's newest cruise ship, the *Island Princess*, passengers need not search far for activities. Amenities aboard the spacious 1,970-passenger, 92,000-ton ship include a Bali-themed spa with ocean-view gym, four pools, kids and teens-only fun zones, a nine-hole putting course and the unique "Scholarship at Sea" program. For nocturnal entertainment, there's the Paris-themed casino, three unique show lounges and a variety of nightclubs.

Dining choices are plentiful with two main dining rooms and seven alternative dining options, including the mouthwatering Cajun cuisine at the Bayou Café. Try a couple of the potent hurricane cocktails here and you may actually see Bourbon Street. Another excellent feature aboard the *Island Princess* is that 90 percent of the staterooms have balconies. From our balcony we spotted Orcas, bald eagles and even a brown bear swimming across Glacier Bay.

But there's much to experience onshore as well. In the historic gold rush town of Skagway we boarded a helicopter for a dog sledding adventure on top of a glacier. We also kayaked near the brilliant blue Mendenhall Glacier in Juneau and took in a lumberjack show in Ketchikan. But if this sounds too exhausting, try a ride on the White Pass & Yukon Route in Skagway, arguably the most scenic railway in the world.

In the end, the only possible drawback to the magnificent state of Alaska is that there still just isn't enough time to partake in all its bounty. But maybe that's yet another one of the great gifts the journey provides – a reason to do it all over again!



A Coral-class ship at sea.



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