

## CRUISING ♦ ALASKA



**A**laska has always been a final frontier, a place where everyone wanted to go. Even 70 years ago.

A slide show of black and white photographs as the *MS Eurodam* sets sail from Seattle shows intrepid travellers standing atop one of Alaska's mesmerising glaciers. But rather than the sea of puffer jackets seen on the Holland America ship today, it seems fashion trumped practicality in the late '40s when the first Alaskan cruisers dressed their best in suits and skirts.

Once in the geographical clutches of Russia, Alaska was bought by the United States for a measly three cents an acre 150 years ago and, ever since tourists started hitching a ride on a cargo ship to cruise the Inside Passage in 1881, a voyage to the True North of Alaska has equalled a perennial gold star on the travel bucket list.

About two million people visit Alaska a year and cruising is a popular way to do it. In 2017, Seattle (the departure point for most round-trip cruises) will host 218 cruise ships and more than one million passengers. Holland America Line, the first tour company in Alaska back in 1947, this year increased their ships to seven, with 135 Alaska departures.

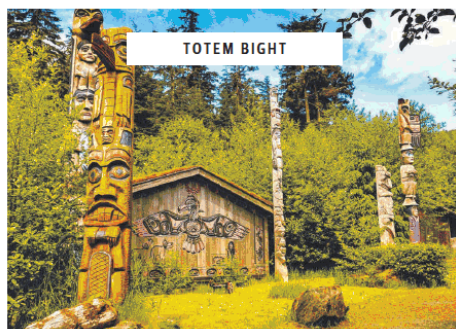
Here is what you should know before you go.

#### 1. PICK YOUR TIME

"If you want to see snow, book early in the season," Captain John Scott tells us aboard the *MS Eurodam* where he's been manning the bridge during this 70th anniversary season of sailing. "You'll see more wildlife midsummer to late-summer."

#### 2. CONSIDER YOUR SHORE EXCURSIONS

With everything from dog sledding to hiking, sea kayaking and whale watching on offer, don't leave the decision-making until you're on board. Have a back-up plan in case the weather turns, and if you prefer to get



### A VOYAGE TO THE TRUE NORTH OF ALASKA HAS EQUALLED A GOLD STAR ON THE TRAVEL BUCKET LIST

off the beaten track, go for activities with longer hiking times that might deter some travellers.

#### 3. IT'S BUSY

There are five ships in Ketchikan the day we arrive. In Juneau, every day from the end of April to October, ships lay down their gangways to deliver up to 15,000 people into the old town.

#### 4. BALD EAGLES ARE LIKE ALASKAN PIGEONS

Half the world's 70,000-strong

population of bald eagles stick to Alaskan skies, with about 15,000 said to be found in Juneau alone. Gaze up at the spruce trees that blanket the hills.

#### 5. GLACIER BAY WILL BLOW YOUR MIND

With an entire day dedicated to skulking through Glacier Bay National Park on most Alaskan cruises, you'll spend hours watching a real-life screen saver outside, dwarfed by groaning glaciers and ice-blue jagged cliff faces. Only two ships are permitted inside the park at any one time and ranger commentary guarantees you get well acquainted with Margerie, Lamplugh, Reid and John Hopkins glaciers.

#### 6. NATIVE HISTORY

As well as learning more about the Indigenous history of Alaska in Ketchikan, members of the Huna Indigenous community of Glacier Bay come aboard the *MS Eurodam* to share stories of ravages of new land ownership and Mother Nature's own pitfalls documented by the community over thousands of years.



#### 7. CHOOSE YOUR STATEROOM

Two words: Balcony Room. There's no better spot to take in glacier views and spot sea lions and otters.

#### 8. TRACY'S CRAB SHACK

In downtown Juneau, Tracy's Crab Shack has been a red beacon of dungeness deliciousness since it started as a humble food stand in the '90s. But beyond this dock delight, every stop on an Alaskan cruise provides the opportunity to feast on the wild salmon, just-caught halibut and crab cakes that will ruin your taste for traditional fish and chips.

#### 9. ALASKAN BREWING CO. BEER

It started with a crowd-funding campaign before Kickstarter was a thing, uses beer to power the making of its beer, and uses Juneau's maze of underground mine shafts to store cases to the optimal 55°F (12.8°C). A special pale ale was brewed for Holland America Line's 70th anniversary. Sample on board.

#### 10. BOOK AHEAD

As any cruiser knows, on-board, it's all about the food. On *MS Eurodam*

there are four restaurant options as well as the all-inclusive Lido Market with dining supplements ranging from \$15 to \$35 per head. Make reservations so you don't miss out on Thai fusion at Tamarind or a hefty President's Cut – carved at your table and best shared between two or more – at Pinnacle Grill (extra supplement).

#### 11. WILD ENTERTAINMENT

Given the scenery, it makes sense that Holland America Line partner with BBC Earth to beam documentaries on to the big screen, while live music set against the series *Wild Alaska* ignites all the senses.

#### 12. SPOTTING WHALES

While you're just as likely to spot a humpback or orca while on the treadmill, a whale watching tour from Victoria BC with *Orca Spirit* provides the advantage of a marine naturalist to explain behaviours like surge feeding – humpbacks fat-load in the North Pacific through the summer.

#### 13. WI-FI IS LIMITED

If you can't stomach the per-minute rates on board and need an online fix,

TELEOZIGIES - V1





Bow to adventure on MS Eurodam inside Glacier Bay National Park, with Steller sea lions and Native American Totems part of the mind-blowing experience.

PICTURES: SUPPLIED, ISTOCK



#### LOUNGING AROUND

you can score free Wi-Fi in the public libraries in Juneau and Sitka.

#### 14. EDUCATE YOURSELF

Brush up on your tech and photography skills on-board MS Eurodam with Windows workshops and camera tips out on deck.

#### 15. RAIN GAUGE

Rain is a constant companion in Alaska but Ketchikan locals make light of it with a "liquid sunshine" measure of the annual drizzle. The record is 202 inches (513cm) in 1949.

#### 16. GIANT RAINFOREST

Tongass National Forest is North America's largest national forest, spread across 17 million acres of glacial-carved landscape.

Book the Sitka Great Adventure shore excursion to hike through the otherworldly landscape, past 500-plus-year-old trees and across spongy muskeg (peat bog).

#### 17. TOTEM POLES

The Totem Heritage Center was built to preserve and exhibit the only original totem pole collection in the

United States. Thirty-three poles were retrieved from abandoned Tlingit and Haida villages around Ketchikan.

A minimal \$US\$ entry fee allows an express lesson in these living cultures.

#### 18. IT FEELS LIKE RUSSIA

In the 1800s, Sitka was the capital of Russian America so you can expect onion-domed cathedrals and other Soviet architecture from the days after Alexander Baranoff sailed in and founded New Archangel (which would later become Sitka).

#### ESCAPE ROUTE

### ALASKA

#### GETTING THERE

Qantas flies daily to Los Angeles with onward connections to Seattle with codeshare partner, Alaska Airlines. [qantas.com](http://qantas.com)

#### DOING THERE

Holland America's seven-day Roundtrip Seattle on MS Eurodam departs from Port of Seattle on May 12 with fares from \$1499 a person. [hollandamerica.com.au](http://hollandamerica.com.au)

#### MORE

[portseattle.org](http://portseattle.org)

#### 19. STOP OVER IN SEATTLE

There's a bustling food market celebrating 110-years this year, quirky underground tours, and works of glassblowing artist Dale Chihuly showcased at the foot of the Space Needle. Stay a few nights pre- or post-cruise to discover the salmon ladder, the Seattle Art Museum and book ahead for the next-level seafood brunch at West Seattle Institution, Salty's.

THE WRITER WAS A GUEST OF HOLLAND AMERICA LINE AND PORT OF SEATTLE.

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