

DESTINATION ♦ ALASKA



ON THE WATERFRONT

GO ON, JUNEAU YOU'LL LIKE IT

A food tour of Alaska's capital? Now that's an idea with legs

CELESTE MITCHELL

They say there's still gold in the hills of Juneau, but these days it's a different type of gold being prospected. Back in the 1880s, the discovery of the precious metal put this town on the map. Now the discoveries are made on foot and the riches are pulled from the forests and oceans surrounding us.

And rather than wearing miners' helmets and wielding picks, the new-wave rush comes in the form of 1.3 million cruise ship passengers walking off the gangways during summer to flood into Alaska's cute-as-a-postcard capital and take home a taste of it. I've just stepped off one of them – Holland America Line's *MV Eurodam*.

"The food scene in Juneau has just exploded," Juneau Food Tours guide Lorinda tells us as she places down steaming bowls of king crab bisque.

Twelve years ago, Colorado native Tracy LaBarge started a food stand selling enormous king crab legs to hungry locals and travellers. They came by the boatload and queued for a taste, dunked them in butter and grew woozy with lust. Now in brand new, much larger digs a little further along the wharf, Tracy's King Crab Shack shines like a red beacon of deliciousness to the towering ships that pull into port each day.

In the pumping dining room, Whitney Houston's *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* plays and a bell clangs every time someone orders a bucket of legs. Around the room, posters and T-shirts shout the catch-cries, "Tracy gave me crabs" and "Best legs in town" but, beyond the kitsch, Tracy's crab bisque and the crab cake with a kick of red "special sauce" that follows is an almost religious experience.

Local fishing-trawler-cook-turned-entrepreneur Deckhand Dave has also struck it rich with his secret recipe for tartar sauce, which we scoop up with crispy panko-crumbed chunks of sockeye salmon and then immediately wish for more. The site his food truck sits on seems to be a bit of a gold field itself – it's where Tracy made her start and she's since become a part owner in the local pub, McGivney's, opened an Indian restaurant called Saffron, fine dining restaurant Salt, and has her own fish processing plant.

"Juneauites march to their own drummer," Lorinda says with a laugh as she hands out spoonfuls of bull kelp marinade among the traditional Ulu knives and bowls, and hunting knives of all shapes and menacing sizes in the Alaska Knifeworks store. The seaweed is harvested in Sitka – where we'll stop later in the cruise – and used in jams, salsas and sauces.

As we walk and taste our way through Juneau with Lorinda, I can feel the excitement in the food scene here. While my cruise companions opted for dogsledding and seaplane flights from today's line-up of shore excursions, I lick my lips to savour the sauce from Randy's Rib Shack and confuse my tastebuds with kimchi-infused halibut nachos.

In contrast to the new, weird and wonderful flavours we've been trying, we end the tour at Juneau's oldest watering hole, the Alaskan Hotel and Bar, for a tasting of Alaskan Brewery ales. The ubiquitous brews are everywhere in Alaska but wandering after the tour I discover the taste of the new Juneau being poured at Amalga Distillery.

At the solid concrete bar inside the old Alaska Electric Light and Power, owner Brandon Howard offers me a tasting glass of their Juneau Gin. "It's a really big gin... a lot of nice local ingredients, then citrus to brighten it up and cardamom and coriander, because I love cardamom and coriander," he says with a laugh.

But it's not just the usual suspects in this gin that make my tastebuds stand to attention. From the forest, spruce tips and traditional medicinal plants like devil's club and labrador tea are used, distilling a distinctly Alaskan flavour. After completing his apprenticeship in Islay, Scotland, Brandon returned to Juneau to open the only distillery in the town he and Laura have called home for 15 years. "We want to slow down and talk to people here in the tasting room," he says.

Artwork by Tasmanian-born, Brooklyn-based Demelza Rafferty makes their bottle labelling and a feature wall in the minimalist space pop – a collage of intricate, brightly coloured paper cut-outs magnified and printed on a large-scale. "She thought Juneau looked a lot like her hometown in Tasmania," Brandon tells me.

Next up will be a range of "foraged" vodkas using spruce tip, wild bull kelp and wild blueberries. On the same street, I discover Barnaby Brewing, which has also just opened making "beer from here" by infusing locally harvested ingredients like spruce tips, dandelions and salmonberries into their rotation. And before I'm due to reboard and set sail to Glacier Bay, I spot a sign advertising "chaga" at 60 Degrees Coffee and, intrigued, order a chaga-infused coffee.

Co-owner Adam Savage was bitten by the prospecting bug when introduced to chaga and, without a clue what he was doing, he decided to head into the forest north of Juneau to try and forage some for himself. (The fungus-like superfood only clings to the birch trees north of 60 degrees – hence the name.) "I was like, okay, I'm going out looking for a mushroom or a fungus on these trees, and I have a picture on my cell phone of what it looks like, let me see if I can go locate this stuff," Adam laughs.

Chaga is said to act as an anti-inflammatory and natural energy booster and if Adam's enthusiasm is anything to go by, I'm sold.

Carrying my coffee cup like a gold nugget back to *MV Eurodam*, I know I've struck it rich in Juneau and I didn't need a pick or a headlamp to find it.

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

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DESTINATION ♦ ALASKA



The food scene in Juneau (main picture) has exploded; spruce tips are a highlight of Barnaby Brewing's beer, and Tracy's gigantic king crabs and her red Shack are like a beacon to cruise ship passengers.

PICTURES: ISTOCK, JOSH LAURA, SUPPLIED

ESCAPE ROUTE

JUNEAU

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies daily to Los Angeles with onward connections to Seattle with codeshare partner, Alaska Airlines. qantas.com

CRUISING THERE

Holland America's seven-day Roundtrip Seattle on *Ms Eurodam* departs from Port of Seattle on May 12, 2018, with fares from \$1499 a person. hollandamerica.com.au

FOOD TOUR

A Taste of Juneau on Foot is a new addition to the shore excursions line-up for Holland America Line, with tours meeting each ship in Juneau. If you're travelling independently, Juneau Food Tours run daily between April 30 and October 1 and include nine tastings for \$US129 a person (about \$165) plus 5 per cent city sales tax. juneaufoodtours.com

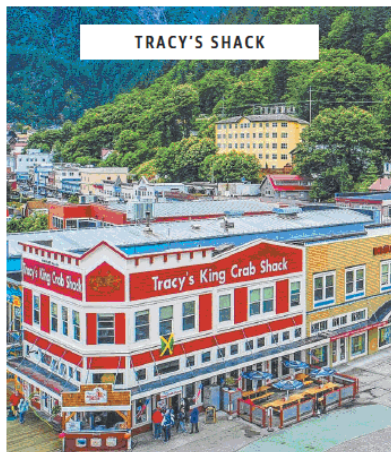
Amalga Distillery's tasting room is open Monday to Saturday from 1pm during the season. amalga-distillery.com

Try a chaga-infused coffee, tea or hot chocolate from 60 degrees should you find yourself in Juneau, Alaska. 60coffee.com

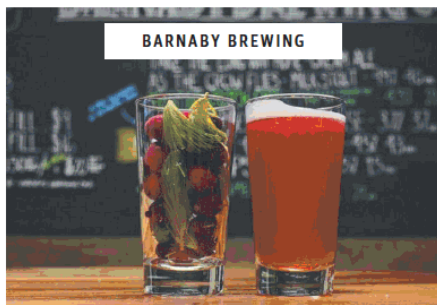
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*Prices cover the cruise only for the least expensive inside or balcony stateroom as stated, and are per person in AUD based on twin share, inclusive of fees and taxes, on-board gratuities and fuel costs (subject to change). Prices and itineraries are correct as at 19 March 2018 and are subject to change or withdrawal. Prices do not cover all product and services offerings that relate to the cruise. Prices based on 7-day Western Mediterranean from Barcelona departing 28 October 2018, 7-day Alaska with Glacier Bay from Vancouver departing 10 September 2018, 7-day Alaska Highlights departing 5 May 2019, 9-day Norwegian Fjords departing 25 August 2018, 9-day Scandinavia, Russia, Baltic from Copenhagen departing 18 August 2018, 7-day Best of Hawaii departing 4 May 2019. *Norwegian's Free At Sea offer valid until 2 April 2018 unless extended. Studio and Inside staterooms choose 1 free offer. Oceanview, Balcony and Mini-Suites choose 2 free offers. The Haven and Suite bookings receive all 5 offers. Shore excursion credit is US\$50 per port and is per stateroom. 3rd and 4th guest sail at a reduced rate only valid on select dates. Free At Sea offer varies. *Up to US\$500 free onboard spend offer valid until 2 April 2018 on select sailings unless extended. Eligible for Pride of America sailings departing from 5 January 2019. Amount is in USD and is per stateroom. Studios receive US\$25. Inside Staterooms receive US\$50. Oceanview Staterooms receive US\$60. Balcony Staterooms receive US\$100. Mini Suites receive US\$140. Haven & Suites receive US\$300. Select Haven & Suites receive US\$500. It may not be used toward onboard service charges or pre-purchased activities. Full terms & conditions, visit www.ncl.com.au. Offer is non-refundable, non-transferable, has no monetary value and are valid for new bookings only. Offer and combinability with other promotional offers is subject to change at any time per Norwegian Cruise Line's discretion. Other restrictions may apply. All rights reserved. Norwegian Cruise Line is not responsible for typographical errors or omissions. Ship registry: BAHAMAS & UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. ©2018 NCL Corporation Ltd. NCL Australia Pty Ltd. ABN 60 507 578 791