



Holland America cruising
Alaska's scenic Glacier Bay

Alaska and Beyond

By Cindy Bertram

Alaska is a destination that conjures up images of glaciers, mountains, wildlife, blue ice waters—but photos don't do this cruise destination justice. It has to be experienced. Over the years, the number of cruise lines offering Alaska cruises has grown, with most now offering land tour extensions as well. For the 2007 Alaskan season, even more options exist to explore this incredible destination, with cruise departures now readily available out of Seattle, Vancouver, Seward and Whittier.

A Little History

The first lines to pioneer the destination, offering both cruises and cruise tours, were Holland America Lines and Princess Cruises. Holland America actually deployed its first ship, the MS Prinsendam, to Alaska in 1975. Royal Caribbean International began offering their first Alaskan cruises in 1990 aboard the Viking Serenade, and Celebrity Cruises followed in 1996. Carnival Cruise Lines also began sailing in Alaska in 1996 with their ship, the *Tropicale*, roughly half the size of the ship they now have sailing in Alaska. When Norwegian Cruise Lines launched their first cruise to Alaska in 2000, they created another first by using the Port of Seattle as their home-port. In another move that really demonstrates their

ongoing commitment and presence, Carnival Cruise Lines placed their newest ship, the *Carnival Spirit* in the Alaskan market beginning in May 2001. Her features—which include an enclosable pool, while 80% of the ship's 1,062 staterooms offer ocean views, and 80% of ocean-view suites feature private verandas—also made the *Carnival Spirit* perfect for deployment in Alaska.

This trend continues with other cruise lines as well. Ships placed in the Alaska market include special features that embrace this destination. These are new ships, not aging tonnage, that cruise lines are using to increase their presence. As Noel DeChambeau, Director of Marketing and Sales for Holland America Lines, Inc. notes, "Holland America Lines has steadily increased its presence to 159 sailings on 8 five-star ships, including three Vista-class vessels – MS *Oosterdam*, MS *Westerdam*, and MS *Zuiderdam*."

For the first time in 2007, Princess Cruises is including the more intimate *Pacific Princess* on its Gulf of Alaska cruises, so guests will have the option of selecting a ship that ranges in size from just 670 to 2,670 passengers. Princess Cruises notes they offer the most voyages of any cruise line across the Gulf of Alaska, and in 2007 they will deploy a record five vessels on this route, with a total of 85 Gulf of Alaska departures on two different seven-night

itineraries. In addition, three of their ships, Golden Princess, Sun Princess and Dawn Princess, will offer 53 departures on three different itineraries on their Inside Passage cruises.

As for the luxury cruise market, Regent Seven Seas Cruises (formerly Radisson Seven Seas) continues to offer Alaskan cruises aboard their all-suite, all-balcony, 700-passenger luxury ship, the Seven Seas Mariner. In 2007, Seven Seas Mariner will offer seven-night cruises between Vancouver and Seward.

ing a nice alternative with good airlift—and it's only a few hours south of Vancouver, which lies across the Canadian border. These advantages were part of Norwegian Cruise Lines' decision to homeport their first ship, the MS Norwegian Sky in Seattle back in 2000. According to Heather Bryant, Public Relations Manager for the Seattle Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the re-interest in cruise lines using the Port of Seattle developed after 9/11, in their quest to offer more homeport departures.

Heather notes, "In 1999, we hosted six cruise ship visits; in 2006, we hosted more than 200."

According to additional statistics compiled by the Port of Seattle, Heather further says, "The 200 sailings in 2006 more than doubles the number of vessels that departed from Seattle in 2003."

On Glacier-route cruises (which are either southbound or northbound one-

way cruises), cruise lines are starting to use the port of Whittier as an alternative to the port of Seward. An advantage? Cruise passengers are flown in and out of Anchorage, and Whittier is actually a little closer to Anchorage (it's about 60 miles southeast). Seward lies about 126 miles south of Anchorage, so transferring between these two cities takes longer, approximately three or more hours. Carnival Cruise Lines began featuring Whittier as the departure port for their seven-day southbound Alaska cruises for their 2004 season onboard the Carnival Spirit. Princess Cruises' Diamond Princess, Sapphire Princess and Island Princess will again offer "Voyage of the Glaciers" cruises between Vancouver and Whittier in 2007.

having special permits to enter Glacier Bay National Park, which strictly regulates the number of ships allowed into the Bay. Princess Cruises, for instance, includes Glacier Bay and Denali National Park on every Gulf of Alaska cruise tour they offer. And Holland America Lines' Noel DeChambeau mentions, "We hold the most permits to the Bay. Holland America Lines provides more opportunities to visit Glacier Bay than any other cruise line. We also feature the Park on three of our cruise itineraries and no one else does that."

Beyond Glacier Bay, however, other glacier areas are included in other cruise lines' itineraries as well. NCL includes Sawyer Glacier, located in Tracy Arm Fjord, on some of its itineraries. Although it is less widely known than Glacier Bay, it's often considered more beautiful. Another glacier option is Hubbard Glacier, which Celebrity Cruises features on their Alaskan cruises aboard the Infinity, Summit and Mercury. In fact, Celebrity Cruises refers to cruises onboard the Infinity as Hubbard Glacier Cruises. Royal Caribbean also features a seven-night Hubbard Glacier cruise.

Cruise Tours

Cruise tours are another component in the Alaskan market. For years, very few lines had their own tour divisions, instead going the route of negotiating with tour operators and adding these package options for guests wanting to experience more of Alaska beyond a cruise. Holland America pioneered Cruise Tours in Alaska and can trace their roots back 59 years to a company that eventually changed its name to Westours, Inc., which they purchased in 1973. Royal Celebrity Tours is the newest of cruise tour company created and part of Royal Caribbean International. Launched in spring of 2000, Royal Celebrity Tours' first season in Alaska was summer 2001; in addition to taking a seven-night cruise on either Royal



Alaskan Cruise Itineraries

Traditionally, there have always been two basic types of Alaskan cruises—the Inside Passage and a Glacier Route (sometimes called the voyage of the glaciers) each offering two variations, either a northbound or southbound sailing. For years, Inside Passage cruises would depart and return to the Port of Vancouver with stops at Ketchikan, Juneau, and Skagway as well as including a glacier area. Glacier Route cruises would either depart from Vancouver and sail up the coast to Seward (where passengers would then be transferred to Anchorage for a return flight back) or do a southbound reversal, with cruise guests boarding the ship in Seward and sailing south down the coast with an arrival in Vancouver.

New Twists

Today, more variations exist. The Port of Seattle has now gained a foothold, offer-

The Glacier Component

For years, an advantage of taking certain cruise lines over others involved their

Caribbean or Celebrity, guests now have the option of taking a cruisetour as well. Today Royal Celebrity Tours has four glass-domed railcars and more than 50 motorcoaches, taking guests throughout Alaska's interiors on land tours.

Cruise tour companies continue to upgrade their motorcoaches, trains and lodging facilities. Holland America Lines recently announced a new fleet of 39 coaches that will be used for its 2007 Alaska season, and it's part of their continued growth of their "Signature of Excellence" enhancements. "These new Explorer coaches are slated to be used on any lengthy highway run," said DeChambeau.

Princess Tours offers 22 land tour options for its 2007 season that can be combined with Princess' Gulf of Alaska cruises. In addition, Princess Alaska cruise tours include accommodations at

the line's five exclusive wilderness lodges. These are complete with scenic riverside settings and located in some of the most desirable locations, including their two Denali-area Princess wilderness lodges.

Shore Excursions

A mainstay of any cruise itinerary are the all-important shore excursions available and these are even seeing some interesting options for cruise guests who want to see and experience it all. Holland America Lines, for instance, has even coined the term, "Your Personal Wilderness," for its tours. Some new features for a number of their cruise tours offer guests the opportunity to ride the White Pass and Yukon Railroad all the way between Skagway and Carcross as part of their "Bennett Lake and Klondike Trail." Carnival Cruise Lines now has more than 100 different shore excursions

available in conjunction with the Carnival Spirit's seven-day Glacier Bay and Glacier Route cruises.

Planning

Although more cruise and cruise tour options exist, careful planning for your group is critical for several reasons. First, Alaska is much larger than people think—roughly one-fifth the size of the U.S. Distances between the more urban cities are great and most people who visit Alaska are doing it for the first time. Discovering what your group's priorities are as far as sights and attractions are important to determine, as well as their "must sees." From there, the planning gets easier, as you can depend on the cruise line's expertise. ■

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