

Alaska Cruise Lessons Learned: A Disney Cruise Line Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I'm looking back at some of our recent Disney vacations, and what we learnt, and in the latest in this [series of articles](#), we move to our Alaskan cruise, which was the final one of the 2015 season.

We were familiar with cruising Alaska, given we'd taken the last cruise of the 2011 season, which was the inaugural year that Disney headed north to this beautiful part of the world. As such, given we'd be retracing our steps and going at the same time of the year, I figured there wouldn't be much we could learn from this trip, but how wrong you can be!

Although we knew the itinerary, and we'd seen the scenery before, there were a lot of differences between this cruise, and our first visit to Alaska. The first was the weather. Four years earlier, we experienced what I assumed was a typical Alaskan climate, and in fact it may well be. Temperatures had been in the low 50s at best, with rain and wind on a number of the days. When we made our way along Tracy Arm Fjord, we were bundled up in layers, and could only stay out on deck for a few minutes at a time, so intense was the wind. This time around, we were in T-shirts, basking in sunshine, and worrying we might need some sunscreen with temperatures well into the 60s. What a pleasant change that was! Had we been able to trust the forecast implicitly, we might even have been able to leave our waterproof coats at home…
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□Something I was worried about before the cruise was that maybe we'd seen the best things in each of our ports of call. My goodness, I couldn't have been more wrong about that! For me, the must-do for a first time cruiser in Skagway is the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad, as it has some amazing views of the beautiful countryside, and we'd loved that and exploring the town. This time, we took the evening wildlife expedition which took us to Haines. What a beautiful place that is! We saw six bears, if I remember the final tally correctly, and wow that eclipsed anything we'd seen on the railroad four years before.

In Juneau, for me, the Mendenhall Glacier and whale watching are the big draws, and that's what we did this time, just like our previous visit, but the excursions we chose were very different. We opted for a photo safari tour taking in both the glacier and whale watching, and we learnt so much about photography and were much luckier with the whales than our previous attempt. Still no orcas, so maybe it will be third time lucky the next time we head back to Alaska.

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□Crab feasts are a huge draw in Ketchikan, and we ended up at the same place again, the George Inlet Lodge. I learnt it was certainly much more enjoyable when you're in a small group, as we had been on our first cruise. This time, we were part of a large group and as a result, I felt more rushed to get through our meals, as the food took longer to be served. However, the other aspect of our tour, exploring the Alaska Rainforest Sanctuary was definitely something I'd recommend.

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□I was certainly very glad I'd done my research before this trip, as I'd found Personal Navigators, saying that if you wanted to do the character breakfast or meet the characters from Frozen, you'd need to book on boarding day. We dutifully did and got to meet Olaf (he was the one I really wanted to see!), which was a lot of fun, but this is something Disney doesn't advertise well, so if you're interested, you do need to check out whether it's likely to be offered on your cruise.

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□The character breakfast though was a real disappointment, and something I wouldn't do again. We were very rushed, and the portion sizes were appallingly small, given it was a cruise, and usually food portions aren't a problem. We gave that feedback to Disney, and that's something I'll certainly do again, as they thanked us with a bottle of champagne on our final night of the cruise -- a lovely touch! Of course, I can't guarantee this will happen to everyone, as it may also have had something to do with my husband's 50th birthday.

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□Something else you need to book quickly are the beverage seminars. I had every intention of getting our names down on embarkation day, but the lines were hideous by the time we'd finished making our arrangements to meet the characters, so I figured we could wait. That was a big mistake, as by day two, all the ones we could attend (some clashed with other bookings we already had) were fully booked.

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□I'm not sure I'd take the time out for the Disney Vacation Club member presentation again. We've always enjoyed the ones we've been to in the past, but this time, we found it much more sales focused, and we came away feeling it was a waste of an hour, and given it was at 9:00am on an at sea day, we'd had to get up early for it, and we'd have preferred to have had a lie-in.

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□If we do an Alaskan cruise again, something I would certainly ensure we do is go to the wildlife presentations by the on-board naturalist. We only made it to the third, all about whales, but based on what we saw, we deeply regretted not making it to others. We saw the others on the on-board TV, and they were all excellent quality.

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□ When it came to disembarking, we learnt that perhaps it is better to tell Disney what your plans are. We were booked on a ferry out of Vancouver to head to Victoria, and were given short shrift by Crew Members, perhaps rightly so, for not having informed them. I suspect ferry sailings aren't as important as flights, but I think I'd note it down to be on the safe side. Fortunately, we were able to make our way off the Wonder early, and had no problem getting to the ferry on time, but we could have done without the stress on our final morning.

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□ In the final part of this series of articles, I'll be reviewing what we learnt on our most recent visit to Disneyland.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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