

Evening Wildlife Expedition in Skagway, Alaska: A Disney Cruise Line Shore Excursion Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

When you head to Alaska, perhaps one of the things that many people want to see is the unique wildlife that makes its home there. Having taken our first Alaskan cruise a few years ago, and concentrated more on seeing the sights in the ports we were visiting, we figured we'd spend our return to this beautiful part of the world focusing on wildlife instead.

I was intrigued by the sound of the Evening Wildlife Expedition in Skagway, our first port of call, which is only offered seasonally, in August and September. Luckily, we were on the final cruise of the season in early September, so it was available to us. The Disney Cruise Line website describes this tour as giving you the opportunity to "observe the thriving wildlife of the Chilkoot River on a twilight tour of this nature photographer's paradise". They also say it will be "an afternoon to remember", and it certainly proved to be that for us!

You're taken from the Wonder across town to where your boat bound for Haines will depart. The ferry ride across the glacial lake takes around 45 minutes, and the views were absolutely beautiful with crystal blue water, and sheer rock faces rising from there, with trees somehow managing to cling to them, and the odd waterfall on the way. We had a fascinating commentary on the ferry, which explained more about life in Alaska, and the lake we were travelling across.

When we arrived, we met our guides, and boarded our bus to head up to the Chilkoot River Valley. On our way there, we were greeted with yet more stunning scenery, but better was to come with our first stop. Of course, we were there to see wildlife, and I amazed myself by being the one to spot a pair of bald eagles in the trees high above us, given I'm usually the last one to see things like this. It was fascinating to observe them in their natural habitat, and they look just as regal in the flesh as you'd imagine them to.

Bobbing in the water were harbor seals, and we were even treated to salmon jumping out of the water, something I'd never witnessed for myself. In the distance, we even spotted a baby eagle, not looking nearly as impressive as the adults nearby, as his plumage wasn't yet fully on display, but he was cute all the same. I almost had to pinch myself at this point, given we hadn't yet reached the main draw for this excursion, and already the sightings had been quite something.

We headed alongside the Chilkoot Lake, and saw the checks being carried on the numbers of salmon here. They keep a certain level, before allowing them to then be released for fishermen. We were told this was a prime spot for bears, unsurprisingly, given the amount of freely available food on offer for them here. I must admit I wasn't expecting much, so I was a little sceptical, but our guides were spot on, as a few minutes later, we spotted a bear.

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□At first, we carefully observed her from the bus, with everyone eagerly craning their necks to get a good view. Once our guides felt it was safe for us to venture outside, we were all ushered out, and were encouraged to remain quiet, so as not to disturb her. We all stood there, transfixed by the scene in front of us, but our luck really was in, as shortly afterwards, a second bear appeared. We watched this one fishing for salmon, and learnt that bears are only interested in the females, as their eggs provide them with the sustenance they need. It was like being part of a TV nature documentary, only the action was taking place right in front of us, and we were able to observe these magnificent creatures behaving completely naturally.

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□We stood there for maybe three-quarters of an hour, before our guides persuaded us we needed to move on. We figured this was the highlight of our tour, but we were very wrong. We headed next to Deer Rock, and once again, we were in luck, spying an eagle's nest, and watching a juvenile return. Once he was in the nest, it was a real struggle to see him, as he was so well camouflaged in the nest.

□Our attention turned to the ground, where we'd spotted a print, and we asked our guide about it. He explained it was a bear print, and I have a photo of him explaining that you could see it belonged to a mother and her cub, when I heard a shout from my husband of "bear", and sure enough, there was the mother, complete with two cubs, heading right for us! She was literally no more than about 20 feet away from us, which was quite a shock to the system. We all retreated very hastily, following our guide's advice. That encounter certainly got my heart racing! All safely in one piece, we were able to observe her, as she happily foraged for food. She really looked as if she had no cares in the world, or any interest in us.

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□Following our very close encounter, we made our final stop at Chilkoot Lake, before making our way back towards the ferry, once again spotting momma bear and her two cubs as we did. The tour didn't end there, as we were treated to a tour of Haines, learning more about its sights and history, and Fort Seward, a National Historic Landmark.

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□On the ferry back to Skagway, we were treated to our picnic "lunch", albeit it was more like dinner, given it was early evening by now. Disney

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does warn you this will be the case, and advise you to ensure you eat before you set off. I forgot to let them know I don't eat meat (they needed 24 hours' notice), so I didn't have much, but my husband told me the sandwich they served wasn't anything special, which was pretty much the only downside to the whole excursion.

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□ Although we obviously lucked out with our bear sightings (our guides told us this broke the record for the number of bears seen on these excursions!), and you're never guaranteed to see wildlife, I cannot recommend this tour highly enough. It gave us a chance to see more of the area outside of Skagway, and the scenery everywhere was stunning. For me, the bears were the icing on the cake, and a very unexpected surprise, after the amazing sight of eagles, jumping salmon, and seals.

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□ The Evening Wildlife Expedition costs \$179/adults aged 10 and upwards, and \$135 for those aged between 5-9. Although those as young as five can participate, the tour is only recommended from 10 years upwards. Wheelchairs and electric scooters are not permitted on this tour.

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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