

Cruising Alaska with Disney Cruise Line: Part One - Planning and Boarding

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

As soon as we heard Disney were heading for Alaska, we just had to be on one of those cruises.

My husband's always wanted to visit that part of the world and of course I'm not adverse to going somewhere with so many amazing photo opportunities!

So how was it? Over the next few weeks, I'll be looking at the different aspects of cruising Alaska with Disney to either help you decide if it's something you're interested in or to give you some helpful tips if you're already booked on one of the Wonder's 2012 sailings to this most northerly point of the States.

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□When should we cruise? This is a highly personal question, and everyone will have their own preferences. You may have no option but to cruise during school holidays, for example. The Alaskan cruise season is relatively short, starting next year on May 21, 2012, with the final cruise leaving on September 3, 2012.

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□It ended up that the final cruise of Disney's inaugural season worked best for us, as it included the American Labor Day holiday during the cruise, which helped our friends stateside by using up less of their vacation time, while we had a national holiday the day before the cruise began. It also happened to coincide with my husband's birthday. It would be a very pleasant change for him to be able to celebrate while away on vacation, as usually we tend to go away for my birthday, which is just before Christmas. Our usual destination of Walt Disney World is out for us in early September, as the temperatures are way too high for our taste, but obviously there are no such issues at the other end of the country!

The final sailing provided us with an additional, and very unexpected, benefit. We were delighted to find that all the Alaskan merchandise on board was half price, as much of it had either "inaugural" or "2011" on it. With spending just \$60, we were able to treat ourselves to two T-shirts, a sweatshirt, fridge magnet, and scrapbook.

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□Because the Wonder was about to go into dry dock for a short period of time, we also found that there was also a slightly more informal atmosphere on board, with the crew members looking forward to the change in their itinerary. I can't say for sure, but I think it made for an

even more relaxed atmosphere.

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□Where should we sail from -- Vancouver or Seattle? I will say that perhaps the biggest issue that we and our travelling companions encountered, was getting to Vancouver, from where the Wonder sailed in 2011. I'm not surprised that, for the vast majority of 2012, the ship will be setting sail from Seattle, as I know that people didn't find Vancouver the easiest departure point.

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□Flight prices into the city from many points in the U.S. proved to be pricey. A common choice was to fly into Seattle, then cross the border, either in a rental car, which we did after our Alaskan cruise concluded, or by bus. We ended up flying into Vancouver from Los Angeles and their airport was very impressive and modern. If you can find a reasonably-priced flight into the city, then getting to the cruise terminal is simple enough. We just grabbed a taxi, at a reasonable price, and then spent two nights at the Pan Pacific Hotel, right on top of the terminal itself.

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□If you are planning on taking in Vancouver as part of your 2012 itinerary, there are only two cruises that include it, the first and last of the season. With the first, the Wonder starts out from Vancouver and returns to Seattle, while the last begins in Seattle and finishes in Vancouver, so with different departure and return points, that may make your plans more complex. Also keep in mind that these two itineraries do not feature Victoria B.C., whereas all the other departures out of, and returning to Seattle, do.

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□We found Seattle to be a beautiful city, and the airport well located, although not nearly as new and impressive as Vancouver. Of course, if you're flying in from elsewhere in the States, you won't need to worry about clearing immigration in Seattle, but if that's something that concerns you, we found this to be a breeze in Canada, and were quickly welcomed into the country with no issues and minimal wait times.

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□Whether you choose to sample just Seattle or add in Vancouver as part of an Alaskan cruise, you won't be disappointed in either. We found plenty to enjoy in each and you can easily fill a good two or three days with sightseeing opportunities.

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□What's it like boarding at a terminal that doesn't belong to Disney? I did wonder what this would be like. Of course, you don't get those wonderful Art Deco touches that you enjoy at Port Canaveral, but despite the fact that Vancouver was playing host to the Wonder for only a few short months, Disney did a great job of decorating the terminal with lots of lovely magical touches. Look carefully and you could see

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that they were put up that morning and no doubt removed as soon as everyone was on board, but even so, it was very well done. I'm sure it will be the same when the Wonder arrives in Seattle in 2012.

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□ We were checked in exceptionally quickly, as there was no line whatsoever for Castaway Club members. It seemed as if our Alaskan cruise at least had attracted a lot of first-time cruises, which did surprise me, but maybe that's why it was a market that Disney was so keen to break into.

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□ There was plenty going on to keep us from getting bored, as we waited for our boarding group to be called. Mickey and Minnie took turns in greeting guests, and the lines, although long, moved quickly enough.

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□ It was an odd experience when it came to boarding itself, with all the signs in both French and English, but the second you were on board, you were immediately enclosed in the Disney bubble.

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□ One other thing that was very different was the Wonder's actual departure from Vancouver. Sailing out was perhaps the most magical experience we've ever had, with so much more to see than when you depart from Port Canaveral. We loved watching the skyline of the city spread out in front of us and then gradually it became smaller, as we sailed underneath Lions Gate Bridge. It really was a wonderful start to our experience.

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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