

Tracy Arm Fjord: A Disney Cruise Line Experience

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Fjord cruising is nothing new.

The wonder and majesty of these glacier-carved arms of the sea, reaching inland between steep mountain walls and cliffs, can often only be experienced from the deck of a watercraft. Cruise lines have been taking passengers through the wonders of the Norwegian fjords for many years, but the launch of the Alaskan cruises on the Disney Wonder finally bought the experience to Disney cruisers.

The inaugural season of Disney's Alaskan sailings had ports of call at Juneau, Ketchikan, and Skagway, but there was also a fourth visit, which although not an actual stop, was just as breathtaking as all the others put together. We were told early on in the cruise that a lot of passengers thought that Tracy Arm Fjord was a port of call, but it's not. Essentially, it's a day at sea, but with the most stunning scenery.

□ The Wonder slowly heads along the fjord, starting out at the head of the fjord in the late morning, allowing you the chance to enjoy activities on board beforehand. You almost don't realise that you've entered the fjord, then you notice that the land is slowly closing in around you on both sides, with waterfalls cascading down the mountains at various intervals.

□ Another sure sign that you're into the fjord is the color of the sea. Again, it's a gradual change, and you hardly notice it, but suddenly it's a beautiful clear blue color, so clear that it looks unreal, as if someone painted it. The color comes from the glacier that lies at the top of this fjord, and that's what you're heading slowly and surely towards.

Perhaps understandably, bearing in mind that this is glacier country, the weather on the day we sailed along Tracy Arm Fjord was bitterly cold, more so than any other day of our Alaskan adventure. The cold really came from the bitter wind, made worse no doubt by the fact that we were sailing through a narrow valley, and the drizzle of the rain which, combined with the wind, was being blown straight into our faces. It was on this day, more than at any other time, that we were very glad of all the clothing layers that we had brought with us!

□ As we cruised along the fjord, we discovered that the temperatures out on decks nine and ten were usually a fair bit colder than out on our verandah. No doubt that had something to do with the fact that our

verandah was very well sheltered, whereas the upper decks of the Wonder were very much open to the elements. We quickly learned not to judge the temperature by stepping out on to our balcony, as all too often, we were then greeted by a nasty shock when we headed up to the open decks.

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□ Disney, as you'd expect, have taken this into account, and had hot chocolate waiting for the passengers out on deck, and we saw plenty of blankets lying around, too. If you did want to retreat back to your room, Disney had taken care of that as well. The narration from the ship's resident naturalist that could be heard on the outer decks was also available on one of the TV channels in your stateroom, so you didn't have to miss anything. We found it fascinating to watch the scenery go by, and at the same time, learn more about how nature shaped this beautiful part of the world.

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□ As we moved further along the fjord, we started to see icebergs, sheared off no doubt from the glacier at the end. They had floated some distance, and some of them were so close to our room that you didn't even have to use the zoom function on your camera to photograph them! I had no end of admiration for our captain, navigating his way through this icy minefield. The stories we'd heard about icebergs in the past, where what you see on top of the water is only a small proportion of it, turned out to be frighteningly true. We could see massive chunks of ice underneath the water, much larger than what was poking out above.

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□ As you cruise along, you tend to see trees located near the shoreline, with sheer rock cliffs above them. It really feels as if you're in the middle of nowhere, with silence outside, except for the occasional distant roar of a waterfall. You continue to glide along gracefully through the fjord, with us assuming that any minute now we'd catch a glimpse of the twin Sawyer Glaciers, North Sawyer and South Sawyer, at the fjord's far end. In fact, it took us over an hour before we caught our first sight of them in the distance.

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□ As we moved along, so the glacier loomed larger. We could see the Carnival Spirit in front of us, and she was completely dwarfed by the glacier behind it. From a distance, it looked as if the ice was completely blue, like many of the icebergs we had seen on the way here, but closer up, you could see black shadows, and brilliant white patches, particularly whenever the sun's rays caught it. Once again, you got a very different perspective from the top decks as compared to our room lower down. From our room, you were no longer looking down on the glacier, so it seemed so much bigger and intimidating.

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□As we looked, we could see black dots on the icebergs floating nearby. Thank goodness someone had thought to bring binoculars, as we found out that these dots were in fact harbor seals! That was the only wildlife sighting we had of the day, although we were aware that other passengers had spotted much more than we had, thanks to the naturalist's narration.

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□Soon, we were turning and heading back out through the fjord, enjoying more stunning scenery, and as we started to lose the light, we were treated to a beautiful sunset. It had been a truly wonderful day, absolutely packed full of amazing sights. Unlike other cruise lines, Disney doesn't offer excursions for the Tracy Arm Fjord, with the Carnival Spirit offering guests the chance to board a smaller boat and get much closer to the glacier. Despite this, it didn't detract from the enjoyment of the day. Somehow, even though it technically wasn't a port of call, we got probably just as much, if not more, enjoyment from this day, as all our other days in port. The Tracy Arm Fjord is definitely one of the highlights of the Alaskan cruises--be sure not to plan too much for that day, as you'll want your free time to take in the breathtaking views in front of you and to either side.

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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