

Alaska Rainforest Sanctuary and Crab Feast in Ketchikan: A Disney Cruise Line Shore Excursion Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Out of all the ports of call on Disney's Alaskan cruise itinerary, we always have the hardest job deciding which shore excursion to take in Ketchikan, perhaps because there's nothing that's quite as stand-out as in the other two stops.

In Juneau, for example, for us it's all about the whale watching, but there's no similar draw for us when it comes to Ketchikan.

On our second cruise to Alaska, we opted for the Alaska Rainforest Sanctuary and Crab Feast, which promised the possibility of bear sightings, a close-up viewing of a bald eagle at the Eagle Sanctuary, before you enjoy freshly cooked Dungeness crab at the George Inlet Lodge.

□ I will say now that sadly this excursion isn't being offered for the 2016 Alaskan cruises, which I personally think is a real shame, and I have no idea why not. However, the number of excursions including the crab feast do seem to have dropped off dramatically this year, compared to last year, so maybe something happened with the George Inlet Lodge?

□ Our tour started with a bus journey over to the Alaska Rainforest Sanctuary, and I must admit it was a bit alarming to start off with a warning to put any food we had into bear proof boxes that wouldn't be coming with us on our hike. Ok…! Although they didn't explain it at the time, you could retrieve everything at the end of your adventure, which was something, and it certainly brought home to me just how good a bear's sense of smell must be.

I cannot say enough good things about our guide who took us on our journey through this amazing place. DJ was an absolute blast, and she was so good at explaining animal behavior in really simple terms, perfect for children, but I have to say I loved her analogies. In particular, the one I remember is her description about the bears stuff themselves before they go into hibernation, and likening them to your "surfer dude friend who crashes on your floor and then you can't get rid of him".

□ We certainly learnt a lot from her, and I was fascinated to find out the rainforest is home to around 200 different types of moss, which is apparently a good indicator of how pure the air quality is. In fairness

though, I was hardly surprised to learn it's pretty clean here, given there's hardly much industrialization in Alaska. We heard all about the different types of trees, and bushes, and we were given a warning about one in particular that's covered in spikes. I made sure to give it a wide berth!

□ However, beautiful as the rainforest was, I could tell most people in our group were here for the wildlife sightings. Given that we'd already had some amazing sightings of bears in Skagway on this cruise, I was quite laid back about it, until we saw a bear right ahead of us. Now, by this point, we were by the salmon hatchery, which is on elevated wooden platforms, which meant we could observe the magnificent creatures below us in complete safety. DJ explained that the bear was probably about two or three years old, certainly a juvenile, and it was fascinating to watch him fishing, and successfully getting a salmon, which he then retreated with. Obviously he was a little shy eating it in front of an audience, and who can blame him?

□ Although this was definitely a highlight, we still had plenty to explore here. We were taken through the old saw mill, learning about the work that used to go on here, before meeting a totem pole carver. This bit of the tour was a bit disappointing, as the woman in there really didn't engage that well with us, and I got the impression she wasn't the master carver, but was just helping out.

□ However, the next bit definitely made up for that. The Alaska Raptor Center has an area here, where they showcase some of the birds they've saved over the years. They're based in Sitka, but come down here every summer with a selection of birds, so more people can learn about their work, and I'm sure it helps them financially too, as I know we gave generously to the donation boxes they had here, as did many others in our group. The birds were beautiful to admire, but they all had such sad stories, including one which was taken as a chick by a young boy who hand reared it. Sadly, that means he's now incapable of hunting for himself, and has even tried to mate with humans, as he thinks we're his family, rather than other birds. It was here that we got to see some of the promised bald eagles, although sadly they were difficult to photograph, given they were behind wire netting.

□ I really enjoyed our visit to the Alaska Rainforest Sanctuary, and there was certainly plenty to see here. I'm glad to see it is still part of some of the Disney Cruise Line itineraries for this summer, as it's well worth visiting.

□ From here, we then headed over to the George Inlet Lodge on the bus for our crab feast. We did this on our first Alaska cruise during the

inaugural season in 2011, so we knew what awaited us. Essentially, this is an eat as much as you can arrangement, although of course you're slowed down by the fact you have to shell your crab. You're talked through how to do it, but when it's something you only do occasionally, it takes a while to get used to it, and it does seem to be quite a lot of effort, sometimes for not very much return! Having said that, the crab is absolutely superb, the best I've ever tasted, but then again, what else would you expect from Alaska?!

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□ Eventually, stuffed to the gills, it was time to head back up the 79 steps to the bus, and by now, we needed the exercise after our huge meal! From there, it was back to the Wonder, where we waddled our way back on board.

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□ Although this excursion isn't offered this year, each element is available through different tours. You can visit the Alaskan Rainforest Sanctuary on the Rainforest, Wildlife Sanctuary, Raptor Center and Totems (\$89/adults, \$49/ages 3-9), and essentially this offers everything we enjoyed on our tour, with the exception of the crab feast.

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□ If the crab feast appeals more, you can choose from either the wilderness exploration and crab feast (\$159/adults and \$109/ages up to 9), where you take a cruise from the lodge to the cannery, with wildlife and scenery to be seen on the way. The other option is the exclusive flightseeing and crab feast tour (\$249/adults and \$189/ages 2-9), which we did on the inaugural season of Alaskan cruises and loved, although it's certainly not cheap, but it is an exhilarating 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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