

Juneau, Alaska: Disney Cruise Line Port Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

As soon as I knew that we'd be cruising Alaska on the Disney Wonder, there was one shore excursion that I knew we had to take.

That was whale watching, as my husband loves whales, and this was his birthday cruise.

Having looked at all the options for our stops in Skagway, Juneau, and Ketchikan, Juneau was the logical choice, offering a wide range of whale watching excursions, all with different extras added in. I even looked at booking it directly with an operator that had some excellent ratings, but in the end, I was swayed back to booking a Disney excursion. Why? Put simply, two words: adults only! I'm sold! This tour also included a visit to the Mendenhall Glacier, which was another must-do for Juneau, along with a salmon bake for lunch to round-off our tour.

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□ Our day in Juneau dawned grey and dull, and the forecast hadn't changed once from when it first came out, proclaiming heavy rain for the day. The one time you want the forecasters to be wrong, of course, they're not. Our bus driver took us over to Auke Bay, a 20-minute drive from the ship, and we were escorted our boat, which looked frighteningly small for seeing such huge animals! I'll say here that I am not a good sailor, particularly on small boats, and I'd already taken sea sickness tablets, just to be on the safe side. As we emerged from the safe haven of the harbor, I was decidedly nervous, not knowing how well my stomach would cooperate with the whole experience.

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□ As happens with any small boat, we did bounce up and down a fair bit as we went along, but I was fine with that. As we bobbed along, the naturalist on board described the area, and the islands we were seeing, as our skipper searched for whales. Soon, he had success, and we went outside to observe. Almost immediately, I spotted the familiar blowhole in the water, before the body emerged, followed by the stunning fantail (or fluke). They are truly magnificent creatures, and I was in awe of what I was seeing. We were in the middle of nowhere, in their territory, yet despite that, I felt no fear. We stood there for some time, all just mesmerized by what we were seeing.

Finally, they moved off, and so did we, seeing hundreds of sea lions all laid out on rocks nearby. You could hardly say that they were sunning themselves, given the wet weather, but they certainly looked happy enough.

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□We hurtled off again, not realizing at the time that our captain was in search of orcas. We raced along the water, not knowing what was going on, but finally when we had to turn back, he explained to us what had happened. What a shame we'd missed them, but it had been a truly amazing experience.

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□Back to dry land we went, and it was back on the bus for our next stop for the day, Mendenhall Glacier. We were dropped off at the National Forest visitor center and given plenty of time to explore the area. Given the weather, with the rain pounding down by now, I took just a few photos outside, before opting for the warm interior of the visitor center. My husband was braver than I and did some exploring of the trails outside, seeing traces of bears in the distance.

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□Inside, you can learn a lot about the glacier, the wildlife in this area, and its history. I was particularly fascinated by how the glacier had retreated over the years, with the last 50 years being the most scary. I guess that's global warming in action for you. From here, we had some superb views of the glacier, although I will admit that after the close-up views we'd had just a couple of days earlier of the twin Sawyer Glaciers in Tracy Arm Fjord, this was a bit of a disappointment. The colors weren't quite as striking, and of course we weren't as close to it. I guess that's what happens when Disney spoils you with some amazing sights.

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□Our final stop was for our salmon bake lunch, with the rain still pounding down around us. Thankfully, this is something they're fully prepared for here, with coverings all around the seating areas. The food wasn't bad, although the clam chowder was a little too salty for our tastes. The main course consisted of either chicken or salmon, along with cornbread, a number of salads, and hot and cold pastas. Dessert was on offer too, but after one of our party sampled it, and didn't seem overly impressed, we passed on it. It wasn't exactly haute cuisine, but it warmed us up, and on a wet day, sometimes that's exactly what you need.

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□However, the highlight here were, once again, nature-related. I was fascinated, and also slightly scared, to discover that there was a bear perched in a tree near where everyone was eating. That's something I never expected to see in my lifetime, and it's a sight that will stay with me forever.

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□Another wonderful sight was a waterfall, just a quarter of a mile's walk away. I just wish that we hadn't got drenched walking down to see it. You could stay here as long as you liked, with buses running regularly

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back into both Juneau town center, and back to the cruise ships. Much as I loved the idea of exploring Juneau further, the rain defeated me, and I gave in graciously, heading back to the Wonder to warm up and dry off. It had been a wonderful excursion, giving us a good look at some of Juneau's main highlights. If I ever get back to Alaska, I'd love to do this one again, preferably on a drier day.

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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