



## Comparing Alaska Cruise itineraries

by: Howard Moses, The Cruise Authority

Alaska has been one of the most popular cruise destinations for many years, and for good reason. Throughout Southeast Alaska many of the sites and natural wonders are truly breathtaking, and there is no easier, or more relaxing way to visit them than by cruise ship.

Alaska has a very short cruise season, just 5 months, in which over 750,000 will visit our 49th state. Sometimes the towns along the way can get crowded, but there are always ways to escape the masses.

For many people, Alaska is a once-in-a-lifetime destination, and of course everybody wants to see a glacier. Having sailed on 11 Alaska cruises, I can say that I have never been disappointed by the glaciers - there is a majesty and timelessness to them which is truly remarkable. So when you are selecting your Alaska itinerary, this is the place to start. While Glacier Bay has the "name" and certainly gets lots of press, there are other glaciers in Alaska. Hubbard Glacier is the only advancing glacier in North America, and as such tends to calve more than the others - calving is the process of ice chunks falling into the water which is so impressive to see. It takes a keen eye to scan the glacier and catch it as it is happening, and even faster shooting finger for you photographers.

For most travelers, their exposure to Alaska is limited to Southeast Alaska, the area north of Vancouver up to Glacier Bay. It should be noted that there is a lot more to Alaska, with the highlight being Denali National Park, home of Mt. McKinley. The park is immense and can take days to see parts of - there are some wonderful lodges near the entrance, note that there are no lodges in the park. Anchorage, Fairbanks and Nome are also cities you might consider visiting.

There are 2 basic 7-night itineraries. First are the round trip cruises from either Vancouver or Seattle. The main ports from here are Sitka, Skagway, Juneau, Haines and Ketchikan. These are by far the simplest cruises to plan, and also the most limited. You will find the air considerably less expensive than the other option as you can book a

round trip ticket. While the itinerary options are excellent, due to their routing, you will end up back where you started and have a more difficult time reaching the interior of Alaska or the Kenai Peninsula should you so choose.

The other itineraries are called Gulf of Alaska cruises. These are 7-night, 1-way cruises from either Vancouver to Seward (or Whittier), or the reverse, and cover many of the same towns as the round trip cruises. As these end near Anchorage, the beginning or end of these trips have all kinds of options for visiting Alaska's vast interior. Many guests go with the cruise lines tour options, which are most comprehensive and a seamless, easy method of travel. Other guests make independent arrangements to spend time in the various places for hiking, salmon fishing, bear watching or other purely Alaskan activities. It is advised that regardless of your choice that you make your plans well in advance and confirm reservations as hotel rooms are at a premium during the short Alaska season.

Regardless of which cruise you take, be sure to budget of the shore excursions. These are where you really get to see what Alaska is all about. There are any number of options available, either through the cruise lines' shore excursion desk or arranged on your own. You can hike, fish, take a train, white water raft, mountain bike, helicopter up to a glacier, dog sled, flightsee, just to name a few options. Note that the more machinery involved, the more expensive the trip. Expect to pay a minimum of \$250pp for a helicopter trip, whereas the train trip is relatively inexpensive.

We encourage our clients to spend as much time as they can up in Alaska. It is a fabulous place, with truly something for everyone.