



CRUISE SECTION



PHOTOS BY KARI J. BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

BY RAIL, LAND, AND SEA, NEWLYWEDS SAMPLE A RUGGED, BEAUTIFUL PLACE

HONEYMOON? YES!

BY KARI J. BODNARCHUK • GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



KETCHIKAN, Alaska — It was a little unnerving being 15 feet from a black bear in the Alaskan wild, especially on our honeymoon.

My husband, Howard, and I stood on a little wooden platform with nothing more than a couple of rocks and a few blades of grass separating us from 355-pound Titan, as the locals called this resident black bear. Titan had long, razor-sharp claws and beady eyes that occasionally darted our way, but luckily he had something more palatable than us on the menu: fresh salmon.

“We release more than 100 million salmon into the bay each season,” said Dave Pederson, our naturalist guide, pointing to the hatchery next to us in Neets Bay, about a 10-minute flight northeast of Ketchikan. “That’s why you can get so close. They have all the food they need.”

Titan sat in a bubbly pool in Neets Creek eyeing the hefty salmon swimming upstream to spawn. As we watched Titan snag one fish after another, four more bears wandered out of the woods and staked out claims along the creek.

Pederson had offered a few warnings for those of us who had traveled to this re-

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A group on a heli-hiking trip head to Yanert Glacier, just outside Denali National Park. Passengers enjoy dramatic scenery as the Coral Princess wends its way through fiords.

A honeymoon on the go, by ship and on s

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mote bay just to see a bear: ••No running, no quick movements, and no loud voices. And if you see a bear on the road, don't freak out or all you'll see is the back end of a bear heading north••

This adventure was one of more than 150 excursions offered on the cruise we were taking from Whittier (near Anchorage) to Vancouver, British Columbia.

SURF AND TURF
See Alaska's rugged beauty in a land and cruise tour at boston.com/travel.

Princess Cruises is one of a handful of cruise companies operating in Alaska and runs "ve basic trips on seven ships, with dozens of land options. We chose a "ve-day land, seven-day cruise package. That way, we could see several landlocked highlights, such as Mount McKinley, North America's tallest mountain at 20,320 feet, and Denali National Park and Preserve, and ride the rails from Fairbanks to Whittier through pristine wilderness. Then we would travel 1,500 nautical miles down the Inside Passage (a series of protected waterways off the coasts of Alaska and British Columbia) on board the Coral Princess, visiting otherwise hard-to-reach glacial bays and the ports of Skagway, Juneau, and Ketchikan. It would be the perfect Alaskan sampler.

If you choose a land-cruise combo, I recommend doing the land portion first, as we did, because you're on the go more and frequently packing. Once aboard the ship, you can unpack and relax.

Alaskan cruises tend to attract more "rst-timers, like us, and younger, more active passengers than do Caribbean and Mediterranean trips. That's because it seems people generally go to Alaska for the wildlife, the rugged scenery, and the adventure rather than for typical cruise recreation. As Barbara Bennett, the ship's naturalist, explained, Alaska's four seasons are "almost not winter, not winter, almost winter, and winter." We went in mid-August, the "not winter" season, when the days were warm enough for shorts, and the chilly evenings required layers.

During the land portion of our trip, we stopped for two nights in Denali Park, an uninspiring town that has several lodges and tourist shops, but is located in a superb spot: at the entrance to the national park (which, at 6 million acres, is about the size of Massachusetts) and on the glacial-fed Nenana River. The town provides a chance to meet local mushers and their dog teams and go for boat trips on the river.

If you stay at the Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge, try its King Salmon Restaurant, which serves beautifully prepared "sh dishes. We tried Alaskan king crab legs and asiago-crusted halibut in a ca-



In Skagway, a heli-hiking adventure includes a trip over the Juneau Icefeld, a trek to the Laughton Glacier, and a train ride to A bear hunts for salmon in Ketchikan's Neets Creek, while "sherman Ken Tashiro does the same on the Talkeetna River.

per and lemon butter sauce, which were the best meals we had on our trip. Also, don't miss Laurent Dick's "Climb Denali." Im and presentation, which offers stunning footage and fascinating anecdotes of Dick's climbs up Mount McKinley, plus an opportunity to meet the Swiss-born adventurer.

We spent the next two nights at the Mount McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge, an upscale, out-of-the-way retreat, the closest "main" town, Talkeetna, is an hour's drive, which has fabulous views of Mount McKinley, 41 miles away. Talkeetna offers a taste of small-town Alaska, where the local doctor/bush pilot "ies into the wilderness to make house calls; the closest grocery store is about 100 miles away; and the state troopers have their office in the hardware store. Talkeetna is also the jumping-off point for those who come to climb Mount McKinley.

While there, we did a walking tour of the town's historic buildings, including a trapper's cabin, a one-room schoolhouse (now a museum), and the popular Roadhouse cafe. The eatery has been serving gold miners, pioneers, and railway workers since the early 1900s and is still a good place to grab a pastry or bowl of soup, sit on a couch, and chat with locals.

Although it was our honeymoon and we had planned to relax, we couldn't resist doing at least one excursion each day. While some went jet boating, whitewater rafting, or on glacier landings, we went on a guided "shing trip, where "ve of us hooked nearly 60 salmon in a few hours, and my arms got so tired



from reeling, I switched to taking pictures of my fellow anglers. We also went on a breathtaking "lightseeing" tour in a twin-engine plane to Mount McKinley, soaring over glacial ice "oes and wind-scoured peaks.

The real highlight was a guided heli-hiking trip into the Yanert Valley, just outside Denali National Park. Our pilot swooped in and dropped us in an open meadow, miles from civilization. We could see caribou in the valley below, Dall sheep perched on ledges above us, and miles of glaciers and mountains.

We hiked across alpine tundra and along unnamed ridges, where we found moose and caribou antlers, Arctic ground squirrels, and

incredible birdlife: a golden eagle with a 7-foot wingspan, a long-tailed jaeger, and at least a dozen rock ptarmigans. We covered only 4 miles because we were absorbed with the wildlife, birds, vegetation, and views. In the distance, peeking above the clouds, loomed the impressive and ominous summit of Mount McKinley.

Once on the ship, we unpacked and tried to relax, but there were so many tempting distractions. One morning, we woke up in College Fjord, where glaciers cling to the sides of mountains that sweep down to the jade-colored sea. According to naturalist Bennett, the area's 16 glaciers were named after East Coast colleges and universities: Smith, Wellesley, Amherst, Harvard, Radcliffe, Yale, and so on.

When we weren't watching glaciers calve (when massive chunks of ice break off) or icebergs drift by with sea otters lounging on top, there were plenty of other activities: We dipped in the outdoor pools and hot tubs and spent hours playing ping-pong on the back deck. I took a pottery class and made an unusual-looking bowl; went on a galley tour, where 10,000 meals are prepared daily; and attended a slide-show presentation by Libby Riddles, the "rst woman to win the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, in 1985. Others I talked to took computer and photography classes, learned how to

line dance and do the cha-cha, or went to lectures on wildlife and natural history.

Some had less ambitious plans: "We're going to our favorite place this afternoon: Nappa Valley." a couple from Houston said as they headed off for an afternoon snooze.

At night, while some passengers tried their luck in the casino, we went to a musical (complete with a full orchestra), a comedy show, and a performance by juggler Mike Price. Or, we simply hung out on deck watching the sun set and counting shooting stars.

For dinner, Princess offers a traditional option, where you eat at a set time, or one that lets you dine anytime between 5:30 and 10 p.m. Even though there were 2,024 passengers, there were no mealtime traf" jams, in fact, the ship never felt crowded. Our biggest meal decision was where to eat: in one of the two main dining rooms or the Italian trattoria, Cajun-style Bayou Cafe, pizzeria, bistro, burger joint, or maybe just the ice cream bar. For breakfast one morning, we indulged in a champagne brunch with quiche, salmon, and pastries, on our balcony while cruising through Glacier Bay.

We did our fair share of grazing during the cruise, but fortunately, there were just as many ways to keep healthy: spa treatments, aer-

If you go . . .



Princess Cruises
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Princess runs cruises in Alaska from May through September, either round-trip from Seattle, Vancouver, or San Francisco or one way north- or southbound between Vancouver and Whittier. Pre- and post-trips can be added to create a land and cruise tour package. Base prices for a 2008 Voyage of the Glaciers cruise aboard the Coral Princess, not including land and shore excursions or "ights, range from \$799 to \$3,699 per person, depending on date and accommodations.

obics and detox classes, and a 5K On Deck for the Cure walk to benefit breast cancer research and programs. We also burned off our Princess Love Boat Dream, a decadent chocolate mousse, and many other desserts in the "tness center. And we explored the ports of Skagway, Juneau, and Ketchikan on foot, and signed up for some of the more active shore excursions.

In Skagway, we did another heli-hiking adventure, this time to the Laughton Glacier. To reach the glacier, we hiked along the Skagway River, through a forest where the sweet and tangy smells of blueberries, "r trees, and Sitka spruce hung in the air, and where the "owers had names like purple monkshood. Then we caught the historic White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad back to town, learning about the area's role in the Klondike Gold Rush of the late 1800s.

The train follows one of the treacherous routes that prospectors once took on their journeys from Skagway to Canada's Klondike region. The town's welcome center has good information on the history of the gold rush, which put Skagway on the map.

Like each port we visited, Skagway had plenty of shops selling furs, gemstones, and gewgaws, but the real gems were the scenery, western-style architecture, and the area's colorful history.

Overall, I wasn't wild about the commercial aspects of the cruise, the daily "iers on where to shop in each port or how to book our next cruise, or the pitch to buy \$348 worth of skin-care products following my facial in the ship's spa. Others welcomed the on-board shops, "ne art auctions, and daily photo shoots, while we avoided them.

After Ketchikan, we "nally enjoyed a lazy day at sea. That is, until killer whales showed up. As we cruised down the Inside Passage alongside Vancouver Island, we were welcomed by a group of more than two dozen playful orcas, which swam by the ship in the golden evening sunlight, offering a picture-perfect end to our wildlife-filled, adventurous trip.

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Ketchikan's Creek Street is home to tourist shops and picturesque buildings on stilts.