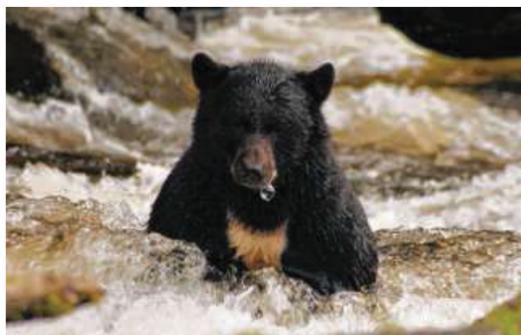


SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE FEBRUARY 8, 2026 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/TRAVEL



We went from ‘Titanic vibes’ to treasured memories

This is our Alaska family cruise comeback story

BY KARI BODNARCHUK
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SEATTLE, Wash. — Six months ago, I would have told you our Alaska family cruise last year turned out to be a dud. Things didn’t go as planned — as often happens with travel — and I realized I would approach the trip differently next time. Now I treasure the experience, but it took hindsight (including reminiscing with our kids and looking through the vacation photos) to show me the value of the trip and realize why it turned out to be a winner.

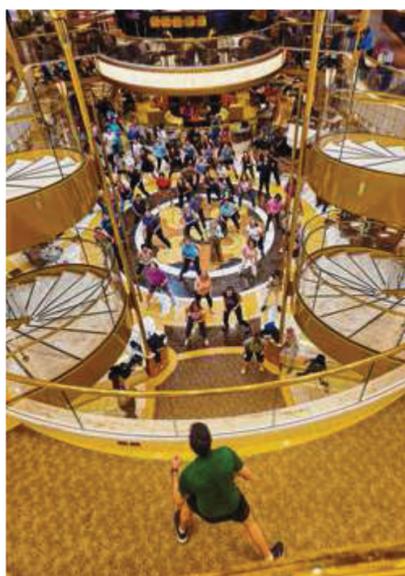
My husband and I took a similar Alaska cruise 20 years ago, right after we got married, choosing the most adventurous options for an active young couple: bear watching, heli-hiking in the mountains, and a glacier walk. We even saw humpbacks bubble-feeding near the Mendenhall Glacier. I wanted to “wow” our teenagers with a similar Alaska experience full of close-up wildlife encounters, rugged mountains,

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PHOTOS KARI BODNARCHUK

Top left: The author and her husband went on a bear-watching excursion (by float plane) on a 2007 cruise. Above: A glacier walk from the author’s previous Princess cruise in Alaska in 2007.



Left: The Discovery Princess offers Zumba in the atrium each morning, which can draw 100 participants. | Top right: Howard Wright of Ferndale, Wash., was among the passengers aboard the ship last year who took the Glacier Point Wilderness Safari out of Skagway, where they got within eyeshot of the Davidson Glacier near Haines, Alaska. Above right: It’s common to see seals and whales at the 2,000-foot-deep Lynn Canal.



ADOBE

Open up those wallets, travelers and Real ID slackers

Here are the new fees coming your way

By Christopher Muther
GLOBE STAFF

Beginning Feb. 25, Americans and Canadians will be required to have an electronic travel authorization (ETA) to board a flight to the United Kingdom. The ETA costs £16 (about \$22), is valid for two years, and is linked to a traveler’s passport. According to the official UK government website, you’ll need to supply the following information: the passport you’ll travel with, an email address, and a credit card, debit card, Ap-

ple Pay, or Google Pay.

When you apply, you’ll need to upload a photo or take a photo of yourself. You’ll get a decision by email from UK Visas and Immigration, usually within a day. Allow up to 3 working days (Monday to Friday) for a decision, though it may arrive much sooner. The email will contain a 16-digit ETA reference number. Without an ETA, you risk being denied from boarding your flight.

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Want to vacation with Bobby Flay? There’s a cruise for that.

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

Sure, cruises are fun, but a sail with your favorite celebrity is next-level. We’re still talking about our Christmas markets cruise on the Danube with British baking queen Mary Berry, and that trip was back in 2018.

As this story goes to press, comedian Nate Bargatze is sailing to Costa Maya, Mexico, with his family and fans on the first-ever “Nateland at Sea” cruise aboard Norwegian Cruise Line’s Norwegian Jewel. That same ship is also hosting the Savannah Bananas baseball team and friends for antics at sea (think singing, dancing, and banana tossing). In late February, Norwegian Jewel sets sail with

the bro-hosts of the “This is Important” podcast, Adam DeVine, Anders Holm, and Blake Anderson, for four days of comedy and live music. (The route is Tampa to Cozumel, Mexico, for both trips.) Note that theme cruises are often run by a collaborating partner, not

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Several themed cruises take place aboard this ship, NCL’s Norwegian Joy, one of the line’s largest vessels. It carries up to 3,776 passengers.



ADOBE

Inside

THE VIP LOUNGE
HARRY LIGHTON

The director of “Pillion” on being taken hostage, his carsick brother, and Werther’s Originals

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MYSTERY CRUISES
OFF TO PORTS UNKNOWN

Would you pay to hop on a ship if you didn’t know where you were going?

N13



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Treasured memories from cruise to Alaska

►ALASKA
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and glacier walks accessed by helicopter (after all, there aren't many places where you can heli-hike on a glacier).

We booked our seven-day round-trip Princess cruise out of Seattle, and I signed us up for two excursions: a helicopter flight to the Mendenhall Glacier for a guided hike, and a combo motorboat-hiking-canoeing trip to the Davidson Glacier near Skagway, billed as a "wilderness safari." The early July cruise would travel up through British Columbia's Inside Passage to Alaska, stopping at Ketchikan, Juneau, and Skagway — with a short trip up Endicott Arm, a 30-mile-long fjord, to the Dawes Glacier before reaching Juneau — and then return to Seattle with a short stop in Victoria, B.C., on the way.

We also opted for the upgraded Premier Package, which included WiFi access for multiple devices, unlimited drinks (knowing the kids would inevitably ask for sodas or Shirley Temples, and we would want Americanos or lattes in the morning), meals at specialty restaurants (we tried a steakhouse and an Italian restaurant), and, among other things, professional photos taken throughout the trip (we hadn't had a family photo since the kids were babies).

One thing we learned from previous trips to Alaska: It's likely you'll wear down jackets and rain gear more than shorts even in the summer. Sure enough, we left sunny skies and warm temps behind in Seattle and made our way up through British Columbia, where towering waterfalls plunged down hillsides and clouds hid mountain peaks.

Our kids spent the first day wandering around the ship and marveling at its sheer size and opulence.

"It's a lot grander than I expected," Grace, 16, said of the Discovery Princess, with its ritzy crystal-chandeliered atrium, golden spiral staircases, and marble floors.

"At first, I got Titanic vibes," Sam, 14, told me after we boarded the 1,083-foot-long, 19-deck ship (he's only been on smaller ships or kayaks).

Soon it all felt familiar, and the kids knew what time the gelato shop opened, where to get extra ping pong balls, and how to navigate from the Teen Club to our room and back in record time.

Things had changed a lot since I last cruised on a big ship — long before apps and tracking technology. We each used the Princess app to customize our individual schedules and plan our onboard adventures. I highlighted a talk by Libby Riddles (the first woman to win the famed Iditarod sled dog race), comedy shows, and open pickleball times,



Above: A Tlingit drummer, part of a statue called The Rock in downtown Ketchikan that tells the story of Alaska's "first city." Above right: Cruises along Alaska's southern coast offer views of waterfalls that plunge hundreds of feet. Right: Cruises often include a side trip to the Dawes Glacier; passengers can take a small-boat ride up near the glacier.



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK

while Grace flagged the salsa dance classes and "pampering parties with free mini facials," and Sam picked his favorite movie nights and Muggle Trivia events.

My husband happily relaxed and read — sometimes in the stateroom, on the pool deck, or in some tucked-away nook. Regardless of where we all went, we could always find each other, thanks to the tracking feature of the medallion we each wore on a lanyard around our neck — a seemingly unnecessary feature until you need it (finding someone on such a massive ship can be a trick). The medallion served as a room key, tracker (for family members and even staff who could find you to deliver a drink, for instance), and payment method. You also need it to scan yourself on and off the ship.

Since I had my heart set on doing glacier tours later in the cruise, we didn't make any plans for the first two destinations. We poked around book-



If you go . . .

The 2026 rates for the seven-day Inside Passage start at \$1,024 per person roundtrip from Seattle and \$794 roundtrip from Vancouver, B.C., based on double occupancy, all taxes and fees included (Vancouver trip doesn't include Victoria).

stores and boutiques in Ketchikan and learned about the town's history, including its role as a summer fishing ground for the Tlingit people and, eventually, a gateway to the area's gold, silver, and copper mines. Then we checked out the Dawes Glacier in Endicott Arm from our balcony while other passengers went on boat tours.

My hopes for our glacier adventures faded the next day when we arrived in Juneau, where clouds and rain had settled in. Tour operators often wait

until the last minute to cancel excursions, hoping for a change in the weather. Our company cancelled our heli-hiking glacier adventure one hour before the afternoon departure (another passenger we talked to had even less notice), meaning we had few options for an alternative tour — they had all already departed or were full. Lesson learned. If you're shooting for any of the floatplane or helicopter excursions, keep a close eye on the weather and consider making a change before it's too late — you only have until noon the day after embarkation to make a change.

We ended up going on the Mendenhall Glacier Float Trip, believing we would have up-close glacier views. We only caught a fleeting glimpse of the glacier more than a mile away before the guide steered our raft down the Mendenhall River where, for the next couple of hours, he told us about life in this part of the world — tales of the wildlife, the importance of the waterway, and the destruction of houses along the riverbanks during flooding. The highlight of the trip was seeing a row of tall pine trees lined with dozens and dozens of bald eagles — an amazing sight, even for those of us who regularly see bald eagles at home. Our guide gave us this tip: To spot an eagle in Alaska, look for a golf ball in the trees (it works). He also mentioned that bears become easier to spot when the salmon start running — usually in July and August. We happened to be there a few weeks too early last year.

Our other excursion, the Glacier Point Wilderness Safari, took us down North America's deepest fjord, the Lynn Canal, where we spotted seals on seaweed-covered rocks and passed a big landslide area near Haines. Then we rode an old school bus through forests of devil's club (a prickly plant), Sitka spruce, and dwarf firewood, and went for a wooded hike and canoe ride across a lake to a landing spot with a distant view of the Davidson Glacier.

We ended up enjoying the excursions, but for us, it turned out the highlights of the trip happened onboard — far from Alaskan glaciers and wildlife. Grace and I loved joining at least 100 other passengers in the atrium for morning Zumba classes; Sam and I played daily pickleball matches with (we later found out) the two lead vocalists for the onboard rock opera performances — Dan and Marissa — and random other competitive pickleballers; and my husband and I got to enjoy a fun date night at 360: An Extraordinary Experience, a dining-in-the-round sensory experience that blended storytelling, immersive film (displayed throughout the room from ceiling to dinner tables), exquisite food, and piped-in scents such as lemon and lavender. As a family, we loved watching movies on deck at night, bundled up with down jackets and fleece blankets and playing ping pong by the pool. And, honestly, for an on-the-go family like ours — and maybe yours, too — we enjoyed hanging out together without the frenetic pace of daily life at home.

We don't consider ourselves cruisers — we spend more of our time on hiking trails than dreaming about floating vacations — but we discovered you can find all sorts of fun in unexpected places.

Kari Bodnarchuk can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

You name it and there's a cruise tailored to your interests

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the cruise line itself. Event company Sixthman (www.sixthman.net) produces several of these.

Whether you're into comedy, cooking, country music, or all things Bachelor Nation, there's a cruise tailored to your interests. Note that these are lively seagoing celebrations — bring your party pants and be ready to have a good time.

Calling all foodies

The hot-as-a-Calabrian chile ticket on NCL this season is the "Food Network's Chefs Making Waves" sail with chef Bobby Flay and his culinary chums. Billed as a "Food, Wine, & Spirits Festival at Sea," this trip sails on Nov. 6-11 from Miami to Montego Bay, Jamaica, and Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. Bring your stretchy pants for this five-day feast at sea — the food will be fabulous since the sea-going chefs are curating the menu. Mix and mingle with star chefs, watch live demos, and get cooking tips during panels and Q&A sessions.

The Norwegian Joy will be jam-packed with Food Network favorites, including Scott Conant, Antonia Lofaso, Marc Murphy, Ayesha Nurjaja, Damaris Phillips, Brooke Williamson, Michael Voltaggio, and Zac Young. We're fangirling just thinking about it. Fares start at \$2,245 per person; www.chefsmakingwaves.com.

Downton, where all the lights are bright

Ah, to live in Highclere Castle, home of the Earl and Countess of Carnarvon and the filming location of "Downton Abbey." Don't bother to check Zillow — it's not on the market — but you can visit.

Guests traveling with Viking can book guided pre- or post-cruise extensions that grant privileged access and experiences at the famous Victorian Gothic-style estate in Hampshire, England. Have a cuppa, and then tour the castle's public rooms during the "Oxford & Highclere Castle" and "Great Homes, Gardens & Gin" extensions, available with several of the line's river and ocean cruises, including their "British Isles Explorer" and "Iberia, France & England Explorer." Three-night pre- and post-cruise extensions, from \$2,199; www.vikingcruises.com.

Solar eclipse at sea

On Aug. 12, a solar eclipse will take a narrow path of totality across the Arctic Ocean, Greenland, Iceland, the Atlantic Ocean, Portugal, and northern Spain, according to the National Solar Observatory. Why not experience this rare celestial event at sea?

Princess Cruises is offering seven-, 14-, and 21-day itineraries that celebrate the magical moments of totality on Aug. 12. During the eclipse, guests are encouraged to wear festive, eclipse-themed apparel and accessories (umm, hopefully they sell these), and will be treated to lectures by astronomy experts, astro-themed treats and drinks, stargazing, and solar system trivia.

One itinerary we love: their 14-day Mediterranean & Adriatic Cruise aboard the Enchanted Princess, sailing from August 4-18. The cruise begins and ends in Rome, and includes Naples; Kotor, Montenegro; Dubrovnik, Croatia; Corfu, Greece; Messina and Palermo, Sicily; Gibraltar; Alicante, Spain; and Barcelona. Note: At press time, these were nearly sold out. Seven-day solar eclipse trips from Barcelona to Rome start at \$2,254 per person; the 14-day round-trip sail from Rome (described above) starts from \$2,879 per person; www.princess.com.

Make it a Bachelor Nation vacation

Is there such a thing as too much Jesse Palmer? We think not. If you'd be happy living in "Bachelor" World — group dates, hometown meets, fantasy suites and plenty of drama — consider joining the virgin (make that "inaugural") sail called "Bachelor Nation Vacation at Sea."

Sailing Nov. 16-20 from Miami to Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic on NCL's Norwegian Joy, this trip has everything your Bachelor-loving heart desires: Bachelor Nation alumni, panels, screenings, tastings, music, and a sail-away party hosted by the most debonair emcee imaginable, Jesse Palmer. Joining you aboard ship will be 20-plus stars of the Bachelor-verse: hosts Wells Adams and Hannah Brown, Grant Ellis, Charity Lawson, Joey Graziadei, Joan Vassos, and Trista and Ryan Sutter, and more. Fares from \$1335; www.bachelornationvacationatsea.com.

Conjure up a magical cruise

It's only an illusion — or is it? Prin-



Above: A demonstration during a "Food Network's Chefs Making Waves" cruise.

Left: Wells Adams, Jesse Palmer, and Hannah Brown host the "Bachelor Nation Vacation at Sea" cruise.

cess Cruises has teamed up with the Magic Castle, an exclusive private club in Hollywood for magicians and magic enthusiasts, for a Conjurer's Cruise. The entrance to the actual Magic Castle requires speaking a secret phrase to an owl statue; for this cruise, you skip that bit and just book a cruise from Sept. 27 to Oct. 4 on the Star Princess.

Sailing from Vancouver, B.C., to Los Angeles, this seven-day coastal journey will offer a treasure trove of delights for magic lovers, with performances by top magicians, meet-and-greets with magicians and members of the Larsen family (founders of the Magic Castle), magic-themed lectures, magic-filled cocktail parties, dinners, and brunches, magic curios and artifacts, and Spellbound, a Victorian-inspired bar experience that combines the world of magic with the

art of mixology.

Will they pull back the veil to reveal the secrets behind the world's greatest acts and illusions? Probably not, but you'll definitely return with some new tricks. Fares from \$954 per person; www.princess.com.

It's a Hallmark Christmas movie — on the water

Is October too early to get into the holiday spirit, and watch a Hallmark Christmas movie or two? Not on this cruise. Discover total immersion in all things Hallmark + Christmas on a sail from Miami to Great Stirrup Cay in the Bahamas aboard the Norwegian Joy from October 23 to 27. Think star-led shows, hands-on creator workshops, and a special onboard screening of a brand-new Hallmark holiday movie.

There's gingerbread in the air as Hallmark stars (they're keeping the names a secret) share what it's like to make holiday magic come alive onscreen.

Alas, the 2026 cruise is already sold out, but staterooms may become available due to cancellations or changes. Check out their First Available program, when openings are released on Fridays at 1 p.m. EST. Fares will vary; www.hallmarkchristmascruise.com.

The ultimate whodunit (and splurge) at sea

Are you a fan of the Ruth Ware novel (and Netflix film), "The Woman in Cabin 10," or the "Knives Out" franchise? Here's a chance to host your family reunion, wedding party, work retreat, or mystery-loving friends on your own private yacht. Joining the guest list: A cast of characters that will add some murderous mayhem to the proceedings. It all takes place on a Pelorus Yacht Charter amid the world's most gorgeous cruising grounds.

Imagine sailing the Mediterranean or Caribbean aboard the fabled Christina O, the yacht once owned by Aristotle Onassis, whose appointments include a Steinway piano played by Maria Callas. Everything is fabulous, until — uh-oh — a precious heirloom is missing. Are you the culprit?

Or perhaps you're cruising Indonesia in the hand-built wooden schooner, Sequoia, peacefully gliding past Komodo and the Spice Islands until a murder interrupts your idyll. Follow a trail of clues from secret beaches to coral gardens to untangle the mystery.

Or maybe you're aboard Celestia, cruising Indonesia and the Coral Triangle, blissfully diving the coral gardens off Raja Ampat, when the underwater expedition takes a sinister turn, leading to a midnight rendezvous beneath the Southern Cross. . . . You get the idea. The devious details are devised by Pelorus' expedition team and employ professional actors for a single evening or multi-day mystery that unfolds from port to port. Charters start at \$77,000 per week for a private yacht charter. (Did we mention this was a splurge? Perhaps your richest pals will go split-sies.) <https://pelorusyachting.com>.

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