

ADVENTURE CRUISING IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Explore hidden Alaska and see more wildlife than you could imagine

Story and Photos by Kate Loweth

Typical Alaskan cruises have you stopping in port towns like Ketchikan and Skagway for crab legs and whale-watching cruises. I enjoyed this style of cruise a few years ago with my son, so when the opportunity to sail aboard the Wilderness Legacy with UnCruise Adventures came about, I jumped at the chance to see Alaska in a whole different way and immediately invited my sister to join me.

When we arrived in Juneau, Alaska, and saw our ship, the Wilderness Legacy, dwarfed by the massive cruise ships, I knew we were in for a very different experience. With only 43 cabins, the Wilderness Legacy looked more like a ferry you'd take for a day cruise.

Our itinerary was dubbed Wild, Woolly and Wow with Glacier Bay, and I was thrilled to learn that our cruise would depart from and return to Juneau, without the typical stop in Victoria or Vancouver, Canada. Victoria was my least favorite port on my prior cruise, so avoiding it by sailing with the U.S.-flagged UnCruise was preferred.

We arrived in Juneau a day before departure, and we spent some time walking through downtown and shopping for souvenirs. We had lunch at the popular Red Dog Saloon, where we indulged in their famous duck fart shot — a sweet concoction that was the perfect end to our meal. We spent the afternoon riding the Goldbelt Tram to the top of Mount Roberts to take in the views.

All Aboard

On departure day, we gathered in the port near the Wilderness Legacy with around 70 other travelers. The excitement was palpable, with people asking each other whether this was their first sailing on UnCruise, and many sharing they'd sailed two, three, or even more times with the cruise line. We were welcomed by CEO and Owner Dan Blanchard, who was in town to speak at a rally supporting the protection of the Tongass National Forest.

Once onboard, we were shown to our cabin that featured a pair of twin beds with drawers underneath. The room was cozy. While we could definitely lie down in our twin beds and hold hands if we wanted to, my sister and I found there was plenty of room to unpack all the outdoor gear we'd brought.

The ship can accommodate a maximum of 86 passengers, and our sailing was just under that number. Guests were mostly in the 40-70 age range, but we had a handful of younger guests traveling with a parent (and even a three-generation group with a toddler!). UnCruise allows kids eight and up on all sailings, with younger kids permitted on a case-by-case basis. They also offer special Kids



Playboating around the Wilderness Legacy.



Looking into kayaks from the Sea Dragon.



Destination.



Skiff tour at the LeConte Glacier.



The Northern Lights

in Nature sailings, where the minimum age limit is waived. Most cabins sleep two people, with three available that sleep an additional person.

Four decks make navigating the ship very easy. On the top deck, you have a workout tent with a few cardio machines, where the morning stretch class is held. Two hot tubs on the deck were popular in the afternoons after returning from excursions.

All guests eat at the same time for all three meals, and you won't find a buffet in sight (except for the afternoon cookies and happy hour snacks). Plated meals kept waste to a minimum but still had us feeling full and fueled for the day's activities. Meals, alcoholic beverages, and all activities are included in the price of sailing on UnCruise.

Activities on the Wilderness Legacy

As we were tucked into our cozy cabin on the first night aboard, we were awakened by an announcement over our cabin's loudspeaker that the northern lights had been spotted off the stern. We bundled up and headed to the nearest deck, where we gathered with other travelers to take in the sight. A bonding experience, for sure!

The magic of UnCruise is that you have a high-level idea of where you are going and what you'll be doing the next day, but things can change. On our sailing, we took a few detours from the original itinerary to duck into coves to avoid choppy seas. We also stopped to watch nearby humpback whales on a few occasions. That's the great thing about a small ship; you have the flexibility to change course when needed.



A pod of orcas in Glacier Bay



Two icebergs near the Marginal Glacier



The polar plunge. Photo by UnCruise Adventure



Best of Alaska

Every evening before dinner, the crew would share the plan for the next day and the activities available. I consider myself adventurous, but my sister is definitely more adventurous than I am. The beauty of this system is that we could see what's offered and decide whether we'd like to do the same activity or split up. We ended up doing about a third of our activities together, as she preferred land-based hikes and bushwhacks, while I always wanted to head out on the water in search of whales, bald eagles, bears, and seals. With such a small ship, you got to know most of the other travelers, so you never felt like you were on an excursion with strangers.

In LeConte Bay, everyone got to go out on skiff rides to see the calving LeConte Glacier, and then the afternoon was spent kayaking between the icebergs. When brown bears were spotted catching salmon at a nearby river, the ship diverted so we could all see them. My favorite excursion was on our last full day when we entered Glacier Bay.

My group was taken by skiff and let off on the moatline, an area of dirt that's deposited by the glacier. Here, we got to walk among the icebergs and take in their immense beauty before we headed back to the ship. And best of all, on our way out of Glacier Bay and back to Juneau, a pod of orcas traveled along beside us for over 30 minutes — a truly magical experience.

In a final send-off, I jumped hand-in-hand with my sister into the frigid water to participate in the "polar plunge." It was the perfect way to celebrate the end of our perfect week in Alaska.

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