

Visit Juneau

Alaska

by Jan Ross, Staff Writer

When I decided to take another cruise to Alaska with some family members a few months ago, I contacted the Juneau Convention & Visitors Bureau to see if they could possibly arrange a visit or tour of some kind for a visiting travel writer.

Lucky for me, I was contacted by Elizabeth Arnett, the Tourism Marketing Manager, who agreed to meet me at the dock and show me around the lovely city of Juneau. This made my visit much more interesting and meaningful, and they would be happy to provide you with information on well; just search for them online.

Our cruise ship docked in Juneau in pouring, icy rain which didn't seem to deter any of the passengers who streamed off the ship to set out on their various shore excursions. Juneau gets about 100 inches of precipitation a year,

so you can't let a little rain stand in your way since it often clears up and the weather becomes beautiful. My family definitely didn't let the weather deter them, as they set out on a whale-watching expedition. We went on a wildlife excursion the last time we were in Alaska, and this is something you absolutely must do when you head to Alaska. At this time of year, you are guaranteed to see whales, and it's truly an incredible sight.

You can also choose hiking, biking and kayaking (guided or unguided), rainforest zipline tours, city sightseeing tours, the Mendenhall



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Glacier, Juneau Icefield flightseeing, trekking and dogsledding, the Mt. Robert's Tram and alpine hiking, and half-day sportfishing charters along with salmon hatchery, cannery, brewery and botanical garden tours. So, you definitely won't be bored in Juneau!

As the crowd on the pier thinned out, I finally spotted Elizabeth holding up a card with my name in one hand and leaning on a cane with the other as the cold rain pattered down on her rain hood. Noble lover of Juneau that she is, she had agreed to host my visit even while recovering from knee surgery. After a stop at her lovely home on the outskirts of town which has a view people would pay thousands of dollars a night to share, she gathered up her trusty crutches and took me on a driving tour of her beautiful city.

Juneau is the capitol of Alaska, but you would never know it as you are experiencing the rustic, small-town charm of this warm and welcoming city, surrounded by mountains with their crowns dusted with snow. There are about 31,000 people who live within the 3,255 square mile boundary which is the largest of any state capital. We drove through the downtown shopping district where I made a note to return to the Alaskan Fudge Company where they make the best fudge in the world and passed by the beautiful Alaskan Capitol which has gorgeous columns made of limestone and marble quarried on Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska.

There are several museums in Juneau with very low admission prices and you can also take a walking tour with the Juneau-Douglas City Museum. We then drove by the lovely governor's mansion, and Elizabeth told me the governor often strolls to work in the morning. This just reinforced the easy-going life-style which Juneau personified.

From downtown, we headed to my favorite place on the tour — the magnificent Mendenhall Glacier. The last

time we were in Juneau, we neglected to drive out to this glacier because we had already cruised through Glacier Bay and had booked a float plane flight over another glacier. This was a big mistake because this glacier is truly wonderful and you can get very close to it — visitors can even hike out right beside the glacier, and there are several other hiking trails as well.

There is a beautiful visitor center and visitors are sometimes treated to black bears which are used to people and stroll casually by. We didn't see any bears on our visit, but there were some beavers busily building a dam on the stream nearby.

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From the glacier, we headed to the Macaulay Salmon Hatchery, which was fascinating and would be a great place for families to visit. The hatchery is designed to allow visitors to watch the whole process of harvesting and fertilizing eggs from outdoor decks. From mid-June to October, salmon swim up a 450-foot fish ladder, visible through a window, into a sorting mechanism, then workers remove the eggs to start the process over again. Guides and exhibits explain what's happening. Sometimes, you can see seals and other wildlife feeding on the returning salmon just offshore from the hatchery. Inside, large and realistic saltwater aquariums show off the area's marine life as it looks in the natural environment.

After a delicious sample of cooked salmon (all kinds of salmon products are available in the visitor center), we left the hatchery and Elizabeth dropped me off at the cruise pier with a sugges-

tion the Mt. Roberts Tramway. This is definitely worth the price of a ticket and would be another great experience for a family. You can see the entire area from the tram and, if you descend in the evening as I did, the lights of the huge cruise ships and the city are breathtaking. You can catch the tram right at the cruise dock. There is a very nice area at the top for hiking, a nature center and there is also a restaurant called the Timberline Grill with Alaskan beer and seafood, a gift shop and a very nice, 120-seat theatre. The theatre shows an award-winning film called Seeing Daylight every half-hour which is a really interesting story of the Tlingit people in the area. The Raven-Eagle Gifts area is part museum and part art gallery, where you can often watch artists at work.

I leaned on the ship's rail as we headed away from Juneau and the lights of the city disappeared into the blackness of the Alaska night and decided that I was not quite ready to leave Juneau. There was still a lot I hadn't seen and I wondered what it was like in the winter. Elizabeth had said it was beautiful when it snowed; many of the shops and restaurants were open and winter sports of all kinds were available. There are plenty of hotels, lodges and bed-and-breakfasts which welcome winter visitors, so you are definitely not limited by the cruise ship's summer to early fall schedule. So my next trip to Juneau might very well include sledding, skiing and snowshoeing.

About the Author

Jan Ross is the Social Media Director for The Travel Authority. Read her travel blog at <http://thetravelauthority.blogspot.com/> to find out about other fabulous travel deals and travel information. Or call The Travel Authority at 1-877-AXP-1515. They have offices located all over Central Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee and Florida and will help you get the best possible deal for a wonderful trip. You can contact Jan at kentuckygal53@gmail.com with comments or suggestions for article topics.

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