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*Once the*

# CRUISE SHIP DOCKS

*Whittling down Alaska's abundant offerings in five port towns*

*by Daliah Singer*

**SOUTHEAST ALASKA'S MOUNTAINOUS TOPOGRAPHY AND PIERCING BLUE, GLACIER-FED WATERS ARE AS DRAMATIC and unique as the region's history.** Settled by the indigenous Tlingit people and Russians who migrated over the Bering Land Bridge (an exposed swath that has since been covered by seawater), the Alaska Panhandle's small towns overflow with remnants of days gone by. From a scenic railroad trip along the path taken by hopeful prospectors during the Klondike Gold Rush to high-caliber salmon and halibut fishing, a trip here affords visitors a firsthand look at how a region mired in the past has evolved in order to survive.

Beyond the historic tours and restaurant menus filled with fresh salmon chowder (and sandwiches and stir-fry), bountiful outdoor recreation opportunities encourage exploration of the temperate rain forest (expect some rain) where astounding views of vertical rock walls, verdant forests, and seemingly endless glaciers start right from port. The majority of Southeast Alaska sits in the Tongass National Forest—the largest in the United States. You'll find hiking, fishing, dog sledding, and more offered almost everywhere, but each borough has a unique character, as you'll discover in this guide to five of the Panhandle's main port cities. Note that rates listed here may vary, and booking them through your cruise line may yield better pricing. Whether you're a thrill-seeker who's not afraid of heights or a day-tripping passenger searching for a more relaxed experience, Southeast Alaska delivers.

(BOTH PAGES) ALL IMAGES: PATRICK J. ENDRES/ALASKAPHOTOGRAPHICS.COM





An aerial view of the Southeast coastal town of Sitka.

 Cruise lines offering stops in Sitka: *Holland America Line, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line*

## Sitka

The snowy, hollowed peak of dormant volcano Mount Edgecumbe serves as a regional landmark in the island-studded waters surrounding Sitka, which bears many obvious Russian and Tlingit influences. (Sitka Alaska Outfitters offers ocean-rafting tours to the volcanic coastline of Kruzof Island.) Fun fact: Sitka's Castle Hill is where Alaska was formally handed over to the United States from Russia in 1867.

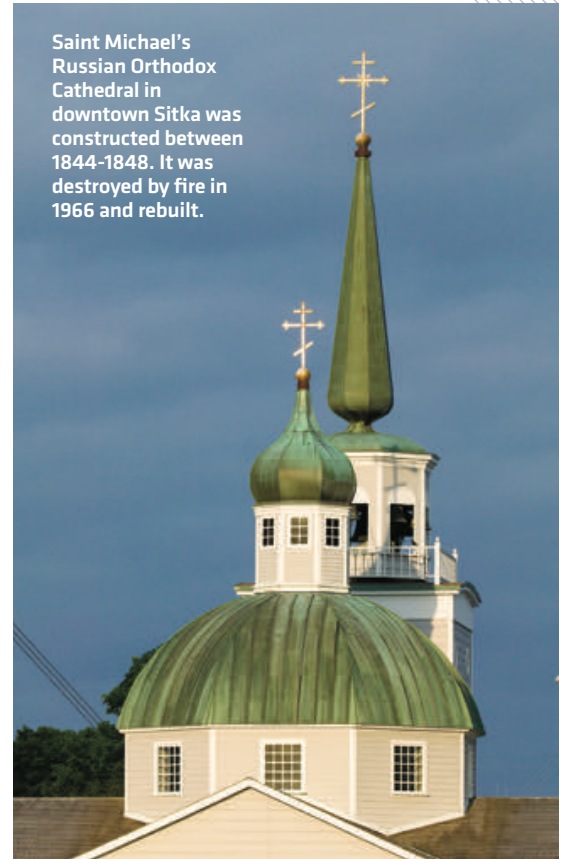
In the center of downtown sits St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral, an active Russian-Orthodox church. It's a replica of the original, which burned down in 1966. Townspeople salvaged more than 95 percent of the artifacts during the fire. The Old Sitka State Historic Site seven miles north of downtown, a Russian settlement in the early 1800s, is now a national historic landmark.

Wildlife viewing is magnified at Fortress of the Bear where visitors get up-close—as in, within 25 feet—to a small population of brown and black bears that the nonprofit has rescued and rehabilitated. Gallant Adventures' wildlife tour (\$125) takes animal enthusiasts to observe sea otters, humpback whales, and—the highlight—puffins on St. Lazaria Island, a federally protected bird sanc-

tuary. Kids, in particular, will also enjoy trips to the Alaska Raptor Center and its 24 residents (admission is \$12 for adults, \$6 for children 12 and younger) as well as the Sitka Sound Science Center's three touch tanks and Sheldon Jackson hatchery (\$5). A stroll along the Sitka Seawalk, a recently improved walkway around town, will take you past both of these venues. Jackson's name will begin to sound familiar, as Sitka is also home to the Sheldon Jackson Museum. Its namesake was a Presbyterian missionary who later became General Agent of Education in Alaska; he was also an avid collector of Alaska Native objects.

Amble along Lincoln Street—Sitka's main drag—and pop into shops and galleries. (Tip: Look for a "Sitka Crafted" decal on store windows.) Dining options include Mediterranean-influenced eats at Ludvig's Bistro, which also serves seafood caught by local fishermen, or a choose-your-own adventure experience at Homeport Eatery, a gourmet food

Saint Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral in downtown Sitka was constructed between 1844-1848. It was destroyed by fire in 1966 and rebuilt.



court that houses cafés serving everything from crêpes to paninis. Keeping with what appears to be an Alaska theme, Sitka does have a brewery: A favorite brew at Baranof Island Brewing Company is the Baranof brown ale.

While fishing, flightseeing, sea kayaking, and ATV trips are available here like in other port cities, easy-access hiking is a big draw in Sitka. Deborah Lyons, executive director of Sitka Trail Works, recommends entering the trail system via Baranof Street, which will take you to the Gavan Hill trailhead just a few blocks from downtown. Here you can start a trek of less than a mile or up to five miles as the trail connects to many others—all well marked with quick access back into town. Regardless of your chosen route, you'll walk a fairly level path through forestland and past muskegs (swamps or bogs covered in moss). More dedicated hikers can take Indian River Road just outside of downtown to Indian River Trail, a 4.5-mile (one-way) excursion to an unnamed waterfall, before heading back to the cruise dock.

A view of Mount Edgecumbe from New Thomsen Harbor in Sitka.





**Cruise lines offering stops in Ketchikan:**  
*Princess Cruises, Holland America Line, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Disney Cruise Line, Carnival, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line*



[LEFT] A floatplane sits on a clear unnamed lake in Misty Fjords National Monument Wilderness. [RIGHT] An eagle grave marker stands guard at the entrance of Totem Bight State Historical Park. [BOTTOM] Creek Street in Ketchikan.

## → Ketchikan

Fishing may as well be Alaska's state sport, and there's almost nowhere better to cast a line than Ketchikan, where colorful hillside buildings greet visitors arriving in the state's second largest port city. Ketchikan Charter Boats' guided sport fishing tours (prices vary based on length of trip) pair your group with knowledgeable and friendly local fishermen. You're almost certain to leave with salmon or halibut (have the company ship it, so it's on your front porch when you arrive home) and action shots of dive-bombing bald eagles.

If fishing isn't for you—or you're planning on it at another port—Spirit of Alaska Tour's World Class Anan Creek Bear Viewing excursion is worth the \$499 (and up) price tag. The four-and-a-half-hour adventure

includes a floatplane ride, a short hike, and an incredible perch from which to watch bears catching and feeding on pink salmon as they head upstream to spawn. Another option: Numerous companies offer outings to view the vertical cliff faces and icy waters of postcard-worthy Misty Fjords National Monument by boat or plane.

When your feeding time approaches, you can't go wrong with a blackened halibut sandwich at Alaska Fish House. Or grab a seat at Annabelle's Famous Keg & Chowder House—renowned for its (surprise!) smoked salmon chowder. If you're done with fish for the day, keep your eyes peeled for one of the handful of traditional Filipino restaurants. In town for dinner? Take the tram from Creek Street to Cape Fox Lodge; the decadent baked Brie and crab dip is a local's favorite.



Like most of Southeast Alaska, Ketchikan is infused with rich Native culture: More totems are said to be located here than anywhere else in the world. Now that your blood sugar levels are back on track, you can explore 14 of the carved artworks at Totem Bight State Historical Park; preserved 19th-century poles and other artifacts at the Totem Heritage Center; and more at Saxman Native Village, where you can also watch carvers at work. The impressive arts community represents vast styles, from Native to contemporary pieces. Visit Crazy Wolf Studio for everything from co-owner Ken Decker's ceremonial drums to hand-woven baskets and carved glass, all sold under the watchful eye of shop dog Roscoe. A half-mile away, Soho Coho gallery carries owner Ray Troll's quirky fish-focused paintings and drawings. (You'll also find Troll's handiwork on the logos for Raven's Brew coffee.)

Travelers with mobility issues—or anyone who is just tired after a long day of excursions—can hop a free shuttle that weaves around town and stops at every cruise dock. Creek Street in the heart of historic downtown is a must-visit stop. When the first Native settlers arrived in what is now known as Ketchikan, this area is where they set up summer fish camps. (It was also the city's red-light district.) Wrap up your day with a step back in time at Dolly's House Museum, the preserved home of madam Dolly Arthur, where you'll uncover secret caches used to sneak booze into town during Prohibition.

 **Cruise lines offering stops in Juneau:** Princess Cruises, Holland America Line, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Disney Cruise Line, Carnival, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line



## → Juneau

Let's start with the obvious: A visit to Alaska's capital is not complete without a stop at the Mendenhall Glacier—whether it's a quick scenic jaunt, a fun kayaking adventure, or an on-glacier climbing experience. The latter is our recommendation as (carefully) feeling the sharp ice and seeing the irregular shapes and unique features (hello, ice caves) of the glacier is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many travelers. The Private Mendenhall Glacier Trek & Ice Climb with Above & Beyond Alaska—one of just two commercial guiding companies holding permits for the west side of the glacier—is a challenging, 7.5-hour excursion (prices vary based on group size, and necessary gear is included). If your heart isn't racing after the 3.5-mile trail hike through the rainforest, it will be after two hours of on-glacier exploring and ice climbing before making the long walk back. Passengers also have the option of taking a helicopter tour of the ice field (we suggest combining that with dog-sledding), powering themselves to the glacier in sea kayaks on Mendenhall Lake, or hopping aboard a scenic wildlife cruise to view whales, harbor seals, and sea lions.

While the Mendenhall Glacier is sure to be a cruise highlight, Juneau offers plenty of other ways to while away a full day at port. In fact, the city has more miles of hiking trails than roads in town, according to Elizabeth Arnett, tourism marketing manager for the Juneau Convention & Visitors Bureau. Pick from one of the more than 90 maintained trails, or opt for a leisurely 45-minute stroll to the Last Chance Mining Museum or a ride on the Goldbelt Mount Roberts Tramway. A shop filled with Native-made gifts awaits at the top.

Which leads us to this: Juneau is the ideal

port to cross "souvenirs" off your to-do list. The further you head into the walkable downtown, the more local wares you'll discover. Glacier Smoothie sells handmade soaps crafted with mineral-rich glacier silt that works as a natural exfoliant. (We like the original turquoise bar.) The Alaska Fudge Company's preservative-free sweets are made fresh daily. And several smokers offer pretty much every salmon and halibut treat you can think of. (If you—or the kids—want to learn more about salmon, the Macaulay Salmon Hatchery is worth a visit.)

Once you're done shopping for everyone else, it's time to satisfy your own taste buds. Food and drink options abound, from local java at Heritage Coffee Roasting Co. to pints at Alaskan Brewing Company. Early diners won't want to miss Silverbow Bakery; the

[LEFT] A climber explores the ephemeral beauty of an ice cave inside the Mendenhall Glacier near Juneau. [RIGHT] Steller sea lions haul out on a navigation buoy near Juneau. [BOTTOM] Air tours of the Mendenhall Glacier and ice fields are offered out of Juneau.

oldest continuously operating bakery in the state serves New York-style bagels (top one with cream cheese and cold-smoked Alaska sockeye salmon), sweet treats, and hearty sandwiches you can grab to go. After a busy day, fine dining enthusiasts will enjoy dinner at the Gold Room Restaurant inside the Westmark Baranof Hotel, while explorers seeking a quicker meal will find crab in every form (legs, bisque, cakes) at Tracy's King Crab Shack.



LEFT: LAURENT DICK/WWW.WILDALASKATRAVEL.COM; RIGHT: PETER BARRETT/ALASKASTOCK; BOTTOM: RON GLE/IRONCLIFFPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

 **Cruise lines offering stops in Skagway:** Princess Cruises, Holland America Line, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Disney Cruise Line, Carnival, Celebrity Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line



[LEFT] The M/V Taiya Explorer thrills passengers on its Zodiac tour of the Lynn Canal with Ocean Raft Alaska. [BOTTOM] Lower Reid Falls can be found hidden behind the Gold Rush Cemetery in Skagway.

## → Skagway

History rules in this community of less than 1,000 residents across the border from Canada's Yukon Territory. Known as the gateway to the Klondike Gold Rush (author Jack London rose to fame by writing about his experiences in the region), the most popular tourist attraction remains the White Pass Summit Excursion. The three-hour, narrated train ride (\$119 adult, \$59.50 child) travels alongside the original Klondike Trail prospectors walked to the 2,865-foot summit. As you chug along, keep your camera nearby to capture panoramic views of snow-covered peaks, waterfalls, and historic sites.

It's easy to keep the olden-time vibe going when you return to the quiet town, as most of the buildings on Broadway Street were built between 1897 and 1900. Stop at the NPS Gold Rush Museum to see the incredible amount of supplies one gold-seeker was encouraged to take for one year of prospecting (including 400 pounds of flour and just two pairs of overalls). Then pop over to the Red Onion Saloon, a working bar and restaurant, that was originally a dance hall, saloon, and bordello; the waitresses still dress in Western brothel get-ups, and tours of the upstairs museum are available.

Those seeking a thrill can sign up for Ocean Raft Alaska's adventure boat ride through the Lynn Canal, the longest and deepest fjord in North America. The vessel

reaches speeds of up to 50 miles per hour as you explore the pristine waters and seek out wildlife during the two-hour excursion. Or get a bird's-eye view with Packer Expeditions' Heli-Hike & Rail Adventure, which blends a scenic helicopter flight, wilderness hike, and historic train ride into a half-day experience. Flatland adventurers will get a sense for Skagway's lush scenery with an easy four-mile round-trip hike from Gold Rush Cemetery in town to the rocky Lower Reid Falls; the National Park Service

estimates it'll take about two hours round-trip. For lunch, take a break from the seafood with Indian cuisine at Bombay Curry (rumor has it the governor's office in Juneau has dishes from the restaurant flown in). If you just can't have enough Alaska salmon, order the filling salmon stir-fry at Skagway Fish Co. before hitting the stores. Shoppers will find an overabundance of jewelry shops in town (more than two dozen are in operation). Keep your purchases local at Kirmse's Curios, which sells and promotes Skagway artists. Other ways to support Skagway artisans include picking up a pound of homemade pecan-chocolate swirl fudge—to share, of course—at the 32-year-old Kone Kompany, and refueling with a pint of Skagway Brewing Co.'s Spruce Tip Blonde, which is brewed with handpicked Sitka spruce tree tips. Then cheers to a day well spent.



TOP: HEATHER CALL/OCEAN RAFT ALASKA; BOTTOM: ADAM ELLIOTT

 **Cruise lines offering stops in Haines:** *Princess Cruises, Holland America Line, Celebrity Cruises*

## → **Haines**

Less than 20 miles from Skagway (by boat) you'll find the small community of Haines nestled against the base of the dramatic Chilkat Mountain Range. If you're unsure of how much Haines can really offer to visitors, look no further than its surplus of nicknames: "The Adventure Capital of Alaska," "Alaska's Best Kept Secret," and "Valley of the Eagles."

Disembarking the ship lands visitors right downtown, in the Historic District of Fort Seward. The fort and related buildings were decommissioned after World War II and now house hotels, B&Bs, and art galleries. (A self-guided tour is available.) Along Main Street, visitors will find a cultural institution dedicated to a single tool: The volunteer-run Hammer Museum (\$5 adults, kids 12 and younger are free) is an archaeological study of man's evolution through the lens of the hammer. Also on this street is the Sheldon Museum & Cultural Center (same pricing); the venue's two permanent exhibits explore Native and non-Native settlements in the area, and there is also a regular rotation of local artwork. Alaska Indian Arts displays limited-edition silkscreen prints. Outside of town, the timber façade of Extreme Dreams Fine Arts Gallery houses work from Alaskan artists, including sculpture, painting, and kiln-formed glass.

Haines most important identity, though, is that it serves as the main living area for the Native Tlingits. Klukwan, 26 miles away on the Haines Highway, is a small Chilkat Indian Village considered the Tlingits' "mother village." Chilkat Guides' Eagle Preserve Raft Adventure (starting at \$89)



[TOP] Eldred Rock Lighthouse stands sentinel in front of the Chilkat mountain range in the Lynn Canal. [BOTTOM LEFT] Haines. [BOTTOM RIGHT] Bald eagles perch high in tree at the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve near Haines.

takes history and culture buffs to the village for lunch and a tour of the tribal long house, fish camp, and carving area. The excursion also includes a journey through the 48,000-acre Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve, which, according to the American Bald Eagle Foundation, contains the world's largest concentration of eagles.

Easy access to wildlife sightings is an obvious perk of Haines. A short jaunt from the dock takes you to the trailhead of Battery Point. A mile-long walk through the rainforest leads hikers to the beach; locals recommend continuing on for another mile or so along the shoreline to try your luck spotting humpback whales, moose, and porpoises. Brown bears, mountain goats, river otters, and fish also call the Chilkat Valley home.

Like the rest of the region, Haines offers kayaking adventures (on Chilkoot Lake), a

high-speed boat ride (to Davidson Glacier), ice climbing, saltwater and freshwater fishing, among other activities. But if you're more of a do-it-yourselfer, try a self-guided ATV tour on Takshanuk Mountain via Takshanuk Mountain Trail.

Unwind at the end of a long day with pizza at Fireweed Bakery & Cafe or local rockfish tacos at Mosey's Cantina. While Haines does also have a brewery (Haines Brewing Company), we suggest switching up your booze routine with a stop at Port Chilkoot Distillery for a taste of small-batch gin (with hints of spruce), vodka, whiskey, and moonshine (in a cocktail or a straight-up). Next door you'll find Dejon Delights Alaska Smokery and Gourmet Gifts; smoked salmon, black cod, and halibut make great gifts for jealous family and friends back home. 🍷



TOP: PATRICK ENDRES/ALASKASTOCK; LEFT: ADAM ELLIOTT; RIGHT: DON PITCHER/ALASKASTOCK