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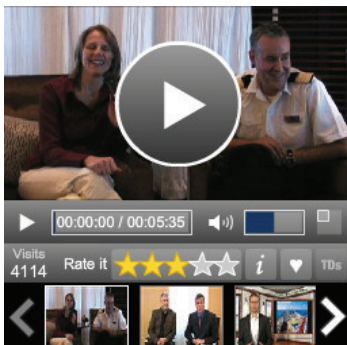
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Small Port, Big Destination

BY MIMI KMET

Juneau proves an excellent base for exploring surrounding attractions



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As a port of call, Juneau, Alaska, is much larger than it looks. What you see as your ship pulls into port is a small town with a main drag, and a few side streets full of shops, restaurants and bars. The center of town is interesting enough, with its historic, Gold Rush-era architecture mixed with a few modern buildings. But look beyond, and you'll see a big destination with a vast area that encompasses wilderness, glaciers and wildlife—all of which serve as settings for a slew of excursions. Yet most excursions can be done in a day or less, leaving plenty of time to have a drink at the Red Dog Saloon or shop for that perfect souvenir.

ARRIVAL: Juneau, a city of about 30,000, is sandwiched between the Gastineau Channel (on the other side of which is Douglas Island) and the mountains, topped by the Juneau Icefield. As with just about anywhere in Alaska, the scenery here is spectacular, and it may be worth getting up early to see how it envelops the small state capital. There are four piers that accommodate large cruise ships, as well as one anchoring point for tendering in.

INDEPENDENT SIGHTSEEING: Ships dock on Juneau's waterfront, and passengers disembark directly into the main tourist area. Juneau is an eminently walkable town, with myriad shops, restaurants and attractions located within a few blocks of the cruise ship piers. Juneau also is a very user-friendly town for cruise passengers, with several kiosks lining the waterfront, offering tours that aren't in the center of town, including pick-up and drop-off from the waterfront area.

MUST-SEE ATTRACTIONS: Located right on the waterfront is the Mount Roberts Tramway terminus. Suspended from cables, tramway cars take passengers to the top of Mount Roberts, 1,800 feet above sea level, where they can dine at the Timberline Bar & Grill; peruse the gift shop and nature center; watch a short film about the native Tlingit culture; step out onto wildlife viewing-platforms; see a captive bald eagle that was rendered flightless by an injury; hike on several trails; and get a panoramic, aerial view of Juneau, the Gastineau Channel and Douglas Island. Tickets are \$27 for passengers ages 13 and older, \$13.50 for children ages 6 to 12 and free for younger kids.

Perhaps Juneau's most famous attraction is the Mendenhall Glacier, a few miles north of town. A Mendenhall Glacier Transport/Mighty Great Trips bus departs the waterfront area every half hour, and roundtrip tickets are \$14 per person.

Several helicopter flightseeing companies offer excursions to dog-sled camps, where canines are trained to pull sleds, including those of the Iditarod races. Among the companies is Era Helicopters, which takes passengers to Dog World, where they can ride on—and help drive—a dog sled. The helicopters also fly over spectacular scenery, including mountains, waterways and glaciers. The price is \$489 per person.

Located about a 10-minute walk from the waterfront is the Alaska State Museum, which offers an in-depth view of the state, from its natural history and native culture to its development as a mining center and, later, an oil-producing region. Admission is \$5 for adults and free for visitors 18 and under.

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OFF THE BEATEN PATH: Beyond the center of town and Mendenhall Glacier are sights such as the Shrine of St. Therese, with its stone chapel, day lodge and 40 acres of waterfront available for day trips and picnics; Eagle Beach Recreation Area; Auke Bay; and the Alaskan Brewing Co., which offers free beer samples and tours. A convenient way to visit all of them is via a half-day tour with Juneau Jeep Adventures, which also takes passengers on a brief spin through town, through the University of Alaska Southeast's Juneau campus and to Brotherhood Bridge to see Mendenhall Glacier from a distance. The price is \$139 per person. For the more physically inclined, Juneau also boasts several hundred miles of hiking trails.

SHORE EXCURSIONS: A plethora of shore excursions are available from major cruise lines, lasting from a couple of hours to a full day, and ranging from less than \$50 to several hundred dollars per person. For example, a two-and-a-half-hour "Mendenhall Glacier Explorer" excursion from Princess Cruises costs \$40 for passengers ages 13 and older and \$24 for children 12 and younger, and includes a narrated tour of Juneau's downtown waterfront and 90 minutes for exploring the glacier area at leisure.

On the other end of the price range is the two-hour-and-45-minute "Dog Sledding on the Mendenhall Glacier" excursion via helicopter, for \$589 per person. And the longest excursion is the six-hour-plus "Best of Juneau" tour for \$195 per passenger ages 13 and over, and \$134 for younger kids. It includes whale watching, a salmon bake and a Mendenhall Glacier visit. In between are fishing excursions, hiking, bicycling, zip-lining, kayaking and more.

CONVENIENCES: High-speed Internet service is available at Seaport Cyber in the Senate Mall Building on South Franklin Street for \$6 per hour. For passengers who are booking pre- or post-cruise extensions, some hotels, including the Goldbelt, offer free, wireless Internet access to guests. The Goldbelt also has a computer terminal and printer in the lobby for guests' use. A postal contract station at 145 South Franklin Street provides all postal services except money orders.

DINING: A slew of restaurants are located within walking distance of the cruise ship piers. Just off one of the piers is Tracy's King Crab Shack, an outdoor, walk-up eatery serving fresh King Crab legs, crab bisque and crab cakes. Covered picnic tables are available. Hangar on the Wharf, located in a former floatplane hangar, offers fresh seafood and steak, as well as pub fare. The aforementioned Timberline Bar & Grill offers a casual menu with great views. Among other restaurants are Twisted Fish, Zen (at the Goldbelt Hotel) and Pizza Roma. Many are also open for dinner, and the iconic Red Dog Saloon features live entertainment.

SOUVENIRS: For a souvenir that's pure Juneau, the Gear Store at the Alaskan Brewing Co. offers a variety of logo items, with prices ranging from \$1 to more than \$300. Salmon lovers can buy cold- (lox) or hot-smoked salmon at Taku Smokeries at the south end of Franklin Street, with prices starting at \$55 for a half pound. For those who like to cook their own, "The Fiddlehead Cookbook," featuring recipes from a former celebrated Alaskan restaurant of the same name, is available at Hearthside Books at the corner of Front and Franklin Streets.

BE AWARE: Juneau welcomes three to four cruise ships every day of the season, so it can get crowded. Passengers not booked on guided shore excursions may want to disembark early to beat the crowds to the shops. Passengers who want to have lunch or dinner are strongly advised to make restaurant reservations as well.

Several retail stores in town are owned by cruise lines, and passengers who want to support the local community should look for signs in shop windows that identify the shops as locally owned or run by an Alaska family.

WHO GOES HERE: Several major cruise lines sail Alaska each year, from approximately mid-May to mid-September, and nearly all of their itineraries call at Juneau. In 2010, lines that are scheduled to visit Juneau are Carnival

Cruise Lines (Carnival Spirit); Celebrity Cruises (Celebrity Infinity, Celebrity Mercury, Celebrity Millennium); Cruise West (Spirit of Columbia, Spirit of Discovery, Spirit of Endeavor, Spirit of Yorktown); Holland America Line (Amsterdam, Oosterdam, Rotterdam, Ryndam, Statendam, Volendam, Zaandam, Zuiderdam); Norwegian Cruise Line (Norwegian Pearl, Norwegian Star); Princess Cruises (Coral Princess, Diamond Princess, Golden Princess, Island Princess, Royal Princess, Sapphire Princess, Sea Princess); Regent Seven Seas Cruises (Seven Seas Navigator); Royal Caribbean International (Rhapsody of the Seas, Radiance of the Seas); and Silversea Cruises (Silver Shadow). In addition, Lindblad Expeditions will offer cruises that embark or disembark in Juneau aboard the National Geographic Sea Bird and National Geographic Sea Lion next year.

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