

Inside Passage Cruise with Princess

Jactina Lane - Aug 2018

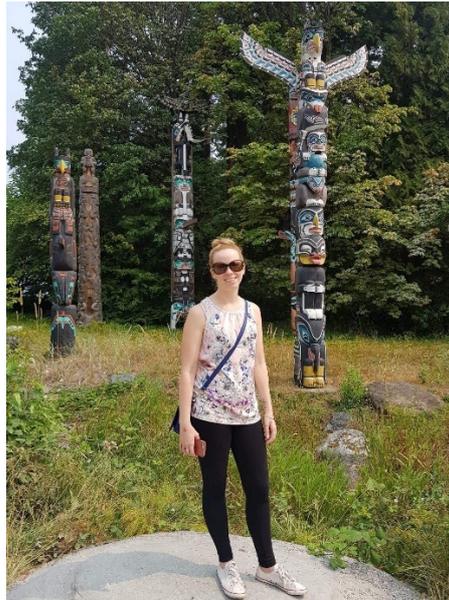


What an awesome experience! If you love wildlife and beautiful scenery, put this trip on your bucket list!

We started our trip in beautiful, sunny Vancouver and we certainly didn't have enough time in this city. There is just so much to see, do and explore. Our hotel (Rosedale on Robson) was located very central on Robson Street. A short stroll away from Rogers Arena, BC Stadium, Canada Place and Gastown.

We started our day with a trip to the aquarium, located in beautiful Stanley Park. Here, they had an array of sea life including a rescued Atlantic white sided dolphin, penguins and seals.

After wandering through the aquarium, we took a walk through Stanley Park and along the sea wall where we saw seals playing just off shore and the native Totem Poles. If you had more time in Vancouver, I would recommend hiring a bike for the day and riding the entire sea wall around the park. There are always events happening here, but there are also waterparks, swimming pools, sights and attractions to stop by along the way.



On our second day in Vancouver we visited Grouse Mountain, which I strongly recommend. There is a free shuttle to the mountain which departs from Canada Place. It takes about 30 minutes through Stanley Park and across the Lion Gate Bridge into North Vancouver. We took the cable car to the mountain and were able to see the famous Lumberjack Show which was very entertaining; we watched a bird show and learnt about the local bird life and we took the chair lift to the very peak of the mountain.

If you are active and up for a challenge, you can hike the mountain on the “Grouse Grind” – a 2.9km hike at an elevation of 853m. In winter, this becomes Vancouver’s closest ski mountain, so you can visit any time of year. However, the absolute highlight of visiting in the summer (for me at least) was seeing Grinder and Coola. Two 17-year-old grizzly bears who were each found at different times separated from their mothers. Bear cubs cannot survive in the wild without their mothers, so the bears were bought into captivity and have been kept here ever since.



In the evening we visited Vancouver Lookout for stunning views across the city. We then ventured to Gastown which is a real hipster part of Vancouver with quirky restaurants and bars.

Our cruise departed on the third day from Canada Place. We cruised on *Coral Princess* and it was an absolutely stunning ship; the staff were exceptional; and the food was divine. We definitely felt like we were sailing in luxury!

Onboard we found a number of bars, restaurants and cafes to choose from – although our favourite feature probably had to be the unlimited pizza and ice cream by the pool, included in our fare! *Coral Princess* also has a putting green; a number of pools and spas; a gym; a day spa and hairdressers; musicals, game shows, information sessions, comedians and live music; Kids club; onboard games, ping-pong, chess, board games; a library; plus loads more to keep everyone of all ages entertained. I particularly loved that there was a naturalist onboard who had a daily show (which was also filmed and played on the cabin TV the next day). Her talks included speeches about the local wildlife, glaciers and the history of the intuits - I learnt so much from her which was fantastic.

We got up early most days and braved the cold outside, but we reaped the rewards with sights of orcas, bald eagles, otters (hundreds of otters!), Atlantic white sided dolphins and humpback whales.

Our first stop was in Ketchikan, where it rains almost every day, so it was a bit drizzly. We got off early (7am) to beat the crowds into town and we are so lucky we did as while we were walking down historic Creek Street, we were fortunate enough to see several seals playing in the water. We also got to see the salmon trying to swim upstream and up the waterfalls. There were literally hundreds and some of them were huge.

We visited historic Dolly's House on Creek Street and learnt the history of this interesting working woman, as well as some history surrounding the gold rush in Ketchikan. At only USD10 per person for a tour through the house, I would certainly recommend it. However, as we got there early, we beat the crowds and had the house to ourselves to explore at our own leisure.



Our next day was spent in beautiful, sunny Juneau. It was very hot here, especially in comparison to raining Ketchikan.

Again, we got up early to head up Mt Roberts and again reaped the rewards with less crowds. We took the cable car up the mountain and enjoyed a leisurely hike along the hiking trail. Less crowds, meant less noise, which equalled more wildlife! We were lucky enough to see the cutest, most curious little marmot during our hike.

On Mt Roberts they also have a beautiful bald eagle in captivity. She was injured by a hunter and is unable to fly, so it is the perfect opportunity to get an up-close photo of one of these beautiful raptors.

We spent the rest of the day exploring the capital of Alaska. A very walkable town with some fantastic historic sights.

If you have the time, you can catch a bus out to Mendenhall Glacier for \$40 per person, return. It is about 15 miles outside of town and also has some hiking trails around the lake.



Our third port was Skagway. The heart of the Alaskan goldrush! We booked a shore excursion for Skagway so that we had the opportunity to get onboard the scenic White Pass & Yukon Route Railway and it was worth every cent.

We caught the train from the centre of Skagway, all the way up to Fraser in the Yukon Territory of Canada. Along the way, we had some magnificent views and our onboard guide told us all about the history of the gold rush and how this 108km (Skagway to Carcross) railway was entirely built by man, with no machinery and no electricity.

We arrived in Fraser and continued to Carcross by bus, stopping in at Caribou Crossing for lunch. Here, they had a small petting farm with husky sled dogs and puppies, along with a small history museum.

Heading back from Carcross to Skagway by bus took another two hours and we had some more spectacular views of the Canadian wilderness. We were also very lucky to see a black bear at one of our photo stops!



We were very spoiled for our next two days onboard the ship as we got to sail through Glacier Bay and the breathtaking College Fjord! Throughout Glacier Bay, our Naturalist was on the PA explaining the science of the glaciers and the history of the ice age and how these glaciers helped shape Alaska's scenery.

We were so lucky to see and hear the Margerie Glacier calf (where large bits of ice break off from the glacier and fall into the ocean). It was an amazing sight and the sound was phenomenal. The locals referred to this noise as "white thunder" as thunder is exactly what it sounds like. Even when ice wasn't falling, the glacier would let out loud, echoing grumbles.

College Fjord similarly was just spectacular to see, and I feel very privileged to have been able to visit such a beautiful part of the globe. It just took my breath away. The scenery was so beautiful that we decided to have dinner outside on the top deck that night. Yes, it was freezing! But it was completely worth it.

Our final port was Whittier, where we took a bus into Anchorage. It was only an hour-long trip and Ashley was lucky to see some Bison on the way into Anchorage (I was on the other side of the bus and missed out!).

Our trip came to a sad end in Anchorage. If we had the opportunity, we would certainly head a little bit further north to Denali National Park and Fair Banks. We definitely weren't ready to go home and feel like there is a lot more natural beauty and wildlife to be seen!