

# GOLD-PLATED CRUISE

The remote scenery and rugged wildlife of the Alaskan Inside Passage is un-constrained, un-conquerable and un-tameable, so one of the best ways to fully absorb its enormity is aboard an Un-Cruise, discovers Jocelyn Pride.







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It's almost like watching ballet. A circle of bubbles froths on the surface of the glassy water and gulls hover expectantly in the stillness above. In one coordinated miracle of nature the eight humpback whales, mouths agape, rise majestically sending a kaleidoscope of spray and herring whooshing into the air. Even in the nutrient-rich waters of the Alaskan Inside Passage bubble net feeding is a rare sight — and I'm in the box seat.

### “EIGHT HUMPBAC WHALES, MOUTHS AGAPE, RISE MAJESTICALLY”

Un-Cruise Adventures are the maestros of Alaska and the SS Legacy is the latest addition to an eight-strong fleet. Small in size, big on life-changing experiences, their motto is simple – unrushed, uncrowded and unbelievable.

As a replica steamer, the 88-berth SS Legacy also brings another dimension to cruising the waterways of this glacial corner of the world. As a first for Alaska, this heritage cruise re-lives the golden days of the 1890s.

#### Klondike Gold Rush

“Put down your cards,” shouts Sergeant William Sharpe bursting through the swinging wooden doors of the Pesky Barnacle saloon, his white-gloved hand resting on the gun holster of his Canadian ‘Mountie’ uniform. His boots snap the wooden floor as he searches the small atmospheric lounge where an elk antler chandelier hangs from the hewn-beamed tin ceiling. Sepia photographs, kerosene lamps, wooden snowshoes and gold pans line the wall and guests serve themselves top-shelf whisky or beer in turquoise jugs.

This is just one of the many vignettes designed to bring the rich history of the Klondike Gold Rush to life. Professional actors appear spontaneously, taking on the persona of historic characters and interacting with guests.

#### Ship to shore

Re-living history continues on land. In Skagway we are guided by flamboyant period-costumed locals in a bright yellow streetcar bumping along the cobbled streets past meticulously restored historic buildings before boarding the White Horse Pass and Yukon Railway. Low clouds shroud the valleys as the heritage locomotive winds its way through snow-capped mountains following the route of the 1898 gold rush stampede. The harshness of the dramatic landscape filled with bears and unpredictable weather conditions gives an appreciation of the extreme hardship that the gold seekers would have had to endure.

Being small, the SS Legacy can also dock in villages that don't rely on the hordes of tourists from large cruise ships. In Haines we watch in awe as a brown bear catches salmon from Chilkoot River and her mischievous cub jumps from rock to rock clutching a fish carcass like a child would a teddy bear. Sitka brings the richness of the local Tlingit American Indian clan through a performance of the



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- 01 A very rare view of whales bubble net feeding
- 02 Glacial ice at Mergerie Glacier
- 03 A bear ambles along the shore
- 04 Creek Street is full of brightly-painted rustic buildings
- 05 Harbour seals at play

#### Life onboard

Although the elegance of the Victorian era is reflected in the décor, life on the SS Legacy is casual and relaxed. Each of the 44 tastefully appointed staterooms opens onto a balcony with the Owner's Suite being the pièce de résistance. Marvel at the sheer size of the lounge room with its leather lounges, handcrafted dining table, full bar and wide-screen TV.

With an all-inclusive rate and a staff to guest ratio of 2:1 there's plenty of pampering; hot tubs, sauna, massage room, daily yoga classes, gym equipment, entertainment, all shore excursions and unparalleled wildlife encounters.

Un-cruising on the SS Legacy is the best of nature with a twist of gold. In the words of John Muir – “By going out, I found, I was really going in.” ♦

#### Travel file

**Accommodation**  
www.un-cruise.com

**Getting there**  
Alaska's Golden History sails from Juneau to Ketchikan or reverse from June to August. Alaska Airlines fly from LAX to Juneau and Ketchikan.  
www.alaksaair.com

**Other info**  
www.travelalaska.com

Naa Kahidi Dancers and a walk through the Sitka National Historic Park where totem poles tower amongst the spruce trees. The petroglyphs found along the beach in Wrangell are some of the best in the country. More than 40 ancient designs and symbols are easily seen along the short stretch of rocky shore. My favourite port is Petersburg, a pretty Norwegian fishing village. We sit in the Sons of Norway Hall sipping tea, eating rich homemade pastries, watching the traditional youth dancers and listening to their hilarious childhood tales of growing up in a remote Alaskan village.

#### Wildlife encounters

Like all Un-Cruise Adventures, wildlife viewing opportunities are at the heart of every voyage. Everyone stops to see the soft eyes of a harbour seal, a bear ambling along the shore, a Sitka black-tail deer darting into the forest, bald eagles gracing the tops of spruce trees, a pod of porpoises riding the bow wave, a glimpse of a coveted orca or the sheer magnificence of a humpback. “I've seen more whales in a few days than in my whole life,” says Susan, a passionate animal-lover. “It's hard to even blink – I'd hate to miss a thing.”