

# A CRUISE TO ALASKA

By Ted Cookson



Seattle skyline



View of Juneau



Juneau fish ladder



Mendenhall Glacier



Brown bear at Mendenhall



Hubbard Glacier



St. Michael's Cathedral, Sitka



Sitka yacht harbor



Totem pole top



Native American handicrafts

During the last week of September 2008 my mother and I enjoyed a one-week cruise from Seattle, Washington round trip to the Alaska panhandle on Holland America Line's 1,848-passenger Oosterdam. Our cruise ship departed Seattle on Saturday afternoon, and Sunday was a relaxing day at sea as the Oosterdam negotiated portions of the Inside Passage on its northbound journey.

On Monday we called at Juneau, Alaska's picturesque state capital. There we took a three-hour city coach tour which included a visit to a salmon hatchery and to the beautiful Mendenhall Glacier, 20 km (13 miles) northwest of Juneau.

Mendenhall Glacier, 19 km (12 miles) long, and 2.5 km (1.5 miles) wide, is retreating at a rate of 21 metres (67 feet) annually. We were fortunate to be able to view and photograph a brown bear from the visitor centre and observatory while at Mendenhall.

Tuesday's highlight was our cruise up to the face of breathtaking Hubbard Glacier, which lies within the confines of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Established in 1981 and with an area of 39,270 square km (12,730 square miles), Wrangell-St. Elias is the largest of the 58 U. S. national Parks. In fact, Wrangell-St. Elias and Canada's adjoining Kluane National Park



Sitka folkdance troupe



Bald eagle at raptor center



Boarding a tender in Sitka



View of Sitka with tender



Ketchikan historical district



Salmon which died after spawning in Ketchikan

together contain the world's largest non-polar conglomeration of glaciers. Hubbard Glacier, one of the world's fastest-moving glaciers, is the longest tidewater glacier in the U. S., extending 122 km (76 miles) from its source on Mt. Logan.

On Wednesday morning the Oosterdam called at scenic Sitka where we took a 3½ hour coach tour that included St. Michael's Cathedral, which is a replica of Sitka's first Russian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately the original church structure, built in 1844, was destroyed by fire in 1966. Our tour continued to Sitka National Historical Park which boasts a terrific collection of totem poles. It was here that the Russians skirmished with the local Tlingit tribe in 1804. This battle is said to have been the last stand by Native Americans against white domination in Alaska. A short but energetic display of folk dancing in downtown Sitka was followed by a fascinating visit to the Alaska Raptor Centre, a rehabilitation centre for bald eagles and other raptors on the outskirts of town. Sitka was the only one of the ports on this cruise where our cruise ship was unable to dock. Instead passengers were ferried ashore using the ship's tenders, or lifeboats.

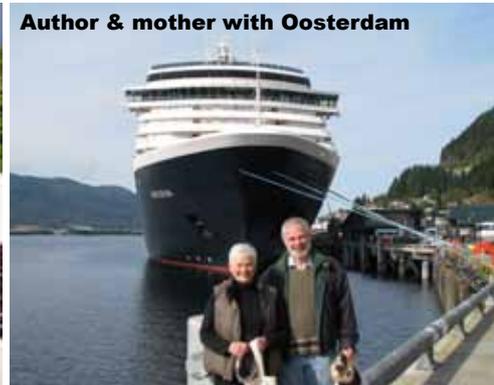
Thursday morning we visited Ketchikan, Alaska's southernmost city and the self-proclaimed salmon capital of the world. Ketchikan has the dubious honour of being the rainiest city in the U. S., receiving over four metres (160 inches) of rainfall annually! What makes Ketchikan especially interesting for visitors is its many totem poles. There are well over five dozen totem poles visible at various locations around the city. In addition, Ketchikan boasts a partially-reconstructed historical district.

On Thursday afternoon and Friday we sailed south again, arriving in Victoria, British Columbia on Friday evening, just in time to take a coach tour of that lovely city by night. Finally the Oosterdam returned to Seattle early on Saturday morning. My mother and I discovered that an Alaska cruise is a convenient and cost-effective way to sample several of the most popular destinations in the panhandle of Alaska easily within the course of one week.

The best time to visit south eastern Alaska is from June



Ketchikan totem pole



Author & mother with Oosterdam

through August when the afternoons are often warm (from 10 C. to 16 C. from 50 F. to 60 F.). However, there can also be some rainfall then, especially in the late summer. Typically the driest days are in May and June. Beginning in September the days become chilly and the nights are cold. Cruising along the Inside Passage is busiest from mid-June until late August. Consequently, the ports in the panhandle are most crowded then. Contrarian travellers can both save money and avoid the biggest crowds by travelling early (May) or late (September) in the season.

**ABOUT TED COOKSON:** Egypt's most widely-traveled travel agent, Ted has been to every country in the world! He has also visited 310 of the 319 destinations on the list of the Travelers' Century Club (visit [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) and refer to World Travel Club). A travel agent in Cairo since 1986, Ted manages EGYPT PANORAMA TOURS, a full-service travel agency, at 4 Road 79 (between Roads 9 and 10, near the "El Maadi" metro station) in Maadi. Contact Egypt Panorama Tours (open 7 days a week 9 AM-5 PM) at: Tel. 2359-0200, 2358-5880, 2359-1301. Fax 2359-1199. E-mail: [ept@link.net](mailto:ept@link.net). Web site: [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com). The password for residents is [eptcool](http://www.eptours.com). Both text and PDF versions of all of Ted's travel articles published since 2002 are archived online at [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) under "Ted's International Travel Articles." Many of the archived articles also contain video clips!