

Princess Escorted Alaska Tour

By Annalou Vincent, Willamette International Travel

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What a trip! I have never experienced anything like that in my life. AMAZING! The tour director's name was Liz. She was so patient, friendly, knowledgeable, and funny. With that being said, here is the day by day, play by play.

Day One

There was a welcome reception at the Doubletree at SeaTac. Everyone introduced them selves. This was interesting because it turned out that only 2 people out of the 30 had ever even been to Alaska. Liz gave us our welcome packets that included bag tags so that our bags would be automatically transferred from the airport in Fairbanks to the hotel. Liz would continue to give us luggage transfers with packets explaining each destination in detail. We never once had to carry our bags. We just put them outside our hotel room doors the morning of departure and they would be waiting for us at the next hotel room. The rooms at the Doubletree were really nice. The décor was modern, up to date and the beds were ultra perfect pillow top, and tons of fluffy pillows. All rooms also came with a balcony.

Day Two

We used our first meal voucher for an early breakfast at the Doubletree. The veggie omelet was quite tasty and very fresh. After Breakfast we headed to the airport. The trip to Fairbanks was 5 hours with a stop in Anchorage. Once we arrived a motor coach transferred us to the hotel. We did a tour of the property, got our keys, and had the rest of the evening at our leisure. Our luggage was waiting for us in our rooms. What a great surprise to get in the room and have everything there.

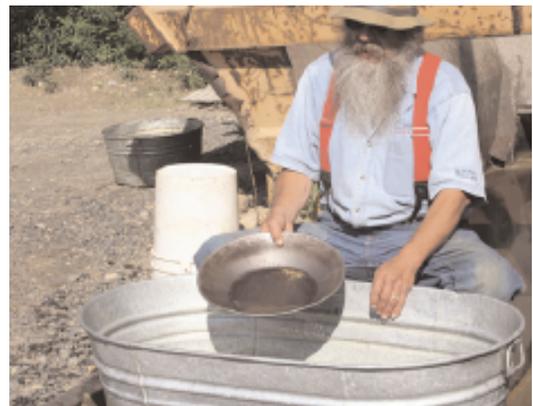
Four of us decided to have an early dinner at Tracker Bar and Grill. We all had Reindeer for the first time ever. I had a sandwich and the others had lasagna. It tasted very similar to a spicy hot dog or sausage. After dinner we went for a walk along the river. The weather was beautiful, very mild and bright. That is right, it was bright. Being just a few days before summer solstice made it close to one of the longest days of the year. A few more people that couldn't sleep joined us on the patio to enjoy the midnight sun. The sunset was at 1230am.



Fairbanks Princess Riverside Lodge — This property was cozy and very comfortable. Board games around the fireplace is just an example of how this is a great family oriented property. The décor was made to feel like a true Alaskan lodge. There was a nice large patio with a view of the river making it a nice place to relax in the sun. The hotel also provides a shuttle service to take you into town or where ever you may need to go.

Day Three

Before the first tour of the day we had the Edgewater's raved-about breakfast Buffet. It was extensive and delicious. The first tour was a gold mining tour. They took us on a little train and explained the history of the mines and miners in the area. We got a gold mining demonstration from a married couple that has been mining for about 30 years. Then we all got to try it. Everyone was guaranteed to find some gold. After we got our loot, they weighed it in (mine was worth 2.00). Meanwhile warm cookies and coffee were available. On the way back to the hotel for lunch we made a pit stop at the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. It was truly breathe taking to see it in real life. For complete details on the pipeline go to: <http://www.alyeska-pipe.com/pipelinefacts.html>



For lunch we opted to have the hotel shuttle take us to the nearest grocery store to pick up the fixing's for a picnic. We headed to the grassy lawn and relaxed in the sun before the next tour.

The second tour of the day was on a riverboat. There must have been 300 people on the boat. A few of us found a good spot on the top deck. The guide told us the history of the area, told us about the people that lived in the houses that we were passing on the river (people were all outside waiving), showed us a water plane take off and land, showed us where they breed dogs for the Iditarod. We stopped at an old fishing camp. They split us into smaller groups; each group had their own guide. All the guides were native Alaskan Indians that were accustomed to the old ways of their ancestors. Each group made about 5 stops, at each stop there was a demonstration. Example- one of the demonstrations was on how they made their clothes with intricate bead work and exquisite leathers. It was beautiful and very educational.

We got back to the hotel with about an hour to spare before our 7pm dinner reservations. We got cleaned up and headed to the Edgewater, which is their fine dining restaurant. Everything looked delicious, it was hard to decide on one dish. I went with the special: Halibut with garlic aioli, a crab leg, saffron potatoes and broccoli.

Day Four

We woke up early again, this time to catch the train to Denali. We had a nice breakfast on the train. I had a breakfast burrito, another delicious meal. Leaving Fairbanks the scenery was much like what we see here in the Pacific Northwest. After about an hour into the 4 hr ride we started to approach majestic mountains. We all kept our eyes peeled for wildlife. A few people saw moose and that is about it.



We arrived Denali with about 2 hours to get lunch and walk around. There were shops across the street with souvenirs. We had pizza at one of the restaurants on the property. After lunch we met our school bus and driver for our 5 hour Denali Wilderness Tour. The scenery was stunning! We climbed to about 10,000 feet. We were above the tree line, so the trees were sparse and small. The higher we climbed the fewer trees there were, until there was just brilliant green grass. The sky was an amazing blue with scattered fluffy clouds. All day was so clear and sunny that everyone was certain we would get to be in 20% of tourists that actually get to see Mt. McKinley. No such luck, but it was still amazing.

After the Denali Tour we had a group photo before dinner at The Summit Restaurant. This dinner was AMAZING. I had the Asiago cheese encrusted halibut with capers, risotto, and broccoli. Everyone else's food looked fantastic as well.

Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge — This is the largest hotel in Alaska. They started off small then started adding new buildings to the property so there are quite a few buildings scattered on the property. It is set along the Nenana River and mere minutes from Denali National Park. There is nothing else of its kind. The property is beautiful and the rooms are extremely comfortable.

Day Five

We had the morning at our leisure. I went for a walk around the property and strangely enough did some laundry (I had packed for rain and packed very few warm weather clothes). We had lunch on the patio of the Base Camp Bistro. Overlooking the river we could see people going by on their river rafting excursions. I had the Seafood Nachos (recommended by Liz), AWESOME! They were huge. In fact, there was enough to feed 4. After lunch we boarded the motor coach to go to Mt. McKinley Wilderness Lodge. It was a smooth 2 hour ride. We were looking forward to getting there in hopes that we would get our second chance to see Mt. McKinley (the hotel is only 40 miles away and the closest that you can get to it without hiking). Sure enough on the ride over the driver informed us that fires had started breaking out and that we were most likely not going to see it.

Mt. McKinley Wilderness Lodge — This is by far the most beautiful of all the properties. We got the grand tour upon arrival. This property also has many buildings. The main lodge is where the Mountain View Restaurant, The Grand Room, The viewing patio (if the mountain is out), and other smaller dining options. The rooms were very comfortable and the staff was really friendly. The main thing that made this property stand out was the remoteness. There was literally nothing else near by except the mountain and some residential properties.

A group of us decided to have dinner at 20320, named for the height of Mt. McKinley. The wait staff was dressed in ranger suites and the food was what you would find at an Applebee's or TGIF, but much better quality. After dinner we then took the motor coach into Talkeetna. It was a quite little town. Apparently in the show Northern Exposure, the town Sicily was based on it. We walked around for a little bit and then went back because it started to rain. When we got back the rain had stopped and had settled the smoke a little bit so we could see the base of the mountain.

Day 5

When we woke up it was the darkest it had been out side during the whole trip. Since the hotel is in a valley all the smoke from the fires got trapped. It was an eerie dark orange outside. All the staff was shocked, having never seen anything like it. I decide to have breakfast at the Mountain View before heading down to Talkeetna again. I had a smoked salmon Benedict. In Talkeetna the smoke wasn't trapped like at the lodge. Not to say it didn't smell like camp fire, but it was clearer. I walked around until the rest of the group came down to catch the train to Anchorage.

The train ride was amazing and so was the food. I had the Prime Rib and it was the best I ever have had. This time we had several Moose spottings. And my personal favorite was going over the land where the earthquake hit in 1964. The land dropped 30 feet and sea water rushed in. The caused the trees to become petrified and the land to be very marshy. It was very interesting being over a piece of history like that (there is actually a really cool exhibit about it at the Museum of Natural History in NYC that I saw the following weekend).

Captain Cook Hotel — This hotel was HUGE. It was clean and comfortable. I think that most of the rooms that we were in had views of the water, which was really nice.

Day 6

This was the departure day so we went home early in the morning.