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OUTDOOR ADVENTURE IN ALASKA'S INSIDE PASSAGE
By Sherrie Strausfogel
From The Christian Science Monitor

SUMMARY: Alaska beckons the visitor to take in the scenic natural wonders and experience the outdoor adventures of one of America's last frontiers. And there is no better way to explore, says the author, than from a cruise ship.

LENGTH: 430 words

PHOTOS: One (No. 84-417c)

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OUTDOOR ADVENTURE IN ALASKA'S INSIDE PASSAGE

By Sherrie Strausfogel

Thinking of exploring one of America's last frontiers -- its 49th state? There's no better way than from a cruise ship.

Cruising is a comfortable way to observe the natural wonders and to experience Alaska's outdoor adventures. Ships cruise into Glacier Bay, almost nudging the mountains of ice. They creep inside the inlet, allowing passengers to listen and watch as masses of blue, glacial ice break from the mountain and fall into the bay. Sea lions float by on chunks they've claimed as their private playgrounds.

Glacier Bay has been designated as a national park and preserve. Park rangers guard the area and offer expertise to visiting cruise ships on glacier formation and wildlife.

Whales return to these rich feeding grounds in Alaska every summer. The gentle humpback is a common sight.

To truly appreciate Alaska, I suggest taking advantage of as many excursions, side trips, and tours as possible during time in port. I opted for two "flight-seeing" trips and a rafting expedition, and allotted time to go to an authentic salmon bake and to learn of the rich Indian heritage and Gold Rush lore.

Yet, the way to see Alaska best is to do as the bald eagles do

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-- take to the air in one of many flight-seeing adventures. In Ketchikan, I boarded a nine-passenger amphibious plane for a 72-kilometer flight to the Misty Fjords, America's newest national monument. Sheer granite monoliths rise over 1,200 meters and drop to inlets and lakes formed by ancient glaciers.

Worth a visit in Ketchikan is the Totem Heritage Center, which preserves and exhibits a unique collection of totem poles retrieved from the deserted Tlingit and Haida Indian villages not far away. These settlements were abandoned around the turn of the century, and the poles have served their intended purpose: to honor the dead, to record history and oral tradition, and to document social events.

The seaport city of Juneau is also Alaska's capital. It was founded in 1880 when Joe Juneau and Richard Harris, led by Indian guides, discovered gold. When it became the state capital, the business of mining was replaced by the business of government.

But there are still adventures that make golden memories -- such as a raft trip down the Mendenhall River. Ten of us in a gray, rubber raft floated by the Mendenhall Glacier, bobbed over rapids, and picnicked on smoked salmon and reindeer sausage. Our rower skillfully pulled us upriver and guided us down through the rapids. She was eager to tell us about the area and its diverse wildlife.

Another way to experience the grandeur of Alaska is a flight-seeing tour over the ice cap of the Mendenhall. In a four-passenger plane, we soared over immense ice falls, hanging glaciers, and rock faces scarred by centuries of glacial action.



The Juneau Ice Field, of which the Mendenhall is a part, covers 3,900 square miles and includes more than a dozen different glaciers.

Tourists can enjoy these breathtaking sights from mid-May through September, when cruise ships sail the Alaskan waters. The lines are attracting increased numbers of adventure lovers of all ages.

Sherrie Strausfogel writes for The Christian Science Monitor, a daily U.S. newspaper.

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CAPTION:

ALASKAN ADVENTURE includes a visit to Glacier Bay where sea kayaks can be seen beside the great Riggs Glacier. Alaska's scenic natural wonders are easily accessible to tourists from any of the visiting cruise ships that explore Alaska's Inside Passage. Photo by Joel Rogers. (No. 84-417c)

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