

Towering masses of ancient blue ice cracked off the massive glacier's pinnacled crystal façade. Collapsing from the glacier's face and plummeting into frigid seawater, great slabs of ice sank far below the water's surface before rising again, a hundred feet or more into the air, throwing up a great wall of water and torrents of freezing, frothy spray.



Alaska

Story and Photography
by Ellen and Hank Barone

Shoreline Safari





(Top left to right)
A "calving" glacier
throws up a wall of
water; Safari Spirit
steward Vanessa
Franson with
Dungeness crab;
at anchor in Misty
Fjords National
Monument.

Nearly a quarter mile separated our tiny inflatable skiff from the thunderous explosions and reverberating roar of Southeast Alaska's magnificent Sawyer Glacier. Harbor seals encircled us, resting nonchalantly atop house-sized icebergs.

Rolling in the swell of the crashing glacier, we cheered and clapped like spectators at a sporting event, in awe of the breathtaking act of nature. When the glacier finished shedding its outer skin—each layer the size of a UPS truck—we meandered back between icebergs, plucking up polished bits of ice from the water to chill our evening cocktail, an Alaskan "ten-on-ten"—ten-year-old Scotch over 10,000-year-old ice.

It was the height of summer. Just the day before, in Juneau, we had boarded *Safari Spirit*, a 105-foot expedition yacht with gleaming brightwork, teak cabinetry, luxuriously outfitted salon, library, dining room, and six spacious staterooms. The ship's friendly crew—Rod, Sara, Heather, April, Kristy, and Vanessa—welcomed us aboard with Champagne and hors d'oeuvre. Our ten affable shipmates, all Americans, ranged in age from 30-something to 70-plus.

Cruising is the most popular way to see Alaska for good reason. The state boasts 33,904 miles of shoreline, more than double the shoreline of the entire lower 48 states. While the majority of ships carry 2,000-plus passengers, American Safari Cruises'

fleet of three luxury yachts gets you out of the crowded ports with off-the-beaten-track itineraries. The yachts visit native villages, fishing towns, wildlife sanctuaries, and other less-traveled spots where the mega-ships simply can't go.

On *Safari Spirit*, suits and ties have been left at home, the ice sculptures that surround us are shaped by nature, and if you have a hankering for a midnight meal, you're welcome to raid the refrigerator. Although cruise-ship-style fanfare may be absent, fine cuisine is definitely not. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner aboard *Safari Spirit* are relaxed, family-style gatherings, elegantly served and presented. Cultivated foodies won't be disappointed. "We're committed to fine dining on our yachts," says Captain Dan Blanchard, president and CEO of American Safari Yacht Cruises. "Our chefs get to know the locals," he adds. "We don't go where the other cruise ships go, so we're easily recognized and welcomed in the small fishing villages where locals know just what we're looking for. If it's available and fresh, we're able to get it onboard and to our guests." ▶



(Left to right) A close encounter with sea lions; the skiff-to-yacht shuttle; Ketchikan's Creek Street.

Motoring slowly along remote coves, we searched for bear, eagles, whales, seals, and sea lions. Silky black, mirror-still water reflected the verdant woods along the shore.

Preparing haute cuisine aboard a yacht, with its 10' x 3' galley would be a challenge for most gourmet chefs, but *Safari Spirit* Chef April Jones is more than equal to the task. Her eclectic and progressive style draws from Alaskan, Asian, and Mexican cuisine. During our cruise, Jones produced sumptuous seafood dishes such as potato-crust Alaskan salmon, Thai curried prawns, and seared black cod with caper mayonnaise. Non-seafood entrées included vegetarian options as well as herb-and-pepper-rubbed prime rib of beef, pan-roasted orange-ginger duck, rack of lamb, Costa Rican flank steak, and slow-roasted strip loin of beef with Jack Daniels sauce. After all, traveling amidst icebergs inspires a healthy appetite.

Our route through Alaska's Inside Passage, a 1,000-mile-long serpentine course through a jumbled mosaic of islands, is not new to marine traffic. Since the first human migrations across the Bering Land Bridge from Asia 12,000 years ago, the Inside Passage has seen explorers, traders, settlers, missionaries, anthropologists, and now tourists from all over the globe.

In 1792, Captain George Vancouver's *Discovery* arrived here, cramped and smelly with 99 men, a dozen or so animals, and a greenhouse aboard. Our elegant vessel, with its master chef and two-to-one passenger-to-crew ratio, was distinctly unlike Vancouver's crowded ship, but the watery wilderness outside our windows has changed little during the more than two centuries between our visits.

Aboard *Safari Spirit*, we lived in two contrasting environments. Inside, we basked in the civilized refinements of a cozy salon, well-stocked bar, topside hot tub, and climate-controlled staterooms with Jacuzzi tubs, TVs, and VCRs. Outside, we encountered a world of sky and sea, clouds, fog-concealed cliffs, thick forests, wildlife, glaciers, and icebergs—a place where nature still exists untamed.

Each time we boarded the Zodiac (a small, inflatable skiff used for exploration), we were suddenly and intimately adrift. Cast off into Alaska's Inside Passage, we entered a food-rich sea where wild creatures reign. Motoring slowly along remote coves, we searched for bear, eagles, whales, seals, and sea lions. Silky black, mirror-still water

reflected the verdant woods along the shore.

Back on board, *Safari Spirit* Captain Rod DuFour offered a running commentary from his post in the wheelhouse, on everything from surfing in Hawaii to Alaska's scoundrels. Perpetually vigilant for wildlife, the captain altered course at each new sighting and summoned passengers over the ship's public address system to come on deck and take a look. His penchant for doubling back to watch a feeding humpback whale, a black bear scavenging along the shoreline, or a surfacing pod of Dall's porpoise, quickly earned DuFour the affectionate title "Captain Detour."

It was during one such unexpected detour that we came upon a friendly commercial fisherman eager to hand over a just-caught king salmon. Hours later, Chef Jones served the salmon with a sumptuous blackberry-and-shallot Shiraz sauce.

Alaska's seafood abundance is legendary. For 12,000 years, traditional fisheries of the Northland have flourished and continue to do so. Tasty salmon, meaty halibut and cod, and oil-rich smelt, herring, and hooligan (candlefish) provide a staple diet for most Alaskans. "There's so much marine bounty here," exclaimed Heather, the ship's 30-year-old expedition leader, as we watched a humpback whale rise, display its mass and barnacles, then dive deep, its huge scarred flukes tipped into the air. Roughly 300 humpback whales spend their summers in Alaska's Inside Passage.

It's no secret that it rains a lot in Southeast Alaska. Our eight days at sea were spent under a spongy sky and constant thin precipitation. There are certain places where weather ought to be moody and mystical, and Alaska is one of them. Under a persistent and prevailing layer of fog, we felt as if we were part of a soft, vague mystery.



Our fourth day at sea dawned gray and foggy, but our spirits were bright. Decked out in rain gear for our Petersburg shore excursion, we set out with Heather in a drizzling rain to hike to Petersburg Creek. We teetered cheerfully along a boardwalk that stretched across the top of a muskeg (bog), a moist and matted carpet of mosses, pines, berries, and flowers. Nearing the creek, we entered a congested world of dense vegetation: six-foot-high cow parsnips, blueberry bushes, and alder thickets. A soft damp breeze scented with salt, berries, and wildflowers floated around us.

Standing beside the wide creek, we watched an eagle turn in tight spirals above us, then fly away. In the stream bed, Alaskan salmon, driven by the peculiar hormonal eruption that urges them on to spawn and promptly die, struggled against the current, their bodies providing food for bears and eagles. "Once they reach fresh water," Heather told us, "they're basically living off themselves."

Back in town, Heather turned us over to Patti Norheim, a sprightly 73-year-old native and local legend, who loaded us into her "Patti Wagon" for an insider's tour of Petersburg, a hardscrabble fishing town where boats greatly outnumber buildings. With one hand on the steering wheel and the other gripping a radio mike, Patti dispensed tidbits of local history and lore. "What's the most significant change you've observed during your lifetime in Petersburg?" we asked Patti. "Paved roads," she replied.

The excursion concluded with a visit to NorQuest Cannery, owned and operated by Patti's family since 1903. NorQuest no longer cans fresh salmon but flash-freezes it directly from the fishing boats, for both higher quality and greater profits. Even more profitable is roe (salmon eggs), once considered a messy waste product. It's a popular Japanese delicacy, "one they pay dearly for!" Patti added.

Docked at the marina, our sleek and elegant *Safari Spirit* looked out of place among the sturdy and well-used fishing vessels. Petersburg fishermen delivered dinner to us that night, a bountiful feast of fresh Dungeness and king crab. Outfitted with paper bibs, we bantered cheerfully, laughing frequently and unabashedly as we fumbled with crab mallets and messy but tasty sea creatures. Later, the party moved to Keito's Kave, a down-and-dirty fisherman's bar.

The next day, we visited the tiny hamlet of Myer's Chuck, population 25 (more or less). Myer's Chuck gives new meaning to the

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Thai Curried Prawns

Courtesy of Chef April Jones, American Safari Cruises

Serves 4-6

- ¼ cup peanut oil
- 1 red pepper, sliced
- 1 yellow pepper, sliced
- 1 green pepper, sliced
- 1 yellow onion, sliced from top to bottom (not in rings)
- 2 pounds peeled and deveined prawns
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon minced ginger
- 1 14-ounce can coconut milk
- 1½ teaspoons Thai curry (red)
- 2 tablespoons paprika
- ½ cup chopped fresh Thai basil (or 1 tablespoon dried basil)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- Chopped peanuts, cilantro sprigs, and lime wedges

Lightly sauté the peppers and onion in the peanut oil. Add the prawns, garlic, and ginger, and sauté until the prawns are just pink. Blend the coconut milk, spices, sugar, vinegar, and soy sauce, and add to the sauté. Bring to a boil just briefly and remove from heat. Serve over rice. Garnish with the peanuts, cilantro, and lime wedges.

Halibut Alyeska*

*Named for Alaska's snow-capped Alyeska mountains.

Courtesy of Chef April Jones, American Safari Cruises

Serves 4

- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup minced red onion
- 4 eight-ounce halibut steaks, cut 1" thick

Blend together all the ingredients except the halibut steak. Spread on top of the halibut. Broil on the top rack of a broiler until the fish is lightly browned and opaque but still moist, about 8 to 10 minutes.

IF YOU GO American Safari Cruises offers luxury yacht cruises in Alaska's Inside Passage from May to September. Cruises embark from Juneau. Air Canada (888-247-2262) and Alaska Airlines (800-426-0333) offer regular flights to Juneau via Vancouver, B.C. or Seattle, WA. American Safari also offers cruises to Mexico's Sea of Cortez (October to April), California's wine country waterways (September to January), and Costa Rica's Pacific Coast (November to March). For information, call 888-862-8881 or visit www.amsafari.com. Cruises start at \$3,695 per person, based on double occupancy.



(Left to right) Bog-walking on Kupreanof Island; Safari Spirit noses up to a 1,000-foot waterfall.



word "remote." Approaching the village's protected harbor, Captain Rod announced our arrival on the marine radio. "Thanks for the notice!" an affable voice on the other end replied. "I'll let everyone know you're here."

As *Safari Spirit* arrived at the public dock, a tiny skiff appeared, piloted by a robust woman. Shouting a friendly hello, the woman alighted, then hustled off to open the town's sole retail establishment, a quaint shop selling local crafts. Across the harbor, a shuttered window opened at the post office, where the postmistress welcomed us with a vigorous wave.

Myer's Chuck is a tiny village of looping paths lightly sprinkled with wooden cabins. We liked it immediately. Flowering shrubs grew wild, artfully concealing the accumulation of terminally rusted fuel tanks, upturned boats, and defunct appliances that surrounded nearly every building—standard Alaskan landscaping. Hummingbirds clustered around feeders hanging from porch roofs.

At the village post office, open one day a week, we mailed postcards simply to see if they'd make it home. Rod told us the fate of one postcard he mailed. "More than a year had passed," he recalled, "when I received a typewritten apology from Postmistress Mary Ann Glenz. 'Dear Captain DuFour,' it read. 'It is with great regret that I must inform you that a postcard you mailed from the Myer's Chuck post office was damaged when eaten by a rather hungry banana slug.'"

Back on board, we celebrated the Fourth of July with a brief break in the weather—the rain stopped, the fog retreated, and the clouds rose to 1,000 feet. As we approached Misty Fjords National Monument and Wilderness Area, the landscape revealed itself bit by bit, exposing a towering ridgeline of glacier-scoured rocks, gaunt crags, and precipices. Guided by the thundering roar of a waterfall we heard long before we saw it, Rod maneuvered the yacht's bow beneath the powerful plunge of a 1,000-foot cascade. "Alaskan snorkeling," Heather quipped. Dressed in full rain gear, she donned a mask and snorkel and playfully plunged beneath the downpour, stoutly withstanding the freezing deluge before finally stepping alongside the waterfall.

That evening, shoehorned into a kayak, just two of us silently knifed through the inky dark waters of Yes Bay, a picture-perfect combination of wilderness and solitude. Only raindrops ruffled the calm surface. Everything smelled of water and earth. An owl's eerie call broke the profound and lonely silence. About 30 feet ahead, a harbor seal periscoped, watching us watch him, then slid soundlessly into the water, without a ripple. There was no doubt. We were completely and utterly seduced by our journey into Alaska's Inside Passage.

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classic pastries

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crunchy toasted coconut, dried apricots, and pecan pieces, it is finished with a drizzle of rich milk chocolate. Even confirmed coconut phobes have been converted.

Rugelach: Rebecca Levine's rugelach is an outstanding variation on the bite-size, crescent-shaped Hanukkah treat. Her version wraps apricot jam, walnuts, currants, and cinnamon into a lip-smacking pinwheel cookie. The dough gets its toothsome quality from cream cheese. Levine's wholesale pastry outfit, Bittersweet, provides pastries for several coffee shops and supermarkets. Her rugelach is available at all three Portland Torrefazione cafés.



Sunken grape cake is a specialty at Carrie Birrer's Florio Bakery.

Sunken grape cake: Florio Bakery, which opened last summer near the booming nexus of Southeast 28th Avenue and East Burnside, has got to be Portland's loveliest place to grab a coffee and pastry. Industrial-height ceilings, windowed garage doors, and blonde-wood furniture make Florio light-filled and airy on even the grayest days. Owner/baker Carrie Birrer's sunken grape cake provides still another reason to seek out Florio. Firm whole grapes, finely chopped walnuts, and lemon zest nestle within this delectable coffeecake that derives its moistness from almond paste.

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