



INSIDE

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CRUISING

The Sea Bird, a small ship with great maneuverability, sails in Glacier Bay. The ship holds 62 passengers.

Photos by Steve Haggerty/Special Contributor

Up close *and* personal

Small-ship cruising gives a more intimate view of Alaska's Inside Passage



Kayakers explore the coves in the Tongass Narrows, Ketchikan. Lindblad cruises include ship-based excursions and the use of kayaks and weather gear.

Story by ANNE Z. COOKE, photography by STEVE HAGGERTY
Special Contributors

KETCHIKAN, Alaska — I trailed my fingers in the water as the Zodiac pulled away from the Sea Bird and headed for the forest, a dark line on the shore. The second hand on my watch clicked around as we passed a floating iceberg. Twenty seconds, 50 seconds, two minutes on the mark and by then my hand felt like a lifeless lump of ice. Meanwhile, in this land of extremes, the contrary Alaskan sun burned down like a torch, scorching my nose.

Behind us, our ship, the 62-passenger Lindblad Expedition vessel, floated serenely at anchor, alone in a hidden inlet. No big cruise ships in sight. Too small for them in this corner of the Tongass National Forest. Hey, check out the eagles on that tree! Look, did you see them? Then the Zodiac bumped up on the gravel and the eight of us, lugging binoculars and sunscreen, climbed out to walk on the beach.

"We've never seen bears here, but it's always a possibility," said Lindblad Expeditions guide Steven Ruggles, jingling the bells attached to his pack. "If there are any, they'll take off when they hear us talking. They're as afraid of us

See **BECOME** Page 5K

WINTER RESORTS

Park City offers more than skiing

Bobsled ride and zip lines ramp up the thrills at Utah mecca

By KRISTIN FINAN
Houston Chronicle

PARK CITY, Utah — Don't head-butt the driver.

This is probably good advice in any situation, but as I prepared to slip down the mile-plus length of an Olympic bobsled track in less than a minute at speeds of nearly 80 mph, it seemed particularly appropriate.

Even though head-butting is a common side effect thanks to the 5 Gs of force your body experiences on the ride, I had just signed my life away on a

waiver during orientation. It seemed to me that the fewer distractions I could offer the driver, the better my odds of making it out alive.

Plus, our driver happened to be Olympic silver-medalist Shauna Rohbock, who now spends at least part of her winters in Park City shepherding nervous tourists down the track like a mom taking her child out on a bike without training wheels for the first time. Head-butting an Olympian seemed, well, amateur.

Of course, my husband, Patrick, and I were amateurs, as are most of the people who fork over \$200 for a bobsled ride at Utah Olympic Park.

During our December visit

to Park City, we experienced a three-helmet tour, meaning we donned helmets three times over a 48-hour period in hopes of getting a sample of this town's mountain spirit. Forget the starlets, films and festivals. Come here for the adventure.

Zippering away

I had ridden zip lines before, so when I heard about the new Zip Tour Adventure at the Canyons Resort, I had doubts it would offer anything unique. Located at the top of the Red Pine Gondola, the ride includes three lines: a demo ride, an 800-foot Red Pine ride and the Lookout ride, which spans more than 2,000 feet across

the canyon between Lookout Peak and Red Pine Lodge.

After putting on our helmets and receiving a safety briefing, we made our way across the first two lines. They were a piece of cake, offering the same fun, quick thrill I'd experienced in the past. It wasn't until we boarded a chair lift to make our way to the beginning of the Lookout zip that the nerves started to set in.

Clipped to the line looking out across the vast canyon, the thought briefly crossed my mind that I would most certainly not survive if there were a malfunction.

See **PERFECT** Page 5K



Canyons Resort

Sure, the snowboarding's great at Canyons Resort, but try the zip line, too.

Become an Inside Passage insider

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as we are of them.”

Think ahead to this coming summer and a blue-sky day on Alaska's Inside Passage, the coastal route between Vancouver and the Gulf of Alaska. If you chartered a float plane for an aerial look at this winding interisland channel, you could bet on seeing 10 mega-ships on the move and 15 more lined up at docks in ports like Ketchikan, Juneau and Skagway.

Imagine it. Thousands of eager cruise passengers bumping elbows when they'd expected to see glaciers, brown bears and humpback whales. Precious vacation time spent climbing on tour buses and standing in line to buy souvenirs. Ships so large and ports so small it's a scrum on the ground. The bigger the ship, the more Alaska fades out, reduced to wallpaper for ear-splitting music and cooking classes, yoga workouts and basketball courts, floor shows and wellness seminars.

That's not my Alaska. I want to toss a pebble overboard and listen to the splash. I want to remember kayaking along the shore looking for

brown bears in search of a meal and sea lions hauled out on the rocks. We did all that on the Sea Bird and it spoiled me for anything less.

This summer brings good news. Despite Cruise West's recent bankruptcy, at least five of her former small-ship fleet are still in Alaska sailing itineraries in the “silver triangle,” the area roughly between Skagway in the north, Sitka in the west and Ketchikan in the south. The ships will visit old favorites and new discoveries, from Misty Fjords and Glacier Bay to Thomas Bay, Patterson Bay, Klawock (a native village), the Brothers Islands and Frederick Sound.

The greatest advantage a small ship brings is its maneuverability. On the Sea Bird, the captain deftly glided into shallow coves and lingered beside waterfalls in narrow fjords. Not bound by a rigid schedule, he was free to follow a pod of swimming orcas or to linger near a raft of sea otters.

Onboard marine biologists, geologists, historians and native-culture experts guided the expeditions and led the daily pre-excursion orientations, often with spot-on tim-



Photos by Steve Haggerty/Special Contributor

Sea Bird passengers get a close-up view of the calving face of Sawyer Glacier.

ing. We were listening to a talk about the humpback whales' annual migration from Hawaii when somebody spotted a half-dozen whales bubble-netting off the bow. We were cruising off Chichagof Island, scanning the rocks for sea lions, when several popped up next to us, curious and unafraid.

Except for Juneau and Sitka, our arrival and departure towns, the only official port stop was in Petersburg, settled by Norwegian fishermen. A tiny village of perhaps eight streets lined with colorfully painted buildings, it wasn't too small to sport a half-dozen gift and sundries stores and an intriguing history museum. You think you know how fresh halibut should taste? Don't answer until you've tasted the seafood market's fresh, fried beer-batter fillets.

“The people who book this kind of a cruise are birds of a feather,” said Joyce Hunter, a retiree from Michigan, who'd grown up in a Midwestern town like mine, one with a similar ethos. She chose the



A whale tail surfaces near the Sea Bird in Frederick Sound.

ship for its size, wildlife orientation and casual dress code. We both liked the single-seating dinner with unassigned seats, a great way to get to know other passengers.

Though most passengers on our cruise were between 45 and 70 years old, four were octogenarians celebrating a birthday. While we kayaked along the shore, they sat in the lounge and watched the panorama from afar. “Just being here,” said 89-year-old Sarah, “means the world.” As it did to most of us.

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty are freelance writers based in Marina del Rey, Calif.

When you go

Lindblad Expeditions: Cruises include meals, ship-based excursions and use of kayaks, sports and weather gear. Not included are port-related shore tours.

InnerSea Discoveries: With an expanded fleet, exciting new routes and an emphasis on active adventure, this cruise company (sister to American Safari Cruises) will be giving Lindblad Expeditions a run for the money.

Cruise rates: Seven-day cruises cost \$3,000 to \$7,000 per person, depending on cabin type and the sailing date, in early season, midsummer or early autumn. Most rates include meals, tips, wines and use of onboard recreation gear. Bar drinks are typically extra.

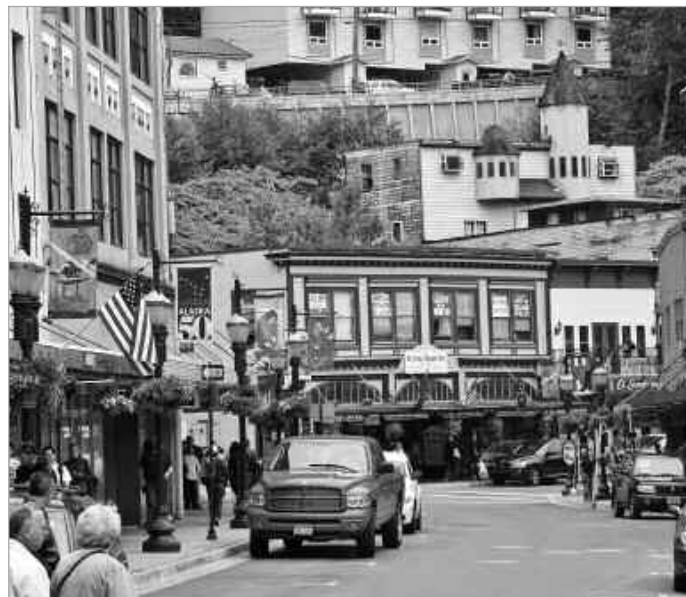
Take along: The best map to the region is the “Inside Passage Cruise Guide,” from Coastal Cruise Tour Guides, \$15.95, at trektools.com. Recommended dress includes a raincoat and hiking boots or sturdy tennis shoes.

Finding your ship:

- American Safari Cruises: americansafaricruises.com. 1-888-862-8881.
- InnerSea Discoveries: innerseadiscoveries.com. 1-877-901-1009.
- Fantasy Cruises: smallalaskaship.com. 1-800-234-3861.
- Lindblad Expeditions: expeditions.com. 1-800-397-3348.
- Silver Seas Cruises: silverseas.com. 1-800-334-6544.



Tom Setzer/Staff Artist



Summertime cruise passengers swamp downtown Juneau's market streets.

Perfect your bobsledding technique at Park City

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Thankfully, there wasn't much time to think. By the count of three, Patrick and I were releasing our brakes and soaring out over the wilderness. Because each ride has two lines, participants can ride simultaneously and even attempt to race if they're so inclined.

As for me, I was just trying to remember to breathe. For the first half of the ride, my eyes were closed tight in terror.

Thankfully, the Lookout zip is so long that my heart stopped pounding about midway and I was able to peek at the scenery below. It was stunning, like something from a Bob Ross painting: happy little trees flanked by ribbons of snow, nary a cloud in the turquoise sky.

Ski session

We had been having so much fun enjoying other at-

tractions that skiing nearly escaped us. Still, you can't visit Park City, which is home to three major ski areas — Park City Mountain Resort, Deer Valley Resort and Canyons Resort — without hitting the slopes.

We were splurging at the Waldorf Astoria Park City, which offers direct gondola access to the more than 4,000 skiable acres at Canyons Resort, so that's where we decided to spend our morning.

We are both novice skiers and tend to enjoy an hour or two on the mountain before fatigue and hunger set in. More than once, we've hit après-ski before it was probably appropriate to do so; we're OK with that.

After fastening my helmet, I made my way down the run with the lessons of former ski instructors (“angle your skis like pizza to stop, like French fries to go”) rushing through my head. A few more trips down the High Meadow run



Waldorf Astoria

The Waldorf Astoria Park City features gondola access to the more than 4,000 skiable acres at Canyons Resort.

and I was in the groove, the feel of the snow beneath my skis and the wind against my cheeks completely invigorating.

Soon my stomach was starting to growl and the eager snowboarders who frequent the mountain seemed to be whirling around me like vultures. It was time to call it a day.

Food and fun

When you do decide to get off the slopes, you have no shortage of places to go. For our après-ski, we selected the Farm, which is located next to the Canyons' “ski beach” and features locally sourced ingredients from farms within 200 miles of Park City.

A couple of locally brewed beers and some chili-smothered thick-cut fries on the outside patio were the perfect

rewards for our time on the slopes.

Another of my favorite adventures (of the culinary sort) occurred at High West Distillery and Saloon. Located in Old Town Park City, High West was the state's first distillery in the 1870s and has since transformed into a gastro-saloon also known for its food.

Start with a hand-crafted cocktail such as the Dead Man's Boots (High West Rendezvous Rye, tequila, fresh lime and ginger beer) before moving on to the menu that includes bacon-wrapped Delta Blue shrimp and whiskey-cider braised short ribs. For dessert, I had a Krispy Kreme and vanilla-whiskey ice cream concoction that has to be one of the most delicious things I've ever tasted.

While you're in the area, take a walk down charming

Main Street, where boutiques, such as Olive & Tweed and Prospect Youth, and art-filled galleries, such as Livin' Life and Lanny Barnard, are sure to catch your eye.

No head-butts

The highlight of the trip, however, was most definitely the bobsled ride.

After we were fitted with helmets, we were seated in our bobsled and pushed out onto the ice. The next 50 seconds were both fast and brutally slow.

With each passing curve — there are 15 — it became more difficult to keep my back straight, my neck bending forward as though I were an ostrich in search of sand at the bottom of the sled.

Eventually, we jerked to a stop. I had concentrated so hard on staying in one position

If you go

Getting there: From Salt Lake City, Park City is about a 30-minute drive. Shuttles, taxis and rental cars are available in Salt Lake City.

Stay: Waldorf Astoria Park City offers 174 luxury guest rooms and residences with direct access to Canyons Resort. Don't miss a signature treatment at the 16,000-square-foot Golden Door Spa. 435-647-5500; parkcitywaldorfastoria.com.

Equipment: Skis on the Run can provide all the gear you need to hit the slopes. 1-888-488-0744; skisontherun.com.

Utah Olympic Park: Enjoy a fascinating look at the 2002 Olympic Games and experience two free museums, facility tours, interactive displays and bobsled and skeleton rides. 435-658-4200; utaholympiclegacy.com.

Zip Tour Adventure at Canyons Resort: \$50 for a three-line ride. 1-888-226-9667; canyonsresort.com.

General info: visitparkcity.com

in the sled that it took me nearly a minute to get myself out. Patrick would discover eggplant-sized bruises on the sides of each of his arms, the result of bumping against the side of the sled at such speeds with such force.

In a post-ride picture, the terror and relief are blended on my face into a look best described as bleary-eyed confusion.

I probably won't be displaying that one on the mantel, but I wouldn't have missed the experience for anything. And, I didn't head-butt the driver.



Canyons Resort

Canyons Resort's Farm restaurant serves dishes made with ingredients sourced within 200 miles of Park City.