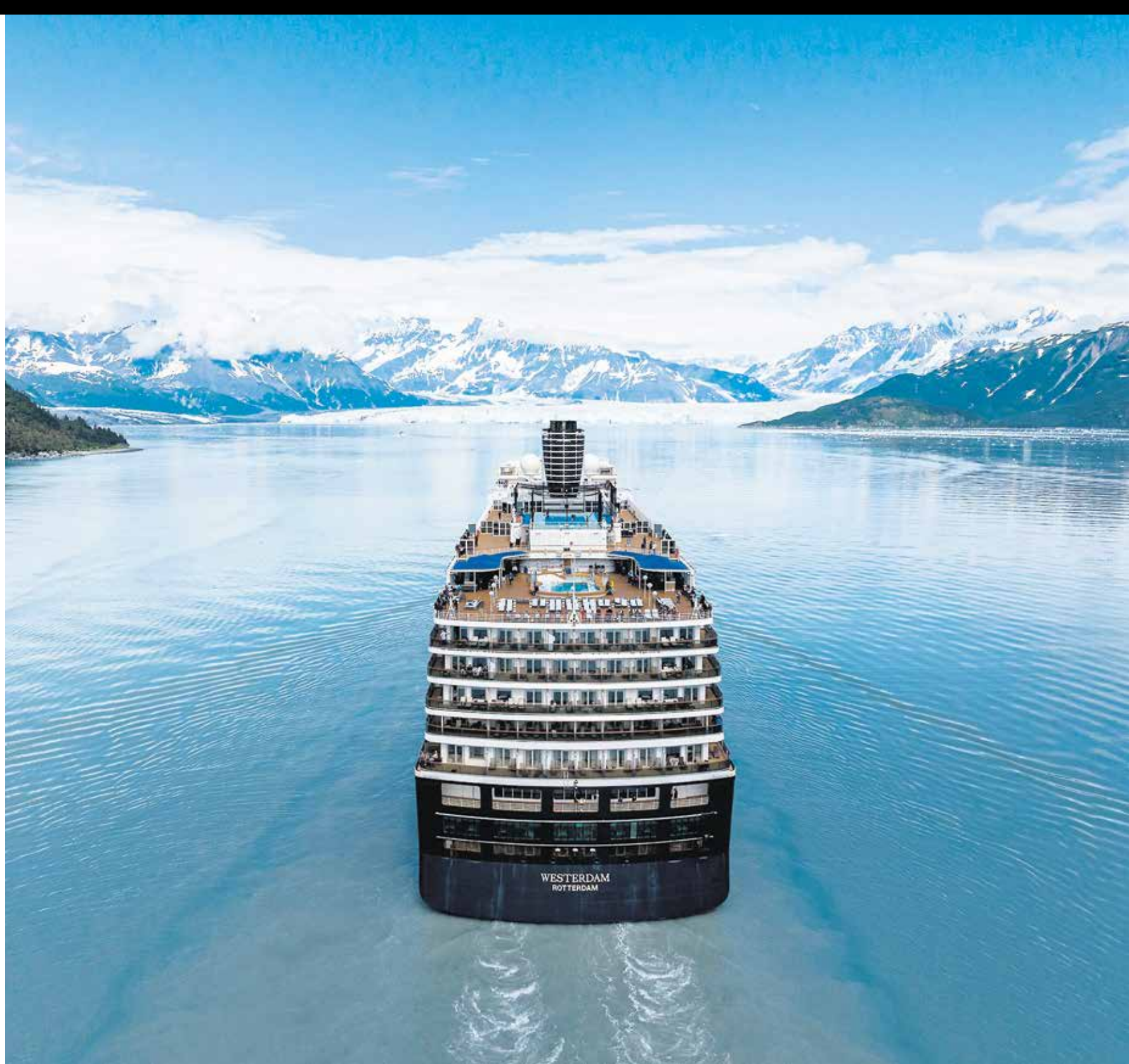




# 'Watching a whale breach just takes my breath away'

America's northernmost state is best explored by sea with Holland America Line, which has been sailing in Alaska for 75 years. By **Kaye Holland**



Extraordinary things happen when you're sailing in Alaska. It's only the third morning of my voyage and already I've seen the tails of humpback whales rise majestically from the water – pausing just long enough to allow me to snap a picture of them silhouetted against the skyline before they disappear beneath the waves. Sea otters come out to play, blue-white glaciers glisten in the sunlight and bald eagles soar overhead.

This is my first trip to the Great Land – which came to the world's attention as a result of the Gold Rush when, between 1897 and 1904, more than a million prospectors flooded into Alaska. The hopeful miners made the journey by homemade boat in treacherous conditions.

Fast forward to 2023 and it's my turn to visit the last frontier – with Holland America Line (HAL), in considerably more comfort and style than the early pioneers.

The line is currently celebrating 150 years of service and has been sailing to Alaska for more than half of them. So if anyone knows the US's wildest corner inside out, it's HAL.

My own cruise, a seven-day Inside Passage itinerary, begins with an overnight in Seattle, the birthplace of Starbucks and one of America's most exciting cities. There are also sailings from Vancouver and Anchorage, with northbound, southbound, and

round-trip voyages available. And, if you really want to delve even deeper into the heart of the destination, you can easily add a pre- or post-cruise tour.

The first day is spent at sea, as we cruise north into Alaskan waters, which gives me time to get to know the ship and meet my fellow passengers, many of whom have sailed to Alaska with HAL before. HAL has privileged access to Glacier Bay National Park and its prime docking locations, having sailed there for 75 years.

I unpack my suitcase in my generously sized stateroom and attend a talk by one of HAL's resident wildlife experts. Here I learn that Alaska is home to around 32,000 brown bears who consume up to 25,000 calories each day.

Later that evening, I give the bears a run for their money in the main Dining Room where my Alaskan

## Special times

Whale breaches in Alaska, top left; HAL's Westerdam sailing into the heart of the rugged scenery, main picture; trekking on the Mendenhall Glacier, below left; indigenous art at Totem Bight State Park, right

experience officially starts as I gorge on dishes – think salmon served with the freshest vegetables – inspired by the 49th state. Holland America is the only cruise line serving Alaskan seafood that is certified sustainable and traceable by the Responsible Fisheries Management.

The next morning we reach our first port of call, Juneau – the quirky state capital that can only be reached by boat or plane – and I spend a happy few hours wandering its charming streets that are chock full of Gold-Rush-era buildings.

But Juneau's biggest draw is its proximity to the mighty Mendenhall Glacier, and a HAL excursion gets me up close with this frozen beauty that's 13 miles long and half a mile wide.

At Icy Strait Point, I book a whale-watching safari which doesn't disappoint: seeing a whale breach, as it lifts its whole body into the air and twirls around, takes my breath away.

But as an arctophile (a collector of the cuddly kind of bears), it's grizzlies that I really want to see. And so, in Sitka, I sign up for a HAL Bears, Birds, and Barnacles tour which offers the chance to encounter Alaskan coastal brown bears. At Fortress of the Bear, a bear rescue centre that opened in 2007, I watch orphaned brown bears pluck salmon from the water.

Back in Sitka proper, St Michael's Cathedral – a Russian Orthodox



Church – reminds me of Alaska's fascinating history of indigenous, Russian, and American rule. As I learned during an insightful onboard lecture, native tribes had lived here for centuries before the Russians arrived in 1741. After 125 years, Russia sold Alaska to America for a mere \$7.2 million – a decision the Russians must have regretted when gold and oil were later discovered.

In Ketchikan, which is no stranger to rain – or totem poles – I stroll along Creek Street, a colourful boardwalk built on stilts that was once a red-light district where "both fish and men came upstream to spawn", before

*'I love watching the scenic drama unfold on sea days... unwilling to move for fear of missing something wonderful'*

joining an excellent HAL tour to view Totem Bight State Park.

Here I admire the sculptures, carved using traditional tools, that tell the ancestral stories of the Tlingit and Haida people – and reinforce that there is more to Alaska than wildlife.

Back on board, there's always a warm welcome and plenty of

downtime – something that I quickly come to love about an Alaska cruise with HAL.

For some, this may mean partaking in a sunset or sunrise stretch class; soaking in a hot tub, or indulging in a facial or massage in the exceptional Greenhouse Retreat.

For others, this could involve borrowing a book from the well-stocked library and retreating to an elegant lounge with a well-crafted drink in hand. Or enjoying a spectacular meal at a specialty restaurant such as Pinnacle Grill, before dancing your socks off in BB King's Blues Club – easily the best entertainment I've experienced on a cruise.

For me? It's watching the scenic drama unfold from the deck on sea days. For every Alaska cruise with HAL guarantees a close-up glacier experience, including the famed Glacier Bay.

This 65-mile-long fjord is so mesmerising that I spend a whole day admiring the snow-capped mountains, forests, and turquoise-tinted icebergs from the water, with binoculars, unwilling to move for fear of missing something wonderful.

All told, Alaska's Gold Rush era may be over but a cruise to the Great Land, with destination experts Holland America Line, offers an array of treasures worth visiting.

## START YOUR ADVENTURE WITH HAL

### Alaska Inside Passage (Vancouver round trip)

This seven-day cruise departs from Vancouver on 4 May 2024, onboard Koningsdam. The itinerary starts with a day of scenic cruising in the legendary Inside Passage, that offers opportunities to witness Alaska's natural wonderland and renowned wildlife.

Next up is Juneau, America's most scenic state capital, where ziplining and sea

kayaking are just a couple of the thrilling adventures on offer. Then it's on to Glacier Bay, the crown jewel of Alaska's national parks, and Ketchikan – gateway to the jaw-dropping Misty Fjords National Monument, a destination HAL encompasses as part of its Misty Fjords and Wilderness Explorer excursion.

Another day of scenic cruising follows before Koningsdam returns to Vancouver, which has earned a reputation for being



one of the world's most beautiful cities. *Departs Vancouver on 4 May, 2024. From £1,129 per person (cruise only).*

### Triple Denali Tour (Vancouver to Fairbanks)

If you want to venture even deeper into Alaska, then HAL's Triple Denali Tour – a 12-day cruise and land adventure – could be the answer.

Setting sail on 12 May 2024, from



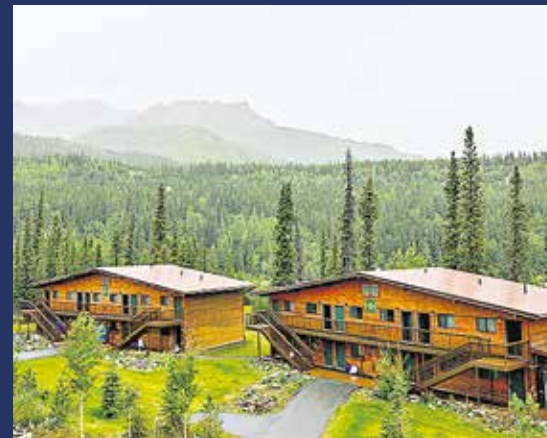
Vancouver onboard Noordam, it weaves through south-eastern Alaska, passing wildlife-dotted fjords and gleaming walls of ice. Two days of

scenic cruising allow you to immerse yourself fully in the spectacular views of Glacier Bay and College Fjord.

Popular ports of call include Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway and Whittier where you can embark on a dog-sledding tour, pan for gold like prospectors, or learn about local Tlingit culture.

HAL will then take you to Denali National Park from Anchorage via the luxurious McKinley Explorer train for a three-day stay at their 60-acre McKinley Chalet Resort – a comfortable base camp for all manner of outdoor adventures. From the park, you will then continue on to your final stop, Fairbanks – a fascinating former Gold Rush town.

*Departs Vancouver on May 12, 2024. From £2,579 per person (cruise tour).*



## Three ways to explore the Great Land with HAL

There's no place on earth quite like Alaska. And, as experts who have been in Alaska since before it became an American state in 1959, HAL can help you make the most of the last frontier.

### 1) By ship

Taking a cruise is the best way to see Alaska, which is separated from the 'lower 48' by Canada, and can be reached only by ship or plane. HAL's carefully

crafted itineraries range from seven to 28 days. The former introduces you to the Great Land, while others dig a little deeper. All cruises feature the famed Inside Passage, and guarantee glacier viewing including Glacier Bay – HAL is a proud concessionaire of this remarkable national park and its onboard experts are right beside you to help bring the sights to life.

### 2) Land and sea

An Inside Passage sailing is paired with a scenic train ride to Denali National Park, home to the US's tallest mountain. Its large dome windows offer beautiful views of the passing landscape from every seat. You can spend your days spotting

Alaska's 'Big Five' – bears, moose, caribou, Dall sheep and wolves – and evenings swapping stories at Denali Square, the focal point of the luxurious lodge you'll call home for up to three nights.

### 3) Branching out

Enjoy the adventure of a lifetime by extending your holiday into Canada's remote Yukon territory with the only cruise line to take you to Alaska's overlooked neighbour. HAL's Yukon & Denali cruise tour combines an Inside Passage cruise with a trip to Denali National Park, lodging on its doorstep. Continue the journey into the Yukon, which inspired Jack London's 1903 novel *Call Of The Wild*.

## The only way to experience Alaska

With a 150-year legacy, Holland America Line has all you need for a memorable cruise, from premium staterooms to award-winning service. With more than 75 years sailing Alaskan waters, Holland America Line

is the region's most experienced cruise option, with six uncrowded ships and long-held relationships in the region ensuring privileged access and exclusive experiences such as the private McKinley Explorer train.

Unpack only once as you explore Alaska on a journey where you really can 'Have It All' with the Early Booking Bonus on Alaska 2024 cruises. Enjoy shore excursion credit,

specialty dining, elite beverage packages and premium Wi-Fi. Secure your cruise with a £99pp deposit before 12 October 2023.

**For full terms and conditions and to find out more, call 0344 338 8605; visit [hollandamerica.com](http://hollandamerica.com), or contact your travel agent.**



Ice pack On an expertly led ship's kayaking expedition