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## THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE: MY ARCTIC CIRCLE ODYSSEY



### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Ed Stahl

Rarely does anyone book a vacation not knowing if they'll actually get where they're hoping to go, but my latest trip was just that.

On August 21, I took a charter flight from Montreal to Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, where I boarded Abercrombie & Kent's luxury expedition ship "*le Boreal*." This was the first-ever passenger expedition through the famed Northwest Passage. (The few cruises which visit the passage generally go part-way, then turn around and come back out.) This sea route that links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans lies 500 miles north of the Arctic Circle and is usually impassable because of ice. Although explorers tried for more than 400 years, the Northwest Passage was only first successfully traversed in 1906, after a 3-year expedition by Norwegian Roald Amundsen.

This cruise was a nature lover's paradise, a geologist's dream, and a unique opportunity to go where only a few hundred people have gone and to visit with the natives of those remote places.

We set off along the West Coast of Greenland, where we hiked to glaciers, walked the tundra, visited a town with as many sled dogs as people (4,500+), and visited Illulisat, the iceberg-cluttered fjord which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. We also visited Upernavik, the northernmost town in the world, still a traditional hunting and fishing village.

After crossing Baffin Bay, we explored Nunavut and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. After a Zodiac ride to land, we spotted groups of shaggy, long-horned muskoxen on Devon Island, where we were accompanied by several "guards," who were to watch for polar bears. Over the next few days, we saw polar bears several times. Other Zodiac outings led to


*Ed with caribou antler.*

additional sightings, and we spotted grizzly bears, Arctic hares and foxes, bearded seals, tundra swans, sandhill cranes and many other Arctic birds. We also got to see several kinds of whales along the way, including Beluga and Bowhead.

Although we eventually sailed into the Bering Sea, the cruise did not end (as originally proposed) in the Far East of Russia. For political reasons, our adventure concluded in Nome, Alaska.

Ready for a Northwest Passage adventure of your own? Abercrombie & Kent's 2016 version of this trip is available now, and with only 199 passengers, it will sell out. Or, for the slightly less adventurous, consider Crystal's brand-new cruise. This one seeks to guarantee a successful crossing with a helicopter onboard to find open water and an ice-breaker to accompany the ship. Call today (408) 354-6531 to get your next travel adventure under way.


*Polar bears on ice floe.*

*How to move an iceberg.*
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# TRAVEL TRENDS



## HOLLAND AMERICA LINE'S NEW MS KONINGSDAM WILL SOON DEBUT

When *ms Koningsdam* sets sail on its premier voyage April 8, 2016 the vessel will debut several innovative concepts and new public venues while still featuring popular amenities guests associate with Holland America Line.

The 2,650-passenger ship will usher in Holland America's new Pinnacle-class cruising. Guests will have the opportunity to enjoy fine dining in several alternative restaurants including Sel de Mer, a new French seafood brasserie, and a new immersive farm-to-table dinner experience in the Culinary Arts Center presented by *Food & Wine* magazine. Onboard entertainment will be taken to a new level with the energetic Music Walk area featuring all genres of music showcased in venues.

The *ms Koningsdam* will spend spring and summer in Europe, moving to the Caribbean in October.

## A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY... NOW AT DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS

Visitors to Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando can now venture into "A galaxy far, far away" in the park's Star Wars Launch Bay. The Star Tours – The Adventures Continue provides insight into the latest movie franchise installment, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

Guests can learn about the film's production through exhibits and interactive attractions, operate the Millennium Falcon and witness younglings in Jedi Training Academy. Season of the Force will launch later this year, providing special entertainment, themed food options and the new Hyperspace Mountain, which is similar to Space Mountain, yet redesigned as an X-wing Starfighter experience. During weekends, Hollywood Studios will produce a fireworks show coordinated with the music of "Star Wars."

## TRAVEL TO CUBA WITH ALEXANDER + ROBERTS

With the lifting of the United States' embargo against Cuba last year, travel to this country has sparked the interest of American travelers. This year, Alexander + Roberts tour company will offer five

different itineraries to Cuba, varying in length from five to 13 days, including a cruise around the island – "Landmark Voyages Around Cuba In-Style."

These Alexander + Roberts tours feature experienced trip leaders and many enriching experiences engaging travelers with Cuba's people, culture and history. Cross-island journeys from Havana include small, historic towns such as Baracoa and vibrant Santiago de Cuba, rarely visited by Americans. The tours also feature several UNESCO World Heritage sites.

## THE COSMOPOLITAN OF LAS VEGAS COOKS UP TWO NEW RESTAURANTS

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas has announced the addition of two new restaurants to the resort in 2016 – Beauty & Essex and ZUMA, a world-renowned contemporary Japanese restaurant.

Beauty & Essex is currently one of the most popular dining destinations on the Lower East Side in New York City. Since opening in 2010, this multi-level restaurant and lounge revolutionized dining in the neighborhood with celebrity chef Chris Santos' unique brand of communal and innovative share plates and stylish design.

Azumi Group has joined The Cosmopolitan in an exciting new partnership bringing the contemporary Japanese restaurant ZUMA to the resort in late 2016. Created and co-founded by Chef Rainer Becker, ZUMA features modern Japanese cuisine and award-winning world-class cocktails in an elegant and sophisticated environment. Inspired by the informal *izakaya* dining style, the international restaurant features a modern Japanese cuisine that is authentic but not traditional.



## CRYSTAL CRUISES UNVEILS ITINERARIES OF NEW LUXURY RIVER YACHTS

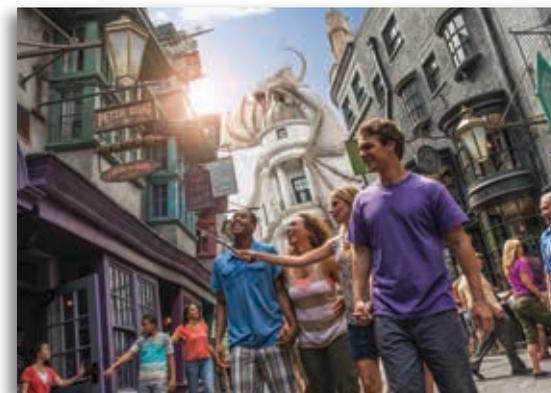
Poised to bring "true luxury" to the European river cruising experience, Crystal Cruises has unveiled the itineraries for its five new luxury river yachts.

The newly acquired and redesigned *Crystal Mozart* will sail in July 2016, and the four newly built vessels, *Crystal Bach*, *Crystal Debussy*, *Crystal Mahler* and *Crystal Ravel*, will embark in June and August 2017.

The luxury river yachts will maintain the celebrated Crystal Experience for savvy world travelers, featuring

all-inclusive amenities, elegantly appointed suites and six-star service.

Crystal River Cruises' itineraries will offer a fresh take on traditional river cruising, focusing on overnight stays and daytime cruising, in addition to sailing less-traveled routes to avoid the congestion of other vessels in port.



## THE WIZARDING WORLD OF HARRY POTTER IS HEADING TO HOLLYWOOD

Universal Studios Hollywood recently announced that the newest WIZARDING WORLD OF HARRY POTTER will open in the Los Angeles park on April 7, 2016.

An attraction currently available at the Universal parks in Orlando and Osaka, Japan, the WIZARDING WORLD will feature fan favorites like Hogwarts, the shops at Hogsmeade (complete with fake snow), and wizarding bank Gringotts. Borrowing inspiration from the J.K. Rowling's series and the Warner Bros. films that followed, the parks are a true homage to the world of wizards, witches, and fantastic beasts the famed author created.

While the new theme park will mirror its Floridian twin, it will add a few new attractions, including the U.S. debut of the 3-D Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey ride and the Flight of the Hippogriff roller coaster, which are also at the Osaka park. The WIZARDING WORLD OF HARRY POTTER will be adjacent to the main Universal Studios park.

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MAKING IDEAS TRAVEL FASTER  
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# EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEYS IN CHILE & PERU

By Judie Karhan



Torres del Paine, Chile

*The culturally and geographically diverse South American countries of Peru and Chile present travelers with an amazing array of experiences. In Peru, explore the ancient Incan citadel of Machu Picchu and stroll along cobblestone streets of well-preserved colonial towns. In Chile, Peru's southern neighbor, witness the beauty of sheer walls of rock rising high above while cruising through the Chilean fjordland, and capture the vibrant spirit of Santiago, surrounded by the magnificent Andean mountains. There are many treasures to be discovered in these exotic lands.*

## Peruvian Wonders

Peru is a land of distinctive, timeless beauty. This is, perhaps, most evident in Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This revered Incan site is dramatically nestled 8,000 feet above sea level in the midst of the Peruvian Andes, surrounded by lush vegetation and skimmed by clouds so close they appear to be within reach. This lost city of ruins was forgotten for centuries before its rediscovery in 1911, abandoned for an unknown reason sometime around the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

A trip to Peru would not be complete without exploring the ruins of Machu Picchu. Visitors to the ruins also have the opportunity to hike up Huayna Picchu, a mountain that overlooks the citadel.

Cherished as the Incas' "Sacred City" and named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983, the historical city of Cusco is another must-see destination for travelers. Settled by indigenous people several centuries before the Inca arrived, the holy city has retained remarkably built stone walls, incorporated into other structures, like those of Qurikancha, the most important Inca temple. While Cusco might be thought



Machu Picchu

of as a city dedicated to archaeological preservation, it is also quite contemporary, with many luxury hotels. Tourism has, in fact, made it one of the fastest-growing cities in South America.

Less than 20 miles north of Cusco is Chinchero, a village that sits at an elevation of nearly 12,350 feet and has been seemingly untouched for centuries. The locals here cling to their traditional clothing and customs, including the time-honored practices of alpaca-wool weaving, potato farming, and bartering for goods.

Lima, situated in a prime location on Peru's central western coast and poised above a coastline of cliffs, is a buzzing city with a rich colonial history that reportedly began in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. While Lima maintains its history as a center of modern trade, entertainment and tourism, the influence of the pre-colonial Incas remains strong. Discovering the historic influences of the city is still possible via visits to archaeological sites, such as Pachacamac, a religious area of extreme importance to the region's ancient civilizations.

## Sensational Chile

Chile, a country that stretches 2,700 miles along the southwestern coast of South America (a distance approximately the same as that from San Francisco to New York),

can be daunting when it comes to making travel plans, yet inevitably worth the effort.



One of Chile's most compelling regions is its Lake District. It is a land of startling natural beauty, where azure, mirrored lakes hold the reflections of ice-capped volcanoes, ancient trees, and the Andes mountains. There are 12 principal lakes in the district, providing some of the best freshwater fishing in the country.

Chile has several national parks, but none quite as famous as the Parque Nacional Torres del Paine with its towering mountains. In the valley, nature lovers are treated to views of sparkling blue lakes, tumbling creeks and rivers, cascading waterfalls, huge glaciers, impenetrable forests, and copious plant and animal species. The park has been designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, protecting the guanaco that graze on the steppes, as well as the Chilean deer. There are 105 species of birds living here – flamingos, condors, eagles and black-necked swans among them – and 25 different species of mammals, including guanacos, armadillos, foxes and pumas.

The city of Santiago, surrounded by the snowcapped Andes, is a delightful blend of 19<sup>th</sup> century European, Spanish colonial, and modern architecture. In the major downtown shopping area, many streets have become paseos, nicely landscaped and adorned with sculptures.

Over the years, many coffeehouses, wine bars and restaurants have sprung up in Santiago, particularly in the Barrio Bellavista where art galleries and experimental theaters add a bohemian flavor to this lovely old neighborhood.

While visiting Santiago, many travelers make side trips outside the city. The vineyard region is particularly favored, as is the Lake District to the south. In summertime, you might head for the seaside playground of Vina del Mar, where you can enjoy some superb fish dishes. During colder months, head for the ski slopes at nearby resorts such as Valle Nevado and Portillo.

# DOWN UNDER W



*Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains*



*Thredbo*



*Snowy mountains*

Traveling to Australia often inspires must-see lists that include warm-weather activities such as swimming the Great Barrier Reef, surfing the Gold Coast and walkabouts in the Outback. This distant island nation shouldn't be sold short only as a destination where catching waves and bungee jumping under sunny skies are the biggest attractions. Visiting this adventure-rich destination during the Southern Hemisphere's winter months provides a distinctively different Down Under experience.

## DECK THE HALLS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Christmas in July takes on new meaning for visitors to Australia's Blue Mountains. During June through August, New South Wales' Blue Mountains are the site of a world-renowned, mid-year Christmas celebration that has become an annual affair dating back to 1980.

Yulefest brings together travelers to sit fireside, convene for roast dinners at the Katoomba guesthouse – the original celebration site, sing Christmas carols in Leura and meet Santa Claus (or challenge him to karaoke) in Mount Victoria. Aussie dinner theatre is extremely popular, therefore accompanying a meal with a side of murder mystery or "Faulty Towers" is a unique visitor experience.

A particular Yulefest favorite occurs each year in June, drawing locals and travelers. The 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Blue Mountains Winter Magic Festival will be held June 18, 2016, only a few days preceding Australia's Winter Solstice. In the town of Katoomba, the main street is open only to pedestrians and attendees are encouraged to dress in costume. The event draws vendors, whose stalls line the streets, and artists,

musicians and dancers. The Winter Magic Festival Parade is a procession of puppeteers, musicians and revelers dressed in colorful festive costumes.

While Yulefest receives a lot of recognition during this time of year, the Blue Mountains boast many more attractions. Three Sisters is a soaring formation of rock that, according to Aboriginal legend, resulted when a tribal witchdoctor turned a trio of siblings to stone. While the legend varies, the magnificence of the peaks is indisputable.

Within the Blue Mountains, travelers will also find the Jenolan Caves, an underground wonderland

comprising rivers and limestone formations. In addition to adventure caving, bushwalks, children's and night tours, Jenolan Caves also offers a "Legends, Mysteries & Ghosts" tour. Guests will learn about local legends and hear tales of inexplicable happenings within the caves.

Guides are available for hire or travelers can plan a journey through the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service.

## AUSTRALIAN-STYLE ALPS

Not as well known as its Swiss counterparts, the Australian Alps, located in the country's southeast region, afford the opportunity to enjoy popular winter activities – Aussie style. Home to Australia's tallest peak, Mount Kosciuszko, which stands 7,310 feet high in the Snowy Mountains, the Alps boast plenty of winter activities including exceptional ski and snowboarding options.

While Mount Kosciuszko reigns as the country's highest peak, Charlotte Pass Snow Resort is Australia's highest resort. Known for its natural powder and regular snowfall, Charlotte Pass is located at 5,791 feet, affording excellent

*Not as well known as its Swiss counterparts, the Australian Alps, located in the country's southeast region, afford the opportunity to enjoy popular winter activities – Aussie style.*

# INTER WONDER

By Dorothy Crouch



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Thredbo

conditions and unmatched views. Accessible only by over-snow vehicle departing from Perisher Valley, the Charlotte Pass Snow Resort offers ticket options for skiers and snowboarders that include transportation cost and fares for guests who simply want to travel up the mountain to enjoy the wintery atmosphere.

Within the Australian Alpine National Park lies Hotham Alpine Resort, located 4.5 hours from Melbourne. Hotham affords accessible snow attractions, such as skiing for all levels – including cross-country options, tobogganing, dog sled tours, snowmobile rides and three terrain parks. Instruction is available for skiers and snowboarders who would like to improve their skills through group or private lessons. Advanced ski and snowboard master classes, and instructor clinics are also available for guests who are passionate about their sport. The area is home to unique flora and fauna, such as crimson rosellas, whose vibrant hues of red and blue bear a striking contrast against the pure, white Australian snow. Accommodations are available in on-site apartments, chalets, lodges and motels, or six miles away at Dinner Plain, an alpine village that includes all the luxuries of a five-star getaway.

Guests of Dinner Plain are afforded access to ski outfitters, a boutique, MYABI Hair Design – specializing in Aveda services, catering and medical facilities. Spa services are provided at the Onsen Retreat and Spa, which offers body and skin treatments, a gymnasium, sauna and the opportunity to soak in the outdoor pool, heated to 104 degrees

Fahrenheit. The site doesn't lack dining options either, as guests can choose from the Dinner Plain Hotel, Tsubo Bar & Restaurant, Alpine Lodge, Alputte Pizza & Bar and Mountain Kitchen.

## AUSSIE ALPINE ADVENTURES

Catering to outdoor enthusiasts of all interests, Thredbo Alpine Village's cold-weather options suit every type of adventure seeker. Located in the Snowy Mountains, Thredbo provides easy solutions for guests to maximize their adventure in true Aussie style. The village offers a variety of lodging styles, including apartments, hotel accommodations and lodge options, for singles or groups, couples or families. Denman Day Spa, located in The Denman Hotel within the village, offers indulgences including aromatherapy, sport massage, facials and waxing. Winner of 2013's World Ski Award for Australia's Best Ski Chalet, the property's luxurious Rockpool Lodge allows guests to enjoy secluded apartment-style accommodations, overlooking the Thredbo River, complete with kitchen, laundry appliances, barbecue, balcony, fireplace, Jacuzzi and sauna.

Boasting Australia's five longest runs, Thredbo is also home to four terrain parks, all of which address the specific needs of different ski and snowboard levels. The resort aims to impress, and on Saturday evenings at dusk it hosts the Thredbo Fireworks and Flare Run. Following a fireworks presentation, advanced skiers and snowboarders fly down the Supertrail while waving flares, creating a flaming

mountainside snow show. On Family Fun Nights, held each Thursday, children travel down Friday Flat, illuminated by glow-in-the-dark accessories. After reaching the end of the run, families enjoy music, fire pits and face painting, and are joined by the resident Thredboland animals. Guests who have intermediate ski or snowboarding experience and a valid lift ticket are invited to participate in complimentary Toyota Ambassador Tours. Led by members of the guest-services team, the tour introduces visitors to different mountain areas.

Thredbo is much more than a ski and snowboard area, as guests are also able to embark on snowshoe adventures to Mt. Kosciuszko through seemingly untouched natural terrain. Also available are avalanche awareness courses, for guests who would like to pursue emergency preparedness training during their holiday. In the Snow Play Park, visitors can also toboggan, snow tube and build snowmen or angels.

*The months between June and September can bring sweltering heat to North America. While Australia doesn't always come to mind when considering ski destinations, many tour agencies offer comprehensive itineraries and can help tailor additional excursions to suit a customer's needs. Outfitters Kensington Tours and Abercrombie & Kent offer itineraries to Australia and provide tour customization. This summer, enjoy a seasonal switch by changing latitude and trade swim trunks for snow-covered peaks with prime powder in an Australian winter.*

# MAGNIFICENTLY SCENIC NORTHERN ITALY

By Judie Karhan

It doesn't take long to fall in love with northern Italy's enchanting Lake District – an inspiration for poets, writers and artists since the days of the Roman Empire. The lakes of this region – Como, Maggiore, Garda and Orta – are stunningly picturesque. Along their shores sprawl 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century villas and gardens, villages and resorts. Lake Maggiore, situated on the southern side of the majestic Italian and Swiss Alps, is a particularly popular playground for locals as well as foreign travelers.

The region of Lombardy, or *Lombardia* in Italian, is also home to the beautiful Renaissance cities of Pavia and Mantua, as well as Milan. As the second most populous city in the country, cosmopolitan Milan is a thriving business center, especially notable for being the marketplace for Italian fashion. The city is home to several global fashion giants, such as Armani, Prada and Versace. Not surprisingly, the city is a shopping mecca; the expansive Corso Buenos Aires boulevard features the highest concentration of clothing stores in Europe, with over 350 shops and outlets.



*Cinque Terre*

Yet despite Milan's modern atmosphere, it is one of the most ancient cities in Europe, with a history dating back nearly three millennia. The city is famous for its wealth of historical sights, including the Duomo, one of the biggest and grandest Gothic cathedrals in the world, and La Scala, one of the best-established opera houses in the world. Milan's historic buildings and art collections can rightfully be compared to those of Rome and Florence.

In the nearby Liguria region of northwest Italy lies Cinque Terre, a rugged portion of the coast on the

Italian Riviera. This lovely region comprises five villages, clinging to the coastline's steep and rocky cliffs as they have for more than a century. Though Liguria is a popular tourist area, notable for its seaside beauty, few roads are accessible by car; boats and trains connect the five distinct towns. Walking paths provide unparalleled views of the rocky coastline as well as access to secluded beaches and grottoes. Wine grapes are grown on the almost-vertical slopes of the region, making it all the more charming.

## SAIL AWAY ON THE GREAT LAKES



*Lake Superior Beach*

By Dorothy Crouch

Summer sailing through the Great Lakes affords a wonderful vacation away, while still remaining in the United States. Comprising the largest freshwater system on the face of the earth, lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario sit between United States and Canada. Eight U.S. states – Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin – boast shorelines that meet the Great Lakes.

Formed by glaciers, the lakes have developed unique ecosystems and rare species, such as the white catpaw pearly mussel, copper redhorse fish and Kirtland's warbler. Rich with wildlife, the region is home to white-tailed deer, beaver, muskrat, weasel, fox, black bear and moose. The Great Lakes fish population includes muskellunge, northern pike, lake herring, whitefish, walleye, lake trout, and small- and large-mouth bass.

Within the Great Lakes, lie 35,000 islands and among them Mackinac showcases its Victorian influences through architectural details that appear on homes and hotels. The island's rich native history traces its origins back to the Anishinaabe-Ojibwe people who believed the Great Spirit Gitchie Manitou inhabited this sacred region. Visitors must travel by horse-drawn carriage, bicycle or foot, as personal motorized vehicles are prohibited on the island.

Choosing a vessel to match a traveler's own personal needs is integral to maintaining comfort and maximizing enjoyment while cruising the Great Lakes. Pearl Sea Cruises offers itineraries between Chicago and Quebec aboard the *Pearl Mist*. This luxurious vessel might be small, but its accommodations are luxurious and it easily navigates smaller waterways often unseen by passengers on larger ships. Its 108 staterooms provide the comforts of home while guests sail through these serene waterways. The ship accommodates up to 210 passengers, and Pearl Sea Cruises employs a dedicated crew that is prepared to provide exceptional service aboard the *Pearl Mist*, ensuring an intimate and luxurious guest experience in which every whim is met.

As the ship sails through Welland Canal, Niagara Gorge, Georgian Bay, and Straits of Mackinac, guests are able to discuss regional culture with on-board experts through the vessel's enrichment program. Intimate presentations, including cooking demonstrations by the ship's master chefs, prepare

travelers for onshore historical, nature and cultural excursions led by local guides.

Pearl Seas Cruises' 2016 schedule includes a 12-day Great Lakes & Georgian Bay Cruise, which sails May 31; June 11 and 22; July 3, 14, 25, and August 5 and 30. Its eight-day Great Lakes cruise sets sail August 16 and 23. While embarking upon an adventure that includes Mackinac Island, the shores of Lake Huron and Niagara Falls, guests can also choose to explore Chicago or Toronto through longer stays.

Enjoy Chicago's famous Millennium Park, the Chicago Library, John Hancock Center, Wrigley Building, Chicago Tribune Tower and Adler Planetarium. In Toronto, tour Yorkville, China Town and Casa Loma. This quaint journey offers fascinating excursions, and an intimate, luxurious setting, in which guests learn about American heritage and natural wonders.



*Pointe aux Barques Lighthouse*

# UNTOUCHED ALASKA SUMMER



*Aurora Borealis*

*By Dorothy Crouch*

***Proving its staying power as a hot destination, Alaska continues to draw travelers during the spring and summer. Offering unspoiled natural beauty, friendly locals and a town in which celebrating Christmas is a way of daily life, the 49<sup>th</sup> state boasts some of the world's most enticing attractions. While winter in Alaska is alluring and beautiful, the warmer months are inviting for explorers, especially during the National Park Service's 100-year anniversary.***

## **It's Always Christmas in the North Pole**

Located 14 miles southeast of Fairbanks, the town of North Pole exists, welcoming visitors with its year-round Christmas atmosphere. North Pole's residents, comprising a population of 2,198, are not only inviting toward visitors, they also embrace the festive nature of the town.

North Pole is home to Santa Claus House, a former general store/post office that now boasts live reindeer, a coffee shop, 9,000-square-foot retail space, and, yes, the man himself. The attraction offers state-themed goods, products made in Alaska, jewelry, sculptures, clothing and toys. Since 1952, visitors can submit a letter-from-Santa request for their child. Enclosed with the letter – printed on Santa's stationery – children receive a Santa Claus dollar, a photo of Santa and sticker exclaiming "I'm on Santa's Good List." Parents can also purchase the deed to one square inch of the North Pole.

In addition to the Christmas spirit of Santa, the town also gives back to those in the community. During May, the car show and street fair – Cruising with Santa – is held to raise money to support the North Pole Lions and Aurora Borealis Eyeglass Recycling Center. Each July, North Pole is also the site of a Jingle in July fundraising five-kilometer run/walk, benefiting the Arthritis Foundation. Participants (human and those with four legs) are encouraged to wear Christmas-themed accessories, clothing or costumes.

## **Arctic Aurora Borealis**

Though admiring Aurora Borealis is predominantly a cold-season activity, catching this natural wonder is still possible when the weather isn't as frosty. Visitors to

Alaska during September and early to mid-April still could have the opportunity to view the northern lights. Traveling to the Arctic Circle is the best option for experiencing this natural phenomenon. Tours that include flights and drivers are available. The Iniakuk Lake Wilderness Lodge provides comfort in the serene desolation of this rural area.

If driving to the Arctic Circle region, stop at the visitor's center for an official certificate that recognizes this accomplishment. Traveling from Fairbanks, along the Dalton Highway allows visitors to see the Trans Alaska Pipeline and visit the Arctic Circle Trading Post for souvenirs commemorating the journey.

En route to the Arctic Circle, travelers will also have the opportunity to see the mighty Yukon River. Measuring more than 2,000 miles, the Yukon spans from Canada to the Bering Sea in Alaska. While Alaska shares the Yukon River with its Canadian neighbors, 1,400 miles of the river are located in U.S. territory. Adventurous visitors can raft down the river, which is surprisingly mild in many areas, and claim bragging rights to conquering this incredible giant.

## **Naturally Alaska**

During 2016, the National Park Service celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, making this year an excellent time to see the natural, untouched splendor of Alaska. Accessible only by plane or boat and located approximately 345 miles southwest of Anchorage, the 79-mile Alagnak Wild River offers a pristine setting, popular for its location. The Aleutian Range is home to the river's headwaters, affording access to Katmai National Park and Preserve. Though the Alagnak Wild River is home to rainbow trout, char, grayling and salmon, it is popular not only for human fishing enthusiasts, but also bears. The Alaskan brown bear population in this area is quite large, therefore exercise caution while exploring the region.

Include Katmai National Park on the Alaska itinerary to safely observe the bears while they feed on sockeye salmon that attempt to migrate over Brooks Falls. In addition to bears, Katmai National Park's fauna includes tundra swans, greater yellowlegs, Hudsonian godwits, moose, caribou, red fox, wolf, lynx, wolverine, river otter, mink, marten, weasel, porcupine, snowshoe hare, red squirrel, beaver and – at times – orca, beluga and gray whales.

The park includes more than 4 million acres of terrain. It is also home to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes and was the site of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's largest volcanic eruption when Novarupta exploded in 1912, altering the area's landscape. Geology enthusiasts will want to visit the park simply to investigate the rock formations and mineral deposits created by the region's unique environment. Salmon Berry Tours and John Hall's Alaska offer intimate group-travel options that provide authentic experiences for a thorough introduction into the region.

Alaska's variety of attractions and hospitable locals allow it to remain an alluring destination any time of year, yet spring and summer visits afford options that are unique to these seasons.



*Katmai National Park*



# 54

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