

This season's colours: blue skies, green hills and bright pink fireweed

Be seduced by ALASKA IN SUMMERTIME

DESPITE ITS PERPETUAL WINTRY PORTRAYAL, ALASKA LOCAL AND AWARD-WINNING GUIDEBOOK WRITER LISA MALONEY EXPLAINS HOW HER HOME STATE DAZZLES IN THE WARMER MONTHS

Words: LISA MALONEY

Having moved around a lot due to my father being in the military, my parents dragged me to Alaska – kicking and screaming – at the age of eight. None of us had a clue what we were in for. All they could tell me was that there'd be mountains and snow, and they were

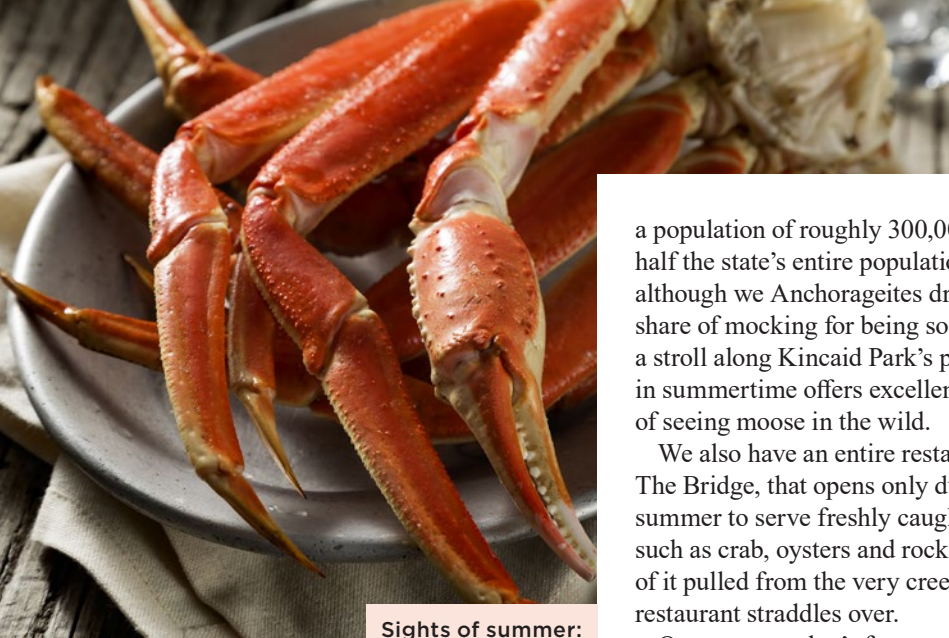
right, of course. And if your mental image of Alaska also contains glaciers and dog sleds, you'd be right there, too.

But as wild and wonderful as those aspects of Alaska are, they're not what's kept me here for more than 30 years. It's summertime that holds me like a magnet: the boisterous growth, long days, and the explosion of activity, as salmon return to their natal streams here, migratory birds wing their way back to us, plants erupt into a riot of thriving greenery and reindeer spill across the land.

Sometimes, however, after over three decades in my adopted state, it still takes a visitor's perspective to help me really appreciate what's surrounding me.

One summer, I was lucky enough to take a sightseeing flight, on which I met a retired Australian couple. As our small plane darted from Fairbanks toward the Arctic Circle work camp of Coldfoot, I gazed down at the lush, rolling hills below us. That kind of terrain is very characteristic of Interior Alaska (the state's central region), and I wondered if the Aussies might be bored by all the greenery. They weren't at all: 'Look at how many different shades of green there are!' one of them exclaimed. Until that moment, I hadn't really appreciated the nuanced palette of those hills before, but their reaction helped me see them with new eyes. If we'd flown a bit lower, we could have seen the abundant wildflowers, too – tiny flecks of colour in a wash of bright green land.

Those hues of emerald and olive and sage are on full display in Kincaid Park, too. Kincaid is a 1,400-acre forest butted up against the relative metropolis of Anchorage, Alaska's largest city with ➤



Sights of summer: Alaskan crab and sunbathing seals



a population of roughly 300,000, or about half the state's entire population. And although we Anchorageites draw our fair share of mocking for being so 'urban', a stroll along Kincaid Park's paved trail in summertime offers excellent chances of seeing moose in the wild.

We also have an entire restaurant, The Bridge, that opens only during the summer to serve freshly caught seafood, such as crab, oysters and rockfish, some of it pulled from the very creek that the restaurant straddles over.

One moment that's forever etched in my memory took place after waking from a short doze on the sundeck of a state ferry, which was traveling north toward Juneau. Having just opened my eyes, I saw a coach-sized humpback whale splashing into the water. Then another whale breached to starboard, and another to port. My sleep-fuzzed brain could barely process what was happening – it was like I'd not woken up at all and was still in a wonderful dream. Only in summertime do humpback whales return from their warm-water breeding grounds to feast on the abundant (though often very tiny) marine life in Alaska's waters.

And then we come to the glaciers. In winter months, glaciers are mostly hidden under heavy blankets of snow, and it's only in summer that they shrug off their

white cloaks and reveal their sparkling blue selves to the sun.

The glaciers 'speak' more during the summer, too. If your ship sails close enough to tidewater glaciers in Glacier Bay National Park, you might just hear the creaking of ice on the move, inching slowly toward the water like a slow-motion river. You might even see the calving of a glacier, where chunks of ice crumble off its edges. From a distance, the falling pieces of ice can look tiny, but they're usually the size of a building.

IN SUMMER, GLACIERS SHRUG OFF THEIR WHITE, SNOWY CLOAKS AND REVEAL THEMSELVES

Glaciers do more than just sit there looking pretty, though – they shape the environment around them, providing a home to local wildlife. Summertime sees seals soaking up rays on floating icebergs, sea lions sprawled out on massive, glacier-sculpted rocks so they can also bask in the sun, and brown bears turning over rocks below the tideline.

Alaska's native people are shaped by their surroundings too, having worked out the best skills and technology to help them thrive in harsh, extreme

environments – and to pass on the cultural principles that they value most. Even the totem poles that stand proudly in almost every Southeast-Alaskan community, which have been painstakingly carved and painted with vibrant colours, will eventually fade under the elements. According to tradition, totem poles should be left to melt back into the forest over time.

Of course, many totems have now been preserved as cultural artefacts, especially in the city of Ketchikan, which is home to more totem poles than anywhere else in the world. You can see them standing in parks, outside municipal buildings, inside a dedicated museum and in clusters on the outskirts of the city. And although you can see them at any time of year, there's nothing quite like admiring them against the backdrop of Alaska's lush green summer. I suppose the same is true about rest of the state...

Sure, winter in Alaska has its own, very distinct and special appeal. But summertime is the season when everything opens up and thrives. I don't just mean the seasonal businesses but the daylight, the people, the plants. There's a good reason why all the wild things flock to Alaska during the summer – but don't worry, there's plenty of room here for you, too.

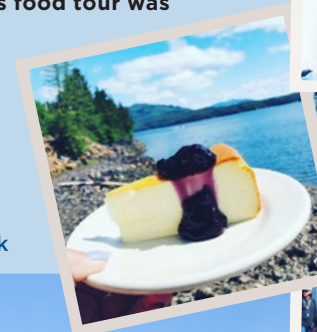
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➤ My Princess journey

'The Juneau Foodie Walking Tour excursion was a great insight into local, seasonal eats. I tried things like succulent crab legs, crispy salmon tenders and was then introduced to the beautiful taste of summer halibut. This food tour was not to be missed!'

Stephanie Chin, Toronto, Canada

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See the sunny side: Kincaid Park (right) and downtown Juneau (below left)

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'Tis the season for snapping

Lisa's five favourite places to capture summer in the state



1 Interior Alaska's green-clad hills are even more spectacular when viewed from the air. Going 'flightseeing' in a small plane (which you can do as part of a Princess excursion) or helicopter gives you the best perspective and some once-in-a-lifetime photos.



2 Anchorage's Kincaid Park is one of the best places in Alaska to see moose. These massive deer are notoriously cantankerous and can kill with their sharp hooves, so bring a good zoom lens and give them plenty of space.



3 Catch a glacier calving in Glacier Bay National Park. If you're on a scenic cruise in the area, sailing from one ice face to another, as long as you're outside on deck and keeping an eye out, you'll have good odds of getting the perfect action shot.



4 From late June, you'll find fireweed growing in almost all parts of the state. Locals often say that once these cone-shaped bright pink flowers have completely blossomed, winter is only six weeks away again. In the meantime, just enjoy the colour!



5 The city of Ketchikan offers a plethora of totem poles to photograph, but my favourite shot is in the neighbouring village of Saxman, where totem poles flank the avenue leading to a traditional clan house, itself beautifully sculpted out of wood.



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7-NIGHT VOYAGE OF THE GLACIERS (NORTHBOUND)

Featured ports: Juneau, College Fjord, Skagway

Departures in 2022/2023

On 21st June, the longest day of the year, Juneau gets 18 hours, 18 minutes of daylight.



10-NIGHT INSIDE PASSAGE WITH GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK

Featured ports: Juneau, Glacier Bay National Park

Departures in 2022/2023

At over three million acres, Glacier Bay National Park is bigger than Connecticut.



14-NIGHT VOYAGE OF THE GLACIERS GRAND ADVENTURE

Featured ports: Skagway, Ketchikan, Anchorage

Departures in 2022/2023

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