



Kayaking with Humpback Whales in Alaska – July 2014



Alaska's Inside Passage is the area that makes up the Southeast Region of Alaska. Approximately 1,000 miles North of Vancouver, it was the centre of activity during Alaska's 19th century Gold Rush. Our Adventure Cruiser 'Safari Endeavour' offered us a 7 day Sea Kayak experience of a lifetime including hiking, bushwhacking, beachcombing, yoga, whale watching and more. Kayaking alongside humpback whales in the Alaskan wilderness would surely assist me in overcoming my fear of water or would it?

Upon arrival in Juneau we took a seaplane over the Juneau Icefield - which is the 5th largest icefield in the Western Hemisphere. Flying over five of Juneau Icefield's glaciers was indeed awesome, the most famous Mendenhall has retreated > 700 metres since 1945 – a true testament to the effects of global warming. With an unstoppable spirit for adventure, we opted to take a helicopter ride onto Taku Glacier for some Alaskan Glacier Dogsledding – another exhilarating and thrilling experience.

Endicott Arm/Ford's Terror: This pristine tidal inlet and fjord was the ideal place to start our kayaking experience. Paddling a double kayak was easier than a single. Getting up close to the 200ft high Dawe's Glacier (1/2 mile wide) and watching the calving activity was unbelievable. Less rain would have been nice but we were dressed appropriately.

Frederick Sound/Stephen's Passage: Kayaking past humpback whales (only from a distance), sea lions and other marine life

was spectacular. We spent the afternoon at Cape Fanshaw on a bushwhack trek through evergreen forests that crowded the lush waterfall-laden shores.

Bay of Pillars: The Bay of Pillars is in Kuiu Island between the cities of Sitka and Petersburg. It is a beautiful, secluded anchorage just off the east side of Chatham Strait - perfect for wildlife viewing. Our beach-combing trek rewards us with a sighting of a large grizzly bear meandering on the shores, while trophy fish of all kinds glide silently through the tranquil waters.

Chichagof Island: An island in the Alexander Archipelago of the Alaska Panhandle. It is the fifth largest island in the USA – coastline measures 742 miles. Chichagof Island has the highest population of bears per square mile of any place on Earth. Our trek ashore did not disappoint with a sighting of two black bears (mother and cub) along the shoreline. That afternoon our skiff boat and kayakers were surrounded by playful sea otters - a sight to behold. Later that evening we said goodbye to the waterfall coast of Chichagof as our Captain called it a day and moored near Baranof Island.

Icy Strait: Today we explored the richest whale waters in Southeast Alaska. Eyes were glued off deck looking for sightings of the humpbacks, orcas, porpoises, sea lions and other wildlife. In the morning, we enjoyed another bushwhack tour through lush forests – very hot and windless day. Unfortunately, I was the recipient of some nasty bites from a mosquito swarm. Went kayaking in the afternoon to cool down – lots of photos and sightings of wildlife.

Glacier Bay National Park: Glacier Bay is part of a 25-million acre World Heritage Site and one of the world's largest international protected areas. Truly one of the highlights of Alaska's Inside Passage - glaciers, mountains, wildlife, history, adventure, challenge, wilderness...and more! Our last day ends as I try to take in the sheer grandeur and size of it all. Upon reflection my fear of water has lessened from this epic kayaking experience. Alaska has left its impression etched upon my soul more aptly described by the discoverer John Muir, in 1879:

"I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in".



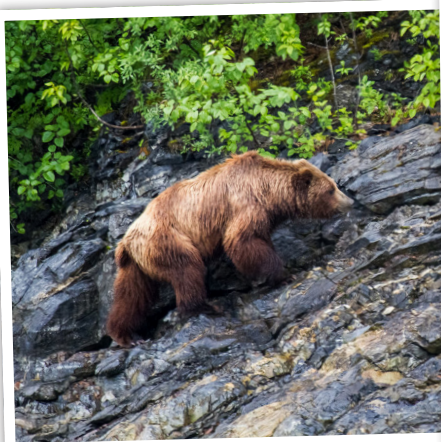
Safari Endeavour & Seaplane



Calving at Dawe's Glacier



Bushwhack at Cape Fanshaw



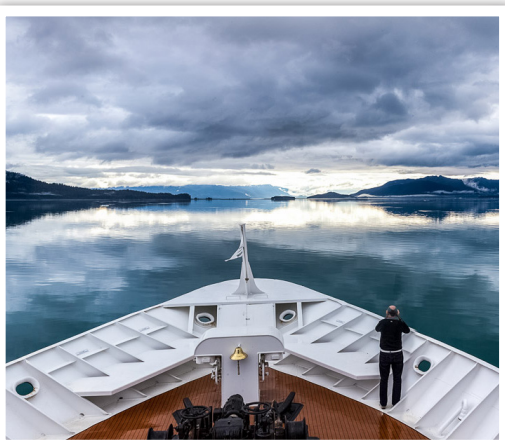
Grizzly Bear at Bay of Pillars



Kayaking at Chichagof Island



'Sunset - Icy Strait'



Epic and Wild - Glacier Bay



Humpbacks hunting for a feed



Dog Sledding on Taku Glacier