

PORTS OF CALL

Seattle, Washington - Seattle has shopping, fine restaurants, attractions galore, good air service, culture, and a wide range of accommodations – more, in fact, than you'll be able to take in on just a short pre- or post-cruise visit. It is very much a water-oriented city, set between Puget Sound and Lake Washington, with Lake Union in the center. Practically everywhere you look, the views are of sailboats, cargo ships, ferries, windsurfers, and anglers.

Juneau, Alaska - Quick quiz: Can you name a state capital that cannot be reached by road from anywhere else in the state? The answer is Juneau. Fronted by the bustling Gastineau Channel and backed by 3,819-foot Mount Juneau and 3,576-foot Mount Roberts, the city is on the mainland of Alaska but is cut off by the Juneau Icefield to the east and wilderness to the north and south. To be sure, there are roads – 150 miles of them, in fact – but they all dead-end against an impenetrable forest or ice wall. Arguably the most handsome of the 50 state capitals (despite a glut of souvenir shops near the pier) Juneau runs with a mix of quiet business efficiency and easygoing informality. It has a good deal more sophistication to it than any city in Alaska outside of Anchorage, and yet it also has a frontier-style saloon!

Skagway, Alaska - Unlike many other Alaska frontier towns, Skagway has been spared the ravages of major fires and earthquakes. Some of the original buildings still stand, protected by the National Park Service. The Klondike Gold Rush National Historic District, contains some striking examples of these buildings. Other little touches of history are preserved around town, such as the huge watch painted on the mountainside above town – it was an early billboard for a long-gone watch-repair shop.

Having a sweet little historic town is nice for Skagway's 860 or so year-round residents, of course, but by itself, history doesn't pay the bills. So, though Skagway is trying to hang on to its gold-rush heritage, it's also trying to make money off it. New businesses, including restaurants (a Starbucks!) and jewelry stores, are sprouting up as well, many of which have gold-rush connotations only in the sense that they've opened to cash in on visitor's gold.

Tracy Arm Fjord, Alaska - Located about 50 miles due south of Juneau, these long, deep, and almost claustrophobically narrow fjords are a striking feature of a pristine forest and mountain expanse with a sinister name – Ford's Terror.

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The place gets its name from the 1889 incident in which a crewman from a U.S. naval vessel (named Ford) rowed into an inlet off Endicott Arm and found himself trapped for 6 hours in a heaving sea as huge ice floes bumped and ground around and against his flimsy craft. He survived, but the finger of water in which he endured his ordeal was forever after known as Ford's Terror.

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