

2012
Passat **VS** 2008
Audi A4

MACIVER DODGE JEEP

17615 YONGE ST. NEWMARKET
1 (866) 980-7939

**BLACK FRIDAY SALE!
3 DAYS ONLY!**

Friday, November 25, 2011

moneyville.ca **Wheels.ca** **theKit.ca** **healthzone.ca** **parentcentral.ca** **yourDome.ca** **TORONTO.COM**

11°C Forecast | Traffic

thestar.com

Connect with Facebook | [Login](#) | [Register](#)

thestar.com Web find a business
[advanced search](#) | [full text article archive](#)

[Home](#) [News](#) [GTA](#) [Opinion](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [Entertainment](#) [Life](#) **Travel** [Columns](#) [Blogs](#) [More](#) [Autos](#) [Careers](#) [Classifieds](#) [Deaths](#) [Rentals](#)

[HOT TOPICS](#) [SANTA CLAUS FUND](#) [EMERGING MARKETS](#) [OCCUPY](#) [ATKINSON SERIES: WOMEN AND ALCOHOL](#) [MAPLE LEAFS](#) [501 QUEEN](#) [POLITICS](#) [ROYALS](#) [more](#)

[Home](#) [Travel](#) [Cruising](#)

Inside
thestar.com



I camped out in Wal-Mart for Black Friday



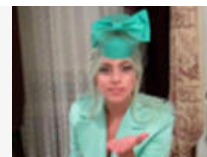
Mubarak-era premier picked to head Egypt



Home attack victim speaks



Paralympian joins elite cycling team



Lady Gaga 'guest' at Etobicoke school

Small ships, big adventures in Alaska

[Article](#) [Photos \(2\)](#)

Published On Wed Mar 23 2011

[Email](#) | [Print](#)



Passengers catch some rays cruising near Seward, Alaska.

STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTO/FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Anne Z. Cooke
Special to the Star

Recommend

HOONAH, ALASKA—I trailed my fingers in the water as the Zodiac pulled away from the ship and headed for the forest, a dark line on the shore. The second hand on my watch clicked around as we passed a floating iceberg. Twenty seconds, 50 seconds, two minutes on the mark, and by then my hand felt like a lifeless lump of ice. Meanwhile, in this land of extremes, the contrary Alaskan sun burned down like a torch, scorching my nose.

Behind us, the 62-passenger Sea Bird, a [Lindblad Expeditions](#) ship, floated serenely at anchor,

-Advertisement -

EXPLORE THE BEAUTY AND SAVE BIG!

IBEROSTAR
HOTELS & RESORTS
Enjoy being a star

Toronto to Cayo Santa Maria
Iberostar Ensenachos
All Inclusive Beach Resort
from **\$658**

[CLICK HERE!](#)

healthzone.ca

Read the latest health news, find local doctors, walk-in clinics and more.

See for Yourself »

- San Miguel**
- Beautiful Banff**
- Singer Castle visit**
- The colour of a Trinidad Carnival**

[More Photos and Videos »](#)

Ads by Google

Alaska Cruises 80% off
Huge Online Discounts! VIP Service

alone in a hidden inlet. No big cruise ships in sight. Too small for them in this corner of the Tongass National Forest. Check out the puffs of white on the tree! Two eagles! Did anyone else see them? Then the Zodiac bumped up on the gravel and the eight of us climbed out, lugging binoculars and sun screen for a two-hour beach exploration.

"We've never seen bears here but it's always a possibility," said Lindblad Expeditions guide Steven Ruggles, jingling the bells attached to his pack. "If there are any, they'll take off when they hear us talking. They're as afraid of us as we are of them."

Think ahead to this coming summer in Alaska, and a clear day on Alaska's Inside Passage. If you had chartered a float plane to follow this winding, interisland channel, the route that follows the Pacific Coast from Vancouver to the Gulf of Alaska, you could count on seeing ten ships on the move and 15 more docked in ports like Ketchikan, Juneau and Skagway.

Imagine it. Thousands of eager cruise passengers hoping for a glimpse of orcas, sea lions, brown bears and humpback whales, and bumping into each other instead. Would-be adventurers just like them, climbing onto tour buses together, waiting in line to buy souvenirs, filling the sidewalks. Take a look at a map and you'll see why. Few of Alaska's coastal ports are large enough for cruise ships to dock.

But the larger problem is today's bloated mega-cruise ships, floating resorts built to carry carry swarms of people, typically from 1,800 to 2,800 passengers. And the bigger the ships have grown, the more Alaska has been reduced to the status of scenic backdrop, wallpaper for ear-splitting music and cooking classes, yoga workouts and basketball courts, floorshows and wellness seminars.

That's not my Alaska. I'd rather be sailing with the Sea Bird, close enough to the water to toss a pebble and hear the splash. Or kayaking in solitary near the shoreline, watching brown bears turning over rocks to find a meal. Or floating in one of the Sea Bird's 12-passenger Zodiacs, idling in the shallows near Point Adolphus, where the sea lions haul out on the rocks. I did them all, recently, on the eight-day "Coastal Wilderness" itinerary, and it spoiled me for anything less.

As graceful as its namesake, the Sea Bird leaves the Inside Passage's Main Channel behind, deftly maneuvering in shallow coves and through narrow fiords—"arms" as they're called in Alaska. Freed of a rigid timetable, her captain can choose to wait or to hurry, to follow a swiftly moving pod of orcas or to linger near a colony of sea lions.

"Each trip has an intended itinerary" said Brian Silver, one of Lindblad's expedition specialists. "But these are expeditions with a purpose, to show you wildlife and the wildness. And since animals travel and weather conditions vary, it's possible that you'll visit slightly different places."

The ship's onboard naturalists and tour guides – chosen for their expertise in Alaskan – marine biology, geology, regional history and native cultures — led all onshore outings and daily pre-excursion orientations, often with unerring timing. We were sitting in the lounge, watching a program about the humpback whales' annual migration from Hawaii, when somebody happened to look out the window and saw that a pod of whales had surrounded the ship and were bubble-netting near the bow. Near [Chichagof Island](#), we were riding in a Zodiac looking for sea lions on the rocks when a half-dozen appeared next to the skiff, popped their heads up to look at us.

The most intriguing hike, I thought, was the "Bog Walk," a two-mile dirt and boardwalk trail along a marsh in the village of Petersburg, the only port stop that the Sea Bird made. Settled by Norwegians, Petersburg perches on a hill above a scenic harbor, a charmer with neatly painted wood houses, a single main downtown street, an intriguing history museum and a couple of fish-and-chip joints. These last, some no more than stalls, fry up the most delectable beer-battered fresh halibut ever tasted, served with French fries.

While some of the passengers shopped in town, we bog-walkers, 24 plus the naturalist, got a brisk walk and a first-hand look at the bog's complex ecosystem and its surprising variety of plants, berries, ferns, fungi, flowers and fry (recently hatched fish).

Updated annually with a contemporary color scheme, the Sea Bird's 32 cabins and public lounges are simple but comfortable. All cabins have outside window, efficiency bathrooms, and individual temperature controls. On the two bright moonlit nights during my trip, I lay in bed and watched the waves curl away from the bow.

Low Price Guarantee. Save up to 80%
www.Cruise.com

Norwegian Cruise Line®

Get Up To \$250 Onboard Credit.
Book Now & Save For Black Friday!
www.NCL.com

Luxury Small Ship Cruises

Best of Alaska - Custom Adventure
Wildlife & Photography Cruises
DiscoveryVoyages.com

Antarctica Cruise 30% Off

Save 30% on 11 or 20 day cruises.
Award winning Antarctica experts.
AdventureSmithExplorations.com

Dress was casual—jeans, khakis and sweaters; dinner was served at a single seating with no assigned tables. That gave me a chance to sit with people I'd met on a hike or a tour, travelers who shared my interests, educational background and even my politics. "The people who book this kind of a cruise are birds of a feather," said Joyce Hunter, from Michigan.

Despite the Sea Bird's dedication to expedition-style travel, there's was nothing in the meals that suggested camping food. Our evening meals, three-course dinners served by the wait staff and eaten leisurely, included roasted beet salad and shrimp cocktail; the choice of entrees ran from braised lamb with a reduction sauce, to fresh halibut with a teriyaki glaze or a vegetable ragout with pasta. Red and white wine were included. We sat until the last cup of coffee was drunk – or until one of the naturalist programs started in the lounge.

To get the most out of this cruise, you need to be spry enough to climb in and out of a Zodiac, to walk on gravel, get your feet wet and step over fallen logs. Hiking boots are recommended. The age range on board ran from 30 to 65, but there were four octogenarians as well, onboard to celebrate a birthday. They were happy to stay in the lounge, or to enjoy the scenery from the bow. "Just being there," they said, "meant the world." As it did to me.

MORE SHIPS TO CONSIDER

If you're a cruise fan already and wondering why I haven't mentioned Cruise West, Alaska's home-grown cruise company and the largest presence in the region, it's because the company declared bankruptcy last year. Meanwhile, other small ships have stepped in to help fill the void.

New this summer is Innerseas Discoveries' two 49-passenger ships sailing eight-day cruises between Juneau and Ketchikan. An arm of the American Safari Cruise company, Innerseas is creating high-energy adventures from hiking and kayaking to snorkeling and fishing in remote fiords and bays. There are no port stops except at a native fishing village. The itineraries, designed for hands-on explorers, are likely to be cruise world's most ambitious and physically challenging.

Also in Alaska this summer are the 392-passenger Silver Shadow and the 32-passenger Island Spirit. The former, a Silver Seas ship, is a six-star luxury vessel sailing the traditional Inside Passage route, with daily ports-of-call. Day-wear is casual, but evening meals are more formal with some dress-up evenings.

In contrast, a trip on the Island Spirit, a 32-passenger yacht owned and captained by Captain Jeff Behrens, is akin to sailing with a friend who knows the region and has been based here since 1976.

"Our goal is to get people up close and personal," said Brenda Blythe, one of the Spirit's relief captains. "We don't advertise because our repeat passengers and small groups buy our space early in the season. But we do get a few open cabins, so don't hesitate to call us."

Dress is casual, guests like the ship's comfortable family atmosphere and two dedicated chefs create "extraordinary cuisine." Absent are ports-of-call, television reception, music over the intercom and a fixed itinerary. The ships anchors overnight in quiet coves and follows the sun. She's the private yacht you always wanted to own.

Anne Z. Cooke is freelance journalists based in Marina Del Rey, Calif. ©The Syndicator 2011

JUST THE FACTS

Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic, strategic partners for the last few years, have joined forces to promote conservation and wildlife education and awareness. This summer, the Sea Bird's first itinerary, sailing on May 1, is "Alaska, A Photo Adventure," is one of their many joint projects. National Geographic experts and award-winning photographers will be on board to photograph the region, to help amateur photographers to capture better images and to enhance the over-all cruise experience. The eight-day voyage is priced at \$5,990 per person in a double cabin.


Travelers who book before March 31, 2011 will receive a free roundtrip airfare between Seattle and Alaska, and a \$500 value certificate from B&H Photo (in New York City) to purchase camera equipment. Other Sea Bird sailings booked before March 31, 2011, will also receive a

free roundtrip airfare between Seattle and Alaska.

FACTS AND FEES: Lindblad Expedition Cruises, sailing a loop trip between Sitka and Juneau, include all meals, naturalist-led shore excursions, and use of kayaks, sports and weather gear. Not included are alcoholic beverages and any outfitter-provided shore tours in Sitka and Juneau. To appreciate the immense size and complexity of this region, I recommend a detailed map such as "Inside Passage Cruise Guide," from Coastal Cruise Tour Guides, \$15.95, available at www.trektools.com. Buy and read it before you go.

CRUISE CONTACTS & RATES: Lindblad Expeditions: www.expeditions.com. (800)EXPEDITIONS. \$5990 per person. Silver Seas Cruises: www.silverseas.com. (800)334-6544. \$3158 per person. Innerseas Discoveries: www.innerseasdiscoveries.com. (877)901-1009. \$2295 per person. Fantasy Cruises: www.smallalaskaship.com. (800)234-3861. \$4495 per person.

 Recommend

 2 recommendations. Sign Up to see what your friends recommend.

[Email](#) | [Print](#) | [Add to Favourites](#) | [Report an error](#) | [!\[\]\(23d9fc146e83b5c3013cfa32c784f8d5_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(f5c463b8c1554ac5049d611bd8e33a51_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(54f1390f33a36173a1b97c4b6eb40204_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(1301e78e125668a3a0cedabdef0db7f3_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(56569b83aa18fd9e11cffbd51c077de8_img.jpg\)](#)

Top Stories:

- [Winter Getaways for Canadians](#)
- [Buff up on Buffalo](#)
- [Getting the country groove on in Nashville](#)
- [Getting the country groove on in Nashville](#)
- [Parasailing deaths lead to cruise cancellations](#)



CANADIAN RESIDENTS BALCONY SALE
BOOK A BALCONY ON A 7-NIGHT CARIBBEAN CRUISE FROM \$799*
AND THE 2ND PASSENGER CRUISES FOR ONLY \$499*



Other Star Sites

  BlackBerry PlayBook just \$200. Should you buy?	  Is this steamy car ad too hot for TV?	  Canadian sperm-donor laws need an update	  How to avoid matching set syndrome	  Overweight people eat less often. True or False?	  What's On: This week in Toronto
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

thestar.com

- [Corrections](#)
- [Contact Webmaster](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Site Map](#)

Toronto Star

- [About](#)
- [Atkinson Principles](#)
- [Statement of Principles](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [My Subscription](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [News Releases](#)
- [Star Internships](#)
- [Careers @ the Star](#)

Advertise with us

- [Media Kit](#)
- [Online Advertising](#)
- [Print Advertising](#)
- [Special Sections](#)

Initiatives

- [Santa Claus Fund](#)
- [Fresh Air Fund](#)
- [Speakers Bureau](#)
- [Classroom Connection](#)
- [Community Giving](#)

Stay up to date

-  [RSS Feeds](#)
-  [Twitter Updates](#)
- [News Alerts](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Mobile Devices](#)

[wheels.ca](#) | [toronto.com](#) | [Stock Photography](#) | [Cheap Flights](#) | [New in Homes](#) | [Car Insurance Quotes](#) | [Leasebusters.com](#) | [Save.ca](#) | [ShopTV](#) | [starsavers.ca](#) | [more](#)



© Copyright Toronto Star 1996-2011 | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)