

Photo courtesy of Alaska Division of Community and Business Development

Larger ferryboats that cruise the Inside Passage can carry hundreds of vehicles and passengers. Below, left to right: Once RVers reach landfall, they can enjoy salmon fishing, explore towns such as Skagway, and visit historical spots such as this Russian Orthodox church in Juneau.



# ALL ABOARD TO THE INSIDE PASSAGE



Photo courtesy Juneau CVB



Photo by Frank Flavin, courtesy of ATIA



Photo by Michael DeYoung, courtesy of ATIA

By **KERRIE FLANAGAN**

**M**ost motorhome travel involves spending time on the highway, driving from city to city in between your campground stops. But the Inside Passage in Alaska is made up of islands and towns that can be reached only by airplane or boat. So, how do you see them if you travel in a motorhome? Take the Alaska Marine Highway System.

Because of the gorgeous scenery and abundant wildlife present along the highway's route, the Alaska Marine Highway was declared a National Scenic Byway in 2002. This highway covers more than 1,000 miles and isn't a road at all — it's a water route that ferries use to take passengers and vehicles from one town to another. While you are enjoying the ride and the break from driving, your home on wheels is safe and sound on the car deck. When the ferry arrives at its destination, you return to your motorhome and drive it off the ship.

Once you're back on land, you choose a campground and decide how long you'll stay. It's an adventure where-in you call the shots, making as many stops as you please.

A fleet of nine ships ferries passengers along the Alaska Marine Highway. Each ferry is like a small cruise

advised to beware of transfer ramps. Another thing to consider is that if you are traveling with a pet, it must stay in your vehicle while you are on the ferry. However, on the long Bellingham-to-Ketchikan route (37 hours), you are given the chance to make an "accompanied pet call" to the coach approximately three times a day.

The amenities on each ship vary. Cafeteria-style food is available for purchase on all the ships, and two also have dining rooms. You are permitted to bring your own food on board. Some ships have cocktail lounges, gift shops, movies, and forward observation lounges. Many have a U.S. Forest Service ranger on board ready to educate passengers about the local wildlife.

Ferry travel in the Inside Passage is not speedy. The fastest ship travels at 17.3 knots (20 miles per hour). Plan to relax with a good book, enjoy the scenery, or search for wildlife with your binoculars. For really long trips, the ferries offer a couple of sleeping options. Cabins are available on some ships for an extra fee. Another option is to get out a sleeping bag and curl up on one of the reclining chairs in the heated solarium, a room available on each ship. If you are feeling adventuresome, you also can pitch a small tent on the deck of certain ships.

Travelers who are coming from the "Lower 48" or Canada most often begin their Inside Passage journey from the south. Boarding points are at Bellingham, Washington, and Prince Rupert, British Columbia. From Bellingham, it is a 37-hour ferry ride to Ketchikan, the first stop; from Prince Rupert to Ketchikan, it's only six hours — but it's more than 900 driving miles from Bellingham to Prince Rupert.

Consider your options. From Ketchikan northward, the ferry trips range in length from three to 10 hours each.

Preparation is important. You need to make reservations for yourself and your vehicle on the ferry, and for the campgrounds you will be staying at in the various cities.

The Inside Passage is located in the largest temperate rain forest in North America. The Tongass National Forest covers 16.8 million acres. The warm Japanese ocean currents keep temperatures mild there year-round. In July, temperatures average in the mid-60s, with sunny days pushing the temperatures into the 70s and 80s. Winter brings mixed snow, rain, and sunshine, with a January average temperature of 29 degrees.

It's a good idea to have a raincoat handy when traveling this way. Annual precipitation totals vary from 25 inches in Skagway to 170 inches in Ketchikan.

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## MOTORHOMERS CAN EXPLORE BEAUTIFUL SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA BY TRAVELING VIA FERRY ON THE ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY SYSTEM.

ship without the fancy accommodations and gourmet food. The ships vary in size; the smallest carries 190 passengers and 29 vehicles; the largest carries 625 passengers and 134 vehicles.

Ferry personnel are familiar with RV travelers' needs and have more than 30 years of experience working with recreational vehicles. Still, several important points need to be considered when taking your motorhome on a ferry, so be sure to read the ferry's informational material about RV transport on the Alaska Marine Highway Web sites, or contact them by phone. For example, the fare you pay for your motorhome is determined by its overall length and width. Electrical hookups are not available on the ships, and the LP-gas tank must be turned off and sealed by a Marine Highway employee. In addition, you are not permitted to have access to your motorhome during the journey. If you drive a coach with a long rear overhang, you're

## Campgrounds

The following is not a complete list, so please check your favorite campground directory or FMCA's Business Directory, published in the January and June issues of *Family Motor Coaching* and online at [www.fmca.com](http://www.fmca.com), for additional listings.

### Ketchikan

Clover Pass Resort  
P.O. Box 7322  
Ketchikan, AK 99901  
(800) 410-2234  
E-mail: [info@cloverpassresort.com](mailto:info@cloverpassresort.com)  
[www.cloverpassresort.com](http://www.cloverpassresort.com)

### Wrangell

Alaska Waters RV Park  
P.O. Box 1978  
Wrangell, AK 99929  
(800) 347-4462  
(907) 874-2378  
[www.alaskawaters.com](http://www.alaskawaters.com)

Shoemaker Bay RV Park  
P.O. Box 531  
Wrangell, AK 99929  
(800) 367-9745  
E-mail: [wrangell@wrangell.com](mailto:wrangell@wrangell.com)

### Juneau

Spruce Meadow RV Park  
10200 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907) 789-1990  
E-mail: [juneaurv@gci.net](mailto:juneaurv@gci.net)  
[www.juneaurv.com](http://www.juneaurv.com)

### Haines

Haines Hitch-up RV Park, C7397  
P.O. Box 383  
Haines, AK 99827  
(907) 766-2882  
[www.hitchuprv.com](http://www.hitchuprv.com)

### Skagway

Garden City RV Park  
P.O. Box 228  
Skagway, AK 99840  
(907) 983-2378  
Email: [gcrv@aptalaska.net](mailto:gcrv@aptalaska.net)  
[www.gardencityrv.com](http://www.gardencityrv.com)

Pullen Creek RV Park, C9647  
P.O. Box 324  
Skagway, AK 99840  
(800) 936-3731  
(907) 983-2768  
[www.pullencreekrv.com](http://www.pullencreekrv.com)

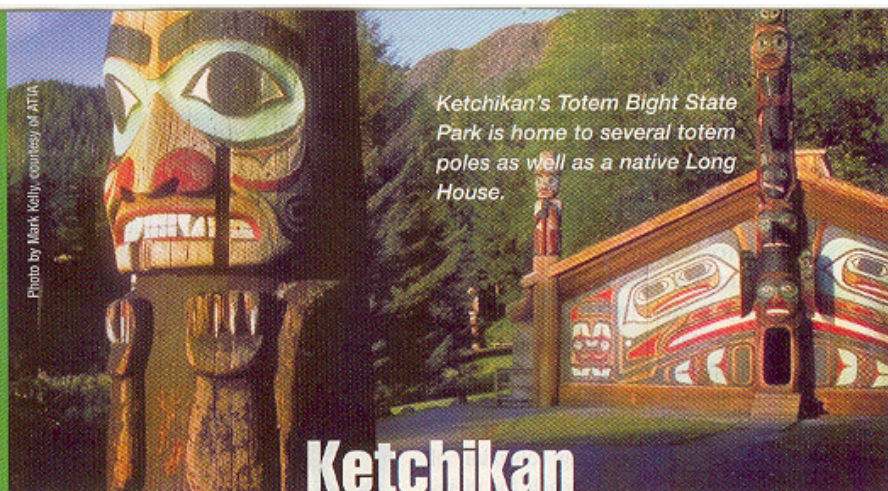


Photo by Mark Kelly, courtesy of ATIA

Ketchikan's Totem Bight State Park is home to several totem poles as well as a native Long House.

## Ketchikan

The roots of three native groups — the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian — run deep on this island. Ketchikan has one of the world's largest collections of totem poles. In a beautiful cove 10 miles north of downtown is Totem Bight State Park, where historic totems and a native community house can be seen. Totems also can be viewed at the Totem Heritage Center downtown, in Saxman Totem Park, and at the Southeast Alaska Discovery Center. At the Saxman Tribal house and at the Metlakatla Long House, skilled groups present traditional dances in regular performances.

Ketchikan also is known as the salmon capital of the world, for huge runs of five different species of Pacific salmon come swimming by each year. Fly fishing is said to be excellent, so be sure to keep a frying pan in your motorhome if you plan to enjoy a fresh catch. The town hosts salmon derbies in May and June.

A 2-mile walking tour winds past 25 points of interest, and includes a boardwalk known as Creek Street, a former red-light district. Today it is home to historic residences, shops, and museums. Also on the walking tour is the Deer Mountain Hatchery, which raises salmon for release into area streams. Next door to the hatchery is the Eagle Center, where you can see and photograph American bald eagles in a controlled area.

Tourism is the mainstay of this town of 14,500 residents, so it offers many places for the avid shopper. The main shopping area is right on the waterfront where all the big cruise ships dock. For more information about Ketchikan, phone (800) 770-3300, e-mail [info@visit-ketchikan.com](mailto:info@visit-ketchikan.com), or visit [www.visit-ketchikan.com](http://www.visit-ketchikan.com).



Photo courtesy of Alaska Division of Tourism

The Chief Shakes Tribal House is on Shakes Island near Wrangell.

## Wrangell

Although you won't find a McDonald's restaurant or any tall buildings in this town of 2,300 residents, you will discover people who are enjoying a slower pace of life than many of us can wish for. Perseverance and dedication are the cornerstones of this community. After a devastating fire to the downtown area in 1952 and the closing of the lumber mill, many thought the city would crumble, but the town remained strong.

Wrangell (pronounced RANG-gull) is the gateway to the Stikine River, a popular outdoor playground for both residents and visitors. The river's glacial water travels all the way from British Columbia into Wrangell. It's among the

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The Little Norway festival in Petersburg highlights the area's heritage.

fastest free-flowing navigable rivers in North America. The shallow part of this waterway is ideal for viewing sea lions, eagles, and salmon.

After spending time at the river, hop in your motorhome and head one mile north of town to Petroglyph Beach State Historic Site. An amazing collection of petroglyphs lies on the beach for viewing. The more than 40 images of animals and geometric forms are chipped into rocks of various sizes and date back 2,000 to 8,000 years.

Other important spots to visit are Tlingit Chief Shakes Island and Tribal House Historic Monument. Golfers will want to experience Muskeg Meadows, the only regulation USGA-rated golf course in southeast Alaska.

For more information about Wrangell, phone (907) 874-2381, e-mail [info@wrangell.com](mailto:info@wrangell.com), or visit [www.wrangell.com](http://www.wrangell.com).



Photo by Frank Flavin, courtesy of ATIA

## Petersburg

This city, nicknamed Alaska's Little Norway, is a ferry stop, but it's untouched by the large cruise ships. Peter Buschmann, a Norwegian, founded Petersburg and opened a cannery there in 1899. This cannery is still part of the modern processing plant that is used today. Fishing is the mainstay of this community, which is home to one of the top fishing fleets in the world.

Evidence of the Norwegian influence in this area is still present on Main Street, where rosemaling, a Norwegian decorative floral painting, can be seen on many of the buildings. Each May the residents celebrate

their Scandinavian heritage with the Little Norway Festival.

Visit Clausen Memorial Museum, which chronicles the town's history, and then stroll around the harbor area. For more information, phone (866) 484-4700, e-mail [chamber@petersburg.org](mailto:chamber@petersburg.org), or visit [www.petersburg.org](http://www.petersburg.org).

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Photo courtesy of Juneau CVB



The Mount Roberts Tramway provides a grand view of Juneau.

## Juneau

This capital city is unusual, because it can be reached only by water or air. The buzz of small floatplanes landing and taking off on the water is a constant reminder that no roads connect Juneau to its inland neighbors.

Magnificent Mount Roberts looms over the city, providing a breathtaking backdrop and protecting it from extremely cold air. The average temperature during winter in Juneau is 29 degrees, making it warmer than Chicago.

The culture of the Tlingits and other native tribes is alive and well at the Alaska State Museum in downtown Juneau. This two-story gray building, home to an impressive collection of artifacts, art, and history, brings to life the native cultures of Alaska.

The downtown area is at the base of the lush, green mountains, so most residences and other buildings have been constructed on steep hills. Behind the mountains of the city is the 5,000-square-mile Juneau ice field, home to the Mendenhall Glacier, Juneau's most popular attraction. This glacier, with its intense sky blue ice, can be visited on foot, from the air, or from the water.

A great way to view Juneau itself is from the Mount Roberts Tramway, which ascends 2,000 feet up the mountain, giving passengers an eagle's view of the city and a chance to see vegetation found only in a temperate rain forest.

For more information about Juneau, phone (800) 587-2201, e-mail [info@traveljuneau.com](mailto:info@traveljuneau.com), or visit [www.traveljuneau.com](http://www.traveljuneau.com).

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Photo by Mercedes Angerlin



The Sitka Pioneers' Home (large building in center), listed on the National Register, serves as a retirement care center.

## Sitka

Take a little Russian and Tlingit Indian heritage, stir in some modern culture, and you get Sitka. This small city of about 9,000 residents is located along the Gulf of Alaska overlooking Mount Edgecumbe, a dormant volcano.

Cultural diversity is one of Sitka's hallmarks. For more than 50 centuries the Tlingits have lived in this area. Sitka National Historic Park is home to many vividly carved totem poles that depict stories of the native group's history.

Sitka also served as the capital of a Russian colony from 1808 until 1867, when the United States bought Alaska. The Russian heritage is still visible today throughout the city. St. Michael's Cathedral, a Russian Orthodox church, has been holding services for 150 years.

Located on the ocean, Sitka boasts the highest saltwater sport fishing catch rate for king salmon in the state. Each Memorial Day weekend, when the salmon are plentiful, the city hosts the Sitka Salmon Derby.

For more information about Sitka, phone (907) 747-5940, e-mail [scvb@sitka.org](mailto:scvb@sitka.org), or visit [www.sitka.org](http://www.sitka.org).

Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



Bald eagles can be sighted all over Alaska, and especially near Haines.

## Haines

Haines is located at the northern end of America's longest fjord and borders 20 million acres of protected forest, making it the gateway to some of the best wilderness recreation. The town's 2,500 residents are very active, spending much of their free time fishing, kayaking, hiking, and biking.

Because only a limited number of cruise ships stop there, Haines has been able to maintain a small-town character. Tourist attractions are unusual, such as the museum that began because of one man's interest in hammers. The facility now has more than 1,000 different hammers, from the Colonial era through the Industrial Age to the present day.

Haines is home to the largest concentration of bald eagles in the world. From October through January, they feast on salmon during a late salmon run at the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve. The eagles can be seen in the summertime, too, albeit in smaller numbers. And where there is salmon, there are bears. From July to September you are almost guaranteed to see a bruin fishing for salmon in the river. Don't forget your binoculars.

For more information about Haines, call (800) 458-3579, e-mail [hcvb@haines.ak.us](mailto:hcvb@haines.ak.us), or visit [www.haines.ak.us](http://www.haines.ak.us).

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Gold-seekers on their way to the Klondike occupied the Arctic Brotherhood Hall in Skagway (building on right) more than 100 years ago. Its exterior is distinguished by thousands of pieces of driftwood.

## Skagway

During the height of the Alaskan gold rush, thousands of people came through Skagway on their way to strike it rich on the Chilkoot Trail and the White Pass Trail, which eventually became a railway. Skagway soon grew into a bustling city complete with stores, saloons, gambling houses, and dance houses.

Once the gold rush ended, it was the White Pass and Yukon Railroad, the first railroad in Alaska, that kept this city going. Today the train ride is the most popular attraction in Skagway, carrying approximately 350,000 passengers each year.

Tourism is the foundation of this quaint town. "The Days of '98 Show with Soapy Smith" is a melodrama showcasing the history of Skagway. Golden history also can be experienced on a free walking tour of the town, and at Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

For more information, contact Skagway's Convention & Visitors Bureau at (888) 762-1898, e-mail [infoskag@aptalaska.net](mailto:infoskag@aptalaska.net), or visit [www.skagway.org](http://www.skagway.org).

From both Skagway and Haines you can drive back through the interior, if you like, exploring Alaska by road as you return home. Of course, a southward (return) ferry trip is possible, too. However you arrange it, a trip to the Inside Passage is a memorable experience worth taking.

### Further Info

Alaska Marine Highway System  
6858 Glacier Highway  
Juneau, AK 99801-7909  
(800) 526-6731 • (800) 642-0066  
[www.akferry.com](http://www.akferry.com) • [www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs)  
Inside Passage Information Web site: [www.alaskainfo.org](http://www.alaskainfo.org) 