

# ALASKA

FOR FIRST TIME  
TRAVELER



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Inside Page

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Thank the Divine in making my dreams come true.  
Thank my parents (MNS Mani & Lakshmi Mani) for this life-  
time opportunity.

Key words: Alaska, Wilderness, Tourist

Disclaimer:

The book is about the travel experience of the author. All the  
photos are taken by the author, except where source  
references are given.

Other information is from city brochures, tour guide stories  
and public domain materials. And the endless tour guide(s)  
chatter, in a clever way!

Cover Page Picture

View from White Pass Train at Skagway

## Foreword

### **Why Alaska?**

"Alaska isn't about who you were when you headed this way.

It's about who you become."

— Kristin Hannah, 'The Great Alone,' 2017.

Like many people in other States of the United States, I had limited knowledge about Alaska. Yes, Sara Palin made is popular. As well as other Senators. I just thought as another state where people live and manage the strong winter. I was wrong!

Didn't know Fairbanks is also known as Aurora city, for the magical northern lights. Thought 24/7 daylight for 70+ straight days happen only in northern Europe.

Alaska in the US map looks large, but never cared to compare. It is twice the size of Texas, which I thought is the biggest state in size. It's 60 times Hawaii, given the multiple islands in Hawaii. Four times California and 118 times the size

of Connecticut. One of the guides said, there are more roads (lengthwise) in Connecticut than in Alaska

Denali national park and preserve is big with six million acres of pure no-man free land. But Gates of the Arctic Park is 8.4 million acres and Wrangell National Park is 13.2 million acres, is the largest national park in America. This park itself has four mountain ranges and nine out of sixteen highest peaks. Katikuk valley park is known for half a million Caribou animals. Someone said, in other States there are people and little wilderness. In Alaska, it is all wilderness and with some people. Certain cities like Skagway and Juneau does not have highway connection. Accessible only by boat/ship or by flight. You can see bush planes parked on the driveways on Fairbanks neighborhoods.

My high school textbooks showed Alaskans as 'Eskimo,' with a picture of dog sled. Never know dog sled is a sport, transportation mechanism for winter and emergency medicine delivery for Nome in previous century.



Given my work travel, thought there are only four time zones- pacific, mountain, central and east coast. There is Alaska standard time zone which is four hours behind Eastern time zone. Alaska makes daylight savings time, as of 2022.

In Alaska, you can still do mud filters to gather cold (if you are lucky that day), do fishing on small boats (pay \$15 daily fishing fee to the boat-in charge). And you have to pay more fees if you are above 250 pounds in weight! I assume they adjust passenger count if there are lot of heavy weighing people in that trip.

Alaska means patience. You can expect to see bears in the morning, sea lions' noon and salmon swimming upriver in the evening- just because you are on a short vacation. As many tour guides repeated it is not like what you see in movies. Whales in groups does not follow your boat. Bears in a family does not align the shore. Bald eagles do not circle above your head. You keep watching glaciers for hours. Suddenly there is a slide, and you hear the thunder of the ice hitting the ocean. Wow, you missed to take a picture at that moment!

The book is titled Alaska, but I went mostly to Southeast Alaska cities. Read more about the Alaska native culture. There is more thousands of years of history and culture in this land

Alaska as a whole warmed by 3 deg F (1.7 deg C) in the last 60 years. This is twice as fast as temperature rising in the lower 48 States. So, the landscape is changing fast with more trees. The original Permafrost, carbon locked layers of land with ice, is melting fast. The housing construction is different here to take care of the slide of the Permafrost.

In Alaska, you can take guided tours in an inflatable boat. There is a federal law that require a distance of 100 yards from marine mammals, although mammals can break the rules! For fishing, you need to buy a non-resident license for that day at \$15. To do King Salmon fishing extra \$15/day. Some excursions have physical weight and/or age restrictions.

Alaska has more volcanoes than Hawaii. 50 active volcanoes in the last 250 years. The volcanic ash from the bottom of the rivers produces the mud which is extremely dangerous for human to get into the water. If a visitor walks into the river and get struck in the volcanic mud airlifting is the only option. The county sends the big bill to the visitor later.

## Alaska

"Above us the sky took a blue so deep that none of us had ever gazed upon a midday sky like it before. It seemed like special news from God"- Hudson Stuck after reaching South Summit on 7 June 1913

Eskimo is not the word anymore. North of Alaska, close to Arctic, is the home to Inupiaq Inuit people. Most of the vast interior is home to Athabaskan people. Once nomadic but now live in small villages. The native population remain low, especially in winter. During summer, workers migrate to take tourism, hospitality, service industry jobs. You can see lot of students from other States taking up summer-time jobs. Secluded and away from parents!

The river cruise like the one in Fairbanks show cases Alaska native arts like caribou antler, moose hide and other artifacts. Athabaskans make baskets out of birch bark and also exquisite beadwork.

Northern part of Alaska is known for Inupiaq Eskimos. Weather is very harsh in winter so is to find food. The whalebones covered with sod keeps the house warm and danger out. Seal oil lamp is used for light, heat, and cooking. This culture believes in the reincarnation of humans and animals. The land includes whales, walrus, seal, polar bear, caribou and of course fish.

Southwest Alaska is known for Yupik Eskimos. In this culture, elders tell stories to the children and share about clan's history, customs, and survival techniques. It's the generational knowledge transferred instead of school textbooks. Marine mammals, fish, muskrat, and fox are popular animals.

South and Southwest Alaska is popular for Aleut and Alutiiq Eskimos. Russian culture influence is high here with Russian churches and usage of Russian words. Russian Orthodox church is dominant. Culture includes singing, dancing, and feasting during the winter. Local resources include seals, sea lions, halibut, cod, and birds.

The interior Alaska along the major river ways is for Athabascan Indians. This area includes south of Kenai Peninsula to north of Brooks Range. Prior to westernization, the people were nomadic people. This culture believes in sharing and respecting every living being. The tradition calls for elders to make all major decisions. Traditionally the husbands lived with their wife's family for the first year of the marriage. Children were considered part of the mother's clan. They use canoes made out of birch bark and cottonwood. Caribou and moose-hide were main component of clothing.

The southeast part of Alaska (like Ketchikan and Juneau cities) has culture similar to pacific northwest of America. The language and clan system differ. They marry across the clans. The language is Tlingit (spelled, KLIN kit). The language is getting extinct.

Here is the pronunciation for the words, real tongue twisters:

Aleut- AL ee ute

Alutiiq- Uh LOO tik

Athabaskan- Ath uh BAS ken

Haida- HIDE uh

Tlingit - KLIN kit

Inupiak- In OO pee ak

Tsimshian- SHIM she in

Yu'pik- YOU pik

The KLIN kit language is remarkably interesting one for these words.

g<sub>1</sub> altú a tóonáx<sub>2</sub> yoo x<sub>2</sub>'adul.átgi át

cell phone

“pocket thing through which someone talks”

datóow x'úx' (compound noun) book

“paper/ book to read”

Dakl'aweidí (clan name) Clan: Killer Whale (Eagle/Wolf  
Moiety)

"People of the Inland Sandbar;"

Gaawhíttaan (clan name) Clan: Brown Bear (Eagle/Wolf  
Moiety)

"People of the Drum House;"

(Source: [tlingitlanguage.com](http://tlingitlanguage.com))

Tlingit's four ancient values

Haa Ani (protecting and honoring the land). The Tlingit believe that everything has a spirit, including the animals and trees. In utilizing resources, the Tlingit acknowledge the Spirits of the Land, Sea, and Air

Haa Latseeni (strength of body, mind, and spirit). Young Tlingit men and women are taught to achieve physical and inner strength, to protect and care for their community, to seek truth and knowledge, and to adapt to changing times



while maintaining the integrity of ancient values

Haa Shuka (honoring ancestors and future generations). The Tlingit maintain strong bonds with their ancestors, whom they honor in their daily lives and in ceremonies. They also protect their land and culture for their children and grandchildren and those who will follow them.

Wooch Yax (maintaining social and spiritual balance and harmony). This value guides relationships with other and includes Kaa Yaa Awune (respect for others) and at yaa awune (respect for all things)

(Source: [traveljuneau.com](http://traveljuneau.com))

The native Alaskans lived in Alaska for thousands of years. Gold run brought Russians and they made hunting a passion for the animal fur. They started migrating to major cities later. The southeast was the first area of Alaska settled when it was acquired by United States from Russia in the Alaska Purchase in 1867. On March 30, 1867, US reached an agreement to purchase Alaska for a price of \$7.2 million.

Tourist guides say it is like 2 cents per an acre price. America saw potential for gold, fur, and fisheries. And easy trade with China and Japan. Politically, it was against England to establish US as a Pacific Power.

In 1912, Alaska becomes a US territory. Following year Alaska Legislature enacts its first law for voting rights for women. On 3 January 1959, Alaska becomes the 49th State. Alaska's population is 739000, like 1.2 people per square mile, compared to New York at 411 people per square mile. Juneau and Ketchikan are accessible only by boat or plane. There is no road access from another city. Another unique tidbit: Alaska is the only State with three different seas, Arctic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and Bering Sea. The coastline is 33000 miles long and Alaska has over half of the world's glaciers.

Alaska means Sled dogs. They are Alaskan huskies born to race or mushed. You have to see it in action when they are ready to mush when they are tied to the sled. They are best cared in sports. What they love most is to run! They receive the best food and medical attention. Watch the documentary film on Iditarod. The dogs get colorful dog booties for the

winter. Surely, there is a bond between human members and the dogs

There are eight distinct species of bear in the world. Alaska is the home for three. Black bear, brown or grizzly bear and Polar bear. Black bear is there in every States in United States except Hawaii. Black bears are the smallest of the three bears. Grizzly bear, known for long hairs and white tips, estimated at 30000 in Alaska. Their distinguishing mark is the hump over their shoulders. They grow up to eight feet and 1200 pounds in weight. Still, they are very agile and can run for 35 miles per hour. Living north of Arctic circle, Polar bear crosses the ice from Russia to Alaska, from Canada to Greenland and onto Norway's Svalbard archipelago. The males can to 10 feet tall and weigh 1500 pounds. They have water repellent outer fur and warm dense under fur.

Grizzly bears of Alaska grow up to 4 feet at shoulders, male weigh 800 pounds (300 kg), females 400 pounds (180 kg). Live for 30 years in varied terrains. Goes into deep caves in winter and stay without food for months. Young bears live with mother for three seasons and then they are kicked out.

Bears eat roots, grasses, berries, mouse, caribou, and salmon. Denali Park has 350 bears. Internet is full of stories and what-if if you meet a bear on the trail. Some say make noises, some say be ready to fight but don't run. Surely, it is not a time to think of a selfie!

Moose grows up to 7 feet at shoulders, males weigh 1600 pounds (630 kg), females 1100 pounds (500 kg). They live 20 years, around river bottoms and edges of the mountains. They feed on willows, bark, and saplings. Alaska has about 2100 of them

Caribou goes up to 4 feet at shoulders, males weigh 350 pounds. They live about 12 years and feed on willows, grass, and dwarf birch

Salmon goes from fresh river to sea. During season, they swim against the current to their original place of birth. They mate and the new fresh fish does the family ritual once again. Whales from Hawaii know this food chain already. They swim to Alaska side to catch the fresh fish food. Bears know this too. Once the winter clears, Bears climb down from the caves

to the river to catch the flying fish on the streams. They eat constantly to save the fat for the next winter season on the mountain with no food for many months.

Pacific saltwater salmon have five species: Kings (Chinooks), Cohos(silvers), Sockeyes (Reds), Chums (dogs), and pinks (humpies). The sports fishing calendar goes from May to September.

The story of Southeast Alaska's native people began more than 10000+ years ago. To promote the awareness of the culture, Sealaska heritage organization does museum exhibits and knowledge transfer. [www.sealaskaheritage.org](http://www.sealaskaheritage.org). The heritage square is located in downtown Juneau.

Volcanic Activity is a constant thing in Alaska, besides the 1964 earthquake. Since 1883, Mount Augustine, Mount Redoubt, Mount Veniaminof has reported many. The last one was in 2018. On 20th Nov Mount Veniaminof emitted ash that reached 13000 feet and covered more than 250 miles in South-East.

'Gold, Gold, Gold' headline of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on 17 July 1897. 68 men on a steamer arrived in Seattle with stacks of yellow metal. The crazy started. Tens of thousands of men and women steamed up to the Inside Passage and arrived in Dyea/Skagway. To trek to Klondike, six hundred miles of trails and waterways. About 3000 horses died due to the trail torture and the inexperience of the stampeder. Former construction engineer, George Brackett built a 12-mile toll road. The toll gates were ignored by the travelers!

After the yellow metal comes the Black Gold. Alaska is famous for the world-famous trans-Alaska pipeline. Constructed between 29 April 1974 to 20 June 1977, it runs for 800 mile long. It has 48 diameter pipe, route of Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. It took \$8 billion in those years. It crosses the Tanana River on a cable suspension bridge. The bridge itself 1200 feet long and rises above 360 feet above the river. With 380 miles of buried pipelines, over 16 billion barrels of oil have moved through since 1977. Today, Alaska supplies 17% of the domestically produced crude oil (or) about 10% of the total consumption of the United States.

Trans Alaska pipeline is the third pipeline construction in Alaska. First one, in 1944, was 3-inch diameter pipe. It sent oil to Whitehorse, Yukon refinery and then to Skagway. After one million barrels sent, the pipeline ceased its operations in 1945. The second line was eight-inch diameter pipes, built in 1954 to transport petroleum products from Port of Haines to military installations in Alaska. The 626 mile long was operational till 1978, carried 24000 barrels per day. The line is still in place, but nothing is flowing!

Next to the pipeline is the aviation story! Alaska has only one mile of paved road for every 44 square miles of land. So, air travel is crucial for traveling and transportation. Alaska has six times as many pilots and sixteen times as many aircrafts per capital than the rest of the United States. Float planes and Sea planes are popular. There are more than 120 sea plane bases in the State. Anchorage's Lake Hood seaplane base is the world's largest and busiest seaplane base with an average of 110 daily takeoffs and landings. This goes to 600 on a peak summer day. They can't rely only on technology since there are areas with no radar coverage and mountain terrains.

Fireweed is the official flower of the Yukon region. It is a part of Evening Primrose family. Fireweed gets its name due to its ability to return quickly after a fire since its deep roots escape fire damage. Lupine is another flower, most poisonous if eaten. Lupine comes from Latin word Lupus meaning wolf. Another flower is 'forget-me-not,' obviously there should be a story behind it. This is the state flower of Alaska. In medieval time, a Knight was said to be picking this flower for his love, when he fell into the river. He threw the flowers into the river crying 'forget-me-not'!

Trees. There 32 species of Alaska's native trees. White spruce is popular at 64%, Birch at 21% and Poplars at 15%. Sitka Spruce is the official state tree of Alaska. Natural fires are an important part of life for the forest. Not the California type reveal the gender forest fire! Much of the Alaska forest gets burned once in 200 years. So, you can see trees older than 170 years. Usually, a region will burn every 50 years. As the spruce and birch trees grow, a thick mass of moss can build up. Acting as a natural insulation, the moss eventually causes the development of permafrost which prevents trees from



growing in that area. When fires occur, they burn away the moss and all a new growth of forest. So natural fires are welcome here.

Incidentally, the same moss the Native Alaskans use to insulate their homes. They burn the moss as effective mosquito repellent too!

There are four types of fires: Ground surface, which burn within the root system. Surface fire burn within the low-lying grass area and shrubs. Spread very quickly yet quickly controlled. Crown fires are very unpredictable, and they are burning at the tops or canopies of the trees. Spotting fires are fire ahead of the main fire. This comes from wind and landscape conditions. 2004 fire season resulted in 6.4 million acres burned in Alaska and 4 million in Yukon. This is about 80% of the total Us fires during that year. Lightening starts around 400 fires in a year. On 15 July 2004 there was a state record of 9000 strikes within 24-hour period!

## Inside Passage

"This place, the land is more ancient and purer; it's like a concentrated tonic for the soul. If you take too much it can infect you, and if you don't take enough, you have missed it completely and your efforts were in vain."

— Danielle Rohr 'Denali Skies,' 2013.

During summer, this is the popular route for the cruise ships. This is the entry point to Southeast Alaska with its beautiful scenery and mild climate. Whale watching is popular if you have balcony in your room. Or go to public view spots in the cruise to watch the whales. Some do Kayaking and canoeing (not part of the cruise). It runs through channels and fjords which are formed by the submerged mountains. These mountains are in the 1100 islands of the Alexander Archipelago.

Native American and Russian influences can be seen in the small coastal towns along the inside passage. The onion-domed, icon-laden churches are from Russians who once

settled in the land. The Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people have lived in Southeast Alaska for over 10000 years. Yes, ten thousand years. Their history can be seen in the carved and towering Totem poles. The Alaska Marine Highway connects Southeast Alaska with the rest of the Alaska and to the continental United States. Cities like Juneau, Ketchikan are accessible only by air or water (boat, cruise). There are no highway roads to those cities.



Inside Passage Scenic View

## Visitor Center

### Skagway Visitor Center

Made from 8000 pieces of driftwood.



## Ketchikan

'When I was 23, I climbed this mountain in Alaska called Devil's Thumb alone. It was incredibly dangerous, and I did it because I thought that if I did something that hard and pulled it off, my life was gonna be transformed. And of course, nothing happened. But I get the search for purpose.'

**[Jon Krakauer](#)**

Ketchikan is on the shores of Tongass Narrows. Tongass national forest at 17 million acres is the largest in US. You can travel 500 miles from Ketchikan to Yajutat and you are still within the forest range. Pretty mountain view and cheerful air greets every visitor. Main attractions are- Tongass Museum, Saxman Village, Bright State Park, Creek Street. Water receding has left huge granite cliffs like few thousands of feet above the sea level. That results in lot of waterfalls.

Ketchikan has population of 8300. Known for the largest collection of standing native American totem poles in the world. Totem poles relate Alaska Native mythologies and

family lineages. Some are carved as tributes to historically important native people. You can see the carvers in action in the shops.

### Gold Rush

This is not California Gold Rush. In 1902, Italian immigrant Flex Pedro found gold in Fairbanks. Captain Barnette built a trading post on the banks of River Chena. The gold rush began. There are many tours that offer gold panning.

Misty Fjords National monument is a deep mountain valley and ocean inlets carved by glaciers thousands of years ago. Full of recreational opportunities and wildlife habitats. Fjord is a Norwegian word for a long, narrow, deep inlet of the sea between high cliffs, typically formed by submergence of a glaciated valley. Many tourists make this as their favorite destination. The typical large Cruise ships does not stop here. They are US forest service cabins for visitors, flight-seeing tours, and river boat cruises





Ketchikan Port. Ship docked and tour bus ready



Ketchikan downtown. You can see the ship on the center.





Numerous waterfalls captured from the river boat ride



Scenic Beauty





Scenic Beauty



Forest land with just trees and water



Another mountain views.

Hard part is to select the pictures for the book







Ketchikan airport runway just close to the port and the sea

## Juneau

"The war between water and land is never-ending."

— Corey Ford.

Juneau is located at the foot of mountains along Gastineau Channel. This place is known from massive Mendenhall Glacier and Juneau ice fields. Visitors enjoy kayaking, rafting, whale watching, etc. Long daylight hours make people spend more time outdoors. Mt Roberts is a wonderful place to hike.

Juneau is the capital of Alaska, with 32000 population. (Sitka was the capital until 1912). Juneau became capital in 1906, 53 years before Alaska becoming a State. Known for 1500 square mile Juneau ice field, 5th largest in the world. Mendenhall Glacier sprawls for 13 miles before falling down on the Mendenhall Lake. Juneau proud itself by having more churches than bars. Russian orthodox church in downtown and Chapel by Lake on Auke Lake with stained glass window are popular ones. Auke lake is known for boating trip to view whales, sea lions, etc. Auke Lake is 12 miles away from

Juneau. Mendenhall Glacier is 13 miles from downtown Juneau.

Juneau covers 3255 square miles, of which 928 square miles are ice, 704 square miles are water. Urban area covers just 14 square miles. Juneau residents called themselves 'Juneauites' and don't use umbrellas. Juneau is the home to 280 species of birds (best destination for bird watching), brown and black bears, five species of salmon and humpback whales.











Whale at a distance



Whale filliping at a distance. They are not going to come to the boat and by the type of boat goes to that place, it's gone!

## Glaciers



Ready to fall anytime Glaciers.

There are smaller boats that can go closer to the mountains

## Skagway

Skagway population is just 1240 per 2020 census. It goes up to 2500 in July with the influx of summer workers. Skagway school has an enrollment of 130 students in grades K-12. What is special about Skagway? In 2019 the city welcomed 1.1 million cruise ship passengers. The visitor information center is a unique building. It was built in 1899 and covered in thousands of pieces of driftwood. (See picture in this section). The exterior of the hall underwent a restoration project in 2005. This is a prime example of the Victorian Rustic Architecture. During the renovation, all the 8883 pieces of driftwood were removed. 40% of them, 3533 pieces has rotted and were replaced. 5300 pieces were still able to be preserved and re-attached. This is more than 100 years after the original construction.

8 miles from Skagway is the old boomtown of Dyea (pronounced Di-eee). In 1898 it had a population of 10000 which got reduced to 250 later after Chilkoot Trail Avalanche in April 1898 that killed 60 gold stampedeers. And the new

WP&YR train took away the construction work from this city.

The current population is about 6 people

A steamboat captain Billy Moore built a dock and a trading post in Skagway, anticipating the gold rush. That was in 1898. At one time it had a population of 20000, gold seekers.

Skagway is a beautiful small town 820 miles (1318 km) away from Anchorage, 1762 miles (2835 km) from Seattle and 704 miles (1133 km) from Fairbanks. Juneau is the primary domestic air entry point for Southeast Alaska and travelers on the inside passage. There is a 45 min commuter flight to Skagway.

## FROG AND DREAM STORY ON THE GOLD DISCOVERY

An old Tlingit story

Two Tlingit Indians were hunting one day and came across a pool of water. They decided to take rest by the pool. The pool had wet clay steep sides. One person watched something different on the pool. A frog was trying to climb out of the pool to get into the river. After several attempts the frog got

tired. The man decided to help. He grabbed the frog in his hand and took it to the stream of water nearby. He helped to wash off the clay on the frog. He talked to the frog briefly about his life like some people talk to the trees. That night in his dream, the frog showed up and said, 'You saved my life and now I want to repay you.' He was standing in the middle of the water next to a mountain and the frog told him to keep walking. Next day, both of them started walking. They reached the mountain that recognized that was the one in the dream. They discovered Gold nearby that became the popular 'Klondike Gold rush.'

Skagway is home for the famous White Pass and Yukon Railroad. Known as the scenic railway of the world, is the most popular visitor attraction. Seeing wildlife is a possibility, though not a guarantee! The habitants are bears, beavers, porcupines, moose, and caribou.

On 3rd Aug 1898, a 100-ton granite slab buried two rail-road workers. More than 30 men were killed during the construction of the rail.

The train has some interesting stories. The train starts right from the cruise ship dock, passes through the Skagway city and the train maintenance depot. Crosses the Pullen House grounds where President Warren G Harding gave a brief speech in 1923. Train goes through gold rush cemetery, where gold stampeders are laid to rest. At 7 miles you can view the Mt Harding and Harding Glacier. At 9 miles comes the Pitchfork falls. At 11 miles comes Bridal Veil Falls. At 18 miles comes 1901 steel bridge, considered the tallest steel cantilever in the world. At 20 miles, the train crosses international boundary and get into Canada. No one can board or step-down from the train during the entire travel. At mile 36 comes Beaver Lake and at mile 40 Bennett church on the hill above the lake.

If maintaining your car in winter is a challenge, think of the railroad! There is a vast maintenance area with building dedicated to car shop, locomotive shop, electrical, machine, paint, and gas shops. They employ 45 people in summer working 24/7 to maintain the tracks. There are two colorful vintage steam locomotives, 20 diesel engines from various years, 92 passenger cars.

It is the historical heritage of the railroad that is impressive.

- Of the two steam engines on the show case, 69 was built in 1908 and worked for 48 years. Engine 73 was fully restored in 1947 and gain in 2018.
- The diesel engines date back to 1950s
- The oldest rail car was built in 1883, known as Lake Emerald
- lake Tutshi car starred in 1935 Universal studio picture, 'Diamond Jim Brady'
- Lake Lebarge car carried Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip on a royal tour in 1959

**'Give me enough dynamite, and snoose, and I'll build you a railroad to hell' - Mike Heney, Railroad Builder**

'Gold, Gold, Gold' headline of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on 17 July 1897. 68 men on a steamer arrived in Seattle with stacks of yellow metal. The crazy started. Tens of thousands of people steamed up to the Inside Passage and arrived in Dyea/Skagway. To trek to Klondike, six hundred miles of trails and waterways. About 3000 horses dies due to the trail

torture and the inexperience of the stampedeers. Former construction engineer, George Brackett built a 12-mile toll road. The toll gates were ignored by the travelers!

Michael J Heney helped many railroads in Canada, Washington, and Alaska but White Pass got him fame and recognition. At 14, he ran away from home to work on a Canadian railroad. He learned to lay rail, measure grades, blast cliffs, build tunnels, estimate costs, and run crews. In 1898 the White Pass & Yukon railroad work started.

The White Pass narrow gauge railroad climbs from sea level in Skagway to 3000 feet elevation at the Summit in just 20 miles. The steep grades are like 4%. To lower construction costs, the roadbed is just 10 feet wide, and the rails are three feet apart (narrow gauge). This \$10 million project used 450 tons of explosives, building two tunnels and numerous bridges and trestles. 35000 men worked on the construction of the railroad. By 20 Feb 1899 workers have reached White Pass summit and 6 July 1899 they reached Lake Bennett.

For decades since 1954 the railroad carried ore to Skagway.



In 1982 the metal prices plummeted, and mines were closed. 1988, the railroad reinvented as tourist attraction. White pass summit is at 2888 feet elevation (880 meters). The train circles back to Skagway for one of the tours. The railroad goes to Fraser at 28 miles (British Columbia, Canada), at 40 miles to Bennett, British Columbia. At 68 miles is Carcross, Yukon Territory, 110 mile is Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

Don't miss the tram tour to the mountain top. There are galleries, shops, and theater on the mountain top. You can take short trails too. Return trip may require waiting time, so be aware of the ship departure time!



Skagway Port map. Four big ships can be docked same time



City view from the ship



Ship to Ship view





Long view with tram cars going to the top.



People lining for the crab food.

Need a change from the ship menu





Proud Display and marketing the food!



Tram tour





View from the top, look at the cruise ship on the background



Mountain to Mountain view



Finally, some snow to play around. This is at the top of the mountain on the tram tour.





The rail cars of the white pass train



Interior View





Multi-car view



Mountain view



And this close to the snow. You can't get down of the train.

## Glacier Bay

'The sheet of ice as far as the eye could distinguish'- Captain George Vancouver in 1794

Long term accumulation of ice once gets compact starts to flow down out of the mountain as a glacier. One sixth of the Denali's six million acres are covered by Glaciers. The largest Glacier is 44-mile Kahitna.

The Glacier Bay is under Glacier Bay National Park. National Park Service was created by Congress in 1916. There are more than 400 park sites in the United States covering 84 million acres. About 300 million visitors enjoy the parts each other. This is total countrywide data.

Glacier bay itself is 3.3 million acres of forest, mountain peaks over 15000 feet and lot of namesake glaciers. People in the cruise just wait for the thunderous crack of the calving tidewater glacier. The tide goes up and down steeply within few hours. The tide water glaciers are great rivers of ice that

flow to the sea and calve large chunks of ice into the ocean. Untamed animals like brown bear, moose, mountain goat can be seen on the shores. Sea mammals like otters, seals and humpback whales show up on the river surface. The park service limit only two cruise ships in a day into Glacier Bay. Glacier Bay national park is the highlight of Alaska's inside passage and part of a 25-million-acre world heritage site- one of the world's largest international protected areas.

The glacier bay is carved out by a glacier and filled with saltwater as the glacier retreated. This created a fjord. The bay is over 1000 feet (300 meters) deep. The glaciers move like five feet a day. Calving happens few times in an hour. When the light hits the highly compacted glacier ice, long wavelength color like red is absorbed, while short wavelength colors like blue reflect back through the ice to your eyes- this gives the ice a blue color look. The bay does not freeze in winter. The wind and tidal fluctuation keep the bay from freezing over. (Source: national park service. [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov))

Turnagain Arm, a fjord with the Cook inlet, is host to one of the world's largest bore rides. This rush of seawater can climb



upwards of 10 feet and reach speeds of 15 miles per hour. Mudflats, also located within the Cook inlet, are another unique geological feature in Alaska. These mudflats are formed as the silt and mud are deposited with the incoming tides. Similar to quicksand, one can get easily stuck in this extremely fine clay. The name Turnagain came from boats turning back repeatedly due to mudflats. Another interesting name for the city Nome. In the paperwork sent to the Government, the officials forgot to fill the city name but wrote 'name.' Someone misreads the letter a too, city became Nome.



Single Mountain View



Look from 11th floor of the ship



Long view



You spend the entire day watching the mountains and snow

## Anchorage

"In the last two years, there has been an increase in people vying for an impressive selfie with animals ranging from seal pups to bison, to black bears," Adam Roberts, CEO of Born Free USA

Anchorage is known for its Dog race. Dog mushing is a famous Iditarod trail sled dog race starts on the first Saturday in March. This is a 1000-mile journey to Nome city. Multiple teams participate but there is more camaraderie (mutual trust and friendship among people who spend a lot of time together) than any other sports. The dogs can run for 100 miles a day. They are taking care with medical help and nutrition. There is a documentary on Iditarod one should watch. There are lot of media stories about Susan Butcher, four-time winner of race

During the winter of 1924-25, Nome Alaska was hit with an epidemic of Diphtheria. There was only expired diphtheria



serum available in town, winter air travel was untested. The weather was minus ten-degree Fahrenheit. It was decided to have a relay run of dog sled teams to deliver serum from Anchorage to Nome. First step was the train from Anchorage to Nenana. Then the dog sled took over. A world record was created with 11 dog mushers covered 674 miles in 127.5 hours. This is known as '1925 Serum run to Nome'. Every musher got a gold medal from President Calvin Coolidge.

Lot of amazing stories about local hero Susan Butcher. She won four times the 1100-mile Iditarod race in 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1990. Her husband won 1000-mile Yukon Quest in 1988. Susan also led the climbing party with dog team when she mushed the top of 20320-foot Mt McKinley. Their two daughters now manage the race.

Anchorage in 1900 square miles is the northern metropolitan city larger than the entire State of Rhode Island. Points of interests include Cook inlet, Turnagain Arm, Portage Glacier, Chugach mountains and Earthquake Park.

The mudflats are from silt and mud from the rivers and get

deposited from incoming rides. This is an extremely fine clay and found throughout the city. The clay collapsed triggering massive landslides during Good Friday's earthquake of 1964 which reached 9.2 scale. It was at 5:36 pm on 27 March 1964, the quake shook the State for nearly five minutes and changed the landscape. Land raised by 30 feet near Kodiak and dropped eight feet in Portage. 350 acres of Homer Spit got submerged in high tide forever. The main Tsunami began near Valdez and reached 220 feet height. 15 people from earthquake and 116 people from the tsunamis lost their life.

## McKinley Explorer

'Whenever I leave home to film, my wife Marina gets terrified that I'm going to come back having bought a tiny plot of land in rural Alaska.'

### **Ben Fogle**

You would have taken various rail-road travel. But this one is unique.

Since most of the Alaska's landscape is inaccessible by car, this is the best way to rail through the Alaska's wilderness. Non-smoking, cashless travel comes with dining rooms, restrooms, viewing options and retail shops. These custom domed rail cars are built by Colorado Rail car company and operated by Holland America Line. Since 40% of the United States' surface water is located in Alaska, the rail cars are named after the rivers.

Chulitna river (River of big leaf trees, the river is popular for fishing and river rafting), Susitna River (15th largest river in United States and long 313 miles), Knik River (25-mile-long

river from the source of Knik Glacier), Eklutna River (22-mile-long river originates from Eklutna Glacier), Kenai River (82-mile-long glacier fed river, famous for salmon fishing. Largest salmon caught at 97 pounds), Kobuk River (110 mile long from Endicott mountains, major transportation route), Chena River (100 mile long cutting through Fairbanks city, tributary to Tanana River), Nenana River (150 mile long starts from Nenana Glacier and joins Tanana River in Nenana.), Kashwitna River (60 mile tributary to Susitna river), Teklanika River (91 mile tributary of Nenana river, popularly mentioned in the book 'into the wild')



Train ready to board



Train passage





Interior view 1



Interior view 2



Denali Mountain View



## Denali

"Alone in an unknown wilderness" - Conservationist Charles Sheldon in 1908

Denali Park and preserve celebrated its 100th birthday in Feb 2017. Unlike other parts in lower 48 States, there are no human development or invasion of non-native plants and species. Pristine is the right word for the land and water space. Park Rangers does a phenomenal job. There are over half a million people visit the park every year for the beauty and for adventure. The land does not show any trace that so many people visit every year!

Short History: In 1897, Harry Karstens came to north Alaska as a 19-year-old gold stamper. He was dog mushing postal worker carrying mail in minus-forty temperature chilly winter. He also served as a guide to Charles Sheldon, the young hunter and conservationist who campaigned for the creation of this park. In 1913 he co-led the first successful summit attempt on Denali Mountain. He was the first superintendent of the park in 1921good

Denali is the North America's highest peak at 20310 feet (or 6190 meters). The height seems to go up or down since this is a live mountain. There is famous shop with name like 310 indicating the highest height achieved. Denali means the Great One or High one, true to its name. On the railroad journey from Anchorage, you can see the Denali extremely far on sunny day. The Alaska range itself is amazing going miles and miles in the rail or road journey.

Denali mountain has many names, with 47 different ones. The word 'Denali' is derived from Koyukon, one of the 11 Athabascan languages traditionally spoken in Alaska. In Koyukon language it is called 'Deenaalee,' translate to 'the tall one' or 'the high one.' Five other Athabascan languages have similar names. In Dena'ina and Ahtna languages, the name translates to 'Big Mountain.' Other names include North Peak, Denmore's mountain and the Russian big mountain as 'Bolshaya Gora.' In 1896, gold prospector William Dickey named the soaring peak as Mount McKinley, for Presidential nominee Ohio's William McKinley. A year later McKinley became President and in 1917 US officially named the

mountain as Mount McKinley. In 1975, the Alaska Board of Geographic Names changed the name back to Denali. Forty years later, Obama announced on 30 Aug 2015 the naming restoration to Denali.

Denali is also known as the coldest mountain in the world. Recorded temperature minus 60 deg F (-51 deg C) with wind gusts of 100 miles (160 km) per hour, wind may chill it down to -100 deg F (-73 deg C). Only one day in three days is storm-free. Denali resides just 200 miles below the Arctic circle.

Denali is one of the hardest climbs and each camp along the route provides new challenges. Kahiltna Base is at 7200 feet level. Climbers are flown on the northeast fork by bush plane. Ski Hill Camp is at 7800 feet, a five and half mile journey - this is the first camp above base. 11000-foot camp, located at 11000 feet known for its winds. Many teams will often stop before this level. Fourteen Medical, 14000 feet level staging area for upper mountains. Area for acclimatization. 16200-foot camp, 16200 feet level, climbers need to create tent platforms to have a flat area. High Camp at 17200 feet the

coldest. Climbers need to create snow caves for protection from the weather. Summit at 20310 feet is the top of North America. They spend a short amount of time there since they need to travel 2.5 miles down same day to reach their tents at High Camp.

In 1913 there were four climbers. Today over 1000 climbers attempt to reach Denali's summit. They take an average of 16.8 days. On 7 June 1913, after three-month expedition the team of four were the first to reach Denali's Summit. Hudson Stuck, an amateur mountaineer from England, Harry Karstens, expedition's co leader, Walter Harper, an Athabaskan, Robert Tatum, a theology student.

In 1947, Barbara Washburn becomes the first woman to summit Denali. In 2001, the youngest person to reach the summit- Galen Johnston at 11 years. In 2013, had the oldest person to reach the summit- Tom Choate at 78 years. In 2005, 1340 climbers attempt Denali, 775 reach the summit. In 2012, 20000th climber reaches the summit. The busiest climbing month is June due to the amount of daylight.

Denali national park and preserve itself covers like six million acres of pure wilderness. You can drive from Anchorage or Fairbanks to Denali national park. There are lodges with sightseeing tours and adventure travel. The only road into Denali is 92 miles long. Within the reserve, you can use your own vehicle till mile 14. You need to use tour bus to go deeper on the gravel road. A part of the road is now closed at 40 mile due to bridge damage. But you can see people doing trekking or rock climbing in small groups or families. Each September there is a 'road lottery' which grants access to a limited number of private vehicles.

A day-time bus tour will help you to spot moose, caribou, Dall sheep, grizzly bears, wolves, etc.

Moose are quite common. They are massive and hulky. You just wait if they are crossing the road! Mosquitoes breed in their nose and make the animal extremely uncomfortable. Caribou travel in large herds during springtime. There is a tour on river boat where you can see domesticated caribou (known as reindeer) for your pictures. They pose in groups on the riverbanks. When you in the land, they come closer to the fenced yard.

Bears and Salmon go together. Bears do summer fishing along streams filled with salmons going upriver. Late summer, the berries on the land feed their hunger. Black bear population is high in Alaska, but this animal is shy for visitors. People say you can seem more in Lake Tahoe California rather than in Alaska. People carry bear spray if there hiking deep interior places. Red fox is common in Fairbanks area. You can see them crossing roads. The arctic fox is white in winter and brown in summer.

There are various park system designations. National Park is large natural place having variety of attributes or significant historic assets. National Preserve is a park where public hunting, trapping and/or oil/gas exploration happens. National monument are landmarks or structures of historic or scientific interest on lands owned or controlled by the Government. National Historic Site pertains to a single historic feature. National Historical Park if there are more properties and buildings involved. National Memorial commemorates a historic person or episode. National wild and scenic river, rivers with natural, cultural, and recreational values.



McKinley Resort



Denali National Park





Cabins

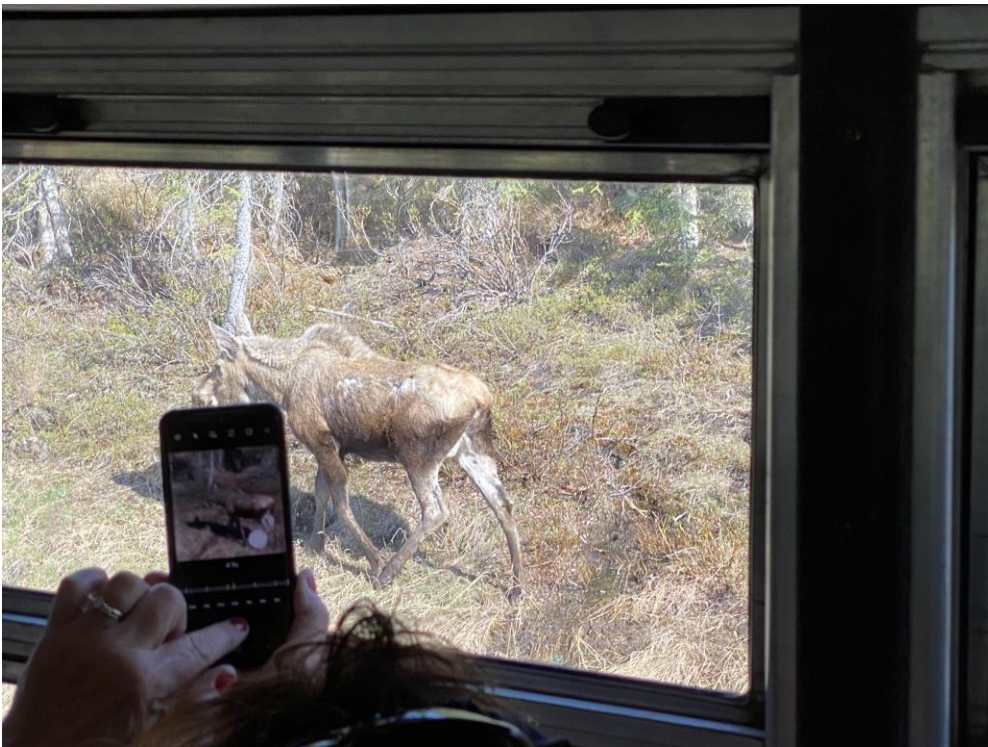


Tundra Bus tour





Caribou spotting



Moose





Ziplines



Proof that I did this too!

## Day at Work



Tyler carving ice martini glass at work. 25 deg F temperature  
(Fairbanks Ice Museum and Hot Springs)

## Fairbanks

"Kids in Alaska don't know they're growing up on the Last Frontier. It's just what they see on the license plates, and it's something tourists like to say a lot because they've never been around so many mountains and moose before."

— Tom Bodett.

Vibrant river city in Alaska, part of the last leg of the land tour. The city is nicely tucked between two massive mountain ranges. The Chena River is really winding all over the places so I would say there are more river bridges than any city in USA. During Aurora season (Aug onwards) for nine months, the magical northern lights dance across the sky. People drive far to see the lights not to get distracted by city streetlights. In Winter, Chena River freezes over giving snow blankets on the ground and lighted snowflakes on lamp posts. The steam from deep underground comes out to face the freezing water on the Chena Hot springs spot.

The summer sun shines all 24 hours a day during the



Midnight Sun season from 22 April to 20 August. While the tour operator put standard guidelines to wear warm layers, the days in May were like 70 deg F. So, you can see fresh gardening all over the places, people golfing, running, or just walking the dogs.

Aurora season of 21 August to 21 April, visitors pour from all over the world. Fairbanks considered ideal location for northern lights since it is directly under the Aurora oval- ring shaped zone over the far north. Plus, no rains, clear nights and less light pollution means dark skies and good views. People rent out heated cabins in the forest. Their daytime work includes ice fishing and snow mobiling. They can also do dog sled adventure or take a flight above arctic circle. It is one of the cities, where you can ask hotel front desk to give wake-up call when northern lights are out! Like looking for bears in Alaska, they say longer you are there, the better your chances of seeing a great show on Earth.

Arctic circle and Yukon River are like four- or five-hour drive. People take aerial tour as well. There is a long highway from Seattle that goes through Canada and come back in

Fairbanks.

If you are not into watching glacier far away but want to be in the glacier cave, there is Castner Glacier. It takes 3-hour drive from Fairbanks and hiking for 3 miles (round trip) to access that glacier cave. May be, not the ideal choice for the first-time traveler!

If we talked about midnight sun season and Aurora Season, what else is left? The guaranteed winter season starts like late October and goes up to March. October gets 10.8-inch snowfall with weather like 32 deg F (or zero deg C). November/December/January gets about 12 inches of snow with temperature like 3 deg F (minus 16 deg C). In 2021 winter, Fairbanks reported minus 40 deg Celsius wind conditions.

The Chena River gives life to the city. The city itself known as 'river city.' The 100-mile chena river runs across the town and winds up on the suburbs in every turn. There is a two-mile river walk along the Chena River.

Chena Hot springs resort has 80 lodge rooms, like an hour drive from town. It has ice museum which is kept at 25 deg F (-3 deg C) all year around. You can sip martini in an ice glass and smash it on the ground. There is a hot springs lake besides pool and hot tubs.

If you have seen gravel road in Denali, then there are amazing roads in Fairbanks. Arctic Circle is just 190 miles from Fairbanks and lot tourists drive up from Anchorage in winter. The parks highway links Fairbanks to Anchorage, 360 miles for 7-hour drive and goes through Denali national forest. The Alaska highway serves Alaska's main road artery to the lower 48 states. The famous Dalton highway is 496 miles route that follows trans-Alaska pipeline

If you are not active outdoor person but wanted to know more about Alaska, then Riverboat discovery is an excellent choice. The three-hour river cruise starts with good lunch. It's a nice packaged and staged event. You will a plane taking off on the river close to you and land back. Champion sled dogs show their skills, managed by the daughter of Susan Butcher. Big houses line up on the river shores, with small river planes

on the driveway. Long-size windows to capture lot of sun rays in summer. Name boards on outside the house to tell you who is the owner! The cruise goes up to wedding of the rivers, meetup of Chena and Tanana rivers. You can take your time to get to know Athabascan Indian culture and there is personalized tour of the Chena Indian Village. Caribou (domesticated) shows up on the river side and follow you on the land tour. The cruise boat has the passenger capacity of 900 and gives you a relaxed environment. The Binkley family generation has been doing this for last 120 years!

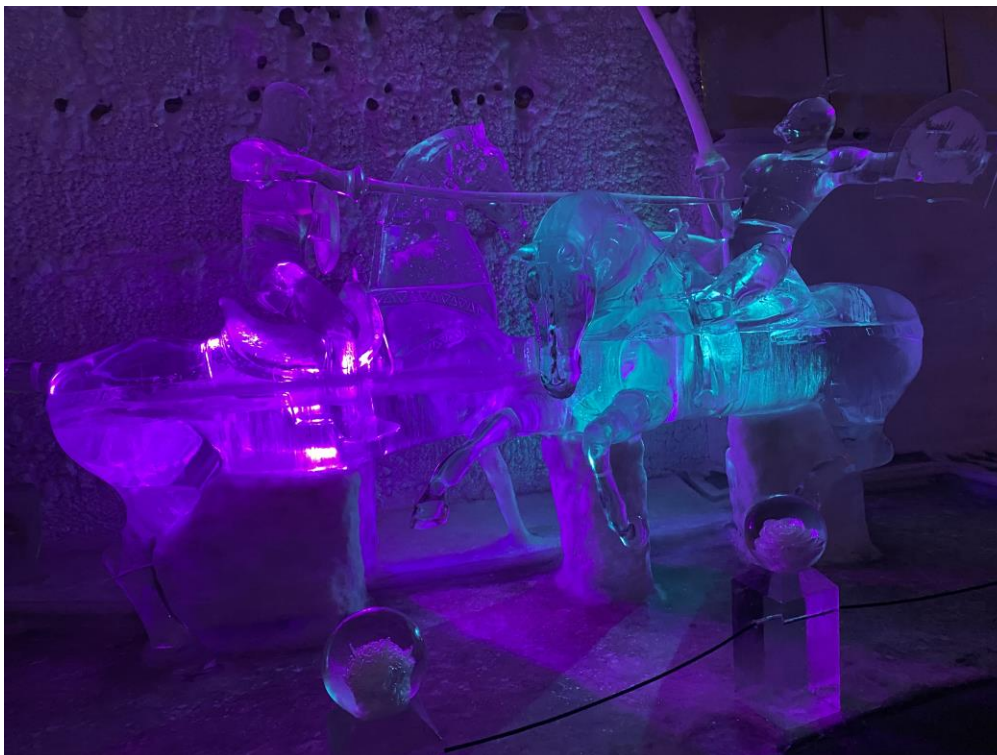
Aurora Borealis- Night lights in the Sky. Alaska's Fairbanks is popular destinations since it's closer to Arctic circle. It is interesting to note that people saw that as omen of war or famine long time back. North America thought it is just a reflection of fire from torches and campfires. The Alaska Natives believed the lights were the spirits of the animals they hunted. Aboriginal people believed that the lights were the spirits of their people. The whistling and crackling sound were thought of as voices of spirits trying to talk to the people of the earth.

What is in the name? Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. In 1621, French Philosopher Pierre Gassendi named the lights after the Roman Goddess of dawn, Aurora, and the Greek word for the north wind- Boreal.

The energy source is 93 million miles from Earth. The electrically charged particles race through space towards Earth, entering the upper atmosphere along the magnetic field. When the particles collide with atoms and molecules of oxygen, nitrogen, and other elements in the upper atmosphere it causes them to glow. The color of the light depends on which atmospheric gases interact with these particles. Green-yellow colors come from oxygen gases about 60 miles above Earth. High altitude oxygen at 200 miles above Earth is responsible for red colors. Nitrogen will produce blue and purple-red lights. Active displays occur near midnight and aurora is visible only when it is dark. In winter, the weather is clear in Polar regions and there are extended hours of darkness.

The author's tour was in May/June so there is no Aurora viewing. There will be a picture from the public domain to make this interesting read.





Ice Museum showcase1





River Plane



River Plane parked in a house's driveway





Dog Sled preparations



Salmon Fish collecting system





Caribou (domesticated ones)

## The Cruise

### THE CRUISE

"John Muir, the famous naturalist, wrote in his journal that you should never go to Alaska as a young man because you'll never be satisfied with any other place as long as you live. And there's a lot of truth to that."

— Tom Bodett

Nieuw Amsterdam from Holland America Line.

The ship is 936 feet length and 105.8 feet width. It can accommodate 2106 guests

Lincoln center stage for shows, BB King Blues club, Gym, Spa, Pools, Hot-spas, formal dining room, Lido market for casual eating, specialty dining halls, etc. Plus, there is walking lanes, basketball court out on the top deck. Bars at every place in case you missed them that day!

This sea/land cruise started at Vancouver, Canada. The next day at Sea. Third day at Ketchikan, Alaska. Fourth day at Juneau, Alaska. Then at Skagway, Alaska followed by Glacier Bay national park. Last day at Sea and dock at Whittier city. Holland America has several types like only cruise, sea+land



options or round trips.

While cashless is the popular and only available option in cruise and ports, it is better carry small denomination notes for tips for the drivers and guides. Carry quarters for your laundry in overnight city stays and in Denali National Park 3-day stays.

## Publications

<b>About the Author - List of Publications</b>	
<b>General Subjects</b>	<b>Published</b>
1 Power of Mantras	April 26, 2022
2 Circa-2020 Inspirational Stories from Covid	September 19, 2020
3 Palghat Trails- Unique lifestyle from South India	September 17, 2020
4 Preaching of Saint Dattareya	July 31, 2020
5 Teachings of Thirumandiram	July 31, 2020
6 Inspirational Stories from covid 19	July 5, 2020
7 Be Happy Enjoy Life	December 11, 2019
8 Smile -100 cartoons	December 11, 2019
9 Life Lesson Stories from nature	December 10, 2019
10 Wisdom in proverbs from India's Tamil Language	December 10, 2019
11 South India's Ancient Wisdoms Demystified	December 3, 2019
12 Mediterranean Cruise Plus Vatican	November 17, 2019
13 Lyrics of Tamil Poet Bharathi	November 17, 2019
14 Marriages Made in Madras	November 16, 2019
15 Women Power	February 12, 2019
16 Lyrics of Poet Kannadasan	February 12, 2019
17 Yes, You can be self publisher	December 3, 2017
18 Guru Shopping made easy	December 3, 2017
19 Learn Quick Books	December 3, 2017
20 Kailash Calling	March 19, 2017
21 Lyrics of Poet Vaali	March 1, 2017
<b>Technical Books</b>	
22 Implementing Oracle JDE Manufacturing	July 20, 2017
23 Implementing Oracle JDE Manufacturing Tip & Tricks	May 28, 2018
<b>Udemy courses</b>	
24 Self-Publish in Seven Days	July 2, 2020
25 Time to be an Entrepreneur	July 31, 2020
<b>Audio Books</b>	
26 Life Lesson Stories from nature	July 6, 2020
27 Inspirational Stories from covid 19	July 31, 2020
28 Marriages Made in Madras	August 15, 2020
29 Kailash Calling	August 16, 2020

## About the Author

Mathur (matt) Ravikumar, an author, consultant, and political/economic cartoonist

Matt started his own consulting company in 2012 and provide functional consulting in enterprise resource planning business software applications.

He has self-published 20+ books over many years. He also publishes weekly cartoon content on political and economic news and events in YouTube Channel. Two of his Udemey lessons have been released, one on entrepreneurship and another on self-publishing. Four of self-published books have been released into audio format, available in audible and iTunes. Regular meditator and trekked partially to Himalayas (Mount Kailash) towards a spiritual journey in 2016.

He is passionate about writing, especially on the subjects that can teach life's lessons. He like to mentor others and find their talent sitting dormant inside.

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