

Spectrum Holidays

Introductory Notes - Real Alaska & Canada Tours



BACKGROUND

Spectrum Holidays

Spectrum Holidays is a fully licensed travel agency (no. 32827) and member of the Travel Compensation Fund, Australian Federation of Travel Agents and International Air Travel Association.

We are a family owned Australian business that specialises in travel to Alaska and Canada and have organised group and independent tours for more than 2,000 clients to these areas.

Our staff members have detailed firsthand knowledge and experience of travel in Alaska and Canada. Over the years we have developed excellent relationships with local suppliers and various tourist bodies including Alaska Travel Industry Association and Canadian Tourist Commission. We are officially recognised by these organisations as Alaska Certified Experts and Canada Specialists respectively.

Types of Tours

We offer clients travelling to Alaska and Canada a choice of two types of tours:

- *Escorted Group tours* – each of our group tours is led by an experienced Australian based leader. Our tour leaders works in conjunction with knowledgeable local tour guides and drivers in each area. We generally limit the size of our groups to a maximum of 34 people. For some tours, such as walking groups, the maximum number is lower. Members of group tours are welcome to add individual arrangements either side of their tour. If you would like any assistance in organizing these extra arrangements then we are happy to help.
- *Independent self guided tours* – we design individually tailored itineraries for clients who prefer to travel independently. The duration and dates of independent itineraries are completely flexible. We have a number of different sample itineraries which can be used as a starting point. There is no charge for the preparation of independent itineraries and quotations. The cost of independent and group tours are normally very similar.

Clients

Most of our clients are reasonably fit and active people who are looking for an alternative to traditional cruise ship style packages. As a rough guide, if you can walk at least one kilometre without assistance, you should not have any difficulty with the activities included in our tours. The majority of clients on group tours are aged between 50 and 75 years, however, we often book people who are outside of these age brackets. In our case ‘attitude rather than age’ is definitely the most important factor in determining whether a tour is suitable or not. Our tours are ideal for people with a sense of adventure and desire to discover the ‘Real Alaska and Canada’.

Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) Ferries

Travelling on the state owned AMHS ferries is one of the most relaxed and enjoyable ways to view the beautiful coastal areas along Alaska’s famous Inside Passage.



There are many similarities between the AMHS ferries and the Spirit of Tasmania. Whilst on-board, passengers have access to observation lounges, cafeteria style dining and free lectures from National Park Rangers.

Many locals travel on the ferries as there are no road connections between towns along the Inside Passage (except between Haines and Skagway). The ferries have clean and comfortable cabins with private facilities for overnight sectors.





Our tours versus traditional cruise ship packages

There are a couple of key differences between our tours and those offered by other companies

- *Access to 'real towns' and spectacular scenery* - by using the AMHS ferries we have a perfect opportunity to explore some of the most spectacular scenery and wild-life in Alaska. The AMHS ferries can navigate their way through narrow sheltered stretches of the Inside Passage that large cruise ships cannot access. Along the way the ferries call into small towns and communities such as Wrangell, Petersburg and Haines which the cruise ships do not include in their itineraries. We know from personal experience that these towns represent the 'real Alaska' that most people want to visit.
- *Atmosphere* – our aim is to create a very relaxed and informal atmosphere throughout the tour. We do not include any meals or events where formal clothing is required.
- *Variety of transport* – in addition to travelling on the AMHS ferries we often include a variety of other transportation in our itineraries including rail, coach and sometimes light plane. Experience has shown this approach makes our tours more interesting and enjoyable.

When to travel

Unless you are specifically looking for a winter tour, the best time to tour Alaska is between mid May and mid September. The season in Canada is slightly longer and people often travel right through until the end of October. During these months the weather is generally fine. Whilst it is possible to travel outside of these dates, there are certain constraints which must be factored into the itinerary including:

- The Alaska Marine Highway ferries run all year round, however, there are fewer vessels in operation and less sailings to choose from between October and April.
- Some hotels, day tours and rail services only operate during the summer months. By mid September hotels in areas such as Denali start closing down for the season and don't re-open again until mid May. Services such as the Alaska Railroad and White Pass Railroad have similar arrangements.

TOUR PRICES AND INCLUSIONS

Flight arrangements

We have access to wholesale airfares with various carriers including: Alaska Airlines, Air New Zealand, Hawaiian Airlines and Air Canada. Wholesale airfares are generally cheaper than normal retail fares and more flexible in terms of payment. In most cases we can hold firm reservations for international flights without actually having to issue airline tickets until approximately 60 days prior to departure.

For people who are planning to visit Europe or Asia as part of their trip we can make reservations on Round World flights.

You are welcome to book your own flight arrangements on frequent flyer points if you wish. In this instance, we can organise 'land only' arrangements.

We can also book flights on airlines such as Qantas and United Airlines although the ticketing conditions on these fares are generally less flexible.

Hotels

In most cases, our tours use clean and comfortable accommodation. The majority of properties would be rated around three stars in Australian terms. Hotel rooms have private bathrooms, hair dryers and access to coffee and tea making facilities. The hotels we book are well located near the centre of town and within walking distance of shops, restaurants and local attractions.

If you are travelling independently and would like to stay in well known hotels including Chateau Lake Louise or the Banff Springs we can certainly arrange this.



Single Supplements

Group tours - if you are travelling alone but are willing to share with another person of the same sex we will not charge a single supplement. If you prefer not to share and wish to be guaranteed a room of your own then a single supplement will apply.

Independent tours – unfortunately there is no way of avoiding single supplements for people travelling alone on independent itineraries. The single supplement only relates to accommodation and does not apply to flights, tours or transportation.

Sightseeing tours

Our philosophy is to include all key sightseeing activities in the tour price. We do not believe in the approach which some tour companies (including many cruise ship packages) adopt of selling a 'bare bones' itinerary and then trying to entice clients into adding extra sightseeing activities.



There are one or two places in Alaska particularly, where you might have the option of purchasing an extra sightseeing tour if you wish, but these are definitely not essential.

In those areas where 'optional extras' are offered, the tours generally involve activities such as flightseeing and dog sledding which may not necessarily suit everyone and are sometimes dependent on weather conditions.

By way of example at Denali National Park, our tour price will include a six hour 'Tundra Wilderness' tour. In our view this particular activity is essential and there is basically no point in visiting Denali unless you undertake this tour. The Tundra Wilderness tour is therefore included in the base tour price. During the rest of the time at Denali, you can simply relax, spend time at the excellent Visitor Center or take a short hike on one of the trails. Alternatively, there are a range of optional extra sightseeing tours which can be purchased including: flightseeing tours by light plane or helicopter, river rafting, or visit to Husky Homestead Kennel operated by Jeff King, one of the world's leading dog mushers.

Gratuities

We include the cost of gratuities for coach drivers and local guides in the group tour price. The one exception is the Rocky Mountaineer where group tips are discouraged. You are also responsible for covering gratuities at restaurants and cafes where it is customary to tip around 15% of the total bill for waiter service.

Meals

We have found that the "pay as you go" approach to meals is the most suitable for our tours. This approach provides maximum flexibility and is also the most cost effective.

There are some hotels which include a simple complimentary continental breakfast as part of their standard room rate. Likewise there are certain sightseeing tours which include a lunch.

In theory it might be possible to pre-book breakfasts on every day of group tours. The main problem is that most hotels will only allow full cooked breakfasts to be pre-booked and the cost is often US\$20 or more per person. Under these circumstances the cost of pre-booking breakfasts unnecessarily inflates the tour price; especially for those people who prefer a simple continental type breakfast.

A reasonably wide selection of foods is readily available in all towns and locations. On average, you can expect to pay the following amounts: breakfast US\$8 to US\$10, lunch US\$12 to US\$15 and dinner around \$US15 to \$US25 per person.

If you were to eat all meals at a restaurant you should allow around \$US35 to \$US50 per person per day. Generally, the size of meals is large and often one main course is sufficient to share between two people. Other cheaper alternatives for meals such as: breakfast bars, fruit, crackers and soup can be purchased throughout the trip



Transfers and luggage handling

Group tours - transfers and luggage handling are organized at most towns. The only exception is Wrangell where the hotel is very close to the Ferry Terminal.

Independent – we can advise clients on the different transfer arrangements which are available in each town or city. Hotels in a number of towns throughout Alaska offer complimentary transfers. Airport bus services are also available in cities such as Vancouver and Victoria. In those towns where neither courtesy vans nor airport bus services operate, we often suggest passengers catch a taxi to/from the hotel.

PRE TOUR PLANNING

Travel insurance

We strongly recommend sorting out travel insurance at the earliest possible opportunity. Substantial cancellation fees often apply to travel arrangements in Alaska and Canada. Policies issued by insurance companies often cover against the loss of non-refundable payments, if you are forced to cancel prior to departure due to accident or ill-health. These policies will generally come into effect from the date when the insurance policy is issued; however, you only pay for the time when you are actually travelling. If you have a pre-existing medical condition which requires cover, please let us know and we will send copies of the appropriate forms for your doctor to complete. If you are intending to take out travel insurance through your credit card it is important to very carefully review the items which are covered and the terms and conditions which apply. You should also obtain contact numbers which can be used in case of emergency. Cover should be arranged from the day you depart right through until the day you arrive back in Australia.

Passport and Visa Requirements

Australian passport holders do not require visas for entry to the United States or Canada provided their stay is less than 90 days and they are visiting for "tourist purposes". Your passport must have at least 6 months validity from the return date into Australia. If you are still in the process of obtaining or renewing your passport at the time when you make a booking, please let us know.

Before arriving into the United States, you must now obtain an electronic travel authorisation (ETA). Under the requirements of this system, all travellers from Visa Waiver countries such as Australia, are required to obtain an electronic travel authorization prior to departure. There is no charge for an ETA if this is obtained through the official website at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/>.

Spectrum Holidays can help those passengers who do not have access to the internet or require assistance in completing the authorization process.

Clothing

Comfortable and casual clothing is appropriate throughout our tour. The most practical option is to take layers of clothing that can be added or taken off as the weather dictates (t-shirt, polar fleece, rain jacket). Our itineraries normally include a number of multiple night stopovers which provide an opportunity to catch up with your laundry. A typical packing list would be along the following lines:

- 3 x skirts/slacks/trousers
- 5 x underclothes
- 1 x polar fleece jacket and 1 x pullover
- 1 x light rain jacket
- 1 x pair of shorts
- 1 x beanie or hat
- 2 x shoes including one comfortable pair suitable for walking
- Nightwear and toiletries
- Essential medication

BOOKING AND PAYMENT PROCESS

After you have selected your group tour or decided upon an independent itinerary and are ready to proceed with the booking, the next steps in the process are as follow:

Initial deposit

Escorted Group tours – to confirm your place on the group tour please complete the booking form and return along with deposit of \$500 per person. We will then send you a letter confirming your place on the tour.

Independent tours - an initial deposit of \$500 per person is required before we commence making reservations with our various suppliers. In some cases, an additional amount may be required to cover services such as Rocky Mountaineer and VIARail where immediate upfront payments are required by the supplier.

Copy of passports

Please forward copies of your passports (via photocopy, fax or scan) at the same time as your deposit is paid. We require passport information when making reservations for flights and Alaska Marine Highway ferries.

Reservation process

Independent tours and extra arrangements - after the deposit is received we will commence making reservations for the various services included in your itinerary. In most cases, we start by requesting transportation services such as flights, rail, coach and ferry. After these are confirmed, we request the remaining services such as accommodation and sightseeing tours. If a hotel is not available on the dates shown in the itinerary, we will endeavour to secure reservations at an equivalent property. If the only possible option is to substitute a hotel in a different category, we will contact you to discuss the alternatives.

Interim Payments

Independent tours and extra arrangements for group tours - if your itinerary includes flights with "instant purchase" fares these will not be booked until all other arrangements are confirmed. Instant purchase fares must generally be paid for almost immediately.

If an airline announces a price increase, we will contact you to discuss the alternatives. In some cases, it might be possible to issue the ticket prior to a specified date and therefore avoid the price increase.

Final balance

You will receive a Statement of Account showing the final balance approximately 90 days prior to travel. Final payment are generally due 60 days prior to departure. Payments can be made by cash, cheque, MasterCard, Visa or Direct Deposit.

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