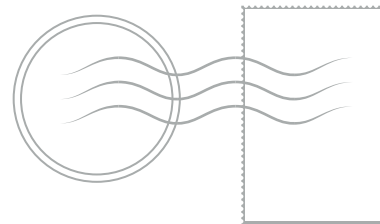


POSTCARD

Alaska



As MSC Cruises embarks on its maiden season in Alaska aboard the refurbished *MSC Poesia*, even the whales are forming a welcome party, writes **Jane Archer**

"That's Flame – she's a regular," enthuses naturalist Lydia, as we watch the whale's fluke (tail fin) lift up out of the water before disappearing back into the icy Alaskan depths.

Given MSC Cruises only embarked on its debut season in Alaska in May, I'm surprised there's been time to establish regular sightings – but I'll take Lydia's word for it, since these North Pacific humpback whales have been here for far longer than newcomer *MSC Poesia*.

The ship is fresh from dry dock with two new restaurants, an upgraded spa and a luxurious Yacht Club area – my home for the week – retrofitted to add the 'ship-within-a-ship' concept to *Poesia*. I plan to join one of the shore excursions that are exclusively for Yacht Club passengers. A four-hour whale-watching tour catches my eye: a small group, whales, champagne and nibbles. What's not to love?

It seems other passengers thought so too, as the tour books out so fast I have to revert to plan B: a four-hour Whale Watching and Wildlife Quest with a bigger group (about 40 of us in total), with no fizz but plenty of outdoor deck space from which to keep lookout.

North Pacific humpbacks spend winter breeding in the warm waters around Hawaii or Mexico, then travel 3,000 miles to Alaska to gorge on krill and small fish. They seem to love these waters around Juneau, but wildlife is fickle, sightings are not guaranteed and so I keep my expectations low. Imagine the excitement then, when just 15 minutes from the dock, the captain spots two whales. Sadly, they disappear without so much as a flick of the fluke. We wait to see if they resurface, but there's not a spout to be seen and the captain announces he's moving on.

"Look there," I yell. I've spotted a humpback bounding through the water off our port side before diving down and showing off its impressive tail. Like fingerprints, all flukes are different, so those familiar with the area's wildlife can recognise each one.

"To the right," the captain shouts. "Now up ahead."

Suddenly there are spouts, flukes and churning water all around us, even alongside the boat. Talk about thrilling. By the time we return to the dock, we've clocked up 12 whales and an amazing excursion that I, for one, will never forget – who needs champagne anyway? **TW**



BOOK IT

MSC Cruises' four-hour Whale Watching and Wildlife Quest costs from \$209 pre-paid; Luxury Whale Watching for Yacht Club passengers costs \$489 pre-paid. A seven-night Alaska cruise on *MSC Poesia* in August 2027 costs from £3,307 per person, based on two sharing a Yacht Club Deluxe Suite.

msccruises.co.uk



TOP: A humpback whale in Juneau, Alaska

ABOVE: The new Yacht Club on *MSC Poesia*

PICTURES: Shutterstock/bonilook, Mikhail Grachikov; Ivan Sarfatti