



Sights Unseen

An Alaska sailing with Princess Cruises offers an exhilarating yet accessible adventure, says blind traveller **Sassy Wyatt**

The icy air rushed against my face as I soared along a zipline in Skagway, laughter spilling out as the harness carried me through the trees. In Ketchikan, I stood with axe in hand, listening for the sharp crack as it hit its target. Out on a catamaran off the shore of Prince Rupert, the silence was broken by the sound of whales spouting beside us.

These are the kinds of adventures most travellers expect on an Alaska cruise. For me, as a blind woman, they are the kind people rarely imagine I could do. Yet over 11 days on board *Ruby Princess*, I discovered that adventure can be inclusive. ➤

A whale breaches off the shore of Prince Rupert

PICTURE: Paul Nordmann



Princess Cruises' wearable Medallion carried the accessibility and dietary information that I had shared in advance of the cruise, and unlocked our cabin automatically as I approached. Outside each door were tactile numbers, braille signs and an electronic display, so whatever your client's level of vision, there is a way for them to confirm the right room. Navigation was equally layered, with lifts that had braille and audio announcements, large-print signage across each deck and a screen-reader-compatible app. From my phone I could check our location – mostly finding Grant raiding the Lido deck for another slice of pizza – or order a drink to be delivered to wherever I was sitting. These touches made access feel seamless.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Creek Street, Ketchikan; Ruby Princess; writer Sassy and husband Grant on a Skagway excursion; Ruby Princess Balcony stateroom



SMOOTH SERVICE

It began with the Princess Cruises crew. I was always greeted by name – “Mrs Wyatt” or “Ma’am Sassy” – followed by them stating their name. At home, even colleagues often speak to me without identifying themselves, so this simple courtesy transformed every interaction. Our stateroom steward, Leonard, kept the room spotless and always returned our belongings to their place, giving me independence in my own space.

Eating in the Da Vinci dining room also showed the same care. Staff asked before tucking in my chair or placing a napkin on my lap. When setting down a cocktail, they announced: “At your 12 o’clock.” Menus were read aloud, in full, without rushing. Arturo, the dining room manager, made us feel like family, helpfully arranging bookings on our behalf. Even the bridge crew added to my sense of autonomy. On port days, they announced where accessible exit points were. It may sound small, but it meant I could lead my husband Grant ashore, instead of the other way around.

There are also accommodations made for guests with mobility needs, including hoists at the pools and hot tubs, accessible toilets on every passenger deck and cabins with roll-in showers and level-access balconies. But accessibility is not one size fits all – as a blind traveller, I do not need a wheelchair-accessible cabin and find larger layouts harder to navigate.

“Excursion information is essential – it allows travellers to make informed decisions instead of being excluded

OUT AND ABOUT

Excursions are where disabled travellers are most often left behind, not because we cannot do the activities, but because no one tells us what’s involved. Is the meeting point a 10-minute walk over uneven paving? Does the tender use a ramp or a steep set of stairs? Are headsets available for walking tours? If a museum is heavily visual, is there braille, tactile signage or audio description? This information is essential, because it allows travellers to make informed decisions instead of being excluded before they even try.

In Skagway, our guides Audrey and Tabi set the tone from the start. Before we boarded the bus for the zipline, they asked how they could best assist me, explained the terrain and made sure I was comfortable with what was coming. They did not assume or challenge my place there.

On the treetop course, I asked for clear verbal instructions and occasional physical support. They



ABOVE: The sights – and the sounds – of a glacier calving are exhilarating RIGHT: A curious sea otter

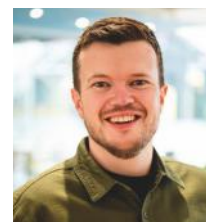
PICTURE: Paul Nordmann



ASK THE expert

"We love recommending Princess Cruises to guests with limited mobility. They offer excellent accessibility and first-class service throughout. When booking, we check every detail is covered, including travel to and from the port and any equipment or care support needed on board. Guests can relax knowing their cruise will be smooth, supportive and truly unforgettable."

Angus Drummond, chief executive, Limitless Travel



described each step, clipped me in, explained the body positions I needed to take and encouraged me throughout. With Grant guiding me between platforms, I felt the rush of flying through the trees.

In Ketchikan, the axe throwing was unexpectedly empowering. Our instructor taught us stance, grip and release. I couldn't see the target, but the unmistakable crack when the axe hit told me exactly how I had done. When another guest with mobility issues and I adjusted our stances to suit our bodies, the instructor welcomed it; adaptation was part of the experience, not an afterthought.

IN THE WILD

I never imagined whale watching was something I could truly appreciate, but that day in Prince Rupert became one of the most powerful experiences of my life. As the humpbacks surfaced, tails lifting high and spray catching the air, I found myself laughing out loud in disbelief.

Even without my sight, their scale and majesty were palpable; the sound of spouts breaking the stillness, the rhythm of the water and the hush that fell across the boat created a shared atmosphere that words can barely capture. For me, it was not about seeing the whales, it was about being fully present with them. Travel is not only about what we see – it's about sound, sensation and connection.

Then came Glacier Bay National Park, which felt

like another world, with 3.3 million acres of mountains, deep fjords and more than a thousand glaciers. Only a fraction can be explored by ship, and as we sailed, national park rangers gave a commentary across the decks. We passed five glaciers, but it was the calvings that took my breath away.

Have you ever heard a glacier roar? We did, twice. A deep crack and groan as the ice began to split, then with a thunderous boom it collapsed into the bay, sending spray and ripples across the water. The wildlife made it more magical, from puffins and seals to sea otters drifting on their backs and climbing onto small icebergs.

What stays with me most is not just what I did, but how it felt. So often accessibility is reduced to checklists, ramps, lifts and wider doors. Those things matter, but are not the whole story. True accessibility is about dignity, autonomy and the freedom to participate fully.

On this trip I was not a blind woman being questioned or second guessed. I was simply a traveller, speeding through the treetops, throwing an axe and listening to whales spouting beside me.

As our catamaran slowed in Prince Rupert and the sound of a humpback's spout echoed across the still water, Alaska felt exactly as I'd imagined: wild, untamed and unforgettable. And it proved something else too – adventure does not have to exclude. With the right detail, care and attitude, it can belong to all of us. **TW**

BOOK IT

Princess Cruises offers a 10-night Inside Passage voyage on *Ruby Princess*, round-trip from San Francisco departing on May 11, 2027, from £899 per person, cruise-only, based on two people sharing an Inside Stateroom. princess.com