



Kayaking is a common activity on Lindblad's sailings in Alaska.

CRUISE REVIEW

In 'The Great Land'

Lindblad Expeditions celebrates 40 years of exploring Alaska

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It was the end of the road, so to speak. Still a good 9 miles from Dawes Glacier, the massive chunks of ice strewn across Endicott Arm made it clear the National Geographic Venture could not go any further. This was the first Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic ship to sail into Alaska for the 2023 season, and Venture's knowledgeable crew — rich with scientists and naturalists — were undaunted by Mother Nature's roadblock.

Zodiacs dropped into the frigid water and Venture's 61 guests were invited to spend the morning navigating the dramatic landscape. Any disappointment from not being able to reach the face of the glacier quickly evaporated, thanks to what naturalists described as an unheard of parade of "charismatic megafauna," or wildlife. Three bears, a humpback whale and a bald eagle lingered along our icy path, cementing the magic of spring in Southeast Alaska.

"I always hope people will understand that we're in wild places and that Mother Nature doesn't have a schedule that's set to what we want all the time, but she will always give us

something," said John Mitchell, expedition leader onboard Venture.

More than simply recreational travel, Lindblad is known for its emphasis on natural history. This year marks the company's 40th anniversary in Alaska; to celebrate the milestone, the veteran naturalists on our two-week Treasures of the Inside Passage itinerary in Alaska and British Columbia, Canada, were joined by additional scientists and guest speakers. Topics of onboard presentations ranged from the impact of climate change on Alaska to insight into whale behaviors and wildlife photography tips.

Onboard Highlights

The American-flagged Venture was launched in 2018. It features 50 outside cabins and a no-key policy. (Cabin doors can be locked from the inside, but guests do not receive room keys.) A bit unsure about the policy when embarking, I was a quick convert, and enjoyed not having to worry about carrying or losing a key.

My Upper Deck cabin was nicely configured with well-thought-out details, including



Passengers get up close to wildlife.

numerous hooks for jackets and gear. The sliding balcony door locked in place at various points, allowing for controlled amounts of fresh air. A combination of firm and soft pillows topped the comfy bed, and electrical outlets and USB ports were within easy reach. The room came with no television or refrigerator.

The bathroom offered ample storage space beneath the sink, as well as a wall shelf to hold assorted toiletries; the shower was tucked in the corner.

Venture's public spaces might feel limited when compared to some of the newest expedition vessels, but having one primary meeting area for everything from nightly briefings to cocktails created a sense of community between guests and crew. As well as serving as a social hub, the lounge was well-stocked with fruit and cookies and a myriad of teas, assorted coffee drinks and beer.

All meals are enjoyed in the dining room. Breakfast is served buffet-style, while lunch and dinner are plated. Each meal offered a half-dozen varied menu options, utilizing local favorites such as salmon, along with flavorful surprises including falafel and soba noodles topped with teriyaki chicken.

All excursions are included on Lindblad sailings; along with near daily Zodiac rides, there were frequent kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding and hiking opportunities.

When expedition leader Mitchell was asked what he hoped guests would take home from a sailing, he immediately had an answer.

"I hope that we have been able to share the love that we all have for this place," he said. "And that there's going to be at least one thing on your list when you walk away that you're going to do to try and keep wild places wild." ●

The Details: Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic (www.expeditions.com)