

Cruising With The Kids

Great-grandma won the trivia contest. Grandma and grandpa hung out around the pool with the lovely Miss Q while her parents worked out in the fitness center. When we met for dinner, there were smiles all around — which was just as I had hoped it would be.

We are not serial cruisers, but when faced with planning a vacation for four generations of our family — ages 2 to 92 — my husband and I concluded a trip up the Inside Passage of Alaska was the best option.

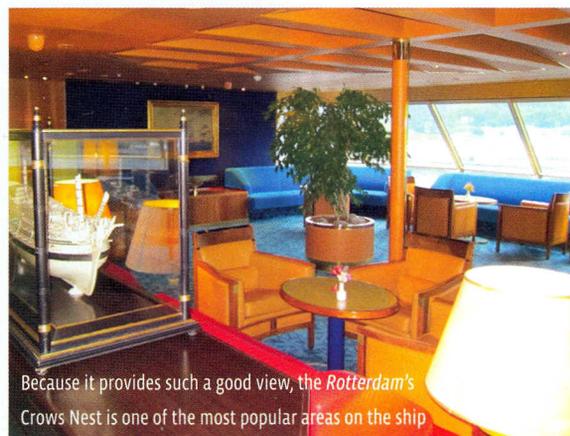
These days, family travel is more popular than ever, but it takes effort to make it work to everyone's satisfaction. Here are some tips, based on our experience, to make cruising with your family — kids, grandkids, and parents — a success:

Not Just Any Vessel Will Do
Holland America's *Rotterdam* is a great choice for family travel because it offers a wide range of cabin types at various price points. With our group of six, this wasn't critical, but for larger parties, it could be an important factor.

Another advantage of Holland America is the super-friendly and obliging staff. Ari provided table service to great-grandma in the Lido Buffet and Rikki catered to Miss Q in the dining room. Holland America also provided high-chairs wherever we dined and a Pack 'n Play at no extra charge.

Our Alaska cruise departed from Seattle, but Holland America's Hawaii, Mexico, and Tahiti trips begin in San Diego — as do some of their Panama Canal crossings.

A Family Needs A Family Room
Cruising works as a family vacation because everyone can do their own thing, but it's also nice to have a special place to be together. In our case, Richard and I booked one of the *Rotterdam's* deluxe veranda suites that



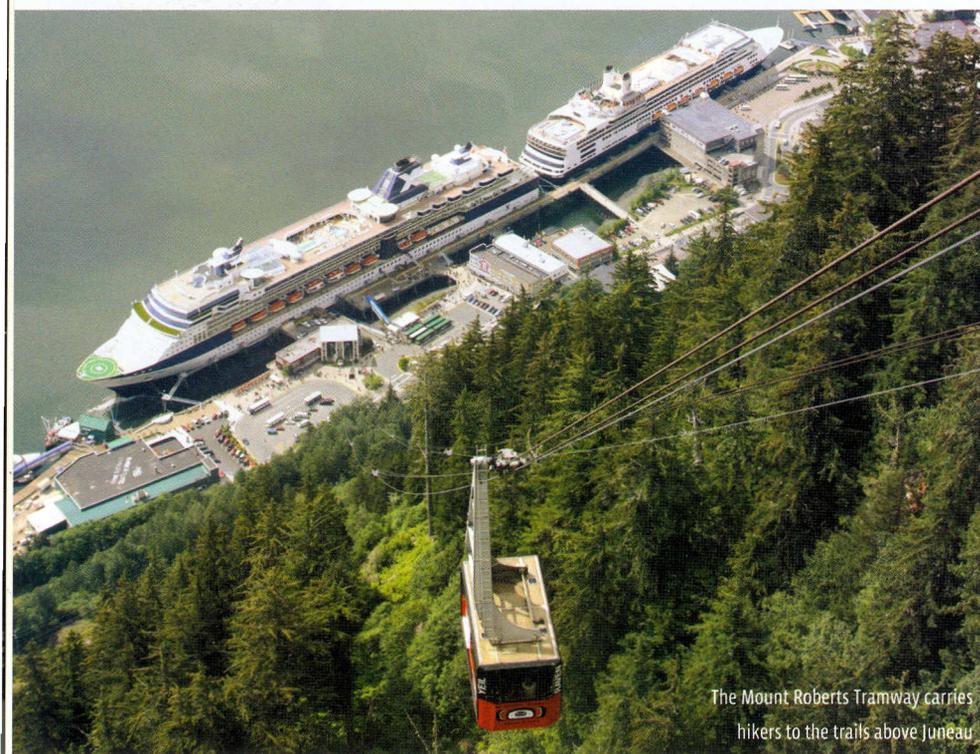
Because it provides such a good view, the *Rotterdam's* Crow's Nest is one of the most popular areas on the ship

provided access to the exclusive Neptune Lounge. During the course of our week at sea, our spacious cabin was the site of a splendid afternoon tea (just as tasty as the formal one served in the dining room — where we couldn't have had toys all over the floor). In addition, at naptime Miss Q and her grandparents found they all fit just fine in the big king bed.

Come Prepared

Holland America's Club HAL cares for kids ages three and older, and Miss Q was turning two during the cruise, so we came prepared with books, toys, crayons, and more. (Great-grandma's bottle of bubbles was the biggest hit.) Q's parents also brought a lightweight stroller, which was great for getting around the ship and invaluable for our time in port. ☛

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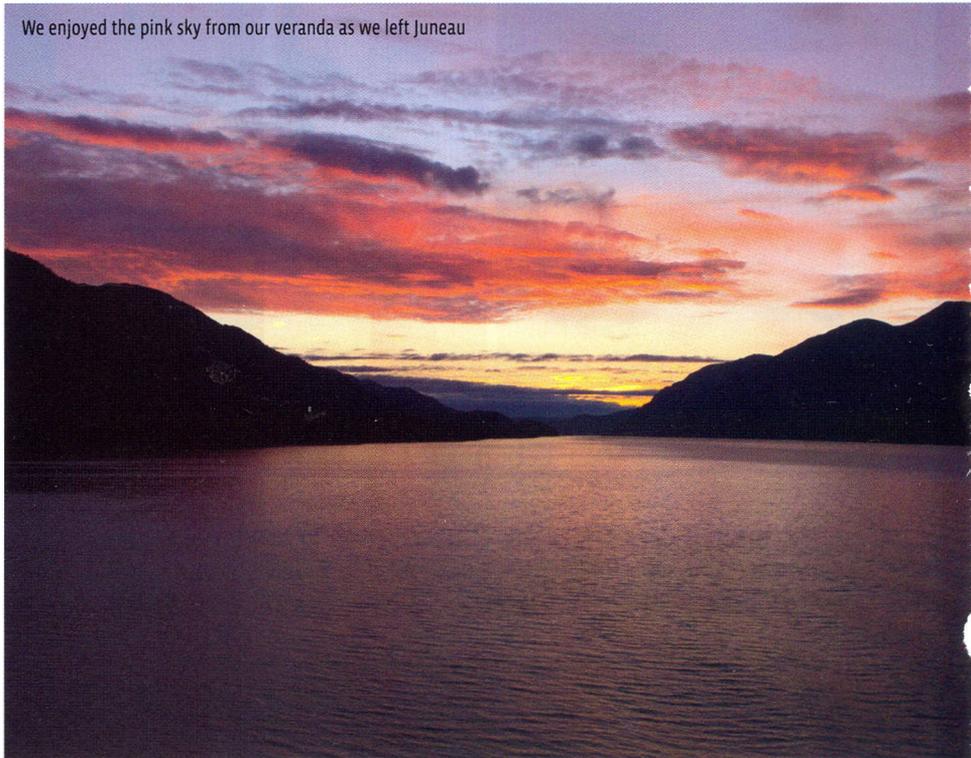
The Mount Roberts Tramway carries hikers to the trails above Juneau

Customize Shore Excursions

While the *Rotterdam* is handicapped-accessible, shore excursions might not be — so we opted to create our own. In Sitka, the adults enjoyed St. Michael's Cathedral, with its characteristic Russian Orthodox cupola and spire, and browsing around the cute shops selling colorful Russian dolls. Miss Q put in some quality time at a local playground, and great-grandma found a hair salon that was to her liking. Holland America is one of the few lines that stop in Sitka. For more details about why this was our favorite port, please see www.ranchandcoast.com.

Be Flexible About Dining

Paul, the concierge in the Neptune Lounge, made our dinner reservations. We ate in the main dining room most nights, but it didn't seem fair to ask a two-year-old to sit quietly through four courses, so my favorite



We enjoyed the pink sky from our veranda as we left Juneau

meals were actually elsewhere.

One evening Richard and I enjoyed the elegant ambience of the Pinnacle Grill, but I think I had more fun on the night we all ordered through in-room dining and ate on our spacious veranda overlooking the Juneau skyline. We were still there enjoying our last Alaskan Ambers and the pink glow in the sky as the ship left port and headed north to Hubbard Glacier.

The Canaletto Restaurant proved to be the perfect place for Q's birthday dinner on the last night of the cruise. Our window table provided an up-close view as the captain maneuvered the *Rotterdam* into port in Victoria. While other passengers rushed to disembark, our family enjoyed delicious Italian fare and an abundance of celebratory Champagne. I started with a tasty bowl of minestrone and then thoroughly enjoyed the Cod

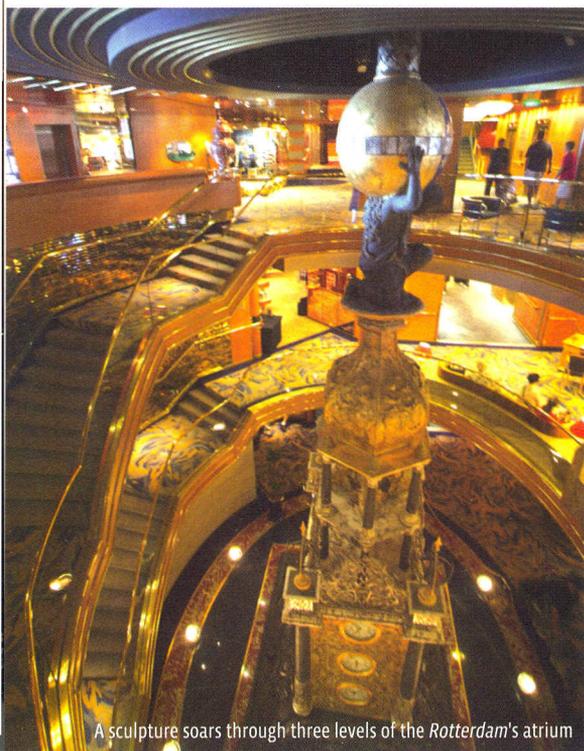
Miss Q admiring the number 2 on her birthday cake



Putanesca with grilled cheese polenta and balsamic glacé. One of the waiters made napkin "mice" for the birthday girl, and the entire Canaletto staff sang "Happy Birthday" in Indonesian as they presented her cake.

Again I noted smiles all around and, this time, also a few tears of joy. (www.hollandamerica.com)

ELIZABETH HANSEN



A sculpture soars through three levels of the *Rotterdam*'s atrium