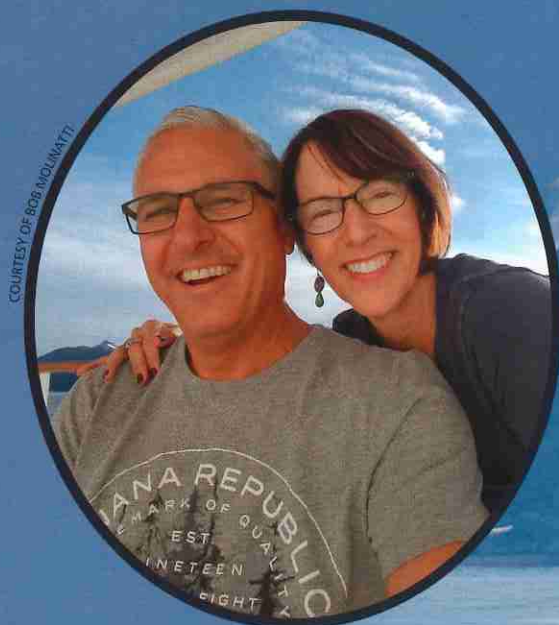


DESTINATION

# Alaska

by Bob Molinatti

Take in the alluring scenery of The Last Frontier on an accessible luxury cruise.



**Last year, my wife, Carole,** and I sat down to plan a trip that would be mutually fun for both of us.

Having already traveled extensively during my wheelchair racing career and work years, I felt pretty complete. I'd been to Hawaii 10 times, various areas of Europe twice, Asia, Australia and to many places within the continental United States over and over, so travel had become less than a thrill for me. And neither of us really had the yearning to return to

Europe, so we decided that Alaska would be a great bucket list adventure.

There are many ways you can venture through Alaska. However, after much homework, we thought a luxury cruise would be right for us.

Just laying the foundation for what we were up against, I'm a 60-year-old, mid-level paraplegic with 41 years in my chair, pretty physically fit and still maintain a high level of independence.

That being said, I nonetheless found myself getting apprehensive as the trip went



ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANDOLPH © GETTY IMAGES/RAINER LESNIEWSKI/STOCK NINJA/SILVER SEA

Bob and Carole Molinatti, inset, took a luxury Alaskan cruise aboard the Silver Shadow, above.

from consideration to reality. We have all heard how accessible hotels and other various travel destinations can be, only to get there and find it not all that accessible.

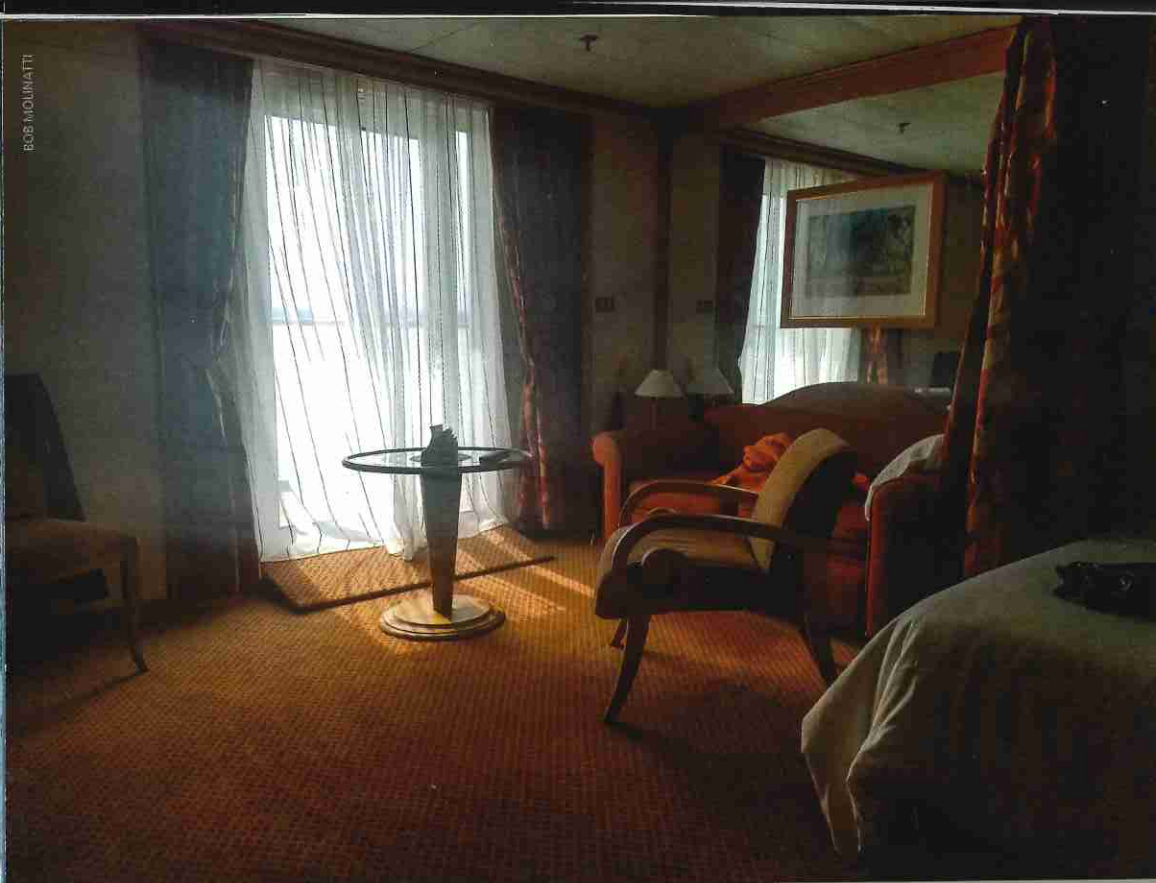
We hired cruise specialist Pat Ellington of Incredible Journey Travel ([incrediblejourney.net](http://incrediblejourney.net)), who worked with us to ease many potential fears and issues. There's no turning back when the ship sets sail, so we were very specific with the travel agent and the cruise personnel about accom-

modations, especially as far as the wheelchair was concerned.

### Cruise Accessibility

We selected Silversea Cruises ([silversea.com/en.html](http://silversea.com/en.html)), and let me tell you that you will not be disappointed if you can afford to travel with them.

It was first class all the way. With only 200 people on the cruise, we had a private butler, who was on call day and night. There



An accessible cabin on board the Silver Shadow includes a parlor.

were four restaurants on board, all of which served high-quality meals, multiple bars and a casino.

For most of us who travel in a chair, room accessibility, getting around and having plenty to do are some of the more paramount issues beyond the scenic nature of the cruise.

closet and a decent-size bathroom.

I have a fairly compact manual chair and found the parameters around me to be of little problem.

I'm confident that those using a power chair could do this trip, however, it may carry with it a few more logistical issues. That

On this particular ship, the Silver Shadow, there were two wheelchair-accessible rooms with roll-in showers.

The room was divided up nicely, including a sitting parlor with a sliding glass door. We had our breakfast each morning as we passed down the inlets to that day's destination. The room also had a separate sleeping area, a walk-in

The cabin's bathroom features zero-rise entries and a roll-in shower.



BOB MOLINATTI



BOB MOLINATTI

Cruise staff built a ramp so Bob Molinatti could enjoy the shared deck off of his cabin.



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The train from Anchorage, Alaska, to Seward, Alaska, meanders through many topographies, from green grass to more mountainous regions.



BOB MOLINATTI

Passengers enjoy the service car on the train from Anchorage, Alaska, to Seward, Alaska.

being said, I believe with the proper planning that it is very doable. There may be a few of the port stops that will carry challenges in terms of getting on and off the ship. The crew is very willing to help, and you will have to come to your own conclusions as to how safe a situation appears on a personal level. Some of the gangways were a little steep, and there may be a few steps here or there.

### First-Class Treatment

We flew into Anchorage, Alaska, to start our 10-day trip and spent only one night there.

The next morning, we boarded the train to Seward, Alaska, which is essentially a port city where many of the cruise ships set sail.

The train ride alone was pretty spectacular, weaving in and out of mountain passes and treating passengers to views of various wildlife, waterfalls and constantly evolving scenic beauty.

The train ride came to its conclusion on the dock where we boarded our ship.

We never so much as saw or touched our luggage until we opened the door to our suite.

After passing through customs inspection (the cruise requires a valid U.S. passport), we went directly onto the ship.

While receiving our room keys, Carole and I sipped Champagne poured by the crew as we waited.

BOB MOLINATTI



Carole Molinatti, right, poses with butler Marlon on board the Silver Shadow.



BOB MOLINATTI

The Mendenhall Glacier is nearly 14 miles long and is located close to Juneau, Alaska.

We met our butler, Marlon, who took care of our every need. Wine was waiting in our refrigerator at cocktail hour each night, our breakfast was delivered with a smile every morning. Marlon even had our cabin decorated for our anniversary, complete with cake and Champagne.

We essentially did the inner loop, where we spent very little time on the open seas. The ships are equipped with stabilizers to limit rocking, though it can't be completely eliminated. I got a bit queasy on one particular day, but overall it was very calm.

We set sail from one destination to the next at about 5 each night and docked each morning at about 9.

Each stop had activities and excursions ranging from just wandering around the port towns to very expensive activities such as seaplane rides, zip lining, daylong hikes, stream fishing for salmon, whale watching and much more. Because of liability issues, you may have a difficult time getting a tour

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CAROLE MOLINATTI

Bob Molinatti, above, goofs around while exploring Juneau, Alaska, pictured left.



BOB MOLINATTI

Skagway, Alaska, is a small, pedestrian-friendly cruise port with many activities and buildings reminiscent of gold-rush-era mining towns.

group to allow you to do activities that they think may be dangerous.

### Experience Of A Lifetime

Our basic itinerary ventured to the Mendenhall Glacier, Juneau, Skagway, Ketchikan and finished in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Each of these towns had its own charm and individual beauty. However, I have to say that Vancouver is a very fun, happening, diverse and beautiful city. Just make sure to bring a wheelbarrow full of money. It's a fantastic city for wandering, and we were very ready to move around once off the ship.

We found the waterfront easily and by asking a few people, we found famed Stanley Park, which is roughly 10 kilometers (6.21 miles) in circumference and has varying levels of hiking paths, gardens and scenery throughout it.

Carole and I stayed on the paved road on the shoulder to the top, which had many cyclists, hikers, joggers and tour buses. It took about two hours of continuous climbing, some of it pretty steep, to make it to the top.

We found a fantastic restaurant with gorgeous views where we had lunch and later that night, we met up with a couple from the cruise and sipped some nice wine.

The following day we ventured into some of the more bohemian sections of town just to get an overall feel for the city.

Having been to many very nice places in my life, I'd have to say this was really a first-class experience. The trip gets an absolute A-plus in my book, and there is no doubt it's on my recommended list.



COURTESY OF BOB MOLINATTI

Bob Molinatti, left, and his wife, Carole, pose for a photo at the waterfront in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Make sure to align yourself with a quality travel consultant, do your homework on accessibility to accommodate your specific needs and get ready for the experience of a lifetime. ■