

GOING PLACES

JOHN COONEY



Glacier Bay

GLACIERS GARDENS & GABLES



Tuesdays, on the whole, are just like any other day in my experience. Nothing special. Nothing stand-out. But on a recent adventure in the north of North America, three Tuesdays in a row left me and my travel-mates with some special, stand-out memories ...

Tuesday #1 featured **GLACIERS** ... monster glaciers ... cracking, crunching, grinding their way to the sea.

We'd been cruising, that week, along the wild, frozen coastline of Alaska – whale-watching in the feeding grounds of hump-back whales, and panning for gold in rivers that rushed between silvery-purple mountains. But, on that particular Tuesday, a fleet of helicopters flew us up-up-up amongst snow-smothered peaks, tortured valleys, cascading waterfalls and massive glaciers – and then landed us on one of them: the mighty Meade.

I couldn't help feeling a certain reverence as I stepped out onto the ice ... knowing that this surreal landscape had taken thousands of years to form. We clomped around spooky-blue crevasses, tried not to fall down, tasted meltwater, and kept muttering: "Fantastic – absolutely fantastic!"

Alaska's famous 'rivers-of-ice' started as frozen snow – and, millennium after millennium, they've been inching downhill, reshaping the landscape and gathering rubble on the way. When their front-ends finally reach the sea, they begin breaking up or 'calving' ... with gunshot-like cracks and thunderous



roars. And the following morning, in Glacier Bay, we stood out on deck and watched huge chunks of glacier crashing into the sea – shooting torrents of water high in the air, then surfacing seconds later as icebergs!

Tuesday #2 featured **GARDENS** ... acres of gardens ... crammed with zillions of rioting shrubs and squillions of blooming flowers.

Okay, gardens aren't everyone's cup-of-tea. And I've got to be in the right mood, I must admit. But everything we'd ever heard about Vancouver shouted "Don't miss them, whatever you do!" So we didn't.

An early-morning wake-up call got us out of bed ... a coach got us to the ferry terminal at Tsawwassen (pronounced 't-WOS-sin') ... and a giant roll-on/roll-off rushed us to Vancouver Island, some 90 minutes away. We were then free to wander, under a hot Canadian sun, through the world-famous-and-utterly-gorgeous Butchart Gardens – where we oohed and aahed and isn't-it-beautifulled for several thoroughly pleasant hours.

This floral feast-for-sore-eyes was created 100 years ago in the remains of an old quarry, and you'd have to be an





uncultured klutz not to be blown away. They were expecting their 50-millionth visitor that day – and, as we strolled along meandering paths, played hide-and-seek in the hedgerows, climbed steps, smelled roses and sat under shade-trees, I had a funny feeling it was me ...

Tuesday #3 featured **GABLES** ... green gables ... on a farmhouse made famous by a girl called Anne. And, even if you're not an *Anne of Green Gables* fan, you've gotta keep reading ...

By now (surprise, surprise) we were on the opposite side of North America – cruising down the glorious eastern coastline of Canada/New England. We'd come half the distance, through gob-smacking scenery, on the luxury *Rocky Mountaineer* scenic train ... before flying to Montreal, where a second floating-hotel awaited us.

Our first cruise stopover, on the *St Lawrence Seaway*, was Quebec City – with its lilt of French accents, its narrow cobblestone streets, its charming



Green Gables House



boutiques and cafes. We enjoyed a horse-&-buggy ride through the old fortifications ... a walking tour of the castle-like Chateau Frontenac ... and a posh high-tea in the Chateau's gorgeous dining room.

Then, Tuesday morning bright'nearly, we docked in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, where we sampled its rolling landscapes and its homemade jams, before visiting the picturesque farmhouse that inspired *Anne of Green Gables*.

These universally popular novels-for-girls were written 100 years ago by Lucy Maud Montgomery – and featured Anne Shirley, a red-headed orphan with a talent for getting into trouble. Visitors flock

here each year to check out their heroine's roots, explore Green Gables House, stroll the Haunted Woods or follow the Balsam Hollow trails ... and the Anne-fans in our group went totally ga-ga!

To calm them down, we took them shop-shop-shopping in quaint, old-world Charlottetown – and yum-yum-yumming on the local seafood chowder. Then it was back to the port, back up the gangplank, and back out on deck as our cruise-ship sailed away under brilliant late-afternoon skies ...



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