

TRAVEL + LEISURE

THE

WATER

ISSUE

CONTRIBUTORS



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1. *Danielle Pointdujour*

GUEST EDITOR (P. 53)

Pointdujour, an editor for *Ebony* and *Essence* who was born and raised in Brooklyn, took the lead in showcasing the Black travel movement as guest editor of this month's Intelligent Traveler section. "Squeezing such a massive story into nine pages was a challenge," Pointdujour says. "The package not only shines a light on some of the movement's best and brightest; it includes people I personally know, admire, and respect in the travel game."



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2. *Michael Twitty*

HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY (P. 94)

Maryland-based Twitty, has roots in South Carolina dating back to the 18th century. So he was keen to travel to the Lowcountry last October to explore how Gullah-Geechee food has told the people's story over time. Twitty says: "Though some say the culture is on its last legs, on the ground you clearly see that it is very much alive and adapting to a changing world."



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3. *Saki Knafo*

A DROP IN THE OCEAN (P. 82)

"I arrived in the Spice Islands expecting dazzling coral and not much else," says the Brooklyn-based writer, who took a cruise around this remote part of Indonesia in November 2019. "I didn't envision the volcanic lake full of stingless jellyfish, and I knew nothing about the brutal history of the spice trade until I was deep into the trip."

4. *Nina Caplan and William Craig Moyes*

HIGH-WATER MARK (P. 66)

This writer-and-photographer duo—a married couple who split their time between England and France—explored the waterways of Burgundy on a luxury canal cruise with Belmond. "Usually, getting from one place to another is the least interesting part of a trip," Caplan says. "Here, it was the highlight. As we watched forests change to vineyards and villages give way to the city of Dijon, we got to know the region and its history intimately."

5. *Melissa Alcena*

BEYOND THE SEA (P. 76)

Alcena hails from the Bahamas and is a portrait and documentary photographer. Her work is on display at the Current—the art studio and gallery at the Baha Mar resort, which she shot for this issue. "I enjoyed being able to photograph and exchange stories with artists I respect," she says. "We're all Bahamian, so there's a sense of pride that comes with documenting each other's work."

6. *Leslie Hsu Oh*

ALL IN GOOD TIME (P. 36)

"Glacier Bay National Park is known as a living lesson in resilience because of how rapidly nature recovered from the fastest glacial retreat in history," says Oh, a writer and photographer based in California near Lake Tahoe who has deep connections to the Indigenous community in Alaska. "I discovered that resilience is something I have in common with the park's natural landscape—and its people."



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Sailing toward Johns Hopkins Glacier, in Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve.



ALL IN GOOD TIME

On a long-awaited family trip to Alaska's Glacier Bay National Park, one writer finds an elemental landscape that holds powerful lessons in loss and rebuilding.

BY LESLIE HSU OH

PEERING THROUGH my camera lens, a finger on the shutter release, I held my breath as the sun ignited a turquoise sheen on a wall of ice. My husband, children, and I had taken a high-speed catamaran to the face of

Johns Hopkins Glacier, which towers 250 feet above the waterline. Black-legged kittiwakes soared above, waiting, like the rest of us, for ice to crack and fracture into the ocean.

Our three-year-old, Logan, sat on my husband's shoulders, clutching his hair for balance whenever the catamaran swayed. Six-year-old Riley wrapped herself around my leg. Fourteen-year-old Kyra and 11-year-old Ethan had already disappeared onto the upper deck, each armed with their own camera. With just two days in Alaska's Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve, I didn't have time to kayak among the icebergs or dive to the depths of the ocean to see the marine snow drifting down. I only had enough time to fulfill a fraction of my mother's dying wish.

My mother believed that life was short and we had to seize the day. With cameras around our necks, we'd raft down rivers or leap onto the backs of horses. A photographer and artist, she taught me that art could say the things that we are afraid to say, that it could deliver a message beyond the life of its creator. She would ask me, "What story are you trying to tell?"

We had visited nearly all the national parks in the United States and Canada except for those in Alaska by the time my mother died from the same disease that had claimed my 18-year-old brother a year earlier. She had asked my father to take me to Alaska after her death, but I refused, angry that he grieved by distancing himself from all evidence of our tragedy—including me. While he moved on to a new wife and son, I looked for answers in the natural world, and in the Indigenous communities most intimately familiar with these places.

Growing up, we'd never stayed in one place long, so the closest I'd come to a sense of belonging was on those trips to the national parks. When I became a mother, I brought my kids to these lands, hoping to anchor them to something that endured beyond the brevity of human life.

WHEN WE ARRIVED in the park, I teared up as I pressed the Glacier Bay cancellation stamp onto my national parks passport. Such a simple act, yet I felt like I had run marathon after marathon for 25 years just to collect this marking. My



▲ husband and I had lived in Anchorage for seven years and explored Denali, Katmai, Kenai Fjords, Gates of the Arctic, and Wrangell-St. Elias. But Glacier Bay remained out of reach—too remote and difficult to visit while juggling our responsibilities raising four children.

This trip had only become possible when we were invited to the nearby town of Yakutat for a Tlingit memorial potlatch, a ceremony hosted a year after someone dies, where rituals are performed to remove grief. We were there to celebrate my late mentor, Elaine Chewshaa Abraham. Elaine was Naa Tláa (clan mother) of the Yéil Naa (Raven Moeity), K'ineix Kwáan (people of the Copper River Clan) from the Tsisk'w Hit (Owl House), whose ancestors have lived in this part of Alaska for generations.

Elaine's family would be carrying out her request to adopt me and the kids at this potlatch. There would be a naming ceremony, and though I didn't know it yet, we would be given Tlingit names of landmarks in and around Glacier Bay, binding us all to this place and its people.

Among ecologists and the Huna Tlingit people who have made their home here for centuries, Glacier Bay is known as a living lesson

▲ The author and her family explore Bartlett Cove, on the southeastern shore of Glacier Bay.

LESLIE HSU OH, OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF NPS PHOTO/CLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

▶ Johns Hopkins, an active tidewater glacier within the park. Opposite, from top: A brittle star in the intertidal zone; shells along the shoreline.



of sediment and midge larvae but are now home to significant salmon runs flowing through cottonwood forests. “The wilderness is very efficient at reestablishing itself in the wake of a catastrophic event,” explained park ranger Rebecca Miller, our guide for the boat tour, “and Glacier Bay is a prime example of the phenomenon.” Around Johns Hopkins Glacier, the land was rocky and bare. But on the southern fringes of the bay, where the ice receded decades ago, life had edged its way back. At Glacier Bay Lodge, we picked beach strawberries and slept beneath a canopy of old-growth Sitka spruce forest.

Our first night in Glacier Bay, my husband and I had walked along the shore of Bartlett Cove while our kids dipped their feet in crystal-clear waves. Kyra nearly stepped on a mottled starfish that had been stranded by the tides. She picked it up gently and returned it to the ocean. As I watched her, I thought of all the adopted mothers I’d been lucky to have, like Elaine Abraham, who had loved me like her own and, even after her death, helped me to anchor my children and myself to her ancestral lands.

Riley found a white, cone-shaped mushroom with upturned scales and gills that stained her fingers black. Ethan chased after Logan with the molt of a Dungeness crab. I chuckled remembering how I’d once sworn I did not want to have kids or get married—a daughter who couldn’t imagine building a life without her mother, or maybe just someone who wanted to protect herself from the possibility of more loss.

My husband warned us to watch our steps. Scattered up and down the rocky shore were

dozens of nearly invisible moon jellyfish, some drifting in the current, others glistening on rocks, translucent on their edges and transparent in the center, reflecting the colors of the setting sun.

BACK ON THE BOAT, Ranger Miller continued her narration as we waited for a piece of Johns Hopkins to break off into the sea. “What happens when nature decides to wipe things clean? A cold, rocky, wet, barren landscape. But somehow, life finds a way.” Suddenly, a cannon-shot sound startled us. A teasing trickle of ice collapsed into the sea, followed by a modest chunk of the glacier’s terminus. It wasn’t the most spectacular calve I had ever seen, but Logan and Riley, who had never witnessed a calving before, were ecstatic. My kids would leave Glacier Bay the next day with Junior Ranger badges pinned

to their chests, showing they learned something from the forces of nature in this place.

I left the park wishing I had more time to digest what my mother wanted me to take from this journey. I was 46, a few years shy of my mother’s age when she died, and part of me felt as though there was a reason I hadn’t made the trip until now. Perhaps only after becoming a mother myself, after years spent learning that things don’t always happen the way we want them to, could I relate to the creatures who choose to adapt to life here. Beneath a calving glacier, a place of biological catastrophe, a sudden drop in temperature or increase in freshwater runoff can be enough to determine survival. Only now, at this stage in my life, could I understand that I’m not the only one struggling with change.

After returning home, I read everything I could on the discoveries scientists have made in Glacier Bay. For a long time, it was believed that nature rebuilt sequentially: moss colonized glacial sediment, then fireweed moved in, then the enriched soil gave rise to alder and cottonwood, spruce and hemlock. But in 2017, a biologist studying this park found that plant succession isn’t an orderly process. One glacier-scraped plot of land had eight-foot willows. Others hadn’t changed at all over a hundred years. Nature doesn’t heal as tidily as we thought. Just as all of us don’t heal from grief in the same way. What matters is resilience, finding some way, however messy, to deal with catastrophic events that advance and retreat unpredictably through our lives. What matters is how we adapt.

One day, long after I am gone, I hope my children will return to Glacier Bay. I hope they’ll walk intertidal zones hand in hand with someone who loves them as much as I do, rescue a stranded creature, photograph a jellyfish, find a glacier or passage that shares their Tlingit name, and feel like they have finally come home. 🐾



LESLIE HSU OH, OPPOSITE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF NPS PHOTO/GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE; MATTHEW HRANEK/ART + COMMERCE. ILLUSTRATION BY MAY PARSEY

HOW TO EXPLORE GLACIER BAY

Both **Alaska Air** (alaskaair.com) and **Alaska Seaplanes** (flyalaskaseaplanes.com) offer flights from Juneau to the Glacier Bay airstrip in Gustavus. **Glacier Bay Lodge** (visitglacierbay.com; *doubles from \$250*) houses the park visitors’ center and serves as the departure point for the seasonal **Glacier Bay Day Tour**, an eight-hour ranger-narrated expedition into the bay.