

Tour Report

Alaska's Bubble-net Bonanza

19 March – 30 March 2026

Humpback whale



Bald eagle



Orca



Humpback whale



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Introduction

Sitka is one of those places where no two trips are ever quite the same, and this week was a perfect example of that.

Over the course of the tour, we experienced a fantastic range of conditions, from snow and wind to calm seas and clear skies. Throughout it all, the wildlife consistently delivered. We were treated to repeated humpback whale encounters, including multiple examples of cooperative bubble-net feeding, one of the most remarkable behaviours to witness in the natural world.

As with any expedition of this nature, patience and flexibility played an important role, but the rewards were well worth it. Alongside the whales, we encountered a variety of other species and enjoyed some truly memorable moments out on the water.

Combined with a great group and an excellent local team, this made for a highly successful and thoroughly enjoyable week in Sitka.

Thursday 19 March 2026

Day 1:

London Heathrow to Seattle

The adventure began with a 14:55 flight to Seattle. I arrived at the gate with plenty of time to spare, which is always a good start. While waiting, I bumped into one of the guests joining the tour. She had previously joined me on a 1-2-1 trip to Wales for night skies and landscapes. We had a quick catch-up, and she shared a bit about her recent travels. It's always great connecting with someone who shares that same excitement for wildlife and exploration.

The rest of the group were travelling in from different parts of the States, so I wouldn't meet them until later at the hotel. In the meantime, the flight itself couldn't have been smoother: no turbulence, no delays, just an easy 9-hour 30-minute journey across to the Pacific Northwest.

After landing, we collected our luggage and had a fast transition through passport control, but eventually made our way to the hotel: Cedarbrook Lodge. And what a place it is. Despite being just minutes from the airport (a huge bonus after a long travel day), it feels like a peaceful retreat. The rooms are spacious and cosy, with a calm atmosphere that makes it easy to unwind.

Once I'd settled in, I reached out to the two remaining guests who were arriving later that evening. I met them at the hotel, introduced myself properly, and helped them get checked in without any issues.

After that, it was time to call it a night. With a seven-hour time difference catching up, some well-earned rest was definitely needed.

Friday 20 March 2026

Day 2:

Coffee, Catch-Ups & a Whole Lot of Sitka Charm

After a much-needed sleep to fight off the effects of jet lag, I found myself wide awake at 5 am; luckily I got back to sleep after an hour or so. Classic body clock behaviour. There's no negotiating with it. Eventually, 9 am came around and I met the group at Cedarbrook's restaurant for breakfast. I opted for some American pancakes. The food was great, but if I'm honest, it was the coffee that truly saved the morning, strong, much-needed, and very appreciated!

Over breakfast, we all had a chance to properly catch up. There was a real buzz of excitement building as

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the tour officially got underway, and it was great to see everyone getting to know each other.

Before long, it was time to head back to Seattle-Tacoma Airport for our flight up to Sitka. We arrived nice and early, which of course meant one thing... more coffee. When in doubt, especially in an airport, a flat white is always a solid decision!

Our departure ended up being delayed by around 30 minutes due to slow luggage loading, but eventually we were on our way, Alaska-bound. We had a short stop in Ketchikan to pick up additional passengers, where we were greeted by heavy snowfall. Unfortunately, this led to another delay as the aircraft needed to be de-iced before we could continue.

Eventually, we were back in the air and heading for Sitka. The approach into Sitka is usually known for its incredible scenery, but this time we were met with thick snow and near whiteout conditions. While the views were a little limited at times, we did have openings in the clouds; there was something pretty special about arriving in what felt like a full winter wonderland.



After landing and collecting our bags, we were greeted by Neil, our local guide and boat captain. I hadn't seen him since August last year, so it was genuinely lovely to be welcomed by a familiar face and his usual warm energy.

From there, we made our way to our base for the trip, Southeast Resort. Once checked in and settled into our rooms, we had a bit of time to freshen up before heading to the hotel restaurant for dinner, rounding off a long but rewarding day of travel.

Saturday 21 March 2026

Day 3:

Snowy Setbacks and Sitka National Park

Today started early, very early, at least for me. At around 5:15 am, I received a call from Neil with an update on the weather. Unfortunately, the forecast for the day wasn't looking good, with wind gusts expected to reach up to 45mph. Given the conditions, he made the call to cancel our planned boat trip.

Not the ideal start to the day, of course, but safety always comes first, especially when you're dealing with the open ocean and unpredictable weather.

With Plan A off the table, it was time to shift to Plan B and figure out how to spend the day in Sitka, with heavy snowfall expected throughout.

We met Neil at the hotel around 7 am, where he kindly brought breakfast and lunch for the group. We had a quick catch-up, and he walked us through the forecast for the coming days. Thankfully, things were looking

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more promising; no more strong winds for now. It was set to be very cold out on the water, but at least we'd be able to continue the expedition.

After breakfast, we regrouped at 10 am and set off on foot towards Sitka National Historical Park. It's not a long walk from the hotel, but with the snow turning slushy underfoot, it slowed us down a bit. Still, it gave us more time to take in the surroundings: snow-dusted trees, quiet streets, and that crisp, cold Alaskan air.

As we entered the park, it immediately felt like stepping into a completely different world. The towering Sitka spruce and western hemlock trees created a peaceful coastal rainforest setting, made even more atmospheric by the fresh snowfall. The trails wind gently through the forest, following the shoreline, with the sound of the ocean never too far away.

One of the most striking features of the park is its collection of totem poles, standing tall among the trees. Each one tells a story, representing Tlingit and Haida cultural heritage, and it really adds a deeper sense of place as you walk through. Even in the snow, they stood out beautifully, colourful, detailed, and full of history.

Wildlife didn't disappoint either. We had our first proper sightings of bald eagles here, perched high in the treetops and calling out across the forest. It's always a special moment seeing them for the first time on a trip. There were also plenty of ravens around, their calls echoing through the trees, along with a few varied thrush hopping between the rocks along the shoreline.

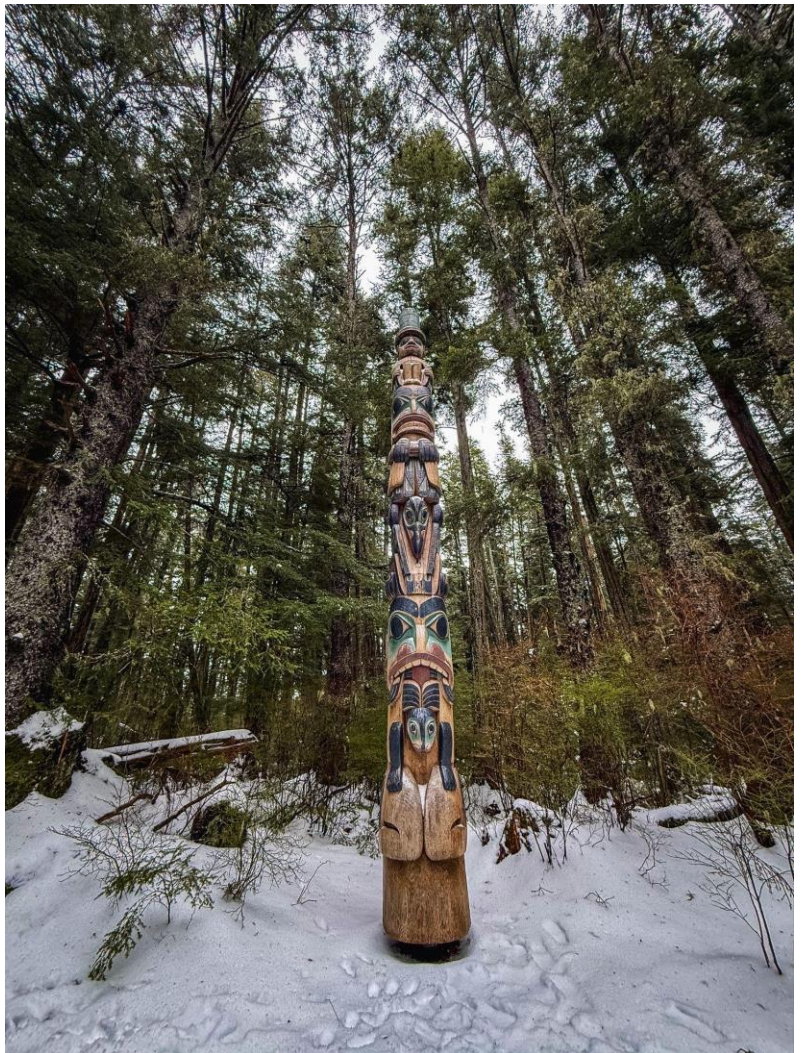
The coastal section of the park was just as impressive. Snow met the shoreline, with gentle waves rolling in and distant views fading into the wintry haze. Despite the cold, it was a really refreshing place to be quiet, scenic, and full of life.

Overall, it was the perfect way to spend a slower morning. A chance to stretch our legs, take in the landscape, and ease ourselves into the rhythm of Alaska before the real wildlife action begins out on the water.

We returned to the hotel to enjoy our lunch, followed by a bit more downtime. Later in the afternoon, we met again at 3 pm and made our way into Sitka town centre to explore some of the local shops. Not everything was open, but we still enjoyed browsing the ones that were, and there will be more opportunities to explore the rest later in the trip.

In the evening, we met for dinner at the hotel restaurant, Cold Water Bar & Grill. It was a lovely meal, made even better by a live band playing, which added a great atmosphere to the evening.

Before long, it was time to head back to our rooms for some rest, ready to shake off the last of the jet lag and hopefully get out on the water tomorrow.



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Sunday 22 March 2026

Day 4:

Into the Sound – Whales, Waves & Questionable Sea Legs

Our morning kicked off in the hotel lobby at 6:50 am, where a slightly sleepy but excited group gathered, ready for our first proper day on the water. From there, it was a short walk across the car park to Crescent Harbour, where our ride awaited, *Catdaddy*.



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A 13-metre, custom-built expedition catamaran, *Catdaddy* is quite possibly the best wildlife-watching platform in Sitka... and, as we would soon find out, a very capable mechanical rodeo when the conditions get lively.

We were welcomed aboard by Captain Neil, who gave us a full safety briefing and showed us everything we needed to know on board, most importantly, how to use the coffee machine. A critical life skill at sea, and one I took very seriously.

Before long, we were out of the harbour and heading towards an area called Biele Rock, where another boat had reported humpback activity. It didn't take us long to find them, and we spent around an hour and a half watching their behaviour. There was feeding going on, but no bubble-netting, so essentially, a warm-up act rather than the headline performance.

We came across another group of humpbacks, tightly packed together, surfacing and breathing in sync. At this point, everyone was quietly thinking the same thing... *this looks promising.*

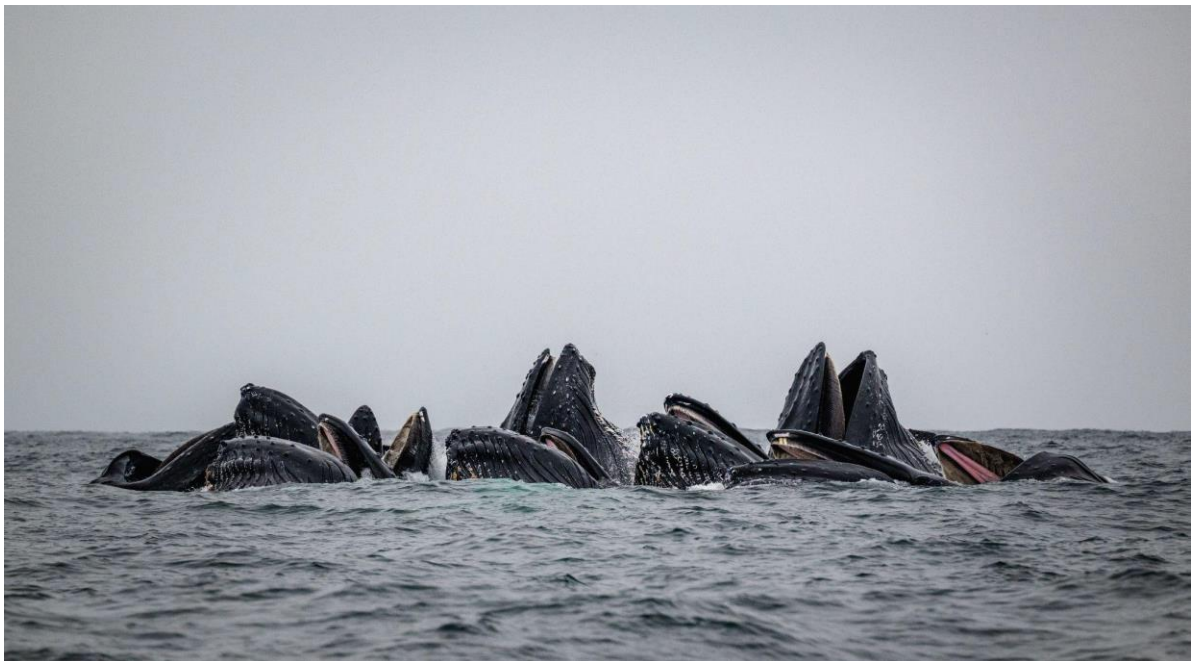


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Not long after moving on, we struck gold.

And then, chaos (the good kind). Multiple whales burst through the surface in a powerful lunge feed. Game on!



For a bit of context, **bubblenet feeding** is basically the whales' version of a perfectly coordinated team sport, except instead of a ball, it's a panicking cloud of fish. The whales dive below a school of herring and blow bubbles in a spiralling pattern known as fibonacci sequence, creating a "net" that traps the fish into a tight ball. Then, in a perfectly timed move, they all surge upwards together with mouths wide open, scooping up thousands of fish in one go. It's part strategy, part teamwork, and 100% incredible to watch. And honestly, it's absolute madness, in the best possible way.

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Out in the sound, however, the conditions were doing their best to keep things interesting. We had around a 1.5-metre swell (fine on its own), but throw in 25mph gusts from the east and suddenly you've got a boat that feels like it's auditioning for *Dancing on Ice*.



Before long, a few people started to feel a little... *green*. Completely understandable, given we were essentially trying to photograph whales while being gently (and sometimes not so gently) launched in different directions.

Despite the rolling seas, we stayed with the whales for a few hours and were treated to some incredible feeding action.

Eventually, in the interest of both morale and stomach stability, we decided to head into calmer waters for lunch. I think everyone appreciated the opportunity to stand upright again without gripping onto something for dear life.

Just as we were regrouping, the radio crackled into life:

"Neil, Neil, Chatham here, we've got another group of bubble-netters near Apple Island. Similar numbers, much calmer water."

"Roger that, Chatham, we're on our way."

Music to everyone's ears. It didn't take much persuasion!

We made our way over, and sure enough, conditions improved almost immediately. Still a bit of swell, still a bit of wind, but nothing like the earlier chaos. And what followed was just nonstop action.

Endless bubble-net feeding, whales lunging through the surface again and again, with the occasional herring

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quite literally being launched into the air like it had made some very poor life choices.



At one point, we even spotted some distant breaching, too far away to fully enjoy, but still a nice bonus. One of the standout moments was recognising this particular group from previous seasons. Neil and I both spotted a familiar individual, *Shreddy*, a whale we've named after the damage to his fluke from an old propeller incident. We'd seen this same pod bubble-net feeding back in August when I was guiding here, which made it feel like a bit of a reunion tour.



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The scenery around us was classic Alaska, moody, dramatic, and almost entirely monochrome thanks to the weather, but it somehow made the whole experience feel even more raw and real.

Eventually, it was time to head back to Sitka harbour, warm up, and regain full control of our balance. We all met again later for dinner, still buzzing from the day's action (and grateful to be on solid ground). An absolutely incredible first day on the water, and a very strong reminder of why we're here... even if the ocean tried its best to throw us off.



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Monday 23 March 2026

Day 5:

Snow, Sucker Holes & Whales Keeping Us on Our Toes

The day started much like the others: same early meeting time in reception, same slightly sleepy faces, and the same growing excitement. Overnight snowfall had done its thing, and we stepped out into a proper winter scene. The walk down to the harbour was beautifully snowy... and just a little bit slippery in places. Nothing like a cautious group shuffle to the dock to start the morning.

We boarded *Catdaddy* around 7 am and headed out into the harbour. It didn't take long before we spotted our first humpbacks of the day, fairly close to shore. Around 3-4 individuals were feeding independently, no coordination, no teamwork... just every whale for themselves. Definitely not our bubble-net crew, but still a great start.



We spent some time with them before making a quick return to the harbour so Neil could refuel. The fuel station had been closed the day before, so this was a necessary (and very sensible) pit stop.

Not that anyone minded too much; the weather had well and truly closed in. Visibility was down to about 30 metres, which, as it turns out, is not ideal when your job is to find whales in a very large ocean.

Once refuelled, we headed back out and pushed deeper into Sitka Sound. And, as if on cue, it didn't take long before we found our bubble-netters again. They were already in the mood.

Despite near-constant snow showers rolling through, the whales put on a fantastic display throughout the morning. Every now and then, the clouds would break just enough to let some light through, what Neil calls a "sucker hole". That brief moment where you think, "Ah, it's clearing!" ... only for it to close up again five minutes later. Classic Alaskan skies.

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Still, the whales didn't seem to care about the lighting conditions; they were busy doing what they do best. Eventually, the activity slowed down a bit, so we made the call to head into calmer water for an early lunch. After some food, warmth, and a chance to regain feeling in our fingers, it was back out we went. We returned to the whales, but things had quietened down. The group had spread out, likely searching for herring, and for a while it felt like a bit of a reset. But, plot twist, the weather suddenly decided to improve. Blue skies started to appear, and for the first time, we could properly take in the surrounding scenery. Snow-covered mountains, calm patches of water... It was a completely different world from the morning. Then, as if someone flipped a switch, the whales got going again.

The afternoon turned into a full-on show. Repeated bubble-net feeds, whales lunging through the surface again and again- it was relentless. In fact, we'd been so spoiled by this point that anything slightly less dramatic was met with comments like, *"Hmm... bit of a weak one that,"* or *"Come on whales, we've seen better!"*

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Then came one of the standout moments of the day.

We noticed a group diving beneath us, clearly setting up for a feed. Everyone turned their attention to the front of the boat, cameras ready, waiting for the action to happen. Then we heard it, that high-pitched feeding call. The signal that something big was about to happen.

We braced ourselves... watching ahead...

...and then they surfaced.

Behind us...

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Literally metres from the back of the boat.

Total chaos, in the best possible way. Cameras scrambling, people turning, a few surprised reactions, an absolutely unforgettable, heart-racing moment that no one saw coming. I managed to get a few images on my phone, albeit too zoomed in for the big group. I also managed to grab a tiny bit of it on my phone but it all happened so suddenly.

Eventually, after around ten hours out on the water (and a full day of excitement), we made our way back to Sitka harbour, tired, slightly frozen, wind-burnt, but very happy.

After a quick 30-minute reset, it was time to head out for dinner, share stories, and relive the best moments of the day, of which there were plenty.

And then... do it all again tomorrow.

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Tuesday 24 March 2026

Day 6:

Golden Light, Fjord Echoes & Still not enough for us apparently.

Another early start; by now it's less of a shock and more just part of daily life. Same meeting time, same routine, and the now very familiar walk down to the harbour. But today felt different straight away. Blue skies.

Actual sunshine. Mountains out, water calm, and for once we weren't being blasted sideways by snow. Sitka had decided to show off, and we were absolutely here for it.

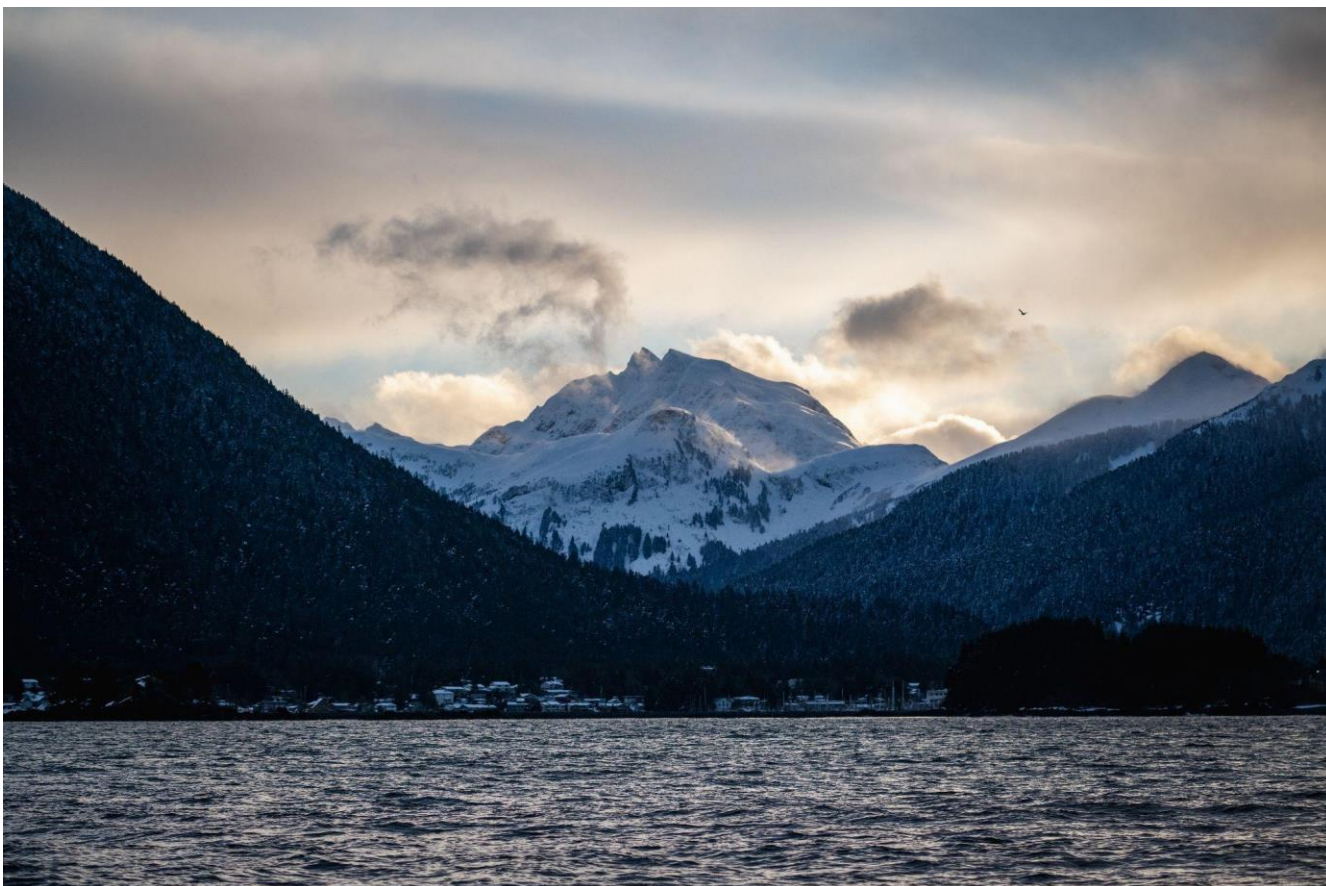
We boarded *Catdaddy*, coffee in hand (as always), and headed out, and almost immediately struck gold. Not far from the harbour, we came across a bubble-net feeding group already in action. No long search, no warm-up, straight into it. A short but brilliant display, with whales lunging through the surface against a backdrop of Sitka itself.

And the light... unreal!



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That soft morning glow lit everything perfectly, and in between feeds we were treated to backlit blows from the whales, their fishy-smelling breath hanging in the air like melted gold. One of those moments where you almost forget to press the shutter because you're too busy just staring at it.

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Eventually, the activity eased off, and we moved on into the sound.

Now, here's where things got slightly ridiculous...

After the last few days, we'd all become *very* hard to impress.

We found more whales, some relaxed feeding, some cruising, and instead of being amazed (as any normal person would be), there were quiet murmurs of:
"Hmm... bit casual."

"Not quite yesterday's standard."

"Come on, where's the effort?"

Truly shocking behaviour from all of us.

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We pushed further out and eventually found another group showing signs of coordination. The anticipation built again, tight groupings, synchronised dives, and then a few smaller feeds kicked things off. Not full chaos straight away, but enough to keep everyone locked in and ready.

By the afternoon, we decided to explore a new area, Deep Inlet. A narrow, steep-sided fjord to the east of Sitka, and an incredible place to be on a calm day.

A group of bubble-netting whales had pushed into the inlet, and while their feeding behaviour was a bit unpredictable, the setting more than made up for it. Each time they did feed, we were treated to something really special, the unmistakable *bugle* call.

That high, haunting sound echoing through the walls of the fjord.

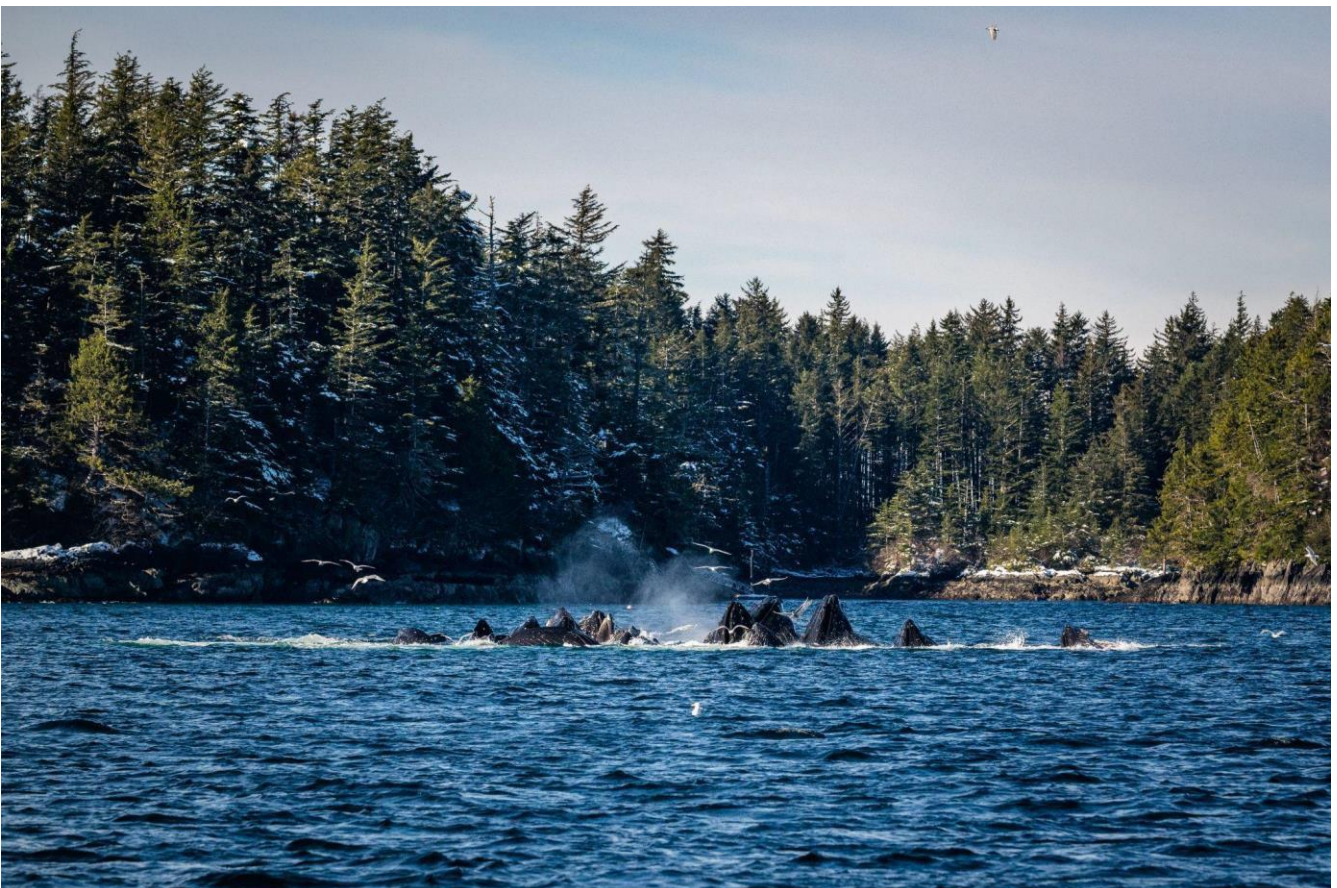
It's one of those things you just can't describe properly, you have to hear it for yourself. It carries through the inlet, bouncing off the steep sides, adding this almost surreal soundtrack to the whole experience.

Even when the feeding wasn't consistent, just being there, watching these whales move through such an incredible landscape, was more than enough.



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The rest of the afternoon settled into a relaxed rhythm. Some nice views, a few well-timed feeds, and for once, conditions that made both wildlife watching and photography feel... dare I say it... easy.



Eventually, we made our way back towards Sitka, sun still shining, water calm, and a very content (if slightly over-spoiled) group on board.

Back on land, it was the usual routine: quick reset, warm up, then out for dinner. Stories were shared, moments replayed, and once again, it was agreed:

“Yeah... not a bad day.”

And just like that, ready to do it all again tomorrow.

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Day 7:

Patience, Peaks & Playing the Alignment Game

Another day, another early start. Same routine, morning meet, slightly sleepy faces, and the now very familiar walk down to the harbour. By this point, the group was definitely starting to feel the effects of the early mornings and long days... but somehow, as soon as we stepped onto *Catdaddy*, the energy came back.

Funny how whales do that.

We headed out into the sound, and it didn't take long at all before we found our bubble-netters, this time out towards Cape Burunof. And what a backdrop we had waiting for us.

Towering in the distance was Mount Edgecumbe, a near-perfect-shaped stratovolcano rising straight out of

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the ocean. Built up over time from layers of lava, ash, and volcanic debris, it has that classic steep, symmetrical profile, often compared to Mount Fuji. It last erupted around 4,000 years ago and has been quietly behaving itself ever since... which is ideal when you're trying to photograph whales in front of it!

No Pompeii needed here.

Now, naturally, this led to *the mission*.

Get the whales feeding directly in line with the volcano.

Simple, right?

Absolutely not!

This turned into a full morning of what can only be described as the ultimate patience game. The whales were feeding well, no complaints there, but getting them to surface exactly where you wanted, with Edgecumbe perfectly behind them? That's a whole different story.



You'd think you had it lined up... *this is it, this is the one*... cameras ready...

...and then the whales would surface 50 metres to the left like, "Not today."

Repeat that process until you lose count.

Naturally, this meant plenty of banter directed at Neil.

We gave him a bit of stick, of course, purely in good humour as always, about getting the whales to "just pop up a bit closer to the volcano." He assured us he'd have a word with them. Clearly, this was all down to his questionable captain skills and poor whale positioning management. He took it in good humour as he always does.

Eventually though, credit where it's due, Neil's "luck" (we'll call it that) and the whales' cooperation came together, and we got the shot. Perfect alignment, whales feeding, volcano in the background... job done.

It only took the entire morning.

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The whales themselves were having a great day. They'd clearly found a solid biomass of herring and were making the absolute most of it, full-on buffet mode. Repeated feeding, strong coordination, and plenty of opportunities for us to enjoy (and photograph) the action.



By the time lunch rolled around, the wind had started to pick up, and with it came that proper biting chill. The kind that goes straight through gloves and makes you question your outfit choices.

But of course... if you want the shots, you stay out.

Fingers are optional. Photos are forever.

The afternoon brought a bit of a slowdown in activity. There were still feeds happening, but they were more spread out and less predictable. We stuck with it, moving between areas, trying to make the most of every opportunity, but eventually, after a solid eight hours on the water, we made the call to head back.

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Back to harbour, back to warmth, and back to functioning fingers.

Days like this aren't just about what you see; they're about how it all unfolds. The patience, the anticipation, the little bits of banter, and then that one moment where everything clicks. It's easy to forget how lucky we are to experience this... until a day like today reminds you.

The usual routine followed: warming up, backing up photos (always the real moment of truth), and then heading out for dinner where the stories we inevitably shared, the shots got better, and everyone agreed it had been another seriously good day.

Thursday 26 March 2026

Day 8:

Close Calls, Golden Light and a Surprise Orca Finale

Same morning routine as usual. Early meet, slightly tired faces, and the steady walk down to the harbour. Although a few of us decided to get ahead of the game and wandered across the road to a gorgeous little café called The Wildflour.

And yes... a proper barista-made latte with an extra shot was involved.

Exactly what was needed. That kind of coffee that makes you feel like you might actually be able to focus your binoculars properly.

Fully fueled, we boarded Catdaddy and headed out into the Sound. And, almost like it had been planned, we found our first group of bubble netters not long after leaving the harbour.

We settled in at a safe and respectful distance, watching as they prepared to feed. The whales dived, and as

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always, we were scanning the water expecting them to surface somewhere within that 100 yard zone in front of us.

Then suddenly... bubbles.

Everywhere!

Not in front of us. Not to the side. Directly underneath us.

We were right on top of the bait ball and the bubble net.

Which was great for about half a second... until we realised they were coming from directly underneath us.

At that moment, it dawned on all of us that we had absolutely nailed the positioning... just unfortunately not in the way we had intended. Not exactly where you want to be when several hundred tonnes of hungry whales are about to come flying upwards.

Not ideal.

Thankfully, Neil reacted instantly. He started stamping on the deck, sending loud vibrations through the hull. The idea is to let the whales know something large and very much not edible is above them. Fortunately for us, it worked.

The whales abandoned the feed and surfaced away from the boat, moving off calmly. A bit of a heart-in-mouth moment, but handled perfectly and a very good reminder that wildlife always keeps you on your toes.



Not long after, they regrouped and went again. Clearly far more organised and awake than we were. Down they went, perfectly coordinated, ready to feed again.

And this time, everything lined up beautifully.

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The light was incredible. That soft, warm glow that every photographer dreams of. It added depth, contrast, and just made everything feel that little bit more special.



Later in the morning, we got a radio call from Chatham. Another group of bubble netters had been found about twenty minutes away, in a channel between Crow Island and Middle Island.

We made our way over. While it was noticeably calmer than where we had come from, it was still pretty blowy out there. Sitka kept us honest as always.

We spent most of the morning with this group, enjoying some good feeding activity in the best light that we have had so far! We stayed with them for a good few hours, catching them lunge feeding through the surface. So near-perfect conditions. Until eventually they began to spread out and search for more herring.

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With things slowing down, we decided to push further out in search of a grey whale that had been reported in the area.

The landscapes were truly stunning, looking back into the mountains towards Sitka, and I couldn't resist the urge to get a few images whilst moving locations.

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Grey whales are quite different from humpbacks. They are coastal feeders, often seen rolling and diving in shallower waters as they sift through sediment for small crustaceans. They also undertake one of the longest migrations of any mammal, travelling up to 12,000 miles round trip between breeding grounds in Mexico and feeding grounds up here in Alaska.

Eventually, we found two.

The views were not the best, but it did not matter. A grey whale is a grey whale, and that gave us another species for the day.

From there, we took advantage of some calmer, sheltered water and had a look for sea otters. We managed to find one, but at a distance, and unfortunately no others nearby. A bit of a tease.

Then it was back to the main event.

Whale searching.

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Found them!

There were plenty around, but they were spread out and clearly still looking for food. While scanning the area, we were treated to something completely different. A US Coast Guard helicopter came into view and started running rescue drills. Not something you see every day, and definitely a cool bonus.



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Eventually, we pushed on towards an area just off Gagarin Island, where we found more bubble netters. They came up fairly close to the boat, again giving us about 2 hours of action. And then once again dispersed.



Back into Sitka Sound we went, searching for more action.

We found it.

The same group from the morning. The very same whales that had nearly popped up underneath us earlier and almost turned *Catdaddy* into a low-budget remake of *Titanic*. This time, they gave us a bit more space... which we all agreed was a much better plan.

Then, on the way, something caught my eye.

A fin in the distance.

At first, I was not convinced. It could have been part of a humpback fluke. But then I saw it again. No doubt about it this time.

Orca!

Transient orca, to be precise.

These are mammal-hunting killer whales, very different from resident orca that feed mainly on fish. Transients travel in smaller groups and are constantly on the move, searching for seals, sea lions, and even other whales. Quiet, stealthy, and incredibly efficient predators.

We had three individuals, including a large male with that unmistakable tall dorsal fin.

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Our third cetacean species of the day.

Not bad, not bad at all.

They looked like they were travelling with purpose, so we gave them their space and eventually made our way back towards the humpbacks.

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We found another smaller group of bubble netters that treated us to a few feeds before splitting and becoming pretty quiet.

Unfortunately, the feeding had slowed again, and after giving it a solid effort, we called it a day and headed back to harbour.

Another full day on the water. A bit of everything.

Back to town, quick reset, and then out to a local Italian for a well-earned meal. Good food, good company, and plenty of stories from yet another unforgettable day.

Friday 27 March 2026

Day 9:

The Grand Finale – Whales, Wildlife & Absolute Chaos (the Good Kind)

Well... what a way to end.

Our final day in Sitka, and somehow the routine still hadn't got any easier. Same early meet, same walk to the harbour, same slightly tired group... but also that underlying feeling of *let's make this one count*.

We boarded *Catdaddy* and headed straight out into the sound, and it took all of about five minutes before we found whales.

Of course it did.

A small group of around four to five bubble netters greeted us almost immediately. A nice start, but before long a radio call came through from Chatham, he'd found a bigger group. No hesitation needed, we moved on.

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And just like that, we were back into it again.

More bubble netting. More coordinated feeding. More moments where you just stand there thinking, *how is this still happening?*

Honestly, the consistency this week has been ridiculous. Bubble netters after bubble netters. Not complaining... just slightly in disbelief.

After spending some time with them, we decided to switch things up and go in search of sea otters while the tide was still high. We did find a few, but they were clearly not in the mood for visitors, keeping their distance and disappearing every time we thought we might get a closer look.

Classic otter behaviour.



We also came across a nice raft of white-winged scoters, which was a great little bonus and a reminder that there's always something happening out here, even when it's not whales.

Then came something a bit different.

We headed out to watch the first herring haul of the season.

Now, I'll be honest, I wasn't entirely convinced. I'd been before and it hadn't exactly delivered. But one of the guests suggested we give it a go... and fair play to her, she absolutely nailed that call.

Top marks.

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The Sitka Sound herring sac roe fishery is one of Southeast Alaska's most important and closely managed commercial fisheries, taking place each spring when Pacific herring gather in large numbers to spawn. The fishery targets herring just before they release their eggs, when the roe (eggs) are at peak quality and highly valued, particularly in Japanese markets.

Fishing is done primarily with purse seine vessels, which encircle entire schools of herring with large nets. The catch is then transferred to tender boats and processed for export. Openings are tightly controlled by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, often lasting only minutes, to ensure that only a sustainable portion of the population is harvested.



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The timing of the fishery is closely tied to the natural spawning cycle, which also attracts a wide range of marine life and lots and lots of bald eagles, seabirds, and other fish, making it not just an economic event, but a significant ecological moment in Sitka Sound.

We arrived to find around fifteen fishing boats gathered, ready for the action. And what followed was complete chaos, in the best possible way.



As the nets came up, the water quite literally started “boiling.” This happens when thousands upon thousands of herring are packed tightly together in the net, thrashing and flashing just beneath the surface, turning the water into a shimmering, churning mass of silver.

And then the birds arrived.



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Hundreds of gulls diving in from every direction. Bald eagles swooping down one after another, some grabbing two or three herring at a time before lifting off again. It was relentless. Noise, movement, action everywhere you looked.



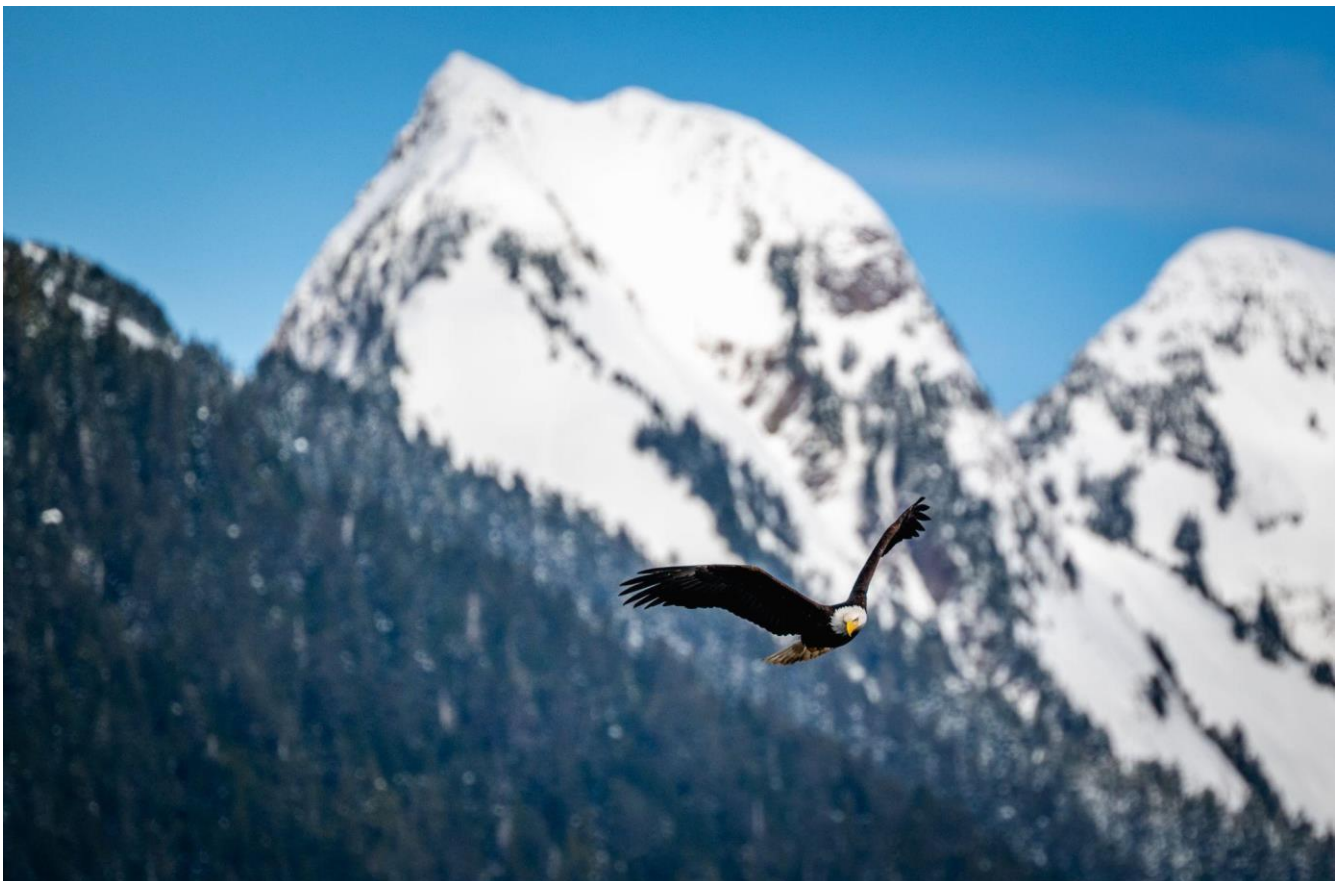
An absolute dream for photography.

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Then, as if that wasn't enough... The eagles arrived and started to dive and hook up herring, sometimes three at a time! It was honestly a fantastic session.



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We pushed back out into the sound and spent the rest of the afternoon with another group of bubble netters. And this time, the conditions were perfect.

Flat calm water. No swell. No wind.

Which meant one thing: visibility.

You could actually see the bubbles forming beneath the surface, tracking where the whales were moving before they came up. It turned the whole experience into a bit of a prediction game: watch the bubbles, pick your spot, get ready.



We missed a few... but the hit rate was high.
Very high.

The whales were consistent, feeding regularly, giving us opportunity after opportunity. It felt like they knew it was the final day and decided to put on one last proper show.
And what a show it was.

In total, we counted 69 bubble net feeds today alone. And realistically, there were probably plenty more happening out there that we didn't even see.

An absolutely ridiculous number.
A fitting finale.

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Saturday 28th March 2026

Day 10:

One More Day in Sitka... Whether We Planned It or Not

Today was supposed to be simple.

Fly from Sitka to Seattle, overnight there, then home to the UK the next day. Easy. Smooth. Textbook end to the trip.

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Alaska, however, had other ideas.

We arrived at the airport bright and early, checked in, boarded the plane, and everything was looking good for an on-time departure. Everyone settled in, bags stowed, mentally preparing for the journey home. And then... we didn't move.

After a bit of waiting, the announcement came through. An oil leak.

Never the words you want to hear when sitting on a plane.

We stayed on board for a couple of hours while mechanics worked on it, with that classic mix of hope and quiet suspicion that things might not be going entirely to plan. Unfortunately, Sitka decided it wasn't quite finished with us yet.

The issue couldn't be fixed. Apparently, they needed a specific part... a nut, of all things... which they didn't have.

And just like that, the flight was cancelled.

Back to the hotel we went. Same place, same rooms, just with a slightly different mindset this time. Not quite the departure day we had in mind, but at least we knew we were in a good spot.

By the time we got back, it was already afternoon, so we had a bit of downtime to reset before heading out for dinner.

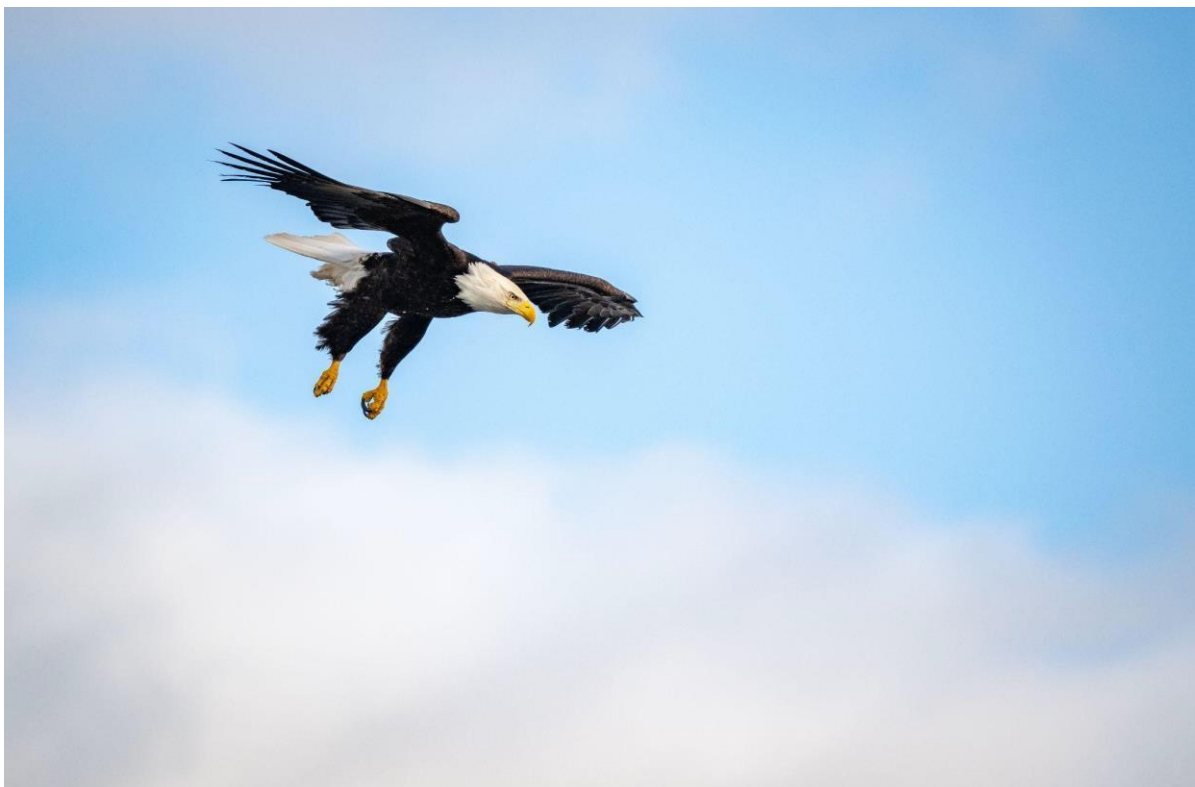
But of course, sitting still isn't really our thing.

I noticed a lot of activity down at the harbour, bald eagles everywhere, so naturally we grabbed cameras and headed down to investigate.

And it did not disappoint.

Fishing boats had recently come in and discarded some fish, which had basically triggered a full-on feeding frenzy. Eagles swooping in from all directions, flybys against the mountain backdrop, constant movement... one of those sessions where you barely put the camera down.

A very nice bonus to an otherwise unexpected extra day.



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Sunday 29 March 2026

Day 11:

Take Two... and Finally Heading Home

After yesterday's unexpected extension to the trip, today was attempt number two at getting out of Sitka. Another early start, with our rescheduled 8 am flight to Seattle. This time, everything went to plan. We boarded, pushed back, and most importantly... no oil leaks.

A strong start.

The flight was smooth, and before long we were back in Seattle. Job done... or so we thought.

The only slight downside was the small matter of a seven-hour layover before our flight back to the UK. Not ideal, but nothing- a bit of coffee, some food, and a good session of photo editing couldn't fix.

To be fair, it was quite a nice chance to sit back, go through the images from the week, and properly take in everything we'd experienced. Bubble nets, close encounters, chaotic moments, and plenty of laughs along the way.

Eventually, it was time to say our goodbyes as some of the group headed off on domestic flights to other parts of the States. Always a slightly strange moment at the end of a trip like this, after spending so much time together out on the water, it suddenly comes to a close.

But not quite for us just yet.

After a long wait, our British Airways flight was finally called for boarding. An overnight journey back to London Heathrow ahead... and a good opportunity to catch up on some well-needed sleep.

And just like that, the trip was finished.

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