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ALERT FEATURED TOP STORY

An Oregonian experiences a small-town Alaskan winter

Maddie Pfeifer

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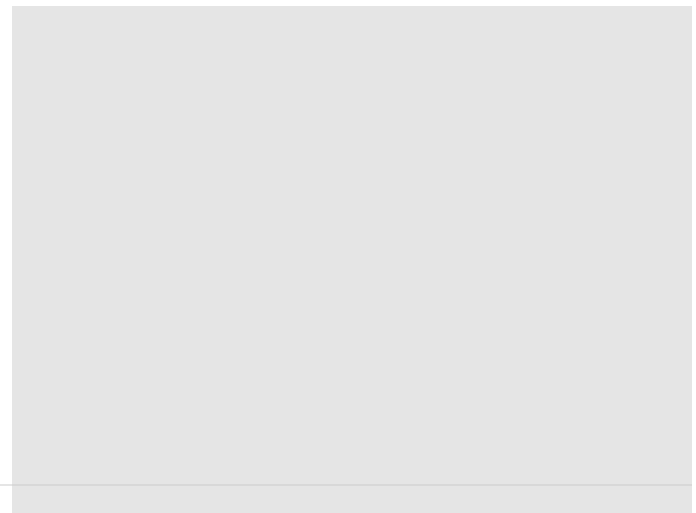
I've lived in Oregon my whole life. I was born and raised in the Portland area, and Corvallis is the farthest away from home I've lived.

As such, I don't use umbrellas in the rain; I'm not very good at driving in the snow; and I am honestly clueless when it comes to pumping my own gas. So, taking trips to other states is always fun for me, as I get to experience something new and different.

The past week, I had the privilege of taking a trip to Alaska — somewhere I've never thought I'd go. I went to the "last frontier" to celebrate my birthday and visit my boyfriend, Henry. He graduated from Oregon State University with an oceanography degree in June and took a job as an ocean scientist and lab technician in the small town of Seward, Alaska.

Before the trip

There was much anticipation for this trip, as I would get a week off from work — and the crime beat — I could see where Henry had been living for the last two months, and I would get to experience Alaska in the winter.



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Staff reporter Maddie Pfeifer took a trip to Seward, Alaska in January. She enjoyed exploring the snow-capped mountains.

Photo courtesy of Henry Rappleyea

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There was also some anxiety, as I worried about whether I was prepared for the extreme temperatures and snowy conditions.

Always the dutiful journalist, I did plenty of research in preparation, learning about the best spots in Seward. As I quickly learned, I was going to this small town at the worst possible time for tourists.

Many restaurants and local businesses shut down completely during the winter months. Others offer very limited hours. My hope for a fancy birthday dinner was squashed before I even got on the plane.

But nevertheless, it was going to be an adventure — a cold one at that.

Oregon can certainly get chilly during the winter, but nothing like Alaska.

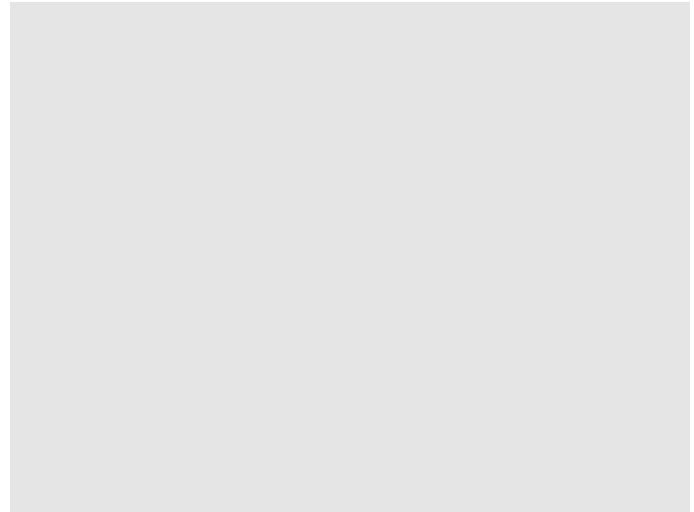
Fortunately, family and friends gifted me with cold-weather apparel at

Christmastime. As someone who has never skied or snowboarded, I didn't have any snow gear.

So, I squeezed my brand-new snow pants, thermals and more into a carry-on suitcase and headed to PDX to begin my weeklong trek.

The trip begins

My flight started off on a lighthearted note with the Alaska Airlines crew playing the song "North to Alaska" before we took off.



Mountains surround clear blue water in the small town of Seward, Alaska.

Maddie Pfeifer, Mid-Valley Media

I landed in Anchorage and was immediately taken aback by the chilly air. I popped on my beanie and waited to be picked up by a Seward woman who runs an airport shuttle.

The drive to Seward was about 2½ hours, and although it was cloudy, I took in the scenery along the highway. One thing about Alaska that's different from any place I've been is the mountains. There are mountains everywhere.

As we drove along the highway, we passed by the majestic snow-capped mountains and winter forests that looked like Narnia.

Before I knew it, I was dropped off at Henry's doorstep, and my Alaskan adventure officially began.

Small town vibes

Seward is a tiny town nestled in the mountains and surrounded by water. It doesn't have a lot going on in the winter, and I was struck by how quiet the town was. There weren't many cars driving around or people taking strolls through the streets.

The closest I felt to city life while staying in Seward was the Safeway — which, thankfully, had a Starbucks inside it. Being more than two hours from a true city was something completely new to me — and pretty inconvenient.

The main road in the town was lined with gift shops, bars and restaurants, most of them closed for the winter.

But I did appreciate being able to walk everywhere, and I truly felt like this was what small-town living is all about: enjoying the beauty of nature and knowing everything about where you live.

The people of Seward weren't always the friendliest or most approachable. Alaskans and Oregonians are quite different. The locals weren't mean by any standards, but they weren't the type to smile at me as I walked by.

At least Henry and I had each other to talk to. I learned more about what he does as an ocean scientist, and we had many interesting and deep conversations.

Food and drink

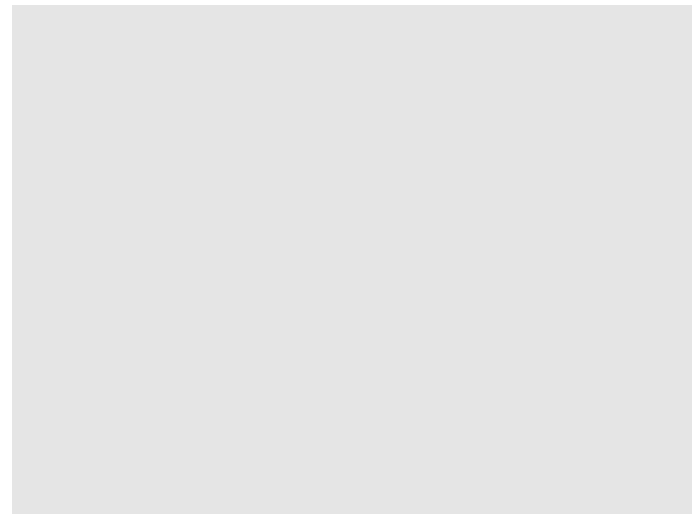
One of the things I was most excited about when going to Alaska was the seafood. Thankfully, I had a wonderful meal of pan-seared Alaskan halibut one night in Seward. It was probably the best seafood meal I have had in my life.

Other yummy dishes I enjoyed included street tacos, burgers and fish and chips. But the highlight of my food and drink experience was probably the mulled wine cocoa I got at the Seward Alehouse — Henry's and my go-to spot while I was visiting. When you're walking around in 20- to 30-degree weather, a nice warm cocktail hits the spot.

I will admit, I missed my 2 Towns Cider, but that cocoa was delicious.

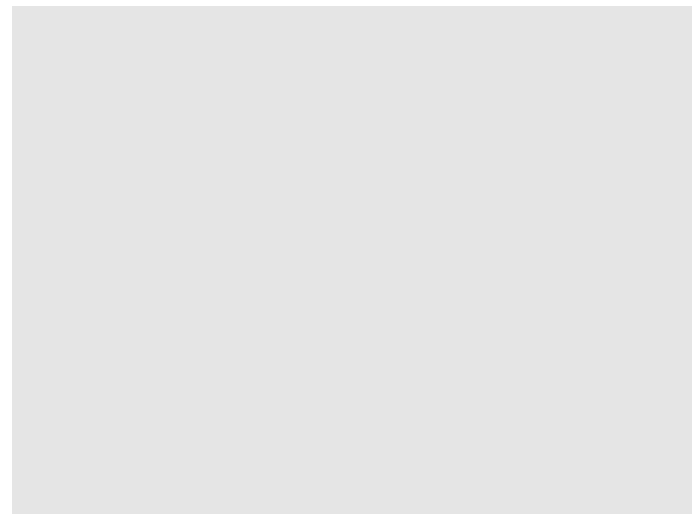
One of the most notable differences between Oregon and Alaska for me was the sales tax and general price of goods. Henry and I actually felt overjoyed when we each had burgers for \$18 each.

My wallet certainly took a hit while I was in Seward. But I suppose it does any time I'm on vacation.



Seward, Alaska features gift shops, restaurants and bars surrounded by mountains. Most businesses close for the winter.

Maddie Pfeifer, Mid-Valley Media



Seward, Alaska is the "mural capital of Alaska." The back side of the town's library/museum features a colorful nature-inspired mural.

Winter weather

Maddie Pfeifer, Mid-Valley Media

I unfortunately did not get a single clear day while I was in Alaska. It snowed, it rained, and I honestly forgot what the sun looked like while I was there. But it wasn't as cold as I expected.

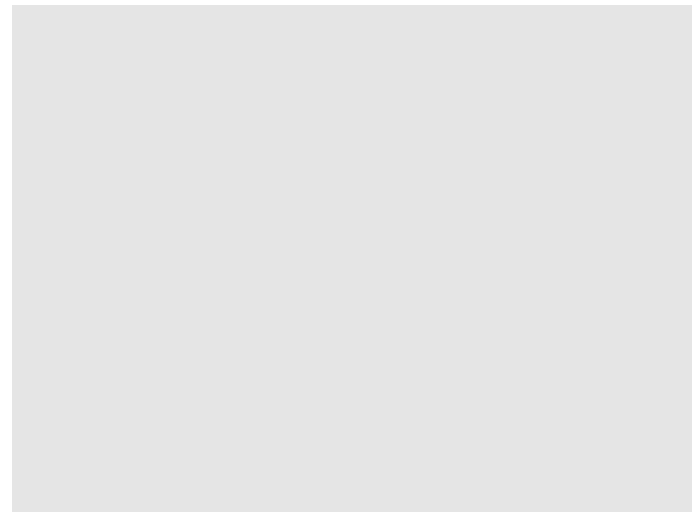
My warm socks, thermal layers and snow coat were all I needed. I never felt that cold. I donned a beanie every day but didn't really need my gloves. My new snow boots were perfect for the weather. But the real MVP of the trip were the cleats Henry let me use.

The ice in Seward was the biggest surprise to me. I hadn't really thought about how slippery walking around town would be. I put my cleats on over my boots basically every time I stepped out of the house. If Henry hadn't provided me with some, I would probably be writing this with bruises all over my body from falling.

Coming home

Seward felt like a winter wonderland. And it was wonderful to celebrate my 24th birthday in that beautiful setting with Henry. My Safeway birthday cake was surprisingly delicious, and although I didn't get any free drinks or fancy dinner, it was still a birthday to remember.

I can unequivocally say that small-town living isn't for me. But taking a trip to Seward was still special. I can see why the town is a tourist destination in the summer. The mountains are stunning, and the water is clear. There's a sea life center where you can watch seals dance through the water, and you can see plenty of wildlife up close, such as moose and bald eagles and sea otters.



Staff reporter Maddie Pfeifer celebrated her 24th birthday in Seward, Alaska.

Photo courtesy of Henry Rappleyea

I was sad to leave Henry when my trip finally came to an end. And although I wish I could see him more, I feel lucky to have had an excuse to visit Seward and see what an Alaskan winter is really like.

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By Maddie Pfeifer

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