

# Sitka AK and tales of whales' tails

17 July 2019

Today we shuttled from *Le Soleal* to Sitka harbor. Sitka was the capital of Russian America. Buses met us at the landing to take us to the totem pole center, a short distance from the center of town. We viewed various totem poles along a trail, but here is our favorite. It depicts a white man at the top, and a symbol representing dishonesty underneath it.



Figure 1. Ridiculing totem pole.

Next stop was a raptor hospital, whose mission was to treat injured birds, and if possible reintroduce them to nature.



*Figure 2. At the raptor center.*



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*Figure 3. Permanent resident at the center due to injured wing. Bald eagle.*

The final stop of our guided tour around Sitka was St. Michael's Cathedral. This is a Russian Orthodox Church built around 1840 by Bishop Innocent (who later became Metropolitan in Moscow of all the Russians, and was later sainted). The church was burnt to the ground recently, and rebuilt according to the original plan. We were then released to wander about on our own. We returned to the totem center for a more extensive walk on the trails there, including a visit to the site of a Tlingit fort, built after they expelled the Russians temporarily. We then walked back to town, and toured Bishop Innocence's house, one of the few buildings from the Russian era, before returning to our ship.





*Figure 4. Totem pole at the Tlingit-Russian battle site.*



*Figure 5. White slug on the trail.*





Figure 66. Raven in Sitka.

Back on board *Le Soleal*, we heard lectures on earthquakes and glaciers, and then had cocktails and dinner with the Tufts Alumni delegation. Immediately after dinner, we were summoned to the deck – the bridge spotted a large pod of humped-back whales, and had stopped engines to allow us to watch. Most of the passengers and many of the crew, including the chef, crowded the rail to watch. Tens of whales passed by. They could be spotted when they exhaled, or came to the surface, and then dived.







*Figure 7. Part of a large pod of humpback whales.*