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Camera Bristol Bay Sockeye Salmon,  
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# ALASKA

Forever Wild

NOT MANY FOODS CAN CLAIM TO BE WILD, NATURAL AND SUSTAINABLE – BUT ALASKA SEAFOOD CAN PROUDLY STATE THAT IT IS ALL THREE. WE RECENTLY FLEW OVER TO ALASKA, TO SEE FOR OURSELVES THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE ALASKA SEAFOOD INDUSTRY, THE LARGEST PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYER IN THE STATE. A RICH THREAD OF HISTORY RUNS THROUGH THE ALASKA SEAFOOD INDUSTRY. OVER 130 YEARS AGO THE FLEET IN BRISTOL BAY FISHED FROM TRADITIONAL WOODEN SAILING BOATS. TODAY, THE LEGACY CONTINUES WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART MODERN FISHING BOATS.



The Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute runs a program that brings together chefs and journalists from across the globe, to enjoy a celebration of seafood, and to witness, first-hand, the efforts made by all involved in the Alaska fishing industry to bring the very best catch into your kitchens. This year's odyssey began in Anchorage and our group assembled for a welcome dinner at nearby Crush Bistro, where we enjoyed a showcase of Alaska seafood for the first time – including locally caught sockeye salmon, king crab and rockfish. It was very apt that the first dinner of our stay was served in a sharing style – sharing is central to the culture surrounding Alaska seafood. Families have

gathered around the table for generations to enjoy the wild-caught harvest. After two nights in Anchorage, we flew out to King Salmon to begin the trip. This remote area is reached by regular flights from Anchorage and enthusiasts descend on King Salmon every year to enjoy the fishing season in nearby waters. Bristol Bay is home to the largest wild salmon run on the planet – millions of salmon surge along the six major river systems when they return annually. An impressive five varieties of wild salmon inhabit the local waters – king, sockeye, keta, coho and pink.

The fishing in the area supports 7,000 fishermen and for over 130 years, the salmon has remained sustainable. One third of the world's sockeye salmon now comes from Bristol Bay. When we arrived, it was predicted that 40 million wild sockeye salmon would return to the waters of Bristol Bay during summer 2019, a 16% greater overall return than the average over the last 50 years. Careful management ensures that wild salmon remain sustainable and abundant in these waters. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game were on hand to tell us about the way salmon fishing is strictly regulated. There is an incredible 34,000 miles of coastline in Alaska and assiduous management of the



stocks is key to ensuring that sustainability is retained. Only certain numbers are caught annually, each fishery is given a total maximum catch quota, and once that quota is reached, fishing comes to a halt. Each fishing vessel, and the families that operate it, remain deeply respectful of this quota.

Various techniques are used to count the salmon making their way upstream, including weirs, sonars and counting towers. The sheer scale of the operation is striking, with many people taking on salmon counting as a summer job. Figures are recorded daily during the salmon run and used to make key decisions in managing the numbers which can be caught - thus ensuring conservation. First up on the itinerary was a setnet site visit, where we were shown how Bristol Bay salmon are harvested by hand by local fisherwoman





Melanie Brown, who has been fishing in the area with her family for generations. Melanie demonstrated how each salmon is carefully picked from the net, before being chilled to preserve its freshness.

Later in the afternoon, we toured a processing plant. Here, we discover how salmon are processed for export. Strict attention to quality is apparent - a huge team of workers making sure that every salmon was individually inspected before being prepared for shipment. Nearly every variety of fish can be smoked, and the tradition of smoking fish is strong in Alaska. We meet another local fisherman and pay a visit to his traditional smokehouse, where he expertly smokes the salmon until it reaches the perfect flavor - he joked that his smokehouse

had to be kept locked to prevent any stray bears making off with his salmon. So, where does the quality of Alaska seafood come from, what can we attribute it to? In short, the salmon swim free and wild in icy, pristine waters, eating only what nature provides. They are allowed to mature at a natural pace. For some chefs, the star of the show is Sockeye Salmon, renowned for its distinctive rich flavor and deep red color. The goodness of the catch can be frozen in - all seafood is frozen immediately - this guarantees its freshness and does not hinder the quality. One thing which is very striking about the Alaska seafood industry is the sense of pride conveyed by everybody involved - from fishermen and scientists to processing plant workers and marketing executives. Everyone we encountered during the trip conveyed real enthusiasm,

all keen to pass on as much knowledge as possible about every aspect of the trade.

Alaska seafood is a popular choice for chefs, and a point of reference and reassurance for diners. The products drawn from Alaska waters, whether salmon, king crab, pollock or one of the lesser known, but abundant varieties like rockfish, are gracing some of the very best UK restaurant menus, and many restaurant chains are now avidly promoting Wild Alaska seafood.

It was a true pleasure to learn how the Alaska seafood industry works during our trip and to experience first-hand the wealth of dedication, knowledge and hard work it takes to make this sustainable and delicious food available across the globe. 📍