

# Glacier Explorer Tour

## INTRODUCTION

The scale of the Last Frontier startles most, and not infrequently even the residents. Emblematic of that vast wildness is for many, the eternal, earth altering force of the glaciers. Evidence of their ancient presence is found across the globe but it is in Alaska, that one can still witness their ongoing effects and feel the primal immensity.

This tour includes many highlights of our others, but places special emphasis on these icy forces of nature diminishing almost universally across the planet. From exploring the surface with crampons, to flying over the icefield sources, to their calving faces in tidewater, a sense of understanding can only come from a variety of perspectives. So too it is with Alaska itself, as we visit three national parks and many unspoiled spots between, in this wonderful overview of, The Great Land. Including the National Parks of Denali, Kenai Fjords, and our largest, Wrangell-St. Elias, this tour features the contrasts of land and sea that define this northern wilderness, all while staying in comfortable lodgings in far flung hideaways.

Alaska can take a lifetime to discover, but you have to start somewhere. This is a trip that will leave even veterans of numerous visits, wondering just what else they missed. As anywhere unique, it's the quality of the visit that distinguishes between deep satisfaction, or, a vague feeling otherwise. Only you can decide.



**7 Day / 6 Night**

**\$2875/person**

<u>2011 Tour Dates</u>	<u>Code</u>
May 28 - June 3	7G1
June 15 - June 21	7G2
July 15 - July 21	7G3
Aug 9 - Aug 15	7G4
Sept 2 - Sept 8	7G5

## ABBREVIATED AGENDA

**Day 1 Anchorage-Denali National Park;** depart AM towards Park; visit quaint Talkeetna, Mt. McKinley/Ruth Glacier flightseeing available, glacier landing dependent on conditions; Park Visitor Center visit; overnight White Moose Lodge

**Day 2 Denali National Park-Maclaren River;** 6 hour natural history/wildlife tour of Park (hopefully The Mountain is out . . .); travel Denali Hwy to Maclaren River; riverboat trip to base of glacier; overnight Maclaren River Lodge

**Day 3 Maclaren River-McCarthy;** travel to Chitina; old railroad grade 60 miles into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park (our country's largest); cross Kennicott River on footbridge (the only surface means); historic McCarthy; Ma Johnson Hotel

**Day 4 Kennicott-Majestic Valley;** travel four miles to abandoned town/mine of Kennicott; extensive exploration; hike to Root Glacier; lunch overlooking Kennicott and Root Glacier; travel to Majestic Valley Lodge

**Day 5 Matanuska Glacier-Hope;** ice walk (with crampons) on the face of the spectacular Matanuska Glacier; Palmer and Anchorage; road along Turnagain Arm to end of the road frontier town of Hope; overnight Discovery Cabins on Bear Creek

**Day 6 Seward-Hope;** morning trip to Seward; board vessel for spectacular day tour of Kenai Fjords National Park to view marine life and calving tidewater glaciers; afternoon return through Moose Pass; overnight in creekside Discovery Cabins

**Day 7 Hope-Anchorage;** morning exploration around Hope (older than Anchorage!); optional gold panning; historical museum; Girdwood tram ride to summit of Mount Alyeska; late afternoon return to Anchorage

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Trip cost includes all modes of transportation, meals, lodging and guiding. Accommodations range from semi-deluxe to log cabins, with shared bath the only option at some destinations. Physical fitness is not a prerequisite, though some walking is involved. A moderate level of fitness will add greatly to the overall enjoyment of the trip with several short optional hikes. Alcoholic beverages and gratuities to guides not included. Additional information and a suggested personal packing list sent upon deposit, and are also available on the website. Group size is limited to ten persons.

**Day 1** Our first day will begin at 8AM, meeting downtown with pick-ups at previously arranged locations. We'll head northward with a stop in Wasilla at the headquarters for the 1000 mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race. The displays and short video here give a good insight into dog mushing in general, as well as the lifestyle and the commitment that it takes to train for and run the Iditarod itself. Pushing northwards, we'll stop for lunch in the charming village of Talkeetna. An old mining town, Talkeetna now serves as the principal staging point for expeditions to North America's highest peak, Mt. McKinley. If the weather cooperates, it's our first opportunity for an up close overview of the incredible glaciers that shaped and continue to dominate the land. Flightseeing tours of the mountain are available and are very highly recommended --sliding between towering peaks and over monstrous glaciers, this is an indescribable glimpse of a world that few experience. Depending on the conditions, there is even an opportunity for a glacier landing . . . We'll return to the Parks highway after lunch, entering the great Alaska Range of mountains and on to Denali National Park. Dinner and lodging are just north of the Park in Healy.

**Day 2** After an early breakfast, we'll take the concessionaire shuttle bus into the interior of the Park. There are chances of seeing caribou, moose, Dall sheep, bears and wolves in the wide open vistas, with the vehicle stopping for wildlife or scenic photos whenever anyone would like. Returning by the same route, we'll leave the Park and have lunch before turning back south to reach Cantwell, the western terminus of the beautiful Denali Highway. A 135 mile gravel road across wide valleys, alpine tundra and breathtaking scenery, the Denali "Highway" is open only in the summer months and is the only road through this remote area. Crossing glacial river and lake country, wildlife viewing opportunities abound in this large stretch of wilderness inhabited year-round only by the occasional trapper and wilderness hermit. We'll cross the Susitna River and follow the winding road over ancient glacial eskers to the western flank of Maclaren Summit, stopping for photos or a short hike as time and weather permit. Dinner and lodging will be at the Maclaren River Lodge with spectacular views of a great glacier in the distance. After dinner is a jet boat trip on the river out the front door, to the face of the Maclaren Glacier and the lake it gives rise to --yet another unique perspective.

**Day 3** After breakfast we'll continue over the summit (4,086 feet), across the Denali Highway and through the Tangle Lakes Archeological District, thought to be the principal corridor through which the earliest peoples passed to populate the rest of the Americas after making their way over the Bering land bridge from eastern Asia. Passing through Glennallen and Copper Center, we'll stop at the office of our nation's largest national park, Wrangell-St. Elias, for an introduction to this uncommercialized jewel more than twice the size of Denali. The scenic Edgerton Highway leads from here to the old railroad town of Chitina at the confluence of the Copper and Chitina rivers from which we will travel the tortuous abandoned railroad grade 60 miles through the mountains back to the tiny town of McCarthy in the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias. At the end of the gravel road we'll grab our overnight bags, leave the van, and cross two forks of the Kennicott River (by footbridge) to reach the near-ghost town of McCarthy on the other side a half mile away, the only means of surface access in the months when the river isn't frozen. Excellent flightseeing tours of the area may also be available from the McCarthy airstrip that give an incomparable overall perspective. After a short hike onto the glacial moraine, and having dinner at the McCarthy Lodge, the night will be spent in the comfortable "Old Ma Johnson" Hotel.

**Day 4** A van trip up the remainder of the road four miles to the abandoned company town of Kennicott overlooking its namesake glacier, allows an almost unbelievable exploration of an entire town sitting much the way it was when the mine closed in 1938. The Park Service has been busy for the last several years, renovating, shoring and adding interpretive displays to the historic buildings, as well as the incredible 14-story mill building itself. Kennicott is truly a ghost town without equal, due to its remoteness and fortunate lack of vandalism. A short hike to the Root Glacier allows those interested to clamber onto the face of an active glacier. Lunch is overlooking all this incredible scenery before our van shuttle back to McCarthy. We again cross the footbridge to regain our transport, for the trip across the Copper River basin to the great valley that divides the Talkeetna and Chugach Mountains to the lovely Majestic Valley Lodge.

**Day 5** After a hearty breakfast in anticipation of the morning activity, a short distance away finds us strapping on crampons (ice cleated "overshoes") that will allow is an intimate exploration of the awe inspiring Matanuska Glacier. A sedate but utterly spellbinding stroll amongst the fantastic ice forms cannot be adequately described. One feels at once both insignificant and privileged to wander a realm so few are able to do. Photos can't truly record, but only serve to recall the sentiments. On down the road, still talking of the glacier, lands us in the old farming community of Palmer for lunch. Back through Anchorage and following the road along the glacially carved fjord of Turnagain Arm takes us past the 1964 earthquake-destroyed community of Portage. From here we will head through the Kenai mountains to the tiny end-of-the-road frontier town of Hope on Cook Inlet. Far older than Anchorage, this first gold rush community in Southcentral Alaska is still a place of log buildings and an atmosphere that can only be experienced. Lodging is in cozy log cabins of Discovery Cabins, on the edge of rushing Bear Creek.

**Day 6** Following a hearty breakfast, we'll head down the road to Seward and board the tour boat to head out into the Gulf of Alaska for the spectacular Kenai Fjords National Park, passing through the Chiswell Islands Refuge. Here we will view calving glaciers up very close in our small vessel and cruise the rugged coastline to view a tremendous concentration of wildlife including orcas and humpback whales, sea otters, sea lions, porpoises, eagles, and many different kinds of sea birds. Stopped off the face of the glacier, the vessel rocking on the swells, one hears the creaking and popping of the great icy wonder that almost makes it seem alive. Returning late afternoon we'll head north through the mountain lake community of Moose Pass and back to Hope. If the weather's conducive after dinner, we might contemplate a walk to the historic Seaview Bar down on the waterfront to meet some of the local "wildlife". Or, you might just like to poke around the old settlement and see the magnificent views of the mountains bordering Cook Inlet, before lodging again for the night at Discovery Cabins.

**Day 7** After a leisurely breakfast, we might try our luck at gold panning (optional; \$25/person) and visit the Hope Historical Museum before following the road to the small town of Girdwood, home of the world-class Alyeska Ski Resort. Here we'll take the tram ride to the summit, with hopefully the clouds permitting a spectacular view of the surrounding Chugach Range and Cook Inlet. The original "roundhouse" is now a museum up top, and the boardwalk around it provides views in all directions to contemplate the immense land forms all around, from the valley in front, to Hope in the distance on the other side of the Arm, to the volcanoes on the far side of Cook Inlet. Others might opt for a short hike through the rainforest (yes, rainforest) after having lunch at the locally famous bakery. We'll return to Anchorage in late afternoon and officially end seven incomparable days on the Last Frontier . . .



## ***Client Pre-Trip Information*** ***7-Day Glacier Explorer Tour***

### **Accessibility/Fitness**

This is our most accessible trip as it does not require a high level of fitness nor does it include camping, though the spirit is very definitely adventure. At least a moderate level of fitness is certainly desirable, as not to preclude the many options that can add tremendously to the overall experience. Walking is also the only way to get around and fully appreciate some of the destinations. As we do leave the beaten path, a certain flexibility and zest for adventure go a long way towards your enjoyment as well as that of the entire group.

### **Accommodations/Dining**

Our lodging ranges from log cabins to lodges to bed & breakfasts, with private bath facilities unavailable at several of the locations. All are very comfortable and are chosen for their uniqueness and charm. Dining is in local restaurants or lodges. Most feature a variety of standard dishes though in some we will be dining from a fixed menu with a choice of one or two main entrees. Special dietary needs cannot always be met as some locations are quite remote and goods purchased weeks in advance. Let us know well in advance if you have any strict or medical dietary needs and we'll gladly discuss the options. A vegetarian diet is usually not a problem. All meals from lunch on Day 1 through lunch on Day 7 are included. Alcoholic beverages are not included.

### **Luggage/Clothing**

No specialized equipment is needed beyond your personal clothing (see separate Trip Packing List). Clothing should be comfortable, limited to three or four changes for the trip (laundry facilities available on Day 5), and when layered be warm to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Dress at our destinations and in the North in general, varies from the very casual to the extremely so. Footwear must of course be comfortable and designed for walking. Rain gear is essential. All clothing and personal items are limited in volume to no more than a manageable medium-sized soft-sided suitcase or duffle bag. Our vans have very limited luggage space, so please pack prudently. Extra items/luggage can usually be left in Anchorage during the trip. A small daypack for cameras, water bottle and miscellaneous items is great for in the van as well as for walks/hikes. The day pack (or a small overnight bag) is necessary also for Day 3, as we will be walking a half mile from the van, across the footbridges to McCarthy.

### **Pre/Post-Trip Lodging/Trip Addons**

Many types of lodging are available in Anchorage as are independent extensions before or after your trip with us. Facilities fill up very early during the summer season. Please advise us of your interests well in advance so that we are able to guarantee suitable accommodations. If you need suggestions for other things to do, just let us know.

### **Miscellaneous**

Purchases can be made with cash, traveler's checks and often (but not always) credit cards. TRAVELERS INSURANCE is strongly recommended, as the season is very short and our cancellation policy is necessarily quite strict. EMERGENCIES: A list of lodging/contacts is sent upon confirmation, though the best way to be reached is through the Adventure Alaska office in Hope. Smoking is not permitted in the vans and nearly all lodging and dining facilities in Alaska are non-smoking. Cell phone use is strongly discouraged in the van. GRATUITIES to your guide not included.

### **Suggested Reading**

Each client's appreciation will be immeasurably heightened by gaining some background beforehand of Alaska and the areas of our travels. A wide selection of books and information is available from Alaska Geographic: 810 E 9th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501; (866) 257-2757; [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org) and also from our local bookseller, Title Wave Books, in Anchorage - [www.wavebooks.com](http://www.wavebooks.com); 907-278-9283