

Alaska Highlights Tour

INTRODUCTION

The immensity of the Last Frontier startles most, and not infrequently even the residents. No matter the length of stay, the spectacular variety of Alaska can be difficult to grasp, and that's the purpose of this tour --to give a fantastic overview in a digestible timeframe.

From the iconic wonders of Denali National Park, to steaming hot springs, to the haunting maritime world of Prince William Sound, this unique tour offers a true sample of why this state is also one of mind. With two days to experience Denali, it's on to the vast Interior and the Golden Heart City of Fairbanks, with an overnight at the famous Chena Hot Springs Resort. From there the route follows the historic trail to Valdez, traversing the spine of the Alaska Range through Isabel Pass and across the Copper River Basin to the coast. From Valdez we cross the inland sea past glacial fjords to Whittier to meet the road system again, and travel the longest tunnel in North America, shared with trains (--alternatingly!).

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.



6 Day / 5 Night

\$2545/person

ABBREVIATED AGENDA

Day 1 Anchorage-Denali National Park; depart AM towards Park; visit quaint Talkeetna, Mt. McKinley flightseeing available; Park Visitor Center and intro visit; overnight at Healy White Moose Lodge

Day 2 Denali National Park; all day natural history/wildlife tour to heart of Park (hopefully The Mountain is out . . .); optional hike near Park entrance; flightseeing or rafting option; White Moose Lodge

Day 3 Denali-Fairbanks: visit historic town of Nenana; excellent University of Alaska Museum; Fairbanks city center; overnight magnificent Chena Hot Springs Resort, both covered indoor and open air, outdoor pools (spa time!)

Day 4 Fairbanks-Alaska Range: return to Fairbanks to visit Pioneer Park and sternwheeler Nenana; historic Rika's Roadhouse stop enroute to Delta Junction; overnight at the wonderful timberframe Black Rapids Lodge, adjacent to historic roadhouse and glacier of the same name.

Day 5 Black Rapids-Valdez; stops in Paxson, Glennallen; interpretive visit TransAlaska Pipeline; Worthington Glacier exploration; cross Thompson Pass; bed & breakfast in Valdez

Day 6 Valdez-Anchorage; board ferry for spectacular trip across Prince William Sound to Whittier, glacial fjords, sea otters (and maybe whales!); drive through mountain tunnels; Portage Glacier; Turnagain Arm; Anchorage

2011 Tour Dates

<u>2011 Tour Dates</u>	<u>Code</u>
June 1 - June 6	6H1
June 17 - June 22	6H2
July 4 - July 9	6H3
July 27 - Aug 1	6H4
Aug 16 - Aug 21	6H5
Aug 30 - Sept 4	6H6

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 eight persons.

Day 1 Our first day will begin at 8AM, meeting downtown with pick-ups at previously arranged locations. We'll take a quick trip to Earthquake Park, site of extensive damage in the 9.2 quake of 1964 and take a peek at Lake Hood, the world's largest seaplane base. From here 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. We'll return to the Parks highway after lunch, entering the great Alaska Range of mountains and on to Denali National Park. The new Visitor's Center is a great prelude to the whole "Denali Experience". Flightseeing tours of the mountain are available just outside of the Park and are very highly recommended (cost approx. \$250-275/person) --sliding between towering peaks and over monstrous glaciers, this is an indescribable glimpse of a world that few experience. Lodging is at the White Moose Lodge, in the old railroad town of Healy, just north of the Park entrance.

Day 2 In the morning we'll re-enter the Park to board a Park Service shuttle for travel to the heart of the Park, as the vast interior is closed to private vehicles. The round trip is a full day, crossing Sable and Polychrome Passes, and wandering the valleys of the Savage, Toklat, and Teklanika rivers, all dominated by Denali itself, the highest peak in North America at 20,320 feet. With much of the country above alpine treeline, the vistas are endless and thus the opportunities are some of the best anywhere for wildlife viewing. And then there's just the plain scenery . . . chances are very good to see bears, caribou, moose, and possibly even wolves. Photographic possibilities are excellent, as the bus will stop at any desired location at the group's request. In the late afternoon when we exit the Park, our legs will most likely demand a stretch and a variety of trails await. Should the weather be cooperating, another option is again flightseeing from the nearby airstrip, or white water rafting on the Nenana River.

Day 3 In the morning we descend the north flank of the Alaska Range to the vast rolling plain of the Tanana River, stopping on its south shore for lunch and exploration of the historic railroad town of Nenana. From there it's on to Alaska's second largest population center, the "Golden Heart City" of Fairbanks, with a famously worthwhile visit to the newly renovated University of Alaska Museum. It's the best in the state and answers (and provokes!) many a question from the natural world to the prehistoric and contemporary human presence in this harshest of lands. With temperatures from the 90's in summer to the minus 60's in winter, Fairbanks is a unique outpost in Alaska's Interior. A wander through downtown (with all the "plug-ins" for vehicles . . .) is enroute to our evening's memorable destination, Chena Hot Springs Resort, 50 miles northwest. Long famed for its ability to soak the cold out of the winter weary, it is now at the very forefront of research and implementation of commercially viable geothermal energy, utilizing the lowest temperatures in the world to generate electricity. From the heating of the buildings and greenhouse, to the self-sufficiency of its power generation, the dogged foresight of the owner has resulted in several industry firsts, with certain future worldwide application. And besides all that, it feels darned nice to soak in water bubbling up from subterranean depths, gazing from the pools to imagine the surroundings crusted in the "other" season's otherworldly embrace.

Day 4 After breakfast we return from the end of the road back to Fairbanks, for a visit to Pioneer Park. Here resides a surprising degree of early Fairbanks history, from simple miners' cabins saved from decay, to an eclectic aviation museum, to the towering sternwheeler Nenana that gives palpable witness to an entirely different era. If the weather's cooperative we might picnic here or push on, with the next direction the Richardson Highway, the original trail from Valdez to the Interior. Enroute we visit Rika's

Roadhouse a restored outpost that long served the area as a welcome place to recuperate along the difficult trail. Then it's through Delta Junction, the actual beginning (or end) of the Alcan Highway, built with all haste under unimaginable difficulty during World War II to finally connect by road to the rest of the country. A few miles south we enter the Alaska Range again, following the Delta River to our evening's most unique accommodations at the hand-crafted, timber frame construction Black Rapids Lodge. Located on a bluff just above the original historic log roadhouse (under restoration), and across from the Black Rapids Glacier, the views from this magnificent structure include the towering mountains of Hayes, Hess and Deborah, as well as the broad alpine valley below with its resident roaming bison herd. It promises to be a most unique experience and memory.

Day 5 After a hearty breakfast it's southward ho, continuing higher to cross the Alaska Range divide of Isabel Pass. The terrain is a surprisingly marked contrast to the same Range farther west we witnessed earlier on our northward journey, finally spilling out into the great Copper River Basin. Presided over by the snow-capped volcanoes of Sanford, Drum and Wrangell (still steaming!), this vast basin is believed to have been a great inland sea a few ten thousands of years ago, before bursting through what is now the Copper River canyon to the Pacific, in a prehistoric cataclysm. With the Wrangell-St. Elias mountains to the left, we enter the Chugach range on the south side of the great Basin, stopping to check out the Alaska Pipeline and Worthington Glacier as we climb toward Thompson Pass. While yet another mountain range, this one bears little resemblance to those previously traversed, as the Chugach Mountains serve as a moisture barrier from the Gulf of Alaska. Shielding the hinterland from the capricious weather of the coast, the temperatures of the Interior ranging from the mid 90's to the minus 60's. As the recipient of so much moisture, from record setting snows to weeks long deluges, this is truly a temperate rainforest. Though not often clear, it's a magnificent pass in any weather, so close to the ocean below. A precipitous drop from the pass to near sea level leads to the true canyon known as the Keystone, the narrow roadbed pounded by vertical waterfalls on both sides. Valdez lies at the head of the bay and at the end of the 800-mile pipeline from the north slope. It is here that the tankers load their precious cargo, as did the ill-fated Exxon Valdez, before heading south to refineries in California. A bed and breakfast is the night's accommodation.

Day 6 Today we cross the marine sanctuary and maze of Prince William Sound, made known unfortunately as the site of the infamous 1989 oil spill. While truly an environmental tragedy, the robust health of this pristine ecosystem also allowed it to better weather such a blow, and though the localized effects are still being studied and felt, the regenerative powers of nature have erased all visible sign. It was a lesson in so many ways, but the vast majority of the Sound was untouched and the countless glaciers don't seem to pay much attention. Home to an incredible array of marine life from puffins to orcas and humpback whales, the crossing is an endless spectacle and will be accomplished by ferry or tour boat, depending on their ever-changing schedules. The far western reach terminates in Passage Canal and the curious little outpost of Whittier, constructed as a military deep water port during WWII. It is here that we regain the road system, at first in unique fashion by traveling the longest tunnel shared by both train and auto (alternatingly!). Arriving on the other side, the ocean here is quite different, dominated by the extreme tides and glacial silt that characterize Turnagain Arm. The road defines the narrow stretch between the mountains on the right, and the sea on the left. A wander through the mountain town of Girdwood is in order, as we wind our way back to Anchorage, stopping at Beluga Point where, maybe just maybe, the whales will offer a fitting close to a six day odyssey. The name of the tour may be "highlights", but that taste and those indelible memories will convince you, of just how much remains for an enchanting return . . .



Client Pre-Trip Information ***6-Day Alaska Highlights Tour***

Accessibility/Fitness

This trip does not require a high level of fitness nor does it include camping. It is though, an itinerary that spends a bit of time outdoors in a potentially inclement environment and so a sense of adventure and flexibility are a must. 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, such as the short hikes.

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, sometimes with a limited menu. Alcoholic beverages are not included. Please let us know beforehand if you have any special dietary restrictions. All meals from lunch on Day 1 through lunch on Day 6 are 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, 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 works well in the van for cameras, water bottle, and miscellaneous items, as well as for hikes.

Pre/Post-Trip Lodging/Trip Addons

Many types of lodging are available in Anchorage as are independent extensions before or after the trip. 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/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 and also from our local bookseller, Title Wave Books, in Anchorage - www.wavebooks.com; 907-278-9283