

Kenai Explorer Tour - Extended

INTRODUCTION

With wildness ranging from the icefields that feed tidewater glaciers, to the bountiful wildlife of the countless coastal estuaries and the rugged mountains in between, the famous Kenai Peninsula is a wonderful capsule of many, "Alaskas". This six day tour offers the Kenai at its best, with a delightful and leisurely variety of contrasts including overnight stays: on a wilderness island, in a coastal village inaccessible by road and an historic end-of-the-road mountain town.

We start by following along Turnagain Arm and through the mountains to reach Seward at the head of Resurrection Bay, heading from here by boat out to cozy cabins on Fox Island. The next day we explore the spectacular marine world of the Kenai Fjords National Park and Chiswell Islands Wildlife Refuge, lingering off the face of the calving Holgate Glacier. From Seward we travel the Kenai Mountains to the scenic gold rush community of Hope, overnighing in log cabins on the edge of rushing Bear Creek. On the third day the road leads along Cook Inlet and the towering volcanoes of the Alaska Range to explore and overnight in delightful Homer. The next morning we make it to the end of the Homer "Spit" for the boat trip across Kachemak Bay to the secluded fishing village of Seldovia and our waterfront bed and breakfast. On Day 5, we cross the bay by air taxi, before heading back to quiet Hope and the creekside cabins. Day 6 we round Turnagain Arm and stop in Girdwood and the famous resort of Alyeska, before returning to Anchorage in the afternoon. If time is somewhat limited, or you're looking to add some authentic Alaska to your existing plans, this special tour carefully skirts the crowds and promises an unencumbered and wild tranquility guaranteed to satisfy.



6 Day / 5 Night

\$2325/person

<u>2012 Tour Dates</u>	<u>Code</u>
June 18 - June 23	6K1
July 10 - July 15	6K2
July 18 - July 23	6K3
July 30 - Aug 4	6K4
Aug 15 - Aug 20	6K5
Aug 28 - Sept 2	6K6

ABBREVIATED AGENDA

Day 1 Anchorage-Seward: travel south along edge of Turnagain Arm and Chugach Mountains; arrive Seward and board boat for short trip to Fox Island Wilderness Lodge at the mouth of the Bay; salmon bake lunch; optional afternoon ranger-led hike; beachcombing; overnight cabins; optional guided sea kayaking

Day 2 Seward - Hope: depart Fox Island by boat for trip to spectacular Kenai Fjords National Park; Chiswell Islands Wildlife Refuge and stunning Aialik Bay with three tidewater glaciers; return Seward, visit Alaska Sealife Center; Kenai Mountains to end-of-the-road gold rush town of Hope; overnight creekside log cabins

Day 3 Hope - Homer: Follow Kenai River through Cooper Landing, Soldotna; skirt edge of Cook Inlet with impressive volcanoes lining the other side; visit Alaska Islands & Oceans Center; walk Bishop's Beach; Pratt Museum; bay view lodging

Day 4 Homer - Seldovia: Travel to the end of the Homer "Spit" to board boat to cross Kachemak Bay to the quaint fishing village Seldovia with tour enroute; afternoon exploration of town, museums, or optional hike; overnight waterfront inn

Day 5 Seldovia - Hope: morning exploration of Seldovia and optional walk on "Otterbahn" trail; late morning return to Homer by air taxi (beautiful views!); overnight in the creekside log cabins in Hope

Day 6 Hope - Anchorage: Museum tour; optional gold panning instruction by local gold miner; stop at Portage Visitor Center, world class ski resort town of Girdwood and northernmost rainforest; return to Anchorage in the afternoon

Note: This tour can be combined with the Alaska & Yukon Explorer Tour for a truly comprehensive Alaskan experience.

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 exploration begins at 8AM, meeting in downtown Anchorage at previously arranged locations. Dispatching quickly with Alaska's largest city, we'll head for more tranquil locales, turning south and hugging the shore of Turnagain Arm where the Chugach Mountains meet the sea. Rising up over Turnagain Pass in the Kenai Mountains we'll then descend toward the Gulf of Alaska and the scenic town of Seward, situated at the uppermost reaches of Resurrection Bay. A deep water port that remains ice-free all year, Seward was one of the earlier Alaskan settlements, serving the mining and various trades of the Interior, as the southern terminus of the state's single rail line. Surrounded by mountains the scene is quite impressive, with the quaint downtown nearly at water's edge. It is here that we will board our boat for the short ride across Resurrection Bay to little Fox Island and its namesake wilderness lodge, disembarking for a truly unique overnight experience. A delicious salmon bake lunch awaits us, with the afternoon open for a wondrous hike through the island's lush spruce and hemlock forest, or optional sea kayaking with all the gear and guide included (approx \$100/person). After a gourmet dinner, a leisurely beach walk is in order, before settling into our cozy cabins overlooking the bay. It's a pristine spot, and you may just want to sit and take it all in.

Day 2 After breakfast we leave our island home and head farther afield; around the point and into the Chiswell Islands Wildlife Refuge, sliding between the rocky islands that are home to an incredible variety of marine mammals and sea birds. Reaching Kenai Fjords National Park, inaccessible by road, we'll head into Aialik Bay and linger off the face of a calving glacier for an otherworldly experience. We'll cruise right up to the rugged coastal cliffs, providing wonderful opportunities for viewing murrets, puffins, harbor seals, and sea lions, with the stretches in between always holding promise of porpoises, sea otters, humpback whales and maybe even orcas. Upon our mid-afternoon arrival back in Seward, we will visit the world class Alaska Sealife Center, to learn more about and view up close and personal, the variety of wildlife found in the area. Then we'll head back up the road through the Kenai Mountains to the end of the road and the delightful little town of Hope on the shores of Turnagain Arm. One of the oldest gold rush communities in Alaska, Hope boasted three thousand souls long before Anchorage existed. As gold rushes pass so did many of the people, with now about two hundred folks in the community. Its unique atmosphere is quite palpable, in the many log cabins, the log Social Hall, the one room schoolhouse and certainly in the local folk that have chosen to call it home. It's a piece of Alaska many have in mind before they come. We'll lodge for the night in Discovery Cabins on the edge of rushing Bear Creek.

Day 3 After breakfast we'll pick up the Sterling Highway toward Homer. Enroute we'll follow the beautiful (and quite famous for salmon) Kenai River through Cooper Landing, where bald eagles quite frequently gather to scour for leftover fish. We'll pass through Soldotna, and stop at the historic center of old Kenai, where there was any early Russian settlement prior to Alaska's sale. Skirting the eastern side of Cook Inlet, the towering volcanoes of Iliamna, Redoubt, Spur, and Augustine frame the Alaska Range on the opposite side. We'll drive down to the water's edge and catch the unique fishery of Deep Creek, before visiting the photogenic old Russian Orthodox Church nearby. Situated on the prominent bluff above the old native village of Ninilchik, the light in the church belfry long served as a beacon for vessels on Cook Inlet, in the days before GPS. The views are quite regal in any direction. Passing through Anchor Point, the most western point on the nation's road system, we arrive at the lookout above Homer, needing no explanation as to why this is a favorite destination of many Alaskans. Glaciers and mountains rim the far view, with Homer below, and beautiful Kachemak Bay in between. We'll head to the wonderful Islands and Oceans Center for a fascinating look at the uniqueness of this area, and insight into the thousands of miles of extreme wilderness of the Aleutian Chain. Just out back is Bishop's Beach, begging for a beach combing stroll. Homer has long been known as an artist's community and wandering the main

street yields several funky emporiums that prove just why. Later we'll visit the eclectic Pratt Museum, gaining further insight into both the area's early history and chapters more recent --namely the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Dinner will be at a local institution, whose decor and cuisine is better experienced than explained. Lodging will be just below our former lookout, with a magnificent panorama that might just beg for a long linger before bedding down.

Day 4 Arriving at the end of the Homer Spit mid-morning, we'll poke around a bit before boarding the boat to cross the picturesque Bay. With the nearby mountains and glaciers on the other side of the bay and the Alaska Range across the mouth of Cook Inlet, it is truly a beautiful mix of geography. Aiming toward the mouth of the Bay, our captain will circle Gull Island and a few others enroute to our destination, giving great explanation to the sights before us. Early afternoon finds us on the dock in the unique community of Seldovia, inaccessible by road. Originally and still a fishing village, the name comes from the Russian word for salted herring, as this fish was the reason for its existence, prior to the purchase of Alaska in 1867. Seldovia is also a place of refuge for artists and those looking for a little less access and the pace of life that it brings. It's a special little town to wander, with the great Sitka spruce forests unlike any other we've seen, starting at the end of almost every street. A good stroll is in order down the historic boardwalk, vestige of the pre-earthquake vitality of Seldovia, before dinner at the always excellent Tidepool Cafe. Our lodging for the night is in the waterfront Boardwalk Inn overlooking the boat harbor, where sea otters are a frequent sight.

Day 5 The morning is as leisurely as it should be, with time to further explore town or just watch the tide come in out the back door. Those looking to stretch their legs might try the "Otterbahn", a great little trail starting by the school that weaves through tall grass and spruce thickets to end at the ocean for an unlimited opportunity to stroll or beachcomb. We'll then head to the nearby airstrip to catch our air taxi quick hop back across the bay to Homer. From above the perspective is priceless. It's almost hard to get back in a vehicle again, but we'll still have time to peruse a bit more of this town that draws so many for its beauty. Lunch will be in a local eatery. We'll know the way back north by now, so Hope will seem like home when we get back to our snug log cabins. A barbecue is planned on the deck of the lodge, with a creekside campfire an apt possibility afterwards. Or, there might be those that prefer to head "downtown", to Main Street that ends in the ocean, and the Seaview Bar that is often a colorful mix of visitors, locals, and gold miners still eking an income from the creeks. The music is often phenomenal too.

Day 6 After breakfast, we might try our luck at optional gold panning with some local miners instructing, while others wander the historic displays of the museum next door. Heading out of Hope, we'll stop at the Portage Visitor Center on the way to the small town of Girdwood, home of the world-class Alyeska Ski Resort situated here due to a much higher level of precipitation than even the adjacent valleys. It is a microclimate that gives rise to a temperate rainforest (yes, rainforest) with flora completely different from Hope, just a couple dozen miles away. Lush ferns and undergrowth along with large spruce trees are dominate. Some might want to explore this environment directly, following the trail up Winner Creek to its beautiful little gorge, while others might opt to take the tram to the top of Mt. Alyeska for a commanding view. It might be a late lunch but worth it at the Bake Shop upon return. The Seward Highway hugs the edge of Turnagain Arm and we just might have to stop at Beluga Point to see if any of the creatures for which it takes its name, might make an appearance. And then it's on back to Anchorage in the late afternoon, each of us probably just a bit different than when we left, and most likely figuring out just when we can return. The Kenai is some of the best of Alaska, but then there are still many other Alaskas that remain . . .



Client Pre-Trip Information ***6-Day Kenai Explorer Tour***

Accessibility/Fitness

This trip does not require a high level of fitness. It is though, an itinerary that spends a considerable amount of time outdoors in a potentially inclement environment, traveling in boats and small aircraft, 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. Alcohol 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. PLEASE NOTE: On Day 1, you will need to pack a smaller bag (daypack) for the one night at Fox Island, as the boat to and from the lodge has very limited space. Extra luggage will be stored in the van. A small daypack also 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 facilities in Alaska are non-smoking. Cell phones are 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