

National Park Adventure

INTRODUCTION

Alaska calls many people for many reasons, but most come in search of a wildness not found elsewhere, as the natural world here dominates all. Great numbers try to taste it in cursory fashion from the deck of a cruise ship, while others know, that to truly experience a pristine wilderness, one must be immersed in it. Our National Parks are the best our country has to offer, and the two featured in this special adventure are among the most magnificent of the planet. Denali is a wilderness of uniqueness known far and wide, from the great mountain itself to the expansive alpine vistas that best allow witness of its wild inhabitants of bear, moose, caribou and wolves. We'll camp two nights in our own little spot with views of, "The Mountain" (should it deign to show!), with a full day into the center of the park and several hikes to savor its singular nature. From here we cross the haunting Denali Highway to lodge in cabins at Meier's Lake before heading to the heart of our largest National Park, Wrangell-St. Elias. Situated just outside of the "ghost town" of McCarthy, our wonderfully private island camp is overlooked by the great glacial icefalls, with McCarthy Creek flowing just in front of the tents. Here for two nights, we'll wander the abandoned town and mine of Kennicott and onto the face of the Root Glacier to marvel at this exquisite environment. To balance the land lubbing so far, next it's off to Valdez over Thompson Pass to lodge in a B & B, before crossing Prince William Sound the next day (more darned glaciers) by ferry. Arriving in Whittier for a mountain tunnel passage back to Anchorage allows one to reflect on the depth and breadth of the worlds just experienced. It's only seven days, but it's a lifetime of memories.



7 Day / 6 Night

\$1885/person

<u>2011 Tour Dates</u>	<u>Code</u>
June 12 - June 18	7P1
June 27 - July 3	7P2
July 13 - July 19	7P3
July 25 - July 31	7P4
Aug 7 - Aug 13	7P5

ABBREVIATED AGENDA

Day 1 Anchorage-Denali: travel north towards Denali National Park; afternoon hike in the Alaska Range near Denali State Park; private camp overlooking Jack River; evening tundra exploration along river

Day 2 Denali National Park: full day natural history and wildlife tour into the center of the park; late afternoon hike in the neighborhood; back to Jack River camp

Day 3 Denali - Paxson: traverse spectacular Denali Highway (gravel); hike alpine ridge of Maclaren Summit; hike to Gulkana Glacier (swinging bridge!); overnight Paxson Inn

Day 4 Paxson - McCarthy: leave Alaska Range and head to the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park; cross Kennicott River to reach private riverside camp; PM hike over glacial terminal moraine; explore McCarthy

Day 5 McCarthy - Kennicott: van ride four miles to abandoned town/mine of Kennicott; exploration; hike to the Root Glacier and onto face; lunch on glacier; dinner in McCarthy; evening hike w/flightseeing optl.; river camp

Day 6 McCarthy - Valdez: morning open for hiking or just plain relaxation, or, conditions permitting, optional flightseeing or river rafting; late afternoon park departure to cross alpine beauty of Thompson Pass, descending to Valdez on Prince William Sound; overnight B & B

Day 7 Valdez - Whittier - Anchorage: board ferry for incomparably scenic trip across Prince William Sound for: mountains, marine life, and yes, more glaciers; arrive Whittier for trip through mountain tunnels (America's longest); Seward Highway hugging Turnagain Arm to return to Anchorage

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Trip cost includes all modes of transportation, lodging, meals, equipment and guiding. Additional information and a suggested personal equipment list sent upon deposit. Accommodations range from semi-deluxe to rustic. When camping, all group gear is provided, with two persons to a tent, and a full length sleeping pad included. Moderate physical fitness is desirable as this is wilderness trip with hiking and outdoor activities, though it is not overly strenuous. Alcoholic beverages and gratuities to the guide not included. Group size is limited to eight persons.

Day 1 The adventure begins at 8AM, meeting in downtown Anchorage at your previously arranged hotel or B&B. From here we'll head northward with a quick 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 it takes to train for and run the Iditarod itself. Pushing northward towards the beacon of North America's highest peak Denali (also still referred to as Mt. McKinley), we'll enter into the great Alaska Range of mountains which serves as the divide between the vast drainages of the Yukon to the north and the Matanuska-Susitna Rivers to the south. The location of our hike this afternoon will depend upon recent weather and trail conditions, but will certainly feature some wonderful scenery and the possibility of coming across wildlife such as moose or caribou. Our alpine camp for the next two nights is a private one on a bluff overlooking Jack River, with The Great One, Denali, hopefully deigning to fill our tents' doors . . .

Day 2 In the morning we'll drive the last 30 miles northward to the entrance of Denali National Park. A stop at the Visitor's Center will better acquaint us with Denali, and it is here that we will board a Park Service bus to travel into the Park, as the vast interior is closed to private vehicles. The round trip is a full day, and opportunities are some of the best anywhere for wildlife viewing. And then there's the 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 highly recommended option is flightseeing from a nearby airstrip (cost approx. \$200-275/person). It's a truly indescribable experience to witness the stark and formidable higher elevations from this perspective --and if "The Mountain" is "out", then there's just no question. It's then back to our camp for dinner and an evening tundra exploration.

Day 3 After breakfast we'll pack up and turn east to cross the spectacular Denali Highway. It is a 135 mile gravel road across wide valleys, alpine tundra and haunting scenery that is open only in the summer months and 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 stop along the way at a couple of the unique establishments to mingle with some of the locals. After crossing the beautiful Maclaren River we will gradually climb up to Maclaren Summit (elev. 4082 ft), the second highest point on Alaska's road system. Here we will leave the van for a great ramble above treeline, walking north towards the impressive Maclaren Glacier and mountains of the Alaska Range. This alpine tundra hike is spectacular, allowing for expansive views in all directions. Numerous kettle lakes dot the landscape and the possibility of seeing migrating caribou is good. After reaching Paxson, we will turn north on the Richardson Highway and depart the road to reach the base of the imposing Gulkana Glacier for a quick hike across a swinging bridge and onto the glacier's terminal moraine. A few miles south we'll find our dinner, and evening's lodging in the comfortable rooms of the Paxson Inn & Lodge.

Day 4 The Richardson Highway, following the old Valdez-Eagle trail, leads us southward through Glennallen to the Visitor Center of our nation's largest National Park, Wrangell-St. Elias. An undeveloped jewel, the Park coupled with the adjoining Kluane National Park of Canada, is the largest piece of protected wilderness on the planet. We'll pick up a one-lane abandoned railroad grade at the confluence of the Copper and Chitina Rivers, that leads us 60 miles into the center of the Park and the near ghost towns of McCarthy and Kennicott. The road ends at the Kennicott River, with public access to McCarthy limited to a footbridge. We though, will utilize a private vehicle bridge to access our own private facility on the island between the Kennicott River and McCarthy Creek. It's truly a fantastic spot with views in all directions, from the towering icefalls up high, to the glacial creek tumbling just out front. Legs and palates will no doubt demand a short walk to the tiny ghost town

of McCarthy (possibly wetting whistles at the unique tavern/watering hole) followed by an "untrailed" hike over the glacial moraine below where the Kennicott and Root glaciers join. It's an eerie landscape seemingly of another planet, and darned beautiful. Working our way back along one fork of the Kennicott river to the confluence with McCarthy Creek, leads us back to camp for dinner and surely an evening fire on the river gravel bar.

Day 5 A post breakfast van trip up the remainder of the road four miles to the abandoned company town of Kennicott overlooking its glacier namesake, allows an almost unbelievable exploration of an entire town sitting much the way it was when the mines 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, with its remoteness dictating that many things were not worth transporting out, coupled with a fortunate lack of vandalism. We'll continue onward by foot paralleling the glacial moraine to reach the face of the Root Glacier itself, and if time allows, beyond. It truly is another world. Heading back down, possibly by the manual method along the old Wagon Road, brings us back to McCarthy. The contrast between the two towns is now very apparent, with Kennicott the regimented company town, and McCarthy, the nearby free wheeling outlet for all of the those lonely miners . . . Another evening creekside fire with views all about is definitely in order.

Day 6 Today feels a bit more leisurely, with the morning open to explore such options fantastic flightseeing, hiking (cost approx. \$150-200/person), hiking or just plain relaxing. In the afternoon we'll reluctantly be on our way, winding out of the park and back to pavement for the beautiful trip to Valdez, up and over the Chugach Range. Crossing Thompson Pass, we descend to follow to the ocean, the long impenetrable Keystone Canyon, whose shear cliff walls kept the route from even being discovered for many years. Valdez, situated in beautiful surroundings, feels a bit different than many of the old Alaska places we've seen, in that it was "moved" after the near complete devastation of its former, geologically unstable location during the great 1964 earthquake (9.2 Richter!). Though the urban planning "grid" ideals of the mid-60's is quite apparent, all's you have to do is turn in any direction to see the mountains meeting the sea. Dinner will be on the town in Valdez, with bed & breakfast accommodations nearby.

Day 7 This morning we will board the state ferry for the beautiful trip across Prince William Sound. It's a wonderful contrast to all of the land lubbing we've been doing so far, and we should see many local creatures including murrets, puffins, and sea otters, with a good chance of humpback and maybe even orcas or killer whales, as we weave amongst the many islands of the Sound before reaching Whittier. Here we will climb back into our van and drive 2.5 miles through the Whittier Tunnel, the longest highway tunnel and the only one combining both rail and vehicle use in North America, connecting Whittier with the road system at the site of the '64 earthquake-destroyed community of Portage. From here we will turn northwest, following the shores of Turnagain Arm, keeping an eye out for the local phenomenon of the "bore tide", a result of the Arm's tremendous tidal range. Stopping to visit the funky resort town of Girdwood shows even another Alaska, with a hike through the rain forest (yes, rainforest). From here it's not too long of a drive back to an Alaska that now seems foreignly raucous and populated, Anchorage. From what probably seemed like a small city at the beginning of the trip now feels like a giant one, with the wilds and solitude of the last days leaving a quiet legacy with which to head to our respective homes. (A glance at the map though, reinforces just how much of the state remains, as your vow to return forms . . .)

Accessibility/Fitness

This is in great part a wilderness trip and while no particular skills are needed for any portion, a prerequisite for personal enjoyment as well as the ability of the group as a whole to proceed without hindrance, is a moderate level of physical conditioning. This does not mean brute strength or endurance but simply the ability to hike for up to four hours over uneven ground (with breaks) in possibly inclement weather. A suggested minimum level of conditioning would be several hours of steady walking a day in the weeks before the trip. We will also be sleeping in tents for four nights, two nights in a row at both locations.

Clothing/Equipment

While all group equipment is provided, this is an outdoor trip and personal gear should be chosen carefully (see separate packing list). The weather we might encounter could range from temperatures in the low thirties to the mid eighties, with rain of course always a possibility. This variety would suggest being prepared for the coldest to ensure comfort at all times, with multiple layers of versatile clothing the best approach. **Clothing:** Three to four changes of lightweight clothing are recommended which can be layered on cooler evenings. For outerwear, a sweater or pullover is perfect with the best being made of polypropylene pile (fleece) accompanied by a light jacket or vest. A high quality, two piece rainsuit is necessary which can also be used as a windbreaker or outer shell and should include a hood or else a rain hat. A hat is also ideal for the sun, with some also preferring an additional light stocking cap and gloves. Footwear should be suitable for the intended hiking, fairly lightweight and comfortable - this is not a time to break in new boots! **Sleeping Bag:** Should be comfortable to thirty degrees to ensure warmth if it gets damp, with mummy styles recommended. (NOTE: Clean, appropriate sleeping bags can also be rented from Adventure Alaska for a fee of \$30 for the trip - please indicate in advance if needed). A very comfortable full-length ThermoRest sleeping pad is provided, that with another gizmo, doubles as a wonderful camp chair. A daypack enough to hold a jacket, camera, water bottle, lunch is also necessary.

Luggage

Soft-sided luggage, duffles or travel packs are best. Total amount of personal gear for the trip including sleeping bag, should not exceed fifty pounds and should be manageable. Extra luggage can usually be stored in Anchorage during the trip if necessary. While this is not a backpacking trip, you will need to be able to carry your gear a short ways (up to 50 yards), as these are wilderness camps.

Accommodations/Meals

Accommodations: Include a roadhouse/lodge and a bed & breakfast, both with private baths, as well as four nights camping. The lodge and B&B are set up for double occupancy while camps are of course camps. Camping will be with two persons to a tent designed for three. Both of the camps are our own, and do feature dining shelters, outhouses, and other amenities. **Meals:** Some of the meals will be in established facilities, sometimes with a limited menu. While in camp, due to the nature of wilderness travel, choice will often be limited to a single entree with choice of side dishes. We make no pretense toward gourmet cuisine, though all meals are hearty and cookbook-worthy! Special dietary needs cannot always be met, though vegetarianism is not a problem. Let us know if you have any special or medical dietary requirements and we'll be happy to discuss the options. Alcoholic beverages are not included.

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

Money: Though most everything is included in the overall price, purchases for souvenirs, alcoholic beverages etc, can be made with either cash, traveler's checks in US Dollars, or, accepted in most places but not all, credit card. Gratuities to your guide not included. **Traveler's Insurance:** is strongly recommended, as the season is very short and our cancellation policy is necessarily quite strict. Ask us for recommendations. **Emergencies:** A trip list of the individual accommodation addresses and emergency phone numbers with the specific dates when you will be there is sent prior to trip departure. As some places are quite remote, the best way to be reached while on the trip, 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 phone use is strongly discouraged in the van.

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