

AK National Parks

- ⇒ 14 days trip, small group up to 10 people
- ⇒ Starts on SUNDAY, finishes on SATURDAY

Day 1: Kenai Fjords National Park

Depart Anchorage, drive to Seward Small Boat Harbor (120 miles, 2 hours)

Kenai Fjords National Park Tour, (6 hours, \$150 pp)

Drive Seward to Trail Lake Campground, dinner at camp

Beginning in Anchorage we will make the scenic 2 hour drive to Seward's small boat harbor where we will embark on the Kenai Fjords National Park Tour. A day on the water will bring us to an unforgettable setting not accessible by road, the northern fringe of the Pacific Ocean where a vast array of maritime flora and fauna carve out a unique existence amongst a geographically dazzling landmass part ice age, part ocean stone but wholly Alaskan. Migratory humpback whales, predatory orcas, Stellar sea lions, sea otters and northern seals are just some of what you might see right off the bow of the boat, as well as the towering face of a tidewater glacier. On land, mountain goats travel the grassy slopes while black bears that call the Kenai Fjords home are sometimes seen scouring the coves for an easy meal and occasionally even seen at play sliding down the snow fields which linger into summer. After the cruise we'll return to port and set our camp for the next two nights.

Day 2: Exit Glacier Hike

Drive to Exit Glacier (approx 35 miles, <1 hour)
Hike Harding Icefield Trail (4miles one way, approx 3,000 ft elevation gain)
Visit Seward after hike, (shower option at harbormaster) Dinner at Rays
Evening drive back to camp at Trail River CG

On Day 2 we will stay on land and hike beside an inland glacier, climbing through meadows of wildflowers and berry bushes through the rich mixture of life which thrives in this coastal northern rainforest with an ultimate goal of reaching the icefield overlook viewpoint. A truly unique perspective of a view thousands of years in the making, we'll descend back to town after the day long hike and enjoy some delicious local fare in one of Seward's excellent seafood restaurants along the harbor.

Day 3: Scenic day on Ferry across Prince Williams Sound to Valdez

From Seward to Valdez via AMH Ferry

Depart Trail River CG to Whittier (60 miles, 1.25 hours plus tunnel)

Lunch in Whittier, picnic

Ferry departure 1:30pm, arrive Valdez 7:15pm

Dinner in town, indoor accommodation

Day 3 we will make a short drive finishing in a long tunnel to access the port town of Whittier where we will board the Alaska Marine Highway Ferry to make the day long voyage across picturesque Prince William Sound.

Known affectionately as "the Little Switzerland of Alaska" because of its Alp like surroundings, the mountain ringed harbor of Valdez will greet us on our early evening arrival.

Day 4: Kayaking along Icebergs

**Kayak, Columbia Glacier Day Tour(10 hours, typically 9am start, 7pm finish. \$260 pp
Dinner, Indoor accommodation in Valdez**

After a night's rest in town, we'll return to the harbor where a water taxi will transport us back into the Sound for a day of kayaking among the icebergs and along the coves of the Columbia Glacier bay. Perfectly suited to the first time kayaker but visually impressive enough to please the seasoned paddler, a day kayaking at Columbia Glacier will leave you with a renewed sense of space and time, beginning amongst the freshly calved icebergs, some as big as houses, and paddling on into the outer bay coves where forests grow as they have since before the ice age. After a short hike to stretch our legs we'll return to Valdez by water taxi for a well earned meal in town and a night's rest.

Day 5: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

Depart Valdez, scenic drive to Chitina (120 miles, 2.25 hours)

Stops en-route to include Thompson Pass overview, Worthington Glacier (short hike to glacier face)

Lunch at Liberty Falls SP or TBD between Kenny Lake and Chitina

Drive McCarthy Road, Chitina to McCarthy (60 miles very rough, 2.5 average drive time)

Arrive at base camp, establish camp, dinner

Next day we travel the road away from the Sound and into the mountainous interior to our second National Park, Wrangell-St. Elias NP, America's largest National Park, 6 times the size of Yellowstone and greater by a quarter than the country of Switzerland. Together with its adjoining neighbor on the Canadian side of the border, Kluane NP, Wrangell-St. Elias comprises the largest contiguous protected landmass and the world. Nine of America's 16 tallest peaks rise within the park's boundary, making this truly a mountain wilderness. Mountains begin immediately out the back door of the tiny town of McCarthy which serves as the gateway to a park accessible only by footbridge after a 60 mile drive on the former rail bed the Copper River & North West railroad, now a dirt road in the classic Alaskan sense. Kennicott, just 5 miles from the village of McCarthy, was the site of the most lucrative copper operation in the history of the world from in the first half of the 1900's. Construction of the CR & NW (dubbed the "Can't Run & Never Will" by skeptics at the time who believed the route was impossible to build) was required to transport the ore to market by ship from the inland mountains, threading a needle's eye between advancing glaciers, mountain ranges, dense northern forests, bogs and delta. Truly an engineering marvel of its time upon completion in 1911, the McCarthy road travels 60 miles of former rail bed from Chitina to the road's end at the McCarthy footbridge, while many of the historic buildings of the Kennicott operation still exist, adding a compelling human historical saga to the stunning timeless setting.

On the Alaska National Parks tour we will spend 2 full days visiting McCarthy and Kennicott, with one day devoted to a glacier hike or introduction to ice climbing on the easily accessible Root Glacier, one of the 3 glaciers that spill down from the mountains towering above town and junction not far from the footbridge at road's end. For those who opt to glacier hike an afternoon tour inside the 13 story mill building crucial to the Kennecott Corporation's copper enterprise is possible. The ice climbing is a full day experience that usually ends with an opportunity to descend into the glacier in a moulin, an unforgettable experience. A memorable day will end in our camp beside the glacier's outwash plain surrounded by mountains with stories to tell.

Day 6: Glacier Hike or Ice Climbing

Ice activities on Root Glacier. Options: Full day Ice climbing or half Day glacier hike with Mill tour

Access across footbridge, shuttle to Kennecott (5 miles one way)

Return to base camp, dinner

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Day 7: Hike Copper Trail to Bonanza Ridge

Morning departure to Kennecott, access across footbridge, shuttle to Kennecott

Hike Bonanza ridge trail (4.5 miles one way, approx 4,000 feet elevation gain)

Return to McCarthy via late afternoon shuttle

Evening meal in McCarthy, (the Potato or McCarthy Lodge) Thursday night open-mic

Walk back to camp (1.5 miles, flat)

On our second day we will turn to the heights above Kennicott and climb the old copper trail to the top of Bonanza ridge, hiking the same route used by the mine workers to access their bunkhouse beside the ruby green veins that ribbon the very top of the ridgeline. Though the bunkhouse is now in ruins the ridgeline remains as impressive as ever, offering an unparalleled perspective into the glacial valley below and the incredible mountainous expanse beyond.

At the heart of this ruggedly unique natural setting is a colorful community of people every bit as colorful and endearing as their setting, and no trip to McCarthy would be complete without some time spent visiting the historic saloon. After a few days of rewarding outdoor activities we'll spend our final night in McCarthy with dinner in town, a toast to our good fortune and perhaps even some live music at the weekly open mic in this entertaining oasis of a bygone era.

Days 8 & 9: On the Denali Highway

Day 8) McCarthy to Denali Highway

Depart McCarthy morning, drive McCarthy Road to Chitina (60 miles, very rough, 2.5 hours)

Lunch at Chitina River overlook

Drive Chitina to Wrangell St Elias Visitor Center (56 miles, 1 hour)

Visit Wrangell St Elias Visitor Center

Drive Wrangell St Elias VC to Glenallen (15 miles)

Drive Glenallen to Denali Highway Junction (71 miles, 1.5 hours)

Drive Denali Highway to Tangle Lakes (20 miles, paved, 30 minutes)

To MacLaren Lodge (41 miles total, 1 hour from junction)

Evening accommodations in MacLaren Lodge, rustic

Day 9) MacLaren Lodge to Denali NP

Morning departure MacLaren Lodge, drive Denali Highway (80 miles, 2 hours to Cantwell)

Short hikes and lunch en-route

Cantwell to Denali National Park entrance (28 miles, 30 minutes)

Afternoon at Denali NP, Visitor Center, entrance area hikes

Denali NP to Healy 15 miles, camp DOC

Departing the Wrangells we will drive west, making our way into the Alaskan range via the Denali Highway. Paralleling the mountains, we'll enjoy this lightly travelled dirt road with short hikes and scenic stops, sensibly splitting the drive from McCarthy to Denali National Park into two days with a night at a rustic lodge along the way. First created after the construction of the Alaska Canada highway for post-war motorists driving to Denali Park from the lower 48, the Denali Highway is a scenic route too often ignored by the average tourist either in a hurry or intimidated by the scarcity of services along the way. Though it is a slow road it is still the most direct route and we'll arrive at Denali National Park in the afternoon, with time to visit the park for a short hike or whitewater raft a class III river before setting camp for the next two evenings.

Day 10: Denali Park

Denali National Park

Visit Eielson Visitor Center on Park Road via shuttle bus system (66 miles one way, 8 hour round trip)

Return to camp, dinner

Day 10 is devoted entirely to Denali National Park and the day long tour to the remote Eielson Visitor Center via the sole road within its boundary. Denali National Park is as large as the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island combined with only one 90 miles long dirt road in its entirety, access to which is limited to the park's unique shuttle bus system which is designed for both wildlife viewing and transportation. Caribou herds, Dall sheep, Moose, Grizzly bears and occasionally wolves are all visible from the park buses which travel the park road along the northern side of the Alaskan range. On a clear day, roughly 40% of the time in summer, the trip out to Eielson culminates in a breathtaking view of the tallest peak in North America, Denali (formerly known as Mt. McKinley), whose seldom climbed stunning north-face, known as the Wickersham Wall, presents its dramatic sheer ice visage just across the valley floor. On the return trip from Eielson, the unique bus system allows you to hop-off and on multiple times to make explorations on foot from the park road and make the most of the long northern summer sunlight in this landscape without equal in our national park system.

Day 11: Knick Valley

Denali NP to Knik River Lodge

Depart Healy, drive to Knik River Lodge (240 miles, 4.5 hours) Lunch, scenic stops en-route

Evening jetboat tour to Knik Glacier (5:30 pm departure, 8:30pm return)

Accommodations Knik River Lodge

Day 11 we will drive south through the Alaska Range with a few more scenic opportunities to see Denali from its southern flank along the way, while the Talkeetna and Chugach mountains slowly rise taller on the southern and eastern horizons. As the slow crepuscular glow of dusk

reaches into the heart of the Knik valley we'll drive to the road's end and then travel by jetboat to the amphitheater of ice at its headwaters known as the Knik Glacier, where a rosy touch of alpenglow can light the ice with an astounding spectrum of color and create one of the most beautiful panoramas you can imagine. Back at the road's end we'll spend a night in the lodge cabins and enjoy a meal featuring the freshest ingredients from the surrounding farms of the Mat-Su Valley, Alaska's agricultural heartland since its founding by pre-statehood farmer pioneers.

Day 12 & 13: Lake Clark National Park

Day 12) Knik River Lodge to Lake Clark NP

Drive Knik River Lodge to Merrill Field Airport (50 miles, 1 hour)

Transfer to Charter flight to Pt. Alsworth, Lake Clark NP (1.5 hour)

Afternoon arrival at Lake Clark campground, orientation

13) Lake Clark National Park

Activities to include: Kayak on lake, hike to Tanalian River waterfall (2.5 miles one way, 250 ft elevation gain) or Tanalian Mountain summit (4.3 miles one way, 3,750 ft elevation gain) Bear viewing flight (4 hours total, 2 hours on ground viewing bears)

Skiff rental available to experienced boat operators

Exiting the Knik Valley the morning of day 12, we will make the short drive to Anchorage's original airport on the outskirts of town where we will trade our van for a sky caravan and leave the road system behind to make the scenic hour and a half flight across the Cook Inlet, travelling through the spectacular Tordrillo mountains to the most beautiful national park you have probably never heard of (unless you are a fan of the One Man's Wilderness story of Dick Proenicke which frequently airs on PBS), Lake Clark National Park. Because it is off the road system, Lake Clark remains a hidden jewel well off the beaten path. The vast majority of Lake Clark's annual summer visitors are migratory salmon making their way inland from Bristol Bay. The tiny town of Pt. Alsworth on the shores of Lake Clark serves as our camp and base of exploration for two days to explore this idyllic setting. Established hiking trails lead from town through peaceful woods to an impressive waterfall or all the way to the summit of Tanalian Mountain offering a commanding perspective on the length of breadth of the lake and mountain surroundings. Kayaks are available to explore the landscape from the shoreline at a leisurely pace while fisherman will be right at home casting from the shore or for the experienced boat operator, a skiff is available for rental for the day.

While the days in Lake Clark, away from the van and roads and activity of the Alaskan summer are a time to really unwind and relax, perhaps the ultimate highlight of your Alaskan tour awaits in the final days just a short plane journey away. Fly-in bear viewing along the Cook Inlet coast. Lake Clark lies within the heart of the world's largest annual salmon spawn meaning brown bears are not far away. Bush planes equipped to make beach landings operate regularly from the airstrip at Pt. Alsworth so included in the cost of our Alaska National Park tour is a 4-hour bear viewing flight, a once in a lifetime experience to see brown bears in their natural habit.

Day 14: Scenic flight back to Anchorage

Lake Clark NP to Anchorage

Morning in Lake Clark, mid-day flight to Anchorage (1.5 hours)

Afternoon program in Anchorage, transfer to hotels, airport

Departing Lake Clark on the morning of day 14, one more scenic flight through the mountains returns you to Anchorage with some time in the afternoon to visit the city as you choose, perhaps spending some time at the award winning Native Heritage Center or taking in a bit of the heart of historic downtown before a transfer to your hotel for the evening or a drop-off at the airport for an overnight flight home.

Whatever your vision of the Alaskan wilderness, we believe our Alaska National Park tour will show you the Alaska you have always imagined and like the best vacations, the memories you make will serve as rich inspiration for further dreams.