

Alaska Wild Adventure

INTRODUCTION

After more than twenty years of offering trips to many "secret" places in Alaska, this one features favorites of both ourselves and our past guests. It purposefully does not include Denali, but concentrates on the incomparable jewel of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, spending less time in transit while featuring hiking and glacier trekking, as well as the maritime world. Very much oriented towards the wilds of Alaska with unique forays by foot by day, four nights of lodging are complemented by three nights camping at our wonderfully private creekside inholding in the heart of the Park. The balance is a delightful one: between wilderness and comfort, motion and stasis, and exertion and reflection. Wandering four mountain ranges, three glaciers and a bit of one ocean, it's a great combo..

We'll explore the history and alpine country of the Talkeetna Mountains at Hatcher Pass, a glacial sculptor of the Chugach Mountains trekking the Matanuska Glacier, and have multifaceted encounters with the marvelous Wrangells. A counterbalance highlight is the maritime wonder of Prince William Sound, followed by explorations of the Kenai Mountains surrounding our last two nights in the end-of-the-road hideaway of Hope.

The size of Alaska can easily dominate the experience, both of logistics and time in transit. This itinerary promises an incredible variety of place, with the time to develop a connection with each. If looking to stump your cruise traveling friends with the destination names, and subsequently blow them away with the in-depth experiences recounted, then this may be the itinerary for you. Come decide for yourself.



8 Day / 7 Night

\$2485 p/person

<u>2012 Tour Dates</u>	<u>Code</u>
June 10 - June 17	8W1
June 29 - July 6	8W2
July 10 - July 17	8W3
July 21 - July 28	8W4
Aug 4 - Aug 11	8W5
Aug 20 - Aug 27	8W6
Aug 28 - Sept 4	8W7

ABBREVIATED AGENDA

Day 1 Anchorage - Matanuska Glacier: travel through Palmer to the high country of Hatcher Pass; explore extensive Independence Mine Historical Park; lunch above treeline; continue eastward for an otherworldly trek on the Matanuska Glacier (w/crampons!); dinner overlooking the glacier; overnight cabins of Nelchina Lodge

Day 2 Nelchina - McCarthy: volcanoes of Sanford, Drum and Blackburn enroute to the Visitor's Center of the Wrangell - St. Elias National Park (our country's largest Park!); picnic by Liberty Falls; follow abandoned railroad grade to heart of park; private riverside camp near McCarthy; glacial moraine evening hike

Day 3 McCarthy/Kennicott: travel four miles to abandoned town/mine of Kennicott; exploration; hike to the Root Glacier and onto the face; continue along lateral moraine to the Erie Mine; dinner in the ghost town of McCarthy; campfire, riverside camp

Day 4 McCarthy: scheduled hike up the west side of the valley/glaciers; optional day rafting on the Kennicott River w/bush plane pickup, or optional flightseeing; evening island stroll; riverside camp

Day 5 McCarthy - Valdez: morning forested hike in the Crystalline Hills; depart Park and cross spectacular Thompson Pass; arrive coastal Valdez for exploration/museum; B & B

Day 6 Valdez - Hope: board ferry for spectacular trip across Prince William Sound to Whittier, passing Columbia Glacier; drive through mountain tunnels; road through Kenai Mtns. to end of the road frontier town of Hope; overnight Discovery Cabins along Bear Creek

Day 7 Hope: day hike to alpine lake country high in the Kenai Mountains; evening barbecue; "wildlife" of oceanside watering hole favorite, the Seaview Bar; overnight in Discovery Cabins

Day 8 Hope-Anchorage: optional goldpanning; museum; travel to Girdwood; rainforest hike along Winner Creek; lunch at Alyeska Bakery; late afternoon return to Anchorage

Note: An independent Denali excursion can be added to the itinerary if desired

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 log cabins. 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 a 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 B&B or a previously arranged location. From here we'll quickly dispatch with "the city" and head north by way of Palmer, through the agricultural bread basket of Alaska formed by the valleys of two great rivers, the Matanuska and the Susitna. We'll follow the Little Susitna river a bit before quickly climbing up the winding road of the west flank of the Talkeetna Mountains, arriving at the tundra above treeline for a visit to the Independence Mine State Historical Park. It's our first taste of the industry responsible in great part for the whys and wheres of settlement all across Alaska. From the roads and trails we travel to the ends of the road that they access, mineral bounty was and is inextricably part of the northern fabric of human presence. Wandering the buildings and remains of the then isolated operation of the 30's and 40's, gives one insight into the faces in the old photos on the walls, all while taking in the same hundred-mile views of Cook Inlet that they did. The same panorama fills the window of our nearby lunch spot at the delightfully funky Hatcher Pass Lodge. From here we descend to track east along the churning Matanuska River towards its birthplace, the glacier of the same name, both in struggle to wear down the mountains that are still growing. On a portion of the terminal moraine, we'll don our crampons, and talk about their operation, as the gleaming white and deep blue of the glacier loom ahead. With a properly requisite waddle, our cleated feet will allow us to safely wander the fantastic forms and tortured shapes of the constantly changing, river of ice. Icefalls, crevasses, couloirs, moulins --it's a world unlike any other, and we're sure you'll agree. Driving away from the current terminal moraine, gives obvious story to the steady development of life that recolonizes the rock and soils progressively released from beneath the ice, as the glacier recedes up the valley. Dinner is appropriately overlooking the glacier at the Long Rifle Lodge, before a few more road miles to our well deserved snooze at the cozy Nelchina Cabins.

Day 2 Breakfast will have the Chugach Mountains and Nelchina Glacier as a backdrop, before dispatching with the 50 miles of road to Glennallen, the crossroads community where one decides whether to go north towards Canada or south towards Valdez. Looming ahead for the drive, has been the startlingly prominent snow-covered form of the volcano Mt. Sanford. Just south, still steaming, comes into view Mt. Blackburn. A short distance yields the new Visitor's Center for our nation's largest National Park, Wrangell-St. Elias. The center gives a fitting introduction to a magnificent park that most never actually visit, due to its challenge of access. Its contrast with Denali is quite apparent in the lack of crowds and regimentation, though it is two and one half times larger. An undeveloped jewel, the Park coupled with the adjoining Kluane National Park of Canada, is the largest piece of protected wilderness on the planet. Lunch will be a picnic next to the thundering water of Liberty Falls. In Chitina, we'll pick up the 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 their unique tavern/watering hole) followed by an "untrailed" hike over the glacial moraine below where the Kennicott and Root glaciers join. It's an eery 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 gravel bar right in front of our tents.

Day 3 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 up, 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. Skirting along the glacier's residue lateral moraine (kind of like the high water mark of its former self), we'll follow what remains of the old wagon road that accessed the ore of the Erie Mine farther "upstream". Perched high above, seemingly without discernable anchor, is the mine's most improbably located massive bunkhouse, particularly astounding to those that view it from eye level flightseeing. Heading back and steadily down, brings us back to McCarthy for a visit to their small but quite informative museum. From there it's but a few paces to the famous local watering hole for refreshment and dinner. 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 . . . Camp is back on our "island", a creekside fire with views all about definitely in order.

Day 4 Today has several possibilities, from just hanging out leisure-like in camp, optional flightseeing (some of the best anywhere, as you're amongst marvels from the moment you take off --cost approx. \$100-200/person depending on flight time), to the option of a day rafting trip down the Kennicott River to join the braided Nizina, with a pick up by bush plane (\$285/person). It's class II and III water, and a concentrated dose of another means of exploring these lands. For those looking to keep their feet active, there is the delightful hike up the western lateral moraine of the Kennicott Glacier, on the opposite side of the valley from the now seemingly tiny town of Kennicott. From here too, one can better understand the complex of mines and tram lines still visible in the hills far above the town. The magnitude of this combined glacial complex is quite evident, with the icefalls of both the Root and Kennicott pouring from the hidden icefields above, to flow down and join a few miles above our perch. All along our "goat trail", the unceasing nature of the glacier's evolution is evident in the continual clatter of rocks yielding to gravity and temperatures as the ice melts from below, falling into the ever changing pools of meltwater. It's an environment unlike any other. Whatever you've chosen for your day's activity, dinner will be a hearty one, followed by a stroll from the fire pit down along McCarthy Creek to its nearby entry into the roaring Kennicott River. Sounds of both will once again lull one to a fine slumber . . .

Day 5 Breakfast will find us reluctantly leaving our island home, headed back the only road, to stop part way for a hike in the Crystalline Hills. Farther removed from glacial activity, the area feels palpably different with taller trees and a much more developed forest than our last few days. Enroute on the loop, we'll pass a "pour-off", a thunderous waterfall with sufficient precipitation (hopefully not today). Afterwards we'll be winding out of the park and back to pavement for the beautiful trip to Valdez, up and over the Chugach Range, stopping at Worthington Glacier along the way. Crossing dramatic Thompson Pass (974 inches of snow one winter!) , we descend to follow a roadbed carved out to the ocean, through 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. There's also a great museum. Dinner will be on the town in Valdez, with bed & breakfast accommodations nearby.

Day 6 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 murrelets, 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. Turning off the main road and following along the south side of Turnagain Arm leads to the little end-of-the-road community of Hope. The second oldest gold rush town in Alaska, Hope is still predominately built of log, from the tiny church to the old Social Hall, still hosting weddings, dances and community functions. It's a very special place and it is here that we'll lodge for the next two nights in cozy log cabins overlooking Bear Creek.

Day 7 Blueberry pancakes for breakfast should give a good start, before heading out on our hike. We'll leave right from our cabin door, heading up the valley to high alpine country, taking our picnic lunch along. It's quite unique to be above treeline, sitting in tundra, looking at the ocean below. You'll have earned dinner by the time we return, and a leisurely barbecue is planned on the deck overlooking our cabins. Afterwards, if you still feel spry, you might be inclined to sample a bit of the "wildlife" at the local watering hole down by the ocean at the Seaview Bar. They have some great music, and the setting can't be beat.

Day 8 Leaving the Kenai Mountains and skirting the Chugach while winding back around Turnagain Arm brings us to Girdwood, home to the 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 with flora quite different from Hope, just a few dozen miles away. Lush ferns and undergrowth along with large spruce and hemlock trees are dominate on the trail up Winner Creek to its beautiful little gorge and hand tram. It might be a late lunch but worth it at The Bake Shop upon return. 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 and find out what's over one of those ridges spied earlier . . .

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 three nights, consecutively.

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:** Four to five changes of lightweight clothing are recommended (laundry facilities available on Day 6) 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 this is a wilderness camp.

Accommodations/Meals

Accommodations: Include a roadhouse/lodge and cabins, the latter without private baths, as well as three nights camping. The lodge and cabins are set up for double occupancy while camps are of course camps. Camping will be with two persons to a tent designed for three. The camp is our own, and features a dining shelter, outhouse, and shelter cabin if inclement. **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 Add-ons

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. **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. 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