



From Humpback Whales & Grizzly Bears to Glaciers & Northern Lights!

Alaska's Wilderness and Wildlife Provide Incredible Family Vacation Adventures.

By Shannon Jones / September 1, 2022

Alaska, the 49th state, is twice the size of Texas and consists of five distinct regions: Inside Passage (Juneau, Glacier Bay, Skagway), Southcentral (Anchorage, Seward), Interior (Fairbanks, Denali Park, Chena Hot Springs), Arctic and Southwest (Kodiak). Seeing wildlife in the wild and enjoying the great outdoors is what Alaska is all about. The wilderness is everywhere as the state has more than 200 parks and preserves, including 8 National Parks. You can see Alaska's "Big Five" in their natural habitat-- grizzly bear, moose, caribou, Dall sheep and wolves.

Here are just a few of Alaska's highlights and ways to enjoy the beautiful state.

Denali National Park

Covering 6 million acres, Denali is larger than the state of Massachusetts. It has the tallest mountain peak in North America at 20,310 feet! There's only one road further into the Park past Mile 1, and you can only travel it on a park-approved bus, a bicycle or on your own feet. This almost guarantees you can see some of the over 40 species of mammals that live here. Denali is the only National Park with a working kennel. Since 1922, Denali's sled dogs and park rangers have protected the Park. When you visit, you can see mushing (or dogsledding) demonstrations.

Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park

This is the nation's largest National Park, covering 13 million acres. Named for the mountain ranges running through the Park, it has 9 of the 15 highest U.S. mountain peaks. The Park also has the nation's largest glacial system, with glaciers (huge, slow-moving masses of ice and rock) covering more than a third of it. Did you know over 5% of Alaska is covered by glaciers and there are over 100,000 within the state?

Hubbard Glacier is North America's largest tidewater glacier (glaciers that calve icebergs into the sea). It's 7 miles wide, 600 feet tall (350 feet exposed above the waterline) and flows 76 miles long to the sea. The ice that falls off it is as much as 500 years old. Listen for "white thunder" as huge chunks of ice crash into the bay.

Katmai National Park & Preserve

Katmai has the highest concentration of bears in the world. Watch them catch sockeye salmon in Brook Falls. The Park is also the site of the world's largest volcanic eruption in the 20th century and is home to horned puffins.

Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve

This 3.3 million-acre Park is an icy wilderness. Today, glaciers still cover 27% of the park. It's home to humpback and minke whales, harbor porpoises, seals, Steller sea lions and sea otters. Experience the Park in a kayak, on a flight tour or guided walking tour.

Anchorage

Anchorage is Alaska's biggest city with half of the state's population living here. The Alaska Native Heritage Center teaches visitors the traditional and contemporary ways of Alaska's 213 Indigenous tribes. Exhibits span over 10,000 years of history and culture and include dance, art, full-scale traditional dwellings and even totem poles.

Fish for king salmon in Ship Creek, an urban fishery that runs right through downtown. Look for the rare white Beluga Whales swimming off Beluga Point. In the winter, you can find 1,500 moose roaming the city streets. The first weekend in March, the ceremonial start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race takes place here.

Juneau

Juneau is the only state capital in the United States that can exclusively be reached by airplane or boat. It's popular for whale watching experiences that run from April to September, as whales migrate to Alaska in springtime. Gray whales typically come back first in mid-April, followed by orcas in May and humpback whales in June. Whale-watching tours are a popular way to see the diverse marine life in the area, including Steller sea lions, Dall's porpoise, killer whales and humpback whales. Juneau has about 60 humpbacks that frequent the area and are very commonly seen.

Skagway

When gold was discovered in the Yukon Territory in 1896, Skagway became the gateway to fortune for tens of thousands of people. Visit Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park and take the historic White Pass & Yukon Route railroad to the top of the mountain pass north of town. Seated in parlor cars, you'll see spectacular scenery such as Glacier Gorge, Dead Horse Gulch and Bridal Veil Falls. At the top, you'll see White Pass, the international boundary between the United States and Canada.

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