

Kenai Explorer Tour

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". In only five days this tour offers the Kenai at its best, with a delightful variety of contrasts including overnight stays: on a wilderness island, in a coastal village inaccessible by road and a 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 before reaching Homer for the boat trip across Kachemak Bay to the secluded fishing village of Seldovia and our waterfront bed and breakfast. On Day 4, we cross the bay by air taxi, before heading back to quiet Hope and the creekside cabins. The next day 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.



5 Day / 4 Night

\$1885 p/person

| <u>2011 Tour Dates</u> | <u>Code</u> |
|------------------------|-------------|
| June 3 - June 7 | 5K1 |
| June 8 - June 12 | 5K2 |
| June 28 - July 2 | 5K3 |
| July 5 - July 9 | 5K4 |
| July 25 - July 29 | 5K5 |
| Aug 6 - Aug 10 | 5K6 |
| Aug 13 - Aug 17 | 5K7 |

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 spectacular Aialik Bay with three tidewater glaciers; return Seward, visit Alaska Sealife Center; drive through Kenai Mountains to end-of-the-road gold rush town of Hope; overnight creekside log cabins

Day 3 Hope - Seldovia: Follow Kenai River through Cooper Landing, Soldotna; skirt edge of Cook Inlet with impressive volcanoes lining the other side; arrive Homer to board boat to the quaint fishing village Seldovia with tour enroute; afternoon exploration of town, museums, or optional hike; overnight waterfront inn

Day 4 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 5 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 a field; 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, with a hot tub waiting . . .

Day 3 After an early breakfast we'll hit the road to Homer to arrive in time for our 11AM appointment with a boat. Enroute we'll follow the beautiful Kenai River through Cooper Landing and pass through Soldotna to skirt the eastern side of Cook Inlet with the towering volcanoes of Iliamna, Redoubt and Augustine framing the other side. We'll dawdle a bit more on the return trip, but the views are nonetheless, quite regal in any direction. Arriving at the end of the Homer Spit, we'll board the boat to cross picturesque Kachemak 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 before dinner on Main Street. Our lodging for the night is in a lovely waterfront Inn overlooking the boat harbor, where sea otters are a frequent sight.

Day 4 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 catch our return flight with a quick hop across the bay to Homer. It's almost hard to get back in a vehicle again, but we'll have to peruse some of Homer's singular shops, in this town known for its artist community drawn to the local beauty. Lunch will be in a local eatery. Heading back north, we'll pass through Anchor Point and make a photo stop at an old Russian Orthodox Church on a high bluff overlooking Cook Inlet. The faith of Alaska's earliest non-Native settlers remains strong among many of the coastal Native communities. We know the way, 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.

Day 5 After breakfast, we might try our luck at gold panning (optional - \$25) with some local miners instructing, with an optional hike in the plan as well. After a stop at the Portage Visitor Center for some wonderful Forest Service displays, we will then follow the road 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 ***5-Day Kenai Explorer Tour***

Accessibility/Fitness

This trip does not require a high level of fitness nor does it include camping. It is though, an itinerary that spends a considerable amount of time outdoors in a potentially inclement environment 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 5 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