

# Outdoor Activities & Adventures

You didn't come all this way to sit in a theater watching three acts of *Hamlet*. Or to stand in a gallery staring at an impressionist painting of lord-knows-what. Or even to spend an evening consuming a six-course meal featuring more silverware and dishes than the last hostel you stayed at.

What truly unites all Alaskans, young and old, tall and small, is the overwhelming desire to be out in the wilderness. You don't have to scale Mt McKinley to enjoy the Alaskan outdoors – there are plenty of ways to leave the pavement behind because Alaska is, after all, the USA's biggest playground. Now go outside and play!

## CABINS

Every agency overseeing public land in Alaska, from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS) to the Alaska Division of Parks, maintains rustic cabins in remote areas. The cabins are not expensive (\$25 to \$50 per night) but they are not easy to reach either. Most of them are accessed via a floatplane charter. Others can be reached on foot, by boat or by paddling. By arranging a charter and reserving a cabin in advance you can sneak away into the wilderness, with half the effort and time that backpackers or paddlers put in, and reach remote corners of Alaska.

**Tongass National Forest** ([www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/cabins/cabins.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/cabins/cabins.shtml)) and **Chugach National Forest** ([www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/cabins/index.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/cabins/index.html)) have the most cabins available, almost 190. Alaska Division of Parks has more than 40 cabins scattered from Point Bridget State Park near Juneau to Chena River State Recreation Area east of Fairbanks. You can get a list of cabins and reserve them up to six months in advance through the **DNR Public Information Center** (☎ 907-269-8400; [www.alaskastateparks.org](http://www.alaskastateparks.org)).

The BLM manages 12 cabins in the **White Mountain National Recreation Area** (☎ 907-474-2251, 800-437-7021; [aurora.ak.blm.gov](http://aurora.ak.blm.gov); per night \$20-25) north of Fairbanks, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service has seven in the **Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge** (☎ 907-487-2600; [kodiak.fws.gov](http://kodiak.fws.gov); per night \$45) on Kodiak Island. In **Kenai Fjords National Park** (☎ 907-224-3175; [www.nps.gov/kefj](http://www.nps.gov/kefj); per night \$50), the NPS maintains three cabins that are reached by floatplane or water taxi and are reserved through the **Alaska Public Lands Information Center** (☎ 907-271-2737) after January 1 for that summer.

## CAMPING

Camping is not just cheap accommodations in Alaska; it's a reason to be outside, soaking up the scenery while watching that trout you just caught sizzling on an open campfire. Camping is such a popular activity that many communities have set up facilities on the edge of town; Homer's Karen Hornaday Memorial Campground (p286) and Wrangell's City Park (p142) are particularly scenic spots to pitch a tent.

But the best camping experience is away from towns at one of the public campgrounds operated by the Alaska Division of Parks, the US Forest Service (USFS) or the BLM in northern Alaska. The state park system maintains the most – more than 70 rustic campgrounds scattered throughout Alaska, with fees from free to \$15 a night in the more popular ones. The majority do not take reservations.

USFS cabins can be the most affordable wilderness fishing trips in Alaska. Most of them are located near water and those beside a lake come with a rowboat.

Since 1985 Alaska has averaged only 4.5 bear attacks a year, which included 24 fatalities and 45 serious injuries.

The Dalton Hwy north of Coldfoot is the longest service-free stretch of road in North America – 244 miles without a gas station, McDonald's or anything else.

If you are planning to camp in Alaska, here are five campgrounds you should not pass up:

**Blueberry Lake State Recreation Site** (p375) Ten sites in a scenic alpine setting north of Valdez.  
**Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park** (p304) Near Kodiak; wooded sites, interesting WWII artifacts and intriguing tidal pools to explore.

**Marion Creek Campground** (p413) Camp north of the Arctic Circle with stunning views of the Brooks Range at this BLM facility along the Dalton Hwy.

**Mendenhall Lake Campground** (p168) Near Juneau, a beautiful USFS campground with a glacial view from many sites.

**Ninilchik View State Campground** (p278) Lots of sites overlooking Cook Inlet, Old Ninilchik, and great clamming beaches.

Weather Underground ([www.wunderground.com/US/AK](http://www.wunderground.com/US/AK)) is the best site to check before you head into the Alaskan wilderness for a weekend of hiking or paddling.

## CANOEING & KAYAKING

The paddle is a way of life in Alaska and every region has either canoeing or kayaking opportunities or both. Both the Southeast and Prince William Sound offer spectacular kayaking opportunities, while Fairbanks and Arctic Alaska are home to some of the best wilderness canoe adventures in the country. For paddling possibilities and rental locations see the regional chapters. For the best canoe and kayak trips you can do on your own see the Wilderness Hikes & Paddles chapter (p89).

## CYCLING

With its long days, cool temperatures, a lack of interstate highways and a growing number of paved paths around cities such as Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks, Alaska can be a land of opportunity for road cyclists.

Cyclists do have to take some extra precautions in Alaska. Other than cities and major towns, comprehensively equipped bike shops are rare, so it's wise to carry not only metric tools but also a tube-patch repair kit, brake cables, spokes and brake pads. Due to high rainfall, especially in the Southeast, waterproof saddle bags are useful, as are tire fenders. Rain gear, mittens and a woolen hat are also necessities.

Some roads do not have much of a shoulder, so cyclists should utilize the sunlight hours to pedal when traffic is light in such areas. It is not necessary to carry a lot of food, as you can easily restock on all major roads.

You can rent road bicycles in many towns. Alaska's three major bike clubs – **Arctic Bicycle Club** (☎ 907-566-0177; [www.arcticbike.org](http://www.arcticbike.org)) of Anchorage, **Juneau Freewheelers** ([www.juneaufreewheelers.com](http://www.juneaufreewheelers.com)) and **Fairbanks Cycle Club** ([www.fairbanksyclclub.org](http://www.fairbanksyclclub.org)) – are good sources for information and news on cycling events.

## DOG SLEDDING

If Alaska is too hot or crowded for you in the summer, arrive in the winter and join a dog sled expedition. There are more than two-dozen outfitters from Bettles to Homer that will set you up with a team and then lead you into the winter wilderness.

Some outings are only three or four hours long, others offer an eight-day journey into the Brooks Range with your own team. The best time for such an adventure is late February through early April, when the days are long, the temperatures are much more agreeable and the snow base is still deep. You do not need previous experience with dog teams or mushing but you should be comfortable with winter camping and have cold-weather clothing and gear.

One of the best places for such an adventure is Denali National Park with **Earthsong Lodge** (☎ 907-683-2863; [www.earthsonglodge.com](http://www.earthsonglodge.com)). The lodge, near Healy, features a sled dog kennel, and winter tours with your own team range from overnight (\$640) to five days (\$3100). **Denali West Lodge** (☎ 907-674-3112; [www.denaliwest.com](http://www.denaliwest.com)) has multiday trips to the base of Mt McKinley including a six-

Ride with a guide! Alaskabike ([www.alaskabike.com](http://www.alaskabike.com)) offers a 360-mile, eight-day tour of the state for \$2995 which includes your bicycle, lodging and meals.

Find all things mushing at Sled Dog Central ([www.sleddogcentral.com](http://www.sleddogcentral.com)) including outfitters, Iditarod news and interviews with mushers. Can you pass the sled dog quiz?