



Kenai Peninsula

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Why Go?

Set enticingly across Turnagain Arm from Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula is a veritable jungle gym for Anchorage residents and tourists alike. With two main roads splintering across an area the size of Belgium, the peninsula is an accessible wilderness, allowing visitors to edge as far away from civilization as they feel comfortable.

The Kenai Mountains form the eastern two-thirds of the peninsula, and there are more hiking trails and alpine lakes here than you can explore in a summer. Glaciers are crammed into every cranny, and the comparatively flat western side of the peninsula is pocked with trout-filled lakes excellent for canoeing. The peninsula's towns are as varied as the topography, with fishing towns, an arts capital and Russian Old Believer villages. And then there's the marine world: the peninsula's jagged coastline makes for some of the best kayaking you'll find, with waters full of marine mammals, birds and fish.

Best Places to Eat

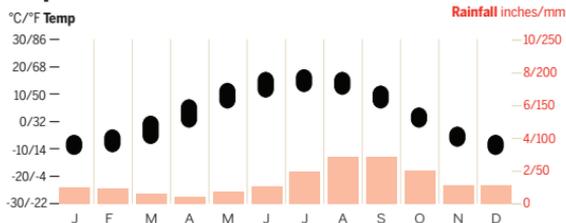
- » Cosmic Kitchen (p246)
- » Smoke Shack (p223)
- » Samovar Café (p239)
- » Bowman's Bear Creek Lodge (p216)
- » Two Sisters Bakery (p246)

Best Places to Stay

- » Alaska Paddle Inn (p222)
- » Eagle Watch (p238)
- » Old Town B&B (p244)
- » Across the Bay Tent & Breakfast (p250)

When to Go

Hope



Mar Catch some turns in Turnagain Pass when the snow is awesome and the sunshine bright.

Jul Hook a salmon as they hump upstream.

Sep It's time for berry picking, so grab a bucket and head to the hills.

History

For millennia, Dena'ina Indians made the Kenai Peninsula their home, as did Alutiqs in the south and Chugaches in the east. They largely subsisted as many modern residents do: by pulling fish from the area's bountiful waterways. In 1741 Vitus Bering, a Dane sailing for the Russians, was the first European to lay eyes on the peninsula; in 1778 British explorer Captain James Cook sailed up the inlet that would bear his name, landing north of the present-day city of Kenai and claiming the area for England. Despite that, the first white settlement on the peninsula was Russian – St Nicholas Redoubt, founded at the mouth of the Kenai River as a fur trading post in 1791. Orthodox missionaries arrived soon thereafter, and many of the local Alaska Natives were converted to that faith.

When Alaska came under American rule in 1867, the US established Fort Kenay near where the redoubt had stood. The surrounding settlement endured as a commercial fishing village until 1957, when the nearby Swanson River became the site of the state's first major oil strike. Kenai has been an oil town ever since.

The Alaska Railroad made its start in Seward in 1903, where Resurrection Bay was the closest ice-free port. The Kenai Peninsula was officially on the map as the main thoroughfare for goods to Anchorage, and eventually for coal leaving the state.

The 1964 Good Friday Earthquake hit the peninsula really hard. After the earth finally stopped churning, oil tanks exploded and tsunamis rolled through Seward, ravaging the town. With the bridges, railroad and boat harbor gone, Seward was suddenly cut off from the rest of the state. Homer suffered badly too: the quake dropped the Spit by 6ft and leveled most of the buildings. It took six years and almost \$7 million to rebuild.

Since then tourism has boomed on the Kenai Peninsula, turning the region into Alaska's premier playground for visitors and locals, and becoming a key engine of the region's economy.

i Getting There & Around

If you have ever been stuck in a Soldotna traffic jam or inhaled the fumes spewing out from behind a string of Seward-bound RVs, you'll know: the Kenai Peninsula is a place of vehicles. Two busy, paved highways extend through this region. The Seward Hwy runs south from Anchorage to Seward, while the Sterling Hwy spurs

westward off the Seward Hwy to Soldotna, then drops down to Homer. If you don't have your own wheels, you could rent some in Anchorage. Alternatively, hop aboard a long-haul bus. **Homer Stage Line** (☎868-3914; www.stageinein.com) operates daily between Anchorage, Homer and Seward.

Another (excellent) transport possibility is rail: the southern terminus of the **Alaska Railroad** (☎265-2494, 800-544-0552; www.akrr.com) is at Seward, which is visited daily by trains from Anchorage.

Finally, as with everywhere in Alaska, there's always flying. Homer and the city of Kenai are served by **ERA Alaska** (☎266-8394, 800-866-8394; www.flyera.com); many of the peninsula's other towns also have airstrips and scheduled flights.

SEWARD HIGHWAY

The Seward Hwy is a road-trip-lover's delight, with smooth, winding turns through mountains that have you craning your neck around every corner. The 127 miles of highway is all Scenic Byway, and there are plenty of turnoffs for gawking and snapping photos. Keep in mind that the mileposts along the highway show distances from Seward (Mile 0) to Anchorage (Mile 127). The first section of this road – from Anchorage to Portage Glacier (Mile 79) – is covered in the Anchorage chapter (p178).

Turnagain Pass & Around

After it leaves Turnagain Arm, Seward Hwy heads for the hills. Near Mile 68 it begins climbing into the alpine region of **Turnagain Pass**, where there's a roadside stop with garbage cans and toilets. In early summer, this area is a kaleidoscope of wildflowers.

Bertha Creek Campground (Mile 65, Seward Hwy; campsites \$10), just across the Bertha Creek Bridge, is understandably popular – site No 6 even has a waterfall view. You can spend a day climbing the alpine slopes of the pass here, or head to Mile 64 and the northern trailhead of both the 23-mile **Johnson Pass Trail** and the paved **Sixmile Bike Trail**, which runs 8 miles – not six – along the highway.

Granite Creek Campground (Mile 63, Seward Hwy; campsites \$10) is reminiscent of Yosemite Valley: wildflower meadows, dramatic mountains...the works. Sites fill up fast.

The Seward Hwy heads south of this junction to Upper Summit Lake, surrounded by neck-craning peaks. The lakeside **Tenderfoot**