

# welcome to Alaska



## Wondrous Wilderness & Outdoor Playground

Wilderness – land free of strip malls, traffic jams and McDonald's restaurants – is the best attraction Alaska has to offer. Within Alaska is the largest national park in the country (Wrangell-St Elias), the largest national forest (Tongass), and the largest state park (Wood-Tikchik). This is where people play outdoors. During 20-hour days, they climb mountains, canoe wilderness rivers, strap on crampons and trek across glaciers. In July they watch giant brown bears snagging salmon; in November they head to Haines to see thousands of bald eagles gathered at the Chilkat River. They hoist a backpack and follow the same route

that the Klondike stampeders did a century earlier or spend an afternoon in a kayak, bobbing in front of a 5-mile-wide glacier continually calving icebergs into the sea around them. In Alaska these are more than just outdoor adventures. They are natural experiences that can permanently change your way of thinking.

## The Biggest State of Them All

Alaska is big and so is everything about it. There are mountains and glaciers in other parts of North America, but few on the same scale or as overpowering as those in Alaska. At 20,320ft, Mt McKinley is not only the highest peak in North America,

*Big, breathtakingly beautiful and wildly bountiful; there are few places in the world, and none in the USA, with the unspoiled wilderness, mountainous grandeur and immense wildlife that is Alaska.*

(left) Northern lights (see boxed text, p294)  
(below) Kenai Fjords National Park (p225)



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it's also a stunning sight when you catch its alpenglow in Wonder Lake. The Yukon is the third-longest river in the USA, Ber- ing Glacier is larger than Switzerland, and Arctic winters are one long night while Arc- tic summers are one long day. The brown bears on Kodiak Island have been known to stand 14ft tall; the king salmon in the Ke- nai River often exceed 70lb; in Palmer they grow cabbages that tip the scales at 127lbs. A 50ft-long humpback whale breaching is not something easily missed, even from a half mile away.

## Far, Far Away

The 49th state is the longest trip in the USA and probably the most expensive. From elsewhere in the country it takes a week on the road, two to three days on a ferry, or a \$700 to \$900 airline ticket to reach Alaska. Once there, many visitors are overwhelmed by the distances between cities, national parks and attractions. Alaskan prices are the stuff of legends. Still, the Final Frontier is on the bucket list of most adventurous travelers, particularly those enamored of the great outdoors. Those who find the time and money to visit the state rarely regret it.