

Welcome to Alaska

Bears larger than bison, national parks the size of nations, and glaciers bigger than other US states. The word 'epic' barely does Alaska justice.

The Call of the Wild

Pure, raw, unforgiving, and humongous in scale, Alaska is a place that arouses basic instincts and ignites what Jack London termed the 'call of the wild'. Yet, unlike London and his gutsy, gold-rush companions, visitors today will have a far easier time penetrating the region's vast, feral wilderness. Indeed, one of the beauties of the 49th state is its accessibility. Nowhere else in North America is it so easy to climb an unclimbed mountain, walk where – quite possibly – no human foot has trodden before, or sally forth into a national park that gets fewer annual visitors than the International Space Station.

Into the Outdoors

Alaska is, without a doubt, America's grittiest outdoor playground where skilled bush pilots land with pinpoint accuracy on crevasse-riddled glaciers, and backcountry guiding companies take bravehearts on bracing paddles down almost virgin rivers. With scant phone coverage and a dearth of hipster-friendly coffee bars to plug in your iPad, this is a region for 'doing' rather than observing. Whether you go it alone with bear-spray and a backpack, or place yourself in the hands of an experienced 'sour-dough' (Alaskan old-timer), the rewards are immeasurable.

Animal Magic

People-watching takes second place to wildlife-spotting in a state where brown bears snatch leaping salmon out of angry waterfalls and curious moose pose majestically on national park roadsides. But the real thrill for wilderness purists is to go off in search of fauna in its natural habitat. The landscapes of the far north might be the domain of musk oxen, gray wolves and bears, but, keep your wits about you, and they'll quietly accept you as a guest.

Meet the People

Isolation fosters peculiarities. A trip into the Alaskan wilderness can be as much about the off-beat people as the off-the-beaten-track location. Take tiny Chitina with its handful of subsistence-hunting locals, or the crusty boom-and-bust town of Nome, or the jokey gold-mining punch line that is Chick-en. Ever since the US bought Alaska for 2 cents an acre in 1867, the land that styles itself as America's last frontier has attracted contrarians, rat-race escapees, wanderers, dreamers, back-to-the-landers and people imbued with the spirit of the Wild West. In a land of immense natural beauty, the Alaskan people are an oft-forgotten part of the brew.



Why I Love Alaska

By Brendan Sainsbury, Author

Like many travelers, I am drawn to roads less traveled, isolated frontier regions where spontaneity and excitement rule over certainty and home comforts. Alaska, for me, fits all of these requirements. Challenging, unpolished and, on occasions, a hard nut to crack, it is, in many ways, the antithesis of the country where I grew up (the UK). Like a stranger in a strange land, I never fail to be astonished by the state's extremes and gaping lack of people. And though travel here isn't always easy, it's a constant education.

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