

Understand Alaska

ALASKA TODAY 372

There's much to debate in Alaska's recent history, from drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to pork-barrel politics.

HISTORY 375

From the arrival of the first Alaskans to the Valdez disaster, delve into the events that have shaped the USA's youngest state.

THE ALASKAN WAY OF LIFE 383

With 70% of Alaskans born elsewhere, uncover what ties them together and defines them as 'Alaskans.'

ALASKA NATIVES 387

Gain insight into Alaska Natives' art and culture, and the challenges they face in the 21st century.

ALASKAN LANDSCAPES 391

Huge, wild and sparsely populated, Alaska is a land of awesome landscapes, unique vegetation and extreme climate conditions.

ALASKAN WILDLIFE 400

Big or small, feathered, furred or finned – discover Alaska's wildlife and the best places to spot it.

Alaska Today

Alaska's economic, political and social chatter tends to follow hot-button national trends. Like the rest of the US, Alaskans grapple with resource management, environmental responsibility, same-sex marriage, the legalization of marijuana, systemic poverty, recovery from the Great Recession, and a number of related social issues that mirror those in the Lower 48. But being so big, so isolated and so independent, Alaska's discourse often diverges from that of the mainstream at its very roots.

Media

Alaska Dispatch News (www.adn.com) Alaska's largest newspaper just went through a name/brand change.

Alaska Magazine (www.alaskamagazine.com) Highlights outdoor and cultural wonders.

Alaska Public Radio Network (www.alaskapublic.org) Has 26 community stations.

Reality TV

The Deadliest Catch (Discovery Network) Crab fishing in the Bering Sea.

Gold Rush (Discovery Network) Happless miners destroy the permafrost in search of fortune.

Ultimate Survival Alaska (National Geographic) Survival in the woods.

Books

Ordinary Wolves (Seth Kantner) A tale about a boy growing up white in Bush Alaska, and his struggles to be accepted into the Native culture.

Coming Into The Country (John McPhee) Powerful journalistic storytelling captures the offbeat and eccentric essence of Alaska's wild men and women.

Alaska A History (Claus Naske and Herman Slotnick) The definitive tome on The Great Land's cultural, geographic and political history.

Social Outlooks

The world looks a lot different from a subsistence village in the Bush than from a drive-up espresso shop in an Anchorage mini-mall.

Alcoholism, suicide, violence and drug abuse are very high in rural Alaskan communities. The rate of rape in Alaska is nearly three times the national average, and child sexual assault is six times higher. Social issues affect an especially large portion of Alaskan Native communities, which make up 14.7% of the population. And while high wages (even for blue-collar jobs) help Alaskans meet the even higher cost of living, around 12 percent of households are still considered food insecure.

On a social equality front, Alaska was the first US state to ban same-sex marriage. In 2014 the law was being challenged in Federal Court. That same year, the state recognized 20 Alaska Native languages as official languages in an effort to honor native heritage and preserve linguistic traditions.

Economy

Since the early 1980s, Alaska's economy has been fueled by oil. Nearly 85% of the state's general fund revenue comes from taxes on oil and gas production, and residents receive an annual dividend check from the Alaska Permanent Fund of around \$5000 for a family of four. Thanks to oil, residents do not pay state taxes on income, sales or inheritance, though you will often find local city and bed taxes.

But the problem with such a narrow economy based largely on mineral extraction is that the minerals run out. Alaskan oil production has been in decline for the past two decades from its peak of 2 million barrels a day in 1988 to just around 500,000 today. In 2014 both Shell and Conoco-Phillips suspended plans to drill in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, citing federal regulations and permitting standards. In response, the Alaska legis-