

Alaska Sampler: Anchorage, Nome, Denali, Seward & Kenai Fjord National Park With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



June 1 – 14, 2018

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**“How could anyone
go through their life
without going to
Denali?”**

— Ellen Lahlum

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In a world where the treasures of wildlife and wild places dwindle, Alaska remains a wilderness jewel. More than any place in North America, its wild character and ecological integrity make a visit here a must. We explore in June to take advantage of endless daylight, active birds, breeding wildlife, and very few biting insects.

In Anchorage, Nome, Denali, and Seward we visit signature landscapes — from the coast to boreal forests. We explore the Arctic tundra and search for nesting shorebirds, seek out moose and a variety of birds in thick spruce forests, circumnavigate seabird nesting islands amid the narrow fjords of Kenai, and hike in Denali National Park.

Tour Highlights

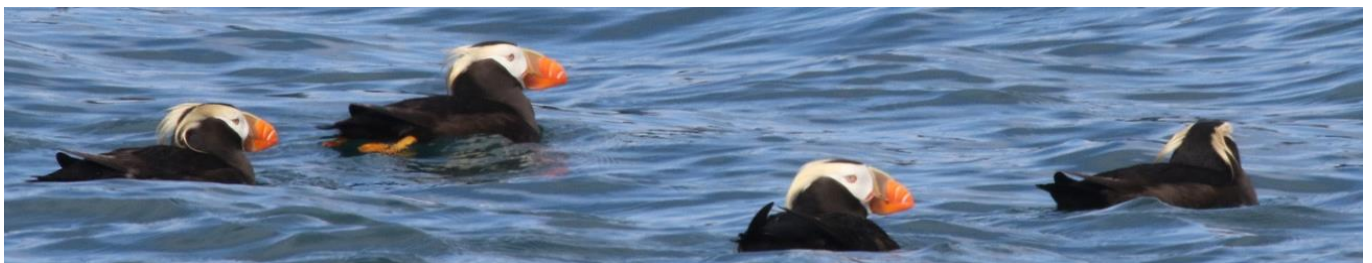
- Explore Nome's wild tundra landscape while searching for vagrant Asian birds, close to the Arctic Circle
- Stand on the finish line of the Iditarod
- Explore vibrant downtown Anchorage
- Cruise into the Gulf of Alaska while viewing the diversity of marine mammals and nesting seabirds
- Experience the sights and sounds of an actively calving glacier in Kenai Fjord NP
- Indulge in fine food, scenic hikes, and abundant wildlife at the renowned North Face Lodge in Denali NP
- Relax on a stunningly scenic train ride from Denali to Anchorage
- Take advantage of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to photograph Alaska's wildlife and scenery

Tour Summary

13-Night / 14-Day Alaska Sampler Tour with Greg Smith

\$6350, from Anchorage

Airport is Ted Stevens Anchorage International (ANC)



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Itinerary

Fri., June 1 Anchorage

Welcome to Alaska! Today, we arrive in Anchorage, Alaska's vibrant and most-populous city. As your plane comes in over Cook Inlet, grab a window seat for stunning mountain scenery — snow-covered peaks to the west and the verdant Chugach Mountains dramatically backing the city.

Today, the plan is to rest and relax after your travels. If you arrive in time, feel free to explore the city or bird the treed habitats surrounding our hotel; our accommodations are ideally situated on the shore of Lake Spenard. Plan to explore at your own pace since flights arrive throughout the day and into the evening. Those arriving in time can join our guide for an informal dinner at the Lakefront Hotel. If weather is good, enjoy lakeside dining! If you prefer to meet the group in Nome, we can back out the cost of this night and meet you in the home of the Iditarod on June 2. *Accommodations near the airport, Anchorage (D)*

Sat., June 2 Anchorage / Nome

After breakfast, we catch a morning flight to Nome. Weather can delay or even prevent landing on the edge of the Bering Sea, but with luck we land on time. The flight takes us over both the Alaska and the Kuskokwim ranges, and if the weather is clear, we enjoy stunning views of a distant Denali and glaciers too numerous to count. Nome is ice locked much of the year, but our visit is timed for the "break-up" — an exciting time when locals celebrate the end of winter and birders from around the world gather to search for unusual species. We're excited to explore Nome with you — we think it offers Alaska's premier birding and photographic experience, as well as an authentic Alaskan experience, away from roads and regular connections to the outer world.



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Once in Nome, we store our luggage, have a quick lunch on the shores of the Bering Sea, and then head out to explore. There are a number of excellent birding sites where we look for Yellow Wagtail, Long-tailed Duck, and Red-throated Loon. We are also on the lookout for Snowy Owl and Yellow-billed Loon. We explore the harbor area and historic sites before driving up to Anvil Mountain where, on a clear day, this windswept pinnacle provides majestic views of the Bering Sea and King Island. It is also home to a number of the area's Musk Ox, as well as low-growing tundra wildflowers like moss campion and woolly lousewort. Even though we are within five miles of Nome proper, there are so many birds and animals to view and photograph that we spend the rest of our day taking advantage of these opportunities.

Accommodations at the Aurora Inn, Nome (B,L,D)

Sun., June 3 – Tues., June 5 Nome

Twenty thousand people lived in Nome at the turn of the last century, seeking their fortunes in gold found in the abundant beach sands. Today, only about 5,000 people live here at the edge of the Bering Sea. Nome is the service center for much of Western Alaska; huge barges give insight to the challenges of life on a 21st Century frontier. Birding the sea wall near the harbor can be rewarding, with sightings of large flocks of sea ducks, Glaucous and Mew Gulls along with a variety of shorebirds, now bright in breeding plumage.

Three main roads lead into the wilds of the Seward Peninsula — the Council Road, the Kougarok Road, and the Teller Road — and we travel a combination of these based on current conditions, wildlife sightings, and the interests of the group. We should find Lapland Longspur perched on driftwood, Grizzly Bear or Red Fox digging up Arctic Ground Squirrels, or a Reindeer roadblock, raised here for meat. Gyrfalcon, Long-tailed Jaeger, and Rough-legged Hawk nest in the region and some years can be found hunting the tundra (their numbers cycle with lemmings, their primary prey).



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The Council Road leads to Cape Nome, with panoramic Bering Sea views and sightings of Arctic, and maybe Aleutian Terns, as well as different eiders and scoters. The road continues on to Safety Lagoon and points beyond, where we could find Bar-tailed Godwit, Arctic Loon, and large flocks of Tundra Swan. Short-eared Owl are on patrol, looking for their next sandpiper, while small patches of wetlands might hold a Red-necked Stint or an alternate-plumaged Red Phalarope. Near Solomon, old railroad cars and engines silently rust away — the “Last Train to Nowhere.” The Council Road has the only spruce forest that can be accessed by vehicle from Nome. If snow is scarce, we drive to the end of the road in search of Bohemian Waxwing, Boreal Chickadee, and Pine Grosbeak.



The Nome-Kougarok Road leads 83 miles north into the Kigluaik Mountains. It is a stunning drive, with diverse birding habitats along the way. Willow bottoms attract Arctic Warbler, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Bluethroat, and may also hide a group of Musk Ox with young! Small lichen-covered rocks provide perches for Willow and Rock Ptarmigans, Northern Wheatear, and Horned Lark, all while Peregrine Falcon hunt overhead. This is probably the most wildlife-rich and photogenic location on this part of our journey.



The tundra provides nesting habitat for American and Pacific Golden Plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, Parasitic Jaeger, and for willing hikers, Bristle-thighed Curlew that nest high on the slopes adjacent to Coffee Dome. With luck, they are calling or displaying, a great reward for the tough climb to the top, and maybe even for folks who choose not to make the climb. Salmon Lake provides us a wonderful picnic spot, and at this time of year there are still snowfields around and ice covering the lake.

The Nome-Teller road leads off to the Northwest. Blackpoll Warbler use the willows of several small drainages along the way, while other habitats provide nesting areas for Northern Shrike and Long-tailed Jaeger. The side road to Cape Woolly is prime nesting habitat for three plover species: American Golden, Pacific Golden, and Black-bellied. This is one of very few locations we can get out of the vehicle and see all three species together in their nesting habitat! The sand spit at the end of the road in Teller is well-known for its rarities, including Black Guillemot, Steller's Eider, and various sandpipers.

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Dinners these three days are at your leisure (guides provide transport and suggestions), so you can pace yourself. Some will want to call it a day and relax for the evening, while those keen can continue birding in the long daylight hours.

Accommodations at the Aurora Inn (B,L daily; dinners at your leisure)

Wed., June 6 Departures from Nome / Anchorage

We depart Nome late morning, after a last (and hopefully productive!) morning of birding. We arrive in Anchorage in time to settle into our accommodations and explore the sights of downtown for a bit.

Accommodations at the Copper Whale Inn (B,L,D)



Thurs., June 7 Anchorage / Eagle River

We designed a day between your grand adventure in Nome and the trip into Denali so you can rest up a bit and enjoy Anchorage. Those that want more nature and birding time can enjoy a morning outing north along the Knik Arm coastline to Eagle River. We visit a delightful nature center with trails, views of the Chugach Mountains, and do some local sightseeing, with the plan to be back to have some city time by mid-afternoon. Those that wish to see more of the city can have the full day to explore as it is an easy walk from the Copper Whale Inn. We recommend the Anchorage Museum and there are numerous shops and galleries, fun restaurants, or you may want to just wander up to Westchester Lagoon as you wish on the coastal trail. The Inn also rents bikes, which is a nice way to explore.

Dinner is at your leisure tonight. There is bar seating next door for those that do not like to plan ahead, but for those that wish to dine, Anchorage restaurants fill up so you may wish to browse, choose, and make an advanced reservation. There is everything from the casual Glacier Brewhouse to fine dining at Sacks, Ginger, Marx Brothers, Orzo, and more.

Accommodations at the Copper Whale Inn (B,L)

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Fri., June 8 Denali National Park / North Face Lodge

Today is an early start for Denali National Park, and we take a shuttlebus from Anchorage to the train station at the entrance of Denali National Park. Our shuttle passes through boreal forest, where we see abundant black spruce interspersed with ponds and wetlands. We should see Trumpeter Swan, Moose, and other wildlife as we drive north. As we get close to Denali, the mountain scenery is quite dramatic and one of our restroom stops even provides our first look at "The High One." Guides from North Face Lodge await us at the station and load our luggage. Lunch will be provided for you to have en route since our time at the station is short.



Then it's into the wilds of Denali National Park, where we drive the scenic 88 miles to our remote and peaceful lodge. En route, any number of up close wildlife sightings are possible, from Gyrfalcon to Grizzly Bear, Moose, Dall Sheep, and more. Along the way, we enjoy a picnic dinner featuring wild Alaskan delicacies. We arrive in time for dessert, an orientation to North Face Lodge, and hopefully stunning views of the mountain.

Accommodations at North Face Lodge, Denali National Park (B,L,D)

Sat., June 9 & Sun., June 10 Denali National Park / North Face Lodge

We have two full days to enjoy the spectacular wilderness of Denali National Park. Our lodgings offer us great comfort, delicious meals, private baths, and warm hospitality. Each morning, expert naturalists offer three hikes in tundra, mountain, and forest habitats. These are described in detail at breakfast; you can select from an easy-paced "naturalist foray," or either a moderate or strenuous hike that often follows ridgelines or riverine routes in Denali National Park.

Each outing is unique, and each of the three choices have abundant wildlife and wildflowers. On all hikes



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you learn about fascinating aspects of tundra ecology, geology, and more. We check creeks and tundra ponds for ducks and geese, and distant hillsides for wildlife. This is the best time of year to see Caribou, Red Fox, and Grizzly Bear. In addition to the large mammals, we may encounter Hoary Marmot, Pine Marten, Rock and Willow Ptarmigans, a variety of songbirds, and a wonderful mix of tundra wildflowers. You can hike as much or as little as you wish. The lodge offers an on-site library, canoes, bikes, and fishing gear, as well as trails just outside the door. Evening programs by the lodge staff or visiting guest speakers focus on Denali's natural and cultural history. *Accommodations at North Face Lodge, Denali National Park (B,L,D, all days)*



North Face Lodge, Denali National Park

We return again to North Face Lodge, one of the Cole/Hamm family's two lodges. Views from the lovely living and dining room are superlative! Camp Denali has a rich history and reputation as one of the first wilderness lodges in Alaska.

Over 50 years ago, people with vision and a true love of the wilderness had the foresight to establish Camp Denali in one of the most pristine areas adjacent to Denali National Park. Since 1975, the Cole family has extended this vision, adding North Face Lodge and managing both properties with an impressive commitment to both conservation and quality of experience. With the expansion of Denali National Park and Preserve in 1980, this owner-operated facility now sits in the center of the most scenic and wild portion of Denali National Park. Guided hikes and programs conducted by expert naturalists, with a keen focus on geology and natural history, are the key to providing far more than just a backcountry stay. Combine wonderful views of Mt. McKinley with an unparalleled educational and wildlife viewing opportunity and you have the North Face/Camp Denali experience.

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With all this to their credit, they also provide incredible service, delicious meals with fresh foods from their own greenhouse and gardens, and well-appointed, comfortable rooms with private bath at the Lodge. Canoes and bikes are available, as is optional flight seeing (additional cost). The location, facilities, and programs are unique, and Naturalist Journeys is proud to offer this location as part of our itinerary.

Mon., June 11

Denali National Park / Train to Anchorage

Our return trip through the park is full of anticipation ... we never know what we may see! We keep our eyes open for rare sightings of Gray Wolf and even Lynx — not likely, but possible! We have seen Arctic Ground Squirrel, the blue morph of Red Fox, and, in some years, Northern Hawk Owl. We do have to meet the train so we can't linger, but we always hope for unusual sightings and photo opportunities.

By noon, we are at Denali Station where we board the train to Anchorage. We have upgraded everyone to the Gold Star Class so lunch and dinner, plus two drinks are included. This is an eight-hour journey, so make sure you bring your camera, journal, or a good book, or just enjoy sightseeing or visiting with each other from your dome car seating. Dinner seating on the train is in the dining car for tables of four.

Accommodations at the Copper Whale Inn, Anchorage (B,L,D)

Tues., June 12

Potter Marsh / Scenic Drive to Seward

This morning you can have a bit of a "lie-in" as our British friends say, or a walk at your leisure on Cooke Inlet. Your guide makes a run to get our vans.

Mid-morning, we pack up and start our drive southwest to Seward. This is a stunning route, and we stop for photography, birding, and sightseeing. From the boardwalk at Potter Marsh we hope to observe salmon, as well as nesting Bald Eagle and a number of waterfowl and waders. We drive along the edge of Cooke Inlet, scanning the rugged slopes for signs of Dall Sheep and Moose, and the waters for Beluga Whale.



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We also look for birds of the temperate rainforest, a habitat that extends up from Southeast Alaska to rim the more easterly-situated Prince William Sound. Birds not often found north of here include Rufous Hummingbird, Steller's Jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and Townsend's Warbler.

Upon arrival in Seward, we settle into accommodations on the small boat harbor, and then enjoy fresh seafood or steaks at Ray's on the Waterfront — one of our favorite restaurants in Alaska and a great place to enjoy the view. It's fun to wander after dinner, watch the halibut harvest come in, and marvel at the many boats while looking for Northern Sea Otter, often just off the docks!

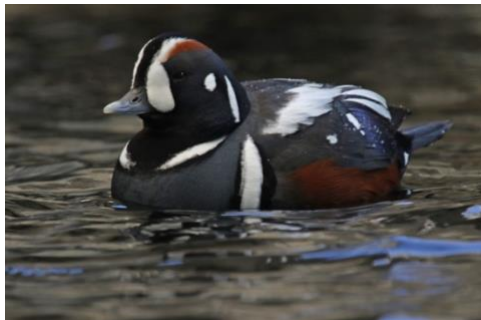
Accommodations at Edgewater Hotel, Seward (B,L)

Wed., June 13 Chiswell Islands / Northwestern Fjord Cruise / Seward

Today we embark on an all-day boat trip into Kenai Fjords National Park heading towards Northwestern Glacier. This is a stunning day spent cruising among whales, glaciers, and seabird nesting islands in the Gulf of Alaska. As we leave the dock, we look for Northern Sea Otter, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, Double-crested and Pelagic Cormorants, Bald Eagle, and Glaucous-winged Gull.

Scenery and some wildlife here are on a massive scale, and we should find several active Humpback Whale groups that spend summers feeding in these food-rich ocean waters. We may also find pods of Orca or Dall's Porpoise, and on bergy bits (glacial ice chunks) near Northwestern Fjord, Harbor Seals with pups.

The Chiswell Islands are prime seabird nesting sites, and here we find Tufted and Horned Puffins, often close to the boat. Common Murre are abundant too and easy to see and photograph. Hopefully our captain is able to find the much less common Thick-billed Murre. Black-legged Kittiwake are also common, and while cruising around the island we also hope to find a few Parakeet Auklet.



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As we enter the narrow channel that leads to Northwestern Fjord, we look for Rhinoceros Auklet, and possibly Ancient Murrelet. The rare Kittlitz Murrelet is usually found in the water adjacent to scree slopes near freshwater inlets. The boat must navigate floating ice recently calved from Northwestern Glacier, but our captain is still able to pull quite close to the glacier. Here we float among the ice and experience the sounds of an actively calving glacier — extraordinary! On the way back, we venture into deeper water where we look for Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, other alcids and Fin Whale. As we reenter Resurrection Bay, we quietly venture close to a very small Red-faced Cormorant nesting colony, and may even find a Black Oystercatcher foraging along the rocky coast. After a very full day on the water, dinner is at your leisure once you regain your land legs.

Accommodations at Edgewater Hotel, Seward (B,L)



Thurs., June 14 Alaska Sea Life Centre / Return to Anchorage

After breakfast we pack our bags and load the van, then walk the harbor's edge looking for alcids and gulls. Sometimes out-of-place birds follow a fishing boat back into the harbor. We continue birding the edge of the bay as we walk to the Alaska Sea Life Center. Along the way we see Harlequin Duck, Marbled Murrelet, and more Bald Eagle! Then we head into the Center, an outstanding marine interpretive center funded by the Exxon Valdez. The Center provides information about the resources associated with Alaska's coastal waters and provides an opportunity to photograph and get up-close looks at rehabbed birds. Both species of puffins, murres, and kittiwakes, along with various waterfowl and shorebirds are on sight and ready for their close-up. And given that we visit during the Arctic nesting season, all are in alternate plumage — they are stunning!



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We plan lunch on the way back to the airport. Our plan is to reach the airport in time for the first flight out *after* 3:00 PM. If no one has that flight, we can linger, or we can stagger our vehicles. Many flights leave Anchorage after 10:00 PM, so for those with later night connections, we can enjoy dinner at one of the hotels near the airport and drop you off — or if very late, you can take a shuttle. For those with next day morning flights, we are happy to drop you at an airport hotel. We recommend the Lakefront. (B,L)

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Tour

Cost of the two-week journey (13N/14D) is \$6350 per person, double occupancy, from Anchorage, Alaska / \$6995 per person, single occupancy. This cost includes: accommodations for 13 nights, most meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), park entrance and other activity fees for activities for 14 days as described in the itinerary, train to and from Denali to Anchorage, the all-day boat tour in Kenai Fjords National Park, professional guide services, pre-departure materials and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour Cost does not include: round-trip airfare to and from Anchorage, Alaska, round-trip airfare to and from Nome, Alaska. We can advise as to times to travel, and what time the majority of the group will fly to Nome.

Tour Cost does not include items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar; or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

Going to Alaska is an adventure! Please note that your cost does not include alternate hotels required at the last minute if inclement weather precludes landing or departing in Nome. Nome is in the far north, almost at the Arctic Circle, and flights can be delayed due to fog or other inclement weather. We have not experienced this in recent years with modern and improved navigation equipment on the planes, but it can happen that your plane is turned back to Anchorage where alternate hotel reservations would be required. As we will not be able to cancel rooms paid for in Nome due to such a delay, have a contingency amount of \$150 in your budget in the unlikely event that we rebook. Our office will make every effort to rebook at a reasonable rate at a convenient location. Again, this has not happened in recent years, but parts of Alaska are still considered the frontier and part of the adventure is getting there.

Please note that the single occupancy rate includes single accommodations for all but 3 nights at Denali, where most occupancy is shared. We have one single supplement available for an additional \$300.00 at this location — be the first to sign on and you may have a chance at it. Please note that we pay single supplements direct to hotels and they incur no markup.

Group size: maximum of 12, minimum of six. The cost of the journey is based on 8 participants; with fewer than 8,

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a small-group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per participant) may apply, or we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of that surcharge.

Travel Information

The airport for this journey is Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (ANC). Please plan to arrive in Anchorage, Alaska, at a time convenient for you on the start date for the main tour.

Plan on using the complimentary hotel shuttle for your arrival on June 1, as travelers arrive throughout the day. You may depart at after 3:00 PM on June 14. Due to flights leaving throughout the day and into the evening (you can store luggage at your hotel and go enjoy the day), the return transfer is by taxi at your expense; sharing with others may be possible.

Our office can assist with suggestions for flights, and will give guidance or do the booking for you at current airline cost for the flight to Nome and return.

Photo Credits

Grizzlies, Greg Smith (GS); Horned Puffins, Peg Abbott (PA); Musk Ox, PA; Willow Ptarmigan, PA; Harbor Seal, PA; Grey Wolf, GS; Orca, PA; Tufted Puffins, PA; Group Photo, Bud Ferguson; Nome Scenic, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Musk Ox, GS; Last Train to Nowhere, GS; Aleutian Terns, GS; Short-eared Owl, Tom Dove; Rock Ptarmigan, GS; Bristle-thighed Curlew, GS; Peg Abbott at the Copper Whale, NJS; Coffee Shop Stop, NJS; Moose Cow, PA; Polychrome Pass, GS; Grizzly in Denali, GS; Canoeing in Denali, GS; Caribou Bull, PA; Train to Anchorage, PA; Bald Eagle, GS; Sea Otter, PA; Humpback Whale Fluke, PA; Harlequin Duck, PA; Harbor Seals with Pup, PA; Common Murres, PA; Clacier, NJS; Kittiwake, PA.