

# Alaska Sampler: Anchorage, Denali & Seward

A Second Summer Tour with Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

**August 10 – 18, 2020**

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



In a world where the treasures of wildlife and wild places dwindle, Alaska remains a wilderness jewel. More than any place in North America, it retains its wild character and ecological integrity, making a visit here simply a “must do” experience.

On this Alaska nature tour, we visit in August: a time for ripe berries, mammals in their prime, and birds. It is also a time of frenzied feeding before fall migration, while the tundra offers its first hints of color from Dwarf Willow and other ground-hugging plants.

This Alaska wildlife tour explores Denali National Park as waterfowl and their broods gather in tundra ponds and kettle lakes, and Moose polish their antlers ahead of the rut. Cruise Kenai Fjords National Park to spot seabirds like puffins, murrelets, cormorants, murre, and auklets. Experience tidewater glaciers calving dramatically in a quiet cove where Harbor Seals rest on floating ice, seeking safe haven from Orca.

This is our classic Alaska Sampler trip: birds and wildlife, plus a uniquely Alaskan cultural and historical experience.

## Tour Highlights

- Explore Downtown Anchorage and its excellent local museum
- Cruise from Seward to watch nesting seabirds on the Chiswell Islands, see an actively calving glacier, and spot plenty of puffins, auklets, Humpback Whales, and other marine mammals
- Spend three glorious nights at North Face Lodge in Denali NP, with the wilds (and wildlife) just out your door
- Enjoy prime time for berries, mammal watching, and bear-sightings, along with a great mix of birds
- Relax and enjoy stunning scenery aboard the Alaska Railroad between Denali and Anchorage

## Tour Summary

8-Night / 9-Day Sampler Tour with Dan Donaldson

\$4750 from Anchorage

Airport is Ted Stevens Anchorage International (ANC)

## Mon., Aug. 10 Arrive in Anchorage

As you arrive in Anchorage, Alaska, flying in over Cook Inlet, watch for a pod of Beluga Whale — that is, if you can take your eyes off the snow-covered peaks on the west side of the bay, or the verdant Chugach Mountains that lend a dramatic background to Anchorage, Alaska’s vibrant and most-populous city.

Today is a rest and relax day with no planned activities. For those who arrive in time, our comfortable accommodations are near downtown so that you can explore at your leisure; flights arrive throughout the day and into the evening. Just outside our bed and breakfast is a walking trail with good birding. On mudflats you may see gulls, cranes, and shorebirds feeding, and in marshy areas you may find migrating Sandhill Crane. In the evening we enjoy dinner at one of our favorite local restaurants to meet our traveling companions.

*Accommodations at the Copper Whale, Anchorage (D)*

## Tues., Aug. 11 Potter’s Marsh | Chugach State Park | Seward

This is a great day for photography, birding, and sightseeing. From the boardwalk trail at Potter’s Marsh, visited as we leave Anchorage, we hope to see spawning salmon, as well as Bald Eagle and a number of waterfowl and waders. We follow the edge of Cooke Inlet, scanning the rugged slopes for signs of Dall Sheep, and the bay waters for Belugas.

Along the way, we 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 here include Steller's Jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Townsend's Warbler.

On arrival, we settle into our accommodations across the street from Resurrection Bay in Seward.

We visit the Alaska Sea Life Center, built as part of the mitigation of the Exxon-Valdez oil spill. This modern, interactive museum has live puffins, other seabirds, and sea mammals (photographers, take your cameras!) and informative exhibits. Afterwards, enjoy fresh seafood or steaks at Ray's, located on the waterfront — our favorite restaurant in Alaska, and a great place to enjoy the view.

It's fun to wander after dinner, watch the halibut harvest come in, marvel at the many boats, and look for Sea Otter often just off the docks!

*Accommodations at the Edgewater Hotel, Seward (B,L,D)*

### **Wed., Aug. 12 Chiswell Islands | Northwestern Fjord Cruise | Seward**

Today we embark on an all-day boat trip into Kenai Fjords National Park. This marvelous day is spent cruising among glaciers and seabird nesting islands of 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 is on a massive scale and we should find several feeding Humpback Whales that spend their summers in these rich ocean waters. We may also find pods of Orca or Dall's Porpoise, and on glacial ice chunks near Northwestern Fjord, we're sure to find Harbor Seals. The Chiswell Islands are prime seabird nesting areas, and here we find numerous Tufted and Horned Puffins, often quite close to the boat. Common Murre are incredibly common and our captain knows where to find the more local Thick-billed Murre on very steep-sided seamounts. Black-legged Kittiwake are abundant and vocal.

As we enter the narrow channel to Northwestern Fjord, we look for Rhinoceros Auklet, Horned Puffin, possibly Ancient Murrelet, and, by small freshwater inlet streams, the rare Kittlitz Murrelet. The boat must navigate floating ice, recently calved from Northwest Glacier; our captain pulls up quite close to this glacier, turns off the engine, and lets us float among the sights and sounds of this actively calving glacier — extraordinary! We then venture into deeper water where we look for Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, more common at this time of year. As we reenter Resurrection Bay, we hope to get a glimpse of the rare Red-faced Cormorant, and hope to find Black Oystercatcher in a rocky bay.

After a very full day, dinner is at your leisure.

*Accommodations at the Edgewater Hotel, Seward (B,L)*

### **Thurs., Aug. 13 Westchester Lagoon | Coastal Trail | Anchorage Museum**

Today as we return from Seward, following the shoreline of Turnagain Arm while we enjoy views of snow-capped mountains.

Once back in Anchorage, we visit Westchester Lagoon. Here we may find Red-necked Grebe (often with half-grown young), Hudsonian Godwit, and Short-billed Dowitcher, as Mew Gull circle overhead. We will look for Boreal Chickadee, Alder Flycatcher, Blackpoll Warbler, or other songbirds in wooded areas in the hills above the tidal mudflats.

In the afternoon we focus on culture, seeing the city and the excellent local Anchorage Museum with

cultural, history, and science exhibits. Enjoy some free time to shop, explore downtown, and have dinner at your leisure from a great choice of restaurants. If you prefer to walk, the coastal trail can be accessed right outside your door and extends for many miles.

*Accommodations at the Copper Whale, Anchorage (B,L)*

### **Fri., Aug. 14 Denali National Park | North Face Lodge**

This morning we start early, embarking for Denali National Park. We take a shuttle bus to the park from Anchorage, passing through boreal forest, where we see abundant Black Spruce interspersed with ponds and wetlands. We keep our eyes focused on the landscape for Trumpeter Swan, Moose, and other wildlife. We pack a box lunch to have on the way.

As we get close to Denali, the mountain scenery becomes quite dramatic. Guides from North Face Lodge await us at the Denali station for our ride into one of Alaska's premier national parks. For the next several hours, we are surrounded by a setting of some of the most spectacular scenery in Alaska as a backdrop, to wildlife that is very often seen at very close range. It is 90 miles through the Park to our intimate and peaceful lodge with front porch views of Denali.

Along our route, any number of exciting sightings are possible, from Gyrfalcon to Grizzly Bears, Moose, Dall Sheep, and more. We enjoy a great picnic dinner featuring wild Alaskan delicacies at a stream side location. We arrive at the lodge in time for dessert and an orientation of our home for the next three nights.

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

### **Sat., Aug. 15 Denali National Park | North Face Lodge**

We have two full days to enjoy the spectacular wilderness of Denali National Park. Our lodge offers us great comfort, delicious meals, private baths, and warm hospitality. Each morning, expert naturalists offer a variety of hikes in tundra and forest habitats. These are described in detail at breakfast, and 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. While learning about fascinating aspects of tundra ecology, geology, and more, we check tundra ponds for ducks and geese, and berry-rich hillsides for bears. This is the best time of year to see Moose and Caribou in their prime. Grizzly Bear sightings are likely, as they feed on abundant berries.

In addition to the large mammals, we may encounter Hoary Marmots, Pine Marten, Common Loon, Rock and Willow Ptarmigans, a variety of songbirds, and a summer's-end mix of tundra wildflowers.

You can hike as much or as little as you wish, and while canoes await you at Wonder Lake. The lodge offers an on-site library, 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)*

### **Sun., Aug. 16 Denali National Park | North Face Lodge**

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

## North Face Lodge, Denali National Park



We return again this year to North Face Lodge, one of the Cole/Hamm family's two lodges, each set in a prime location. Views from the lovely living and dining room are superb! Camp Denali and North Face Lodge have 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 upheld 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 unparalleled views of Denali with an unparalleled educational and wildlife viewing opportunity, and you have the North Face/Camp Denali experience.

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 Alaska Sampler itinerary.

### Mon., Aug. 17 Denali National Park | Train to Anchorage

Our return trip through the park is full of anticipation — we never know what animals we may see. We keep our eyes open for rare sightings of Gray Wolf and even Lynx! We have seen Arctic Ground Squirrels, the blue morph of Red Fox, and, in some years, Northern Hawk-Owl. Even though we traveled this spectacular road on our drive to the lodge, the views on the return are likewise varied and equally stunning!

We do have to meet the train so we can't linger, but we always have excellent sightings. By noon, we are at Denali Station, where we board the train to Anchorage. We take the upgraded Gold Star class cars that include drinks, dining, and dome car seating amenities. This is an eight-hour trip, so bring your journal or a good book, or just enjoy sightseeing from the dome car's open air deck.

*Accommodations at the Millennium Hotel, Anchorage (B)*

### Tues., Aug. 18 Departures

We say goodbye today; make flights out at your convenience. The airport return is a complimentary shuttle from the hotel. (B)

# 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 Journey

### Cost of the Tour

\$4750 DBL / \$5440 SGL per person, from Anchorage, Alaska. Single rate is for all nights except North Face Lodge, Denali. Singles at Denali are possible but limited and additional cost, so please inquire.

### Cost of the Tour Includes

accommodations for 8 nights, most meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), park entrance and other activity fees for activities for nine 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.

### Cost does not Include

Round-trip airfare to and from Anchorage, Alaska. It does not include items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar; or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

### Group Size

Maximum of 12, minimum of six. The cost of the journey is based on 8 participants; with fewer than 8, 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 (ANC) at a time convenient for you on Monday, August 10. Plan on a taxi Uber or Lyft ride into the Copper Whale Hotel downtown and we will let you know who you may coordinate arrival times with. Please plan departures at a time convenient to you on Tuesday, August 18.