

Alaska Sampler Summer Tour with Naturalist Journeys

August 7 – 15, 2023

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Tour Summary

8-Night / 9-Day Alaska Nature Sampler Tour
\$5290 DBL / \$6490 SGL, from Anchorage
Airport is Ted Stevens Anchorage Intl (ANC)

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 normally explores Denali National Park but a major road construction project has closed the magnificent drive into the park. But do not fear, we have another WOW location lined up for you. This year we feature Homer in our mix, with a bear-viewing day-flight possible from here to see Alaskan Brown Bear fishing for salmon. This is a photographer’s dream and something incredibly memorable. In addition to bears we see Bald Eagle, whales, Dall Sheep, Boreal birds, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Around postcard-perfect ponds, massive bull Moose polish their antlers ahead of the rut and Merlin may come charging out of the trees. Cruise Kenai Fjords National Park from the docks in scenic Seward to spot seabirds: puffins, murrelets, cormorants, murre, and auklets. At Northwestern Fjord, experience tidewater glaciers calving dramatically in a quiet cove where Harbor Seal rest on floating ice, seeking safe haven from Orca. Stay in rooms at the edge of the ocean at Land’s End in Homer. Listen as Sandhill Crane migrate overhead, watch Black-legged Kittiwake and Red-faced Cormorant on Gull Rock in Kachemak Bay, and opt to watch Brown Bear up close as they fish.

This is our classic Alaska Sampler trip: birds and wildlife, plus a uniquely Alaskan cultural and historical experience. Enjoy three nights in Anchorage, three nights in Homer, and two nights in Seward on scenic Resurrection Bay.

Tour Highlights

- Explore Anchorage and its excellent museum, great birding hotspots, views of the dramatic Chugach Mountains and way too many good restaurants.
- 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
- Enjoy prime time for berries, mammal watching, Dall Sheep, Moose and bear-sightings, along with a great mix of boreal birds
- Opt for a bear-viewing day-trip to see Alaskan Brown Bears fish for salmon on a short flight that lands in the wilderness from Homer

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Mon., Aug. 7 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.

We've chosen a lovely hotel in the center of downtown Anchorage so that you can explore the city a bit at your leisure; flights arrive throughout the day and into the evening. Just a few blocks away there is a walking trail along Cook Inlet 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 get acquainted with our guides traveling companions.

Accommodations at the Copper Whale, Anchorage (D)

Tues., Aug. 8 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, 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 Beluga.

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 Harbor 360, Seward (B,L,D)

Wed., Aug. 9 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 Whale 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 Seal. 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 a favorite Seward restaurant.

Accommodations at the Harbor 360, Seward (B,L,D)

Thurs., Aug. 10 Seward Birding Hotspots | Tern Lake | Soldotna | Homer

Our birders can be out early for some optional birding at a couple of hotspots and a local feeder in Seward. Mid-morning we depart, following the shoreline of Turnagain Arm while we enjoy views of snow-capped mountains. We finish the day in Homer, our home for the next three nights.

Accommodations at the Lands End Hotel, Homer (B,L,D)

Fri., Aug. 11 Wildlife in Homer | Bear-Viewing Flight Options

As July and August are prime time for witnessing Brown Bear feeding at salmon streams, we highly recommend that you opt for a bear-viewing flight out to an active salmon stream, with a guide, to view the amazing spectacle of bears fishing in a stunning wilderness setting. Be sure to sign up for this as you book the trip — we go over options and get it set up!

We also offer activities in Homer for those that do not wish to go bear-viewing, including transportation up to walk at the local nature center, and a drive east along the bay, looking for Sandhill Crane feeding in the meadows and agricultural areas. The excellent local museum showcases history, nature, and art and there are nice coffee shops and lunch places.

Another option today is fishing. This is one of the best places possible to fish for salmon and halibut and there are daily charters going out from the docks.

Dinner tonight is a special place — the Homestead at Fritz Creek, out of town with delicious food and Alaskan décor and ambiance, nice!

Accommodations at Land's End, Homer (B,L,D)

Sat., Aug. 12 Homer Seabirds | Gull Rock | The Saltry

We have the full day to enjoy this small and charming Alaska town on the edge of the sea. Right outside our windows we should see Fork-tailed Storm Petrel feeding daintily and with luck, a Sea Otter floating by. Today we take the *Danny J* ferry out to an artist's cove — eventually dining at the cozy Saltry Restaurant. This excellent and small restaurant hosts two seatings, with time to walk between artist's studios when not your time to dine. En route though, we get great views at seabirds on a small islet that serves as a rookery for Black-legged Kittiwake, Red-faced Cormorant, Common Murre, and more.

You may opt for a second day of bear viewing or a fishing charter if you wish. Back in Homer we meet up at a very picturesque watering hole for a local brew, then go to dinner — fresh Halibut anyone?

Accommodations at Land's End, Homer (B,L,D)

Sun., Aug. 13 Return to Anchorage

We break up the five-hour drive back to Anchorage, making a day of it with stops for birding, learning highlights of local ecology, geology, and more. Behind Potter's Marsh we wind up into the hills to check for possible Boreal Chickadee or Black-backed Woodpecker. We check some ponds for Pacific and Common Loons, and scan the berry-rich hillsides for bears, Mountain Goat, and Dall Sheep.

Our accommodations are out by the airport, near the hike and bike trail that is often frequented by Moose as well as humans. Visit Earthquake Park for a wonderful Cook Inlet View. We dine at a favorite local restaurant in Anchorage.

Accommodations at The Lakefront Millennium, Anchorage (B,L,D)

Mon., Aug. 14 Anchorage: Nature & Culture

We visit Westchester Lagoon today. Here we may find Red-necked Grebe (often with half-grown young), Hudsonian Godwit, and Short-billed Dowitcher, as Mew Gull circle overhead. We look for Boreal Chickadee, Alder Flycatcher, Blackpoll Warbler, and other songbirds in wooded areas in the hills above the tidal mudflats. We want to network with local friends and guides for tips on recent sightings. We may go to the local Arctic botanic garden, or head up into the hills or north to Eagle Creek, based on finding species we'd still like to see.

In the afternoon we focus on culture, seeing the city and the excellent local Anchorage Museum with cultural, historical, and scientific exhibits. Enjoy some free time to shop, explore downtown, and then a grand finale at Simon and Seaforts – just an amazing restaurant with a view. If you prefer to walk this afternoon, the coastal trail can be accessed right outside your door and extends for many miles.
Accommodations at the Lakefront Millennium Hotel, Anchorage (B,L,D)

Tues., Aug. 15 Departures

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

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour is \$5290 DBL / \$6490 SGL per person, from Anchorage, Alaska and 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, 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, or your airport transfers. 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.

Optional bear viewing (\$850 pp) should be booked with registration. You should be fit enough to walk at least two miles over uneven terrain. Rubber boots or hip waders are supplied. Times are based on bears, weather and tides, but the trips run 5-7 hours, typically a one hour to one and a half hour scenic flight each way and 3 hours on the beach/streams with bears. This is an outing with professional guides that we book for you.

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 August 7. Plan on a taxi, Uber or Lyft ride into the Copper Whale. Please plan departures at a time convenient to you on August 15.

Photo Credits

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