

Alaska Cruise: Aleutian Islands, Dutch Harbor and Kodiak with Naturalist Journeys

June 26- July 06, 2026

Trip Report by Wes Larson



Guided by: Wes Larson

**Participants: Gingy and Bud, Mike and Ray, Linda and Mark, Larry and Dawn,
Molly and Luke, Nancy and Robert, Carol and Husam, Barb and Sue**

Friday, June 26 – Anchorage to Seward | Boarding the Safari Explorer

Today our group gathered in Anchorage to then board a bus and take the 2.5-hour trip from Anchorage to Seward and the start of our ship adventure. The drive is a famously beautiful one, and it's easy to see why it has garnered that reputation. Driving around the Turnagain Arm and the Cook Inlet, you are surrounded by the stunning Chugach Mountains and pristine coastal rainforest. The drive winds its way along the Cook Inlet where we spotted Bald Eagles, Glaucous-Winged Gulls, Black-Billed Magpies and other birds, and we kept our eyes peeled for charismatic mega-fauna like Moose, Brown Bears and Beluga Whales. While the drive today didn't produce much wildlife, it was a gorgeous introduction to the vast scenery of Alaska, and really just served as a means to get us to our boat, which was docked in Seward awaiting our arrival.

We boarded the Safari Explorer, checked into our beautiful and cozy rooms, and then got a great introduction to the boat, the crew, the safety procedures and the overall plan of the trip from the Uncruise staff. And last but not least we enjoyed our first incredible dinner over some welcome drinks.





Saturday, June 27 – Kenai Fjords National Park

Some of our group got up for the “Early Riser” breakfast and did some birding on the bow of the ship, where we managed to see both Tufted and Horned Puffins, and well as Marbled Murrelets and Common Murre. But the real stars of the show this morning were a group of Humpback Whales that was being followed by a small pod of Orcas. The Orcas seemed to be harassing the much larger Humpback Whales, and it was an incredible sight that lasted around 30 min and was something that even the local guides had never seen before. Next, we ate breakfast and got a briefing about the options for the day (kayaking or skiff riding) and we then either kayaked or took the skiff around the bay where Holgate Glacier is found. The stark blues of the glacier mixes with the incredible greens of the surrounding mountains, and we got to watch as multiple large sections of the glacier calved into the water. It was a beautiful sight and one made that much better with the addition of a few new bird species to our list including Black Oystercatchers, Pelagic Cormorants, Double Crested Cormorants, Rhinoceros Auklets and others.

As we continued on that evening and saw more of the Kenai Peninsula, we had a brief sighting of a solitary Black Bear on the shore, and then a bit later we also briefly saw a female Brown Bear with two cubs. While the sightings were short, they were a good reminder that you can find bears anywhere in this part of Alaska!

Following an absolutely incredible dinner, we had a presentation from Nicole, one of the guides, and she went over the general science and history of glaciers and it was an especially interesting presentation and certainly gave us all a better appreciation for the magnificent glaciers we had seen that day. As we went to bed a large pod of Orcas could be seen a few hundred yards from the boat, and it was a perfect way to say good night to Alaska.

Sunday, June 28 – Full Day in Kodiak

We woke up in Foul Bay, one of the large bays surrounding Kodiak Island. The water was calm and the sun was shining, so following a really delicious eggs benedict breakfast, we got ready for the morning activities. We had the choice to pick between a shore walk, a skiff ride, or a kayak paddle. People from the group picked each of these activities and everyone had a great time spotting some new wildlife in one of the most beautiful parts of Alaska and the second biggest island belonging to the United States. Wildlife included a very charming Cross Fox, which is a very interesting color phase of red fox, Horned



and Tufted Puffins, Pigeon Guillemot, Harlequin Ducks, and lots and lots of Sea Otters. Following a hearty and tasty chili lunch, we headed out for more activities, this time with the shore walk being replaced by a bushwhack. The Bushwhack ended up being a bit challenging, but for those that did the skiffs we had some good luck with more Sea Otters, Parakeet Auklets, some very photogenic Bald Eagles, and a really nice view of Tufted Puffins. It was a very nice relaxing day in a picturesque spot, and we had some incredibly sunny weather, which you definitely can't count on when you are in Alaska.

Dinner was rack of lamb or rock fish and you really can't order anything wrong on this boat because everything is delicious. Our chef trained and worked with Chef Emiril Legassi, so the food was top notch throughout the journey. Following dinner, we had a very fun and very informative presentation about bears from lead guide Dai Mar, and then Wes told a pretty crazy story about an experience he had in a black bear den during one of his research projects.

Monday, June 29 – An Incredible Day in the Bear Heaven of Katmai

Today was one of the most anticipated days for a lot of our group, because it was the day that we would spend focusing on looking for one of the most famous residents of Alaska, the Coastal Brown Bears. This is the same species as our inland Grizzly Bears in the Rocky Mountains, but the incredible food sources on the Alaskan Coast have led to Coastal Brown Bears being much larger on average and also generally much more tolerant of other bears and of people. In the morning after a biscuit and gravy breakfast, we set off in skiffs and kayaks, and some of our group took a shore walk hoping to encounter a bear on foot (from a safe distance of course). While we didn't see one nearby, Wes did manage to spot one across the channel and we were able to load back into the skiffs and both skiffs got an extended up-close view of a very beautiful Katmai Brown Bear as it worked its way along the shore. During the morning, we also saw Golden-Crowned Sparrows, Common Mergansers, Bald Eagles and Surf Scoters, so it was a fun morning all around.

While we ate freshly made falafel or lamb pitas for lunch, the boat pulled anchor and we set off for Geographic Harbor, one of the most scenic and bear-y parts of Katmai. The long bay gets skinnier and skinnier as you move down it, and at the end there are large sections of grasses and sedges that comprise important food for the local bears, and sure enough there were a number of bears around. Some of the group had a very swift sighting of a mother bear with four cubs(!) and then as we got into the skiffs and kayaks, it seemed like bears kept appearing out of nowhere and we saw three other individuals including two smaller blonde Brown Bears, and one massive brown male. All of these bears were quite tolerant of

the skiffs and kayaks and we got to observe them for a couple hours before heading back to the boat and another delicious dinner of duck confit and muscles. Following dinner we had a presentation on geology plus a longer look at the bear with four cubs and it was a perfect end to an incredible day in Katmai.

Tuesday, June 30 – Ugashik National Wildlife Refuge

Well, if you thought Katmai was going to be the only day we had good luck with bears, you were wrong. Today we woke up near Wide Bay in the Ugashik National Wildlife Refuge and following yet another perfect breakfast, we got our stuff together and headed out for different excursions. Today they included a more strenuous hike, a calmer nature walk and a skiff ride, and each excursion had different surprises for each group. While the hikers and walkers were treated to some great flowers, beautiful vistas, some nice birds including Northern Harrier and Savannah Sparrow, the skiff riders got another prolonged look at a large Coastal Brown Bear as it patrolled the coast looking for food. Other birds sighted included Semipalmated Plover, Cliff Swallow and American Herring Gull. Every group had a wonderful experience and it was fun to trade stories and photos over a tasty lunch and some hot chocolate. We then had a bit of time to rest while we took the boat further into Wide Bay and some more adventures. Once again groups were a more energetic hiking group, a nature walk, and a skiff ride. And once again everyone had great luck. The skiff group saw three different female Brown Bears with cubs, and we even got a dramatic moment where one of them crossed a wide channel with a cub on her back and another one that lagged behind. All of the other groups saw bears as well plus there were plenty of birds. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, American Pippit, Horned Puffin and large groups of Pigeon Guillemot were all viewed in the afternoon among lots of other species. That and another day of beautiful weather led to high spirits as we enjoyed a great dinner prepared by the onboard chef, and then a wonderful iphone photography workshop by lead guide Dai Mar.

Wednesday, July 1 – Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve

Today was the day where it really started to feel like we were in wild parts of Alaska where no one ever visits. As we pulled into the huge open bay of Aniakchak in the early morning, the jagged, treeless cliffs and verdant green grasslands seemed to stretch on forever. After a French Toast breakfast, our group spilt once again and some people took the skiffs to look for wildlife, while others went on either a long





or short hike along the delta. Both the skiff and the longer hike groups managed to see another brown bear and the skiff also saw Stellar's Sea Lions, River Otters and a number of good bird sightings. The longer hike saw some a harbor porpoise, some huge bear tracks, a large brown bear that ran from the group, and some nice birds including Wilson's Snipe and Savannah Sparrow. All in all, though the morning was mostly about taking in the experience of being in such a remote place where humans hardly ever visit, and the quiet solitude of the Aleutian wilderness.

After returning to the boat and eating some really exceptional chicken and dumpling soup for lunch, the afternoon was a quiet one while we pulled back out into the open ocean and looked for whales and seabirds. Both were scarce but we all appreciated some downtime to go over photos, nap, tell stories in the lounge, or just stare out the window at the endless ocean and jagged coastline. Dinner was Japanese Ribs or Halibut and we had a lively presentation about the history of the Russian expedition to explore the Alaskan coastline and look for a potential land connection between Asia and North America.

Thursday, July 2 – Unga Island

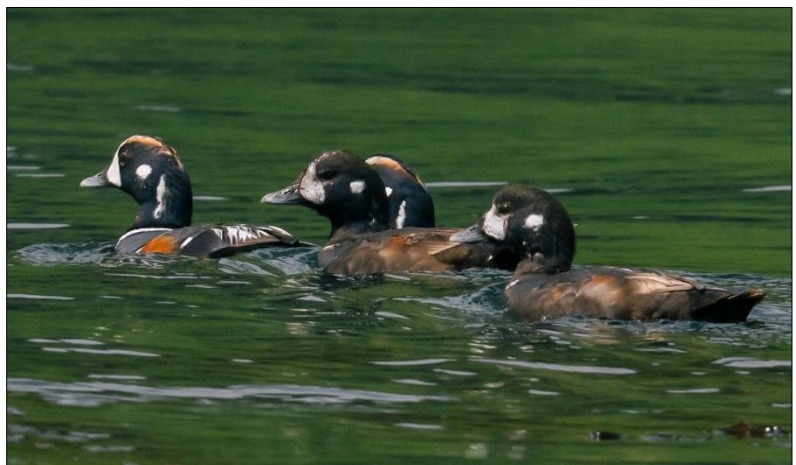
One of the best things about this trip is waking up and looking outside after the boat has been traveling all night and seeing a new set of mountains and coves and bays, and today we really woke up to a beautiful scene. Unga island is full of green windswept meadows with the occasional feral cow here and there, and the coast is jagged and covered in incredible spires and arches. As we ate breakfast, we excitedly anticipated the skiff and kayak tours in the morning and they sure didn't disappoint. We wound our way through the massive rock outcroppings along the coast while looking for birds and other wildlife, and the sheer quantity of bird life here was higher than anywhere else on the trip so far. There were so many Horned and Tufted Puffins flying around one of the huge rock islands that they looked like mosquitoes, and the massive colony of Black-Legged Kittiwakes was amazing to see up close. We also saw rock islands with Pelagic, Double-Crested and Red-Faced Cormorants all on the same rock, and we had a really nice view into a coastal Bald Eagle nest with a fledgling inside. It was a wonderful morning of birding and exploring and returning to the boat we were happy to see a warm cup of hot chocolate waiting for us at the disembarkation area (and Emma the bartender makes a GREAT hot chocolate). All

of the drinks and food are covered on this trip and they are all available at request, and with the quality of both food and drinks on the boat, it is a huge perk and we all ate and drank some wonderful offerings.

In the afternoon part of the group went for a longer hike along one of the coastlines and up a bluff and it was one of the prettier hikes of the trip with beautiful ocean views, incredibly green meadows dotted with purple Geraniums and then breathtaking views of the coast and island. The rest of the group headed to the abandoned ghost village on Unga Island and explored the old buildings and shoreline. The village was officially abandoned in the late 60's and it is a fascinating place to explore and imagine how people once lived on this small island on the edge of the Aleutians. There were some interesting birds on the island as well and we saw Pine Grosbeak, Hudsonian Whimbrel and Lesser Yellowlegs while taking in the unique history of Unga Island. Dinner was all-you-can-eat Dungeness Crab legs or pork loin for those that didn't want seafood (as well as a vegetarian option too). Following dinner, we had a very interesting presentation on the whales of the area by lead guide Dai Mar, and then we headed to bed looking forward to what the next day would bring.

Friday, July 3 – Bear Bay and Captain's Harbor

Today was "Captain's Choice" when it came to the itinerary, and our captain decided to take us to the Volcano Bay area, specifically Bear Bay, which ended up having a bit more protection from the wind and weather. We have had pretty outstanding weather all things considered, so a little wind really didn't bother anyone. This location was back on the Alaska Peninsula, and that meant more chances for large mammals like Brown Bears. And before we even put our skiffs and kayaks in the water, we saw a large





Brown Bear patrolling the shoreline looking for food. Bears have really been the stars of the show this trip and while there are a LOT of birds out here, the species diversity isn't very high, so we've been thrilled to have such good luck with mammals, specifically Brown Bears. As the skiffs got into the water, one went off to look for more bears and another stayed behind to see what might be present in the bay. We saw a lot of old favorites including Tufted and Horned Puffins, Pigeon Guillemots, Black-Legged Kittiwakes and Cliff Swallows. And we had some great looks at bears too, including a really nice blonde bear walking in the early light. One boat also got up close with a large group of Harbor Seals and some Sea Otters, and these kinds of sightings never get old.

For the post-lunch excursions, we took the boat to a nearby, quieter bay called Captain's Harbor, and along the way we were treated to some very active displays from Humpback Whales that seemed to be feeding in the area, including one that completely breached out of the water. Many of us were once again struck with the realization that we are sharing the planet with some absolutely incredible animals, and whales seem to just have a certain aura about them that sets them apart. Once we got to Captain's Harbor people split up into skiffing groups, walking groups and kayaking groups, and we had some pretty amazing luck. One of the skiff groups was watching a Brown Bear feeding on some grass when another mammal appeared on the opposite side of a ravine, and at first it looked like maybe a Brown Bear cub. But after we looked through our binoculars, we couldn't believe what we were looking at, a true unicorn of a sighting up here, a Wolverine! We got to watch it for about 15 seconds before it disappeared into some alders. The rest of the excursions brought sightings of other bears, otters and birds, but the Wolverine loomed large over the conversations that night when we ate prime rib and reminisced.

Saturday, July 4 – Aktutan Island

This morning, we woke up in the Aleutians! The large volcanoes and treeless green slopes loomed over us as we pulled up to Akutan Island. This island has a small community living on it that revolves around the large fish cannery nearby. As we planned our activities we watched as trawlers and other ships pulled up to the cannery to empty their catch. Today would be another day of choices between a casual walk, a more intense hike, and a skiff ride. Many of us chose the more intense hike and it led through the tundra and up onto a pretty unforgettable vista of a wide post-glacial valley. Along the way we saw some good birds too including Lapland Larkspur, Least Sandpiper, Banks Swallows, and Short-Billed Dowitcher. The hike was one of the prettiest many of us could remember doing, and the long green meadows dotted with purple wildflowers and distant snowcapped volcanoes made us feel like we were living in a different, more ancient time.

Returning back to the boat a few intrepid members of our group participated in the polar plunge and took a quick swim in the frigid Beiring Sea, and it gave us a lot more appreciation for the thermal abilities of Humpback Whales, Sea Otters and other marine mammals. Then we chose between town tours, shore walks and skiff rides, and we saw a large group of Sea Otters floating in a kelp bed, countless Puffins from both species, large groups of Guillemots and Harlequin Ducks, and the occasional Marbled Murrelet. It was odd being back by any kind of civilization, even just a tiny community surrounding a fish cannery, but it also gave us an appreciation for just how difficult life would be on a tiny, cold, windswept island in the middle of nowhere.

Dinner was elk medallions and once again the chef knocked it out of the park. During dinner we finally found ourselves in some bigger waves and luckily, they were short lived because as soon as the water calmed down, we went out on the bow of the boat and had an absolute show as over a dozen Humpback Whales were lunge-feeding on krill and small fish all around the boat. The plentiful food had also drawn in birds and we watched Sooty and Short-Tailed Shearwaters diving all around as well as Horned and Tufted Puffins, a Laysan Albatross and a very quick look at the rare Whiskered Auklet, a true treat and a VERY memorable 4th of July.

Sunday, July 5 – Dutch Harbor

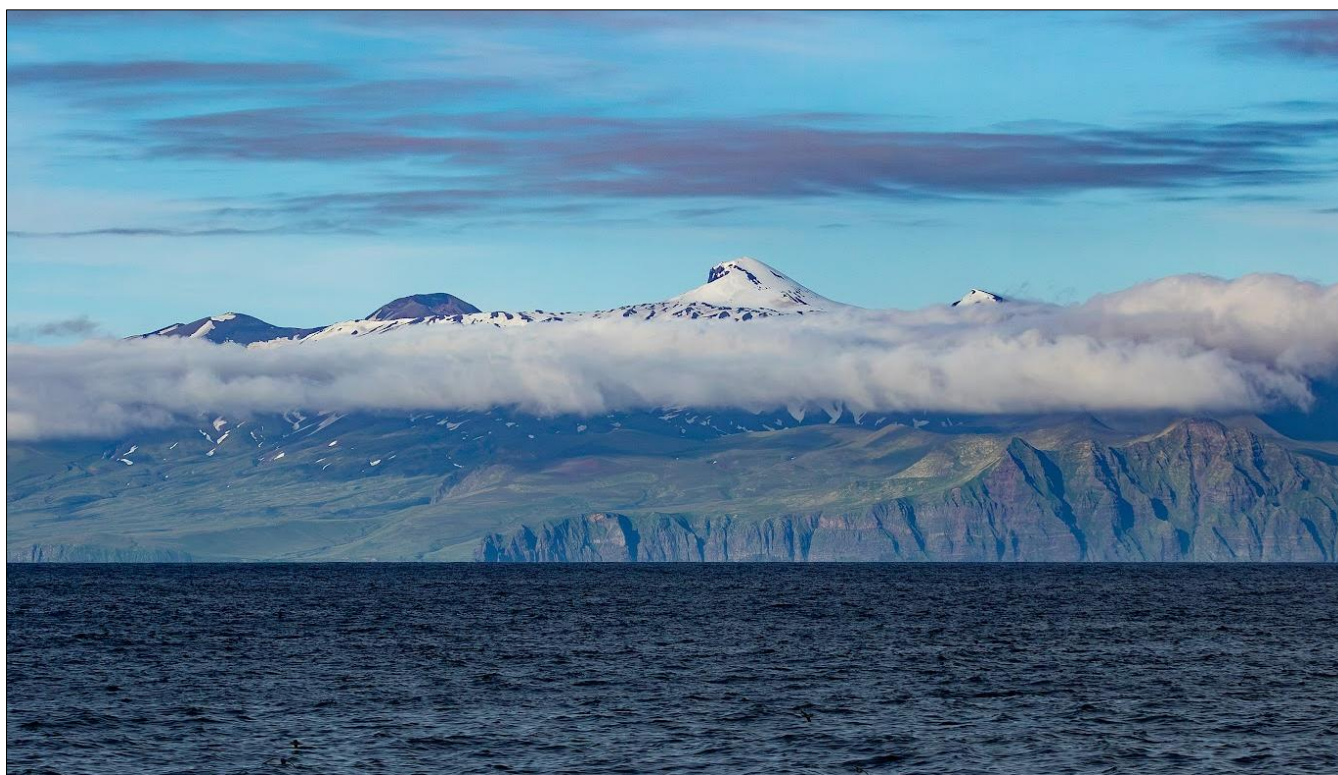
Dutch Harbor and the island of Unalaska have a large reputation due to the significance of the location in WW2 as well as the prominence of the commercial fishing industry in the area. So today most of our time was focused on getting to learn about the unique history of the area, of the local Unangan people, and of course the incredible wildlife that can be found here. We visited museums, saw local cemeteries and points of interest, and enjoyed incredible sunny weather that is anything but typical in this area. One of the first things we noticed in Dutch Harbor was just how many Bald Eagles there are. Everywhere you look there were eagles perched on every available perch, and their beautiful and eerie calls are almost constant background noise in the town. But there were a lot of other great birds too and we saw groups of Rock Sandpipers, Red-Breasted Merganser, Gray-Crowned Rosy Finch, and Lapland Longspur. In fact, it was one of the birdier places that we stopped on this trip, and aside from the eagles there seemed to be different birds around every corner. And there were some great mammals too! Our skiff group got to see two feeding Humpback Whales up close as well as one of the famous black Red Foxes that call the area home. Not to mention some huge Stellar Sea Lions and dozens of Sea Otters. Between the weather and the incredible wildlife, it was a last full day that was so perfect it was almost



unbelievable, and we capped it off with some tasty drinks, delicious dinner, and a great slide show put together by our Uncruise guides. Is it possible to be nostalgic for a trip that isn't even over yet? It sure seems so.

Monday, July 6 – Dutch Harbor | Departures

It's time to get out of Dutch! But just getting out of Dutch Harbor is a bit of an adventure. Today after breakfast and saying goodbye to the incredible Uncruise crew, our group got our stuff together and headed to the Grand Aleutian Hotel where we enjoyed a bit of time before taking transfers to the airport. The airport is tiny and doesn't even have a security check, but the view of Dutch Harbor and the Aleutians as we took off was spectacular. Farewells were said in Anchorage and then the entire group split to catch respective flights home. This was a trip of a lifetime where we got to experience many of the things that make Alaska so special and wild. Having access to one of the least-traveled and most beautiful parts of the state was something we will never forget and between dozens of brown bears, orcas harassing humpback whales, huge flocks of puffins and even a wolverine, we had some absolutely incredible luck when it came to wildlife. But the true highlight of this trip was the group. Being able to share travel stories and pet photos and laughs with all of you over incredible meals was the best part of the journey and I felt very lucky to be guiding such a kind and curious group of people. Hope to see you all on another trip very soon!



Trip Report Photos – Page 1: Approaching McCarty Glacier in Kenai Fjords NP (Mark), Male Orca (Wes) **Page 2:** Pigeon Guillemots (Mark), Kayakers and McCarty Glacier (Mark) **Page 3:** Cross Fox (Wes), Sea Otter (Mark) **Page 4:** Brown Bear (Mark), Bald Eagle (Wes) **Page 5:** Sleepy Brown Bear and lupines (Wes) **Page 6:** Horned and Tufted Puffins (Mark), Pelagic, Red-faced and Double-crested Cormorants (Wes), Black Oystercatcher (Mark), Harlequin Ducks (Wes) **Page 7:** Wolverine (Wes), Humpback Whale (Mark) **Page 8:** Steller's Sea Lion (Mark), Lapland Longspur (Wes) **Page 9:** Aleutians Islands scenery (Mark). (More great trip photos can be viewed [here!](#))