

# **THE ULTIMATE ALASKA EXPERIENCE, 2015**

**DESIGNED AND ESCORTED BY  
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**DAILY TRIP ITINERARY**

**JULY 1-11, 2015**

## **DAY 1: WEDNESDAY JULY 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2015: ARRIVING IN FAIRBANKS:**

Upon arrival in Fairbanks, you'll be transferred to your Fairbanks home for the next two days, the Pikes Waterfront Lodge which is located in a scenic setting along the banks of the Chena River. There are no activities planned for tonight as it will have been a long day's journey from the lower 48 states to reach Fairbanks, which is 4 time zones removed from Eastern Daylight Time.

Overnight Pikes Waterfront Lodge

**DAY 2: THURSDAY JULY 2<sup>ND</sup>, 2015: RIVERBOAT DISCOVERY AND NORTH POLE, ALASKA:** This morning, enjoy a hot breakfast at the lodge before transferring to the dock for this morning's riverboat excursion. Your three-hour authentic paddlewheel riverboat cruise will take you into the heart of Alaska and introduce you to a family who has made the rivers of Alaska a way of life for five generations. You will see a bush floatplane takeoff alongside the boat, visit the home and kennels of the late four-time Iditarod winner Susan Butcher and see her champion sled dogs in action. Be immersed into the ancient Athabascan Indian culture when our Alaskan Native Guides take you on a personalized tour of the Chena Indian Village.

This afternoon, your customized tour includes a visit to the nearby community of North Pole, Alaska. Its biggest attraction is a gift shop named Santa Claus House, the modern-day incarnation of a trading post established in the town's early days. The Santa Claus House is known for the world's largest fiberglass statue of Santa Claus outside. While the real North Pole is much further north and located in the Arctic Ocean, many travelers have discovered this town as an ideal way to finally visit the home of Santa Claus. Driving through North Pole in any season you will notice Christmas decorations, street names, and light poles that reflect the theme of Christmas and Santa Claus. Your visit to North Pole will also include a drive down Santa Claus Lane that features giant candy cane light poles. And no visit to North Pole would be complete without a stop at the Santa Claus House. This world famous attraction houses unique gifts sure to please family and friends back home.

This evening, your day ends with a Welcome Dinner in Fairbanks, a great way to get to know each member of the group better.

Overnight Pikes Waterfront Lodge. **B, D**

## **DAY 3: FRIDAY, JULY 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2015: MORNING ALASKA RAILROAD GOLDSTAR SERVICE FROM FAIRBANKS TO DENALI; AFTERNOON FREE IN DENALI:**

This morning, you will be transferred to the Fairbanks Train Station to board one of the Alaska Railroad Dome Cars in which you will experience the very best of the Alaska Railroad, Goldstar Service. The rail journey portion of your tour begins in Fairbanks, the northern terminus of the Alaska Railroad. During this morning's scenic rail journey, you will be served a hot breakfast in the dining room just below the dome seating level of your rail car. Upon arrival in Denali Train Station mid-day, you will be transferred to the Grande Denali Lodge, your home for the next two nights.

This afternoon is an unplanned free afternoon, so be sure to take advantage of at least one of the many optional excursions available in the Denali area. Among the more popular optional excursions experienced in the Denali area are river rafting (your choice of either white-water route or more gentle non-white water route), visiting a family that raises sled dogs, flightseeing to Mt McKinley, hiking, and ATV tours into Denali National Park. Information on optional excursions will be available during the morning train trip, and also at the lodge. Be sure to take advantage of the free park shuttle buses that will take guests at area lodges to the Denali National Park Visitors Center, a must visit during your stay in the Denali area.

The Denali National Park area affords the best initial opportunity to encounter wildlife during your journey. While in Alaska, It is always a good idea to be aware of your surroundings at all times, and upon encountering any wildlife at a relatively close distance, it is recommended that you slowly back away and keep your distance.

Overnight Grande Denali Lodge **B**

**DAY 4: SATURDAY, JULY 4<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: DENALI NATIONAL PARK TUNDRA WILDERNESS TOUR:** This morning, enjoy a hot breakfast at the Grande Denali Lodge. Today could be your best opportunity to see wildlife during your journey. The "Tundra Wilderness Tour" provides an excellent opportunity to see caribou, grizzly bears, moose, Dall sheep, and possibly wolves, and on rare occasion, a lynx. A snack is provided to tour participants which can serve as a lite lunch. This particular tour takes you 55 miles deep into the park, whereas most cruise-tour passengers are booked on the "Natural History Tour" that does not travel deep enough into the national park to even have a chance to see bears or other wildlife. Due to the length of the Tundra tour, two nights lodging at Denali is usually required, whereas many cruise-tour passengers only receive one night's lodging near the park.

Upon returning to the lodge, there may still be time this afternoon to experience another of the many optional excursions offered in the Denali National Park area.

Overnight Grande Denali Lodge **B L**

**DAY 5: SUNDAY, JULY 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: FREE MORNING IN DENALI, THEN AFTERNOON ALASKA RAILROAD GOLDSTAR SERVICE FROM DENALI TO TALKEETNA:** After enjoying a hot breakfast at the Grande Denali Lodge, use your free morning to explore the area before transferring to the Denali Train Station. After boarding the Alaska Railroad Goldstar Dome Car, enjoy lunch in the dining room on the lower level. Then prepare to cross one of the most scenic portions of the Alaska rail system, the 900 foot long high trestle bridge 296 feet over Hurricane Creek and Hurricane Gulch. Be sure to be outside on the viewing platform for excellent photo opportunities as the train moves slowly over the trestle bridge. Then it's on to Talkeetna, a small historic village midway between Denali and Anchorage.

Upon arriving in Talkeetna, you will be transferred to the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge located just outside the village of Talkeetna. Set on a ridge above the small community of Talkeetna on the south side of Mt. McKinley, the lodge offers unforgettable views of Denali and the Alaska Range, weather permitting. Take advantage of one or more of the many optional excursions offered in the nearby village of Talkeetna, such as jet boating (very popular), flightseeing (take a flight around the base of Mount McKinley), ziplining, float trips, hiking, or just browse the town and visit the Talkeetna Historical Museum that displays artifacts from many decades of mountain climbing expeditions to Mt McKinley. A visit to the Talkeetna Roadhouse in 'downtown' Talkeetna is a must during your stay.

Overnight Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge **B L**

**DAY 6: MONDAY, JULY 6<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: FREE MORNING AND AFTERNOON IN TALKEETNA, THEN LATE AFTERNOON ALASKA RAILROAD GOLDSTAR SERVICE FROM TALKEETNA TO ANCHORAGE:** This morning, enjoy a hot breakfast at the Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge. Then plan the rest of your day to maximize your free time in Talkeetna. A walking tour map of Talkeetna will help ensure you don't miss any of the highlights of Talkeetna. Most cruise-tour passengers miss Talkeetna entirely on their packaged tours, but it's well worth an overnight stop while traveling between Denali and Anchorage.

Late this afternoon, board the Alaska Railroad once again for an even more scenic 4 hour journey between Talkeetna and Anchorage. Enjoy dinner in the lower level dining room of your Goldstar dome car.

Upon arriving in Anchorage about 8:00pm, you'll be transferred to the nearby Comfort Inn Ship Creek located just a couple of blocks from the train station for a brief overnight stay in Anchorage before continuing your journey further south to the Kenai Peninsula. While there will not be time during tonight's brief stopover for exploring Anchorage, there will be time on the last day of the tour to experience Anchorage and make some of those last minute gift purchases before heading back south to the lower 48 states.

Overnight Comfort Inn Ship Creek Anchorage **B D**

**DAY 7: TUESDAY, JULY 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: EARLY MORNING ALASKA RAILROAD GOLDSTAR SERVICE FROM ANCHORAGE TO SEWARD; AFTERNOON FREE IN SEWARD:** This morning, you'll be transferred back to the Anchorage Train Station for an early morning train departure for travel on this the final and most scenic segment of the entire Alaska Railroad system, from Anchorage to Seward. The vast majority of cruise-tour passengers never get to experience this very scenic train route as most are transferred between Anchorage and the cruise ship ports of either Seward or Whittier by bus. Once again, you'll get to enjoy a great breakfast in the lower level dining room of your dome car before entering the scenic Turnagain Arm portion that connects with the Pacific Ocean via the Cook Inlet. If the tide is up, look for Beluga whales in the Turnagain Arm. The Chugach National Forest borders Turnagain Arm and consists of six million acres, the second largest national forest in the U. S. On your left, be on the lookout for Dall Sheep that often come to feed on the low plants growing on the cliffs bordering the track. Then after a brief stop at Portage, you'll enter the Placer River Valley where moose, bear and wolves populate the valley. Then the train begins a climb through the mountains passing Spencer Glacier on the left. Near the summit, the train passes through a series of short tunnels with a rushing mountain stream just below the tracks. Then after descending the mountains, you'll wind through Moose Pass with soaring mountains and numerous lakes on both sides of the tracks. Your final rail journey on the Alaska Railroad ends just before noon in Seward, the southern terminus of the Alaska Railroad.

This afternoon you are free to enjoy Seward, the most scenic coastal town in all of Alaska. Seward was voted #1 U. S. Destination for 2010 in Trip Advisor's Travel Trends Survey. As the "Gateway to the Kenai Fjords National Park", Seward offers incredible opportunities for outdoor exploration, recreation, or just relaxation. While your luggage is being transferred to your lodge, just walk the few blocks into town from the station to enjoy a great seafood lunch at Rays Restaurant in the Small Boat Harbor. Then later on this afternoon, when you are ready to go to the lodge, you can catch the free shuttle from town out to the lodge which is located two miles from town in a beautiful wooded setting. There are many excellent optional excursions available in Seward, such as visiting the Alaska Sea Life Center, the "I-Did-A-Ride" dog sled tour, helicopter tours to land on a glacier, and many more. But perhaps this afternoon would be a great time to just enjoy one of the most beautiful settings in all of Alaska, the coastal town of Seward in the spectacular Kenai Peninsula.

Overnight Seward Windsong Lodge **B**

**DAY 8: WEDNESDAY, JULY 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: KENAI FJORDS NATIONAL PARK BOAT TOUR WITH DINNER AT FOX ISLAND:** This morning, enjoy a hot breakfast at the lodge. Then following a complimentary transfer from the lodge to the Seward Small Boat Harbor, board your 100 passenger vessel for an 8 ½ hour boat tour of the scenic Kenai Fjords National Park onboard Alaska's #1 wildlife and glacier cruise. You will experience the abundant wildlife, glaciers and breathtaking scenery in the comfort of a climate-controlled cabin, with the option of stepping outside on occasion to catch that one perfect photo opportunity. Among the marine wildlife expected to be seen are sea otters, Stellar Sea Lions, Orca whales, humpback whales, and thousands of birds like the colorful Puffin that can only be seen along the estuaries of coastal Alaska, where the big ships can't go. In addition, both alpine and tidewater glaciers can be seen on this tour, with your vessel able to navigate much closer to a tidewater glacier than any glacier experience on a big ship cruise. During the tour today, you will learn about the ecosystem of the Kenai Peninsula and the Harding Icefield, one of only 4 remaining ice fields in the U. S., from which numerous alpine and tidewater glaciers extend. You'll enjoy a cold-cut luncheon onboard the vessel. In addition, before returning to Seward, you will experience one of the highlights of the boat tour with a stopover at the remote Fox Island Lodge where you will be served a hot dinner of Salmon, Prime Rib, and even Alaskan King Crab, along with all the fixings!

At the conclusion of your tour, you will return to the Seward Small Boat Harbor by 6:30pm for any additional browsing in the local shops, or to return to the lodge at your leisure, thanks to the frequent free shuttles that operate daily between town and the lodge.

Overnight Seward Windsong Lodge **B L D**

**DAY 9: THURSDAY, JULY 9<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: FREE DAY IN SEWARD AND THE BEAUTIFUL KENAI PENINSULA; SCHEDULE THE OPTIONAL EXCURSION OF A LIFETIME, JUST FOR YOU!** Today, after enjoying another excellent breakfast at the lodge, you will experience yet another benefit of a customized land tour, and that is an entirely free day with no pre-planned activities. Recognizing that everyone doesn't enjoy the same type excursion, a free day has been built into the itinerary, to accommodate the many different types of unique excursions that might be of interest to those in the group. Among the more popular optional excursions that have received the most positive feedback over our many years of designing individual custom land packages in Alaska are: Float Plane Trip for Remote Bear Viewing, Guided River Fishing for Salmon or Trout, Deep Sea Fishing for Salmon and Halibut, Renting a Car for a Day of Sightseeing On Your Own, the I-Did-A-Ride sled dog tour in Seward, or just hanging out in Seward on your own. More details on specific optional excursions will be made available to each member of the group, and it is highly recommended that optional excursions be booked as soon as possible because of the very limited capacity on some excursions, such as small planes, fishing boats, etc. Historically, the Float Plane and Remote Bear Viewing Excursion has been the highest rated by returning customers of our agency.

Overnight Seward Windsong Lodge **B**

**DAY 10: FRIDAY, JULY 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2015: EXIT GLACIER, THE ALYESKA TRAM, THE SCENIC SEWARD HIGHWAY, DOWNTOWN ANCHORAGE:** This morning, after enjoying a final breakfast at the lodge, it's time to check out, board the motor coach, and experience more of Alaska, while making our way back to Anchorage to catch our overnight flight back to the lower 48 states. First, you'll visit Exit Glacier, an Alpine glacier located about 12 miles from the lodge. Often there are wildlife sightings in the area of the glacier, and caution is recommended as you travel the gentle paved pathway from the Ranger Station to the face of the glacier. Then it's time to head north toward Anchorage on Alaska Highway #9 until its intersection with Highway #1, which is labeled as one of the top ten Scenic Byways of America. By late morning, we'll be arriving at Girdwood, where you'll get to ride the Alyeska Tram over 2,000 vertical feet to the top of a mountain where you will be greeted with spectacular scenery, including the Turnagain Arm and surrounding snow-capped mountain peaks. Lunch is available in the snack bar on top of the mountain (on your own). Then it's back down the mountain to reboard our motor coach for the final 40 mile drive to downtown Anchorage where we'll be arriving early afternoon for free time for last minute shopping from among the dozens of shops (and hundreds of beautiful hanging baskets) that line the colorful streets of downtown Anchorage. Then we will be transferred to a local restaurant for an excellent and memorable Farewell Dinner, prior to our final destination, the nearby Anchorage Airport to catch our overnight flight home.

Overnight on the Plane **B D**

**DAY 11: SATURDAY JULY 11<sup>TH</sup>, 2015:** Arrive early in the morning in Atlanta after on overnight nonstop flight from Anchorage.

**B = Breakfast   L = Lunch   D = Dinner**

**ACCOMMODATIONS:**

July 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> :	Fairbanks:	Pikes Waterfront Lodge
July 3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> :	Denali:	Grande Denali Lodge
July 5 <sup>th</sup> :	Talkeetna:	Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge
July 6 <sup>th</sup> :	Anchorage:	Comfort Inn Ship Creek
July 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> & 9 <sup>th</sup> :	Seward:	Seward Windsong Lodge

**OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS AVAILABLE TO BOOK UPON ARRIVAL (We'll tell you how to book when arriving):**

**IN DENALI NATIONAL PARK:**

Examples Include:

- White water rafting (lots of fun, wet suit provided)
- Sled Dog Tour (great opportunity to pet the sled dog puppies)
- Flightseeing (for those who want to take a small plane on a scenic ride to Mt McKinley)
- ATV Tours (a little touristy, but fun. Don't expect to see wildlife on this tour! Too noisy.)
- Hiking Excursions (Guided hikes into the park available)
- Cabin Nite Dinner Theater (Good food and good slapstick entertainment in a venue close to the lodge)

**IN TALKEETNA:**

Examples Include:

- Jet Boat Adventures (most popular, you'll travel on one of three rushing rivers that converge near Talkeetna)
- Flightseeing (for those who want to take a small plane on a scenic ride to Mt McKinley)
- Walking Tour of Talkeetna (maps of the walking tour trail located in lodge lobby, shows points of interest)

**OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS TO PRE-BOOK WELL IN ADVANCE OF ARRIVAL (Notify Us ASAP if Any Interest):**

**IN SEWARD:**

Examples Include:

- Float Plane Excursion that includes Bear Viewing and Literally Fishing With The Bears (Most Popular)
- Guided River Fishing for Salmon on the Kenai River (Also very popular, This Guide gets booked up early)
- Deep Sea Fishing for Salmon and Halibut out of Seward (Great for Deep Sea Fishing Enthusiasts)
- Rental Car Sightseeing in the Kenai Peninsula (Also very popular. Caution: Limited number of Cars to Rent)
- I-Did-A-Ride Sled Dog Tour in Seward (Great opportunity to pet the dogs and take a sled ride in the woods)