



Alaska: Denali and Kenai

Known as America's Last Frontier, Alaska is one humongous land mass: it's bigger than Texas and Montana, combined. Most visitors see only the southwest edge of it from the decks of cruise ships. Some are drawn to Denali National Park, a five-hour drive north of Anchorage, and to the Kenai Peninsula, which lies to the south. Denali has lots of wildlife and the tallest mountain in North America, Mt. McKinley. Kenai is known as Alaska's playground and features boat tours to observe sea life and glaciers. Everywhere one looks, there is spectacular mountain scenery.

Ask almost any Alaskan when the best time is to visit this part of the state and they'll say: wildflowers are at their peak in early July, but the last week of August and the first few days of September are best. The crowds and mosquitoes have thinned out, and the fall colors—especially on the tundra in Denali—have reached their apex.

Be prepared for temperatures in the 70's, but be sure to bring warm clothing all times of the year, as well as binoculars and a camera with a zoom lens. That way you can be comfortable while seeing and photographing the grizzly bears, moose, orcas, sea lions, puffins and fabulous scenery.

This is an expandable five-day guided driving tour that you'll remember forever.

Pathfinder Newsletter

Fall 2012

Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West
by the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California*,
Seven Perfect Days in Arizona and *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado*

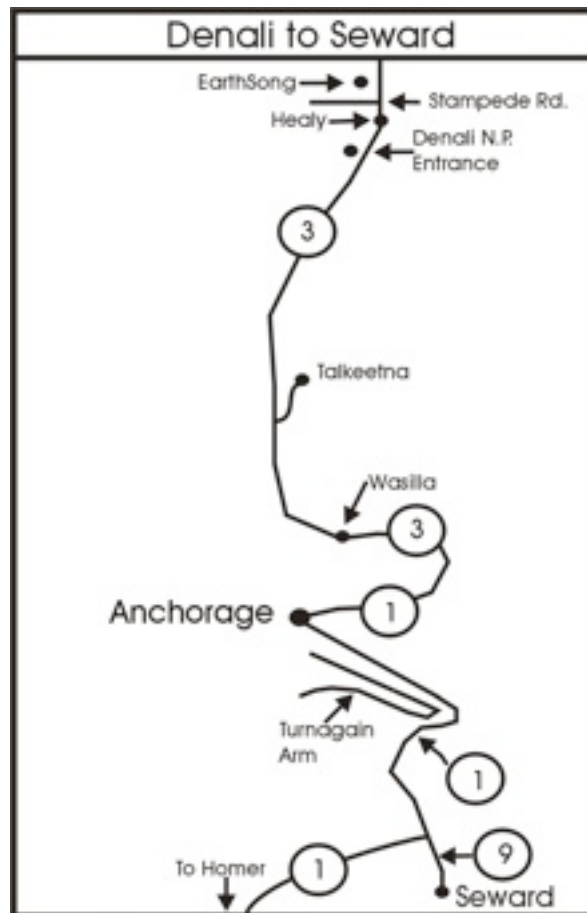
Note 1: Some locations cry out for more time; this is one of them. Watch for suggestions about spending more time in the Denali-Anchorage-Kenai Peninsula area.

Note 2: You will need to make reservations well in advance for your preferred days and times for the Denali shuttle bus tour, the Kenai Fjords tour and EarthSong Lodge.

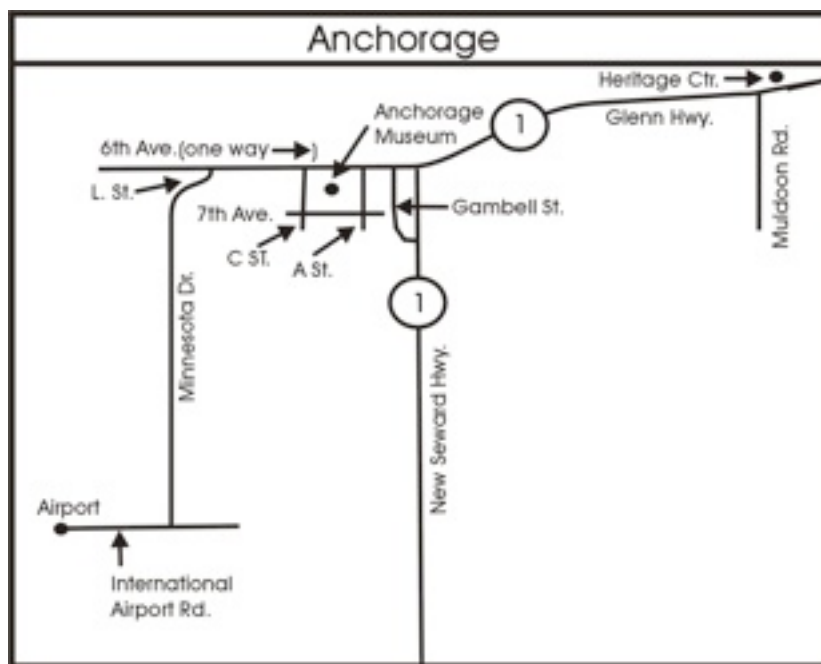
Note 3: Bring: rain gear with a hood; hiking boots; warm sweater and jacket; gloves; wool knit cap; brimmed hat; camera with zoom lens; binoculars; insect repellent.

The Day Before Day One

Fly to Anchorage and drive to Talkeetna, but *don't drive in the dark while it's raining*. We felt very vulnerable on that wet, two-lane road at night.



Ask for an "Alaska Activity Map" at the car rental counter. It will supplement the maps in this issue. It contains a map showing the entire area of this tour, detailed maps of Anchorage, Talkeetna, Denali National Park and Seward, and lists points of interest, services and suggested activities in each of those locations.



To get to Talkeetna (towl-KEET-nuh) from the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, drive:

- east about two miles/3.2 km on International Airport Road to Minnesota Dr.
- north (left) about three miles/4.8 km to 6th Ave. (Minnesota becomes L St. downtown)
- east (right) on 6th Ave. until it becomes the Glenn Highway (Highway 1)
- continue on Highway 1 about 40 miles/64.4 km, then north on Parks Highway (Highway 3) through Wasilla (see the italicized note below) to Talkeetna junction (just after mile-post 98), where you'll turn right
- northeast for 14 miles/22.5 km from the junction to Talkeetna.

From mid-May through mid-September, it's possible to take the state-owned Alaska Railroad from Anchorage to the Denali National Park entrance, with a stop at Talkeetna. You can also take the railroad to Seward. Call 800-544-0552 (toll free) or 907-265-2494 or go online at www.alaskarailroad.com for more information.

The total drive, from the airport to Talkeetna, is 119 miles/191.5 km and 2-1/2 hours. *If you enjoy a glass of wine with dinner, we recommend that you purchase what you need at a liquor store on your way through Wasilla. EarthSong Lodge is a BYOB facility.*

As for overnight accommodations in Talkeetna, we recommend that you consult the reviews on TripAdvisor.com (Google keywords "Talkeetna accommodations"). The one lodging that we saw and recommend is Denali Fireside Cabins & Suites, PO Box 591 Talkeetna AK 99676, 907-733-2600, 877-345-2226, www.denalifireside.com; it's highly rated by TripAdvisor.com reviewers. We also recommend that you use the keywords "Talkeetna restaurants" and check the TripAdvisor reviews for places to eat. We recommend Talkeetna Roadhouse on Main St., 907-733-1361, www.talkeetnaroadhouse.com (see also breakfast, below).

Day One - Talkeetna and an Introduction to Denali

Talkeetna is a town of 800 permanent residents that has the look and feel of a small, historic, authentic Alaskan community...which it is.

Start your day with a sourdough pancake at **Talkeetna Roadhouse** (they serve other delicious items as well). You'll be seated with locals, other travelers and mountain climbers in a rustic and historic setting. It's a breakfast you won't quickly forget.

As for Talkeetna itself, it was founded in 1919, is a National Historic Site, and today is known, around the world, as the staging center for climbers as they set about tackling Mt. McKinley and for flightseeing tours of the mountain. It's also a hot spot for salmon fishing, rafting and other outdoor activities. It's located at the confluence of the Talkeetna, Suisitna and Chulitna rivers. In its early years, it was a fishing and trading center for the local Natives, a supply depot for gold prospectors, and the engineering center for the building of the Alaskan Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks.

Three of the oldest structures in town are Nagley's Store, the Fairview Inn and the Talkeetna Roadhouse. You can see and learn about these and other historic buildings by taking the Talkeetna Historic District Walking Tour. You can get a tour pamphlet at the visitor center on the right side of Nagley's Store at the corner of Main and D Streets.

Along the way, we suggest that you visit the very worthwhile, locally-oriented, three-building **Talkeetna Historical Museum** in the "little red schoolhouse" behind Nagley's Store. It's open 10:00am to 6:00pm during the summer and on weekends during the winter; 907-733-2487, www.talkeetnahistoricalsociety.org/museum.php. The first building is the old school house and features items from that school and Nagley's Store. The second building is the old railroad depot and displays the ticket office and historical items from the railroad, gold mining, trapping and freighting. The highlight of the museum is in the third building: a nearly room-sized contour model of Mount Denali, large photographs of Denali on the walls with poignant information about some of the Denali and Mount Foraker climbs, and colorful flags hanging from the ceiling representing climbers and their countries.

Another worthwhile stop is the **Ranger Station** on B St., to see the 17-minute film, "Climbing Mt. McKinley." The station is open all year, 8:00am to 4:30pm; 907-733-2231, www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/talkeetnaranger.htm. This is Denali National Park's mountaineering headquarters. Climbing expeditions to Mt. McKinley and Mt. Foraker must stop here for permits and mountain orientation.

Two miscellaneous facts: "Talkeetna" means "river of plenty" in Athabascan, and the town averages eight feet of snow and 22 degrees Fahrenheit from December through February.

Next, return to the Parks Highway (Hwy. 3), turn right, and head north toward the Denali National Park entrance, which is located at milepost 237. Just past milepost 139, there's a pullout from which you can get an excellent view of Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range...on clear days. And we're certain that you've noticed the spectacular Talkeetna Mountains close by on your right.

Denali N.P. Orientation

When you reach the Park entrance, turn left into the park, pass the **Wilderness Access Center**, and drive another 3/4 mile/1.2 km to the Visitor Center. Tomorrow, your shuttle bus will leave from the Wilderness Access Center.

We suggest that you visit the Visitor Center this afternoon because it closes at 6:00pm and you may not have enough time to do so tomorrow after the shuttle bus tour, which ends about 5:00pm.

An alternative is to have dinner at 229 Parks Restaurant located at highway milepost 229. The restaurant is closed on Mondays; 907-683-2567, www.229parks.com. It's highly regarded by TripAdvisor.com reviewers.

The **Visitor Center** is open 8:00am to 6:00pm from late May through early-September. The winter visitor center is open 9:00am to 4:00pm in the **Murie Science & Learning Center**, across the street from the Visitor Center.

See the movie, of course. It's 18 minutes long and titled "Heartbeats of Denali." There's no narration; only beautiful music and wonderful scenes of plants, animals and seasons. As with the Talkeetna Museum, there's a contour model of Mount Denali, but this one extends outward to include the rest of the Alaska Range. As you descend the stairs to the lower level, you'll be greeted by stuffed animals: a grizzly, a moose, a Dall sheep, an eagle and a marmot; it's an opportunity to see some of Denali's animals up close. The displays on this level include science in the park, early visitors, miners and park history.

Denali National Park had 406,581 visitors in 2011. Lots of people visit, despite its remoteness.

When you're finished at the Visitor Center, return to Parks Highway/3 and turn left. You'll soon come upon the main service area for Denali N.P.: hotels, gas station (*do you need gas?*), restaurants, liquor store, general store, just about anything you'd need.

EarthSong Lodge

Fourteen miles/22.5 km north of the Denali entrance, turn left on Stampede Road. It's the first left turn after **Rose's Café** in Healy. Four miles/6.4 km later, you'll come to EarthSong Lodge on your right.

If you check TripAdvisor.com, you'll learn that **EarthSong Lodge** is rated much higher than the six hotels near the entrance to the Park. It's well worth the extra effort to get to it.

In our three travel books and five years of *Pathfinder Newsletter* issues, we have only once treated a lodging as a visitor attraction by itself (it was Crickethead Inn B&B in the Spring 2008 issue, "Tucson, Arizona: Enjoy the Sonoran Desert"). We do it again, because EarthSong Lodge is a very special place.

The warm and knowledgeable owners are Jon and Karin Nierenberg. He's originally from New Jersey but has been in Alaska for 30 years. Karin is from Canton, Ohio and started their relationship after reading an article about Jon in *Alaska* magazine. She brought her three kids to the wilderness to be with him 21 years ago. Their story has been featured in two national magazines and also in the September 2012 issue of *Alaska* magazine. Karin has written a book, *Lasting Impressions*, about their experience and Jon has written *Backcountry Companion* about Denali National Park's wilderness treasures.

Jon is a former Park ranger and naturalist and has been a sled dog guide for many years. He owns 23 sled dogs, all bred and raised by himself, and provides guided sled dog tours in the winter. He gives tours of the kennel for guests every morning.

Jon gives an hour-long slideshow every evening at 8:00pm, one on Denali National Park the first evening and one on dog sledding the next. He took all of the wonderful photographs.

Situated on 10 acres, EarthSong Lodge is made up of 12 log cabins and the lodge (now their home), all of which were hand-built by Jon, as well as Henry's Coffeehouse. (Henry was a favored sled dog.) The coffeehouse serves breakfast and dinner to lodge guests and to the public, and bag lunches can be purchased for consumption on Denali's buses or on hikes. You don't need to eat anywhere else while staying at EarthSong; the food is excellent.

The log cabins come in three sizes; for couples, we recommend the family cabins. Don't think rustic; these smallish cabins are well-appointed, each has a full bath and they are very comfortable. Negatives? Double beds and no TV. Wi-fi is available in Henry's Coffeehouse.

One day of your visit to the area will no doubt be taken up by a bus tour of Denali National Park. If you decide to stay in the area a second, or even third day, here are some things you can do: hikes in the Park, ranger-led nature talks, rafting, and flightseeing. Ask Jon or Karin to point you in the right direction.

Want to get a better idea of what you'd be getting into at EarthSong Lodge and surrounding area? Check out the lodge's website at <http://www.earthsonglodge.com>, especially the slide show. It's located at mile 4 Stampede Road, Healy AK 99743, 907-683-2863.

Day Two – Denali National Park and Preserve

There are three stars in the magnificent nature show that you are about to observe in the six million-acre Denali National Park: one is enormous, permanent and all one color; the second is small, temporary and multi-colored; the third comes in various sizes, is seen in motion and is mostly in brown hues. The three are: Mount Denali; plants on the tundra during fall; and the park's wildlife.

Denali, A-Mazing

We hope that you become members of the "30 percent club." Members are park visitors who have seen **Mount Denali**. The mountain is so often covered by clouds that it's not easily seen by visitors. Even on cloudless days, Denali may not be visible, because it's so big that it makes its own weather. We were fortunate to see snow-covered Denali up to about 15,000 feet/ 4,572 m, so we're members of the club. But, if you're not so fortunate, *the other two stars in this grand show will carry the day*. And since you've seen the contour models and photographs in the Park Visitor Center and in the Talkeetna Museum, you get the idea.

By the way, McKinley and Denali are the same mountain. Alaskans prefer the name Denali, which is the native name. Denali means "the high one" in Athabascan.

How high? 20,320 feet/6,193.5 m, which makes it the tallest mountain in the world from base to summit. Mount Everest's base-to-summit elevation is less, but it wins the highest mountain on Earth contest (29,029 feet/8,848 m), because its base in the Himalayan Mountains starts at a higher elevation.

Tundra A-glow

The word tundra means “treeless heights.” Put another way, it’s land above treeline that has cold temperatures, high winds and a short growing season. Most of the tundra in the world is in the northern hemisphere, in western and northern Alaska, northern Canada, southern Greenland, northern Finland, northern Russia, and the tops of high mountains.

Plants that grow on tundra are generally low-lying and include small shrubs, sedges, mosses, lichens, and some flowers such as the Arctic poppy. There are more than 1,300 species of such plants in Denali National Park. And during a two week timespan in late August and the first few days of September they all turn color—to red, pink, gold, yellow, purple and orange. (See page 1.) It’s like leaf-changing time in New England, but at waist level—as far as the eye can see...in all directions...like a multi-colored carpet...even to the tops of some mountains. It is truly breathtaking...and worth timing your trip to see the phenomenon.

Wildlife A-Movin’

This is a harsh climate for most of Denali’s wildlife. Songbirds are gone on their annual southern migration by late August. The grizzly bear, the marmot and small mammals hibernate through the winter. Those that don’t hibernate, like the moose, caribou and wolf, have difficulty finding enough food to subsist on.

Even during the first week of September, you’ll see the wildlife moving, to find food for themselves and their young. That movement will give you opportunities to see Denali’s animals reasonably close, from the comfort and safety of a shuttle bus.

Eight Hours on a Bus?

You can opt for tours that are shorter (and longer), but here’s why we and everyone we talked to had no problem with that much time on the bus:

- You get closer to Mount Denali and have more chance of joining the “30 percent club.”
- There is more observable wildlife closer to the Eielson Visitor Center, 66 miles/106.2 km from the Park entrance.
- Visitors are kept busy assisting the driver with finding wildlife, and stops are made each time animals are sighted.
- Several stops are made at picturesque locations and to allow passengers to stretch their legs.
- There are two bathroom stops on the way to Eielson and two returning from it.
- The terrain is quite varied; sometimes in valleys, sometimes in mountain passes, but always with large mountains close by.
- And, of course, there is that carpet of multi-colored plants, stretching in all directions, which you never tire of looking at.

It’s a thrilling experience to see a mother grizzly walking with her cubs, a moose standing in water, and a wolf looking down on you from a rock outcropping...all in the wild. And it’s, an especially relaxing experience to see them all enveloped by the colors of fall.

Reservations for shuttle bus tours can be made by contacting Denali Reservations at <http://www.reservedenali.com>, 866-761-6629 or 907-292-7275.

For information about Denali Park and Preserve, go to the national park website at www.nps.gov/dena, or call 907-683-9532 daily 8:00am to 4:30pm Alaska time.

Some things to know before you go:

- There is only one road in the park, most of it packed gravel; visitors can drive only the first 15 miles/24 km of it.
- Shuttle buses operate only mid-May through mid-September.
- You must bring your own food and drink; food is not served beyond the entrance services.
- You can depart the shuttle at any time and take a later one (approximately every 30 minutes) if seats are available.
- Park Rangers give daily, guided walks at Eileson.

Day Three – The Drive to Seward

Here's the unvarnished truth of what you're facing today: seven and one-half hours in the car. But, if the weather is decent, they will be seven and one-half hours of eye candy: mountains and forests galore, and a stunning drive on an All American Highway, with water on one side and mountains on the other. And we recommend one stop in Anchorage. At the end of the day, you'll be in position to take a boat tour the following day, to enjoy sea animals, birds and glaciers up close. So, look at the bright side: some things in life are worth a little more effort.

Important Note: We strongly recommend that you fill your gas tank at the service area just north of the Park entrance. There are virtually no gas stations in the 200 miles/321.8 km between there and Wasilla.

Now, return to Anchorage the way you came.

The stop that we recommend in Anchorage is at the Anchorage Museum. If you decide to stay another day or two in Anchorage, there are other worthwhile things to do there; you'll be passing right by one of them as you enter the city. At Muldoon Rd., turn right and then right again into the Alaska Native Heritage Center. (See the map.) From the Center's website: "...inside...storytelling, artist demonstrations, Native dance performances, Native games demonstrations, movies;...outside...six life-sized ancient dwellings representing the 11 culture groups. Cultural representatives at each site share how Alaska Native peoples thrived in a harsh and unforgiving climate, what their daily lives were like and how their cultures live today in a changing world" www.alaskanative.net.

For other things to see and do in Anchorage, check Fodor's excellent book, *Alaska*, or websites for the following: Tony Knowles Coastal Trail; Wells Fargo History Museum Anchorage; Potter Marsh; and Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum.

The **Anchorage Museum**, the largest museum in Alaska, is definitely worth a couple of hours of your day. And it will be a nice break from driving. Using the map, find your way to the museum and park at meters on the street or across 6th Ave. in the pay lot. Our recommendation for lunch is the Muse Restaurant in the museum, operated by a local restaurant favorite, Marx Bros. Café.

The star of the show in the museum is the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center on Level two and its display of more than 600 items from Native cultures...including clothing, tools, hunt-

ing implements, dog blankets, ivory carvings and masks. All are beautifully displayed in floor-to-ceiling glass cases. This is the nicest and most impressive display of Native American objects that we have ever seen.

The museum has a lot more to offer, including a planetarium, a discovery center, and art and science exhibits, but if your time is limited, we recommend that you focus on the Alaska History Gallery on Level 2. There, you will find descriptions and dwellings of various native cultures, and sections on the Russian era, the gold rush, statehood and the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. There are lots of photos and lots of interesting descriptions.

The Anchorage Museum is located at 121 W. 7th Ave. and is open 9-6 every day May 1 through September 30 and 10-6 Tuesday-Saturday and noon to 6pm Sunday October 1 through April 30; 907-343-4326, www.anchoragemuseum.org.

Continue to Seward, Agog

Before you continue on your drive to Seward, we suggest that you check your gas level. There are no service stations during the 90 miles/144.8 km between Girdwood and Seward.

That done, drive east on 6th Ave. several blocks from the museum to Gambell St. and turn right. That will shortly put you on New Seward Highway (Highway 1), heading south to...Seward. In short order, you'll find yourself at a finger of water called Turnagain Arm, which opens up to Cook Inlet.

At www.bellsalaska.com/myalaska/sewhwy, you can find an excellent mile-by-mile guide of the Seward Highway, with map, that you can print and use during this drive. There are many scenic turnouts along the way. We'll hit the highlights of the drive here. Perhaps you'll add on time to your trip to enjoy some of them, or be able to stop at a few when you return to Anchorage on Day 5.

- Seward Highway has been designated by the U.S. Government as an All-American Road, which means it's viewed as a destination unto itself. It's also a National Forest Scenic Byway. It has no billboards. (Hooray!)
- As you drive alongside Turnagain Arm, the 3,000-foot/914 m peaks of Chugach State Park will be on your left for about 50 miles/80.4 km, and across the water, you'll see the Kenai Mountains. Beautiful!
- **Turnagain Arm** is one of the most unusual bodies of water that you'll ever see. Besides being quite beautiful in its natural setting, it has 25- to 37-foot (7.6-11.3 km) tides, which means that water frequently rolls into it from the Cook Inlet at about 15 miles per hour/24.1 km per hour, with the lead edge measuring about six feet/1.8 m high. This is called a bore tide and can be observed approximately every 12 hours. When the tide is out, Turnagain Arm is one large, four-mile/6.4 km wide mud flat. *Do not attempt to walk on the mud flat; it has quicksand-like qualities.*
- At mile 117/km 188, you'll come to the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, known locally as Potter Marsh. It's a safe haven for migrating birds. It has a boardwalk with interpretive displays.
- At mile 110/km 177, you'll find Beluga Point, where travelers can occasionally see the white whales hunting salmon.

- At mile 90/km144, you'll come upon the Girdwood junction. Here, you can see the posh Alyeska Resort and ride the ski tram 2,300 feet up the mountainside (expensive).
- At mile 79/km 127, you'll see signs for the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center on the right side of the road. You'll visit it on Day 5.
- At mile 80/km129 you'll find the road to Portage Glacier and Whittier. At Portage, you can enjoy an up-close view of the glacier, and at Whittier, wildlife- and glacier-seeking boat tours can be taken into Prince William Sound.
- Between mile 80/km 129 and mile 37/km 59, the countryside is filled with trees, lakes, creeks, campgrounds, picnic areas and hiking trails.
- Mile 37/km 59 – Junction of Seward and Sterling Highways. Highway 1 continues to the southwest as Sterling Highway to Soldotna and Homer. Seward Highway continues southeast to Seward as Highway 9.
- Mile 3/km 5—Road to Exit Glacier, which you'll visit on Day 5.
- Mile 2/km 3—Seward Chamber of Commerce, on the right side of the road. They have an excellent restaurant guide. Ask for a "Seward Walking Map" if you plan to spend additional time in the area. Also ask about other things to do, including a side trip to Homer.
- Mile 1/1 km—Small Boat Harbor, on the left, where you'll meet your tour boat tomorrow and have dinner this evening. The headquarters of the Kenai Fjords National Park is also located here.

You'll probably want to check into your accommodations before having dinner. Our recommendation for that meal is **Ray's Waterfront**. You'll have wonderful food and beautiful views of the boats in the harbor and mountains behind; 1316 Fourth Avenue, 907-224-5606, www.rayswaterfrontak.com. For other restaurants, for this evening and tomorrow evening, Google "Seward restaurants" and look for the TripAdvisor reviews. Or ask your lodging host, or look at the Chamber of Commerce's Restaurant Guide. This is THE area of the country to get fresh salmon and halibut. We do not recommend Exit Glacier Salmon Bake Restaurant.

As for accommodations, we suggest that you Google "Seward accommodations." We prefer B&Bs while traveling and wanted to be on a lake in the woods, so we chose Bear Lake Lodgings Bed and Breakfast on Bear Lake Road, 907-224-2288, www.bearlakelodgings.com. A nice bonus: the B&B provides canoes and kayaks for guest use on the two-mile long lake.

Day Four - Touring the Fjords

Glaciers, orcas (killer whales), humpback whales, sea lions, sea otters, harbor seals, horned puffins and other sea birds...you should see them all today...even if you have only half-decent weather. You may even see a bear or moose foraging on the shore or Dall sheep doing the same on the sides of the mountains.

"Fjord" (pronounced f'yord) is defined as: "a long narrow coastal inlet with steep sides, often formed by glacial action, especially along the west coast of Norway." Kenai Fjords National Park is another such coastal environment. The Park's fjords were carved by massive glaciers during the last great ice age and were subsequently filled in by seawater.

Harding Icefield—all 1,000 square miles/2,590 square km of it, most within the Park boundary—is a remnant of the last Great Ice Age. It's 50 miles/80.4 long and 30 miles/48.2 km

wide. It's thousands of feet thick and sits on top of the mountains to the west of the fjords. It receives about 30 feet/9 m of snow each year, which compacts into ice and spawns glaciers—some 38 at last count. The glaciers empty into the fjords and terminate at inland valleys or lakes. You'll see at least one glacier during today's boat tour and one tomorrow (Exit Glacier), the only one in the Park that's accessible by car.

If you choose to use Kenai Fjords Tours, by far the largest tour operator in Seward, your boat will head south from Seward on Resurrection Bay, round Ailik Cape, and go up Ailik Bay to view a calving glacier, all the while seeking marine life for you to enjoy. You'll be able to see the eastern edge of the Harding Icefield from many points in Ailik Bay. This icefield is the largest in the United States.

While in the Ailik Bay, you'll see spectacular views of high mountains almost all the way around you. If you're fortunate to have a clear day, as we did, it's a sight that you'll never forget. We were also fortunate to view Holgate Glacier up close while it was calving...another unforgettable experience. (See page 1.) Calving is the sheering off of large sheets of ice from the front of the glacier, which drop into the water as small icebergs.

A third unforgettable sight is the marine life—sea otters floating on their backs, pods of orcas feeding, humpback whales rising to the surface and diving again, hundreds of Stellar sea lions sunning themselves on the rocks, horned puffins seemingly floating happily in the water or standing commandingly on rocks. The boat captain knows where to find them and does so for your benefit.

Here are a few logistical things to know before you go:

- Kenai Fjords Tours offers 6- and 8-1/2 -hour national park tours and other cruises March through September. We chose the six-hour tour; it leaves at 11:30am and returns at 5:30pm. Check-in one hour before departure at 1304 4th Ave. in the small boat harbor area. Make reservations at 907-276-6249, 877-777-4051; www.kenaifjords.com.
- Lunch on the boat is included, as is free parking in their lot at Phoenix Rd. and Seward Highway (behind the Marina Motel). There is a complimentary shuttle to and from the boat harbor.
- Rough water can cause seasickness. Watching the horizon should cure that. Cinnamon chewing gum can help; it's available at the gift shop checkout counter.
- Be sure to bring your camera (with zoom lens, if possible) and rain gear, and put on layers of clothing. It's much cooler on the water, especially at the face of a glacier.

Day Five – See Them Close Up

Today, you'll enjoy close-up looks of Exit Glacier, marine life in the Alaska Sealife Center, and land animals at the Alaskan Wildlife Conservation Center. Time permitting, you can take a walking tour designed by the city, and you can watch a movie about the 1964 Great Alaskan Earthquake and resulting sunami, which decimated Seward.

Exit Glacier - You'll find the road to Exit Glacier at mile 3 of Seward Highway. The **Exit Glacier Nature Center**, part of the Kenai Fjords National Park, is eight miles/ 12.8 km up that road. Begin watching for the glacier at about seven miles/11.2 km and for the markers that show how

much the glacier has receded over the years, starting in 1815 (approximately seven miles downstream).

Inside the Nature Center, you'll learn all about glaciers and this one in particular. Outside, you have three hiking possibilities: The first and easiest (Glacial View, really a walk) is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile/1.2 km roundtrip and takes you to near the front of the glacier, where you can see the water runoff that becomes the Resurrection River, and the wide bed of gravel that's been deposited by the retreating glacier. The second trail is a 1-1/2 mile/2.4 km round trip, a little more strenuous, and brings you to near the edge of the glacier. And the third is a very strenuous 8.2 miles/13.2 km round trip to the Harding Icefield. Rangers strongly urge visitors to *not* walk on the ice, because of snowed-over crevasses that can cause injury or death. All trails are hard-packed gravel and rock.

There are daily ranger-led hikes at 10:00am, 2:00pm and 4:00pm.

How did the glacier get its name? In 1968, the first successful, recorded crossing of the Harding Icefield was made by Yule Kilcher from Homer to Seward. (The singer, Jewel, is his granddaughter; she was raised in Homer.) The expedition exited the icefield via this glacier and the name stuck.

The road to Exit Glacier is closed during the winter months, and the Nature Center is open from 9:00am to 8:00pm, May 26 through early September, www.nps.gov/kefj/planyourvisit/exit-glacier.htm.

If you're staying some time beyond our five-day itinerary, you may want to take a sled dog ride at the home of 2004 Iditarod champion Mitch Seavey. His company is called IdidaRide Sled Dog Tours and is located at mile 1 of Old Exit Glacier Road. 1-1/2 hour dog sled rides are available, summer and winter. 907-224-8607, www.ididarod.com. Old Exit Glacier road intersects Exit Glacier Road less than 1/4 –mile/.4 km from Seward Highway.

It's Lunchtime!

Sometime while you're in the Alaska SeaLife Center, you're going to get hungry. Just save your receipt to gain reentry and head for nearby **Chattermark Restaurant** at 220 4th Ave. The ambiance is cheerful and the food is very good. (Try the Glacial Blue Hamburger. It has blue cheese, bacon, tomato, onion and sauce...delicious!.) Other restaurants on 4th Ave. recommended by the Chamber of Commerce are: Apollo at 229, Christo's at 133, Peking at 338, and Sea Bean at 225.

Alaska SeaLife Center – This is the only public aquarium in Alaska. It features local marine animals and birds, so you won't see jellyfish and sea horses. There are some educational displays...the one about the salmon life cycle comes to mind first. But mostly you'll be seeing many species of fish in tanks, 2,000-pound/907 kg sea lions swimming behind large windows, lots of different sea birds in their enclosure, and sea anemones, starfish and an octopus in a touch tank. All great fun for kids, but we enjoyed it, too.

The Center is open during summer from May 12-September 16, Monday through Thursday, 9:00am to 6:30pm, and Friday through Sunday, 8:00am to 6:30pm. It's open during the winter from September 17 to May 11, seven days a week, 10:00am to 5:00pm.

It's located at 301 Railway Ave. in Seward; 907-224-6300 or 800-224-6300, www.alaskasealife.org.

Movie of the 1964 Earthquake and Sunami

If you have the time, and have any curiosity about that cataclysmic event, head for the **Seward Community Library**, at the corner of 5th and Adams, before 2:00pm daily (except Sunday) when the movie is shown. It's made from original black and white film footage and shows the bleak aftermath of the earthquake and sunami, which destroyed most of Seward. The sunami was the result of Resurrection Bay emptying and seawater reentering as a 150-foot-high/45.7 m wall of water. Interestingly, only 12 people died. The earthquake was the second most powerful in recorded history, at 9.2 on the Richter scale. Anchorage sustained a lot of damage in that earthquake, as well.

Seward Walking Tour

Also if you have time and are curious about Seward, use the Walking Map that you got at the Chamber of Commerce a couple of days ago to become better acquainted with the city. (The Chamber is located at mile 2 of Seward Highway.) The walking tour focuses on historical locations and other points of interest. The map can also be obtained at the Kenai Fjords National Park Headquarters in the Small Boat Harbor, 907-422-0500, www.nps.gov/kefj.

Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center

You may remember that this attraction is located at mile 79 on Seward Highway. If you allow an hour to visit it on the way back to the airport, you'll complete your opportunity to see many of Alaska's land animals up close.

It's possible to both drive and walk around the Center to see the animals...twice, if you wish. You'll see them not in cages, but in very spacious natural outdoor settings, fenced from each other and you, and eating the pasture grass and looking longingly at the distant mountains.

The grizzly bears are fed close to the fence, so you'll have a great view of them. There are so many bison that they make up a small herd. The elk buck is very happy in his enclosure...with his concubines. The moose babies we saw will be full grown or gone by the time you get there. The musk oxen should have thrown off the straw from their horns by then. And the eagle should feel a lot better and look much more healthy.

The Center's basic purpose is to take in injured and orphaned animals, nurse them to good health and return them to the wild. 907-783-2025, www.alaskawildlife.org.

One Big Surprise

We've always heard that Alaska is the "Land of the Midnight Sun," that is, the days are extremely long in the summer, and the sun doesn't rise above the horizon in winter. That may true in northernmost Alaska--in Barrow, for example.

But on September 4, while we were in Denali National Park, the sun rose at 7:01am and set at 8:54pm (nearly 14 hours of daylight). And we saw a sign there that reported: On January 9, 2011, the sun rose at 9:57am and set at 4:06pm (6 hours). That's not too different from what we experience in the Lower 48, where we live.

Now, if it wasn't so dang cold and snowy in the winter...those mountains are quite a magnet.

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Next Issue: "San Diego"