

INSPIRING
VACATIONS

INSPIRING CANADA & ALASKA

WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO & MORE



WELCOME TO CANADA & ALASKA

At Inspiring Vacations, we're on a mission to inspire you to see the world.

If you're dreaming of travelling to the most iconic destinations across the globe, you're in the right place. We couldn't be more excited to get you there.

Inside these pages, we showcase one of our most popular destinations, Canada and Alaska. It offers so much to the first time visitor and returning adventurer alike — one visit is just not enough. By the end of this eBook, we're sure you'll be as eager to visit Canada and Alaska as we are to get you there!

Happy travel planning and, as always — safe travels.

Paul Ryan
CEO
Inspiring Vacations

To view our
Canada/Alaska
tours, scan here



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WHY TRAVEL WITH INSPIRING VACATIONS?



GLOBAL EXPERTS

When you travel with Inspiring Vacations, you can expect thoughtfully curated tours to iconic destinations across the globe. Our authentic and culturally-rich tours are packed with must-see sights, lesser-known locations and enriching local experience, all at an unbeatable price.



ONLINE ADVANTAGES

Browsing and shopping for your next Inspiring Vacations tour couldn't be easier. We are an online company which means you can shop at your own convenience — anytime, anywhere, even while on tour. Our award-winning website is user-friendly and easy to navigate. We want our customers to be empowered to be able to access and manage their booking at any time — manage upgrades, book optional tours, and more.



INSPIRING COMMUNITY

Our travel articles, digital magazine, destination videos and member-only Facebook community groups will inspire your wanderlust or if you prefer, have a phone chat with one of our travel specialists for their recommendations.

WHY VISIT CANADA & ALASKA NOW?

If Canada and Alaska aren't on your travel bucket list, they need to be!



Brendon Cooper
HEAD OF TRAVEL
Inspiring Vacations



TICKING BUCKET LISTS

Canada is a captivating country which offers a multitude of reasons to be explored, making it an ideal destination for travellers, while Alaska is as much a great frontier now as it was during early settlement.

↳
Sled dog racing in
the Alaskan winter



NATURAL BEAUTY

From its stunning natural landscapes to its vibrant cities, Canada boasts an array of experiences that will leave visitors in awe. One compelling reason to travel to Canada is its unparalleled natural beauty: vast national parks, towering mountain ranges, pristine lakes, and picturesque coastlines. And 2024 marks the centennial anniversary of Canada's national parks, providing a unique opportunity to celebrate the country's rich natural heritage.



INCREDIBLE WILDLIFE

Rich with natural resources, Alaska is North America's wildlife sanctuary. Home to some of North America's most iconic wildlife from the proud bald eagle, powerful grizzly to the wild salmon runs, Alaska will have you on the edge of your seat around every turn. For the full experience ensure any tour to Alaska includes time on the water, time in the national parks and time on the famous Alaska Railroad.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT?

Canada has it all – from breathtaking scenery, to modern, vibrant cities, friendly locals and incredible wildlife. Likewise, neighbouring Alaska has some of the most famous wilderness in the world. But, when is the best time to go?

CANADA IS AN ENORMOUS country that experiences very distinct seasons, but the diversity in the landscape between regions means the conditions can present differently within each.

In the west, Canada boasts many incredible treasures, from the cosmopolitan city of Vancouver, to the famous resort of Whistler, beautiful Banff and the picture-perfect scenery of Lake Louise in the Rocky Mountains, and some of the most famous national parks on the planet. In the east, French Canada is simply stunning with European architecture and equally captivating scenery. In-between, the cities of Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa each have their own flavour, packed with multicultural influences and an innovative art scene.

Summer is the peak travel period across Canada and, given its proximity to the Arctic, both locals and visitors make the most of the warm, sunny weather. Canada is the king of outdoor pursuits, and the summer months present ideal conditions for hiking, boating, fishing and more. Wilderness areas of British Columbia and Alberta are great for spotting active wildlife such as moose and bears, and it's the perfect time to tick the Rocky Mountaineer off your bucket list.

In cities like Vancouver and Toronto, people enjoy al fresco dining and spend as much time outdoors as possible. In neighbouring Alaska, it's the peak time for cruising the Inside Passage, exploring the capital of Juneau, or watching an iceberg ▶



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Canada/Alaska
weather video.
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↘
Clockwise from left: Moraine Lake and the Rocky Mountains in Banff National Park; an Alaskan bear takes a rest; fishing for salmon in the Russian River, Alaska

The Inside Passage averages around 8 degrees at this time, and the wildlife will be out and about, getting ready for winter. If you're lucky, you could even spot the Northern Lights.

Canada is a famous **winter** destination for many reasons. With the first dump of snow, the Rocky Mountains transform into a world of buzzing, world-class ski resorts; people flock to Banff and Whistler at this time of the year. The beautiful Lake Louise freezes and turns into an enormous ice-skating rink, Christmas is celebrated with markets and festivals, and the world's largest winter carnival, the Quebec Winter Festival, runs over 14 days.

Almost all of the country experiences snowfall and most national parks are closed. Those that remain open make the most of the season with activities like dog sledding. Yes, the weather does drop significantly during winter, but rug-up in the right gear and you'll enjoy the outdoors as much as locals do.

Temperatures in Vancouver hover around 5 degrees celsius in January.

In Calgary, expect -5, in Toronto -2, in Banff -6, in Whistler -1, and in Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec, around -6.

Spring brings some welcome sunshine to the country, and the wildflowers beckon everyone back from winter. Temperatures rise above freezing, national parks start re-opening, and whale sightings become more common on the Atlantic coast.

Temperatures in Vancouver hover around the mid-teens, while Banff averages 7 degrees, and Whistler and Calgary both 10 degrees. On the other side of the country, Toronto will be around 12 degrees in the middle of Spring, Ottawa and Montreal 11 degrees and Quebec 9 degrees.

In Alaskan spring, destinations along the Inside Passage slowly come out of winter shutdown and the cruise season recommences, in time to see wildlife wake up and flowers burst into bloom.

Canada and Alaska's incredible scale and diversity mean there's something for visitors at any time of the year. ●

THE AUTUMN PERIOD IS ALSO KNOWN FOR THE SALMON RUN, WHEN MILLIONS OF FISH RETURN TO THE RIVER SYSTEMS AND ATTRACT BEARS. “ ”

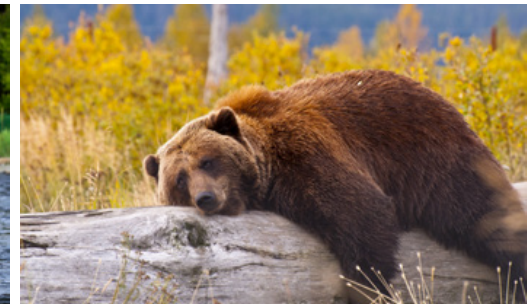
calving into the sea. Montreal's famous jazz festival is a fixture on the summer calendar, along with Canada Day and the Calgary Stampede; visit during the grand festivities to immerse yourself in Canadian culture.

Canadian summer temperatures vary from province to province but are usually in the twenties. In Vancouver, expect averages of 23 degrees celsius, in Banff and Whistler it will be around 22 degrees, Calgary averages 23 degrees, Toronto up to 27 degrees, Quebec 26 degrees, Montreal 27 degrees and Ottawa 26 degrees.

In Alaska and the Inside Passage, summer temperatures range from 0 to 16 degrees, so warm clothes are still a must. One thing there's no shortage of is sunshine, with almost 18 hours per day.

By **autumn**, the weather cools and a breathtaking display of colour emerges, particularly on the east coast. This famous site attracts visitors from all over the world and the moderate temperatures make it a great time for touring. The autumn period is also known for the salmon run, when millions of fish return to the river systems and attract bears. The colours along Niagara Gorge are simply spectacular at this time of year, and the Rockies are usually still pleasant but can experience surprise snow flurries.

Vancouver gets down to roughly 14 degrees celsius in the middle of autumn, while Banff and Whistler average 11 degrees, Toronto 15 degrees, Calgary 12 degrees. In the east, Montreal will be around 14 degrees, Quebec 12 and the capital Ottawa 13.



(All images: Shutterstock)

INTRODUCING →

CANADA

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↘
Sunrise at Moraine Lake,
Banff National Park

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Canada videos
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(Image: Shutterstock)



SNAPSHOT ON →

BANFF

This Alberta mountain town is home to a stunning national park and more

(Image: Shutterstock)

AN AREA RICH in natural beauty, the Canadian Rockies are also home to a number of gems. Among them is Banff, a picturesque resort town surrounded by the grounds of Banff National Park – a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

One of many photo opportunities in the area can be found at Bow Falls, which may only have a nine-metre drop but still manages to create a memorable atmosphere. The neighbouring Bow Valley has plenty of options for food and drink, from saloon dining at Where The Buffalo Roam to the experimental fusion cuisine inside Blake’s converted garage space.

With their appetite sated, visitors can follow the trail to Surprise Corner, which provides a view of another local landmark: Fairmont Banff Springs. An eye-catching 19th-century structure that began life as a grand railway hotel, the Castle in the Rockies is now a 757-room abode that includes a 27-hole golf course, spa and health club, and valley views. Johnson Canyon is another great vantage point from which to view Bow River wind its way through the terrain.

Banff’s surrounding lakes never cease to impress, with their bright blue and green waters and picturesque, mountainous backdrops. In addition to Lake Louise, there is Moraine Lake to explore. Canoe across its glacial waters from CA\$20 (AU\$22) an hour or hike nearby trails such as Rock Pile, Consolation Lakes and Larch Valley, depending on your



↘
Clockwise from left: Canoes at Moraine Lake; Consolation Lakes; Sulphur Mountain view point; Banff town street

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time, inclination and fitness levels. Visitors during winter months will also be able to skate the frozen water on Lake Louise.

There are plenty of attractions for lovers of the great indoors. Banff’s main cultural centres are the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies and the Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum, both offer fascinating histories of the area. There’s also the Banff Park Museum, housed in Banff’s oldest building and nestled on Banff Avenue – the street where Banff was founded. The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity offers contemporary attractions, workshops and concerts, and is the proud host of the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival during the first week of November. Expect to pay CA\$4-10 (AU\$5-11) for adult

admission in most cases, and free entry for children under 12.

For those looking to unwind, Banff Avenue is also a great spot for shopping, from its homely Cascade Shops arcade to countless local arts and jewellery vendors, and The Spirit of Christmas, where it’s the most wonderful time of the year all year round. Local steakhouses are another staple, with flame-grilled local meat on the menu – and probably a vegan option or two, if you look hard enough.

After all of that, why not wind down with a different kind of view from the top? Take the Banff Gondola to Upper Hot Springs Pool, where for a mere CA\$7 (AU\$8) you can take a dip in the thermally heated mineral waters and let nature do the rest. ●

(All images: Shutterstock)

Lace up your hiking boots and step away from the water's edge to explore the area surrounding Lake Louise

SNAPSHOT ON →
LAKE LOUISE

WHILE IT'S TRUE the Canadian Rockies are a winter paradise, Lake Louise — the Jewel of the Rockies — has just as much, if not more, to offer when temperatures begin to rise and its turquoise waters thaw.

The lake owes its mesmerising hue to the Victoria Glacier which looms overhead. Unfortunately, the flipside to the fact that the lake is glacier-fed is its, well, glacial temps even in the height of summer. But luckily, you're not there for swimming.

Here, the views are what it's all about, and you'll soon learn that the best way to see Lake Louise is from above. Its shoreline can become crowded in summer, so if it's peace and panoramas you're after, strap on your hiking boots and head for the trails.

There are many accessible hikes in the area, and the Plain of Six Glaciers ranks among the finest. ▶



Clockwise from right: Hiking at Plain of Six Glaciers from Lake Louise; stunning Lake Louise; the snow-capped mountains and fresh water valley of Plain of Six Glaciers; horseback riding to Plain of Six Glaciers

It's best to start early to catch a dazzlingly beautiful sunrise as you begin to stretch your legs along the trail.

It can take between four to six hours to complete the round-trip hike. The first half will take you around the lake and is relatively flat but once you leave the shoreline, you'll begin to climb a gentle path through the lush, sub-alpine forest.

Once past the treeline, you'll catch your first glimpse of the shimmering Lake Louise below, and the stately Fairmont Chateau Hotel in all its grandeur.

If you feel the need to refuel along the 5.5km, 370m climb to the top (and who wouldn't?), make sure you make time for a pitstop at the Plain of Six Glaciers Teahouse. Overflowing with charm, the stone and wood tea shop was built in 1924 by the Canadian Pacific Railway and offers homemade

That tiny green-blue dot in the distance? That's Lake Louise, your starting point, and it's time to make your way back down towards it.

For the same majestic views, from a different approach, horse-riding enthusiasts can book a trek from Brewster Stables, whose tours take in all six glaciers — a little less effort is required on your part.

Once you return from the mountain, treat yourself to pre-dinner cocktails at the Fairmont Chateau, yet another Canadian Pacific Railway treasure. The Station Restaurant is the oldest and perhaps most charming building in Lake Louise. Here, you'll feast on highly-rated contemporary Canadian cuisine in a rustic log cabin and can even rent out a beautifully restored railroad car for the evening. ●

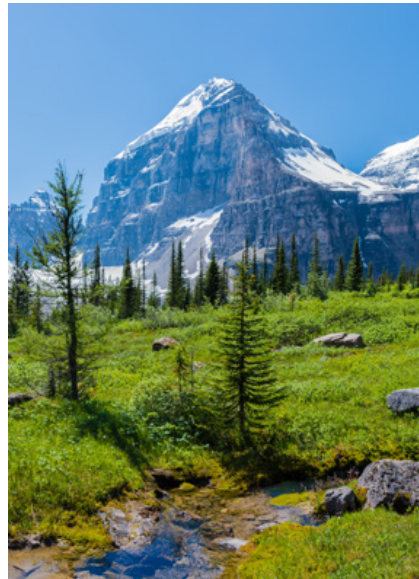
HORSE-RIDING ENTHUSIASTS CAN BOOK A TREK FROM BREWSTER STABLES, WHOSE TOURS TAKE IN ALL SIX GLACIERS. “”

cakes, scones and sandwiches. But remember, card readers and ATMs haven't quite made it to 2,133m, so take some cash with you.

The Abbot Pass marks the end of the hike and on a good day, you can spot a tiny mountaineers hut, built in 1922, which rests between Mount Victoria and Mount Lefroy.



(All images: Shutterstock)



GUIDE TO → TAILOR-MADE CANADA

Whether you love hiking, film, or wine, there are several ways to experience the world's second-largest country

THE FACT CANADA offers something for everyone is a huge part of its charm. The country evokes images of looming mountain tops, epic skiing, ice-blue lakes, pine trees for days, eclectic cities, rugged hiking and so much more. Depending on the type of traveller you are, it's likely you will choose to explore the country based on what you love.

If you like cosmopolitan cities YOU'LL ♥ VANCOUVER

Vancouver is a postcard-perfect city set around a harbour with a downtown city skyline to envy. You could spend a whole week or a speedy 48 hours exploring all that it has to offer. The pulsating Gastown district attracts foodies and night owls, while verdant green Stanley Park is a haven for nature lovers and cyclists. Take a micro-brewery tour, catch an ice hockey game or chill out in the sunshine while taking in the surrounding snow-capped mountains. It is a city living at its very best. ▶

(Image: Shutterstock)

Autumn at Stanley Park in Vancouver

If you like nature,
**YOU'LL LOVE THE
CANADIAN ROCKIES**

If walking atop glaciers is your idea of fun, then the Canadian Rockies are calling your name. Athabasca Glacier in Jasper National Park, Alberta, is said to be one of the most accessible glaciers remaining in the world but it's disappearing fast, so add it to your to-do list. The glacier is a part of the Columbia Icefield, the largest mass of ice in the Rocky Mountains, a range that stretches 25km across the Continental Divide. Guided tour companies will take you to the glacier; you can choose from a basic three-hour hike or a longer six-hour hike. You can also scrap the walking and opt for a comfortable snow coach instead – the scenery will blow your mind.



Icefields Parkway, Banff

If you like hiking,
**YOU'LL LOVE
GEORGIAN BAY**

Hello, Ontario. This Canadian province has your name written all over it if you love the idea of going off the grid in the wilderness. In particular, Killarney Provincial Park in Georgian Bay boasts a multi-day 80km trail, La Cloche Silhouette Trail, which will get your legs working. The pink granite rocks that line the bay's shoreline make for a pretty backdrop, and there are more than 50 teal-blue lakes to explore. Alternate your days between rewarding hikes and on-water activities including canoeing, kayaking and trout fishing.



Georgian Bay

If you like wildlife,
YOU'LL LOVE THE YUKON

Remote, wild, rugged, sparse sums up the Yukon territory in northwest Canada. It has a tiny population which spans 480,000 sq km. Its surface area is larger than the size of Germany and all this space means it's a region that is untouched, pristine and home to an array of wildlife. Moose are everywhere, and in the upper third of the territory, which is located inside the Arctic Circle, you can even see caribou, Arctic fox and Canadian lynx. The Yukon is also one of the best places to catch a glimpse of the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. ▶



Canadian lynx



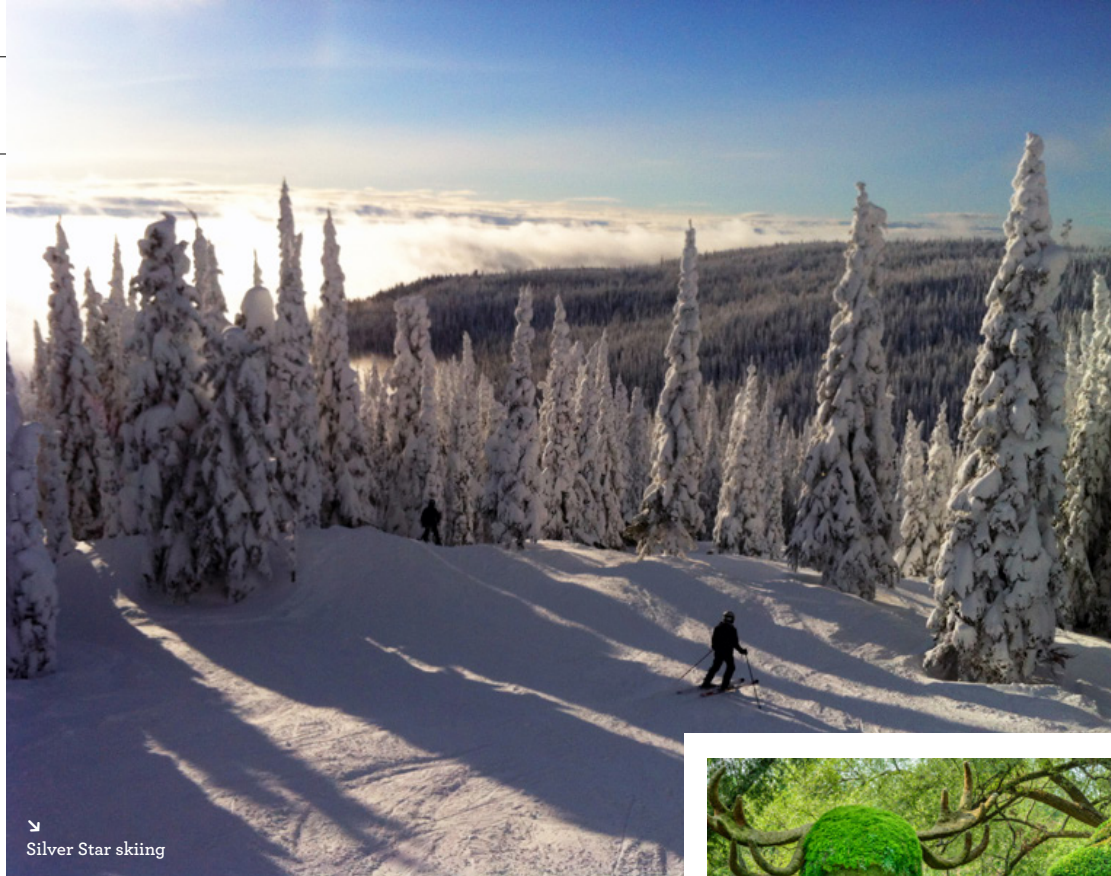
Caribou

**If you like ski resorts
YOU'LL ♡ SILVER STAR**

Powder feigns naturally adore Canada, but Silver Star — 22km north-east of Vernon in British Columbia — is the pick of the mountain ski resorts if you love the idea of a family-friendly atmosphere set amid a small, rainbow-like village that seems fresh out of a Disney movie. There are plenty of trails for the cross-country skier and tube riding, bowling and fat bike riding for the kids. It's more reasonably priced than the bigger resorts, too. If you need a break from the mountain, pop on your skates and hit the resort's ice rink. Or, head indoors and go bowling.

**If you like wine
YOU'LL ♡ THE OKANAGAN VALLEY**

Wine is serious business in Canada's Okanagan Valley. With the stunning, 135km long Okanagan Lake at the heart of the valley and rolling vineyards that meet the lake's edge, this really is a wine country with a difference. Think paddock-to-plate fare, lilac-coloured fields of lavender, rustic farmhouses, fruit orchards aplenty, 200-plus regional wineries and lakeside walks worthy of a photo — or three.



↘ Silver Star skiing



↘ Okanagan Valley



↘ Montreal Botanic Gardens



↘ Banff

**If you like culture,
YOU'LL ♡ MONTREAL**

With its European influence, rich Francophone Canadian history, hip bars, bustling food markets and some of the best eats in North America, finding your *joie de vivre* in Montreal is a given — if you know where to look. Visit the Montreal Botanical Garden and explore its beautiful 75 hectares of greenhouses and themed gardens; sample artisan cheeses, for which Quebec is known (there are over 400 to choose from), and fall in love with age-old structures dating back to 1642 in Old Montreal. When you've dabbled in enough culture for the day, hit the bars for the perfect mix of old meets new.

**If you like festivals,
YOU'LL ♡ BANFF**

Charming is an understatement when talking about Banff. This beautiful town in Alberta has it all: picturesque lakes framed by imposing mountains, hot springs to soak in, roaming bison and some serious luxe hotels. The resort town turns all this on, and then some, when the annual Banff Centre Mountain Film and Book Festival kicks off every October. The event is a celebration of some of the world's most remote cultures and adrenaline-fuelled mountain expeditions. Add it to the diary. ●

(All images: Shutterstock)

Do you get snap happy at the sight of picture-perfect lakes and quaint towns with colourful architecture? Let these stunning Canadian towns inspire your next adventure

9 OF THE MOST CHARMING TOWNS IN CANADA

1 NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONTARIO

How can one city be so lovely? Niagara-on-the-Lake, the oh-so-charming town that is nestled just beyond the roaring power of Niagara Falls, makes for a beautiful stop. The town is painted with colour, from the many hanging baskets filled with blooms in the warmer months to the pretty Georgian-style architecture. Take a walk through the streets, visit the Falls on a day trip, and get your sugar fix at an award-winning chocolate factory. ▶



↙
Main street in Banff, Alberta

(Image: Pierre Guerin / Shutterstock)

2 BANFF, ALBERTA

Snow bunnies and action lovers adore Banff not only for its immense beauty but thanks to its close access to epic ski fields and neighbouring ski resorts such as Sunshine and Lake Louise. The town is surrounded by looming mountains carved by glaciers, grand chateau-style hotels and 6,500 sqm of parkland that is home to grizzly bears and elk. A soak in the Banff Upper Hot Springs is recommended.

3 MAHONE BAY, NOVA SCOTIA

Mahone Bay may be one of Canada's lesser-known towns but its friendly vibe, chilled-out pace, and location — it hugs the rocky Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia — make it a charming hotspot to loll a while. Vibrant dollhouse-like buildings painted in shades of lavender and aqua blue, dot the Bay's edge as do several historic churches. Be sure to stroll through some of the town's galleries and shops to see intricate works from local Nova Scotia artists.



↙
Mahone Bay



↙
St. Andrews

4 ST. ANDREWS, NEW BRUNSWICK

Over on the east coast of Canada, you'll find this sweet seaside town that goes by the charismatic name of St. Andrews-by-the-Sea. The town is located on a pretty peninsula and is the oldest seaside resort town in Canada, dating back to the 1700s. Visit the St. Andrews Farmers' Market, open Thursdays, and take a zodiac ride on the Bay of Fundy to see humpback and North Atlantic right whales in August and September.

5 ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

St. John's has the kind of small-town charm you don't find everywhere — its young, hip locals love to dabble in the arts, crafts and music. The food is also amazing. Just a short drive from the city centre lies cute-as-can-be neighbourhoods, such as the picturesque fishing village, Outer Battery Village. Enjoy photographing vibrant houses, which hug the coastline in tight-knit clusters, and are painted in shades of canary yellow, lipstick red and emerald green; visit the two lighthouses at Cape Spear, the most easterly point in Canada; and satiate your taste buds with a Touton, a traditional Canadian pancake commonly made in Newfoundland. ▶



↙
St. John's

(Image: Shutterstock)

6 LAKE LOUISE, ALBERTA

Honeymooners and expert skiers, this one's for you. An aerial view of the picturesque hamlet of Lake Louise reveals a peacock-blue lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains and the iconic Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise at the water's edge. In winter, it's a snow-laden utopia with visitors ice-skating atop the frozen lake, taking sleigh rides around its edge, and skiing down world-class slopes. Come summer, daylight lasts until 11pm allowing you plenty of time to go hiking to sparkling glacial lakes or canoeing along Lake Louise.



↘
Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise

7 MEAT COVE, NOVA SCOTIA

This tiny and remote fishing village located on Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island has some seriously jaw-dropping scenery. Sunset turns the rocky cliffs and headlands a shade of crimson while the rolling green hills set in the highlands make for an idyllic backdrop. The town is a popular stop while road-tripping the Cabot Trail. If you love hiking, the Cape Breton Highlands National Park has many trails, and the water at Meat Cove Beach is definitely worth a dip. The Meat Cove Oceanside Chowder Hut, directly opposite the town's campground, serves up some of the tastiest seafood chowders, mussels and lobster you will eat.



↘
Meat Cove



↘
Manitoba



↘
Baie-Saint-Paul

8 BAIE-SAINT-PAUL, QUEBEC

A short drive from Quebec City will see you to the gorgeous town of Baie-Saint-Paul. But don't just stay for the day — spend a few nights relaxing amid its bohemian atmosphere and artistic streets. This is the hometown of Cirque du Soleil. If this, combined with the town's location on the northern shore of the Saint Lawrence River, doesn't lure you to linger awhile, then perhaps the town's hard-to-beat French cuisine will.

9 CHURCHILL, MANITOBA

No trip to Canada would be complete without a visit to the town that has been dubbed the 'polar bear capital of the world.' The subarctic climate means temperatures can plummet, but the chance of sighting those fluffy, cream-white polar bears from October to November more than makes up for the chill factor. Churchill is also one of the best spots in the world to see the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights in all their glory. ●

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A totem pole
in Ketchikan

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INTRODUCING →

ALASKA

(Image: Shutterstock)

With glaciers slowly grinding their way down from icefields and snow-capped peaks into bottomless fjords — the Glacier Bay National Park and Reserve is a geography lesson writ large

SIMPLY PUT, Glacier Bay Park is vast, covering just shy of 13,000km² of southeast Alaska, roughly the same size as the US state of Connecticut. However, aptly enough, the park is just the tip of the iceberg as this wild giant stands shoulder to shoulder with Canadian peers, the Tatshenshini-Alsek World Heritage Site and the Kluane National Park and Reserve, as well as fellow Alaskan, the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, which is the US's largest national park.

This UNESCO-protected chain of parks cover 100,00km², making it the world's largest contiguous area without roads; it encompasses 1,900km of rugged coastline, active tidewater glaciers, the world's only non-polar icefields and an amazing range of biodiversity. ▶

(Image: Shutterstock)

↳ [Left: Glacier Bay National Park is a designated World Heritage Site](#)

SNAPSHOT ON →
**GLACIER
BAY** NATIONAL PARK
& RESERVE

OVER THE PAST TWO CENTURIES, THIS HUGE GLACIER HAS RETREATED 100KM UP FROM THE BAY'S MOUTH INTO ITS TRIBUTARIES WHICH, DESPITE BEING SHADOWS OF ITS FORMER SELF, ARE STILL IMPRESSIVE. “”

In 1925, US president Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the area around Glacier Bay as a national monument; it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, enlarged by Jimmy Carter the following year before UNESCO doubled down on the region's natural charms, recognising it as a Biosphere Reserve in 1986.

Although there is evidence of human settlement dating back 9,000 years in nearby Groundhog Bay, the park itself is only known to have been populated as far back as 3,000 years. The Tlingit people's oral history details how they were displaced by a glacier 300 years ago; scientists have since confirmed that this was during a mini ice age which saw the glacier's snout jut out into the Icy Strait almost to Lemesurier Island at its peak in the mid-1700s.

It had retreated by the time George Vancouver, the British captain of the HMS Discovery, chartered the Pacific Northwest in 1794 when he found the bay was just an 8km indent blocked

by a wall of ice over 12,000m thick and 30km wide. As well as mapping the region and having the Canadian city named after him for his troubles, Vancouver led the first European expedition to Hawaii and learned his trade exploring the southern seas as a junior officer on Captain Cook's expedition to Australia.



Over the past two centuries, this huge glacier has retreated 100km up from the Bay's mouth into its tributaries which, despite being shadows of its former self, are still impressive. The largest of the park's 50-plus named glaciers is the 55km-long, 3km-wide Grand Pacific Glacier — which creeps by at a pace of 2-10cm a day, a snail's pace compared to the Johns Hopkins Glacier's 15-25cm a day. The park features seven tidewater glaciers — those which reach the sea — as well as several which only touch seawater at one of this far northern region's two daily high tides that can be as

high as seven metres above low tide. After being buffeted by waves, large sections of these glaciers' snouts regularly break off or 'calve', dropping huge blocks of ice into the sea. The retreat of the glaciers has uncovered another geological marvel, fjords — deep, U-shaped valleys whose walls have been worn down and polished smooth by the slow passing river of ice and debris.

The Fairweather mountain range which fringes the park's western edge is the world's highest coastal range as well as part of the Rockies chain that runs the length of North America; its highest of which ▶





Clockwise from right: A variety of Scenes from the spectacular Glacier Bay National Park, Glacier Bay National Park

is Mount Fairweather at 6,600m. These were formed by the collision of the North American and Pacific tectonic plates; meaning that there are frequent earthquakes and the mountains are growing, albeit at a pace of 50mm a year.

Despite glaciers covering over a quarter of the park, it is so much more than a frozen wasteland and has an abundance of flora and fauna. Around 20% of the park is water and this is teeming with sea life — with everything from orcas, humpback whales, minke whales and porpoises, feeding on and alongside salmon, sculpin, harbour seals, Steller sea lions and sea otters. Above them flap around 281 species of birds, including ducks and geese, albatross, gulls, the iconic golden and bald eagles and the colourful puffin.

On land, its lush temperate lowland rainforests and wide valleys are

similarly well-populated with moose, blacktail deer, mountain goats, minks, coyotes, wolves and wolverines doing their level best to avoid apex predators such as the lynx and an assortment of bears, be they brown/grizzly, black or blue/glacier (a subspecies of the black bear).

Keep your eyes peeled on the beaches as this is where visitors are most likely to see them feeding on fish while keeping a safe distance away. The park has only a few short trails; those wishing to get off them are advised to stick to the beaches, riverbeds and meadows as the thick brush is difficult to navigate. With some of the most spectacular sea kayaking in the world, grabbing a paddle is by far the best way to explore the coastline. ●



**WITH SOME OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR
SEA KAYAKING IN THE WORLD, GRABBING
A PADDLE IS BY FAR THE BEST WAY TO
EXPLORE THE COASTLINE** “ ”



(All images: Shutterstock)

With no road in
or out of town due
to its rugged terrain,
Juneau is an island
washed ashore on
the mainland

JUNEAU IS MUCH like Alaska itself: vast, yet sparsely populated, the city is larger than the entire New York metropolitan area and four times the size of Melbourne, and home to just over 32,000 people. However, its population jumps by 20% when a cruise ship pulls into port and this small town manages to welcome over a million visitors every year.

The Gastineau Channel — which separates Juneau from Douglas Island — has been the Aueke and Taku tribes' herring fishing grounds for thousands of years. The Russians never put down roots here and the first white settlers came after the end of the California gold rush when would-be prospectors migrated up the coast in search of their fortunes. Quebecois prospector, Joe Juneau, and his partner, Irishman Richard Harris struck lucky in Gold Creek, which runs through the east of the city. ▶





Clockwise from bottom left: Scenic view of Juneau port from a cruise ship; fresh King Crab; welcome to Juneau; Juneau cable car

The town was briefly and blandly called Harrisburg after one half of the duo, before the half won an 1881 vote among local miners, winning 47 of the 72 ballots cast by plying voters with drinks. Joe was subsequently swept up in the Klondike Gold Rush where, after blowing his fortune, he opened a restaurant in Dawson.

After his death, Juneau was brought back to Juneau and buried in Evergreen Cemetery, built to replace the city's previous graveyard, which had — believe it or not — been turned into a gold mine.

Mount Juneau is far from the tallest peak in Alaska — in fact, it doesn't even make the top 100 — but the contrast between the sea level city

and the adjacent 1,090m summit gives the impression it is dwarfed by its neighbour. Visitors can hike up to its peak by branching off from the Perseverance Trail from the city, but only very experienced hikers should try, as it's a steep and treacherous route. Those that don't fancy 5kms of steep uphill while taking their lives in their hands can get up the next peak in as many minutes by taking the Mount Roberts Tramway. Near the top is the Timberline restaurant, which boasts arguably the best views of the city and surrounding mountains. Visitors can walk off their lunch by taking the trail to the summit (8kms round trip) or back



THE CITY'S COMPACT DOWNTOWN MAKES FOR A GREAT NIGHT OUT WITHOUT THE NEED TO TAKE A CAB EVERYWHERE ... AS THE BARS ARE ALL WITHIN CRAWLING DISTANCE. “ ”



down to town (6kms one way). The mountaintop also features an eyrie for injured birds, the Juneau Raptor Centre, where visitors can set their eyes on a bald eagle.

Just outside of town is another Juneau must-do, the 20km-long Mendenhall Glacier, one of the 40-plus large glaciers which drain from the 4,000km² Juneau Icefield. The well-maintained trails in the forest around it are a great place to spot local wildlife, such as black bears, porcupines, beavers, bald eagles, and salmon. Those who want to stay on the flat or ride a bike should head to the 16kms Herbert Glacier Trail as its gravel path and tall tree cover make it a good option for a rainy day.

The city's compact downtown

makes for a great night out without the need to take a cab everywhere — although the city now has pedicabs — as the bars are all within crawling distance. Local notables include Tracy's King Crab Shack, which boasts it has the state's best crustaceans, the Alaskan Bar & Hotel, and the city's oldest bar, the Imperial Saloon, which opened in 1891.

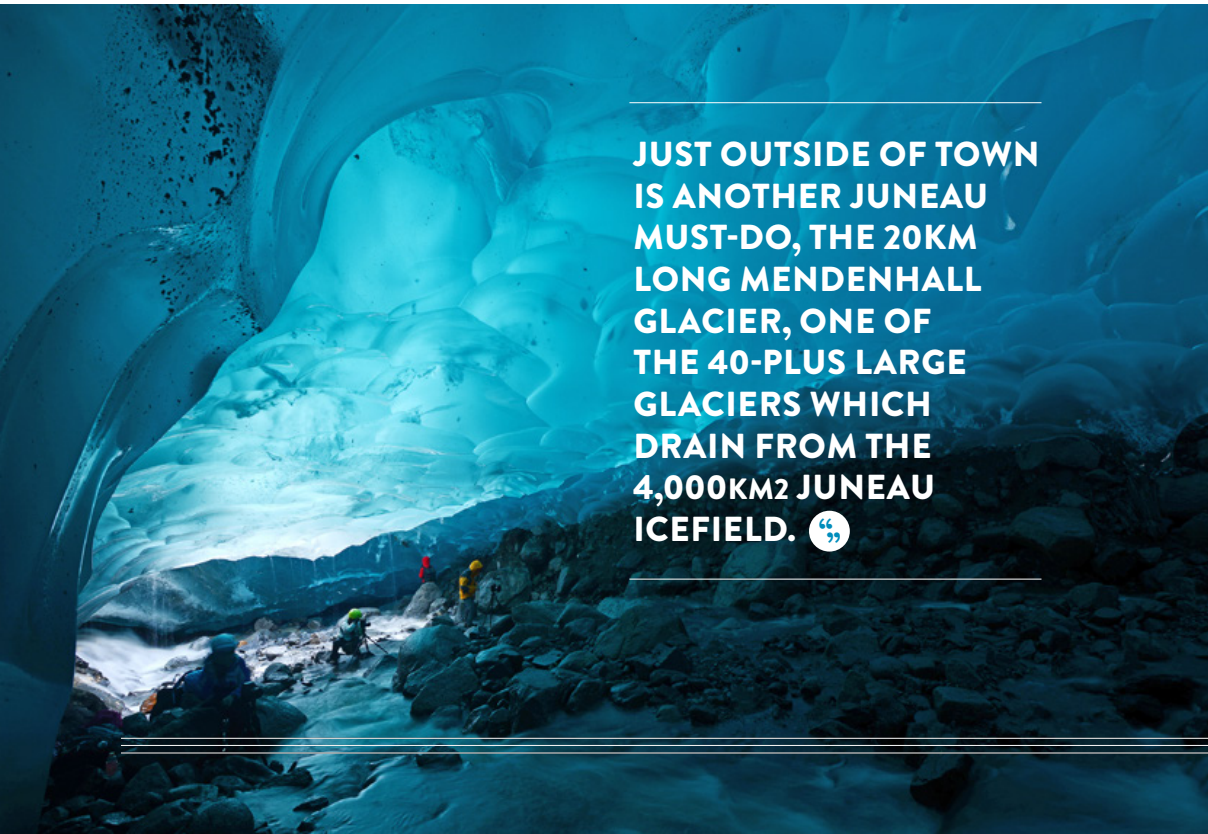
Those in search of a bit of spirituality, or just an afternoon out in the lush Tongass National Forest — yes, the nation's biggest — should head 20 miles north out of town to the National Shrine of St. Therese, honouring Alaska's patron saint, the French Carmelite nun known as the 'little flower of Jesus.' ▶

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(Image: Ruth Peterkin / Shutterstock)

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Clockwise from left: Hikers take a rest at one of the many pools of blue water on top of Mendenhall Glacier; Mendenhall is the only glacier in southeast Alaska accessible by road; cavers explore a blue glacier ice cave near Juneau



JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN IS ANOTHER JUNEAU MUST-DO, THE 20KM LONG MENDENHALL GLACIER, ONE OF THE 40-PLUS LARGE GLACIERS WHICH DRAIN FROM THE 4,000KM² JUNEAU ICEFIELD. “ ”



(Image: Shutterstock)

With its beautiful forest-fringed stone chapel with a causeway running across the water to Shrine Island, it is reminiscent of the monasteries Vikings used to regularly pillage in northern England. However, it is now open to all faiths as a place of prayer and meditation in keeping with her message of “what matters in life is not great deeds, but great love.”

Culture vultures should seek shelter in the Alaska State Museum which has an impressive collection of Native American art and artefacts, exhibits from the region’s time under imperial Russian rule, as well as a treasure trove of trinkets

from its more recent time as the US’s wildest and most western frontier. The highlights of the collection include prehistoric Eskimo ivory carvings and watercolour by William Ellis, the artist who documented much of famed British explorer Captain Cook’s journey through the Pacific Northwest.

Also visit the Sealaska Heritage Institute, which is dedicated to preserving the art and culture of the native peoples of Southeastern Alaska; its exhibits include an authentic clan house and its gift shop sells only the most authentic locally-made souvenirs. ●

Salmon hanging to dry in Fairbanks, Alaska

From hearty game meats, to freshly foraged berries, Alaskan cuisine is a treat for taste buds

ALASKAN FOOD is a product of its geography. The 49th state has the longest coastline in the US, stretching for 10,686km, and a staggering three million lakes, so it's hardly surprising that seafood is the cornerstone of its cuisine. Fish, oysters and crab are among its most popular catches, and thanks to strict sustainability regulations, Alaskan seafood is some of the freshest in the world. Throw in an array of game meats and dishes originally eaten for survival by the first Alaskan Natives, and you've got quite the diverse culinary scene. Here, eight must-try Alaskan dishes to sample during your travels. ▶

8

MUST TRY
**LOCAL DISHES
IN ALASKA**

↘
Clockwise from left: Boardwalk Fish & Chips; fresh oysters; 49th Street Brewing Company's yak nachos; Alaskan king crab in Juneau



1 YAK MEAT

A few years ago, you'd be hard-pressed to find yak meat on an Alaskan menu, let alone people keen to order it. But now, the secret is out: yak meat is one of the healthiest red meats, a leaner alternative to chicken, high in iron and if that isn't enough, it's also deliciously juicy. Although the hairy bovinds aren't native to the state, their Himalayan heritage makes them remarkably well-suited to the bitter Alaskan winters. As demand for the meat grows, more and more restaurants are adding yak dishes to their repertoire.

One of Anchorage's most loved restaurants is also known for its delicious yak dishes. 49th State Brewing Company offers yak burgers, yak nachos, and indulgent yak-a-dillas (quesadillas containing yak), all of which are sure to satisfy your meaty cravings.

ANOTHER OF ALASKA'S FINEST CATCHES IS THE KING CRAB, KNOWN FOR ITS RICH, MEATY FLAVOUR AND OF COURSE, FOR ITS SIZE. “ ”



2 KING CRAB

Another of Alaska's finest catches is the king crab, known for its rich, meaty flavour and of course, for its size. Dwarfing all other varieties caught in Alaskan waters, the king crab is low in fat and calories, and contains plenty of protein and omega-3. It's also one of the hardest marine creatures to snag, as king crabs are wild-caught and harvested from treacherous seas.

Tracy's King Crab Shack has been serving up mouth-watering king crab for years now, first from a modest stall and now from a bright red restaurant in downtown Juneau. Owner Tracy is passionate about the Alaskan crustaceans and it shows—order a portion complete with hot melted butter and try not to salivate.

3 FISH

Between its great lakes and seas, Alaska is home to 48 species of fish, making it an angler's paradise. Grab a rod and join in, or watch the experts attempt to bag the biggest catch of the day, from chinook salmon to rainbow trout. Thanks to the variety available, people can enjoy almost every imaginable fish dish if they know where to look. From grilled salmon, to rockfish tacos and cioppino stew, Alaskan restaurant menus are a mecca for seafood lovers.

Indulge in an unbeatable helping of good, old-fashioned fish and chips at the Alaska Fish and Chips Company in downtown Juneau. Their deep fried halibut and chips is regarded as one of the best in the city; sit out on the

4 FRESH OYSTERS

Alaskan oysters are heralded as some of the world's tastiest, but the molluscs don't grow here naturally. Oysters require estuaries abundant in high-quality plankton to thrive, and while waters surrounding the state tick both of these boxes, the cold temperatures prevent them from reproducing. Today, thanks to advancements in harvesting methods, the fledgling Alaskan shellfish industry continues to grow, and as does the amount of specialty oyster restaurants.

The Cookery Oyster Bar in the city of Seward has a wine and seafood-studded menu, but its oysters steal the show. They're available shucked with a selection of sauces, or broiled with bacon and/or 'everything butter.' Don't forget the bubbly! ▶





5 FRY BREAD

This traditional snack is sure to satisfy all of your carb cravings. A Moorish delight, fry bread is made from flat dough, deep-fried until the outside is crisp and the inside soft and fluffy. While the treat is now popular in bakeries, fry bread is thought to have been invented out of desperation. When the crops of Native Alaskans were destroyed and their hunting lifestyles outlawed, they used their rations of flour, sugar and fat to create something edible and fry bread was born. Today, the act of making and enjoying fry bread connects generations of Alaskans to their past.

Klondike Doughboy's rendition of fry bread is known as some of the best on the commercial market, coming in behind the traditional, handmade variety from an Alaskan Native's kitchen.

6 REINDEER SAUSAGE

Once confined to street stalls, reindeer sausages have become one of the state's most iconic foods. Alaskan reindeer are considered a type of caribou, and descendants from a herd of Siberian reindeer brought over in the 19th century. Today, reindeer sausage — typically a mix of reindeer and pork or beef mince — is a breakfast staple across Alaska, served as a side to eggs, toast or even pancakes, as well as grilled and topped with onion.

For a classic rendition, visit the Red Umbrella Reindeer stall in Anchorage, where owner Andres Guarderas has been slinging fresh reindeer sausages with his homemade 'boss sauce' for over 10 years. Guarderas closes up shop in the cooler months, so be sure to plan your visit between April and September.



7 WILD BERRIES

While seafood is the star attraction, come August, Alaska's wild landscape transforms into a sea of reds and pinks, thanks to its abundant wild berries. It's thought that the extensive daylight hours and so-called midnight sun allows for extensive photosynthesis, meaning plants and crops grow exceptionally well. Everyone is free to pick wild berries with abandon (excluding on private properties), but a degree of care is needed; some berries are poisonous, while others are foraged by grizzly, four-legged locals.

For a taste of Alaskan spring, head to Humpy's Alaskan Alehouse to try their famous berry crisp, served warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

8 AKUTAQ

The last recommendation is an obscure one. In fact, you'd be lucky to find somewhere selling an authentic bowl of akutaq like the Alaskan Native's once enjoyed. Searching for it is half the fun. The dish resembling a sort of ice cream traditionally contained things like animal fats, caribou meat, fish, berries, snow and seal oil. While the combination may sound odd, the dish's high fat content was essential for combating extreme temperatures and commonly eaten when hunting.

Each family has their own methods and ingredients for making akutaq. These days, iterations often substitute the raw animal fat for crisco, and add sugar to make it more palatable. Some ice cream shops bring out akutaq flavours reminiscent of the centuries-old treat, but you may have to befriend an Alaskan Native for a taste of the real deal. ●



The team at Travel Alaska share their recommendations for first-time visitors

GUIDE TO →
WHAT TO EXPECT
ON YOUR FIRST TRIP
TO ALASKA

WITH SWEEPING mountain ranges, soaring peaks, and wildlife galore, Alaska is practically a highlight reel of nature's greatest hits. The US state bordering Canadian Yukon has an impressive set of stats to support its status as one of the most awe-inspiring destinations in the world. It's home to dozens of volcanoes and volcanic calderas, over 3,000 rivers, three million lakes, more than half of the world's glaciers and 17 of the highest peaks in the United States. Needless to say, if you're looking for a place to connect with nature, whether on foot or by plane, Alaska is the place for you.

We spoke to Travel Alaska, the official state of Alaska tourism office, to find out their top tips and recommendations for first-time travellers to Alaska. ▶

(Image: Shutterstock)



Top to bottom: Views of Glacier Moraine and Glacier Lake; totem pole at Ketchikan; Ketchikan marina; Northern Lights in Fairbanks

A HISTORY LESSON

Geographically speaking, Alaska is blessed. Its location in the far north-west of North America makes it a crucial gateway to the Arctic; it's also bordered by the Beaufort Sea in the north, the Gulf of Alaska and the Pacific Ocean in the south, and the Bering Strait and Sea in the west, home to some of the world's most prized catches, from king crab to chinook salmon. The state is also naturally rich in resources, such as petroleum, gold and natural gas.

Although Alaska has been a part of the United States since it was sold by Russia in 1867, and a designated state since 1959, its history stretches back millennia. Alaska is made up of five groups of Alaska Natives from different regions of the state: Inupiaq, Athabascan, Yup'ik and Cup'ik, Alutiq and Eyak, Haida and Tsimshian cultures dominated Alaska for thousands of years and make up about 15% of the state's population today.

The best way to learn about the rich heritage and traditions of Alaska's indigenous people is by visiting one of the state's museums, such as the Anchorage Museum or the Alaska Native Heritage Centre.

NATIONAL PARKS

Alaska is home to 15 parks, preserves, monuments and national historical parks, covering an astounding 54 million acres of Alaska land. This works out to over 60% of all land managed by the National Park Service nationwide. Within the confines of its protected land, rich biodiversity thrives. Animals big and small, from grizzly bears, to beavers and bison frequent these parts of the state, in addition to its most famous residents: elk, moose and caribou.

Time spent in one of the parks will give visitors access to the best of the state, with opportunities to view glaciers, mountains and look for wildlife. Some of the state's must-see attractions are located in these parts, such as Glacier Bay National Park and Denali National Park and Preserve.



CLIMATE

Numerous myths surround Alaskan weather. Many believe the state is permanently frosty when in reality, Alaska's climate varies substantially from region to region, and each season offers something different to travellers.

Head north and expect bitter temperatures, thanks to its subarctic climate, high latitude and air masses that travel across the Bering Strait from Siberia. Venture a little further south to interior Alaska and the climate varies dramatically between seasons. Summer (June to September) is relatively mild, but visit in winter (December to March) and you'll need a good set of thermals — Alaska's lowest temperatures are continually recorded in this region, with the US record of -62 degrees celsius taken at Prospect Creek in 1971.

During the summer, temperatures tend to fluctuate between 15-27 degrees celsius and feature long days of sunlight, perfect for exploring. Travel Alaska says it's becoming a year-round destination,

as visitors book winter trips to see the Northern Lights. Hikers and wildlife enthusiasts may opt for summer travel but visiting between January and late-March is best for snow sports, traditional dog mushing and to catch the magnificent views of the Aurora Borealis.

No matter when you're planning a visit to capital Juneau, be sure to pack a raincoat. The southern capital city experiences precipitation on average, 222 days a year.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

One major factor driving winter tourism to the 49th state is the Northern Lights. Predominantly seen near the North Pole, this natural phenomenon lights up the sky when charged particles from the sun collide with gaseous particles in the earth's atmosphere.

The Aurora Borealis can be seen across Alaska, depending on weather conditions. It is best to get away from city lights and to an area with unobstructed views of the sky, says Travel Alaska.

Fairbanks is one town that fits this bill. It's considered by many to be the best places in the state for aurora spotting, thanks to its location under the aurora oval.

If visitors spend three nights looking for the aurora in Fairbanks and surrounding areas in interior Alaska, they have a 90% chance of seeing the lights, recommends Travel Alaska. ▶

(All images: Shutterstock)



Clockwise from bottom left: Sea plane on the waters of Upper Trail Lake on the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska; Alaska king crab; Moose has right of way in Denali National Park

TRANSPORT

Travelling across Alaska is unlike other destinations. While much of the state is connected by the usual road and rail, many of its wildlife hotspots are remote, so the easiest (and often only) way to visit is by bush or float plane. Anchorage is home to the world's busiest seaplane base, averaging 800 takeoffs and landings every day, culminating in roughly 90,000 total between late spring and early autumn.

These light aircrafts are a fascinating experience of their own,

offering panoramic views of the Alaskan landscape as they efficiently transport people from city to wilderness. Travel Alaska recommends taking a flightseeing trip to watch bears fish for salmon on remote rivers.

Another great way to get around Alaska is by boat. Whether you're eager to cruise a fjord, ferry between ports or kayak to a glacier, there are plenty of options available. If you're lucky, you might spot some marine life along the way.



MANY OF ITS WILDLIFE HOTSPOTS ARE REMOTE, SO THE EASIEST (AND OFTEN ONLY) WAY TO VISIT IS BY BUSH OR FLOAT PLANE

CUISINE

Typical Alaskan cuisine centres around traditional recipes and local produce. If Alaskan's can catch it or forage for it, there's a good chance it will be on menus across the state. Many bars and saloons across the state offer hearty meals made from the farm-raised game like venison, but to sample Alaska native dishes, you may need to befriend some locals.

Alaska's most popular ingredient is undoubtedly seafood, sourced from the many bodies of water surrounding the state. A few of its most popular species are salmon, trout, halibut and crab.

WILDLIFE

Alaska's pristine landscape and low population density create optimal conditions for flora and fauna, and boy do they thrive. The state is home to all manner of wildlife, from marine creatures to ferocious carnivores, migratory birds and dozens of land-based mammals, making it a veritable paradise for animal lovers.

The sprawling national parks act as wildlife sanctuaries, allowing animals to roam free in their native territories as nature intended. To spot Alaska's big five — moose, grizzly bears, caribou, grey wolves and Dall sheep (named after scientist William Healey Dall) — make a beeline for Denali National Park and Preserve. For humpback and blue whales, jump on a southern coastal cruise during the summer, or take a boat trip through Kenai Fjords National Park where you may also see harbour seals and sea lions. ●



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Maria Wilson



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