



50 Ways to See Alaska

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Alaska celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2009. We found 50 unique ways to experience the "Last Frontier" all year long.

1. Turning 50 this year? Your birthday gets you a free ticket on the [Alaska Railroad](#), which stretches from Seward to Anchorage, then continues up through Denali National Park to Fairbanks. With their dome cars, every seat feels like a window seat. Disembark to climb on glaciers, canoe and kayak, or camp in the park. +1 907 265 2494.
2. Grab a spot on a sled dog team through the annual [IditaRider](#) auction. A winning bid (or a upfront fee of \$7,500) will get you a ride on a sled through 11 miles through Anchorage the day before the official race begins. Anchorage, +1 800 545 6874.
3. Visit the Nikolaevsk Russian village on the Kenai peninsula, and a welcoming committee most likely will come in the form of Nina Fefelov of the [Samovar Café and Gift Shop](#), who is known to invite guests to dress up in traditional garb, and serve them piroshki and borscht. While in town, visit the dazzling icons painted throughout the St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox church. Nikolaevsk, +1 907 235 6867.
4. For nearly 20 years, international teams of ice-cutters have converged on Fairbanks to create huge, sometimes 25-foot-tall sculptures at the [World Ice Art Championships](#). These guys work through the night whittling away at their frozen masterpieces, but there's an amateur classic if you want to get the hang of it yourself. Held every March. Fairbanks, +1 907 451 8250.
5. Stay with chef Kristen Dixon, who with her husband owns the five-cabin [Winterlake Lodge](#) along the Iditarod trail, 198 miles northwest of Anchorage. A cookbook author and hotelier, Dixon imports cheeses from Murray's in New York, and hosts wine-tasting sessions and cooking classes. Work off your organically prepared meals with yoga sessions, guided hikes, and bear-viewing trips. Winter Lake, +1 907 274 2710.
6. Float along the Chilkat River on a 21-mile guided viewing tour of the Bald Eagle Reserve in Haines, just one part of the week-long [Bald Eagle Festival](#) held in November each year. Watch as over 3,000 eagles make the most of salmon spawning season, and learn more about our national symbol from photographers and preservationists working in the field. Haines, +1 907 766 3094.
7. If you want to stay in the eight public-use cabins in [Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge](#), don't plan on driving

there. These rustic cabins are only accessible by boat or floatplane, but once you settle in, you can hike through the park's trails, looking for moose, lynx, black bears, and wolves. The lottery for cabins starts three months in advance; cost per cabin is a staggeringly cheap \$20 per night. Kodiak, +1 907 487 2600.

8. Dream of skiing with the likes of Tommy Moe or Laird Hamilton? Sign up for the Kings and Corn heli-skiing package from [Chugach Powder Guides](#) and one of them might be along for the ride. This five-day adventure trip combines king salmon fishing and corn-snow heli-skiing on the Tordillo Mountains. Not for the fainthearted! Girdwood, +1 907 783 4354.

9. Pop quiz: Which national scenic byway is not only a road? The [Alaska Marine Highway](#) includes the Aleutian Island ferry system, and you can grab a spot in their onboard cabin (or pitch a tent on the ferry's roof) to visit the World War II embankments, Russian villages, and the native Alaskan town of Nilokski, believed to be the oldest active town site in North America. Based in Juneau. +1 800 642 0066.

10. Travel the [Golden Circle](#), a linked highway and ferry system considered one of the most beautiful drives in the world. Connecting Haines and Skagway, Alaska, with Whitehorse, British Columbia, the route takes you through mountain passages first carved out by miners and World War II soldiers. The trip typically takes three days by car or RV, but many have cycled it as well. +1 800 661 0494.

11. For quirky Alaska at its best, don't miss the annual [Talkeetna Moose Dropping Festival](#) held every July. Yes, there's music and a parade, but you're there for the weekend's highlights: The Moose Drop Dropping (fecal matter launched at a large bulls-eye target) and the Mountain Mother Contest (moms competing to chop firewood, diaper a baby, shoot bows and arrows, and prepare a pie). Talkeetna, +1 907 733 2487.

12. From the outside, the facade of [Fairbanks's Museum of the North](#) evokes the glaciers, alpine ridges, and icy waters of the Yukon River. Inside the museum, you'll find the cultural elements that have developed within the landscape, like ivory figures and tools, contemporary paintings, and a sound and light exhibit drawn from daylight cycles and the phases of the moon. Fairbanks, +1 907 474 7505.

13. Skagway's annual [50K Buckwheat Ski Classic](#) is a testament to the hearty nature of local legend Buckwheat Donahue, who created the race, which loops from Alaska through British Columbia, over 20 years ago. An amalgam of cross-country skiers gather each year, often in costume, for this raucous mix of all-out athleticism and full-on mirth. If you're up for a lesser challenge, opt for the 25K or 10K races. Skagway, +1 907 983 2127 or +1 907 983 2354.

14. Explore the oft-overlooked areas of Alaska's Inside Passage with [Alaska Sea Adventures](#), based out of Petersburg. Captain Dennis Rogers was a commercial fisherman for 26 years before opening his custom charter operation, so he knows the nooks where you can best see humpbacks or the annual herring spawn. Trips can be catered to your specific interest, be it birding, photography, or fishing. Petersburg, +1 907 772 4700.

15. Tipple samples of locally brewed beer on a tour of the [Alaskan Brewing Company](#), operating in Juneau for over 20 years. This eco-friendly company is committed to good stewardship of the Earth, but they also serve up some tasty ales, ambers, and stouts. Be sure to sample their Rough Drafts, experimental tastes brewed in

the original ten-barrel brewhouse where the company started. Tours are complimentary. Juneau, +1 907 780 5866.

16. Hop on the [Mount Roberts Tramway](#) and rise 1,800 feet over Juneau, taking in the vistas of the nearby Chilkat Mountains and Gastineau Channel. Local artisans and musicians greet you at the summit, where performances and lessons on Tlingit culture are held in the Mountain House. Hike the surrounding trails for outstanding photo ops. Juneau, +1 907 463 3412.

17. Wander along the shores of [Petroglyph Beach](#) in Wrangell, admiring the stone carvings chiseled into boulders and rock outcrops along the tideline. This collection of over 40 glyphs is one of the best surviving collections in Southeast Alaska. Scientists still don't completely understand their full meaning, but believe they may have some magic-religious significance in historic cultures. Wrangell, +1 907 874 2381.

18. This summer, [Alaska Wildland Adventures](#) will open the first lodge within Kenai Fjords National Park. The sustainably designed Glacier Lodge sits on the foot of a protected lagoon, allowing you to kayak through the glacial ice alongside harbor seals, puffins, and humpback whales. All inclusive. Kenai Peninsula, +1 800 334 8730.

19. Recently recognized with an award from *Traveler* and the Travel Industry Association for sustainable tourism, [Icy Strait Point](#) is a private cruise ship destination that has done a fantastic job of preserving the native Tlingit culture on Chichagof Island. Visitors stopping for a day trip can choose between 16 tour options like exploring the original cannery, built in 1912, riding a mile-long zip line (the longest in North America), or grabbing lunch at their famous Crab Station. Staffed nearly entirely by locals, most of whom are Alaska natives, the site gives visitors the opportunity to soak up cultural offerings, such as crafts and dance demonstrations, and participate in historical presentation on language and music. Hoonah, +1 907 945-3141.

20. If your focus is fish, the [Riversong Lodge](#) might be a lure worth biting. These ten cabins, located 70 miles northwest of Anchorage, are outside of cell phone range. In fact, there are no electronics of any kind on site—allowing you to enjoy the quiet and get ready to reel in some five species of salmon, plus rainbow trout, arctic grayling and northern pike. Learn to fly-fish and tie lures, or follow along with their on-site chefs as they help you prepare your catch and offer culinary demonstrations throughout your stay. +1 907 350 2392.

21. You'll have to bus 90 miles into Denali National Park to find [Camp Denali and the North Face Lodge](#), one of the few guest properties within the six million miles of parkland wilderness. The hand-hewn lodges have been on site since 1952 and were first founded by two women WASP pilots who settled there after World War II. Based on the Nordic hut system, the lodge is considered by many to be the country's first eco-lodge, and its commitment to sustainable living is furthered by the collection of area guides, scientists, and anthropologists who act as visiting resource leaders for guests. +1 907 683 2290.

22. Kayak through fjords and inlets in the Misty Fjords National Monument. Located in the [Tongass National Forest](#), Misty Fjords also has 15 miles of hiking trails. Have binoculars ready to catch a glimpse of bears, eagles, and spawning salmon, and spend the night in a cabin by the clear, blue-green water (reservations required). The area is accessible only by boat or air charter. Ketchikan, +1 907 225 2148.

23. Get an up-close glimpse of eagles, hawks, and falcons at the [Alaska Raptor Center](#) in Sitka. The Bald

Eagle Flight Training Center helps injured birds recover their survival skills. Other birds too injured to return to the wild make their homes in the open-air "Raptors in Residence" area. May-Sept. Sitka, +1 800 643 9425.

24. All things Alaska—and then some—are on display at the [Alaska State Museum](#). Admire beach grass baskets woven by ancient Aleuts, sit in a 34-foot *umiak* (boat) made by Eskimos, and check out the unusual Lincoln Totem, a totem pole with the likeness of the former President on top. Juneau, +1 907 465 2901.

25. Watch thousands of salmon jockey for food from an elevated platform at the Macaulay Salmon Hatchery in Juneau. A guided tour explains how the hatchery fuels the local economy. The site also features a massive aquarium with more than a hundred species of fish and a shop offering local salmon products. May-Sept.; by appointment only in winter. Juneau, +1 907 463 5114.

26. Step through the swinging doors of the Mascot Saloon in [Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park](#) and imagine gold prospectors unwinding around the bar and piano after a long day on the trail. To learn about the experience of homesteading, visit the Moore House and Cabin (May-Sept.). Located 110 miles south of Whitehorse, Canada, in Skagway, +1 907 983 2921.

27. North America's largest system of glaciers covers over 5,000 square miles of the [Wrangell-St. Elias National Park](#). The park is also home to Mount St. Elias, the United States' second highest mountain peak, and the best way to view the massive glacial area is via flightplane. The visitor center is located at mile 106 Richardson Highway between Glennallen and Copper Center, +1 907 822 5234.

28. Although the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes in [Katmai National Park and Preserve](#) no longer "smokes," you can hike to a section of the valley (June-Sept.) for an up-close look at the layers of colorful ash from the 1912 eruption. In the summer, watch groups of brown bears catching their dinner during the salmon runs. Access the park by plane or boat; +1 907 246 3305.

29. A colorful visual history lesson awaits you at the [Totem Heritage Center](#), where over 17 restored totem poles from the 19th century are on display. The totem poles were rescued from abandoned Tlingit and Haida villages near Ketchikan. Ketchikan, +1 907 225 5900.

30. Aviation buffs can admire the dozens of meticulously restored vintage aircraft from the 1920s on at the [Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum](#) in Anchorage. Be sure to visit the Restoration Hangar, where you can watch devoted volunteers work on the museum's next labor of love. Anchorage, +1 907 248 5325.

31. Delve into the depths at the [Alaska SeaLife Center](#) in Seward, 125 miles south of Anchorage, at milepost 0 of the Seward Highway. Alaska's only public aquarium calls itself your "window on the sea" and delivers with a series of behind-the-scenes tours of the research and wildlife rehabilitation efforts. You can meet a marine mammal keeper, get to know a 2,000+ pound Steller sea lion, learn about the giant Pacific octopus, or even dissect a squid. Seward, +1 907 224 6300.

32. The 182-acre [Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park](#), a national historic landmark, is a haven for outdoor junkies and history buffs three miles north of Kodiak. The fort was part of the strategic buildup of coastal defenses during World War II when Japanese planes were sighted within 125 miles of the fort. Descend into

the restored bunker, now the Kodiak Military History Museum, to get a sense of the period and check out the remaining gun mounts. Kodiak, +1 907 486 6339.

33. [Lake Clark National Park and Preserve](#) is quintessential Alaska, accessible only by plane, about one to two hours from Anchorage, Kenai, or Homer. Highlights include the park's two active volcanoes, Iliamna and Redoubt, which are part of the Pacific's Ring of Fire, and the Telaquana Trail. But make sure to see Dick Proenneke's cabin, which was crafted in 1968 entirely with hand tools. Considered by some this century's Thoreau (with the Twin Lakes area serving as his Walden), Proenneke spent 30 years off the grid, painstakingly crafting utilitarian wood pieces and penning detailed journals documenting his woodworking and the splendid nature around him. + 1 907 781 2218.

34. Think you can handle infamous Alaskan winters? Don a parka and step inside the 40° below zero F chamber at the [Alaska at 40° Below](#) subzero experience to find out. If you enjoy temperatures frigid enough to vaporize hot water when it is thrown into the air, you may just be an Alaskan at heart. Locations in Fairbanks, +1 866 479 6673, and Denali, +1 800 426 0500.

35. Have you ever played tug-of-war using your ear? How far can you walk while carrying four people at once? You can see these, as well as other traditional strength and agility competitions, including the Nalukataq (in which a group tosses a teammate 30 feet in the air using walrus skins), at the [World Eskimo-Indian Olympics](#) held each July. Fairbanks +1 907 452 6646.

36. Climbers and hikers alike head to the [Chena River State Recreation Area](#) to view wildlife and to scale the popular Granite Tors during summer months. The trail leading to these towering rock formations (some over 100 feet tall) boasts a variety of wildflowers from May through July and is "one of the most awe-inspiring hikes" in the park. Fairbanks, +1 907 451 2705.

37. See native Alaskan artists in action—carving totem poles, beading necklaces, weaving, and crafting other folk art—at the [Sheldon Jackson Museum](#) in Sitka, +1 907 747 8981.

38. Explore the rifts, mountains, and coastline of [Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve](#), a "living laboratory" that attracts scientists from around the world. Sea kayak through the tidewater forest, keeping a lookout for black bears, arctic foxes, gray wolves, and bald eagles. Go flightseeing from nearby communities for a holistic view of Glacier Bay. +1 907 697 2230.

39. Discover the local Tlingit culture at the [Clausen Museum](#) in Petersburg. Peruse more than 5,000 artifacts and 45,000 photographs documenting the fishing history of the Scow Bay channel. You can even learn how to catch and clean a fish yourself, just as the Tlingit Indians have done for thousands of years. +1 907 772 3598.

40. Visit the largest seabird refuge in the world at the [Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center](#), located on dramatic Kachemak Bay. Unique stained-glass sandhill cranes and hand-sculpted sea objects created by local artists dot the landscape. Check out brown bag seminars led by local nature experts, or attend the annual AlaskaWILD photography exhibit in August. +1 907 235 6961.

41. The only way to get to [Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve](#) is by air charter from King Salmon, but it's worth the effort to steer clear of the crowds. Hike to the bottom of a six-mile-wide, 2,500-foot volcanic

caldera set on the Ring of Fire, or take to the rapids of Aniakchak River. Soak up the vibrant colors of the western shores of Surprise Lake, where thermally influenced springs drain and light up the landscape with its rich iron content. +1 907 246 3305.

42. Want to come face-to-face with Alaska's fiercest wildlife? Visit the [Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center](#), a nonprofit center for injured and orphaned animals open everyday year-round. While there, watch bison meander through 65 acres of tidal flat terrain, snap photos of coyotes and bald eagles feasting on salmon remains left by grizzly bears, and observe the birth of newborn Rocky Mountain elk in June. Portage Glacier, +1 907 783 2025.

43. Drop a fishing line in the Nick Dudiak Fishing Lagoon to catch a trophy-size king of silver salmon on [Homer Spit](#). Not a fishing enthusiast? Enjoy a walk down the narrow, 4.5-mile stretch of sandy shoal, or shop and dine along Kachemak Drive. Homer, +1 907 235 7740.

44. Fly into [Togiak National Wildlife Refuge](#) to camp, fish, or hunt among 4.7 million acres of protected forest. The land is home to more than 30 species of terrestrial mammals, 200 species of birds, and 3 million fish. Interested in learning more about the Alaskan wilderness? Enroll in one of their environmental education camps, like the river ecology float camp. Dillingham, +1 907 842 1063.

45. The annual [Mt. Marathon Race](#) in Seward started as a fight between friends. Arguing over whether someone could climb and descend the mountain in less than an hour, they decided to race, and the event was born. Today, runners from around the world gather to take on the hilly climb, which is held each year on the 4th of July. Seward, +1 907 224 8051.

46. Celebrated every year in Anchorage, the [Fur Rondy](#) (Rendezvous) is Alaska's version of the Winter Carnival. The weeklong celebration is held each February, and locals come out for a host of odd events like the Running of the Reindeer, a Frostbitten Foot Race, and an Outhouse Race, plus fireworks displays, ice skating, and the annual Miners and Trappers Ball. Anchorage, +1 907 274 1177.

47. Combine the bliss that you feel at the peak of a mountaintop hike with the calm of a great yoga session with the [Yoga and Rock Climbing seminar](#) offered by Ascending Path expeditions and Laughing Lotus Yoga Studios. The hike goes up through Hatcher Pass, and the yoga focuses on deep breathing, stretching, and relaxation. Available in the summer. Anchorage, +1 907 783 0505.

48. Available for only a few weeks each summer, the trips arranged by [Walrus Islands Expeditions](#) take you to one of the most remote areas of Alaska's Bering Strait. Explore Walrus or Round Island to see the puffins and walrus that hang out on the shores, then hike the islands' trails to find seabird colonies and salmon-hunting bears. Available for day trips or overnight stays. Homer, +1 907 235 9349.

49. Over 200 Native Alaskan women make up the [Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers Cooperative](#), and together they knit the soft underwool, known as qiviut, shed by the oxen each summer. Each woman works on their projects remotely, knitting patterns distinct to each village, and then send their finished projects to the co-op store in Anchorage. Visit the store to choose from their exquisite scarves, stoles, hats, and tunics. Anchorage +1 907 272 9225.

50. Visit the [Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository](#) in downtown Kodiak. Don't miss the museum's archaeological and ethnological collection of 150,000 objects spanning 7,500 years, and take a tour of its exhibits and conservation laboratory. The museum hosts many events throughout the year, including the Last-Minute Shopper's Bazaar in December and a community archaeological dig you can truly sink your hands into in the summer months. Kodiak, +1 907 486 7004.

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