

Things to Do in Alaska: Ultimate Guide to Top Attractions & Adventures



Alaska is one of the most extraordinary [*travel destinations in the United States*](#). Known as the Last Frontier, this vast state offers dramatic landscapes, untouched wilderness, and outdoor adventures that few places in the world can match. Travelers come here to experience towering mountains, massive glaciers, remote national parks, and incredible wildlife.

From the rugged peaks surrounding Denali to the glacier-filled fjords of Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska delivers unforgettable scenery at every turn. Visitors can watch humpback whales in the waters near Juneau, see the northern lights dance above Fairbanks, or explore the cultural and outdoor attractions of Anchorage.

What makes Alaska especially unique is the diversity of experiences across its towns and regions. Coastal communities offer glacier cruises and marine wildlife

encounters, while interior destinations provide opportunities to see the aurora borealis, historic gold rush sites, and vast Arctic landscapes.

This [*Alaska travel guide*](#) highlights the best things to do in Alaska, organized by major cities and travel regions. Each section introduces the top attractions, outdoor adventures, and unique experiences travelers should not miss when visiting the state. Whether you are planning a summer road trip, a wildlife expedition, or a northern lights getaway, Alaska offers something unforgettable for every type of traveler.

Explore the Best Experiences and Things to do in Alaska

Alaska is vast, and each destination offers a completely different experience. Some places are known for glaciers and marine wildlife, while others are famous for northern lights, national parks, or mountain adventures. The sections below highlight the best things travelers can do in Alaska's most popular destinations.

Things to Do in Anchorage



Located between the waters of Cook Inlet and the rugged Chugach Mountains, **Anchorage** is Alaska's largest city and the starting point for many travelers exploring the state. The city blends modern attractions with easy access to wilderness areas, making it one of the best places to experience both Alaska's culture and outdoor adventures.

- **Visit the Anchorage Museum:** The Anchorage Museum is the largest museum in Alaska and one of the best places to understand the state's culture, art, and history. The museum features exhibits on Alaska Native heritage, Arctic exploration, science, and regional history. Visitors can explore contemporary Alaska Native art, interactive science exhibits, and historical displays that explain how Alaska developed from indigenous communities to modern cities.
- **Bike or Walk the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail:** The Tony Knowles Coastal Trail is one of Anchorage's most scenic outdoor attractions. This 11-mile trail runs along the shoreline of Cook Inlet and offers incredible views of mountains, forests, and wildlife. Travelers often spot moose, bald eagles, and even beluga whales while biking or walking the path. The trail connects

downtown Anchorage to Kincaid Park and is popular with both locals and visitors.

- **Experience Alaska Native Culture at the Alaska Native Heritage Center:** The Alaska Native Heritage Center provides an immersive look into the traditions of Alaska's Indigenous cultures. Visitors can see traditional dwellings from different Native groups, watch cultural performances, listen to storytelling, and learn about centuries-old survival techniques used in Alaska's harsh environments.
- **Hike Flattop Mountain:** Flattop Mountain is the most popular hiking destination near Anchorage. The trail offers a moderately challenging hike with rewarding panoramic views of the city, surrounding mountains, and Cook Inlet. On clear days, hikers can see far across the Chugach Mountains and sometimes even catch glimpses of Denali in the distance.
- **Explore Chugach State Park:** Just minutes from downtown Anchorage, **Chugach State Park** is one of the largest state parks in the United States. The park features hundreds of miles of hiking trails, alpine lakes, waterfalls, and wildlife viewing opportunities. Visitors can hike to scenic destinations like Thunderbird Falls or explore remote mountain valleys.
- **Take a Glacier and Wildlife Flightseeing Tour:** One of the most unforgettable experiences in Anchorage is a scenic flight over Alaska's wilderness. Flightseeing tours depart from Anchorage and take travelers over massive glaciers, rugged mountain ranges, and remote valleys. These tours often include glacier landings where visitors can walk on ancient ice fields.
- **Visit the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center:** Located about an hour south of Anchorage, this conservation center allows visitors to see rescued Alaska wildlife up close. Animals commonly seen include brown bears, musk oxen, wolves, moose, and bison. The center focuses on wildlife rehabilitation and education.

- **Drive the Scenic Turnagain Arm:** The Turnagain Arm drive is one of the most beautiful coastal drives in Alaska. The road follows the shoreline south of Anchorage and offers incredible views of mountains, glaciers, and tidal flats. Travelers often stop at viewpoints to watch beluga whales or photograph the dramatic landscape.
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Things to Do in Denali National Park



Home to North America's tallest mountain, **Denali National Park and Preserve** is one of the most famous [*wilderness destinations in Alaska*](#).. The park protects over six million acres of wild landscapes filled with mountains, glaciers, tundra, and wildlife.

- **See Denali, the Tallest Mountain in North America:** The highlight of the park is **Denali**, which rises more than 20,000 feet above sea level. On clear days, visitors can see the mountain towering above the surrounding wilderness. Several viewpoints and trails inside the park offer incredible

perspectives of the peak.

- **Take a Denali Bus Tour into the Wilderness:** Private vehicles are limited inside the park, so many visitors explore Denali through guided bus tours. These tours travel deep into the wilderness, giving travelers the chance to see wildlife and remote landscapes that few people ever experience.
 - **Watch Wildlife in Their Natural Habitat:** Denali is one of the best places in North America for wildlife viewing. Visitors often see grizzly bears, wolves, caribou, moose, and Dall sheep roaming the open tundra. Park rangers and guides help travelers identify animals and understand their behavior.
 - **Hike Scenic Trails in the Park:** Denali offers many hiking opportunities ranging from easy nature walks to challenging backcountry treks. Popular trails include the Savage River Loop Trail and Horseshoe Lake Trail, which provide beautiful views of mountains, forests, and rivers.
 - **Visit the Denali Visitor Center:** The visitor center provides educational exhibits about the park's wildlife, geology, and ecosystems. Rangers offer guided programs, wildlife talks, and safety information for travelers exploring the park.
 - **Take a Flightseeing Tour Over the Alaska Range:** Scenic flight tours from nearby airstrips allow travelers to see Denali and surrounding glaciers from the air. These flights offer incredible views of towering peaks, ice fields, and remote valleys.
 - **Experience Backcountry Camping:** Denali is famous for its remote wilderness camping opportunities. Adventurous travelers can obtain permits to camp in designated backcountry areas where they can experience Alaska's wild landscapes with minimal human presence.
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Things to Do in Juneau



Surrounded by mountains, rainforest, and glaciers, **Juneau** is one of the most scenic capital cities in the United States. Accessible only by plane or boat, Juneau offers incredible outdoor adventures and cultural attractions.

- **Visit Mendenhall Glacier:** Mendenhall Glacier is one of Alaska's most accessible glaciers. Located just a short drive from downtown Juneau, visitors can view the massive ice formation from scenic viewpoints or hike nearby trails for closer views.
- **Go Whale Watching:** Juneau is one of the best whale-watching destinations in North America. Boat tours take visitors into nearby waters where humpback whales, orcas, and sea lions are frequently spotted.
- **Ride the Mount Roberts Tramway:** The Mount Roberts Tramway carries visitors from the waterfront up into the mountains above Juneau. At the top, travelers can enjoy hiking trails, cultural exhibits, and panoramic views of the city and surrounding waterways.

- **Explore the Alaska State Museum:** This museum provides an excellent overview of Alaska's history and cultures. Exhibits highlight Alaska Native traditions, Russian colonial history, and the state's development through the gold rush and modern times.
 - **Kayak Along the Juneau Coastline:** Kayaking tours allow visitors to explore the scenic waters surrounding Juneau while spotting marine wildlife. Sea lions, harbor seals, and bald eagles are often seen during these excursions.
 - **Hike in Tongass National Forest:** Juneau sits within **Tongass National Forest**, the largest national forest in the United States. Hiking trails pass through dense rainforest, waterfalls, and coastal viewpoints.
 - **Walk Through Historic Downtown Juneau:** Downtown Juneau features historic buildings from the gold rush era, colorful waterfront shops, and local restaurants serving fresh Alaska seafood.
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Things to Do in Fairbanks



Located in Alaska's interior, **Fairbanks** is one of the best places in the world to see the northern lights. The city also offers rich Gold Rush history and unique Arctic experiences.

- **Watch the Northern Lights:** Fairbanks is one of the most reliable places to see the Aurora Borealis. During the winter months, travelers visit special viewing areas outside the city where the sky often lights up with green, purple, and pink colors.
- **Relax at Chena Hot Springs:** **Chena Hot Springs Resort** is a popular destination located about an hour from Fairbanks. Visitors can relax in outdoor hot springs while surrounded by snowy landscapes and mountain views.
- **Visit the University of Alaska Museum of the North:** This museum showcases Alaska's natural history, wildlife, and indigenous cultures. One of its most famous exhibits includes the preserved remains of ancient animals discovered in the Arctic.

- **Take a Riverboat Discovery Cruise:** Riverboat tours on the Chena River introduce visitors to Alaska's river culture, including dog sledding demonstrations, bush plane landings, and traditional Athabascan fishing camps.
 - **Explore Pioneer Park:** Pioneer Park is a historic theme park celebrating Alaska's Gold Rush era. Visitors can explore restored buildings, museums, and exhibits highlighting the region's early settlers.
 - **Experience Dog Sledding:** Dog sledding is one of Alaska's most iconic winter activities. In Fairbanks, travelers can visit sled dog kennels and even ride behind teams of energetic huskies.
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Things to Do in Seward



Located on the Kenai Peninsula, **Seward** is one of Alaska's most scenic coastal towns. It serves as the main gateway to Kenai Fjords National Park and offers incredible marine wildlife and glacier adventures.

- **Take a Kenai Fjords National Park Cruise:** Boat tours into **Kenai Fjords National Park** allow visitors to see tidewater glaciers, towering cliffs, and abundant marine wildlife. These cruises often include sightings of whales, sea lions, puffins, and sea otters.
- **Visit the Alaska SeaLife Center:** The Alaska SeaLife Center is both a public aquarium and marine research facility. Visitors can see rescued marine animals and learn about the ecosystems of Alaska's coastal waters.
- **Hike the Harding Icefield Trail:** The Harding Icefield Trail is one of Alaska's most rewarding hikes. The trail climbs high above the landscape and provides spectacular views of the massive Harding Icefield and surrounding glaciers.
- **Go Sea Kayaking in Resurrection Bay:** Kayaking tours allow visitors to paddle among glaciers and explore quiet coves along Resurrection Bay. These tours often include close encounters with sea birds, seals, and sea otters.
- **Take a Wildlife and Glacier Flightseeing Tour:** Small aircraft tours departing from Seward provide dramatic aerial views of glaciers, fjords, and rugged mountain landscapes.
- **Walk the Seward Waterfront:** Seward's harbor area is filled with fishing boats, tour vessels, and scenic mountain views. The waterfront path is a relaxing place to enjoy the coastal scenery and watch wildlife in the bay.

Things to Do in Homer



Located on the scenic shores of Kachemak Bay, **Homer** is known for its thriving fishing industry, vibrant arts community, and stunning coastal scenery. Travelers exploring **things to do in Homer** will quickly discover that the town offers a mix of outdoor adventure, wildlife encounters, and cultural experiences on Alaska's beautiful Kenai Peninsula.

- **Walk Along the Homer Spit:** The Homer Spit is the town's most iconic landmark. This narrow stretch of land extends nearly five miles into Kachemak Bay and is lined with seafood restaurants, fishing charters, small shops, and scenic viewpoints. Visitors often spend hours exploring the harbor, watching fishing boats arrive with their daily catch, and enjoying spectacular views of glaciers and mountains across the bay.
- **Go Halibut Fishing in Kachemak Bay:** Homer is widely known as the "Halibut Fishing Capital of the World." Charter boats take visitors into the waters of Kachemak Bay where anglers can catch massive Pacific halibut. Fishing trips are available for beginners and experienced anglers alike, and many visitors consider this one of the most memorable experiences in

Alaska.

- **Explore Kachemak Bay State Park:** Across the bay from Homer lies **Kachemak Bay State Park**, the first state park established in Alaska. Accessible by water taxi, the park features rugged mountains, alpine lakes, and scenic hiking trails. Popular activities include kayaking, wildlife watching, and hiking through pristine wilderness areas.
- **Visit the Pratt Museum:** The Pratt Museum offers exhibits focused on the natural environment, marine ecosystems, and cultural history of the Homer region. Visitors can learn about Alaska Native traditions, local wildlife, and the region's fishing heritage.
- **Take a Water Taxi to Remote Wilderness Areas:** Water taxis depart regularly from the Homer Spit and transport travelers to remote cabins, hiking trails, and beaches across Kachemak Bay. This is one of the easiest ways to access Alaska's untouched wilderness.
- **Watch Wildlife Around Kachemak Bay:** The waters and coastline around Homer are home to sea otters, seals, whales, and a wide variety of seabirds. Wildlife watching tours provide excellent opportunities to observe these animals in their natural environment.

Things to Do in Sitka



Located on Baranof Island along Alaska's Inside Passage, **Sitka** combines dramatic coastal scenery with a rich blend of Alaska Native and Russian heritage. Travelers researching **things to do in Sitka** will find a destination known for historic landmarks, wildlife encounters, and beautiful island landscapes.

- **Explore Sitka National Historical Park:** **Sitka National Historical Park** preserves the site of an important battle between Russian forces and the Tlingit people in the early 1800s. The park features scenic forest trails lined with traditional totem poles and cultural exhibits explaining the region's history.
- **Visit St. Michael's Cathedral:** One of Sitka's most recognizable landmarks, **St. Michael's Cathedral** reflects the city's Russian colonial past. The church features beautiful architecture and religious artifacts dating back to the 19th century.
- **See Rescued Bears at Fortress of the Bear:** Fortress of the Bear is a wildlife rescue facility that provides safe housing for orphaned or injured bears. Visitors can watch brown and black bears from elevated viewing

platforms while learning about conservation efforts.

- **Discover Birds of Prey at the Alaska Raptor Center:** The Alaska Raptor Center rehabilitates injured birds of prey including bald eagles, owls, and hawks. Educational programs allow visitors to learn about bird conservation and see these impressive birds up close.
- **Go Sea Kayaking Around Sitka's Islands:** Sitka's coastal waters are perfect for kayaking adventures. Guided tours explore sheltered bays and small islands where paddlers often see sea otters, harbor seals, and seabirds.
- **Explore Sitka's Historic Waterfront:** Sitka's harbor area offers scenic views of fishing boats, surrounding islands, and distant mountains. Many visitors enjoy walking along the waterfront while visiting local restaurants and shops.

Things to Do in Talkeetna



Located at the base of the Alaska Range, **Talkeetna** is a small mountain town famous for its views of **Denali** and its relaxed frontier atmosphere. Travelers researching **things to do in Talkeetna** often come here for scenic flight tours, river adventures, and a glimpse of Alaska's mountaineering culture.

- **Take a Flightseeing Tour Around Denali:** Talkeetna is one of the best departure points in Alaska for flightseeing tours around Denali. Small bush planes and helicopters take visitors high above glaciers, towering peaks, and vast wilderness landscapes that are difficult to access by land. These flights provide breathtaking aerial views of the Alaska Range and often include glacier landings where travelers can step onto ancient ice fields. For many visitors, a flightseeing tour from Talkeetna is one of the most unforgettable experiences of an Alaska trip.
- **Explore Talkeetna's Historic Downtown:** Talkeetna's historic downtown area is filled with colorful wooden buildings, small galleries, local cafés, and souvenir shops. Walking through the town gives visitors a glimpse of Alaska's gold rush past and its long connection to mountaineering expeditions. The relaxed atmosphere makes it a pleasant place to spend an afternoon browsing art galleries, meeting local artists, and enjoying fresh Alaska seafood in locally owned restaurants.
- **Go River Rafting on the Susitna River:** Adventure travelers can explore Alaska's wilderness by joining rafting trips on the **Susitna River**, which flows near Talkeetna. Guided tours take visitors through scenic valleys surrounded by forests and distant mountain peaks. Some rafting trips offer gentle scenic floats suitable for families, while others provide exciting whitewater sections for thrill-seekers. Wildlife sightings along the river often include bald eagles, moose, and occasionally bears.
- **Visit the Talkeetna Historical Society Museum:** The Talkeetna Historical Society Museum offers a detailed look into the town's past, including its origins as a gold rush settlement. Exhibits display historic photographs, equipment used by early miners, and stories of explorers who traveled through the region. Visitors can also learn about Talkeetna's unique role as a staging point for climbers attempting Denali expeditions. The museum

provides valuable context for understanding how this small town became an important part of Alaska's mountaineering history.

- **Watch Climbers Preparing for Denali Expeditions:** Talkeetna serves as a primary base for mountaineers attempting to climb Denali. During the climbing season, visitors often see climbers gathering supplies, organizing gear, and preparing for flights to remote glaciers. Observing this preparation process offers a fascinating glimpse into one of the world's most challenging mountaineering adventures. The town's small airport is often busy with bush planes transporting climbers to base camps deep in the Alaska Range.
 - **Enjoy Local Breweries and Restaurants:** Talkeetna is known for its welcoming community and locally owned restaurants that showcase regional ingredients. Many establishments serve fresh Alaska seafood, locally brewed craft beer, and hearty meals designed for travelers exploring the wilderness. Visitors often enjoy relaxing at outdoor patios or cozy cafés while taking in views of the surrounding mountains. The town's dining scene reflects its friendly, adventurous spirit and strong connection to Alaska's outdoor culture.
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Things to Do in Utqiagvik (Barrow)



Situated above the Arctic Circle, **Utqiagvik** offers one of the most unique travel experiences in the United States. Visitors searching for **things to do in Utqiagvik** will discover Arctic landscapes, Indigenous culture, and natural phenomena rarely seen anywhere else in the country.

- **Visit Point Barrow: Point Barrow** marks the northernmost point of the United States and sits along the Arctic Ocean. Travelers visiting this remote location can stand at the edge of the continent and experience the dramatic Arctic environment. The landscape here consists of vast tundra and icy waters that stretch toward the polar horizon. For many travelers, reaching Point Barrow represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit one of the most remote places in North America.
- **Learn About Inupiat Culture:** The **Iñupiat Heritage Center** provides an in-depth introduction to the culture and traditions of the Inupiat people who have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years. Visitors can explore exhibits featuring traditional tools, clothing, artwork, and historical photographs that illustrate how Indigenous communities adapted to extreme Arctic conditions.

- **Experience the Midnight Sun:** During the summer months, Utqiagvik experiences the phenomenon known as the midnight sun. The sun remains visible for weeks without setting, creating endless daylight. This unusual natural event allows visitors to explore the Arctic landscape at any hour of the day. Hiking, photography, and wildlife observation become especially memorable under the glowing Arctic sky.
 - **Witness the Polar Night:** In winter, the opposite phenomenon occurs when the sun remains below the horizon for several weeks. This period of darkness is known as the polar night. Despite the darkness, visitors often enjoy unique experiences such as viewing the northern lights, observing Arctic wildlife, and learning how local communities adapt to extreme seasonal conditions.
 - **Watch Arctic Wildlife:** The Arctic coastline near Utqiagvik supports a surprising variety of wildlife. Visitors may spot Arctic foxes, migratory birds, seals, and even whales moving along the coast during seasonal migrations. Guided wildlife tours help travelers understand the fragile Arctic ecosystem while providing opportunities to observe animals that are rarely seen elsewhere in the United States.
 - **Explore Arctic Coastal Landscapes:** Guided excursions introduce travelers to the tundra environment surrounding the city. These tours often explain how plants, animals, and people survive in the harsh Arctic climate. Visitors gain a deeper appreciation for the region's unique geography and cultural traditions while exploring one of the most remote landscapes in North America.
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Things to Do in Valdez



Surrounded by glaciers, mountains, and waterfalls, **Valdez** is one of Alaska's most scenic coastal destinations. Travelers researching **things to do in Valdez** often visit for glacier cruises, fishing adventures, and spectacular mountain scenery.

- **Take a Glacier Cruise in Prince William Sound:** Boat tours through **Prince William Sound** provide close views of massive tidewater glaciers and dramatic coastal landscapes. These cruises travel through calm waters surrounded by towering peaks and icy fjords. Wildlife sightings frequently include sea otters, seals, whales, and seabirds. Watching glaciers calve into the ocean is one of the most unforgettable moments visitors experience in Valdez.
- **Visit the Valdez Museum:** The Valdez Museum offers exhibits that explain the history of the town and the surrounding region. Visitors learn about Alaska's early exploration, the development of the fishing industry, and the dramatic 1964 earthquake that reshaped the town. Interactive displays and historical artifacts help travelers understand how Valdez evolved into an important port and gateway to Prince William Sound.

- **Drive Through Keystone Canyon:** Keystone Canyon is one of the most scenic drives near Valdez. The narrow canyon features towering cliffs and spectacular waterfalls cascading down the mountainsides. Two of the most famous waterfalls along the route are Bridal Veil Falls and Horsetail Falls. Photographers often stop along the highway to capture the dramatic scenery.
- **Go Kayaking Near Glaciers:** Kayaking tours provide a more intimate way to explore the waters around Valdez. Paddlers travel through quiet bays surrounded by glaciers and rugged mountain landscapes. Guided tours allow visitors to safely explore these remote environments while observing marine wildlife and drifting icebergs up close.
- **Enjoy World-Class Fishing:** Valdez is one of Alaska's top fishing destinations. Anglers visit the area to catch salmon and halibut in the nutrient-rich waters of Prince William Sound. Fishing charters depart daily during the summer season and often provide equipment, guides, and fish processing services for travelers.
- **Explore the Scenic Richardson Highway:** The **Richardson Highway** connecting Valdez to interior Alaska is widely considered one of the most beautiful drives in the state. The route passes glaciers, waterfalls, and mountain passes while offering numerous scenic viewpoints where travelers can stop to admire the landscape.

Conclusion

Alaska offers endless adventures, from the towering peaks of Denali to the icy waters of Prince William Sound. Whether you're exploring charming towns like Talkeetna and Homer, spotting wildlife in Utqiagvik, or enjoying glacier cruises in Valdez, the Last Frontier has something for every traveler.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the must-see attractions in Alaska?

Alaska's top attractions include Denali National Park, Kenai Fjords, the Alaska Range, Glacier Bay, and towns like Anchorage, Juneau, and Homer. Outdoor adventures, wildlife spotting, and scenic flights are highly recommended.

What is the best time of year to visit Alaska for sightseeing?

The [*best time to visit Alaska*](#) is late May through September when weather is milder, wildlife is active, and national parks are fully accessible. Summer also provides the longest daylight hours for exploring.

How many days should I spend in Alaska to see the highlights?

For a comprehensive trip, 10-14 days are ideal. This allows time for key destinations like Anchorage, Denali, Homer, and Juneau while enjoying activities like glacier cruises, hiking, and wildlife tours.

What outdoor activities are popular in Alaska?

Popular activities include hiking, kayaking, flightseeing tours, fishing, rafting, dog sledding, wildlife photography, and glacier tours. Most destinations have multiple outdoor options suitable for all skill levels.

Can I see the Northern Lights in Alaska?

Yes! The best places are Fairbanks and Utqiagvik from late August to April. Winter months offer longer nights, providing optimal viewing conditions for this spectacular natural display.

Are guided tours necessary in Alaska?

Guided tours are highly recommended for activities like Denali climbs, glacier landings, and wildlife viewing. Local guides provide safety, knowledge, and access to areas not easily reached independently.

What towns in Alaska are best for first-time visitors?

Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks are excellent starting points, offering access to national parks, cultural attractions, and tour operators for outdoor adventures.

Is Alaska suitable for family travel?

Absolutely. Families can enjoy wildlife tours, easy hiking trails, glacier cruises, museums, and cultural experiences. Many activities cater to kids and adults alike.

How do I travel between Alaska destinations?

Travel options include rental cars, scenic drives, ferries, bush planes, and small regional airlines. Distances can be large, so planning flights or multi-day drives is recommended.

Where can I find local experiences and cultural events in Alaska?

Small towns like Talkeetna, Homer, Sitka, and Petersburg often host cultural festivals, local markets, and art galleries. Visiting community centers and museums provides insight into Alaska Native traditions and local life.