

# Accessible Adventures in Alaska

By Debbie Fogle

It has been said that Alaska is the last frontier of the United States and for good reason. It is a wild and beautiful land rich with contrasts; majestic mountains, high-walled fjords, slow moving glaciers and still-active volcanoes. It has extremes of wind, sun, rain and snow, yet people come from all over the world to visit because this is just one of those places where you can actually feel the Earth's heart-beat.

Alaska is the largest state but ranks 47th in population. To put that in perspective, Alaska is large enough to fit both Texas and California with enough room left over for New Mexico. The land is vast and rugged which is why Alaska is home to more than a dozen National Parks, six of which are the largest. Adding to the grandeur of the state are seventeen of the nation's twenty highest mountains.

## Anchorage is Alaska's largest city and a great place to begin.

The Ted Stevens Anchorage International is a modern and busy airport. It is completely accessible and their web site has maps showing the location of family restrooms and elevators. Public transportation is provided throughout the city by People Mover and their fleet of fully accessible buses. If you would rather have your own vehicle then contact Access Vans of Alaska or Wheelchair Getaways. You can also call Alaska Yellow Cab and make use of their two accessible vans.

Finding a place to stay is not a problem. There are many mid-range hotels that have accessible rooms with roll-in showers like the Hampton Inn Anchorage, and Motel 6 Midtown. Both hotels are conveniently located and rank fairly high on Tripadvisor, a useful site that ranks hotels based on customer reviews.

While in Anchorage be sure to visit the Alaska Native Heritage Center. They have an excellent presentation of the native culture through storytelling, craft-making, dancing and simulated, life-sized villages - each representing the five main indigenous groups. The entire cultural center is accessible and they have loaner wheelchairs available. Other noteworthy and accessible attractions include; Imaginarium, a hands-on science and discovery center and Wolf Song of Alaska, a 5,400 square foot exhibit dedicated to exploration of the unique wolf/human relationship.

To find out what Alaska is really all about you need to get out of the city and feel the pulse of the landscape for yourself. Travel by train is popular and a very comfortable way to see the magnificent scenery. Alaska Railroad is fully accessible and has numerous packages and destinations to choose from. One of the more popular trips is to Denali National Park and Mount McKinley which at 20,320 feet, is the highest point in North America. The Alaska Railroad packages can include accessible accommodations within the



park and accessible shuttles from the depot to numerous hotels and points of interest.

Denali National Park is a spectacular wilderness that is accessible to varying degrees to people of all physical ability. The National Park Service has a great web site detailing the accessibility of the park including; trails, wildlife tours, campgrounds, lodging and how to obtain a special road travel permit for those unable to take a tour or shuttle bus.

There is no way to see all that Alaska has to offer in just one visit but one place that should not be missed is Prince William Sound. Captain Gerry Sanger and Sound Eco Adventures offer biologist-guided whale watching tours, glacier and wildlife tours, photography tours and overnight adventures. The custom designed 30' boat allows anyone with impaired mobility to enjoy these tours with minimal assistance in the harbor and out in the wilds of the Sound.



Flightseeing is another way to get up close and personal with the Sound. Grasshopper Adventures has stunning tours of both glaciers and wildlife. As one Alaskan resident said, "as you fly over the Sound through these magnificent glaciers, it feels as though the heavens will open and trumpets will sound." Grasshopper Adventures has decades of experience both flying and accommodating people of all abilities.

Alaska is also famous for great fishing opportunities. On the beautiful Kenai River, Dan McDowell (a.k.a. 'The Last Frontiersman') and family operate an accessible 21' landing craft boat. There are two ramps to board and exit the boat and everything is designed so that people in wheelchairs will feel safe. Dan has won numerous awards for providing barrier-free salmon and trout fishing and has done so well with it that he now has accessible riverside cabin rentals and will add two more accessible boats to the fleet this spring.

Somehow, spending time in Alaska seems to put everything in perspective. No matter what your physical abilities are, you will find plenty of adventure and leave with a rejuvenated spirit and invigorated soul! Check out the Access-Able web site for more access information about Alaska and destinations around the globe.

## ALASKA RESOURCES

Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport <a href="http://www.dot.state.ak.us/anc/index.shtml">www.dot.state.ak.us/anc/index.shtml</a> 907-266-2526	<a href="http://www.hamptoninn.com">www.hamptoninn.com</a> 907-550-7000	Alaska Railroad <a href="http://www.alaskarailroad.com">www.alaskarailroad.com</a> 907-265-2494 800-544-0552
People Mover <a href="http://www.muni.org/transit1/index.cfm">www.muni.org/transit1/index.cfm</a> 907-343-6543	Motel 6 Anchorage Midtown <a href="http://www.motel6.com">www.motel6.com</a> 907-677-8000	Denali National Park <a href="http://www.nps.gov/dena/">www.nps.gov/dena/</a> 907-683-2294
Access Vans of Alaska <a href="http://www.accessvansofalaska.com">www.accessvansofalaska.com</a> 907-244-3550	Tripadvisor <a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>	Sound Eco Adventures <a href="http://www.soundecoadventures.com">www.soundecoadventures.com</a> 888-471-2312
Wheelchair Getaways <a href="http://www.wheelchairgetaways.com">www.wheelchairgetaways.com</a> 800-471-2312	Alaska Native Heritage Center <a href="http://www.alaskanative.net">www.alaskanative.net</a> 907-330-8000	Grasshopper Adventures 907-746-6923
Alaska Yellow Cab <a href="http://akyellowcab.com">http://akyellowcab.com</a> 907-222-2222 Hampton Inn Anchorage	Imaginarium <a href="http://www.imaginarium.org">www.imaginarium.org</a> 907-276-3179	The Last Frontiersman <a href="http://www.thelastfrontiersman.com">www.thelastfrontiersman.com</a> 907-232-8057
	Wolf Song of Alaska <a href="http://www.wolfsongalaska.org">www.wolfsongalaska.org</a> 907-622-9653	Access-Able Travel Source <a href="http://www.access-able.com">www.access-able.com</a>