



*Beauty everywhere*  
INSIDE: SEE READERS' TOP VACATION PHOTOS

**SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK, TANZANIA** - Looking out over Serengeti National Park in 2012. The park is one of the world's most famous wildlife sanctuaries and is noted for its zebra and wildebeest migrations. Photo by Michael Hornisher

AUGUST 2018

# Destinations

## ALASKA

THROUGH THE LENS OF A **FIRST-TIME EXPLORER**,  
**'THE LAST FRONTIER'** IS A WILD SIGHT TO BEHOLD

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN HUMENIK

**U**nder the rainforest canopy of Juneau's Mendenhall Valley, hundreds of red-belly and silver salmon thrash in the shallow Gold Creek. Navigating up stream, the arm-length fish move like passengers exiting a rush-hour commuter train.

We watch, transfixed, as the salmon — which recently departed the Pacific Ocean and nearby glacial water inlets to spawn in creeks and streams — shoot skyward into a double waterfall, then disappear in the rush of white water.

This is Alaska — one of the most photogenic destinations on Earth. With a land mass of more than 586,000 square miles, it has about 27,000 glaciers and nine national parks, among them Denali National Park and Preserve, Glacier Bay National Park and Kenai Fjords National Park. It is an untamed wilderness to behold.

In mid summer the landscape is alive with flowering plants, bald eagles, black bears, brown bears, moose, caribou, gray wolves and more. The waters teem with humpback and orca whales, sea lions, otters, and of course, five kinds of salmon.

We have ventured thousands of miles from our Midwest comforts into the wilds of "The Last Frontier." This is an experiment in new experiences, and that's the point of traveling to Alaska. It's accessible, but you need to give your adventure planning some thought.

The wilderness can be unnerving for the novice. But it's here where we settle in and find uncommon peace. As eagles soar above, whales breach the icy waters from below and the damp August breeze blows, a raincoat and a cup of Heritage coffee puts us at ease in this land of rainforests, tundra, and mountains.

Our adventure starts in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. We travel day and night through the majestic Inside Passage aboard a towering 2,500-passenger cruise ship. We've set sail for a seven-day, six-stop tour of memorable southeastern Alaska ports.

As we pass lush forest along the many inlets, sounds, canals, and straits, we're eager for the precious hours reserved for upcoming shore excursions at Ketchikan, Icy Strait Point (Hoonah), Juneau, Skagway, and Seward. This is the common northern route of cruise ships, including a spectacular viewing on our seventh day of Hubbard Glacier, Alaska's longest and most active tidewater glacier.

At Seward, we'll extend our trip another week to venture deeper north. We'll have traversed nearly 850 miles by auto and rail to Fairbanks, and then Fairbanks back to Anchorage before a red-eye flight home to Chicago.

The star attraction of the two weeks is Denali, meaning "the high one" or "the great one." Rising 20,310 feet at its south peak, Denali, recently known as Mount McKinley, is the tallest peak in North America and the crown jewel in the Alaska Range, which stretches over 600 miles of the southcentral part of the state.

The 6 million-acre Denali National Park and Preserve, which celebrated 100

Denali, formerly known as Mount McKinley, rises 20,310 feet above Denali National Park and Preserve in the Alaska Range and can be seen from the south in Talkeetna. Due to changing weather conditions, only about 30 percent of visitors will see "the high one" in Koyukon from the Athabaskan language. It is the highest mountain peak in North America.



Abundant wildlife, including black bears looking for spawning salmon in Gold Creek near Juneau, and the Huna Tlingit culture on display in totem poles and elaborate wall carvings at Potlatch Park in Ketchikan create a colorful view of Alaska's past and present.

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**Inside**

WALT DISNEY WORLD VACATION ISN'T JUST FOR KIDS

PARKS, ATTRACTIONS OFFER ACCESS WITH PREPARATION

DESTINATION WEDDING PLANNING IS NO DAY AT THE BEACH

FOOD, CULTURE ARE CENTERPIECE OF EUROPEAN VACATIONS