

Our Favorite Memories

Alaska: The Kenai Peninsula, Denali & Talkeetna

By Tour Leader Karen Joeckle

Wow! WHERE TO START?

Alaska provided so many amazing sights and fantastic experiences, it is hard to pick favorites.

From the very first time I met the 15 ladies on this trip, I knew this was a very special group and that we were all going to have a great time together. And, we did have a great time during our adventure throughout Southcentral Alaska on "The Magic Bus", the Alaskan Railroad, a catamaran, shuttle buses, the Denali tour bus and even on a small sightseeing airplane.

We were all looking forward to seeing Alaska's famous wildlife and the list of animals we saw grew each day. Our visit to the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, whose mission is to care for injured and orphaned

wildlife, gave us an up close introduction to Alaska's animals. We enjoyed watching two young brown bears put on a show for us as they frolicked and played together. There were also wood bison, moose, elk, black bears, caribou, musk ox, deer and a bald eagle with one wing at the Center for us to see and photograph.



Alaskan Caribou



Wish I could take him home! At the Jeff King Husky Homestead.

While on our Glacier Express Catamaran cruise out of Seward to the Kenai Fjords National Park & Chriswell Islands National Wildlife Refuge, we saw sea lion colonies, a few orca and humpback whales, sea otters, puffins, as well as large bird rookeries. A favorite part of the cruise was when we sailed right up to the face of the Holgate Glacier. Everyone went outside to see and hear this impressive wall of ice despite the cold and misty weather. For almost everyone, it was their first time seeing a glacier.

During our Denali Tundra Wilderness Tour we saw several large moose (some weighing up to 1,800 pounds), grizzly bears (including a female just a few yards from the bus with her two cubs), quite a few caribou, two wolves, a group of Dall sheep (which blocked the road for a time), lots of snowshoe rabbits, golden eagles, a raven, and porcupines. Only 30% of the people who visit Denali Natural Park actually get to see Mt. McKinley because it is usually covered by clouds. We were lucky. As we got closer to Mt. McKinley, the clouds completely disappeared and we were able to see it in all its 20,320 foot, snow capped glory.

A visit to the Jeff King Husky Homestead educated us about how Alaskan Huskies are bred and trained to be sled dogs. If a dog shows promise, it might be chosen to be part of a team participating in the 1,049 mile Iditerod Trail Sled Dog Race held every March. Jeff King, a 4-time Iditerod Champion, was on hand to explain the special relationship between a musher

and his dogs. We all loved getting to hold the Husky puppies, some so young that their eyes weren't fully open.

We also took a scenic flight from the Talkeetna Airport in a small plane. Once settled into our window seats and airborne, we were all totally mesmerized by the breathtaking snow-capped mountains, glaciers, bright blue sky and fluffy white clouds. Magnificent!

As with every WTT trip, our Alaska adventure was over all too soon. The scenery, the wildlife, the great company joking about trying to sneak a husky pup home — all made for an unforgettable experience. ❖



View from the flightseeing plane.



Love the color!

Getting ready to board our flightseeing plane at Talkeetna Airport.

The scenery almost looks like an Impressionist painting.

Mt. McKinley is the tallest peak in the background. Over 20,000 feet in height, Mt. McKinley is covered in snow even in June.