

ALASKA, “the Last Frontier”, “the Land of the Midnight Sun” is breathtakingly beautiful! The land was purchased from the Russians in 1867 for 2 cents an acre. America paid \$7,200,000 and most Americans thought that was way too much! Of course when gold was found in 1898 that feeling changed. Then in 1968 when “black gold” was discovered near Prudhoe Bay, America was really proud we made that purchase! There are an estimated recoverable 10 BILLION barrels of oil and 27 TRILLION cubic feet of gas! In 1912 Alaska became a territory and then in 1959 it became the 49th state to join the Union.

The entire state of Alaska has a population of only 731,449 people. Those folks share 663,300 square miles, which means they get to live in an area that is about 1/5 the size of the whole continental USA!

My first trip to Alaska was a result of my oldest daughter and her husband becoming teachers in a small village on the Bering Strait. The year my son-in-law did his student teaching was the year that Oklahoma decided we couldn't pay for any more teachers! The kids went to a job fair and it was a decision between Las Vegas and Alaska! They chose Alaska, yeah. Prior to them being accepted for the Alaskan teaching positions, they had to watch a 30 minute video of just what life would be like where they were going – very cold, lots of snow, lots of dark, few people, and did I mention very cold! They did not go to a large town, in fact, the town they went to could not even be reached by car. It wasn't even a town it was a village! The only way in and out was by plane. (In the winter you could go to a neighboring village by snow mobile but you had to wait until everything was frozen.) Their small village was Golovin. Golovin is in western Alaska and is 65 miles east of Nome and 472 miles from Anchorage, it is 3.7 square miles and has a population of 156 which are mostly American Natives (the original natives were the Inupiat's.) Craig and I had the distinction of becoming the first non-native visitors to the village! To get there we took a very LONG plane ride from Tulsa to Chicago, Chicago to Anchorage, Anchorage to Nome and from Nome on a very small plane to Golovin. The flight from Nome to the village was truly amazing – I now know what the word vast really means! There were acres and acres of land with nothing but trees, tundra and wildlife. When we reached Golovin the kids met us on their four wheelers (their means of transportation in the summer) to pick us up and take us into the village. The fire weed was in bloom – beautiful blossoms of pink were everywhere. My daughter told me the blooms were used to make jelly. I did take home a few jars that we made and it was delicious!

The Golovin community is run by the elders. The elders are three women; two sisters that run a small store and the third had a small store also. These two small stores bring in items that are delivered by plane twice a week that support the community. My daughter is good friends with the elders and they helped her to acclimate to the Golovin culture. While we were there we were invited to go out on their boat to do some salmon fishing. It is an experience I will always remember. My husband and I had one fishing pole between us and we were catching huge fish one after the other! I would catch one, hand the pole to him and he would catch one! Once we caught the fish the elder would fillet it for drying. She used a knife called an ulu which is an Alaskan knife that looks like a rounded triangle. She was very adept at cleaning fish! On our way home that evening we were looking up at the sky and saw a beautiful rainbow. It was 3:00 in the morning!!! Land of the midnight sun was no lie in Golovin. There were also wild blueberry fields and wild salmon berries everywhere – it was nature at its best. Not sure if you will ever have an opportunity to visit the “bush” in Alaska but if you do it will be a trip to remember!

After a few years (5) my daughter moved back to the road system. When she first said this I had no idea what she meant but then she explained it means you can drive somewhere without taking a plane or snowmobile!

She currently lives in Wasilla. Wasilla is the 5th largest city in Alaska with a population of 8,456. It is about an hour north of Anchorage.

One of my favorite times to visit is the end of August when the state fair is going on. I have been in December but it is dark and cold but still really pretty. I have also been in July. That time of year it stays light most of the day and is a little warmer than August. My last trip was August/September of 2013. My brother and I went for two weeks. While there we went fishing several times. We booked a trip out of Seward to go Halibut fishing, we booked a trip out of Whittier to go Halibut fishing and we booked a trip on the little Susitna River in the Mat-Su valley to go salmon fishing. We also went to the Kenai River to try salmon fishing on our own.

Whittier is the closest town to Anchorage for halibut fishing trips. However, to get to the town you have to go through a one way tunnel in a huge mountain. It runs each way every thirty minutes so sometimes if you don't hit it just right you have to wait awhile to go through. We had the most luck on this fishing trip. We brought home our limit of halibut. The trip was \$400 per person. Left at 6:30 a.m. and got back about 5:30 p.m. The boat was a sixteen (16) person boat. We were at the very end of the season so our boat left with only nine (9). You bring a bag lunch, something to drink and a fishing license and they provide the rest. They also clean all the fish and can even package and send to your home address if you want them to. Speaking from experience, fresh Halibut is pretty darn awesome! They told us the best time to catch the really big ones was July and to take the three day trip so you could go further out in the ocean. That trip will set you back about three grand!

Seward is a little further away but it usually has good fishing. Seward is where most of the cruise ships leave from. Our fishing trip wasn't great, no halibut but we did catch a lot of rock fish. This was our first halibut trip and cost us \$425 each. As above, you bring food, drink and a fishing license and they supply everything else. This boat was a little smaller so the price was a little more. It was a nine (9) person boat. Going out of Seward we saw more wild life than we did out of Whittier. We saw mountain sheep high up on the hills, seals sun bathing on warm rocks, puffins playing in the water, porpoises jumping and eagles flying! We did not see any whales but they are in this area so sometimes they are around to see. If you take this trip make sure you bring your binoculars and if you aren't into fishing, they have a sight-seeing tour that is well worth the money!

Our first fishing experience was for Salmon. We were at the end of the season but there were still plenty of fish to catch. We decided to try fishing on our own and we had to go to Soldotna for a football game (my son-in-law is a coach) so we decided to fish the Kenai. It was also closer to Seward and our halibut trip was the next day. My daughter caught a beautiful silver salmon but that was not the highlight of this fishing adventure. My brother is an Oklahoma fisherman and has been for years so he is uncomfortable with fishing close to someone as that person was there first and in Oklahoma you don't poach another guys fishing hole! (It is different in Alaska but my brother didn't know that) anyway,

while my daughter was fishing the “other guy’s fishing spot” he trudged further down the river to see if there was another good place to fish. A few minutes later he comes back and tells me I really need to come see what he found! Down the stream and on the other side were two bears! There was a huge black bear and a big brown bear. The brown bear was in the water catching fish and eating them and the black bear was just milling around on the bank. The fisherman on our side of the river stopped fishing and just watched them. Wouldn’t you know it I did not have my camera! Those were the first bears I had seen in the wild. It was just amazing!!! We were close enough to see them very very well!! They didn’t bother anyone and no one bothered them. So when you go to Alaska always have your camera ready, you never know when you might see something amazing!

Our last fishing trip was near Wasilla in the Mat-Su valley on the little Susitna River. We tried our luck on our own but had none! We really wanted to catch salmon so we hired a guide. The cost was \$250 per person and was for a day or until you caught your limit. The limit on Salmon (that day) was two per person per day. The guide took us up river on his boat and baited our line with salmon eggs. We had no trouble catching fish! We were so concerned with NOT catching any that we were very reluctant to throw smaller ones and reddish ones back – the best to eat are the big silver ones. Once you put a fish in the boat you can’t throw it back though so we had our limit in an hour!!! Wish we would have thrown some of those redder ones back so we could have fished a little longer!!!!

We also went to the Alaska state fair. It isn’t very big, about half the size of the Tulsa fair (if that) but for Alaska it is a pretty large event. One of the highlights is the very very very huge vegetables!!! I always get a kick out of seeing a pumpkin the size of a small car! I also always buy birch syrup. Not sure if Alaska is the only place they tap for it but it sure is good!

We also took a day trip to pick wild blueberries! What an experience. We found a field on the side of a mountain and off we went to gather them up. I made several jars of jam that lasted no time at all. Wild Alaskan blueberry jam that you make yourself is pretty darn good eating!

I have taken one Alaskan cruise and would like to take another one. We left out of Seward on a Princess ship. I would recommend you get a balcony if you go. You will also probably have to spend the night in Anchorage. Hotels are pretty pricey so make sure you check them out pretty well before going. You then take a bus to Seward. I think if we did not have family there we would just book the entire trip, transportation and all through the cruise line. We went from Seward to Vancouver. The places you stop on the cruise are much different than the places you will see if you just take a land trip to Anchorage and tour from there. The things that stood out for me was the absolute beauty and the sheer vastness of the land. There is a ton of wild life and very few people. It is still pristine - purple mountains majesty will come to mind!

I have added a few web sites if you want to look at the places I have talked about. Hope you enjoyed my accounts of my wonderful trips to the great state of Alaska! You will not regret going!

Golovin Alaska:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=golovin+alaska&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=PLiQU5SXJI2cqAabgYKgCw&ved=0CCwQsAQ&biw=1440&bih=785>

Wasilla Alaska:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=susitna+river&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=KLGQU7XwKYqSggbDgIKIAG&ved=0CC8QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=785#q=+wasilla+alaska+images>

Whittier Alaska:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=susitna+river&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=KLGQU7XwKYqSggbDgIKIAG&ved=0CC8QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=785#q=whittier+alaska+images>

Seward Alaska:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=seward+alaska+images&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=rBmQU-qUCNKfQgbD24CoDQ&sqi=2&ved=0CB8QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=785>

Kenai River Alaska:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=susitna+river&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=KLGQU7XwKYqSggbDgIKIAG&ved=0CC8QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=785#q=kenai+river+alaska&tbm=isch>

Sustina River:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=susitna+river&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=KLGQU7XwKYqSggbDgIKIAG&ved=0CC8QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=785>

Alaska State Fair:

<http://www.alaskastatefair.org/site/>