

These are the notes for our trip to Alaska including activities we did, where we stayed, and where we ate. This is a [Google map link](#) that shows our route.

Day 1

We took an Alaska Airlines flight through Seattle to Anchorage.

The flight from Milwaukee to Seattle was about 30 minutes early and the flight from Seattle to Anchorage was about 30 minutes late. We were able to fly first class this trip. So, having the extra room and a meal on each leg was very nice. By the time we walked to baggage claim and went to the restroom, we just had to wait about 5 minutes for our luggage to arrive.

It took less than 15 minutes in line at the Avis counter. We were given a black, 2026 Honda CR-V with only 6,000 miles on it. It was in excellent shape.

We stayed overnight at [Hyatt Place Anchorage - Midtown](#). It was an 8-minute drive from the airport. The room seemed to be newer and was large and clean.

We had a great dinner at [Kincaid Grill](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 2

We drove from Anchorage and stopped in Palmer at a Fred Myers grocery store to get a few items. From there, we drove up to [Hatcher Pass Lodge](#) for lunch. After lunch, we drove up the road to the Independence Mine State Historical Park and took the self-guided tour on the grounds. You could not go in the mine, but you could walk thru a number of the buildings on the grounds that were used from the late 1930s when the mine was first opened. The mine closed many years ago but was reopened for a brief time in the early 1980s. It is now just a historical park.

After that, we stopped at the [Matanuska Glacier State Recreation Site](#) to get some pictures of the glacier. The site has easy accessibility off the highway and has excellent views of the Matanuska Glacier which creates the headwaters of the Matanuska River. There is a mile long nature trail that you could take to get a bit close to the glacier.

We then finished our drive for the day at our lodging for the next two nights - [Sheep Mountain Lodge](#). We had one of the premier cabins (#1) which was steps from the restaurant, sauna and helicopter pad. It was an efficiency type of cabin, but we did not cook at all opting to eat at their onsite restaurant for all of our meals.

The lodge is one of just a few accommodations in the area. We chose it because of the helicopter tour on site as well as close by views and hiking trails. It was clean, but was missing a few minor items that could be added at little cost and would make the stay a bit nicer - there was no closet or place to hang clothes other than an accordion style, wood hanger that pulled out over the couch. There were no shelves in the shower. There was a small, but adequate heater in the room that used oil as its fuel. The internet was very slow, but adequate. They have a backup generator and needed to use it at least once while we were there.

We ate dinner at the lodge (review is later in this document).

Day 3

We ate breakfast at the lodge (review is later in this document).

After breakfast, we took a self-guided, short hike from the lodge on one of the trails they have made on their property. We took the Cruiser trail which was .7 miles each way and relatively easy.

We relaxed on our deck until it was time for our helicopter tour at 2:30pm. It was a 1-hour tour where we were able to fly over the Matanuska glacier and actually land on it and take a short walk on the glacier - [Matanuska Glacier Landing with Walking Tour \(Private Tour\)](#).

The pilot, Mark, is also the owner of the lodge. We were fortunate to be able to make two landings on the glacier. The first stop we made was so the pilot could check out the place he was planning on bringing divers the next day. Yes, you can dive into the pools on the glacier. Some pools are as deep as 300 feet! We took a short walk on the glacier to a spot where there was a rushing river of water on the glacier. We learned a lot from the pilot about glaciers about how they move, how the blue pools appear and disappear. We also learned that while the glacier continues to slowly move, a lot of the huge boulders on the glacier actually roll in the opposite direction.

We then took off in the helicopter again and had a very short flight to a gorgeous, shimmering, blue pool of water.

We walked up the slope of the glacier a short way to get a view of the pool and the helicopter from above – breathtaking.

In order to walk on the glacier, the pilot put some microspikes on our shoes that really grabbed into the ice. We also used a trekking pole to go up and down that slope.

We saw a moose from the air on our way there and a different moose on the way back.

The pilot showed us a recent picture he took of a bride and groom inside an ice cave. It was one of the coolest pictures I have ever seen. Mark (the pilot) is also a professional photographer and is legally able to marry people. While flying is what he spends most of his time on, he still does shoot about 10 weddings a year.

This was definitely one of our favorite adventures ever.

Glacial pools are incredibly blue because of two main factors: dense ice and glacial flour (suspended rock powder). As centuries of snowfall compress into dense glacial ice, air bubbles are squeezed out. This ultra-dense ice and suspended rock powder absorb longer light waves (reds and yellows) but reflect shorter blue waves back to our eyes.

We ate dinner at the lodge once again (review is later in this document).

Day 4

We drove from the lodge in Glacier View to Valdez. The views were best once we hit Hwy 4 (Richardson highway). The view of Mt. Drum and the Wrangell mountains behind Willow Lake is beautiful. Further south you can get a great view of the Worthington Glacier. Then, close to Valdez is Keystone Canyon. This is a beautiful canyon that features stunning glacier-carved walls and impressive roadside waterfalls, including Bridal Veil Falls and Horsetail Falls. A littler south of the canyon is Thompson's Pass. There are great views from there as well.

Across the street from our hotel was a beautiful, lush green mountain with snow capped peaks and multiple waterfalls flowing down its sides. It is all very beautiful.

We stopped for lunch at [Grizzly Pizza](#) (review is later in this document).

After arriving in Valdez, we checked into the [Totem Hotel](#) and did a load of laundry (\$4.50 to wash, \$2.50 to dry). The hotel burned down in 2016 and was fully rebuilt. The room was clean and large with fast

internet (160mbps), a large shower that was hot and had great pressure, and the biggest seating area for their breakfast buffet than we have ever seen. No waiting for a table here.

We ate dinner at [Valdez Brewing](#) / [Poor Betty's](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 5

After breakfast, we drove to the Worthington Glacier recreation site and took a short walk to the viewing platform. We could see a small piece of the glacier. You can walk two miles each way on a rugged trail, but since the view from this angle of the glacier was very slight, we drove a bit up the road to get a good look at the glacier from the front. That view is much better, and we did not have to go on a rough hike to get there.

We then drove over to Chitina and crossed the Chitina Bridge stopping shortly after that – just before the start of the McCarthy dirt road. We took a picture of the warning sign that states that most people should not venture out on that road. Most rental car companies prohibit one from driving on that road.

On our way back thru Chitina, Jan spotted a moose meandering thru the town. We stopped and turned down the dirt road to get a picture of it.

Just before Valdez, we stopped at Solomon Gulch Fish Hatchery and walked their self guided tour. They had some videos and signs along the way that explained how they harvest pink and coho salmon eggs here from the fish as the salmon return to this spot to spawn. Unfortunately, it was not spawning time, so we did not see any action, bears, or sea lions that typically are here during that time.

We walked over to the [Nat Shack](#) food truck for tacos for dinner (review is later in this document).

Day 6

We had to get up early to get to the car ferry by 5:30am. We took the car ferry from Valdez to Whittier. It was about 5 ¾ hours – similar to the time it would take to drive from Valdez to Seward, but relaxing on the ferry was so much nicer. The ride was very smooth. We saw some whales as well as some small broken off pieces of ice floating past the ship in one area – did someone say Titanic??!!

You could purchase food items on board for breakfast and lunch and they were not bad tasting and not a bad value for a captive audience.

After getting off the ferry in Whittier, we drove thru the one-way [Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel](#). It is a unique 2 ½ mile tunnel used by both trains and cars (but not at the same time). Prior to this tunnel's construction, no one could drive to Whittier as there was no road to that city.

We were fortunate that they just had started letting cars go thru from our end or we would have had to wait for an hour for the opening going in our direction.

We then drove to Seward. About 6 ½ miles from Seward, we stopped at [Bear Creek Weir](#) where we saw salmon trying to jump up the dam at that location. The salmon were huge. There were no bears there at the time, although you can sometimes spot one fishing there.

We then checked into our hotel - [Harbor 360](#). We had a room overlooking the harbor – that was the best thing about the room. The room itself was clean and updated, but the internet did not reach our room. We could only get connected in the lobby. We talked with the hotel staff and even tried their premium internet - which also did not reach our room. While we are not on vacation to be online, we do like to have good access in the evening and morning. For this reason alone, I would never stay at this hotel again. They said they had recently added more network devices, but if they did – they need more. When we did laundry on the 2nd floor (our room is on the 3rd), the internet was fine.

The parking lot was also very small for the size of the hotel. It cannot accommodate all guests. Many people had to park across the street and pay for the parking in that lot. The hotel will reimburse you, but that is inconvenient. The TV was initially not working. As it turns out, it had been somehow unplugged.

The hotel staff quickly came up to fix the problem. They had to move the credenza to see that the cord was not plugged in. The room had no drawers to keep your clothes and the small bench they had to place and open your luggage was way too small. It could not be used to unpack our suitcases. I wonder sometimes who makes these design decisions in a hotel.

They have pay laundry (3 washers, 4 dryers) that costs \$3 a load to wash or to dry.

All of the above being said, my research indicated that this was one of the better hotels in the city with a king bed.

We ate dinner at [Fifth Avenue Bistro](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 7

We drove up to the trailhead at Exit Glacier and hiked the Glacier Overlook Trail to get to a closeup view of the glacier. Roundtrip, it was 2.2 miles (50 minutes actual hiking time roundtrip).

The glacier continues to recede. Where we stood was right next to the glacier in 2011, but it has receded up the mountain more since that time. Still, some great views.

We ate lunch at [Primrose Provisions and Wine Bar](#) (review is later in this document).

We can't pass up a wine bar!! It was a small boutique wine bar overlooking the sea and the mountains.

After lunch, we drove around the small town and stopped at a few souvenir stores to buy Justin's friend a snow globe that we were asked to pick-up for him.

We ate dinner at [The Cookery](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 8

Today we took the [8 ½ hour Northwestern Fjord Cruise](#) – it was fantastic.

The cruise departed and returned right from the dock directly behind our hotel. It boarded on time and we returned on time. This tour utilizes a smaller boat than most tours in the area. There were 36 passengers (max capacity), the captain and the first mate.

The cruise goes part of the way on the open sea in the Gulf of Alaska. So, we (especially me) were glad that it was a fairly calm day. The captain said the waves were forecast to be 4 feet, but they were only 2 feet.

We saw most all of the wildlife in their brochure, orcas (killer whales), a fin whale, humpback whales, Dall's porpoises, mountain goats, sea otters, Steller sea lions, Harbor seals, Tufted Puffins, a Bald Eagle and more.

We were able to watch the humpback whales perform their bubble netting routine to corral and then eat their fish – it was very cool. The best area for both Jan and I was when the ship went to the very end of the Northwestern Fjord in Kenai Fjords National Park and stopped very close to the base of the Northwestern Glacier. It was a magnificent blue color, and you could hear some of the calving going on – it sounded like a big clap of thunder. There were a ton of seals sitting on blocks of ice within the glacial ice field our boat had to go through (think of the scene in the Titanic movie with the floating ice chunks).

The turkey sandwiches we ordered for lunch were large and tasty and the unexpected brownie on our return was excellent. The crew went out of their way (8 miles each way) for us to be able to see a pod of the "resident" orcas. They ended up coming very close to our boat and at one point the mom and baby swam underneath our boat.

We ate dinner at [Ray's Waterfront](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 9

We drove to Homer today stopping at a number of scenic spots hoping to see salmon running and the many fisherman trying to catch them. It was a slow day, and we did not see any real action today. Even at Brooks Falls, the web cam only showed 2-3 bears there. We learned that the first salmon run in this area is over, and there is a lull between the first and second runs.

We stopped at Cooper Landing State Recreation Site & Boat Launch to get a picture of the Kenai River's green waters.

We then stopped at the Russian River campground and walked down to the river. They have a great facility here for fisherman to have a private spot and easy access into the water. We did not see anyone catch anything.

We also stopped at the Soldotna Visitor Center and took a walk on the fisherman's boardwalk just behind the center. Again, nothing going on there yet.

We stopped at the Deep Creek State Recreation Area boat launch in Ninilchik to see numerous eagles up close. There were only one or two eagles in the grassy area and 7 or 8 flying above us. We could not really get close to any.

We did get a nice picture of the mountains/volcanoes across Cook Inlet.

Just as we entered the Homer city limits, we stopped at a large rest stop that had a great view of the bay and the Homer Spit.

We then checked into our bed and breakfast - [Good Karma](#). We had the "Mindfulness" room which was on the second (top) floor of the cabin like B&B. It has a shared porch with a superb view overlooking the mountains across the Kachemak Bay. It is a bit further out of town – actually in Fritz Creek – but has much better views than most of the lodging in town. The owner, Mike, cooked breakfast each day to order. He offered a number of cold cereals, eggs, bacon, reindeer sausage, bagels and muffins and the typical condiments and beverages. Guests would eat in his kitchen so they could chat with other guests or with Mike as he cooked. The food was good and the portions were large. There was an interior, common area with 3 recliners and a built-in desk, mini-frig and sink. Mike's dog, Luna, was very friendly. She might meet you as you were checking in but was not allowed in the kitchen during breakfast. Mike would welcome you with his three "S" rules - no shoes, no smoking, no sniveling! The internet was adequate at 12mbps. We had a quiet, relaxing stay.

We ate dinner at [Fresh Catch Cafe](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 10

We spent the morning touring the small town of Homer and the Homer Spit.

We went all the way to Land's End and then ate lunch at [Captain Pattie's Fish House](#) (review is later in this document).

We then did a plane trip with [J Bear Tours](#) (and the pilot/owner Chris) to see brown bears. We checked in at their airport location at 4:30pm and watched a quick video, signed the legal paperwork, put on a pair of hip waders that they provided and then we were weighed. We then drove a few blocks from the check-in point to the plane. It was a small Cessna that seats 5 people plus the pilot. We took off about 5:00pm on a 30-minute flight over to the Lake Clark National Park and Reserve. The pilot did a quick flyby over part of the coastal area where he could look down to see where the brown bears were at that time. He saw a

mom and her two cubs (just 18 months old) and we landed on the beach near to where he spotted them. Within 5 minutes we were standing near to those bears and watching them eat and play. We observed them for about 10 minutes or so when the bears decided to take a nap. They were tired from eating all day and laid down without a care in the world. Our guide said they may nap for a while. So, he said that we will walk to another spot that he saw bears earlier that day.

He took us on a picturesque walk thru meadows and thru a small stream with the majestic mountains on one side of us the entire walk – it was gorgeous. After walking a little under 2 miles, we came across two “teenage” bears that were six years old. They had the same mom and grew up together. They were playing, wrestling and hugging each other without making much of any sound – it was precious to see. Our guide directed us on where to walk and stand. We were about 30 feet away from those bears! About 10 minutes later, we spotted two adult bears, one male and one female on the other side of the meadow (maybe 100 yards away). They were looking at the teenage bears and soon took off running towards them – and towards us!

Our guide knew exactly what to do and how to do it. We slowly moved away from the teenage bears and kept some distance from the adults. However, as the adults got close to the teenagers, the teenagers started walking away from them and in our direction. At first, they were going parallel to us, then one of them changed direction a bit and angled towards where we were. At that time, the guide had us all (3 adults, a child and the guide) line up close together and told us to get down on one knee. He said that way, we look larger to the bears. We were still within 50 feet or so of that teenage bear.

The adult bears remained in the initial area where we were standing and did not end up chasing the teenagers. The teenagers then relaxed and got close to us again – about 30 feet away. They played some more, ate some grass and one even relived itself. They were no longer bothered by the adult bears and did not mind us. We were able to spend more time observing all 4 bears and were able to get some fantastic pictures of us and the bears together - what an experience!

We spent 30-40 minutes in total being in close proximity to those bears.

After that, we started walking back to the plane and the area we left the initial brown bears napping. We were hoping that they were now awake and still in the area. We took a different route back to increase the odds that we would end up on the other side of the bears. As luck would have it, the guide’s choice to go that route (which included crossing a deeper, moving torrent of water - about up to our knees) was spot on. The bears were awake and closer to our plane than before. We were able to observe them for much longer this time. The cubs were eating and playing with each other. I was able to get a picture of one cub standing on its hind legs, and a video of them all crossing the stream with momma bear scolding one of the cubs along the way.

These bears ended up walking even closer to us than the prior bears. One of the cubs walked about 10 feet from us. In fact, another guide who was there, loudly clapped her hands to shoo the cub away because it had gotten to maybe 5 feet from them. The bear did change course and walked a few more feet away.

I call this day “Closer encounters of the brown bear kind”!! It was a fantastic day with beautiful weather. We ended up walking a total of 4.35 miles and spent 4 hours in total walking and observing the bears. We went back to the plane and took off from the beach where we had landed. The pilot/guide took us on a 10-minute detour over the mountains and glaciers before heading back to Homer. That 10-minute detour had some of the most gorgeous scenery of the jagged peaks of the snow-capped mountains that we have ever seen in such a close proximity.

We arrived safely back at the airport, and I had to help the pilot push the plane a short distance to get it into its “parking space”. I pushed on one of the wings and he used a device that pushed on the front wheels – easy-peasy.

This was truly an adventure of a lifetime.

Day 11

We left Homer via a different route driving up to [Viewpoint Skyline Dr](#) where there is a viewpoint where you can see the valley, the airport, Katchemak Bay, the mountains and the Homer Spit – a beautiful view. We then headed to Girdwood where we would spend the night.

We stopped for lunch at [Cooper Landing Brewery/Blue Yeti](#) (just east of Cooper's Landing).

We then stopped at [Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center](#) (AWCC) to take a driving/walking tour to see the various animals they have roaming about. It is sort of like a small, self serve zoo where you can view all of the animals in an outside environment.

Most of the animals that have come to AWCC have either been orphaned or injured.

With consent from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, animals taken in by AWCC are cared for by their animal care staff and are given a permanent home at AWCC.

We saw an American Marten, a black bear, brown bears, coyote, elk, fox, lynx, moose, muskox, porcupine, reindeer, wolves, and bison.

We then checked in to [Alyeska Resort](#). We had a very comfortable and clean room on the 7th floor that had a nice view of the mountains. The room was large, quiet and decorated nicely. The internet was 21mbps. Their main parking lot was being repaved. So, we had to use an additional lot that was a 3-minute walk away. There was nothing wrong with that, but a hotel of this caliber really should have provided free valet parking for all of its guests for the 2 or 3 days while the lot was being worked on. In the winter, the hotel serves as a base for skiers on the high mountains just behind the hotel. There are a ton of double black diamond runs that look to be phenomenal if you are an avid skier.

We ate dinner at [Double Musky Inn](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 12

We had breakfast in the hotel and then headed out to Talkeetna.

When checking out of the hotel, they said that the Alaskan highway near Anchorage that we needed to use, just was closed due to an accident. When this happens on many of the highways there, you could be stuck for up to 7 hours with no other option than to wait. However, in this case the staff at reception showed me a map that seemed to indicate that where the accident was, we might have an option to get around without that long a delay. We decided to chance it. When we got to that point, the highway was indeed closed, but there was a side road that the police directed drivers on to, and while it was slow moving, it did get us around the closure in about 45 minutes. My navigator, Jan, noticed on Google that there was another turn off along this new route that would save us 15 minutes or so. We followed Goggle's advice (not many others were), and it indeed saved us at least 15 minutes.

There was a rest stop shortly before the point where we had to turn off the highway due to the closure. We decided to stop there since we did not know how long we might be on the detour. On our drive out, we saw a black bear walking along the edge just above our car and were able to get a couple of good pictures of it.

We drove to Talkeetna and drove through the small, but busy town. It was a very cute town with a number of shops and lots of people walking around. The Alaska train stops here, and we saw some tour buses as well which probably explained the many people.

We then checked into our B&B at [Liberty Farms](#). It was an okay sized room with a king bed, but had no a/c. That was okay on a cool day like today but may not be the best if the temps got up into the 70s. The

bedroom did have blackout shades. The bathroom was small without hand towels, bathmat or Kleenex. To reach the B&B you had to drive a short drive down a dirt road. The door to our room was very difficult to completely close and lock. The owner showed us how you had to really bang the door hard to close it. There was a large, well cared for patio that was used for breakfast or their reserved dinners. Internet was 9.7mbps. Our reservation for dinner was misplaced and thus, we could not eat dinner at the B&B. The owner offered to pay for our dinner in town, but we declined. Instead, we ate dinner at the [Denali Brewing tasting room](#) a few blocks from the hotel (review is later in this document).

Day 13

We had a great breakfast on the patio at the B&B. It consisted of orange juice, coffee, a fruit cup, a fresh blueberry scone, scrambled eggs, waffle and bacon. The eggs were laid fresh that morning by their chickens. The patio was just a tad cool, but they turned on the space heaters to make it more comfortable. A great way to start the day.

We then drove up towards Denali and checked in at our lodging for the next 3 nights - [McKinley Creekside Cabins](#).

Our cabin was good sized and was next to Carlo Creek with views of the mountains. We could sit out on our patio next to the river or sit in one of the Adirondack chairs a couple of feet from the creek.

The bed was a bit too soft for me. The internet was good at 40mbps.

In the room they provided a coffee maker, filters and fresh coffee so you could make as much coffee as you wanted – a unique touch and it made for better tasting coffee than most lodgings.

We had lunch here (review is later in this document) and then drove to Denali Park to watch the [Denali Sled Dog Kennels - sled dog demonstration](#). You were able to get close to the dogs and pet them prior to the talk and demo. The demo was 5 dogs pulling a sled once around a track. Some good information about the history of the kennels was interesting, but the demo was much less than I expected. Probably not worth the time if you have other things to do.

We had dinner at McKinley Creekside Cabins (review is later in this document).

Day 14

We took the East Fork Shuttle into Denali. It is about a 2 ½ hour trip each direction with stops for wildlife and one stop for a restroom. We did see quite a bit of wildlife on our trip – moose, caribou, Dall sheep, a grizzly bear, a snowshoe hare and the Alaskan state bird - willow ptarmigan. If you choose, you can get off the shuttle at any stop and do your own hiking and then get back on the shuttle at any time (as long as there is space). Shuttles run at least every 30 minutes.

The shuttle only goes up to mile marker 43 in the park, and this year, does not get you close enough to see Mt. Denali because they are still fixing roads and bridges that were damaged and wiped out in August of 2021. Everything will be re-opened for the 2027 season.

We knew that limitation when planning the trip back in 2025 but decided we did not wish to delay our trip until 2027. Going that far on the road you end up within 30 miles of the mountain and can get a great view – if the weather cooperates. Without being able to go that far, I don't feel that the length of the trip is worth the time.

We had dinner at McKinley Creekside Cabins (review is later in this document).

Day 15

We had a late brunch at McKinley Creekside Cabins and drove back into the park with stops at Mountain Vista and Savage River. Savage River is as far into the park you can drive unless you have a reserved spot at one of the small, primitive campsites a bit further on down the road. We saw a couple of caribou in the distance and a female moose and her two yearlings feeding along the road. We were able to drive slowly right past them and Jan took an up-close video.

Day 16

We drove to Anchorage today and spent the night at [Susitna Place \(B&B\)](#)

We stayed in the Denali room. The bedroom had plenty of room with a love seat, electric fireplace, small TV, and a shared porch with great views of the water and the Alaskan range mountains. The porch had 2 rocking chairs and an end table.

The bathroom was small with a jetted tub and a shower with good water pressure.

The room had fans and no a/c. When the sun beats in on a warmer day, it can get a little hot in the room.

It was okay for us on a 67-degree day – we opened the door to the deck and turned on the fans.

The only issue was that the internet was not reliable – it kept dropping on our phones when we were in the room but was fine in the common area on the floor above us.

The common space had 2 large dining/kitchen tables, a large TV, a large deck with chairs and a high top with a tabletop fire pit. The views were great from up there.

They offered water and soda for \$1.

We ate dinner at [Glacier Brewhouse](#) (review is later in this document).

Day 17

Breakfast at the B&B was great. It was a self-serve buffet that you could partake of on your own schedule between 7:30am and 10:00am. We love that flexibility. There was hot reindeer sausage, rosemary breakfast potatoes, cheesy eggs, lots of fruit, breads and bakery. Excellent breakfast with a wonderful view.

After breakfast, we had to head home.

The Avis car rental return was quick and easy. It is in the garage attached to the airport terminal. So, we just had to walk thru the underground tunnel to get to the terminal.

Our flight home departed at 12:15pm Anchorage time and landed in Milwaukee at 12:30am Milwaukee time.

The flight from Anchorage to Seattle was on time, but our flight from Seattle to Milwaukee was late departing Seattle and got us home about 35 minutes late – not a big deal at all. When parking at the airport, we scored a primo parking spot so were on our way quickly after getting our bags. Alaska Airlines guarantees that you will have your bags in no longer than 20 minutes. No complaints about car or flights.

General

High temperatures for most days:

68, 61, 54, 60, 70 (Seward), 58, 56, 61 (Homer), 60 (Girdwood), 69 (Talkeetna), 64 (Denali), 61

Our plan allowed us to not have to rush anything and allowed us not to have to drive too long on a single day except the last day from Denali to Anchorage. It was very relaxing driving for the most part. Not a lot of traffic, and in a few areas, like the way from Palmer to Valdez, there were spots on the road where we could not see another car in front of us or behind us. Most of the driving had gorgeous views along the way. The drive from Seward to Homer was an exception. A lot of that drive looked more like one was driving in up north Wisconsin – no mountains and a lot of pine trees. That being said, once we turned the corner after entering the city limit of Homer, the view opened up dramatically with gorgeous views of the bay and mountains. You could even see Homer Spit in the distance.

What a gorgeous state Alaska is!!!

The temperatures were generally in the upper 50s to the low 60s with a one day at 68 (Anchorage), one at 69 (Talkeetna) and another at 70 (Seward).

Most days were dry and partly sunny with more clouds around the mountain tops. On some days, it was cloudy above the mountains and then there was a layer of clouds part way down the mountains - a beautiful site. All in all, great weather for activities and driving.

We drove a total of 1,958 miles. Alaska was admitted as a state in 1959 – we should have driven 1 more mile!

Alaska is certainly the “land of the midnight sun”. During our time there, the sun set around midnight and rose at about 4am. It never really seemed to get pitch dark. It seemed like about 2am it was as dark as it would get and you could still see some leftover light outside. On our last day in Denali, the sun set at 12:18am and rose at 4:06am – over 20 hours of daylight.

While some hotels had room darkening shades, most could not fully block out the outside light as they either still had an uncovered window high up in the room, or there were gaps around the curtains/shades. That being said, we really had no trouble sleeping. It was interesting to wake up in the middle of the night, peek outside and still see there being so much light.

Dining

Kincaid Grill

This was an excellent dinner at a restaurant about 8 miles from our hotel in a small, strip mall. They have about 20 tables covered in white tablecloths in a quiet space. Most are regular tabletops, but they have a few high tops as well. I started with a special soup of the day which was a creamy tomato bisque with some olive oil and balsamic (\$16) – it was delicious, very tasty and smooth – I could have had another serving. Jan started with the Caesar salad (\$14) which was better than most restaurants. It had a true anchovy-based dressing that was wonderful. We each shared tastes of each others soup and salad and we both agreed on how good they were. For our entrees, I had the filet (\$62) and Jan had the special filet – Oscar style (\$62). Both steaks were cooked perfectly and were very tender. The honey sage carrots with mine were excellent. Jan had asparagus with hers. We had a bottle of Mollydooker Shiraz (Blue Eyed Boy) wine (\$88) with the meal. Their wine list was decent size, and it is documented on an iPad rather than a printed menu. This allows you to easily see the wines by category as well as a detailed description of them. I wish more restaurants did this.

The wine was also priced very inexpensively compared to many other restaurants. Our wine was only marked up 25% higher than retail – hardly unheard of! Service was excellent.

They had so many things on their menu – if I lived here, this certainly would be one of my go-to fine dining restaurants – just a great, great meal.

Hatcher Pass Lodge

We ate lunch here. We both had a black forest ham and cheddar sandwich and a glass of beer. I had mine toasted and Jan had hers on untoasted bread. They were freshly made sandwiches with large chunks of ham (not just deli slices). Not a bad place to stop with a view.

Sheep Mountain Lodge

We had breakfast and dinner here for a couple of days because it was where we were staying and because there were no comparable restaurants for miles and miles.

All of the meals were good to excellent.

For our first dinner we shared the bang bang shrimp (\$20) for an appetizer. It had nine nice sized shrimp topped with a tasty, but not too spicy of a sauce served on a bed of baby spinach. Jan had the Waygu Weathervane (\$43) which was a combination of shredded Waygu beef and three large scallops. It was wonderful. David had the halibut beurre blanc (\$42) which was a tasty filet of halibut with a lemon sauce and capers on a bed of rice with zucchini and asparagus on the side. The sauce was very flavorful, and the fish was great (of course – it's fresh and was caught nearby)! We had a strawberry/rhubarb cheesecake for dessert (\$10).

The wine list is small but had about 12 red choices - more than I expected from a restaurant located here in Glacier View. Service was very good. If it was a few degrees warmer, we would have sat on the patio – maybe for lunch tomorrow.

For our first breakfast we both had the meat combo (\$17) which was scrambled eggs, reindeer sausage, breakfast potatoes and toast (with strawberry/rhubarb jam).

The meal was excellent – the reindeer sausage was tasty, but not too spicy and the breakfast potatoes were the best I have ever had – they had a crispy outside and the inside was as tender as could be – almost melt in your mouth – wonderful and not heavy at all!

For our second dinner we had the same bang bang shrimp (\$20) for an appetizer. Jan had the maple glazed salmon (\$40) for her entrée. It was a good-sized filet and had plenty of maple flavor. I had the

Dovetail Gourmet Pasta (\$42) with reindeer sausage and scallops – I know, an odd combination, but I liked the sausage at breakfast and liked the bite of Jan's scallop I tried yesterday. It was a very good, creamy tomato pasta with two large scallops and plenty of sausage. We shared the glacier cookie for dessert (\$8.50) – a large chocolate chip cookie with moose tracks ice-cream. Tonight, we each had a glass of a local beer rather than wine. Another very good meal.

Grizzly Pizza

We stopped here for lunch (pizza) and conversation with the owner who we heard loves to chat with his customers. He was a nice, 75 year old gentleman that has owned the bar/restaurant for 50 years. He poured us a couple of beers and made our pizza and chatted with us most of the time he was not in the kitchen preparing the food. He has a special recipe for his homemade dough. We could see him rolling it out in the kitchen. His sauce is also homemade, but the rest of the ingredients are all canned or packaged. He par-bakes the crust then adds the sauce and ingredients. When baked like this, the crust is a little crisper and holds up to the weight of the ingredients. It was an okay pizza, but the ambiance of an old-time bar with dollar bills pinned to the ceiling and other nick knacks was enjoyable. Note - cash only.

Valdez Brewing / Poor Betty's

Valdez brewing does not sell food but has a food truck on premise that sells fish and chips, cheese curds and poor boys. So, we had a beer inside the brewery and brought in food from the food truck. We each had the halibut fish and chips (fries). It was a huge portion of lightly breaded fish and plain or Cajun seasoned fries. The food did not live up to the online hype, and at \$41 for one fish and chips was the worst value so far on the trip. The really only disappointment thus far.

Nat Shack

We ate dinner at this food truck that was a short walk from our hotel. They have some outdoor dining tables – some covered, some not – where you can eat after you get your order. They mainly have taco type meals that we enjoyed. Jan had “the lower 48” (\$15) which was two tacos with mainly shredded beef, tomatoes and sour cream. I had the “Halibut Tacos” which was two fish tacos with a tangy sauce, tomatoes and cilantro. We both liked our tacos. We each had a beer for a total bill of \$53.

Fifth Avenue Bistro

We ate dinner at a nice, quiet restaurant in the Hotel Seward. There were only a handful of tables and some outside seating. We shared two appetizers – a Caesar salad (\$12) and a rhubarb ricotta toast (\$16). The salad was good and the toast (like a bruschetta) was unique and tasty with goat cheese, tomatoes and bacon. We both had the halibut (\$52) which was a good portion of halibut with butternut squash and some tasty green beans with bacon bits – very good. They had a number of Michael David (MD) wines on the wine list that were only marked up twice retail. Our server said that one of the winery owners has a home in Seward and he was able to get a good price from him on the wines to sell in the restaurant. We are big MD fans, so we ordered the Earthquake zin (\$50). We shared a flourless, chocolate dessert (\$10) that was dense and flavorful. The total bill including wine, but before tax and tip was \$192. I am glad we went here – a bit off the main drag, very quiet and an excellent meal.

Primrose Provisions and Wine Bar

We ate lunch here. We each tried a couple of different wines, and each had a sandwich.

Jan had THE JAMMIN' HAM (\$15) - house honey whipped chevre spread, sweet & spicy jam, mixed greens, applewood smoked ham, warm ciabatta.

I had the TAKE ME BACK TO ITALY (\$17.50) - warm ciabatta, mortadella, prosciutto, burrata, truffle mushroom spread, mixed greens.

Both were excellent. I only wish they had poured the wine in proper stemware. They used glasses like we used to have – Cristal D'Arques Longchamp that were more of a goblet shape.

The wine choices were okay, but nothing I would buy back home.

The Cookery

We had a great dinner here. They were as busy as advertised (they do not take reservations). We stopped by at 6:30pm and put our name on the waiting list. We were seated at 8pm. Our table was across from the kitchen. They have an eclectic wine list – nothing that we were familiar with. I chose a bottle of a Georgian red blend (\$60) that was very good. They had wine notes describing the wine and I looked on-line to see a description as well.

After ordering, we received an amuse Bouche. Jan then started with mushroom toast (\$15) that was flavorful and full of good quality mushrooms. I had a cup of the halibut and salmon soup (\$8). It had large chunks of halibut and potatoes, celery, carrots and some shaved salmon in top – very good. We both had the grilled halibut (\$39) for our main course. It was a huge portion grilled in some light BBQ seasoning and was served over bok choy and some other veggies – very tender and delicious. For dessert, we shared a “pot du crème” which was some mousse like chocolate and whipped cream served in a ramakin. The chocolate was light and airy. We also shared a glass of Moscatel (\$12) – we'll have to try this more back home as it was a great dessert wine and far cheaper than a Sauternes.

Service and timing of the courses was perfect. We would definitely return even considering the wait for a table. The total bill including wine, but before tax and tip was \$185.

Ray's Waterfront

We had a great dinner with a view. I am glad we had reservations here, otherwise we'd have had to wait as the restaurant was full and had a waitlist.

We were immediately seated at a table by the large window overlooking the harbor with a nice view.

After ordering, we were given a basket of fresh, hot bread and a plate with olive oil and balsamic. The bread was an excellent sourdough – and it was HOT, not just warm.

We started with appetizers. Jan had the wedge salad (\$16) which she liked. It had a lot of blue cheese and crispy bacon. I had the crab cakes (\$22) which were two, large cakes topped with a tasty, but spicy remoulade sauce – very good. For her entrée Jan had the Halibut Andaman (\$46) which was Macadamia nut crusted, baked halibut with a red curry coconut sauce – she loved it. I had the Miso sablefish (aka black cod, butterfish \$42) which was marinated in miso and broiled – it was excellent – really melt in your mouth tender. They had a decent wine list, and we had the Mollydooker Blue Eyed Boy (\$62) that we liked so much with the dinner in Anchorage. Our server seemed new to the service business, but they did a very good job. Total before tax and tip (including wine) was \$205.

Great dinner and just two blocks from our hotel.

Fresh Catch Café

We had a good dinner here at the small restaurant. Good thing we had reservations because they were full up and were not even accepting anyone for a waitlist.

The restaurant was out on the Homer Spit on the shore of Kachemak Bay.

We shared the ricotta toast (\$15) which was a unique appetizer of toast, cheese and tomatoes topped with some small chiles – maybe a bit too spicy. We each had the halibut (\$44) which was a large filet on top of some broccolini, mushrooms and a nice sauce.

Their wine list is very small so we each had a beer. Total cost before tax and tip was \$123. They charge 2.5% if you use a credit card. Service was average. Excellent value for a good meal.

Captain Pattie's Fish House

We had lunch here because during the afternoon and the evening we would be on a plane tour to see bears.

The restaurant was in the heart of Homer Spit and had great views of the water and mountains. We were given a high-top table along the window. Janice had the halibut tacos (\$31) with a side salad (\$2). They were two, large flour tacos with chunks of halibut. I had the char-grilled halibut (\$35) and side salad. This was the simplest dish of halibut so far. It was good, but it helps having some spice or sauce alongside the fish. The service was good. The total before tax and tip for the two entrées, two side salads and two beers was \$87.

Cooper Landing Brewery/Blue Yeti

We ate lunch here on our drive from Homer to Alyeska.

They have outside and inside seating. We sat outside at one of the tables with a patio umbrella.

We both had a local beer (\$13 total). Jan had a burger (\$18) and I had the spicy Nashville chicken sandwich (\$18). It is all self serve. You go to a counter to order and pay for your food and another counter to order your beer.

A nice stop for lunch and a refreshing brew. They have a large stage outside that they use for live music at various times during the season. Those events seem to draw huge crowds.

Double Musky Inn

We ate dinner here because it seemed to be the best restaurant in small Girdwood. They do not take reservations. We saw earlier comments on-line that said if you don't get here by 5pm, you should probably wait until after 7pm to arrive. We arrived about 10 minutes to 7pm and the waiting area/lounge inside was packed and there were people waiting outside. The people that got on the waitlist before us were told it would be a 45-minute wait. However, we only had to wait about 10 minutes because the hostess found a place to squeeze us in when a larger party did not have all of its expected people show up.

The restaurant mainly offers steak or Cajun dishes. I love Cajun, but the hot Nashville chicken sandwich from a late lunch was still on my mind and I thought I should stay away from too much spice for dinner, plus we were still a bit full, from lunch. So, we ended up sharing a filet (\$75). Their portions were all huge including the steak – a 12-14 ounce cut. Dinner came with a salad, baked potato and warm bread.

The steak was a bit underdone, and it was a bit tougher than I would have expected. It had a nice char and a sauce on top. We are glad we shared because that steak was huge. The service was very good. The staff really seem to know what they are doing and are efficient at their jobs.

One shared entree and two beers before tax and tip was \$90.

Denali Brewing Tasting Room

We had a fun time here for dinner tasting some beers and eating some good pizza. We each had four, 4-ounce beers served on a tasting pallet. They had 22 different beers to choose from. Jan liked the Nitro Chaga stout the best. I liked the Petersville pilsner the best.

We had two, small Neapolitan pizzas – one Margherita and one Meat Lovers.

You have to go to the counter to place your beer and food orders, and you have to take the beer to your table. They charge 3% for using a credit card.

They have plenty of indoor seating and a number of tables outside where they had live music on the night we were there – a beautiful “night” that was sunny and 69 degrees.

An enjoyable time was had by all.

McKinley Creekside Cabins

We had a number of meals here as I read that they were supposed to have good food. Plus, there are not many options nearby. The food and service were very good here. A huge bonus when staying in this area.

For lunch on our first day, I had the halibut tacos (\$28) and Jan had the salmon tacos (\$26). We both liked our tacos. They had a lot of fish and the mixture was tasty. The accompanying warm, taco chips were fresh and excellent. We each had a beer for a grand total before tax and tip of \$69.

For dinner on our first day, we shared the toast of the day special that was a tasty mix of goat cheese, arugula, onions, leeks and beets (\$14) – very good. Jan had the baked halibut (\$38) which she liked. It was flaky and topped with parmesan cheese and artichokes. I had the salmon special of the day (\$32) which was salmon served Greek style with sour cream and dill sauce, leeks, tomatoes and Kalamata olives. It was good, but I liked the halibut more (I had a taste of Jan's).

They have a small wine list, but we found a Sonoma County red blend we liked from Ridge (\$54).

For dessert, we shared the yummy ice box peanut butter pie (\$8).

Service was excellent. A very good meal. Total with wine, but before tax and tip was \$146.

For breakfast on our second day, Jan had the breakfast banana split (\$16) which was two sliced bananas with yogurt, granola and fruit – it was very good and very large. David had two sides – scrambled eggs (\$5) and the elk sausage gravy and biscuit (\$10). It was good and the elk sausage bits in the gravy were plentiful and tasty – milder than a typical breakfast sausage. Total before tax and tip including one coffee was \$35.

For dinner on our second day, Jan had the Caesar side salad (\$10) which was large and had a lot of shaved parmesan cheese and croutons. I had a cup of their award-winning chili (\$9) which was excellent. It had meat, black beans, red and green peppers and something white (some type of bean?) that I was not sure what it was. The chili was just a bit spicy and overall excellent.

We then both had the Friday night special of prime rib (\$45). It was a 12-14 ounce slice that was cooked maybe just a tad on the rare side. I liked the spices they had on the exterior of the roast, but Jan did not care for them. The mashed potatoes were a creamy Yukon gold that were excellent. It included the too commonly served asparagus. We shared the Avalanche dessert (\$12) which was a Ghirardelli brownie, ice cream and whipped cream – very good. I also had a double espresso (\$4).

We had the same wine as yesterday (\$54 Ridge Three Valleys) and plan to try a couple of bottles at home. I looked up the retail price, and the markup at the restaurant is not even twice retail – so a great value.

It was sunny and nice at dinner time today, so we were able to sit on the deck in front of the mountains.

The only issue today is that the entrees came far too fast.

Total before tax and tip for 2 entrees, 2 appetizers, 1 dessert, espresso and a bottle of wine was \$179.

For breakfast on our third day, Jan had the eggs benedict (\$22) and I had scrambled eggs and reindeer sausage (\$21). They serve brunch from 7am-2pm on Saturdays and Sundays, so we ate a bit later today.

For dinner on our last full day, we shared the appetizer special (\$18) which was lightly fried rockfish with yum yum sauce. The sauce and spices tasted similar to a General Tso's chicken, but with fish. Jan had turkey pot pie (\$26) which was huge. It had large pieces of turkey and a light flaky crust over the top. The crust was only a covering, and the turkey, veggies and sauce were in a bowl with the crust covering the top. She liked it.

I had the baked halibut (\$38). Jan had this on the first night and the bite I tried I really liked. So, I had to get my own entree. It was our last dinner here and maybe my last halibut entrée in Alaska.

We shared the flourless chocolate cake (\$11) that was warmed up and served with whipped cream and vanilla ice-cream. Serving it warm adds to the nice flavor.

We had the same wine as our other dinners (\$54 Ridge Three Valleys).

Total before tax and tip for 2 entrees, 1 appetizer, 1 dessert, and a bottle of wine was \$147.

For breakfast on our last day, Jan had scrambled eggs and toast (\$9) and a mocha (\$6) and I had scrambled eggs and ham (\$11) and a coffee (\$4).

All meals here were very good to excellent. It is nice to have a full restaurant onsite – especially when there are not many other restaurants nearby.

Glacier Brewhouse

We walked from our B&B to have dinner here. Good thing we had reservations as it was crowded and busy. Since it was a brew pub, we both had a beer. Jan had a number of stouts to choose from. She had the Imperial Milk Stout (\$8.50) which she really liked. I had the Bavarian Hefeweizen (\$7.50) which was an unfiltered Bavarian style wheat beer that I really liked. They have quite a large food menu, but with us flying home tomorrow, we wanted something a bit lighter. So, we both had the fish fry (\$26.95). That was served with 3 large pieces of fish in a beer batter with a side of fries. The fish was black cod. The fish was okay but was not close to the better fish fries back home. There was a lot of breading, and the fish was not as flavorful. Total for 2 beers and 2 fish fries was \$71 before tax and tip.