

With tips and recommendations
from the experts at **Frommer's**

5th Edition

Alaska

FOR

DUMMIES[®]



Charles P. Wohlforth

Alaska FOR DUMMIES® 5TH EDITION

by Charles Wohlforth



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Alaska For Dummies®, 5th Edition

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2011 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Trademarks: Wiley, the Wiley Publishing logo, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, A Reference for the Rest of Us!, The Dummies Way, Dummies Daily, The Fun and Easy Way, Dummies.com and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. Frommer's is a trademark or registered trademark of Arthur Frommer. Used under license. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Wiley Publishing, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEB SITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEB SITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ. PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT TRAVEL INFORMATION IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT ANY TIME AND THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF PRICES. WE THEREFORE SUGGEST THAT READERS WRITE OR CALL AHEAD FOR CONFIRMATION WHEN MAKING TRAVEL PLANS. THE AUTHOR AND THE PUBLISHER CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EXPERIENCES OF READERS WHILE TRAVELING.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

For technical support, please visit www.wiley.com/techsupport.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

ISBN: 978-0-470-88871-1 (paper); 978-1-118-03048-6 (ebk); 978-1-118-03049-3 (ebk); 978-1-118-03050-9 (ebk);

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



WILEY

About the Author

Charles Wohlforth is a lifelong Alaskan who has written ten books about the state, its nature, its history, and its politics. His most recent book, *The Fate of Nature: Rediscovering Our Ability to Rescue the Earth* (Picador), uses the story of Alaska's coasts to explore the capacity of humanity to solve global environmental challenges. His previous book, *The Whale and the Supercomputer: On the Northern Front of Climate Change* (North Point Press), won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for science and technology. Wohlforth lives in Anchorage with his wife, Barbara; sons, Robin and Joseph; and daughters, Julia and Rebecca. Learn more about his work at www.fateofnature.com.

Author's Acknowledgments

This fifth edition of *Alaska For Dummies* is again the product of teamwork. Over 15 years of writing about travel in Alaska, I've received help from more friends than I can ever thank. For this edition, Mara Hill did the heavy lifting of updating the text. Karen Datko was, once again, an invaluable researcher. Talented writers from around the state contributed as well, bringing expertise about their own areas of Alaska: Jessica Edwards, Charlotte Glover, Eric Troyer, Kris Capps, Martha Robinson, Jay Barrett, and Anne Hillman.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

Editorial

Editors: Stephen Bassman,
Eric T. Schroeder

Copy Editor: Elizabeth Kuball

Cartographer: Guy Ruggiero

Editorial Assistant: Andrea Kahn

Senior Photo Editor: Richard Fox

Cover Photos:

Front cover: © Doug Demarest /
AlaskaStock / PhotoLibrary

Back cover: © Bruce
Lichtenberger / Peter Arnold
Images RF / PhotoLibrary

Cartoons: Rich Tennant (www.the5thwave.com)

Composition Services

Project Coordinator:
Katherine Crocker

Layout and Graphics: Claudia Bell

Proofreader: Sossity R. Smith

Indexer: BIM Indexing & Proofreading
Services

Publishing and Editorial for Consumer Dummies

Diane Graves Steele, Vice President and Publisher, Consumer Dummies

Kristin Ferguson-Wagstaffe, Product Development Director, Consumer Dummies

Kelly Regan, Editorial Director, Travel

Publishing for Technology Dummies

Andy Cummings, Vice President and Publisher, Dummies Technology/
General User

Composition Services

Debbie Stailey, Director of Composition Services

Contents at a Glance

Introduction.....	1
Part I: Introducing Alaska.....	7
Chapter 1: Discovering the Best of Alaska.....	9
Chapter 2: Digging Deeper into Alaska.....	15
Chapter 3: Deciding Where and When to Go.....	25
Chapter 4: Great Alaska Itineraries.....	35
Part II: Planning Your Trip to Alaska.....	45
Chapter 5: Managing Your Money.....	47
Chapter 6: Getting to Alaska.....	58
Chapter 7: Getting Around Alaska.....	69
Chapter 8: Cruising Alaska's Coast.....	81
Chapter 9: Planning an Outdoor Adventure.....	110
Chapter 10: Booking Your Accommodations.....	134
Chapter 11: Catering to Special Travel Needs or Interests.....	140
Chapter 12: Taking Care of the Remaining Details.....	146
Part III: Anchorage and Environs.....	161
Chapter 13: Settling Into Anchorage.....	163
Chapter 14: Exploring Anchorage.....	184
Chapter 15: Side Trips from Anchorage.....	205
Part IV: Road Trips from Anchorage.....	223
Chapter 16: The Kenai Peninsula: Seward, Kenai Fjords National Park, Kenai, and Homer.....	225
Chapter 17: Fairbanks.....	264
Chapter 18: Driving Alaska's Highways.....	286
Chapter 19: Denali National Park.....	300
Part V: Southeast Alaska.....	325
Chapter 20: Juneau.....	327
Chapter 21: Skagway.....	347
Chapter 22: Sitka.....	356
Part VI: The End of the Road and Beyond: Bush Alaska.....	369
Chapter 23: The Arctic.....	371
Chapter 24: Bear Country: Katmai National Park and Kodiak Island.....	382

<i>Part VII: The Part of Tens</i>	395
Chapter 25: Ten Great Walks and Hikes in Alaska	397
Chapter 26: Ten Questions to Ask an Alaskan.....	401
Chapter 27: Ten Ways to Be an Alaska Know-It-All	405
<i>Appendix: Quick Concierge</i>	410
<i>Index</i>	415

Maps at a Glance

Alaska Wildlife.....	120
Anchorage	171
Downtown Anchorage.....	177
The Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound.....	227
Seward	231
Homer	253
Fairbanks	269
Downtown Fairbanks	273
Alaska Highways	289
Denali National Park.....	309
Greater Juneau.....	331
Downtown Juneau	333
Skagway	351
Sitka.....	359

Table of Contents

.....

Introduction..... 1

About This Book	1
Conventions Used in This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	3
How This Book Is Organized	3
Part I: Introducing Alaska	3
Part II: Planning Your Trip to Alaska.....	4
Part III: Anchorage and Environs	4
Part IV: Road Trips from Anchorage	4
Part V: Southeast Alaska.....	4
Part VI: The End of the Road and Beyond: Bush Alaska	4
Part VII: The Part of Tens.....	4
Icons Used in This Book.....	5
Where to Go from Here	5

Part 1: Introducing Alaska 7

Chapter 1: Discovering the Best of Alaska9

The Best Big Ice.....	10
The Best Bear Viewing	11
The Best Places to Encounter Indigenous Culture	11
The Best Gold-Rush Towns.....	12
The Best Day Hikes	13
The Best One-of-a-Kind Lodgings.....	13

Chapter 2: Digging Deeper into Alaska15

Understanding Alaska's Native Cultures.....	15
Treating Alaska's first people properly	17
Finding Native culture.....	17
Alaska History: Not an Oxymoron	18
Searching for Russian America (1741–1867)	18
Rushing for gold (1867–1940).....	19
Defending the United States (1940–1968)	19
Discovering oil (1968 to the present).....	20
Speaking Alaskan	21
Ordering Dinner: Hope Ya Like Fish	22
Background Check: Recommended Books, Movies, and TV Programs	24

**Chapter 3: Deciding Where and When to Go25**

Narrowing Your Travel Options.....	25
Anchorage.....	25
The Kenai Peninsula.....	26
Fairbanks and the Interior highways	27
Denali National Park.....	27
Southeast Alaska.....	27
The Bush.....	28
Sorting out the Seasons.....	28
The seasons from Anchorage north.....	29
The seasons in coastal Alaska	31
Perusing Alaska's Calendar of Events	32
February.....	32
March	33
May	33
June	33
July.....	33
August	34
November	34
Keeping Your Trip on Track.....	34

Chapter 4: Great Alaska Itineraries35

Touring Southeast Alaska in One Week without a Cruise Ship	36
Seeing the National Parks: Denali and Kenai Fjords in One Week.....	38
Covering a Lot of (Alaskan) Ground in Two Weeks.....	39
Planning a Kid-Friendly Week in Alaska	41
Experiencing Alaska in White: A Week of Real Winter	43

Part 11: Planning Your Trip to Alaska..... 45**Chapter 5: Managing Your Money.....47**

Planning Your Budget.....	47
Transportation.....	48
Lodging.....	49
Dining	49
Sightseeing and outdoor activities.....	49
Shopping.....	50
Nightlife.....	52
Keeping an Eye on Hidden Expenses.....	52
Cutting Costs — But Not the Fun.....	53

Handling Your Money.....	55
Using ATMs and carrying cash	55
Charging ahead with credit cards	55
Toting traveler's checks	56
Dealing with a Lost or Stolen Wallet.....	56
Chapter 6: Getting to Alaska.....	58
Flying to Alaska	58
Finding out which airlines fly there.....	58
Getting the best deal on your airfare	59
Booking your flight online	60
Getting to Alaska by Road, Water, or Rail.....	61
Driving to Alaska.....	61
Taking the ferry to Alaska.....	61
Riding the rails to Alaska — not!	62
Finding a Travel Agent	62
Joining an Escorted Tour.....	64
Finding out the basics	64
Shopping for an escorted tour	65
Selecting an escorted-tour company.....	65
Choosing a Package Tour.....	66
Chapter 7: Getting Around Alaska	69
Flying Around Alaska.....	70
Flying around Southeast Alaska.....	71
Flying around Southcentral Alaska and the Interior.....	71
Flying to the Bush.....	72
Riding the Rails	72
Sailing the Alaskan Coast.....	72
Reserving ferry passage.....	73
Making your ferry ride more enjoyable	74
Covering Ground by Bus	74
Driving Around Alaska	75
Renting a car.....	75
Renting an RV	78
Driving safely in Alaska.....	79
Chapter 8: Cruising Alaska's Coast.....	81
Weighing Your Cruise Options.....	81
Deciding when to go	82
Knowing where to go.....	83
Choosing between a big ship and a small ship	84
Finding the best cruise-ship experience for you	86

Booking Your Cruise.....	91
Booking a small-ship cruise.....	92
Finding an agent who specializes in mainstream cruises	92
Booking air travel through the cruise line.....	95
Choosing your cabin	95
Speaking up about special health and dietary concerns.....	96
The Small-Ship Cruise Lines	96
The Big-Ship Cruise Lines	99
Chapter 9: Planning an Outdoor Adventure	110
Getting Active in the Alaska Summer	110
Backpacking	111
Biking off-road.....	111
Biking on pavement.....	112
Canoeing	112
Day-hiking.....	113
Fishing.....	113
Rafting.....	114
Sea-kayaking	116
Keeping Active in the Alaskan Winter	116
Dog-mushing.....	117
Skiing	117
Snowmobiling.....	118
Viewing Alaska's Wildlife	118
Bald eagle.....	122
Black bear	122
Brown bear (grizzly).....	122
Caribou.....	123
Dall sheep	124
Humpback whales.....	124
Moose.....	125
Musk ox.....	125
Orca (killer whale).....	125
Polar bear	126
Puffin (and other alcids).....	126
Sea otter	127
Wolf.....	127
Choosing an Activity-Based Escorted Tour.....	128
Nine Tragic Deaths to Avoid in Alaska's Outdoors	128
Getting eaten by a bear (and such).....	129
Drowning in freezing water	130
Succumbing to exposure	130
Getting eaten alive by bugs	131
Getting lost	131

Drowning while crossing a river	132
Keeling over from bad clams.....	132
Getting seasick	132
Drinking tainted water	133
Chapter 10: Booking Your Accommodations.....	134
Choosing the Lodging Right for You	134
Bed-and-breakfasts	136
Hotels	136
Wilderness lodge look-alikes.....	136
Knowing When to Reserve.....	137
Finding the Best Room at the Best Rate.....	137
Shop early for peak times	137
Travel off-peak	137
Ask for discounts	138
Don't stop with the Internet	138
Book a package tour	138
Don't worry about it	138
Booking Rooms Online.....	139
Chapter 11: Catering to Special Travel Needs or Interests	140
Vacationing in Alaska with Children	140
Tackling the challenges	140
Finding a family-friendly package.....	141
Keeping kids happy on the road.....	142
Traveling as Senior Citizens	143
Accessing Alaska: Advice for Travelers	
with Disabilities.....	144
Resources for Gays and Lesbians	145
Chapter 12: Taking Care of the Remaining Details ..	146
Playing It Safe with Travel and Medical Insurance.....	146
Trip-cancellation insurance.....	147
Medical insurance.....	147
Lost-luggage insurance	148
Staying Healthy When You Travel	148
Reserving Activities, Restaurants, and Shows	149
Booking your activities	150
Reserving a table at restaurants.....	151
Getting performing-arts reservations.....	151
Packing for the North	152
Summer clothing.....	152
Winter clothing	152
Dressing like a local.....	154

Communicating on the Road	154
Logging on to the Internet	154
Making a cellphone call.....	155
Keeping Up with Airline Security Measures	155
Flying with Bulky Outdoor Equipment.....	157

Part III: Anchorage and Environs..... 161

Chapter 13: Settling Into Anchorage.....163

Getting to Anchorage.....	164
Flying in.....	164
Getting into town from the airport	165
Arriving by car	165
Arriving by train.....	166
Orienting Yourself in Anchorage	166
Downtown.....	166
Midtown and the rest of the Anchorage Bowl	166
Beyond the Bowl.....	167
Finding Information After You Arrive.....	167
Getting Around Anchorage.....	167
Driving around town	168
Calling a cab	168
Waiting for the bus	169
Riding a bike.....	169
Using shoe leather	169
Where to Stay in Anchorage	169
The top hotels and B&Bs	170
Runner-up accommodations	175
Where to Dine in Anchorage.....	175
The top restaurants.....	176
Runner-up restaurants	182

Chapter 14: Exploring Anchorage.....184

Hitting the Top Sights.....	185
Getting Outdoors: Summer and Winter in the City.....	186
Summertime outdoor activities	188
Wintertime outdoor activities.....	194
Discovering More Cool Things to See and Do	195
Downtown.....	195
Beyond downtown.....	196
Seeing Anchorage by Guided Tour	197
Spending One, Two, or Three Days in Anchorage.....	197
Day 1 in Anchorage.....	198
Day 2 in Anchorage.....	198
Day 3 in Anchorage.....	198

Saving Time for Alaska Shopping.....	198
Finding the best shopping areas.....	198
What to look for and where to find it.....	200
Getting Out in the Evening.....	202
Attending the performing arts	202
Hitting the nightclubs and bars	202
Spending the evening at the movies	203
Fast Facts: Anchorage	203

Chapter 15: Side Trips from Anchorage205

Driving Between Mountain and Sea on the Seward	
Highway.....	205
Getting there.....	205
Seeing the sights	206
Enjoying the Slopes of Girdwood.....	210
Getting there.....	210
Seeing the sights	210
Getting outdoors in Girdwood	211
Where to stay	213
Where to dine.....	214
Embarking on Prince William Sound from Whittier	214
Getting there.....	215
Getting out on the sound.....	216
Where to dine.....	219
Taking a Side Trip to the Mat-Su Area.....	219
Seeing the valley's highlights.....	220
Where to stay and dine.....	221

Part IV: Road Trips from Anchorage..... 223

Chapter 16: The Kenai Peninsula: Seward, Kenai Fjords National Park, Kenai, and Homer225

Discovering the Kenai Peninsula and Its Major	
Attractions	226
Seward.....	226
Kenai Fjords National Park.....	226
Kenai and Soldotna.....	226
Homer.....	228
Landing in Seward.....	228
Getting there.....	229
Getting around	229
Where to stay	230
Runner-up accommodations	232
Where to dine.....	232
Seward's top attractions.....	233
Getting outdoors in Seward.....	234
More cool things to do in Seward.....	236

Fast Facts: Seward	236
Enjoying Kenai Fjords National Park	237
Getting there.....	237
Getting park information	238
Enjoying the park.....	238
Deciding on a tour	238
Checking out Exit Glacier.....	241
Kenai and Soldotna.....	242
Getting there and getting around	243
Where to stay	243
Where to dine.....	244
Fishing in Kenai and Soldotna.....	245
Canoeing near Kenai and Soldotna.....	247
More cool things to do in Kenai and Soldotna.....	248
Fast Facts: Kenai and Soldotna	249
Driving to the Sea in Homer.....	250
Getting there.....	250
Getting around Homer	251
Where to stay	251
Runner-up accommodations	254
Where to dine.....	255
Finding Homer's top attractions.....	257
Getting outdoors in Homer.....	258
More cool things to do in Homer.....	261
Nightlife.....	262
Fast Facts: Homer	262
Chapter 17: Fairbanks	264
Getting There.....	265
By car	265
By air	265
By train.....	265
Orienting Yourself in Fairbanks	265
Getting around by car	266
Getting around by bus	266
Getting information	266
Where to Stay in Fairbanks.....	267
Runner-up accommodations	271
Where to Dine in Fairbanks	272
Runner-up restaurants	275
Exploring Fairbanks	275
The top attractions.....	275
Getting outdoors in Fairbanks	277
More cool things to see and do	279
Spending one, two, or three days in Fairbanks.....	280
Shopping.....	281
Nightlife.....	282

Fast Facts: Fairbanks	283
A Side Trip on Chena Hot Springs Road.....	283
Getting there.....	284
Where to stay and dine.....	284
Getting outside on Chena Hot Springs Road	285
Chapter 18: Driving Alaska's Highways.....	286
Understanding Alaska's Road Map	287
The Prince William Sound Loop: Anchorage to	
Whittier to Valdez to Glennallen	289
Day 1: Anchorage to Valdez.....	289
Day 2: A day in Valdez.....	290
Day 3: Valdez to Glennallen	290
Day 4: The road back to Anchorage.....	291
The Denali/Fairbanks Loop: Anchorage to	
Glennallen to Fairbanks to Denali	292
Day 1: Anchorage to Glennallen.....	292
Day 2: Glennallen to Fairbanks.....	293
Day 3: A day in Fairbanks.....	293
Day 4: Fairbanks to Denali	293
Day 5: A day in Denali.....	294
Day 6: Denali back to Anchorage.....	294
Linking Up the Loops.....	294
Driving to the Arctic and Other Extremes	295
Dalton Highway (Route 11).....	296
Denali Highway (Route 8)	297
Edgerton Highway and McCarthy	
Road (Route 10)	297
The Klondike Loop	298
Teese Highway (Route 6).....	299
Chapter 19: Denali National Park.....	300
Planning Ahead	302
Reserving shuttle seats and campsites	
in advance.....	302
Reserving when you arrive.....	303
Paying entrance fees	303
Reserving rooms	303
Packing for the park	304
Getting There.....	304
Driving to the park.....	304
Taking the train.....	304
Taking the bus.....	305
Flying to Denali	305
Getting the Lay of the Land	307

Arriving in the Park.....	307
Arriving at the park's main entrance	308
Arriving in Talkeetna.....	308
Riding the Shuttle Bus	308
Choosing your bus and destination	311
Getting ready.....	312
Spotting wildlife on your way.....	312
Hiking and Backpacking from the Shuttle Bus	313
Day hikes by bus	313
Backpacking	314
Great Activities off the Bus.....	314
Day-hiking near the park entrance	315
Flightseeing.....	315
Rafting	316
Ranger programs	316
Visiting educational centers.....	316
Where to Stay	317
The top hotels and lodges	317
Runner-up accommodations	320
Campgrounds	320
Where to Dine.....	321

***Part V: Southeast Alaska* 325**

Chapter 20: Juneau.....327

Getting There.....	328
Arriving by air	328
Arriving by ferry	328
Getting Downtown	328
Navigating by taxi	328
Navigating by bus	328
Navigating by rental car.....	329
Orienting Yourself in Juneau.....	330
Getting around by car	330
Getting around by bicycle	330
Where to Stay in Juneau.....	330
The top hotels and B&Bs.....	332
Runner-up accommodations	335
Where to Dine in Juneau	335
Exploring Juneau.....	337
Exploring the top attractions	337
More cool things to see and do	340
Shopping	340
Nightlife	341