

A Glimpse of

Alaska

August 19-27, 2024



The forty ninth state was purchased from Russia in 1867 for the piddling sum of \$7.2 million. Another way of putting it would be : 2 cents an acre containing almost 600,000 square miles of rich natural resources. There were naysayers at the time linking the wisdom of purchase to name the United States Secretary of State as "Seward's folly." The state contains the 10 highest mountains in the United States and it is the only state that has beaches on 2 oceans. On the lighter side, there is a rumor that Alaska will be divided in half which would put Texas to number 3 in state sizes.

We were thinking of visiting Venezuela at this time but Marjan's brother Cornelius, a notable veterinarian and resident of Caracas advised this,

" There will be an election here near the end of July which will surely cause riots... not a good idea.

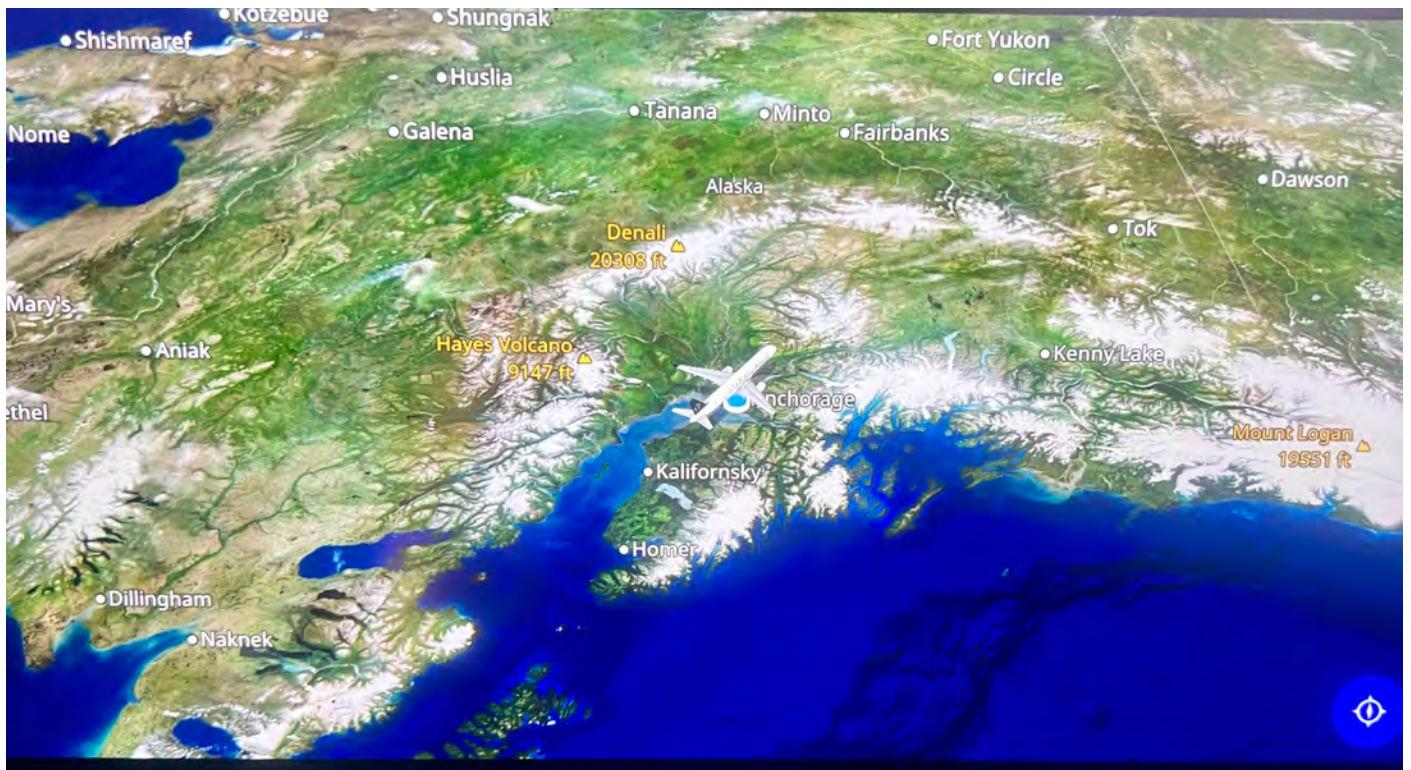
"Ok then, we will visit Alaska instead"!

The r/t ticket from San Jose, Costa Rica to Anchorage on United was only \$ 600. The best deal for a car rental for nine days was Avis at \$1600 with lousy insurance. I complained to Marjan, who lives in Santa Ana, Costa Rica. She went online from there and nailed the same proposal but with good insurance for \$638. The reason for this difference was because she received the "Latin discount." How neighborly is Alaska!

Our flight was delayed for one day so we spent first night in Houston, Texas. The approach to Anchorage was spectacular. The city



is so important to the aviation world; air traffic involving the Eastern



coast of United States to Japan and central China will all fly over Anchorage.



My family, five children and wife Martha, and I visited Alaska in 1972 and 1977 using a Chevrolet Suburban and

trailer camper from Pennsylvania. We took three months each summer. The Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek, BC to Fairbanks stretched to 1500 miles with 1200 miles of gravel through Canada. That road style gave you a gift of an hour and a half between mud to dust after a rain. We were blessed by so many adventures, especially the fishing one!





The big surprise coming out of the Anchorage Airport in a 2023 Nissan Sentra was the roads... beautifully wide,

high speed expressways. It didn't matter that we are going 85 mph; we were being passed by many Alaskans! We had the King's Landing Hotel reserved for the night in Homer... so, we took the Seward



Highway going South along the water of Turnagain Arm on the right with a good view of the Chugach Mountains on the left. The Sterling



Highway is the main road of the Kenai Peninsula where there are only



5% of the 645 miles of roads that are paved. It is a solid, two lane with sideburns gem the whole way to Homer. The leisurely 225 mile trip from Anchorage takes about 5 hours. Our plan was to sightsee the Kenai Peninsula all day on our return North.

Homer

A small town of only 6000 folks that is known as “ The Halibut Capital of the World.” Most of the residents have a good view of Kachemak Bay and the Homer Spit. The “ Spit “ is a four and one half



mile long narrow , glacial moraine with shops, restaurants and art galleries. The end of the “ Spit “ features a state of the art fishing boat dock.





The Salty Dog Saloon now features concrete floors. In the nineteen seventies, they had sawdust over dirt floors. Now, there is have a pool



room next to
the bar that
is also
covered with
hundreds of
one dollar
bills and
name cards
f r o m
around the
globe.





There are folks who with a different sense of humor to be enjoyed by all.



The sea chowder is a wonderful lunch.



How about the stove from yesteryear?

Kachemak Bay is the forty mile long of the Cook Inlet that is 150' deep. The tide at the boat docks at Homer Spit is up to 23 feet. This is evident every day when the level of the boats change.



We hired The “Orca” for \$160 to take us r/t across The Kachemak Bay to the mainland to see the birds and aquatic life. Curt,



our captain, had a small, ruggedly powerful boat that had a hydraulic front to make landing most anywhere easy. He could carry many kinds of freight as well as people. The bay freezes rarely so he has a year round business. He has fought 8' swells however. Curt gave us this photo of glacial ice that drifted into the bay. We were treated with scenes







of birds and sea lions and million dollar homes on the edge of the



wilderness. The people here share the same blessing as many other Alaskans where there are no roads!





The Russian village of Ninilchek is graced with an Orthodox



Church from the home country. The graveyard contains the remains of many Americans who gave their lives in many distant wars. They are marked with the distinctive Russian Orthodox cross. Near





the old church there is a beautiful new chapel. The fireweed makes a

pretty base for the view of the bay and the snow capped mountains.



The red salmon run was on within the Kenai Peninsula but we were not permitted to visit the falls on the Russian River where we could see the bears grabbing the fish for their next meal. We did see a dead one and some lucky fellows in a boat.



Our lodging for the night was north of Anchorage at Lazy Mountain. A fancy log structure where the management was unseen. We received instructions on how to unlock the front door and our room via email. How we were to leave the premises as we found it and the well stocked kitchen was through the same media. The bannisters for the railings were made from diamond willow; very prevalent in the Alaskan bush. It takes much labor carve the bark away from the knots but it



achieves a pretty effect. The property featured some fine woodworking



*worthy of a few
photos.*





Talkeetna

We were able to purchase six pieces of diamond willow in a gift shop down on the Kenai. The best way to get them home was the US Post Office in town. The post mistress said they need to be in a box for them to be shipped. Two Alaskan women overheard this demand and volunteered their grocery boxes as the solution. Marjan and the ladies were cutting the cardboard to size on the porch as I went in to purchase a roll of tape. A fine package was made in rapid time which speaks so well of Alaskan ability, good will and gusto...Many thanks!





Don Sheldon, the legendary bush pilot, was stationed here. He perfected the technique of glacier landings on Denali. His Talkeetna Air Taxi Company still exists where his aircraft rest between flights. He won many awards for his bravery in numerous rescue operations on and off the Mountain. He died of cancer in 1975 when only fifty three years old.





Talkeetna has interesting pubs, restaurants and gifts.





Denali

Denali National Park, Alaska



It is highest mountain in North America at 20,310 feet was climbed by my son Anthony and Jim Balog in the early 1978. They did it in alpine style not wasting time in the processing camps. It was a new approach at the time. It took them a total of 8 days. Denali is the tallest mountain in the world from base to summit on land, with a rise of 18,000 feet.

We had a cozy cabin at \$273/night outside of Denali National Park near Healy. It was a charming place with a special toilet paper holder in the bathroom.







The Park, formally named Mt. McKinley, is larger than the State of New Hampshire. The 92 mile park road which begins at the eastern end of the park ends within 28 miles of the Mountain. Because of the size of the Mountain, it is able to control its' weather. We went from sun



to rain at least 4 times in one day. Only 10 percent of the visitors ever

get to see the Mountain because it is usually in the clouds. A one day bus trip never disappoints because of the beautiful terrain and abundant wildlife. The road is closed at Mile 43 at East fork due to a



rockslide at PrettyRocks a few years ago. A new bridge bypass will be completed by the summer of 2026.









The visitors center is worth a visit.



There is a five star hotel with memorable toilets and shopping just North of the park entrance.





How about a fancy egg croissant breakfast in the bush?



Palmer

The famous Matanuska Valley northeast of Anchorage is the main agricultural region of the state. The annual State fair brings



visitors from great distances.

The Animals:





The Quilts:





The Rides:





The Food;





The Equipment:





There is a well stocked knife and as store in Wasilla. We made a few w purchases of high quality knives. The owner was formally from Pennsylvania.

The Nissan Sentra performed well for our 1160 mile, short Alaskan glimpse. Alaska Airlines permitted us to access their executive lounge where there were 5 delicious but different soups on their for food bar. United Airlines then upgraded us down to San Jose, Costa Rica which topped off our ten day trip as extra pleasant.



*Text by John Bucher Herr
Photos and videos by John Bucher Herr and Marjan Vuurman*