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55 Best-Kept Alaska Finds

Published on WEDNESDAY, 07 AUGUST 2013 Written by HEIDI BOHI

Sidenote: Alaska became a state on Jan. 3, 1959.

State's double-nickel birthday approaching

Every day, of every year, forever and ever until the end of time, you can find something new to discover in Alaska without ever exhausting the possibilities. (We're trying, though.)

In honor of the state's upcoming 55th birthday, marking the day Alaska was sworn into statehood, here are 55 of the Great Land's best-kept secrets and fantastic finds, ranging from fairytale-like to proven favorites—whether they are in big towns like Anchorage and Fairbanks—or tucked away in the far, far corners of the state.

1. Eat a world-famous cinnamon roll at The Bake Shop in Girdwood. ([The Bake Shop](#))

2. **Drink from ice-cold, glacier-fed Eagle River.** Always purify water first, though, no matter how clean and sparkling the river or stream it comes from appears to be. ([The Eagle River Nature Center](#))

3. **Take the historic Danny J ferry across Kachemak Bay**, from Homer to Halibut Cove. Along the way, there are marine wildlife-viewing opportunities, and the charming village is a fairytale community of artists and craftspeople. ([Halibut Cove, Alaska](#)) ([Danny J Ferry](#))

4. **Watch some of the biggest bore tides in the world** advance into Turnagain Arm between McHugh Creek and Girdwood along the Seward Highway. Check the bore tide schedule and go witness this natural phenomenon: a huge wave, or series of waves, forming a wall of seawater up to 10 feet high that reaches speeds of 15 mph. There are about 60 bore tides worldwide, though this is the only one that occurs in the far north and is bordered by mountains, making it the most geologically dramatic in the world, as seen along its entire 50-mile length. [Alaska 2013 Bore Tide Schedule](#)

5. **Get your picture taken with the world's largest cabbage** during the Alaska State Fair, Aug. 22-Sept. 3, in Palmer. Last year's behemoth veggie set a new personal, state and world record for the largest cabbage ever weighed—138.25 pounds. ([Alaska State Fair](#))

6. Unless you're the lead dog, the view never changes. As an IditaRider, from the seat of a professional musher's sled, you will **see more sights from The Last Great Race On Earth** than folks cheering from the sidelines. Bid on the chance to ride along with one of the teams for the first 11 miles of the ceremonial race start, which leaves from Anchorage Saturday, March 1, 2014. ([Official site of the Iditarod](#))

7. **Learn to make the world-famous Van Hale's Caesar salad** at the historic Marx Bros. Café, overlooking Knik Arm from downtown Anchorage. ([Marx Bros. Cafe](#))

8. Look up—it's **Haines' annual Alaska Bald Eagle Festival** in November, part of the annual migration of 3,500 bald eagles to the Chilkat River valley between September and December. Rated by Outside magazine as one of the 20 best places in the United States to live, Haines is 80 miles from Juneau and accessible by the Alaska Marine Highway System. ([Haines, AK](#))

9. Combine two of Alaska's most popular attractions, dog mushing and Mount McKinley, with Vern Halter, Iditarod and Yukon Quest musher and owner of Dream a Dream Dog Farm. Join him when he and his Alaska huskies go on winter treks and tours, including the Denali-Mount McKinley Explorer package, **a three-day sled dog tour from Willow to Tokosha Mountain Lodge in Denali National Park.** ([Vern Halter](#))

10. **Take a private yachting trip in Prince William Sound and Kenai Fjords National Park** aboard Alaska Wilderness Adventures' Miss Brizz: a five-star, 54-foot extra-wide custom-built aluminum sailing yacht with a teak interior and amenities that include a Jacuzzi tub and leather couches. Three staterooms sleep up to six people and include a master bedroom and bath. The back deck encompasses more than 150 square feet, with an awning that extends to keep passengers dry in inclement weather. ([Alaska Wilderness Voyages](#))

11. How cool is this? **Drink an appletini in a martini glass made from ice** at the ice bar in the Aurora Ice Museum, which is made entirely of ice. It's located just 60 miles northeast of Fairbanks. ([Chena Hot Springs Museum](#))

12. Giddy up! The Horse-Drawn Carriage Co. offers **horse-drawn carriage rides through downtown Anchorage** on one of two antique carriages: a falling-front brougham, built in 1893, and a landau, built in France in 1879. ([Horse Drawn Carriage Company](#))

13. Only in Alaska. **The NYO Games**, formerly the Native Youth Olympics, feature more than 2,000 students from about 50 Alaska communities. They compete in 10 events based on games past generations of Alaska Natives played to test their hunting and survival skills, increase strength and maintain endurance, agility and the balance of mind and body. The Games are held every April. ([Native Youth Olympics](#))

14. Built as a supply road to support the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, **the 414-mile Dalton Highway** is one of the most isolated roads in the country, starting north of Fairbanks and ending near the Arctic Ocean. There are only three towns along the route, which features breathtaking views and a milestone, including passing the Arctic Circle at Mile 115, the northernmost truck stop in the world. Alaskans know it as the Haul Road, named for the reason trucks use the route.
(www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/recreation/dalton_hwy.html)

15. **Soak in the Tenakee Hot Springs**, located on Chichagof Island and accessible by the Alaska Marine Highway System. Hot spring lovers have been coming here since before 1895, when a public bathhouse was built around the source of a 107-degree mineral spring. Separate bathing times are posted for men and women. (www.tenakespringsak.com)

16. **Learn how to Eskimo dance** at the Alaska Native Heritage Center, a cultural center and museum in Anchorage. (www.alaskanative.net)

17. **Tour Juneau's Alaskan Brewing Co.** and tasting bar, and meet the "brew crew" responsible for making the most award-winning craft brewery in the history of the Great American Beer Festival. (www.alaskanbeer.com)

18. We still can't believe they aren't charging admission to use the **Tony Knowles Coastal Trail**, which parallels the coastlines of Knik Arm and Cook Inlet for 11 miles, from Second Avenue in downtown Anchorage to Kincaid Park. Walk, run, bike, roller blade, or just plop down on a bench and enjoy the views. (www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aktrails/ats/anc/knowlsct.htm)

19. **Eklutna Lake**, 40 minutes from Anchorage and surrounded by the Chugach Mountains, is seven miles long and offers soft and hard adventure, including hiking, biking, horseback riding, climbing, picnicking, fishing, boating, cross-country skiing, dog mushing, snowmachining, camping and wildlife viewing. A concessionaire offers rentals and guided adventures ranging from day trips to overnight outings. (www.lifetimeadventures.net)

20. You'll forget about the touristy part when you sample the legendary candies, jams, jellies, syrups and sauces made from Alaska berries. And who doesn't want their **photo taken in front of a chocolate waterfall that uses 3,000 pounds of chocolate?** (www.alaskawildberryproducts.com)

21. **Perseverance Theater in Douglas**—just across the bridge from Juneau—enters its fourth decade as the state's showcase theater, presenting classical, contemporary and world-premier productions created by and for Alaskans. (www.perseverancetheatre.org)

22. Grrrrrrrr. **McNeil River on the Alaska Peninsula** is prime habitat for brown bears, June through August. Viewing permits are required. (www.adfg.alaska.gov/store)

23. **Dine on French pepper steak for two at the Double Musky in Girdwood.** It's a 16- to 20-ounce New York steak crusted with cracked pepper and covered in a spicy burgundy sauce. Mop it all up with jalapeño-cheese rolls. (www.doublemuskyinn.com)

24. **St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs**, known for 250 species of birds and its northern fur seal rookeries, is like watching the National Geographic Channel. Late May is best for seeing male seal beachmasters stake out their territory in preparation for the arrival of the girls. (www.alaskabirding.com)

25. On the rocks, please. **There are more than 100,000 glaciers in Alaska**, and many of the most picturesque ones are in Prince William Sound. (www.stanstephenscruises.com)

26. **Take in the view from Point Woronzof Park**, in Anchorage, which overlooks Cook Inlet and Mount Susitna—affectionately known as "Sleeping Lady." (www.anchoragelparkfoundation.org)

27. **Try two Alaska delicacies: reindeer sausage and smoked salmon** from Alaska Sausage and Seafood (www.alaskasausage.com) or Indian Valley Meats (www.indianvalleymeats.com).

28. **See one of the best collections of Alaska artwork in the state.**

(www.wellsfargohistory.com/museums/museum_anchorage.html) 29. Go to The Flying Dutchman Pastry Shop and see the famous clock that stopped March 27, 1964, at 5:36 p.m., when it fell on the floor at exactly the time the Great Alaska Earthquake hit. (www.ravenchocolates.com)

30. **Sip on a Café Diablo for two at Crow's Nest**, a fine-dining restaurant perched on the 20th floor of Anchorage's Hotel Captain Cook. (www.captaincook.com)

31. **Set sail in Seward** (<http://www.sailinginc.com>) or Southeast (www.sailinginc.com).

32. Hang out with hippies. **The Alaska Folk Festival in Juneau** is one week of free concerts, dancing and workshops. Pencil in April 7-13, 2014. (www.akfolkfest.org)

33. Then, hang out with more hippies. Fourth of July weekend is synonymous with **the Girdwood Forest Fair**: three days of arts and crafts, live music, art and food tucked away in a magical forest setting. (www.girdwoodforestfair.com)

34. Would you go to New York and not see the Statue of Liberty? Then you can't go to Alaska without seeing elusive **Denali/Mount McKinley in Denali National Park and Preserve**. You'll see why it's called "The Great One." (www.nps.gov/dena/index.htm)

35. On your way north, **stop at Talkeetna's West Rib** for a crab sandwich or caribou burger—eat it outdoors on the deck, amid tables of sunburned mountaineers from all over the world. Don't miss Fairview Inn for live music and a cold one, and Talkeetna Roadhouse Café & Bakery for strong coffee and a huge, home-cooked breakfast. (<http://www.westribpub.info>) (www.talkeetnaroadhouse.com).

36. We love Homer—where the land meets the sea. It is also listed as one of "**The 100 Best Small Art Towns in America.**" (www.homeralaska.org)

37. **The Shrine of Saint Therese** on the outskirts of Juneau has little to do with religion and more to do with peace of mind. (www.shrineofsainttherese.org)

38. **Drive the 135-mile Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway** in early September when the fall colors are electric. The scenic byway segment of "the Glenn" extends from Anchorage and ends at Eureka Summit; the highway then continues to Glennallen. The scenic byway provides some of the most accessible glacier viewing in Alaska. (www.glennhighway.org)

39. **Try martinis and steak at Club Paris**, which survived the 1964 earthquake. The oven-poached halibut is also a signature dish, and don't forget Tillamook cheese sauce on the baker. (www.clubparisrestaurant.com)

40. It takes some planning, but it's worth it. Heaven on earth, **the Don Sheldon Mountain House** sits on a five-acre rock and ice outcrop at 6,000 feet in the middle of the Don Sheldon Amphitheater of the Ruth Gorge in Denali National Park & Preserve. (www.climbalaska.org/mountain-house.html)

41. **See the world's largest collection of standing totem poles** in Ketchikan: Saxman Totem Park, Totem Bight State Park, Totem Heritage Center. (www.visit-ketchikan.com)

42. **Watch sockeye salmon as they swim upstream**, trying to leap over the Russian River Falls to return to their ancestral spawning grounds. (www.alaskarm.com/RussianRiver.pdf)

43. Don't miss **feeding time for the brown bears at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center**. (www.alaskawildlife.org)

44. **View the northern lights, or aurora borealis**. Check out the forecast to find out where and when the best displays are. (www.gi.alaska.edu/cgi-bin/predict.cgi)

45. **Hike the 39-mile Resurrection Pass Trail** from Hope to Cooper Landing. (www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/chugach/recarea/?recid=13398)

46. Book one of 60 public-use cabins run by **Alaska State Parks**.

(www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks/cabins/index.htm)

47. Nothing better than milkshakes and Mexican food from the **Baja Taco bus in Cordova**, featured in Sunset magazine and the “Best Of” series on Food Network. (www.bajatacoak.com)

48. **Look for fossils in the cliffs of Fossil Beach in Pasagshak Recreation Area** at the end of the road on Kodiak Island. (www.kodiak.org)

49. **Fly to Barrow**, the northernmost city in the United States, known as the end of the earth. This town of fewer than 5,000 has total darkness for about 70 days of the year and the sun never sets from May to August. (www.cityofbarrow.org)

50. **Jump on the ferry.** Homer to Kodiak, Ketchikan to Haines, Juneau to Gustavas, Bellingham to Prince of Wales Island, Whittier to Cordova and Valdez—with 44,000 miles of coastline, and 33 Alaska ports, the itineraries along the Alaska Marine Highway System routes offer endless possibilities, whether you sail directly to your destination, or stop at communities along the way.
(www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs)

51. **Cross the Winner Creek Gorge** using the hand-tram crossing. (www.alyeskaresort.com/events-activities/summer-hiking-trekking.aspx)

52. **Spend a spring day shopping for mammoth hanging flower baskets** and plants at nurseries and greenhouses in the Mat-Su area. For recommendations, email Mat-Su Master Gardeners.
(www.matsumastergardeners.org)

53. **Hike trails with magnificent views in Hatcher Pass, northwest of Palmer.** Reed Lakes, April Bowl, Gold Cord Lake and Gold Mint trail are the most popular trails.

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/hatcherpass/hatcherpass.html>

54. **There's no place like Nome.** Watch the finish of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, or what is known as the “Mardi Gras of the North.” (www.visit nomealaska.com)

55. **Take a road trip to Valdez** via the Richardson Highway. You'll see Worthington Glacier and one of the most stunning views in the state: crossing Thompson Pass and descending into Keystone Canyon on your way toward Valdez. Don't miss Bridal Veil Falls!

<http://www.valdezalaska.org/discover-valdez-history/valdez-history-keystone-canyon>

Heidi Bohi hasn't done all 55 things on this list, but got a good start during her 20 years living in Alaska. She continues to check off new firsts during her travels there throughout the year. She currently lives in Fountain Hills, Ariz.

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