



Alaska

Tips for Travel

Alaska! The name alone invokes dramatic images of majestic mountains rising from the ocean, glaciers towering over shorelines, rushing rivers teeming with salmon, and grizzlies and caribou roaming freely in a vast wilderness. This truly is the Last Frontier. And for many, it is the vacation destination of a lifetime.

To help ensure that your experience in Alaska is a positive one, the Alaska Attorney General has some advice on how to plan and enjoy your trip.

Know before you go

- **If booking your vacation online,** remember that even if a website looks professional, you should still do your homework to make sure it is a legitimate business. Check to see that the website provides a physical location for the business, as well as a mailing address and phone number. If you have trouble reaching the business by phone, or if your emails are not answered in a reasonable period of time, consider taking your business elsewhere.
- **Ask the business if you can get a free no-obligation quote in writing.** Avoid businesses that won't give you a written quote or ask for a payment prior to confirming your trip.
- **When you purchase your trip through a booking agent,** get your itinerary, confirmation number and proof of payment in writing, including the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all the hotels where you will be staying, as well as any vendors of other services, such as boating excursions or guided tours. Independently confirm your reservations within 14 days of travel.
- **Make all deposit and balance payments using a credit card.** In the event of fraud, it is easier to obtain a refund. Try to avoid paying by wire transfer, check, money order, or cash, since these payment methods usually do not have the protections associated with credit cards.
- **Many states have laws requiring sellers or promoters of travel-related services** (generally referred to as "sellers of travel") to

register, post a bond or meet other financial criteria, and comply with other requirements designed to protect consumers. Check with your state consumer affairs agency or Attorney General's Office to see if your state has such a law, and if it does, whether the person or business you are dealing with is registered.

- **Make sure you understand all of the terms and conditions of your vacation package** before you agree to purchase it, and get in writing the cancellation and refund policy of any business you deal with, including booking agents, tour operators, and lodging providers. Some businesses may charge a fee for changes to your itinerary or may keep a portion of your deposit, even if you cancel months in advance.
- **If you are comparing travel packages, you may find that some businesses provide a breakdown of the package price.** If a business does not list individual prices for each service, consider asking for a breakdown of the package price.
- **Some accommodations may be described as "rustic."** This can range from a luxury hotel with a log-cabin façade to an actual log cabin with an outhouse. Before you book a room, clarify what amenities—and utilities—are included.
- **Pay attention to whether the business is seasonal,** as many vendors may only be in Alaska during the summer tourist season (about May to September) and may shut their doors come autumn. If this is so, make sure you have an alternate, off-season business address and phone number.



- **Ask for references**, and find out how long the company has been in the tourism business and whether it actually provides the services, or contracts with others to provide them. Also helpful is an emergency contact number for the business that you can call if you experience problems while you are traveling.

- **Consider purchasing travel insurance** to cover trip cancellation or delay, lost luggage, or medical emergencies. Make sure, however, that you are not already covered under your existing medical, auto, or homeowner policies. Some credit-card companies also automatically provide travel insurance when you book your reservations using their charge card.



- **Consider checking with the Better Business Bureau** to make sure the business you are dealing with has a satisfactory record, by going to <http://welcome.bbb.org/>.
- **For hunting trips, check to make sure your hunting guide is licensed** with the State of Alaska by conducting a search at <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/occ/pgui7.htm>.

- **When shopping, pay attention to return policies.** Make sure you know the exceptions to any refund policies or guarantees. Some stores, especially those that cater to cruise-ship passengers, limit their guarantees to 30 days or do not give refunds for “buyer’s remorse,” and may give store credit instead of a refund. For more visitor shopping information go to www.law.state.ak.us/departments/civil/consumer/travel.html.

- **Weather can change at a moment’s notice.**

Planned excursions, such as kayak outings or flight-seeing tours, may be cancelled due to inclement weather, so it is a good idea to know the business’s weather related cancellation and refund policy.

- **Distances between towns may be much greater than you are used to**, and the availability of gas stations may be more infrequent. If you are planning a driving tour, make sure your itinerary allows for opportunities to fill up.

Be aware while you’re here

- **Shop smart! It can be difficult to distinguish arts and crafts produced by Alaska Natives from items that are imitations.** Read the *Alaska Native Art* brochure for more information about how to identify authentic Alaska Native arts and crafts. You can obtain a copy of the brochure from www.law.state.ak.us/departments/civil/consumer/Nativeart.html.

When you return home

If you believe you have been the victim of an unfair or deceptive practice, you can file a complaint with the Alaska Attorney General’s office. To obtain a complaint form, contact the Office of the Attorney General, 1031 West 4th Avenue, Suite 200. Anchorage, AK 99501; call 907-269-5200 or toll-free from outside Anchorage, AK 1-888-576-2529; or download the complaint form at www.law.state.ak.us/consumer.

