

## ANCHORAGE: TOWN AND COUNTRY IN ONE

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services  
[World's Fare](#)

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- Just where does a moose hang out? If you're in Anchorage, look for them in town, where the living is easy.

In winter, the city's roads and sidewalks are cleared, invitingly easy to walk on. In summer, bike paths wind through the trees and suburban yards fairly bloom with exotic flowers and leafy bushes. It's only sensible for Alaska's largest, crankiest citizens to prefer the cushy life of the streets.

But spotting the animals before they wander out in traffic is an essential skill, one that ranks up there with reading a compass, lighting a campfire and surviving the seasonal onslaught of millions of tourists.

"You don't want to hit one," warns Jeanette Moores, a resident, her eye on the speedometer and both hands on the wheel as she drives through a residential neighborhood. There's no traffic to speak of on this cool May afternoon, but she isn't taking any chances. "Moose aren't like deer, they're like tanks on stilts," she says.

When 1,200 pounds of bad-tempered muscle flies over the hood and crashes through the windshield, the outcome is usually fatal.

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But the moose make a point, albeit unintentional. The story of Anchorage, population 260,000, is a tale of two cities. To the tourists who fly in and stay for a single night, Anchorage is a port-of-entry, a slightly seedy transit point. Visitors passing through, heading to a cruise, flying on to a fishing lodge or catching the train north to Denali National Park, barely take a second look.

Like any cookie-cutter town center, Anchorage has its share of high-rise hotels, paved sidewalks, shopping malls and tract housing. There are libraries, theaters and museums. Multi-lane highways link the town to the airport, and to points beyond.

But the other Anchorage, emerging after three or four days of coaxing, is a multicultural microcosm of the state at large. Here on the shores of Cook Inlet, you can meet Alaska's first people, learn about their cultures and crafts, explore early European history, tour local art galleries and museums, shop at Nordstrom and gawk at Alaskan-style souvenirs. You can dine well, order fresh halibut, sample locally made beer and stay up late in the Midnight Sun.

All the while the frontier is right there, beyond the highway, a wilderness as raw and as wild as if the town were an illusion. In a few minutes you can be hiking in the mountains -- and getting lost if you're not careful. You can drive to Whittier, on Prince William Sound, to fish for halibut or take a boat tour of the glaciers. You can take a sightseeing flight over Knik Glacier, or watch beluga whales swimming in Cook Inlet.

No museum replaces a two-week hike in the remote Brooks Range, or a month in an Eskimo village. But Anchorage compresses as much content into three days as you'd get from a month of bushwhacking.

How about a real recipe for Eskimo Ice cream? If you're interested, head to the 26-acre Alaska Native Heritage Center, 10 minutes from downtown. Inside the main building you'll find a museum, film, performance stage and a craft demonstration area; outside, examples of native dwellings cluster around a small lake, staffed by docents.

After you've seen the 10-minute history film, toured the exhibits and watched a drumming or story-telling performance, follow the path around the lake, stopping at each dwelling to learn native survival skills. In the Demonstration Hall, Yupik, Inupiat and Athabaskan craftsmen demonstrate gill net making, mask carving, basket weaving, parka design and bead work.

Cooking is not part of the program. But Liz Powell, a Yupik basket maker from Kipnik, on the southwest coast, was happy to talk to someone about her favorite "ice cream" recipe.

"The older people still make it with seal oil," she said. "But I like Crisco better. It's easier. You whip the Crisco with sugar until it's fluffy, mix in a little water and salmon berries, or blueberries if you have those and then stir in Cool Whip. Keep it cold and it's good!"

To revisit the topic from another point of view, stop at the Museum of History and Art, on Seventh Avenue. Exhibits here rush through 10,000 years of pre-European history and then slow down to focus on the last three centuries. Dozens of intriguing artifacts tell the tale: sealskin raincoats and kayak covers, beaded clothes, harpoons, pioneer dishes and tools and gold-mining equipment. A separate gallery shows photo images of the World War II Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands. The fine art gallery is on the ground floor, adjacent to the cafeteria and a wonderful museum shop.

Anchorage is also a launching pad for sightseeing flights over some of Alaska's 100,000 glaciers. If going by sea, book a float plane (or skis in the winter) out of the Lake Hood Seaplane Base, the world's largest seaplane port for flights. As you fly up the valley toward Knik Glacier, the pilot points out moose in the clearings below, and an occasional pair of wolves.

The Glacier itself -- vast, icy, sloping downhill -- is cracked into a

million blue-ice wedges that look as big as trucks, but, says the pilot, are actually 15 stories high. Flying above them, like a fly on a sandwich, gives you a sense of the valley's immense scale.

If going by land, drive (or take a bus) to Portage Glacier, 45 minutes southeast on the Seward Highway. Big chunks of blue ice calve off the glacier and float to the edge of the Begich Boggs Visitors Center, named for news anchor Cokie Robert's father, Sen. Boggs and Alaska Congressman Begich. The pair was killed in a small plane crash nearby. Recently remodeled, the center has a new collection of nature and science exhibits with hands-on experiments for children and a viewing deck.

Anchorage is also kind to sportsmen. Fish for salmon (with a fishing license) in Ship Creek, in the middle of town. Walk or jog on the 11-mile Tony Knowles Coastal Trail (keeping an eye open for moose), starting at the west end of Second Avenue.

For a closer look at salmon, drive five minutes out of town to 2,300-acre Potter's Marsh (the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge), on the Seward Highway along Turnagain arm. There's plenty of parking here, a boardwalk that winds over the marsh and interpretive plaques. Look down as well as out. During the salmon migration, the fish, already deep red and with elongated snouts, swim under the boardwalk and into the marsh to spawn. Pods of white beluga whales also swim up Turnagain Arm, following the salmon.

As for bald eagles, they congregate wherever there's food: in rivers and in city dump sites. Look for the mature birds perched in the treetops; their heads look like popcorn balls. Seeing brown (grizzly) bears is a game of chance. They come to town on occasion but are often seen on hiking trails in the Chugach Mountains. Don't count on adding them to your wildlife portfolio.

For a self-guided walking tour of the downtown area, pick up a map at the Log Cabin and Downtown Visitors' Center, at Fourth Avenue and F Street. Before leaving, check out the cabin itself, a pioneer house with traditional insulation: a real sod roof. Believe it or not, old timers (sourdoughs) who shun the city still live in cabins just like this one, getting by without electricity or plumbing and burning wood in an iron stove to stay warm. But the sod roof, that's a goner now, even in the bush. So take a good look and a photo and remember you saw it in Anchorage.

#### IF YOU GO:

Alaska is a frontier destination. The wilderness begins at the city limits and at the edge of the state's few roads. Ask for advice before you hike, and exercise care in climbing, walking, boating, fishing and walking off marked trails.

NEVER park your car on the road beside Turnagain Arm and walk on the mudflats when the tide, measured as high as 39 feet, is out. Although the ground looks solid, hidden quicksand has been known to trap unwary visitors, usually causing them to drown when the tide comes in.

#### STAYING THERE:

The Historic Anchorage Hotel, an oldie but goodie, is downtown. Call 1-800-544-0988, or visit [www.historicanchoragehotel.com](http://www.historicanchoragehotel.com). The Captain Cook, an upscale multi-story hotel is also downtown, at 1-800-843-1950 or visit [www.captaincook.com](http://www.captaincook.com). Or call the Hawthorn Suites, a family-style hotel in mid-town, at 1-888-469-6575, or visit [www.hawthorn.com](http://www.hawthorn.com).

#### GETTING THERE:

To experience Alaska from the get-go, fly to Anchorage on Alaska Airlines, the one most Alaskans prefer. The airline has historical and cultural connections to the 49th state. For connections, call 1-800-426-0333, or visit [www.alaskaair.com](http://www.alaskaair.com).

#### MORE INFORMATION:

Visit the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau at [www.anchorage.net](http://www.anchorage.net), or call 907-276-4118.

(Anne Z. Cooke relives her travels at home in Venice, Calif.)

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