

Thinking Of Traveling To Alaska?(Part I)

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Good Day Nancy and thank you for accepting our invitation to be interviewed.

Norm:

Please tell our readers something about yourself, your educational background, and the books you have written and are now in the process of writing.

Nancy:

I'm a 5th generation Pacific Northwesterner. My father had a profound wanderlust and an enthusiasm for discovering new people and places that rubbed off on me. A university professor, he held jobs around the U.S. and Brazil. I lived in California, Brazil, Washington and Oregon before moving to New York at age 17 to attend Sarah Lawrence College. My upbringing allowed me to feel at home in widely different milieus and engendered deep curiosity about other lands, and I've had a passion for travel since childhood. Although I did cherish dreams of writing a great novel as a kid, the passion for travel writing came later.

After college, I moved to Canada and worked a few years before attending York University Law School. On graduating, I worked at public interest law firms first in Toronto, then Vancouver where I wrote and edited legal self-help materials before moving to the US to marry. At that time I made a strategic decision to abandon law and become a full-time writer.

My first venture into authoring a book was when I wrote *Adopting Your Child* was published in 1993. This opened the doors for me.

I contributed the British Columbia section to the fourth edition of *Going Places: Family Getaways in the Pacific Northwest*, published in 2000, and went on to write *Going Places: Alaska and the Yukon for Families*, which comes out in April 2005. Both titles are available from Sasquatch Books.

I just completed a new Alaska travel book, *Activity Guide to the Inside Passage: Whether You Have Four Hours or Four Days*. Sasquatch will publish it in January 2006.

Norm:

Where is the Yukon Territory and Alaska, and how easy is it to travel from the United States, Canada or Europe to these areas?

Nancy:

Yukon Territory is bordered to the south by British Columbia, to the east by the Northwest Territories, to the north by the Beaufort Sea in the Arctic and to the west by the state of Alaska. Most of Alaska sits to the left of Canada, but the gorgeous Alaska panhandle, a narrow coastal strip with widely separated communities, many on islands, runs several hundred miles south, bordered to the east by BC. At the top of the panhandle, the towns of Skagway and Haines offer road access to the rest of Alaska, the US and Canada.

The easiest way to get here is by air. International air carriers serve Vancouver and Anchorage. National carriers serve these destinations and Whitehorse (the Yukon capital). Alaska Airlines serves major Alaska cities and many smaller communities. Air Canada and its partners serve BC and the Yukon. Throughout the region, huge distances

make plane travel essential. Smaller airline, charter and air taxi service is widely available across the north. From Seattle, a non-stop flight to Anchorage takes 3.25 hours. From Vancouver, a non-stop flight to Whitehorse takes 2.5 hours.

Highways run north through BC and Alberta, connecting to the Alaska Highway, which starts officially at Dawson Creek, BC, and runs through the Yukon into central Alaska. It is 817 miles from Seattle to mile zero of the Alaska Highway; and 548 miles from Calgary.

The Alaska Highway itself is 1,390 miles long, ending at Delta Junction, Alaska. Another 98 miles brings you to Fairbanks. The road is paved all the way, and services are rarely more than 100 miles apart--usually closer.

Once in the Yukon, motorists can drive to Dawson City, ground zero of the Klondike Gold Rush, and over the Top of the World highway to Alaska. The Dempster Highway leads north from Dawson to Inuvik, through the Northwest Territories. It's not paved but in good summer weather can be driven comfortably.

In Alaska one can drive from Anchorage to Denali National Park, home of the continent's highest mountain, spectacular Mount McKinley, in eight hours on good paved highway. Four more hours brings you to Fairbanks, with road access to the Yukon and points north. Many northern highways offer good driving conditions, breathtaking mountain and ocean views, and very little traffic apart from the occasional moose or bear ambling across the roadway.

Norm:

Would you consider Alaska and the Yukon Territory a good choice for a romantic getaway or wedding and honeymoon destination? Why?

Nancy:

The answer is a resounding yes--for the right couple. This region contains the world's largest protected wilderness, spanning Alaska, British Columbia, and Yukon Territory and designated a UN World Heritage site.

The scenery is magnificent, access to wildlife unequalled, and despite its ever-increasing popularity as a tourist destination, has many all-but-undiscovered destinations to explore. Native cultures, largely eclipsed down south, are major players in the north, and are glad to share their world with visitors. However, if your idea of a holiday or honeymoon is lying on a tropical beach, you'll want to look elsewhere.

Let's look at weddings first.

Getting your wedding party up north can be a challenge, although it could also be a magnificent experience. Alaska has several five-star hotels in the Anchorage area; otherwise most choices can be characterized as comfortable but rustic. A large wedding party and guests--more than 100 people--could be accommodated in Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks or Whitehorse. The Captain Cook, in Anchorage, or the nearby Alyeska Resort in Girdwood, would be top choices. Smaller wedding parties can be comfortably accommodated in many places.

For honeymoons and romantic getaways, options are endless. Cities offer the usual urban amenities; but to experience the unique attractions of Alaska and the Yukon, try:

- An out-of-the-way spot like the Boardwalk Lodge on Prince of Wales Island, a great choice for fishing enthusiasts. In recent years, visitors have clamoured for a look at the world's largest brown bears (AKA grizzlies).
- An August trip to Katmai National Park & Preserve, with a stay at the Brooks Lodge, a short walk from brown bears fishing for salmon, is unforgettable.
- The lovely Windsong Lodge near Seward on the Kenai Peninsula makes a great home base from which to explore Kenai Fjords National Park where you can get up close to beautiful Exit Glacier, hike some of Alaska's loveliest trails, and kayak among glacier-carved fjords.
- The Yukon, especially Dawson City and Whitehorse, come to life in summer. A trip at the start or end of the season is recommended. Even in August, fall colours are rampant and yet temperatures can rise above 25C/77F. Take a day trip up the Yukon River to Eagle, Alaska.

Norm:

You mentioned to me that you have traveled to the north by just about every means available: plane, cruise ship, sailboat, motoring. Which one did you prefer and why?

Nancy:

I enjoyed all of them. Driving is great because it allows the most access to the region. If you have the luxury of time, the options are infinite! For visiting southeast Alaska, travel by water is my top choice. The variety of options grows every year. At the high end are small luxury cruise lines, or you can book a sailboat, complete with captain and crew, for your party and go exploring. For most visitors, especially those unfamiliar with the region, large cruise-ship travel is often the most comfortable choice. To experience Alaska as Alaskans do, I suggest taking the Alaska ferry up the Inside Passage; it combines the most access at the least cost in time and money. And to simply get north fast and start exploring, nothing beats flying.

Norm:

When is the best time to visit Alaska and the Yukon Territory from the point of view of weather, costs, crowds, and the availability of flights from the USA, Canada and Europe?

Nancy:

The most affordable time to visit is the so-called "shoulder season." Up north, that's May and September. Attractions are open and flights are available, but crowds are thinner. Mosquitoes, which can be a trial throughout the north, are scarce in those months, yet days are still long. Thrifty-minded visitors can find cheaper flights and often bargain for lower hotel rates at this time. Cruise fares tend to be lower as well. For a winter trip, avoid Christmas holidays and school midwinter breaks to obtain the best rates.

Norm:

How safe is it to travel to Alaska and the Yukon Territory?

Nancy:

Quite safe. The crime rate is low and human-generated risks are few. However, if you plan to get into the wilderness, you'll need to be prepared, inform yourself and take sensible precautions. Read up on the terrain and the wildlife. Learn how to handle bear and moose encounters. If you're visiting in January, you'll need cold-weather clothing suitable for average low temperatures of -22C/-9F. It's not unheard of for temperatures to reach -40C/-40F. On the other hand, it comes as a nice surprise to many summer visitors to the Alaska and Yukon interior that summer temperatures can soar to 27C/81F or even higher.

Norm:

Could you give our readers an idea of the costs involved if travel originates from the USA or Canada?

Author: geet

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