

Kenai Fjords

KENAI FJORDS
NATIONAL PARK
ALASKA



Kenai Fjords National Park encompasses a coastal mountain system on the southeastern side of the Kenai Peninsula in southcentral Alaska. Moist, marine air billows off the Gulf of Alaska and presses up and over the steep Kenai Mountains. So much precipitation falls in this cool climate that the 300-square-hectare (800-square-mile), nearly flat Harding Icefield buries all but the tops of the central mountain range. The icefield stands almost 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) above the Gulf of Alaska, radiating glaciers out in all directions. To the southeast they reach down to the Kenai Fjords, where several tidewater glaciers calve

directly into saltwater. Mountain ridges extend out into the Gulf of Alaska, their seaward ends depressed by tectonic forces so that only mountaintops remain above sea level. Glaciers then carved the submerged valleys between these jagged ridges. When the glaciers receded and were replaced by the ocean, the fjords were created. The ends of peninsulas, free of ice for at least several hundred years, support mature rain forests. Along the shoreline in the spruce and hemlock trees bald eagles nest. Mountain goats inhabit the rocky slopes above treeline. Sea otters live in shallow and protected bays and lagoons.

Harbor seals summer in the waters and on icebergs calved from tidewater glaciers. Steller's sea lions live on the rocky islands at the entrances to Aialik Bay and Nuka Bay. Thousands of seabirds seasonally rear their young on the steep cliffs and offshore islands of the Kenai Fjords.

The park comprises about 237,500 hectares (587,000 acres) of federal land. Part of the Harding Icefield and the central Kenai Mountains' western flank are in the Kenai National Moose Range. The offshore islands in the Kenai Fjords are federal lands but are not included in the park.

WHAT TO DO AND SEE

Entering the Kenai Fjords by boat is a popular and rewarding experience. Seabirds, sea lions, seals, porpoise, and whales are frequently sighted along the rugged coastline. Tidewater glaciers in Aialik Bay, Northwestern Lagoon and Nuka Bay actively calve huge

blocks of ice. Fishing for salmon and bottom fish is usually productive. The steep terrain throughout Kenai Fjords limits camping and hiking.

The Harding Icefield is awesome and beautiful. Air char-

ters out of Seward, Homer, and Anchorage can provide spectacular views of the icefield, glaciers, and coastline. Crossing the icefield on foot or skis, or travel on glaciers is recommended only to experienced and well-equipped mountaineers.

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ACCESS

Seward and Homer are within a few hours drive of Anchorage, where air transport, both scheduled and chartered, is available. Seward has bus service from Anchorage. Charter boats and aircraft are available in both communities. The

state ferry system connects Seward, Homer, Kodiak, and Prince William Sound, and passes along the coast of the Kenai Fjords. Seward, closest to the park, is the usual starting point for trips into the area.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES
Seward and Homer have hotels, motels, campgrounds, food, and most supplies. Contact their Chambers of Commerce for more information. There are no campgrounds in the park.

WEATHER

A maritime climate prevails, with abundant rain and snow. The driest month is May; successive months receive increasing precipitation. Mid-June normally begins the travel season, as spring storms cease and temperatures reach the 10-15°C range (the 50s and 60s°F). June, July, and August are the best months for boat travel. Warm, sunny days are welcome exceptions. September initiates the usual wet and stormy fall. Snow can occur on the Harding Icefield at any time.

CLOTHING

Comfortable wool clothing and rain gear are essential.

PRECAUTIONS

The Kenai Fjords are rugged, remote, and exposed to the tempestuous Gulf of Alaska. Strong currents flow past them and few landing sites exist. You are strongly advised to employ an experienced guide and seaworthy craft. Those entering the fjords without a guide should be very experienced and should seek information on landing sites, weather conditions, and navi-

gational hazards from the National Park Service, or U.S. Coast Guard.

Crevasses and foul weather pose dangers on the Harding Icefield and its glaciers. Experience, skill, good equipment, and stamina are required for successful icefield and glacial travel. For your safety, please leave your itinerary with someone and contact that person upon completion of your trip.

For further information write:
Superintendent
Kenai Fjords National Park
P.O. Box 727
Seward, Alaska 99664

