

# Katmai National Park, Alaska



**VISUAL TRAVEL TOURS**

Maps Show You Where... We Show You Why!

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# Tour Summary

“This is one of the world’s top three natural destinations.” That’s what Gavin Thurston, a 24-year veteran of the BBC’s Natural History Unit, said about Katmai National Park. In a place that offers world-class fly-fishing, unparalleled backcountry hiking, and incredible bear viewing, Katmai has it all. So come spend the day fly-fishing on a remote river or lake. Hike into the Valley of 10,000 Smokes, or, if you dare, witness the bears as they cavort, fish, and play right in front of you.

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# Once in a Lifetime





I've always been told that there are places in the world that are truly magical. Places where, when you arrive, something clicks and you quickly realize that this isn't going to be your ordinary vacation. It might be a scent in the air, a striking visual landscape, or maybe a cultural experience.





But whatever that hook may be, it is absolutely enchanting. You have discovered a place so magical that you can't forget about it no matter how long you've been away. I've traveled for over 40 years and never once did I make that connection - until 2004 when I first set foot inside Katmai.



Katmai National Park is 4.6 million acres of rugged wilderness tucked into the south-central section of Alaska. My friends had been begging me to go there for years. According to them, Katmai had it all: oceans, mountains, wildlife, and solitude.



As tempting as it was, I kept delaying my trip to Katmai. After continually hearing how beautiful this place was, I felt there would be nothing but disappointment. There was no way this place could live up to my expectations. Was I ever wrong!





My first peek into Katmai was from the window of a true Alaskan bush plane, complete with propellers and 6 seats, including the pilot's. Tidewater glaciers, tens of thousands of years old, blanketed rugged mountains. The blue ice gleamed in the shiny sunlight.



An hour's flight went by in a flash. Before I knew it, our pilot was steering the plane into an inlet and preparing to land on a sandy beach. I've been to a number of beach resorts, but this one was striking for one simple reason: there was no sign of civilization.



There are almost as many pilot's licenses in Alaska as there are driver's licenses, and places like Katmai help to explain why. Alaska is twice the size of Texas, our second biggest state, and most of it is pure wilderness. Some places, such as Katmai National Park, do not have road access into the park. The only ways to access it are by plane, boat, or foot.





As I peeked out the window barely 100 feet in the air, I caught my first glimpse of the very thing that would lead to my magical connection with Katmai. There were 4 of them, in positions staggered along a creek that led inland from the Pacific Ocean. From my perspective in the air, they looked smaller than I expected, and not the least bit scary.





Hard to believe that I would ever say that about a grizzly bear, but that was my initial thought when stepping off the bush plane and taking my first steps in Katmai. We were met by the owner of the camp, Simyra Hlebechuk, who welcomed us to Hallo Bay, a wilderness camp on the southeastern edge of Katmai.



As we walked to our camp, I wondered if Katmai could live up to my expectations, given my friend's hype. In my experience, high expectations had led to disappointment. So when we set out from camp with our guide, I expected an incredible experience, completely unaware that Katmai offered something more.





A fairly easy 1/2-mile walk led us to the entrance of Clint's Creek, a stream that leads inland from the Pacific Ocean. We looked in both directions, but saw nothing. The bears that had been on the stream when we arrived must have wandered back into the adjacent woods and out of our sight. It was about an hour before one

showed up, and when it did, I certainly didn't expect it to be on a sandy ledge 15 feet above us.





You could see it on everyone's faces - except the guide's. That tensing of the muscles...fast twitch fibers ready to spring into action. The fight or flight survival instinct bubbled to the surface. Either from experience or from perception, our guide sensed our fear. Much to my surprise, she motioned for us to stay calm while she started talking gently to the bear.



“Good bear,” she said. Like that was going to help! Everything I ever knew about a grizzly bear came from television. Man attacked by grizzly. Hiker mauled. Now she was trying to sweet-talk this ferocious predator?



As she spoke, I studied the bear. His teeth seemed sharp enough. He even had a crimson spot on his snout. Yet the more I looked, the more I saw that this wasn't a ferocious man-eating animal. He seemed too...too...friendly.





As the bear looked down, he bobbed his head much like a dog panting. His stare, more curious than menacing, seemed to be a greeting. “Hey. How’s everybody doing?” For our group, the moment was exhilarating. To be that close to a wild grizzly bear in his natural habitat was amazing. It was my first encounter with the magic of Katmai National Park and I instantly wanted more.





Alaska is known as the world's last frontier, so as you can imagine travel to different points in the state is not as simple as getting in a car. The common gateway for Alaskan visitors is Anchorage, with most major airlines servicing the main airport.



Once in Anchorage, Katmai can be accessed easily by 2 modes of transportation: air and sea. Both Alaska Airlines and Peninsula Airlines offer daily flights from Anchorage to King Salmon, a small town within the park. Katmai can also be reached from Homer and other Alaskan towns through charter companies offering tours and/or transportation.

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