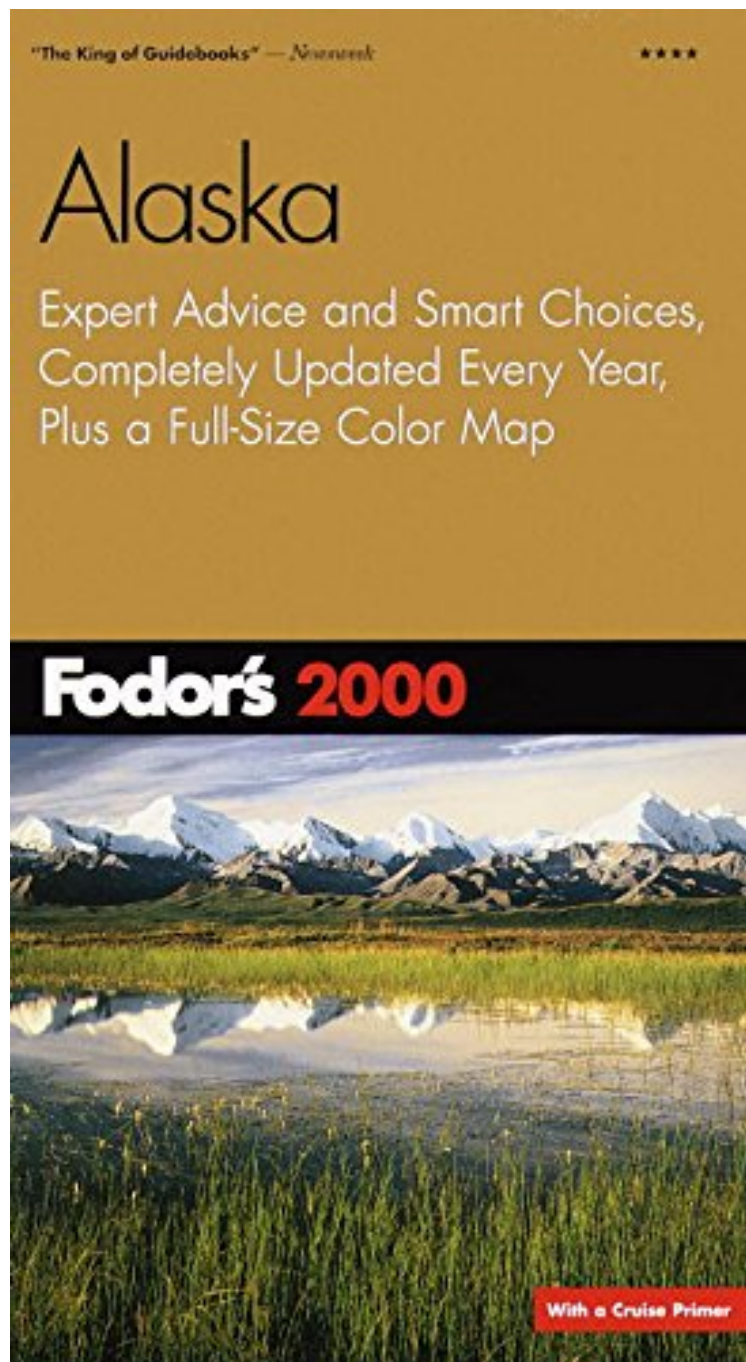


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Pleasures and Pastimes
Bicycling
Anchorage has an excellent bike-trail system -- one along the coast and several others inland. You can take your bike on the Alaska Railroad to Denali National Park. Although the park road is largely unpaved, it has a good dirt surface and only light traffic. You can also bring your bike on Alaska's ferry system for an extra charge. Use it to explore the Southeast's charming communities and surrounding forests, but come prepared for heavy rain. Many Interior residents are avid bikers, and mountain biking has become a hot sport here. Fairbanks has miles of scenic bike paths along the Chena River and into the city's outskirts. Most roads have wide shoulders and, of course, offer those incredible Alaska views.
Boating
With its numerous streams and rivers, Alaska is a natural for waterborne exploration. In the Southeast, the busiest river for running is the Mendenhall; in South Central, it's the Kenai. White-water boaters often spend their weekends playing in the whitecaps of the Nenana River, near Denali National Park in the Interior. Remember that Alaska has some serious white water: unless you are experienced, do not undertake a boating expedition without a professional guide.
Canoeing
Canoes are generally safe and comfortable, and they're suitable for many of Alaska's protected waterways, particularly those around the Kenai Peninsula and Southeast's Admiralty Island.
Kayaking
Sea kayaking is big among Alaskans. It was the Aleuts who invented the kayak (or bidarka) in order to fish and hunt sea mammals. Kayaks give the boater a feel for the water and a view from water level. They are also more stable than canoes.
Rafting
Rafts take multiple passengers, are reasonably comfortable, and can be broken down and readily packed for transportation on a human back or via small plane. White water is almost as thrilling on a raft as in a kayak.
Sailing
The beautiful Prince William Sound, with tidewater glaciers and forested islands, has good winds in late summer. The protected waters of Southeast Alaska have fickle winds, but you'll discover quite a few sailboats in Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka.
Dining
Alaska's primary claim to gastronomic fame is seafood. The rich coastal waters produce prodigious quantities of halibut, salmon, crab, and shrimp, along with such specialties as abalone, sea urchin, herring roe, and sea cucumbers (a favorite in Japan). If you haven't yet tasted fresh Alaskan salmon, do so here -- there's nothing quite like a barbecued Copper River king salmon. For a distinctive taste of the past, step into a classic Alaskan log roadhouse. The food is basic and hearty, and you're likely to meet the

hardscrabble folk who survive in the Bush. Roadhouses are not, however, good places to show up with a "Ban Assault Rifles" bumper sticker.

DogsleddingAlaskans are dog crazy. With more and more mushers offering wintertime tours, you can try anything from a half-hour jaunt outside Anchorage to a two-week outing in the Brooks Range or an expedition along the Iditarod Trail. You can participate as much or as little as you like, riding in the basket and being pampered at an overnight lodge or helping harness the dogs and taking a turn on the back of the sled.

FishingAlaska has no shortage of fishing spots. People from all over the world come to Alaska for a chance to land a trophy salmon or a 200-pound-plus halibut. If you're driving through Alaska, you can fish from the roadside in the Interior. In the Southeast you can sink a line right off the docks. If you're a truly serious fisherman, though, a guided boat charter or a stay at a fly-in fishing lodge is the ultimate Alaska fishing adventure.

FlightseeingThe magnitude of Alaska can perhaps best be comprehended from the air. Every major destination from the Southeast to the Arctic has flightseeing services that will show you Alaska from a bird's-eye view. It's an experience not to be missed.

Gardens and Giant VegetablesAlaska has a short growing season, but the days of midnight sun produce some of the biggest blooms you'll ever see. Anchorage beautifies its downtown parks each summer with spectacular plantings, and every August, the Alaska State Fair, in Palmer, is a showcase for 90-pound cabbages and other oversize vegetables.

National Parks and ForestsAlaska has 15 national parks, preserves, and monuments; two national forests; and 16 national wildlife refuges. The most visited of all is Denali National Park, site of Mt. McKinley, at 20,320 ft the tallest peak in North America. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, east of Anchorage, is the largest national park in the United States -- six times the size of Yellowstone.

ShoppingAlaska, believe it or not, is a big shopping state. In most respects, shopping in Alaska is not unlike shopping in the contiguous United States. Most of the larger cities have department stores and malls, and they accept the same credit cards you use at home.

Native CraftsAmong the most prized items sought by souvenir hunters are Native crafts. In particular, look for carvings of walrus ivory, soapstone, jade, and wood, and for items made of fur. You'll find a wide choice of jewelry, mukluks (seal- or reindeer-skin Eskimo boots), masks, totem poles, paintings, and baskets. The state has adopted two symbols that guarantee the authenticity of crafts made by Alaskans: a hand symbol indicates the item was made by one of Alaska's Native peoples; a polar bear marks an item as made in Alaska.

Skiing and SnowboardingAlthough it has no lack of snow or mountains, Alaska is not a big ski destination. There are, however, numerous opportunities for both downhill and cross-country adventures. You can charter a helicopter to go backcountry skiing in the Valdez area, or visit one of the downhill areas near Anchorage, Fairbanks, or Juneau. Ski in the summer by chartering a plane to a glacier in Denali National Park. Valdez is home to the World Extreme Skiing Championships every April.