

*Car Rental:*

**Midnight Sun Car & Van Rental** - Fantastic rates, especially for those under 25. As long as you have full coverage on your car, then they will not up-charge you for being under 25 years old. Very personable and great customer service! I highly recommend that you get your own vehicle while you're in AK. There is so much area to cover, and it allows you the flexibility to stop along the way to hike, take pictures, and go wherever you'd like. There isn't much of a public transport system, even in Anchorage, so a car rental is generally a must.

*Places to stay:*

**Base Camp Hostel** in Anchorage - Great way to meet others. Lots of amenities - sensory float tank, kayaks for rent, yurt and fire pit in the backyard, farmer's market nearby. Hikers will leave their unused gear or dried food after their trip is complete, so you can usually grab a few freebies if you stay here.

**Alyeska Hostel** in Girdwood - Nice bunks and well-maintained space. Good shower, kitchen, and lounge space.

**Exit Glacier Campground** - You cannot reserve the spots ahead of time, but I've never had an issue finding an open spot. This is just off of Exit Glacier, and it is free and secluded. I love this campsite.

**K'esugi Ken Campground** - We stayed on the way to Denali. Well maintained, beautiful views of Denali.

**Savage River Campground** in Denali - Riley Creek Campground is fine, but generally busier and noisier. Savage River is more secluded. (I've also stayed in privately-maintained cabins ~15 minutes from Denali. Nice to have a hot shower and bed sometimes. Not sure where this was - I don't remember the place).

*Places to visit (from North to South):*

**Denali** - Do this. You won't regret it. The Mount Healy Overlook trail is exhausting, but beautiful! The pictures from that hike still take my breath away! There are so many good trails, you can interact with the sled dogs, and I've come face-to-face with a lynx and many moose while there. There are some nearby souvenir shops and restaurants if you're feeling like you need a rest day.

**Anchorage** - This is a city, not super remarkable. I've always treated it as a rest stop for a shower, souvenirs, or a launching point up to Barrow. If you want to see the city from a mountaintop, you can hike Flattop Mountain. That said, one of my all-time favorite restaurants is Bear Tooth Grille. Locals recommended it to me, and I make it a point to go at least once every time that I'm in Anchorage. Hehe, sometimes I've gone twice... (Moose's Tooth Pizza is the sister restaurant to Bear Tooth, but they always seem to have a line out of the door - I've never been).

**Girdwood** - This is a huge ski resort destination in the winter. If you hike up the mountain to the resort and restaurant, the aerial tram will lower you down for free. There is also a hike (Winner Creek) near the resort that leads you to a hand-tram. You manually pull the tram across a deep river gorge to the other side.

**Seward** - Can be rainy, but this is a beautiful place to visit. Seward Brewing Company tastes amazing after a day of exploration. Exit Glacier is a MUST. (This is the only glacier that I've gotten to see up close in AK) - it is the most accessible glacier. I believe

that you can visit the very top of the glacier (i.e., the Harding Ice Field) in the summer or fall when it isn't snowed in (but not in May or early June). You'll probably see a few ptarmigans at Exit.

You could stop by the Turnagain Arm Scenic Boardwalk or Byron Glacier Trail on your way to/from Seward, too. You can't get close to Byron Glacier, but it's still neat to see a glacier and an easy hike.

**Homer** - I flew down to Homer and I spent a few weeks there living with a friend. There isn't a good way to get to Homer via train or bus. The drive to Homer isn't as pretty as the drive north to Denali. It's a great little fishing town. The mountains meet the water, so the landscape is amazing. Be prepared to spend some money (\$70 RT) if you want to take a water taxi across the water and hike the mountains in Kachemak Bay State Park (highly recommended!). There are some other local hikes that I could recommend if you plan going to Homer.

*Places I've heard good things about:*

- Hope (Good place to meet other travelers, generally a younger crowd, good hiking. Not great hiking in May or early June because it is still snowed in, muddy, or icy).
- Valdez (The few travelers that I've met that take this passage to Valdez speak so highly of the views, hiking, and overall experience. There isn't much to Valdez as a town, it's more about the experience of getting there).

For your first trip to Alaska, I'd recommend Denali and Seward over traveling to Homer. I'm not sure that you'd be able to do both Denali and Homer in a week because of the distance and travel time. Just my two cents.