

## **Taylor's Travel Tips:**

### **Vehicles to rent!**

I rented an outfitted travel van from Outdoorsy at the end of the 22 & 23 field seasons and rented a car from Hertz in 2024.

#### **Van Pros:**

- Park & sleep almost anywhere
- Come with most amenities needed (fridge, bed/sheets, cookware)
- Cheaper than renting a car/hotel if travelling for more than several days
- Easy to view wildlife and “relax” after long field season
- Most come equipped with bear spray

#### **Van Cons:**

- Expensive to fill (many will be diesel)
- Need to be over 25 to rent
- May need to take road test/meet with owner for a bit
- Might go several days without a shower (after a long field season)
- Limited to certain roads (no Dalton highway, no Skilak loop...etc)

#### **Rental Car Pros:**

- Cheaper for a few days
- Cheaper to fill
- Easier driving and parking

#### **Rental Car Cons:**

- Limited space
- Still expensive
- Need to rent hotels or camp

## **Places to go!**

**Anchorage:** I usually don't stay in Anchorage, more so renting a van there and leaving the same day. The Native History Museum is very nice to visit, and there are a lot of grocery stores to stock up on goodies before traveling (highly recommend Fred Meyer!!). My favorite place to stay is Bird Creek Campground, which is about 40 minutes south of the city and the first campground you will come across (Beluga Point is a nice spot to stop on the way).

There is easy fishing access at Bird Creek too, but I would recommend spin gear over fly setups.

**Whitter:** I have never actually gone to the town but have gone to the tunnel. I would recommend staying at the Bear Campground before, there were plenty of beautiful spots and it's right along Portage creek. You can fish for a lot of species, but this river is typically closed to all Salmon fishing.

**Seward:** Seward is one of the next big spots you can go. There are lots of day excursions offered on boats, and a lot of cool spots to eat. Walking along the beach was a lot of fun, and we got to see a lot of Sea Otters. I travelled there in late August and September, so there was less to do, but it is a fun place during peak season I hear.

**Hope:** Hope is north of Seward and is a much smaller town. There are a lot of river rafting opportunities on the Sixmile Creek, but not a lot of fishing. The river itself is a lot of fun to explore and can be a great spot to read. Bring bear spray though, lots of grizzlies. I would recommend staying at the Porcupine Campground. Make sure to turn North on Old Hope Rd and see the actual town! The resurrection trail is a fun hike that isn't too demanding, while offering a good run of Pink Salmon.

**Coopers Landing:** I haven't actually spent much time here; however, it's an awesome spot if you want to fish the Kenai. Lots of guides and public access.

**Soldotna:** I like to stop in Soldotna to stock up on groceries mostly. North is Kenai, but there isn't a ton to do there. Before you reach Soldotna there is an awesome coffee and ice cream shop that is shaped like an ice cream cone that offers dairy free stuff (BIG DEAL TO MY WIFE). I would recommend stopping at the Kenai Wildlife center, where you will have opportunities to hike down to the marsh to see Moose if you're lucky.

**Ninilchik:** I really like to stop here for a few nights. There is some amazing beach access and some nice fishing spots available. This town is a wildlife HOT SPOT (as well as Anchor Point). Otters, eagles, duckies, and moose depending on the time of year. There's a beautiful campground with beach access.

**Anchor Point:** This is my favorite spot in Alaska hands down. We camped here each year at the Coho Campground and rented an Airbnb here in 2024. There is beach access and some great wildlife viewing. There are some good restaurants in Anchor Point, but I like to cook on the beach.

**Homer:** Camping on the spit is a great time! I would definitely recommend making it to Homer because you can camp out there, and there is a nice shower (unlimited hot water g bless)! The Homer spit offers lots of day cruising and passage to Kenai, fishing trips, and a

plethora of shops and restaurants. The wildlife viewing center is very cool and you will find many similar plants as you studied up north. Parking on the spit can be a bit tough, and it is easier to just drive to the end. The library is really nice, but I would specifically recommend stopping at Captain Pattie's Fish House (note most restaurants are closed on Wednesdays so the workers can go fishing and stock up on fresh fish for the week).

**Denali:** North of Anchorage and it is a must. It's a "you have to go at least once in your life" type of spot. I only went in 2021, but it was nice. I saw lots of Caribou and Bears. If you rent a van or feel comfortable, you can park at any of the pull offs along the road and camp for the night. We parked our van on a random pull off along the river one night and saw a caribou wading through the river. There is a campground once you get to Denali National Park where you can camp, wash your clothes, and shower for a fee. There's also a restaurant at the National Park but I've never been.

### **Overall Spots to go:**

I would strongly recommend picking an area and just exploring it as well as you can. You will not have enough time to see everything (unless you come back...). Personally, heading south has much more to offer and was a lot more fun. I would make sure to check out the Skilak Lake Loop, in between Soldotna and Coopers landing. You might have some vehicle restrictions so be aware. You need to go on the Skilak Lookout Trail, it is absolutely beautiful, but a little demanding.

Near Coopers Landing, the Quartz Creek campground is a hidden gem, GO! There is great fishing, sweet camping and a ton of nice hikes. The river is very pretty and is a lot easier to fish than most.

If you have extra time, Hope is one of my favorite towns and doesn't get a ton of visitors. The campground is very secluded, private, the spots are HUGE, and there's hiking trails starting right at the campground. The town/locals are very welcoming to visitors and will chat your ear off. They have a coffee shop (no surprise) close to the campground that is a favorite.

### **Sam's Survival Suggestions**

Prep before you go but be open to ditching your plans to just wander once you get there! Also, stop at as many roadside coffee stands as you can. ALSO go to smashburger in Anchorage while you're there, I dream about their dairy free oreo shake sometimes.

Words of Advice:

- Camping is first come first serve at the state parks. Some take cards for payment but most are cash only!
- State campgrounds have pit toilets but no running water. Be prepared with hand sanitizer and sometimes toilet paper because they aren't always super stocked by the time y'all travel at the end of the season
- Be prepared for rain! Someone once told me that their winter season starts in September, so depending on when you travel it can be rainy and chilly.
- Bring binoculars, good hiking shoes (don't rely on your summer muck boots), hiking poles, and a good book or something fun to keep you entertained if it's too crappy outside

#### Camping/Travel:

- Outdoorsy for van rental
  - o Kind of like airbnb for converted camping vans
  - o Can customize your search to include certain amenities you want in the van, if you want gas vs diesel, or a van without mileage restrictions (I recommend this feature)
- <https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/campsitelist.htm> OR <https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aspunits/index.htm>
  - o Campgrounds in AK
  - o My favorites are Bird Creek, Ninilchik View, Coho, Black Bear, and Quartz
- <https://www.alaska.org/public-use-cabins#listings>
  - o Alaska has dry cabins you can rent throughout the state. Most are hike-in cabins that you can rent ahead of time
- All Trails has been my most used app while we're traveling (free version)
- Taylor's most used app is OnX Hunt (free version)
- If you want to view some glaciers without having to book a cruise/day boat, I recommend Exit Glacier and Byron Glacier! Both beautiful hikes and if you're feeling wild, you can hike the Harding Icefield at Exit Glacier
- <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishing.main>
  - o For all of your fishing needs (I literally read books while Taylor fishes, I have no idea what any of this means)