

Explore Alaska (From The Comfort of Your RV!): Part One

by Ann Weber, PassPorter Guest Contributor

About two years ago my family started thinking about an Alaskan vacation. My dad had always wanted to go to Alaska and my husband jumped on the bandwagon saying he had always thought it would be a great place to go too. Personally, I couldn't understand going on a summer vacation to a place where it is likely to be 50° Fahrenheit and raining! I quickly changed my mind as I began to research this gorgeous state.

My husband wanted to see the "vast wilderness" of Alaska and I was fascinated by the culture and history. We received an advertisement that told us we could enjoy both! We decided to rent an RV and explore some of the interior of Alaska, then take a southbound cruise. An article about how we selected our cruise appeared in the August 10th issue of PassPorter News. In this article you will learn the details about renting an RV as well as the campgrounds we stayed in.

We looked at several RV rental companies and quickly decided on Great Alaskan Holidays. Although at first glance their prices were more expensive, I liked the fact that most everything we would need was included in the price - no extra charges for cleaning (they clean it when you bring it back), using the generator, etc. The price includes linens, dishes and common kitchen items, 2 folding chairs, and more. There are extra items that you can pay to add on (like a cooler for fish), but we didn't need any of these items.

There were options to pay by the mile or for unlimited mileage. Considering the distances we were planning on traveling, we decided unlimited mileage was a better deal for us. We did travel enough miles that the option easily paid for itself. One more rental decision to make is whether to pre-pay for gasoline and propane. We decided it would be easy enough to fill-up the gas tank just down the street from the rental location when we returned the RV. The price to prepay the propane was relatively small, so we decided to do that. We weren't sure where in Anchorage you could refill propane tanks, but we knew gas stations were everywhere.

Great Alaskan Holidays has a shuttle that will pick you up at and/or take you to the airport. You need to call them and schedule a pick-up time. Someone just walked in when we were there and was sent away with a time later in the day to come back. Everything you need to know

(even the fact that you have to call to schedule a pick-up time) is in the paperwork they send you before your vacation. All drivers must watch a safety/driving video before you can fill out the paperwork and be on your way. Plan at least an hour to pick-up your RV. Don't make significant driving plans for the first day since your pick-up time and how long it will take to get the RV are not guaranteed.

For us, the RV was a great solution. We had a 30' motor home with 2 slide-outs. We were amazed by the additional space the slide-outs provided. We had 4 adults and 2 teenagers so two hotel rooms would have been needed. Although I have heard people say they have found nice Bed and Breakfast locations for under \$100/night, I found most hotels were in the \$150 to \$250 per night range. Our RV was around \$200/day. Some of the stretches of road were long and it was really nice to have a restroom and food always available. We also had much greater flexibility on where we wanted to stop in the evenings with the RV. One thing you definitely need to plan for with an RV is how you will cope with the close to 24 hours a day of sunlight. Our camper had 3 skylights, making it impossible to darken the RV for sleeping.

Our first evening was in Talkeetna, on the way to Denali National Park. We stayed at the Talkeetna Camper Park. Although this campground was nothing extraordinary, it was pretty, clean and well maintained. I did not use the showers as I found the price ridiculous (something like \$2 for 5 minutes), but my son and husband used them and said they were clean. We had full hook-ups at this park.

Our second evening was at the Riley Creek Campground in Denali National Park. This campground does not offer hook-ups, but there is a convenient dump station. If you have a National Parks Golden Access Pass or Golden Age Pass you can camp for half price. Although we had a difficult time leveling our trailer here, the campground is beautiful. It was peaceful and really well maintained. In the National Park, your reservation is not for a specific spot. I recommend getting there fairly early in the day so you can pick a good campsite for yourself. We arrived around 5pm and were still able to find a pretty site, but most of the level ones were already gone. Also, book early as it is not unheard of for campgrounds to fill to capacity.

The next night we did not have reservations. We decided we would stop when we were too tired to continue. I decided at the Denali North Viewpoint campground that I didn't want to go any farther. This is more of a parking lot than a campground, but we knew this ahead of time. We wanted to see if we would get lucky and have Mt. McKinley be visible in the morning when we awoke. The view of the mountains from here is beautiful. There were no facilities here other than public toilets and a

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few picnic tables. There is a small shelter with forms that you fill out and leave in a box with your check and the site (parking place) number you chose.

The following evening was also a stop-when-we-feel-like-it evening. Although not having reservations gave us more flexibility with our schedule, having reservations was less stressful as we knew we had a place to camp.

We ended up near Anchorage, so we stayed at the Anchorage RV Park, where we also had reservations for our final evening in the RV. Although this was one of the more expensive parks, it was beautiful. There was abundant wildlife and trees in the park and yet it had many amenities including wireless Internet and a nice Laundromat.

For our next two nights, we had reservations at the Stoney Creek RV Park near Seward. We were disappointed in this campground, especially after the other beautiful locations we had found. The road into the campground was very rough and it was a difficult turn on and off of the Seward Highway. The entire campground was a large gravel parking lot. There were full hook-ups and large pull through sites, but I felt like I was staying in a Wal-Mart parking lot. This was also a fairly expensive campground. Both this campground and the Anchorage RV Park had free showers. I took a picture to show how disappointing the campground was, but now looking back, all I notice is the beautiful scenery around it and not the campground itself.

(Ann's Alaskan RV adventure will continue in an upcoming edition of PassPorter News!)

About The Author: Ann Weber is an avid vacation planner. Now that the two years of planning the Alaska adventure is behind her, Ann is diving into plans for her family's upcoming Disney Christmas vacation.

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