

# WILD & WONDERFUL

ALASKAN LODGE ADVENTURES

BY CAROLYN O'NEIL | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF WITHIN THE WILD

Alaskan summers are alive with nature and greenery.

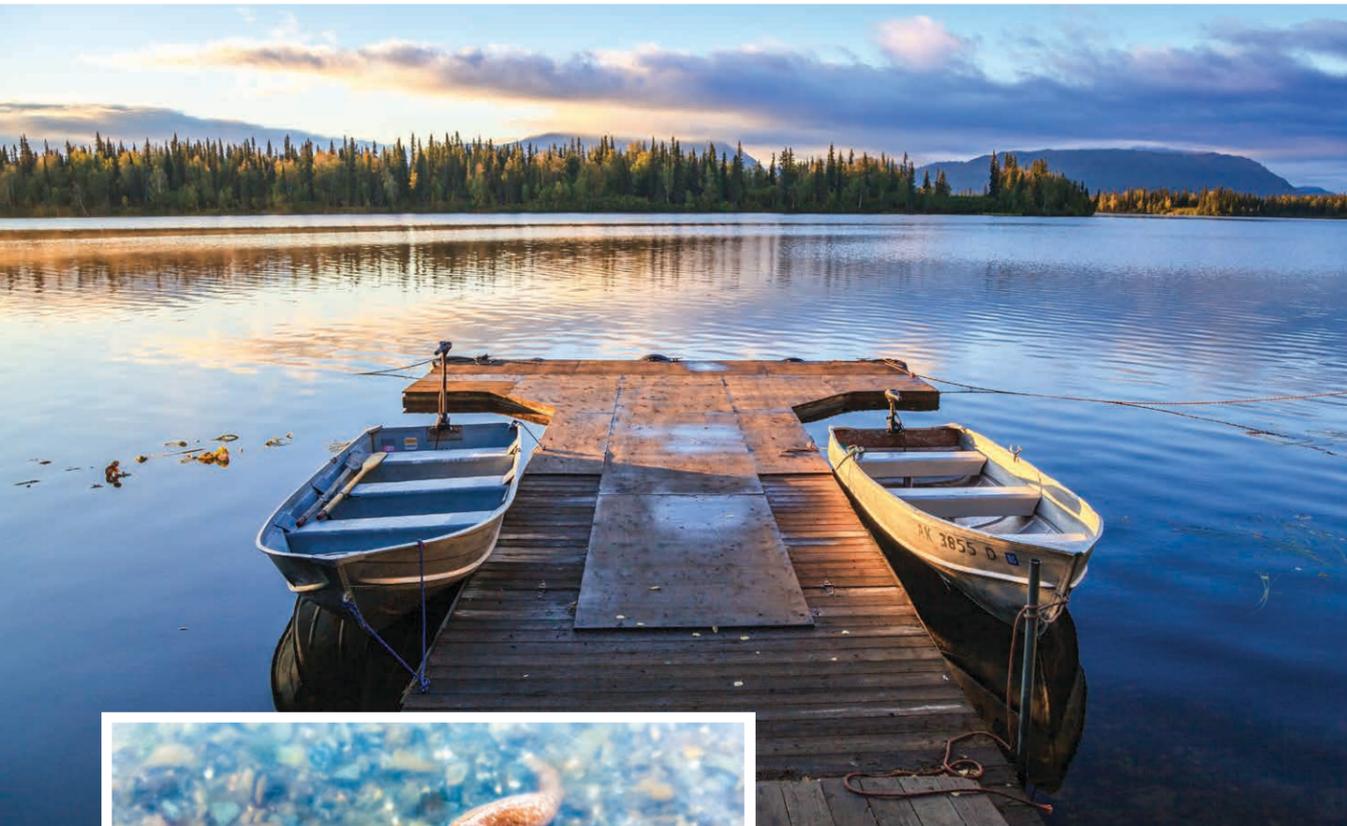
Above right: Glacier trekking as seen from a helicopter



**TAKE A SUNLIT JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF AMERICA'S FORTY-NINTH STATE TO EXPLORE ALASKA'S NATURAL BEAUTY, WILDERNESS THRILLS, AND WILDLY DELICIOUS CUISINE.**

While Alaska may be best known for vast expanses of wintry terrain—images of dogsleds navigating snowy backcountry and harbor seals sunning on floating icebergs come to mind—summer in Alaska offers a different wonderland. Meadows of wildflowers and green valleys are alive with animals on the move and birds soaring overhead. Waterfalls splash into winding rivers filled with fish, bays teem with playful otters, and coastal tide pools burst with starfish and other colorful sea creatures.

The summertime sun in Alaska shines brightly all day and into the night, so it's the best time of year to explore by kayak, hike forest trails, swim in crystal lakes, and work up an appetite to enjoy the bounty of the land and sea. Fresh-caught halibut and salmon star on summer menus, and sunlit gardens yield a bumper crop of berries, vegetables, and herbs. Toast with one of many Alaskan craft beers or a cocktail garnished with edible flowers, but don't wait until sunset—that may be well after midnight!



helicopter, or floatplane. Upon arrival at Within the Wild's luxury lodges, what truly delights travelers is the welcome surprise of personalized service, expertly crafted local cuisine, and comfy rustic-chic cabins. Race you to the hot tub!

## COASTAL ALASKA TUTKA BAY LODGE, SOUTH OF HOMER

The adventure begins with a short commercial flight from Anchorage into the charming seaside town of Homer. Then it's on to breakfast at La Baleine Café on the Homer Spit, a long, skinny stretch of land reaching into Kachemak Bay. Run by formally trained chef Mandy Dixon (daughter of Carl and Kirsten), the café hums with locals and visitors craving salmon BLTs, omelets with farmer's market veggies, or steel-cut oats served with Alaska's fireweed honey.

Fueled and fired up for the next leg of the trip, guests board a water taxi that shoots across the large bay

## SUMMER FUN, ALASKAN STYLE

The state of Alaska is huge; it's twice as big as Texas and boasts more than half the entire US coastline. So there's lots to explore, and it is best when done with folks who know their way around.

Embracing the pioneer spirit of Alaska, Carl and Kirsten Dixon began guiding backcountry explorations in the 1980s. Today, they own Within the Wild, comprising two adventure lodges that invite summer guests to discover the diverse delights of Alaska, from hold-on-for-the-ride river rafting adventures to relaxing and reading in a rocking chair. You know you're in for a summer camp-style adventure when the suggested gear list includes hiking boots, warm socks, and a swimsuit, with an added reminder to pack it all in a soft duffel bag for transport by water taxi,



**NATURE SIGHTINGS CAN BEGIN IMMEDIATELY AS GUIDES POINT OUT BABY BEARS ON THE ROCKY SHORE OR BALD EAGLES IN THE TREETOPS.**

dotted with fishing boats and delivers them to the long dock of Tutka Bay Lodge. Nature sightings can begin immediately as guides point out baby bears on the rocky shore or bald eagles in the treetops. The aroma of spruce trees and wet stones splashed by the salty sea perfumes the air.

Open May through September, the intimate lodge is spread over eleven wildflower-filled acres and features a main lodge, six private guest accommodations, kitchen gardens, sauna, hot tub, and boathouse connected by a large relaxation deck with panoramic vistas and room for a stylish helicopter landing. Helicopters are common in Alaska since there is little to no access by roads in the remote backcountry for such guided activities as fishing, wildlife viewing, bear watching, glacier touring, and hiking high meadows (with lunch packed by the lodge chefs) in the Kachemak Bay State Park. Don't worry—the chopper will come back later to pick you up!

*This page main:*  
The sun-washed relaxation deck at Tutka Bay Lodge

*This page inset:*  
Guided bear watching is a popular activity.

*Opposite top:* The dock at Winterlake Lodge

*Opposite bottom:*  
Starfish abound in the tide pools of Tutka Bay.



Alaskan mountain peaks stay covered in snow year-round.

Opposite top: Don't miss appetizer hour at Within the Wild lodges!

Opposite bottom: An otter floating in Tutka Bay



**EVEN THOUGH IT'S WELL PAST TEN, THE SUNLIGHT CATCHES THE SPLASH OF SEA OTTERS PLAYING AND POSING FOR THE EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT AND FANTASTIC WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY.**

After dinner, since it's still full daylight, the adventures continue with a boat ride into Tutka Bay. Even though it's well past ten, the sunlight catches the splash of sea otters playing and posing for the evening's entertainment and fantastic wildlife photography.



## **GARDENS AND GLACIERS** WINTERLAKE LODGE, BASE OF WOLVERINE MOUNTAIN

Winterlake Lodge guests arrive via floatplane, landing gently on the two-mile lake and gliding smoothly to the dock. In winter you might arrive via dogsled, as the lodge is located at Mile 198 on the Iditarod Trail, offering dogs and mushers a rest during the famous annual race that covers nearly a thousand miles from Anchorage to Nome.

Located on the western edge of the Alaska Range, this remote lodge is nestled on fifteen acres at the base of Wolverine Mountain. This picturesque property has six individual comfy and cozy knotty-pine cabins, a central main lodge with a bar and vaulted ceiling, and a game room. Outside there's a hot tub and sauna house, along with beautiful flower gardens. The lodge offers complimentary massages, yoga classes, and daily cooking classes in the kitchen overlooking the vegetable gardens. Rhubarb and berries grow abundantly here. There's even a resident forager on the kitchen staff. (A word of caution: not all berries in Alaska are edible, so refer to a guide before snacking on your hike!)

In summer, when daily temperatures can reach into the 80s, the refreshingly cold lake offers welcome relief. Splash around in kayaks, or take a dive off the dock to earn bragging rights that you swam in Alaska!

## **A TASTE OF ALASKA**

There are unique adventures for the palate as well. With appetites often on overdrive given the exhilarating lodge activities on tap, the kitchen is a hive of culinary creativity. Each day busy chefs turn out freshly baked breads and desserts. Inspired by the state's Russian history, proximity to the Pacific Rim, abundant seafood, and focus on organic ingredients, menu specialties include slow-cooked fish chowders, elk sliders, barbecued salmon, and halibut with rhubarb and ginger. A meal may start with grilled oysters and shrimp ceviche and end with artisanal cheeses from France and California. The Dixons are so serious about offering their guests a world-class culinary experience that Tutka Bay Lodge houses a cooking school.

Built into the *Widgeon II*—a ninety-foot 1940s-era troop transport boat turned crabbing boat, which now sits safely on dry land—the cooking school is festooned with giant driftwood chandeliers hanging over a massive wooden dining table. Of course, salmon is a popular subject. Guests might make salmon bacon with a sweet birch syrup glaze and learn the difference between cold-smoked and hot-smoked salmon.

What makes Winterlake Lodge especially unique is the sled dog camp. A helicopter whisks guests up into the mountains to a snow-covered valley where the lodge's sled dogs spend their summer months. Enjoy a hot chocolate, and then jump onto the runners to try your hand at mushing, or strap on cross-country skis for a spin around the camp. Then the helicopter takes off to tour the majesty of Alaska's vast blue-and-white glacier fields and sets down so guests can go for a thrilling walk along the top of an icy glacier.

Back at the lodge, dinnertime talk usually starts with, "What did you do today?" and continues with tales of moose spotting, fly-fishing success, adrenaline-pumping river-rafting moments, or interactions with friendly sled dogs.

Multiadventure vacations are trending with travelers, and Alaska is ready to roll out the red carpet to welcome visitors to a place of true beauty and adventurous spirit. ▣

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VISIT [WITHIN THE WILD.COM](https://www.withinthewild.com) TO LEARN MORE OR BOOK YOUR TRIP.



*Carolyn O'Neil is an Atlanta-based food writer who specializes in culinary travel and healthy lifestyles. She believes travel is the ultimate way to learn about people of the world, and cuisine is the most exciting way to learn about their histories and cultures. Visit her blog at [TheHappyHealthyKitchen.com](https://www.TheHappyHealthyKitchen.com).*



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Up on the glaciers, even summer visitors can try dogsledding.