

Kesugi Ridge Backpacking in Alaska



Highlights

High above the birch and spruce forests of Denali State Park, Kesugi Ridge commands spectacular views of the surrounding country, including Mt. McKinley, North America's highest peak! Spend a week up on the tundra on this breathtaking backpacking tour!

With over 100,000 glaciers, a million lakes and 34,000 miles of tidal shoreline, Alaska is without doubt one of the world's premier adventure travel destinations! America's largest state is home to just 700,000 people; outside Juneau (the capital) Fairbanks and Anchorage, Alaska presents as wild a landscape as you're likely to find anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. 'The Bush', as it is known locally, comprises tundra, marshlands and scores of active volcanoes, along with the Aleutian Islands, a 300-strong archipelago strung out like Christmas lights between America and Asia! As you'd expect of such a wild and wonderful region, Alaska is home to a mesmerising diversity of wildlife. Terrestrial fauna include wolves, bears, beavers and moose, while the Peninsula waters abound with sea lions, whales and seabird colonies!

This seven-day hiking tour is a perfect introduction to the wild majesty of this awesome region! From your starting point in Anchorage, you'll head out through rural farmlands to Denali State Park and Kesugi Ridge, a tundra-covered crest with breathtaking views of Mt. McKinley! The trail takes you up through lowland birch, spruce and cottonwoods along Little Coal Creek to the carpeted crest of the ridge itself. Once on the tundra you'll set up camp; this will be your base for the next few days, which means ample opportunity for serious exploration with nothing more than a light day pack. These day hikes take you past upland lakes and tumbling creeks, across talus-covered slopes and over rocky ridges, from which the views of Denali (North America's highest peak), the western Talkeetna Mountains and the Susitna and Chulitna Rivers are out of this world. You might even spot moose, bears and caribou en route! After three nights on the tundra, you'll descend through lush boreal forest to Byers Lake, where this terrific trek comes to an end.

Is it for me?

This is a truly awesome adventure in one of the world's last great wildernesses! Needless to say, this tour is aimed at folk with a high level of physical fitness and a serious appetite for adventure – the Alaskan Bush is no place for lassitude! It's suggested that you do some training (hiking, hill walking, etc.) before coming on this trip, preferably with a weighted backpack, as once on tour you'll be expected to carry your own gear, often while negotiating uneven terrain. You'll also need to ensure you're well equipped, with quality boots, clothing and sleeping bag. As long as you're properly prepared and up for the challenge you're sure to adore to this backpacking tour, one of North America's finest!

Accommodation

For this tour you'll spend one night in a comfortable bed and breakfast in Anchorage, then the following five nights camping on the tundra! You'll be provided with an expedition-quality tent, as well as all group camping equipment and cookware, meaning a cosy and communal base camp. Food-wise you're in for a treat – this is not your standard camping fare! In addition to high-energy staples like pasta, cereals and chocolate, you can expect breakfasts comprising pancakes, scrambled eggs and fresh coffee, bagels, wraps and foccacia sandwiches for lunch, and hearty dinners like lasagne, pad thai and tacos! Ingredients are fresh and locally sourced wherever possible, and special dietary requirements are well catered for.

Prices from

1,210 GBP (7 days) per person

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Itinerary

Day 1: Your trip begins in Anchorage, Alaska. You can arrive at any time and transfer to your bed and breakfast independently. Depending on your arrival time, the remainder of the day can be used to relax after your flight or to explore some of the city's notable sites including the Anchorage Museum of History and Art or the city Park Strip. This evening, you'll meet your guide at 6pm when you'll head to an orientation dinner at a local restaurant. The orientation will include a discussion of the route, an introduction to Alaskan wilderness travel, a familiarization with the principles of Leave No Trace and a conversation about traveling safely in bear country.

Day 2: Your guide will pick you up this morning at the B&B at 8am. You'll load into the passenger van and will begin the drive north to Denali. Your route will take you from Anchorage along the Chugach and Talkeetna Mountains and into Alaska's breadbasket – the Matanuska/Susitna Valleys. From rural farmlands along the highway to the foothills of the Alaska Range, this drive will introduce you to Alaska's real character. If the weather is cooperative, the views of the highest peaks in North America will fill the panorama. After four hours on the road, you'll arrive at Denali State Park's Little Coal Creek trailhead. Here you'll load packs and begin the ascent into the high country. What is likely the most vigorous portion of the trip, the Little Coal Creek trail, switchbacks almost 3,000 feet in roughly 2 ½ miles. Tonight you'll camp in the tundra and sleep to the soothing sounds of the Alaska wilderness.

Days 3-6: These days will be spent backpacking, day-hiking, and camping along the tundra capped Kesugi Ridge; your route takes you past small lakes, tumbling creeks, across talus covered slopes and over rocky summits. Part of what makes these backpacking trips so special is that two layover days are built into each itinerary. These days are reserved for long day hikes where you and your guide will explore the region with nothing more than a light day pack. This allows you to maximize your time in the alpine country and cover as much ground as possible in the area. It also allows ample time to recover from the more difficult days of moving camp with heavy packs or gives you a cushion of time should the weather present you with delays. The Kesugi Ridge offers amazing day hikes and affords unparalleled views, not only of Denali and Mounts Hunter & Foraker, but also of the western Talkeetna Mountains and the Susitna and Chulitna Rivers. In short, the Kesugi Ridge is Alaska's finest trail-accessible backpacking trip.

Day 7: This morning, you'll break camp and will be on the descent to Byers Lake by 10am. As you descend into the mixed spruce and birch woodlands, the unobstructed views afforded in the high country will be replaced by the shade of tall trees and the amazing diversity of the Alaska boreal forest. You'll return to the van by 3pm and will be back in Anchorage no later than 7pm. Please schedule all homebound flights for after 10pm.

Details

Getting there

You need to get to the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. There are no direct flights there from the UK, so you will need to change planes in Chicago or Seattle.

Price includes

Food, accommodation, activities, guide, camping gear

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

Some previous experience is needed