

Arctic North America Travel Routes

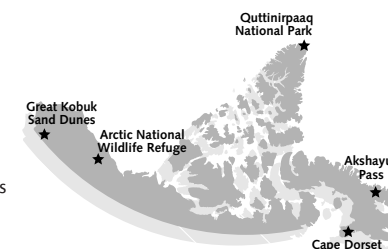


CONTENTS

Getting Around	236	Dangers & Annoyances	264
Itinerary 1: Canada's Dempster Highway	237	Further Reading	265
Dawson	238	Money	265
Dawson to Eagle Plains	241	Telephone	265
Eagle Plains to Fort McPherson	242	Time	266
Fort McPherson to Inuvik	243	Tourist Information	266
Inuvik	243	Visas	266
Itinerary 2: Flying Canada's Eastern Arctic	245		
Iqaluit	245		
Katannilik Territorial Park	247		
Resolute	247		
Grise Fjord	248		
Pond Inlet	248		
Pangnirtung	248		
Cape Dorset	249		
Itinerary 3: Alaska's Dalton Highway	250		
Fairbanks	250		
Fairbanks to the Yukon River	253		
Yukon River to Wiseman	255		
Wiseman to Deadhorse	257		
Itinerary 4: Northwest Alaska	258		
Fairbanks	258		
Kotzebue	258		
Barrow	261		
Essential Facts	264		

HIGHLIGHTS

- Witnessing the migration of the largest caribou herd in the world at Alaska's **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge** (p254)
- Flying over Alaska's bizarre **Great Kobuk Sand Dunes** (p262)
- Watching a carver conjure spirits out of soapstone in the Inuit art capital, Canada's **Cape Dorset** (p249)
- Beating a path to the top of the world and marvelling at the pristine wonders of Canada's **Quttinirpaaq National Park** (p247)
- Hiking past a kilometre-high cliff and across the Arctic Circle on Canada's **Akshayuk Pass** (p249).



Big skies, big vistas, big game, big rewards – everything in Arctic North America seems to have succumbed to that supersize effect. In the vast wilderness of the untouched north, wild animals far outnumber people, jagged mountain peaks give way to immense sweeps of desolate tundra, and tiny isolated villages carry on with life through winter's cruel temperatures and perpetual night. It's an area of incredible beauty, engulfing silence and constant awe.

The far north is alien to most North Americans, and although Alaska conjures up an image of year-round ice and snow, most of the state remains firmly below the Arctic Circle. Even the Arctic gateway towns of Fairbanks, Dawson and Iqaluit, isolated frontier towns of the imagination for most southerners, linger well below the 66th parallel. To the tiny population who make their home in the fly-in villages far to the north, the gateway towns are southern cities full of glittering lights, shopping malls, cafés and the cosmopolitan treats of a trip 'out'.

The isolated northern communities range from rough-and-tumble backwaters to tiny traditional villages where the native people still live mainly off the land. Neither will hold your attention for too long, but leaving the settlements behind and making your way into the bush or onto the tundra will leave you smitten by the vast world and hidden drama that lie beyond. It's one of the greatest wilderness experiences on earth.

As you'd expect with all that space and isolation, tourism in Arctic North America isn't especially straightforward. Only two roads cross the Arctic Circle on this vast continent, and travellers will need plenty of time and especially money for their Arctic adventure. Choosing one route, one activity or one area and exploring it properly will vastly improve your experience. Take one trip, though, and we guarantee you'll be back.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Much of the far north of Alaska and Canada is accessible by air only, and many of the most interesting communities are fly-in. Return flights are generally much better value than one-way, and you'll save a bundle with a 14-day advance purchase.

ALASKA

Alaska Airlines (www.alaskaair.com) runs scheduled flights to Fairbanks, Kotzebue and Barrow, and **Air North** (www.flyairnorth.com) flies from Anchorage and Fairbanks to the Yukon, the Northwest Territories (NWT) and British Columbia.

In addition, many smaller regional carriers operate flights to isolated communities, while a large number of charter operators provide 'bush flights' into off-runway locations: river sandbars, wilderness lakes, gla-

ciers and open tundra. Many of these carry outside boat-racks for hauling canoes and kayaks.

Hourly rates for charter services can range from US\$300 all the way up to US\$1000 per hour. You'll have to pay for the flight time to your destination and the return flight to the plane's home base. If you're not at the designated spot at the designated pick-up time, you'll still have to pay for the flight. If bad weather prevents a pick-up, the pilot will arrive as soon as it's safe to fly in – but be sure you have sufficient supplies to ride out a bad spell of at least several days.

Reliable operators:

Brooks Range Aviation (www.brooksrange.com)

Circle Air (www.circleair.com)

Frontier Flying Service (www.frontierflying.com)

Larry's Flying Service (www.larrysflying.com)

Yukon Air Service (www.yukonair.com)

CANADA

First Air (www.firstair.ca) and **Canadian North** (www.canadiannorth.com) are the main carriers to Arctic destinations. **Kenn Borek Air** (www.borekair.com) serves the High Arctic islands from Iqaluit, First Air covers the Kitikmeot region from Cambridge Bay, and **Calm Air** (www.calmair.com) and **Kivalliq Air** (www.kivalliqair.com) cover the Kivalliq region from Rankin Inlet.

Bus

Bus services in Arctic North America are severely limited, but where they do exist they can get you into superb wilderness at a fraction of the cost of air travel. In Alaska there is a scheduled van service between Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay with **Dalton Highway Express** (www.daltonhighwayexpress.com) from June to August.

In Canada services are limited to the Yukon and the NWT. Whitehorse is the northernmost Yukon terminal for **Greyhound** (www.greyhound.ca), but from there you can travel to Dawson and Inuvik along the Dempster Hwy with **Dawson City Courier** (www.dawsonbus.ca) from June to September. Greyhound makes it as far as Hay River in the NWT; from there you'll need **Frontier Coachlines** (☎ 874 2566), which runs services to Yellowknife.

Car & Motorcycle

Even with your own transport, road travel is restricted to a small network, mostly in eastern Alaska and the Yukon. **Arctic Outfitters** (www.arctic-outfitters.com) in Fairbanks is about the only hire company willing to let you travel on the Dalton Hwy (see p250). If you travel this route, never stop in the middle of the road to observe wildlife or scenery: huge trucks travel at high speeds and they have limited braking ability.

Driving into the Yukon, the Top of the World Hwy runs from Tok in Alaska to Dawson, a 301km (188-mile) jaunt on a wily but scenic stretch of road. From here you can start the mother of all road trips up the Dempster Hwy to the Mackenzie Delta (see p244). You can rent cars for this trip in Whitehorse or Dawson (see p238). Headlights are required to be on at all times on all roads. Make sure you have enough food, water, warm clothes, blankets and spare tyres for emergencies. Note that although there are no specific snow-chain requirements, governments in both countries recommend

TO THE NORTH POLE

There are no regular flights to the North Pole from Arctic North America, but you can get pretty close. Scheduled flights go as far as Resolute on Cornwallis Island (see p247), where a chartered Twin Otter can take you to Ward Hunt Island, just off the northern tip of Ellesmere Island. From here there's 770km (481 miles) of pack ice between you and the Pole. Northwinds (see p67) organises extreme skiing trips (60 days) or combined skiing and dogsledding trips (52 days) from here to the Pole, but you need Arctic experience, incredible fitness and stamina, and a true sense of adventure to even sign up.

that you speak to a tyre specialist to advise you on which tyres to use. Most local drivers carry chains in their cars.

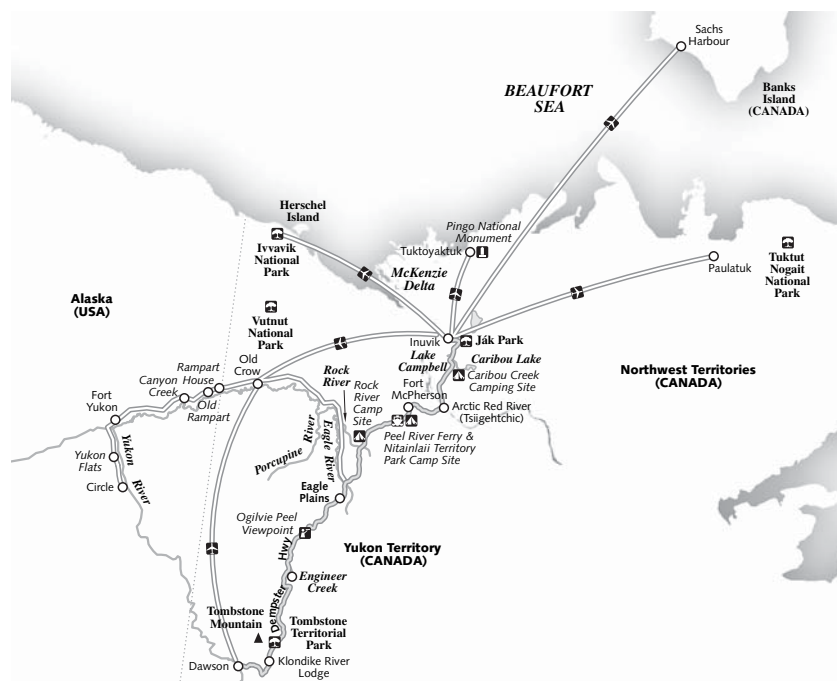
Although petrol is very good value, car hire is expensive. Check mileage charges and try to get a deal that includes unlimited mileage if you're going to tackle one of these epic routes.

In much of this area, wildlife such as deer and moose are potential road hazard. Most run-ins occur at night, when animals are active and visibility is poor. Always scan the verges for animals that may bolt out into the road. Vehicle headlights will often mesmerise an animal, leaving it frozen in the middle of the road. Try honking the horn or flashing the lights to encourage it to move away. In winter, watch for caribou, which like to amble down the highways licking off the salt.

ITINERARY 1: CANADA'S DEMPSTER HIGHWAY

Starting from Dawson, the last remnant of the Yukon gold rush, the Dempster winds its way through pristine wilderness flanked by craggy peaks and rolling tundra before arriving at the Arctic hub of Inuvik, gateway to the remote communities of the Western Arctic.

One of the most incredible road trips on earth, the Dempster Hwy is one of only two roads in North America that cross the Arctic Circle (the other, the Dalton Hwy, is outlined in Itinerary 3).



This 747km (467-mile) stretch of gravel winds from the centre of the Klondike gold rush, Dawson, through pristine wilderness, over two mountain ranges and across an expanse of tundra to Inuvik, near the shores of the Beaufort Sea. It's a road deep in history, with stunning scenery and myriad chances to see wildlife. You may catch sight of moose, caribou, bears, Dall sheep, muskoxen and wolves as well as gyrfalcons, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, ptarmigan, Arctic terns, long-tailed jaegers and lesser golden plovers, all without leaving the road.

The highway is open all year, but the crossings of the Peel and Mackenzie Rivers cannot operate during spring thaw and winter freeze (any time from mid-April to June and mid-October to December, respectively). In summer free ferries cross the rivers and in winter there are ice roads. The best time to travel is between June and early September, but you can get daily road reports throughout the year at www.gov.yk.ca/roadreport. Be prepared for plenty of dust in dry weather, slimy mud in wet weather, snow on any day, and tyres that have been shredded to ribbons.

DAWSON

☎ 867 / pop 1800

A frontier town that was once nicknamed 'the Paris of the North', Dawson found fame and heady fortune as the centre of the Klondike gold rush. Preserved as a relic of those days, the whole town is a National Historic Site with unpaved roads, boarded paths, no electric wires and a host of historic buildings. You'll also find mounties on horseback, modern-day gold prospectors, and a gambling saloon complete with honky-tonk music and dancing girls. The town gets choked with visitors in midsummer, but it's still well worth a visit for an insight into life on the Klondike and the hardships early prospectors faced. More than a century after the original gold rush, as many as 100 small, often family-owned, enterprises still mine for gold in the surrounding region.

Information

Dawson Medical Clinic (☎ 993 5744; Church St)
Parks Canada (☎ 993 7237; www.parksCanada.ca)
In the VRC Tourist Information office.

Post office (☎ 993 5342; 3rd Ave; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

VRC Tourist Information (☎ 993 5566; www.dawsoncity.ca; cnr Front & King Sts; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Western Arctic Information Centre (☎ 993 6167; Front St; ☎ 9am-8pm) Maps and information on the Dempster Hwy, including road updates.

Sights

Dawson and its environs teem with places of historic interest. If you're planning to see several of Parks Canada's sites then its **pass** (adult/child \$28/14) is a good investment as it allows access to all the sites and tours.

Dawson City Museum (☎ 993 5291; 5th Ave; adult/child \$7/5; ☎ 10am-6pm) This is a good place to start any tour of town. It houses a collection of 25,000 gold-rush artefacts, and engaging exhibits walk you through the hardscrabble lives of the miners. The museum is housed in the landmark 1901 Old Territorial Administration Building. Next door is the old locomotive barn, housing historic trains.

Commissioner's Residence (Front St; adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) Also built in 1901, and aimed to give potential civic investors confidence in the city, the building is noted for being the long-time home of Martha Black. Martha came to the Yukon in 1898, owned a lumberyard and was elected to the Canadian parliament at age 70.

Further north is the **Robert Service Cabin** (cnr 8th Ave & Hanson St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm), a typical gold-rush cabin home to the 'Bard of the Yukon' from 1909 to 1912. Long-time Robert Service re-enactor Tom Byrne gives captivating **readings** (☎ 993 5543; 5th Ave; admission \$10; ☎ 3pm) of the poet's works at the Westmark Inn.

You can also visit the cabin of Jack London, author of Yukon stories *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. Now the **Jack London Interpretive Centre** (8th Ave at Grant St; admission \$2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm), it's a treasure trove of artefacts and information. There are talks about the author at 11.30am and 2.15pm.

On the waterfront you'll find the **SS Keno** (adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm), which plied the perilous white water between Whitehorse and Dawson for more than half a century. Today it features many good displays about travel 100 years ago.

For an insight into the life of the local indigenous people, visit the **Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Cultural Centre** (☎ 993 6768; www.trondek.com; Front St;

admission \$5; ☎ 10.30am-6pm). Inside this beautiful wooden building there's a slide show and interpretative talks on the Hän Hwëch'in, or river people, who were the first to inhabit the area. The collection includes traditional artefacts and First Nation regalia. Locally made crafts are for sale.

For culture of an altogether different nature, **Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall** (☎ 993 5575; cnr Queen St & 4th Ave; admission \$8; ☎ 7pm-2am) is a re-creation of an 1898 saloon, complete with small-time gambling, honky-tonk piano and dancing girls. The casino's winnings go toward town restoration, and at weekends it can get packed as locals jostle with tourists to support preservation.

For great views over the Ogilvie Mountains, Klondike Valley, Yukon River and Dawson, head for the **Midnight Dome**, a quarried hill to the north of town. It's accessible by car or a steep footpath from Judge St.

Another good hike goes to the **Ship Graveyard**, where the paddlewheel ferries were abandoned after the completion of the Klondike Hwy. Left to rot on the riverbank just downstream from town, they're overgrown but still fascinating. To get there take the ferry across the river, walk north through the Yukon River camp site for 10 minutes,

FAST FACTS

- **Access for independent travellers** Excellent
- **Best time to travel** June to September
- **Difficulty level** Easy to moderate
- **Don't forget** Spare tyres, basic tools, plenty of food and water, blankets, warm clothes, binoculars, first-aid kit, insect repellent
- **Don't miss** Tombstone Mountain, the pingos round Tuktoyaktuk
- **Gateway city** Dawson, Yukon
- **Length of route** 747km (467 miles)
- **Modes of travel** Car, bus
- **Recommended map** International Travel Maps *Yukon Road and Physical Travel Reference Map* (1:1,500,000); the *Milepost* (see p265)
- **Time needed** 12 hours to a lifetime; one week is a good compromise

and then continue for another 10 minutes north along the beach.

Tours

Excellent walking tours are available with **Parks Canada** (adult/child C\$5/2.50) and **Gold City Tours** (☎ 993 5175; Front St), which also runs a trip to the Bonanza Creek gold mine.

Festivals & Events

Trek Over the Top (www.trekoverthetop.com) is the Yukon's premiere snowmobile event, featuring hundreds of snowmobilers travelling from Tok, Alaska, over the Top of the World Hwy to Dawson, takes place in mid-February to mid-March. The town hosts loads of activities for participants and plenty of live music and gambling.

Dawson City Music Festival (www.dcmf.com) is a weekend music festival in July featuring well-known Canadian musicians. Tickets sell out well in advance.

Discovery Days & Yukon Riverside Art Festival is Dawson's premier annual event, celebrating the great discovery of 1896. On the third Monday in August there are parades and picnics, street performances, entertainment, exhibits in local businesses, and a stage show, the Gaslight Follies at the Grand Palace.

Sleeping

Most places are open from May to September and fill up quickly in July and August. Many places will pick you up at the airport if you ask in advance. If you arrive without a booking the VRC will help you find a bed.

Dawson City River Hostel (☎ 993 6823; www.yukonhostels.com; dm member/non-member C\$15/19, r C\$39; (P)) This funky hostel is across the river from town and five minutes up the hill from the ferry landing. It's a rustic spot with good views, cabins, a wooded area for tents, a cooking shelter and a communal bathroom. There's no electricity, and lockers are recommended for your gear.

Bedside Manner B&B (☎ 993 6948; cnr 8th Ave & Princess St; s/d C\$79/89; ☹ year-round; (P)) This small B&B has simple, comfortable rooms, and the friendly owner can give lots of advice on local events and activities.

5th Ave B&B (☎ 993 5941; www.5thavebandb.com; 702 5th Ave; r C\$85-115; ☹ year-round; (P)) This is another cosy place in a neighbourhood of historic homes near the museum. It has bright rooms and a large communal sitting area.

Bombay Peggy's (☎ 993 6969; www.bombaypeggys.com; cnr 2nd Ave & Princess St; r C\$74-195; ☹ year-round; (P)) In a renovated old brothel, Peggy's is the best and most stylish place to stay in town. Rooms range from 'snugs' with shared bath to suites. There's a great pub downstairs.

Aurora Inn (☎ 993 6860; www.aurorainn.ca; 5th Ave; r C\$99-190; ☹ year-round; (P)) The Aurora has large bright rooms with pine furniture and subtle décor. Service is friendly, and there's a good breakfast (C\$10) and an excellent restaurant.

Eating

Klondike Kate's (☎ 993 6527; cnr King St & 3rd Ave; meals C\$6-20; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A local favourite, this place dishes up some killer king salmon, and there's a long list of other dishes and great desserts. It's a fun spot out on the covered patio.

Mama Cita's Ristorante (☎ 993 2370; 2nd Ave; meals C\$8-22; ☹ lunch & dinner) The insanely large portions of excellent pasta draw the crowds, but the pizzas and sandwiches are also popular and the service is good.

Aurora Inn Restaurant (☎ 993 6860; 5th Ave; meals C\$9-25; ☹ lunch & dinner) This bright and cheery place serves excellent hearty meals. The menu has a German focus, but there's a good choice for all tastes. The steaks at dinner, replete with fresh mushrooms, are tops.

Back Alley (☎ 993 5800; 2nd Ave; meals C\$7-14; ☹ lunch & dinner) Behind the Westminster Hotel, this top choice serves great souvlaki sandwiches and pizza. There are tables outside to eat at, or you can get free delivery in town.

River West (☎ 993 6339; cnr Front & Queen Sts; snacks C\$2-5; ☹ 7am-7pm) The best of several places along Front St, this café has excellent coffee, bagels, soup and sandwiches on delicious bread. The tables outside are a local meeting spot.

Drinking

Bombay Peggy's (☎ 993 6969; cnr 2nd Ave & Princess St; ☹ 11am-11pm) Peggy's is a delightful place for a drink, with good beers on tap and a fine wine selection. There are some nice quiet tables at the back.

Bars at Westminster Hotel (3rd Ave; ☹ noon-late) These two bars are variously known as 'Snakepit', 'Armpit' or simply 'Pit.' The one to your left as you face the pink building has a great old tin roof that matches the age of

some of the timeless characters hanging out by the bar. The bar to the right has more of a '70s motif as well as live music many nights. Both get lively.

Getting There & Away

Air North (see p236) serves Whitehorse (1¼ hours, three weekly), Old Crow (1¼ hours, up to three weekly), Inuvik (2½ hours, up to two weekly) and Fairbanks (one hour, three weekly). Flights average between C\$130 and C\$250 one way.

Dawson City Courier (☎ 993 6688; www.dawsonbus.ca; pick-up cnr 2nd Ave & York St) runs buses to Whitehorse (C\$91, eight hours) and Inuvik (C\$262, 14 hours). The service runs from

Monday to Friday between May and September. Be sure to reserve.

Alaska Trails & Tours (☎ 888-600 6001) has a van service to Dawson from Anchorage, Fairbanks and Tok (C\$95, eight hours, three weekly).

Fischer Contracting (☎ 993 6465; www.norcan.yk.ca; km 712 Klondike Hwy) hires out cars and trucks.

DAWSON TO EAGLE PLAINS

363km (227 miles)

Although you could drive straight to Inuvik without a break in 10 to 12 hours, you'd miss the whole reason for travelling this route. Give yourself several days, camp en route and just enjoy the breathtaking scenery along the way.

ACTIVITIES: PADDLING THE PORCUPINE RIVER

If you fancy some true wilderness experience, try an incredible canoe trip from Eagle Plains to Alaska. This unforgettable 1100km (688-mile) trip takes about three weeks and will take you through remote and untouched landscapes with breathtaking scenery and plenty of opportunities for spotting wildlife and meeting the locals.

You'll need to be prepared for true wilderness camping, unpredictable weather, swarms of mosquitoes and little contact with civilisation. You'll have to transport your own canoe to Eagle Plains, where you can launch into the Eagle River. This can be quite shallow in dry periods, so be prepared for some portaging. The trip along the Eagle River and briefly onto the Bell will take about four days, after which you'll join the Porcupine River. The landscape here is full of sweeping vistas of mountains, plateaus and river valleys, and the possibility of spotting moose, caribou, bears, bald eagles and peregrine falcons is high. The 152,000-strong Porcupine caribou herd migrates through this area in spring and autumn on its way to and from birthing grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska (see p254).

After about 10 days of paddling you'll reach the small Gwich'in community of Old Crow (population 300). The tiny community is made up of three rows of traditional log cabins and an airstrip, and most people still rely on seasonal hunting, fishing and trapping for their livelihood. You can stock up on supplies here, hike Crow Mountain or just hang out and meet the locals. So few visitors come to town – it's 560km (350 miles) from the nearest road – that you're sure to get some curious people starting a conversation. Camping on the river banks is free, but there are no facilities. Alternatively, the **Porcupine Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 966 3913; r C\$120) has a couple of comfortable rooms. Old Crow has regular flights to Inuvik and Dawson if you wish to take a shorter trip and fly out from here. You can also charter planes to the Vuntut National Park, with its countless kettle lakes and ponds, Porcupine caribou herd and half a million water birds. The park has no services or facilities of any kind.

Downstream from Old Crow the river develops high canyon walls known as the **Ramparts**. In this area you'll see many summer cabins and fishing camps for people from the village. As you cross the Alaskan border you can take a pit stop to wander around the abandoned village of Rampart House. Further on is the older, ghost town Old Rampart. You'll often find some activity going on at the old settlement of Canyon Creek just before you join the Yukon River at Fort Yukon. Many people finish their trip here and fly out, while others continue on and navigate the maze of tributaries on the **Yukon Flats**, one of the most spectacular wildlife havens on the continent, before hitting Circle, Alaska, where there is road access and you can arrange a pick-up.

If you're interested in dogsledding the first portion of this trip from Eagle Plains to Old Crow, visit www.muktuk.com/mushing/oldcrow.html for information.

This is the longest stretch of the Dempster without any services, so be prepared. It'll be 363km (227 miles) before you can buy petrol or food, or get even minor vehicle repairs. Fill your tank at the **Klondike River Lodge** (☎ 993 6892) at the Klondike–Dempster Hwy turnoff. The lodge will hire out jerry cans of gas you can take north and return on the way back.

The first stop en route should be **Tombstone Territorial Park**, the Yukon's newest territorial park, just 73km from the start of the highway. You can't miss stunning Tombstone Mountain, the steep conical massif at the end of the broad sweeping valley. It's a distinctive landmark on First Nation routes and is now an aerial guide for pilots. Here you'll find the **Dempster Highway Interpretive Centre** (☎ 9am–5pm Jun–Sep), which has plenty of information on hiking trails, wildlife and road conditions. There's also a rustic camp site (C\$12) with expansive views, pit toilets, river water and firewood. There are several good day hikes leading from the centre; for experienced wilderness hikers there are more rigorous backcountry trips of up to 10 days. The scenery is simply spectacular, even if you never leave the camp site.

Further north, at Engineer Creek (km 194), deposits of iron oxide have turned the river bed and rocks red. The peaks of the **Ogilvie Mountains** to the west are popular with climbers, and if you look closely you'll see flags on the summits. At km 259 the Ogilvie–Peel viewpoint has fantastic views over the mountains and river valley below.

Drive on, taking plenty of time to enjoy the incredible scenery and wildlife before you hit the blink-and-you-miss-it community of Eagle Plains (population 8; km 365.7). This is the only place on the highway with full services. The **Eagle Plains Hotel** (☎ 993 2453; eagleplains@ykn.net.yk.ca; r(\$112–135)) has a choice of good but fairly standard rooms, and some decent, reasonably priced food. Book ahead if you want to stay, as tour groups can book the whole place. There's also a garage for fuel, tyre and mechanical repairs, and fantastic views that just seem to go on forever.

EAGLE PLAINS TO FORT MCPHERSON

180km (113 miles)

From Eagle Plains it's only 36km until you cross the Arctic Circle. The point is marked with a large parking area, a wooden sign and a few interpretive displays – ideal for a photo

opportunity but not much more. Further on there's a wonderfully protected camp site at Rock River (km 447; C\$12) at the bottom of a wooded valley. It makes a good choice in bad weather, though the mosquitoes will eat you alive in midsummer. Just after the camp site you'll cross the Yukon/NWT border, where you'll need to put your watch back an hour. From here on the road conditions generally deteriorate, but the scenery spreads out before you in a vast stretch of mountains, hills and rolling tundra. The rugged **Richardson Mountains** are part of the migratory route for the Porcupine caribou herd (see p47), and thousands of animals pass this way in spring and autumn. There's also a good chance you'll spot Dall sheep, Arctic foxes and wolves.

At km 539 you'll need to take the **Peel River ferry** (rides free; ☎ 9am–1am late May–Oct) or ice road (open late December to March) to get across to the **Nitainlaih Territorial Park**, just 9km south of Fort McPherson. The park is perched on a cliff overlooking the Peel River, and it's surrounded by a large stand of white birch and white spruce trees. There's a visitor information centre featuring displays on the traditional life of the Gwich'in Dene. The camp site (C\$15) has pit toilets, water and firewood. Along the river you'll find several traditional fishing camps.

The small town of **Fort McPherson**, established as a trading post by the Hudson Bay Company in 1840, is home to the Gwich'in people. There's not too much to see other than the cemetery at the Anglican church where the remains of the famous Lost Patrol are buried. These four mounties set off from McPherson on a routine patrol to Dawson just before Christmas 1910. When they still hadn't arrived in late February, a search party led by Corporal Dempster (for whom the highway is named) set out to find them. Their frozen bodies were found just 42km away from town. They had missed the pass out of the delta over the Richardson Mountains and had run out of food.

If you have time, a visit to the **Fort McPherson Tent & Canvas Company** (☎ 867-952 2179; fm.tent@netcom.ca) provides an insight for armchair and real-life adventurers. It manufactures prospector tents and tepees used across the north by hunters and trappers.

The only place to stay in town is the **Peel River Inn** (☎ 1-888 866 6784; www.peelriverinn.com;

r(\$185; ☎), which has rather overpriced but comfortable rooms and a decent restaurant. The hotel can also arrange tours of the area or put you in touch with local outfitters such as **Ch'i'i Adventures** (☎ 952 2442; jrossnco@cancom.net) and **Rat River Tours** (☎ 952 2363), which can arrange spectacular wilderness and river tours with a Gwich'in slant. Adventurous canoeists can complete the trip by paddling down the winding Peel River through the Mackenzie Delta.

FORT MCPHERSON TO INUVIK

186km (116 miles)

Soon after leaving McPherson you'll hit the second **ferry crossing** (rides free; ☎ 9am–1am late May–Oct) or the ice road (open from late December to March) at Tsiigehtchic (Arctic Red River; km 615). There's little to see in the community, but the surrounding scenery is stunning.

Eighty-four kilometres (52 miles) north you'll hit the start of the largely undeveloped **Gwich'in Territorial Park Reserve**, a landscape of limestone cliffs and rare Arctic plant communities overlooking Lake Campbell. The park is an unusual example of a reversing delta in the spring and an important migratory-bird staging area in the autumn. It's possible to camp at Vadzaih van Tshik territorial camp site (Caribou Creek; km 717). Facilities are basic, but there's good fishing for trout and cony on Lake Campbell.

Just before you hit Inuvik you'll pass Ják Park, famous for its cranberries, blueberries and cloudberry. The park **camp site** (☎ 777 3613; tent/RV sites \$10/20; ☎ Jun–Sep) has hot showers, firewood, a good view of the delta and a welcome breeze that keeps the mosquitoes down.

INUVIK

☎ 867 / pop 3500

Bustling hub of the Western Arctic, Inuvik has gone from government administrative post to thriving community. The locals are equally divided between Inuit, Dene and non-First Nations people and are incredibly welcoming. Although like most Arctic towns it looks a bit shabby, it's a fascinating place and well worth the effort and expense to visit, especially if you can use it as a jumping-off point for trips to surrounding communities.

For 56 days each year from late May, Inuvik has 24-hour daylight. However, the

first snowfalls begin in September, and from early December the sun sets for an eight-week period.

Information

CIBC Bank (☎ 777 2848; 134 Mackenzie Rd) Has an ATM.

Inuvik Regional Hospital (☎ 777 8000; 285 Mackenzie Rd)

Post office (☎ 777 2252; 187 Mackenzie Rd)

Western Arctic Visitors Centre (☎ 777 4727; in winter ☎ 777 7237; www.inuvik.ca; 284 Mackenzie Rd; ☎ 9am–7pm Jun–mid-Sep) Has numerous displays about the area and its ecology.

Sights

The town landmark is **Our Lady of Victory Church** (☎ 777 2236), or Igloo Church, with a lovely interior created by local artists.

Northern Images (☎ 777 2786; 115 Mackenzie Rd; ☎ Mon–Sat) is not just a store but is also a gallery with a huge range of work by northern artists. Many of the works are created in remote aboriginal villages and are quite stunning. Stone carvings are a speciality.

Festivals & Events

The **Sunrise Festival** (☎ 777 2607) brings the locals together in early January for fireworks on the ice to greet the first sunrise after 30 days of darkness.

The Great Northern Arts Festival (☎ 777 3536; www.greatart.nt.ca) is a major show of First Nations art that happens in the third week of July. Most of the more than 100 artists travel from remote villages to display and sell their high-quality work. There are evening dance and drumming performances, as well as workshops and demonstrations during the day.

Sleeping

Happy Valley Campground (☎ 777 3652; Franklin Rd; tent/RV sites \$10/20) This decent camp site is convenient for town, and has hot showers, firewood, RV sites, tent platforms, nice views and a coin laundry.

Arctic Chalet (☎ 777 3535; www.arcticchalet.com; 25 Cam St; cabins C\$110) This is the best place to stay, with bright cabin-style rooms in a pretty setting. Each building has a private porch, and there are simple kitchen facilities in each unit. The energetic owners hire out canoes, kayaks and cars, and run dogsledding tours (one day C\$98). They're also good sources of local information. There's a rustic cabin

SIDE TRIP: WESTERN ARCTIC

You've come this far, you might as well see the real Arctic. From Inuvik you can access some truly spectacular Arctic wilderness; most tours involve flights over the Mackenzie Delta, a spectacular labyrinth of water, squalls, pingos, wildlife and abandoned trapper's huts on emerald-green banks. Photographers should try for a seat at the rear of the plane.

About 137km (86 miles) northeast of Inuvik is **Tuktoyaktuk**, commonly known as Tuk. Originally the home of the whale-hunting Inuit, it's now a land base for some of the Beaufort Sea oil and gas exploration. There is an **old military base** here dating from the Cold War, as well as **old whaling buildings** and two charming little churches. Pods of beluga whales can be seen in July and early August. The Tuk peninsula has the world's highest concentration of pingos. Some 1400 of the huge mounds of earth and ice made by frost heaves dot the landscape and have been designated the **Pingo National Monument**. Land access is limited to a winter ice road, and most tourists arrive by air in summer as part of half-day trips from Inuvik. The **hamlet office** (☎ 977 2286; www.tuktoyaktuk.com) can provide more information on the area and services.

About 400km (250 miles) east of Inuvik is **Paulatuk** (soot of coal), a 300-strong community whose main claim to fame is the **Smoking Hills**, which contain smouldering sulphide-rich slate and seams of coal. For more information contact the **hamlet office** (☎ 867-580-3531).

Paulatuk is the closest settlement to **Tuktut Nogait National Park**, a wild and untouched place about 45km east that is a major calving ground for bluenose caribou. There are no services or facilities, but a small visitors centre for the park is open in town during the summer. For information, contact **Parks Canada** (☎ 777 8800; inuvik.info@pc.gc.ca; Inuvik).

North of Paulatuk is **Banks Island**, a fantastic place for spotting wildlife and one of the best places to see muskoxen, flocks of snow geese and seabirds in the summer. Only about 150 people live in the island's one community, Sachs Harbour. Contact the **hamlet office** (☎ 690 4351) for information. Prices at **Kuptana's Guest House** (☎/fax 690 4151; r C\$180) include all meals. The guesthouse also organises nature tours of the island.

Aulavik National Park, on the north of the island, covers 12,275 sq km. It has the world's largest concentration of muskoxen, as well as badlands, tundra and archaeological sites. Contact the Parks Canada office in Inuvik (see above) for details on visiting the park.

Ivvavik National Park is another good side trip along the Beaufort Sea. Dominated by the British Mountains, the wild rolling tundra is on the migration route of the Porcupine caribou herd and is also a major waterfowl habitat. Just off the coast is **Herschel Island**, a former whaling station and the Yukon's first territorial park. This desolate and foggy place was once an Inuit settlement, which literally died out after Westerners brought foreign diseases. Today it's rich in birds and other wildlife, and has camping at Pauline Cove's protected harbour during the short summer season. Amenities include fire rings, wind shelters, outhouses and a limited water supply.

without facilities (C\$40) for travellers who want a true pioneering experience.

Polar B&B (☎ 777 2554; www.inuvik.net/polar; 75 Mackenzie Rd; r from C\$95) This centrally located B&B has four large, comfortable rooms with shared bathroom, common area and kitchen. Prices include free laundry.

The three large hotels in town (see following) are all run by the **Mackenzie Delta Hotel Group** (www.inuvikhoteles.com), a local corporation that has enjoyed an unfortunate lack of competition.

Finto Motor Inn (☎ 777 2647; 288 Mackenzie Rd; s/d C\$159/174) The best of the trio, the Finto is on the east end of town and has good views. Rooms have enjoyed a revamp and now have

large TVs and, most importantly, new furniture. Some have kitchenettes.

Mackenzie Hotel (☎ 777 2861; 185 Mackenzie Rd; s/d C\$149/164) and the **Eskimo Inn** (☎ 777 2801; 133 Mackenzie Rd; s/d C\$149/164), right in the centre, have little to boast about beyond their typically cheery employees. Rooms are aged, and the hallways will quickly inspire a sense of gloom.

Eating & Drinking

Green Briar Restaurant (☎ 777 4671; 185 Mackenzie Rd; meals C\$10-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) In the Mackenzie Hotel, Green Briar has Arctic foods such as char and muskox and a very popular prime-rib special on Thursday nights, which

sells out to locals. There's also a pub, the Brass Rail, and a dance club, the Zoo, in the hotel.

Café Gallery (☎ 777 2888; 90 Mackenzie Rd; meals C\$4-10; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-8pm Sat & Sun) This pleasant café has espresso, fresh sandwiches, homemade soup and muffins.

Ingamo Hall (☎ 777 2166; 20 Mackenzie Rd) Ingamo Hall serves lunch every other Thursday at 1.30pm for village elders. Visitors are welcome but should call first. There is no charge, and you can hear wonderful stories.

Mad Trapper Pub (☎ 777 3825; 124 Mackenzie Rd; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Sat) This raucous pub snares locals and visitors alike. Pool tables add to the fun.

Getting There & Around**AIR**

Mike Zubko Airport is 14km south of town. **Town Cab** (☎ 777 4777) charges C\$25 for the trip to town.

Air North (p236) flies to Dawson, Old Crow and Whitehorse. Canadian North (p237) and First Air (p237) fly daily to Yellowknife, where there are flights throughout the north and to Calgary and Edmonton.

Aklak Air (☎ 777 3777; www.aklakair.ca) has scheduled services to Aklavik, Holman, Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk and Sachs Harbour, and runs a free shuttle to the airport for passengers. It also offers charter services to the small Arctic communities and the national parks.

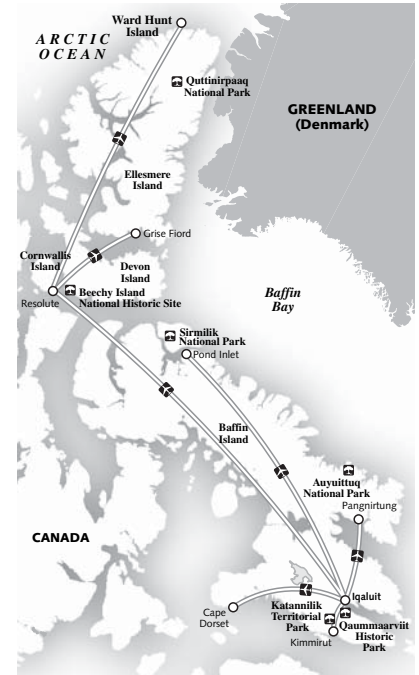
CAR

Arctic Chalet Car Rental (☎ 777 3535; www.arcticchalet.com) hires out a range of vehicles and has a counter in the airport. **NorCan/National Car & Truck Rental** (☎ 777-2346, 800-227-7368; norcan@permafrost.com) also has an airport counter.

**ITINERARY 2:
FLYING CANADA'S
EASTERN ARCTIC**

A high-flying odyssey across the eastern Canadian Arctic from Nunavut's buzzing capital, Iqaluit, through tiny isolated communities rimmed by stunning fjords and towering peaks, and on to some of the Arctic's most incredible national parks.

It'll cost you dearly in air fares, but this trip will take you to some of the most stunning areas of all the Arctic and leave you speech-



less with awe. From towering rugged peaks dripping in ice to pods of beluga whales and wildlife so unused to humans that it seems tame, this is a pristine Arctic wilderness that few will ever see.

Scheduled flights will take you to most destinations, but as Iqaluit is a hub you'll have to do some backtracking if you want to visit all the communities listed in this itinerary. Alternatively, choose a few destinations that take your fancy or gather a crowd and charter a small plane.

IQALUIT

☎ 867 / pop 6000

Nunavut's capital, Iqaluit (ee-kal-oo-eet), is a perversely fascinating place. It has a booming economy but a ramshackle, debris-strewn townscape. The Space Age buildings and prefab houses are hemmed in by a mess of above-ground pipes and seasonally abandoned vehicles, but the young, diverse population gives the town a buzz missing from the more insular villages of the rest of the territory. It's a melting pot of Inuit professionals and politicians, dog mushers and hunters,

FAST FACTS

- **Access for independent travellers** Expensive
- **Best time to travel** April to September
- **Difficulty level** Moderate
- **Don't forget** Camera and plenty of film, lots of warm clothes, credit card
- **Don't miss** Pangnirtung, Cape Dorset artworks
- **Gateway city** Iqaluit, Nunavut
- **Length of complete route** Approximately 8200km (5125 miles) as the crow flies
- **Mode of travel** Air
- **Recommended map** Canada Map Office Northwest Territories & Nunavut East Arctic (1:2,000,000)
- **Time needed** Ten days to one month

Ottawa technocrats and Québécois cabbies. Although there aren't too many specific sights to see, there's a choice of restaurants and shops, making it a good hub for a trip to the great white expanse beyond town – the real reason for any visit up north.

Information

Ambulance & Fire (☎ 979 4422)

Baffin Regional Hospital (☎ 979 7300; Niaqungusiaq Rd)

Bank of Montreal (☎ 979 2901; Queen Elizabeth Way; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri) In the post office building downtown. Nearby are Royal Bank and CIBC.

Police (☎ 979 1111)

Unikkaarvik Visitors Centre (☎ 979 4636; Sinaa St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 1-4pm Sat & Sun) Has an informative mini-museum and a reference collection of Nunavut books and videos. Topo maps can be purchased here.

Sights

Nunavut's prefab **Legislative Assembly** (☎ 975 5000; Federal Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, tours 1.30pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug or by appointment) is no marble-columned parliament, but it has nice touches such as sealskin benches and a narwhal-tusk ceremonial mace. You can see impressive local art in the foyer.

Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum (☎ 979 5537; Sinaa St; admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sun), though itty-bitty, is worth a look. It permanently

displays traditional Inuit garments, tools and carvings, and has a more interesting gallery with ever-changing exhibits of contemporary northern art.

The **waterfront** between the breakwater and the Coast Guard station is the focus of traditional Inuit activity. Amid the junked snowmobiles and fuel cans, hunters butcher seals and build boats and sleds. Ask before taking photos.

It's worth taking a walk from downtown along the waterfront to sandy Apex beach, where you'll find the old red-and-white **Hudson Bay Trading Post** (Bill Mackenzie Rd). For longer walks, try **Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park**, where you'll often see caribou and foxes. There are plenty of paths leading to a waterfall, rapids and escarpments.

Sleeping

Camping at Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park is the only cheap option. It's pretty basic – there are no facilities except pit toilets – but it is free. For everything else, book ahead and prepare to haemorrhage cash.

Accommodations by the Sea (☎ 979 6074; www.accommodationsbythesea.ca; Bldg 2536, Paurngaq Rd; s/d with breakfast C\$120/140) About 2km from downtown, this spacious house has excellent views of the bay. Guests prepare their own breakfasts with food provided.

Crazy Caribou Bed and Breakfast (☎ 979 2449; www.crazycariboubedandbreakfast.com; Bldg 490, Atungayait St; s/d with breakfast C\$120/140) This cosy Inuit-owned place has comfortable rooms, a sauna and free rides from the airport.

Frobisher Inn (☎ 979 2222; www.frobisherinn.com; Astro Hill; r C\$210) Up on the hill, the 'Frobe' has modern bayside rooms with marvellous views. There's a good restaurant and the Astro Hill complex has a coffee shop, pool, bar and movie theatre.

Eating

Snack (☎ 979 6767; Nipisa St; breakfasts C\$9-11, sandwiches C\$6-15; ☎ 6am-8pm) This Francophone-run diner is bedecked with 1950s kitsch and serves cheap, decent, mainstream meals (on paper plates).

Wizard's Bistro (☎ 979 4726; Bldg 1107, Ikaluktuutiak St; lunches C\$8-16; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Thu, 11am-10pm Fri, 6-10pm Sat) Wizard's conjures up good pastries, wraps and lunch specials, such as Reuben with mulligatawny soup (C\$14), but the service is far from magical.

Discovery Lodge Hotel (☎ 979 4433; Niuravik St; mains C\$30-45; ☎ 6am-9am, noon-2pm & 6-9pm) Nunavut's top dining room has an extensive wine list and luscious local cuisine, such as poached Arctic char (C\$38) and caribou steak in peppercorn sauce (C\$39).

Frobisher Inn (☎ 979 2222; www.frobisherinn.com; Astro Hill; mains C\$25-40; ☎ 7am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 5-9pm Sat & Sun) A close second to the Discovery, the Frobisher offers caribou, char, pasta and steak.

Drinking

In Iqaluit almost all crimes, as well as the astronomical suicide rate, are linked to drinking. To combat this, the town clamps down on alcohol. Beer and wine can be had with a meal at several restaurants, but there's no liquor store and only one public bar – the Storehouse.

Storehouse Bar & Grill (☎ 979 2222; Astro Hill; ☎ 5pm-12.30am) is a big, new, well-appointed watering hole that is less of a madhouse than the former saloon, but it can still get rough. The pizza and burgers are yummy.

Getting There & Away

Iqaluit is the air hub of the eastern Arctic, with flights to Quebec and Ontario as well as smaller Baffin communities. Iqaluit has nearly daily arrivals from Montréal and Ottawa aboard First Air (p237) and Canadian North (p237) for about C\$1300 return. Both airlines serve Iqaluit from Yellowknife for about C\$1400 return.

First Air serves all communities on the island, plus Resolute and Rankin Inlet. Kenn Borek Air (p237) has fewer destinations but is often cheaper.

The airport is an easy stroll from downtown, about half a kilometre along Mivvik St. The city is also awash with shared cabs, charging C\$5 to go anywhere.

KATANNILIK TERRITORIAL PARK

One of the finest, most accessible parks in Nunavut is just outside the community of Kimmirut (population 433), about 175km (109 miles) from Iqaluit. Katannilik comprises two main features: the Soper River and the Itijjagiq Trail.

A Canadian Heritage waterway, the aquamarine Soper splashes 50 navigable kilometres through a deep, fertile valley, past cascades, caribou, gemstone deposits and

dwarf-willow forests. Paddlers usually spend three days to a week floating and exploring.

Hikers and skiers can opt for the trail, a 120km (75-mile) traditional route over the tablelands of the Meta Incognita Peninsula and through the Soper Valley. The hike usually takes 10 or 12 days. The trailhead is on Frobisher Bay, about 10km west of Iqaluit. For more details, contact **Parks Nunavut** (☎ 975 5900; www.nunavutparks.com).

Most paddlers charter a plane from Iqaluit to the riverside airstrip at Mt Joy. Kenn Borek Air charges C\$1634 and can carry over 1000kg of people and gear. If hiking, you can hire an Iqaluit outfitter to boat you to the trailhead; ask for names at the Unikkaarvik Visitors Centre in Iqaluit (opposite).

First Air flies back from Kimmirut to Iqaluit four times weekly (one way C\$143).

RESOLUTE

☎ 867 / pop 220

Godforsaken Resolute, on Cornwallis Island, was founded when the federal government lured Inuit here to shore up Canadian sovereignty. The land is downright lunar, with remains of centuries-old villages by the beach. Most visitors are just passing through on their way to Quttinirpaq National Park (below), the North Pole, or scenic Grise Fjord (p248) – the only Canadian community that's further north.

SIDE TRIP: QUTTINIRPAAQ NATIONAL PARK

If you have a fortune to squander and a penchant for wide-open spaces, head for Quttinirpaq National Park (formerly Ellesmere Island National Park), right up at the top of the world. It's Canada's second-biggest park and one of the world's most pristine wilderness areas.

Superlatives include numerous High Arctic icecaps and glaciers; **Cape Columbia**, the continent's northernmost point; **Mt Barbeau**, which at 2616m is the highest peak in eastern North America; and **Lake Hazen Basin**, a thermal oasis where, due to their unfamiliarity with humans, animals appear strangely tame. The chartered plane from Resolute costs C\$32,000 return for up to six people. For park information, contact Parks Canada in Pangnirtung (p249).

If you have time, try local hiking or fly to **Beechey Island**, about 80km (50 miles) south-west (an air charter for up to 10 people costs C\$1660). This desolate place was where the ill-fated Franklin expedition wintered in 1845–6 before vanishing forever. Traces of expedition members and their unsuccessful rescuers remain. Ask at Resolute's hotels for tour and outfitter information.

Qausuittuq Inns North (☎ 252 3900; www.innsnorth.com; s/d C\$165/330, with meals C\$215/430) is a delightful family-style lodge that has good home cooking. **South Camp Inn** (☎ 252 3737; www.southcampinn.com; s/d C\$240/480) may be expensive, but it has Internet access in every room, Jacuzzi tubs and free use of snowmobiles.

First Air (p237) has flights to Iqaluit twice a week (C\$1793 return), while Kenn Borek Air (p237) serves small High Arctic towns, including Grise Fjord (C\$700) and Pond Inlet (C\$622), and does charters.

GRISE FJORD

☎ 867 / pop160

Grise Fjord, at the southern tip of Ellesmere Island, is the northernmost civilian community in Canada and rivals Pangnirtung as the most beautifully located village in Nunavut. Surrounded by spectacular peaks and icebergs, it truly is breathtaking.

Local boat owners can arrange tours to the floe-edge, the spot where the sea ice meets the open water, about 50km east of the village. Here you'll have a good chance of seeing walrus, belugas, seals, polar bears and a variety of sea birds. Along **South Cape Fjord**, 40km west of town, the seas are often choked with icebergs, ensuring stunning photos. Hiking on the area's glaciers and icecaps is also possible. The area is also dotted with **archaeological sites**, including an ancient polar-bear trap, abandoned Inuit camps and the cross erected to a sailor who died on the Otto Sverdrup expedition (see p21).

The **Grise Fjord Lodge** (☎ 980 9913; www.innsnorth.com) charges C\$185 per person, including meals. Alternatively, you can camp free of charge at several inviting streamside sites outside the village. Kenn Borek Air (see p237) flies from Resolute for C\$700 return.

POND INLET

☎ 867 / pop 1300

On Baffin Island's north coast, Pond Inlet is in a fabulous setting of rugged mountains,

icy peaks, glaciers and icebergs. Non-Inuit originally arrived here for whaling and trading; now they come to kayak and gaze slack-jawed at the incredible landscape.

You'll get information on local activities and outfitters from the **Nattinnak Centre** (☎ 899 8225; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri summer). Some of the best hiking and touring is in nearby **Sirmilik National Park**, a vast haven strewn with spires, glaciers and hoodoos (stone pillars formed by wind and water erosion) that provides breeding grounds for countless sea birds. For details on the park and a list of outfitters organising tours there, contact **Parks Canada** (☎ 899 8092; sirmilik.info@pc.gc.ca; ☎ 1-5pm Mon-Fri).

Another ambitious trek is to the summit of 765m **Mt Herodier**, 15km east of town. For something less adventurous, try the short hike out of town to Salmon Creek, where you'll find the remains of an old Inuit village and (in July and August) spots along the coast to fish for Arctic char.

Polar Sea Adventures (☎ 899 8870; www.polarseaadventures.com) hires out kayaks and guides for summer kayaking and whale-watching trips. In late spring, it and other outfitters, including **Tununiq Travel & Adventure** (☎ 899 8194; www.tununiq.com) and **Toonoonik Sahooinik Outfitters** (☎ 899 8928; www.pondtours.ca), lead wildlife-viewing trips to Sirmilik National Park, Bylot Island and the floe-edge, the biologically rich area where the sea ice meets open water. Whale watching, fjord visits, dogsledding, kayaking, fishing, cross-country skiing and hiking are all possible. Budget on about C\$400 per day.

You can camp for free at Qilaluqat Park, though the facilities are basic. Alternatively, the **Saunig Hotel** (☎ 899 8928; s/d C\$185/370, with meals C\$260/520) has comfortable rooms, and there's also a guestroom at **Sirmilik Inn B&B** (☎ 899 8688; www.tununiq.com; s/d with breakfast C\$135/220, with all meals C\$180/310).

First Air (p237) flies to Iqaluit for C\$1130 return, and Kenn Borek Air (p237) serves Resolute for C\$622 return.

PANGNIRTUNG

☎ 867 / pop 1364

Among Nunavut's outlying communities, 'Pang' is one of the best destinations to visit, with stunning scenery, art and outdoor opportunities galore. The community, 40km south of the Arctic Circle, hugs a stunning

ACTIVITIES: HIKING AUYUITTUQ NATIONAL PARK

Auyuittuq (ah-you-ee-tuk) means 'the land that never melts'. Appropriately, there are plenty of glaciers in this 19,500-sq-km park, plus jagged peaks, vertiginous cliffs, deep valleys, fjords and meadows. The most popular activity in the area is the 97km (61-mile) **Akshayuk Pass hiking route** when it's snow-free (between late June and early September). Nearby, intrepid climbers head for Mt Thor, with its incredible 1500m granite cliff face, the earth's tallest wall. You can camp wherever you can find a safe and ecologically responsible spot. Nine emergency shelters dot the pass, but hikers and climbers who get into trouble are responsible for rescue expenses, so make sure you have insurance.

You must register at the Parks Canada office in Pangnirtung (below) and pay the park entry fee – C\$15 for a day trip or C\$40 for up to three nights – before setting off for the park.

The south end of the pass is 30km from Pangnirtung. In summer you can hike there in two days or have an outfitter take you by boat for C\$85 to C\$95. For about C\$200, through-hikers can arrange to be picked up at the other end by an outfitter from Qikiqtarjuaq (population 519), which is served by First Air and Kenn Borek Air.

mountain-flanked fjord and is the gateway to Auyuittuq National Park.

For information on local guides and outfitters, and an insight into Inuit life, visit the **Angmarlik Interpretive Centre** (☎ 473 8737; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Jul & Aug, 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun). Next door is the **Parks Canada office** (☎ 473 8828; www.parkscanada.gc.ca; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun).

The town is famous for tapestries, prints and woven hats. You can meet some of the craftspeople and buy their work at the **Uqquarmiut Centre for Arts & Crafts** (☎ 473 8669; inuitart@nunanet.com; ☎ 9am-noon, 1-5pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun).

Hikers should try the 6km **Ukama Trail**, which follows the Duval River and takes about three hours, or the highly recommended 13km **Ikuvik Trail**, which heads for the summit of Mt Duval (671m) and takes about six hours return. Though not always well marked, the Ikuvik Trail hike offers superb views of the town and the fjord. You can pick up a map at the interpretive centre.

You can camp for C\$5 at Pitsutinu Tugavik Territorial Park, but don't leave any valuables in your tent. The only hotel is **Auyuittuq Lodge** (☎ 473 8955; s/d C\$150/300, with meals C\$215/430), which has rudimentary shared rooms and bathrooms. Book early.

It may also be possible to bunk with a local Inuit family if you contact the interpretive centre in advance. Singles/doubles cost C\$80/125; with meals they're C\$120/175.

First Air (p237) and Kenn Borek Air (p237) fly daily from Iqaluit (return C\$288).

CAPE DORSET

☎ 867 / pop 1300

Cape Dorset, on the rocky shore of Baffin Island's Foxe Peninsula, is the epicentre of Inuit art. A half-century ago residents here pioneered modern Arctic carving and printmaking, marketing it to the world with remarkable success. Though many Inuit communities now generate world-class artworks, Cape Dorset's remain the most revered. The **West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative** (☎ 897 8944; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri winter only) has studios and a gallery, but – in maddening Nunavut fashion – is technically closed in summer. Call ahead, and someone might let you in. The Kingnait Inn also sells sculptures, and you can often find artists carving outside their homes.

You can hike to **Mallikjuaq Historic Park** in about 45 minutes, but only at low tide. Otherwise, hire an outfitter to boat you there. The park features ruins of 1000-year-old pre-Inuit stone houses, hiking trails, wildlife and tundra flowers. Ask at the Kingnait Inn about other hiking routes near town.

Huit Huit Tours (☎ 897 8806; www.capedorsettours.com) offers one-/four-day dogsledding trips (C\$75/980) in spring, and week-long fishing, hiking and culture tours (C\$1320 to C\$3400) in summer. It also operates the waterfront **Beach House** (s/d C\$175/350), which has two bedrooms and a kitchen for preparing meals. **Kingnait Inn** (☎ 897 8907; s/d with meals C\$250/300) is the local hotel, offering meals and Spartan shared rooms.

First Air and Kenn Borek Air fly to Iqaluit (p245) for about C\$450 return.

ITINERARY 3: ALASKA'S DALTON HIGHWAY

Starting from the Arctic frontier town of Fairbanks, the Dalton runs north along the Alaska pipeline before climbing over the Brooks Range, flanked by two of Alaska's most scenic and remote national parks. The route ends on Alaska's North Slope, breeding ground for thousands of caribou and home to a massive oil base.

The 670km (419-mile) Dalton Hwy (better known as the Haul Rd) connects the Elliott Hwy, near Livengood, with Deadhorse, near the Arctic Ocean, with a thin ribbon of gravel. The road was the original truck supply route during the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and it's definitely not a trip for the ill-prepared. In summer the 8.5m-wide truck route of coarse gravel is dusty, punctuated with potholes and littered with the carcasses of blown tyres. It's not a question of whether your car will get paint scratches or window chips but of how many, which is the main reason most car-hire companies

in Fairbanks don't allow their vehicles on the highway.

There are few services on the road, and none for the final 360km (225 miles) from Wiseman to Deadhorse. A tow back to Fairbanks can cost US\$2000. The road is open year-round, but travellers should only drive it between late May and early September, when there is virtually endless light and the road is usually free of ice. Few people apart from truckers manage to exceed 55mph. Expect a 40mph average and a journey of two hard days to reach the town of Deadhorse, the community that houses the workers of what was once the largest oil reserve in the USA.

If this doesn't make you chicken out you'll be rewarded with some spectacular scenery at Wiseman and the Atigun Pass, access to pristine wilderness and incredible wildlife at Gates of the Arctic National Park and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and a glimpse of real-life Arctic Alaska.

It may seem obvious, but don't feed the bears, don't stop on the road itself and don't drink river water without boiling it for 10 minutes. For trip planning advice, visit <http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/dalton/index.html>.

FAIRBANKS

☎ 907 / pop 30,200

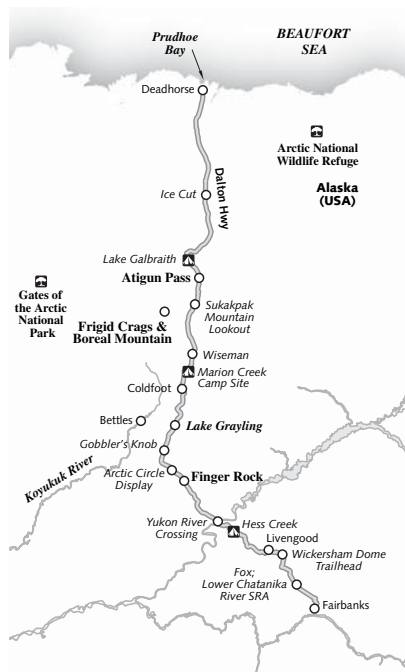
A rough-and-tumble northern town, Fairbanks is Alaska's second-largest city and gateway to the Alaskan bush. Downtown Fairbanks has few redeeming features, apart from a cluster of log cabins and sled dogs, and the friendly, hardy and oddball locals who exemplify the Alaskan theme of 'work hard, play hard, drink hard'. The city isn't too interested in providing tourist facilities, and the downtown area has a down-and-out feel, but if you're invited out to the bush or make your own way there you'll have a trip to remember.

Information

Alaska Public Lands Information Centre (☎ 456 0527; www.nps.gov; 250 Cushman St; ☎ 9am-6pm mid-May-mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat mid-Sep-mid-May) Maps and information on state and national parks, wildlife refuges and recreation areas.

Fairbanks Memorial Hospital (☎ 452 8181; 1650 Cowles St)

Key Bank of Alaska (100 Cushman St) Has an impressive gold nugget display.



FAST FACTS

- **Access for independent travellers** Good
- **Best time to travel** Late May to early September
- **Difficulty level** Moderate
- **Don't forget** Spare tyres, basic tools, plenty of food and water, blankets, warm clothes, binoculars, first-aid kit, insect repellent
- **Don't miss** Atigun Pass, Gates of the Arctic National Park
- **Gateway city** Fairbanks, Alaska
- **Length of route** 784km (490 miles)
- **Modes of travel** Car, bus
- **Recommended map** International Travel Maps *Alaska* (1:1,500 000), the *Milepost* (p265)
- **Time needed** At least four days

animals aren't always cooperatively grazing nearby. The campus is 6km west of downtown. Take MACS Red Line or Blue Line buses to UAF's Wood Centre.

Back in the centre of town you'll find the incredible **Ice Museum** (☎ 451 8222; 500 2nd Ave; adult/child US\$9/6; ☎ 9am-9pm mid-May-mid-Sep). Inside you'll see some 20 tons of ice carved into fabulous sculptures. Also worth a visit is **Fairbanks Community Museum** (☎ 457 3669; 410 Cushman St; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-May-mid-Sep, Tue-Sat rest of year), which features displays, exhibits and artefacts tracing the city's history.

On 1st Ave there's some old log cabins and several historical buildings, including **St Matthew's Episcopal Church**, a log church originally built in 1905 and reconstructed in 1948. Just across the Chena River Bridge from the visitors centre is the **Immaculate Conception Church** (1904), with its beautiful stained-glass windows.

The city's largest attraction is **Pioneer Park** (☎ 459 1087; Airport Way at Peger Rd; admission free; ☎ 11am-9pm mid-May-mid-Sep), a 44-acre pioneer theme park. It features everything from a gold-rush town to an aviation museum and a native-village museum. There's night-time entertainment at the Palace Theater and Salloon. You can reach the park on a MACS Blue Line bus.

If you're caught by all the tales of gold and glory you can try your own hand at panning at several former gold mines or at selected areas in the bush. **Gold Dredge No 8** (☎ 457 6058; www.golddredgeno8.com; 1755 Old Steese Hwy N; tours adult/child US\$23/16), off the Steese Hwy at Goldstream Rd/mile 10, is a good place to start. This five-deck, 76m dredge was built in 1928 and is now a national historical site. The dredge operated until 1959 and still manages to make money – it's probably the most visited dredge in Alaska. Tours are given hourly from 9.30am to 3.30pm every day in summer.

Fairbanks offers a wide variety of canoeing opportunities, from leisurely afternoon paddles to overnight trips into the surrounding area. Several places hire out boats. The most convenient is **7 Bridges Boats & Bikes** (☎ 479 0751; www.7bridgesinn.com; 4312 Birch Lane), just off the river at 7 Gables Inn. It provides canoes and a pick-up and drop-off service. Canoes are US\$35 a day, and transportation costs US\$1.25 a mile (US\$10 minimum). You can

Log Cabin Visitors Centre (☎ 456 5774; www.explorefairbanks.com; 550 1st Ave; ☎ 8am-7pm mid-May-mid-Sep)

Main post office (315 Barnette St)

Wells Fargo bank (613 Cushman St)

Sights & Activities

Start your tour with a visit to the excellent **University of Alaska Museum** (☎ 474 7505; www.uaf.edu/museum; 907 Yukon Dr; adult/child US\$5/3; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep), generally regarded as one of Alaska's best. It's definitely the top attraction in Fairbanks. Inside, the museum is divided into regions of the state, with each section examining the geology, history and unusual aspects of that area. The museum's most famous exhibit is Blue Babe, a fully restored 36,000-year-old bison. Even more impressive, however, is the state's largest public gold display.

Other attractions on the campus include the **Georgeson Botanical Garden** (☎ 474 1944; www.uaf.edu/salrm/gbg; W Tanana Dr; admission US\$1; ☎ 8am-10pm May-Sep), a kaleidoscope of flowers, herbs, fruits and gigantic vegetables, and the **Large Animal Research Station** (☎ 474 7207; www.uaf.edu/lars/), which keeps herds of muskoxen, reindeer and caribou. Platforms outside the fenced pastures allow free, all-hours viewing of the herds, but bring binoculars as the

even arrange to paddle down the Chena River and bike back to the downtown area.

Festivals & Events

Apart from gold, Fairbanks' other claim to fame is as dog-mushing capital of the world, and the city is home to the **North America Sled Dog Championships**, a three-day event in which mushers, some with teams as large as 20 dogs, compete in a series of 32km to 48km (20- to 30-mile) races. Fairbanks is also the start of the **Yukon Quest**, arguably the toughest dogsled race in the world. The 1637km (1023-mile) run between Fairbanks and Whitehorse follows many of the early trails used by trappers, miners and the postal service. Mushers climb four mountains over 900m (3000ft) high and run along 320km (200 miles) of the frozen Yukon River. The race headquarters are at **Yukon Quest Cache** (☎ 451 8985; 410 Cushman St). Inside there's race memorabilia, a few displays and lots of sled-dog souvenirs for sale.

Summer solstice celebrations (www.fairbanks-alaska.com/midnight-sun-events.htm), with footraces, speed-boat races, arts and crafts booths and the traditional midnight-sun baseball game, all take place in June.

Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival (www.fsaf.org) has numerous concerts and workshops in the performing and visual arts on the UAF campus in the last two weeks of July.

Golden Days (www.fairbankschamber.org/goldendays), Fairbanks' largest summer festival during the third week of July, celebrates the gold discovery with parades, games, a boat parade and numerous special events, such as the hairy legs contest and the locking up of unsuspecting visitors in the Golden Days Jail.

Tanana Valley State Fair (www.tanana-valley-fair.org) is Alaska's oldest fair, held at the fairgrounds on College Rd in early to mid-August and featuring sideshows, a rodeo, entertainment, livestock shows and produce of immense proportions.

Sleeping

Fairbanks has tons of choice when it comes to accommodation. At the visitors centre you can pick up information or use the courtesy phone to check vacancies.

Billie's Backpackers Hostel (☎ 479 2034; www.alaskahostel.com; 2895 Mack Rd; dm US\$22; ☑) Book ahead, as this popular place well deserves your custom. The dorms are fairly standard, but there's free coffee, linen and luggage

storage, a great sundeck, laundry facilities and bike hire at this friendly hostel.

Minnie Street B&B (☎ 456 1802; www.minniestreetbandb.com; 345 Minnie St; s/d US\$95/115; ☑ ☑) This beautifully kept B&B is on the river's north side, a block and a half north of the train station. Rooms have traditional quilts, wooden beds and plenty of floral patterns. Some share bathrooms.

4A Care B&B (☎ 479 2447; www.aaaacare.com; 557 Fairbanks Street; r US\$79-149; ☑ ☑ ☑) This beautiful log home near the university has a selection of bright, comfortable rooms, three wonderful decks and a Jacuzzi.

Pike's Waterfront Lodge (☎ 456 4500; www.pikeslodge.com; 1850 Hoselton Rd; d US\$99-205) This large upmarket place on the banks of the Chena River has comfortable modern rooms and plenty of extras, such as a steam room and sauna, exercise facilities and a deck overlooking the river.

Eating

Sam's Sourdough Café (☎ 479 0523; University Ave at Cameron St; breakfast US\$4-8; ☎ 6am-10pm) Sourdough specials are available all day at this buzzing place near the university. You can have sourdough pancakes (US\$4.75), sourdough omelettes, sourdough sandwiches or a bowl of soup and a mini-loaf of sourdough bread (US\$5.75).

Thai House (☎ 452 6123; 526 5th Ave; dinner mains US\$9-12) Come here for some of the best Thai dishes in town, including eight vegetarian selections. Don't order anything 'blistering hot' unless you have a cast-iron stomach.

Gambardella's Pasta Bella (☎ 457 4992; 706 2nd Ave; pasta US\$10-17, pizzas US\$11-13) Homemade pasta dinners and some of the best pizza in the Alaskan interior are the focus at this homey place. It has an outdoor café that is a delight during Fairbanks' long summer days.

Alaska Salmon Bake (☎ 452 7274; Pioneer Park; meals US\$26; ☎ mid-May-mid-Sep) Hungry souls should head for Pioneer Park, where you can choose between grilled salmon, halibut, cod or prime rib. Meals come with salad, sourdough rolls, baked beans, dessert and nonalcoholic beverages (beer and wine are available for an extra charge).

Pump House Restaurant & Saloon (☎ 479 8452; Mile 1.3 Chena Pump Rd; mains US\$19-32) The best place to turn dinner into an evening or to enjoy a great Sunday brunch, the Pump House has classic gold-rush atmosphere

with a solid mahogany bar and plenty of relics from the city's mining era. Steak and seafood dominate the menu, and you can also enjoy a drink on the outdoor deck while watching the boat traffic on the Chena River. The MACS Blue Line bus goes by here.

Drinking

Rowdy saloons that are throwbacks to the mining days are the area's speciality, though now they're for tourists, not sourdoughs.

Palace Theater & Saloon (☎ 456-5960; www.akvisit.com; Pioneer Park; adult/child US\$14/7; ☎ mid-May-mid-Sep) The Palace comes alive at night, with honky-tonk piano, can-can dancers and other acts. Showtime is 8.15pm nightly.

Big I Bar (122 N Turner St) This basic Alaskan bar is the hangout for city workers and reporters from the *Daily News-Miner*. It's a good place to see the locals in action.

Marlin (3412 College Rd) If you fancy some live music, this place simply hops with it six nights a week. It's always busy and has a great atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Fairbanks International Airport (☎ 474 2500; Airport Way) serves as the gateway for travellers heading into the Brooks Range and Arctic Alaska. The airport is almost 6km southwest of the city. MACS Yellow Line buses run between the airport and the Transit Park downtown, where you can transfer to any other line.

Alaska Airlines flies daily to Anchorage (US\$163), where there are connections to the rest of the state and to Seattle. Air North flies to Dawson (US\$110), with a connecting flight to Whitehorse (\$163).

For travel into Arctic Alaska, try Frontier Flying Service (p236), Larry's Flying Service (p236) or **Wright Air Service** (☎ 474 0502). All have offices or terminals off University Ave on the airport's eastern side. Regular scheduled flights are available to more than 30 villages, including Bettles, Fort Yukon, Kotzebue, Barrow and Nome.

BUS

Long-distance bus services are available from **Alaska Direct Bus Lines** (☎ 800-770 6652), which runs services to Anchorage (US\$70) and Whitehorse (US\$140) three times weekly in summer and twice weekly in winter.

Alaska Shuttle (☎ 1-888 600 6001; www.alaska-shuttle.com) runs services to Anchorage (US\$84, daily in summer, four times weekly in winter) and Dawson (US\$160, mid-May to mid-September) three times a week.

CAR

Most people driving to Prudhoe Bay hire a car for five days, but finding somebody in Fairbanks to hire out a vehicle to you for travel on the Dalton Hwy is a major challenge. Drivers generally need to be at least 21 (often 25) and must have their own insurance. Damage to tyres and windscreens is not normally covered by company insurance.

Your best bet is to try **Arctic Outfitters** (☎ 474 3530; www.arctic-outfitters.com; per day US\$87) or **Arctic Rent a Car** (☎ 479 8044; www.arcticrentacar.com; 4500 Dale Rd; per day US\$60).

Avis (☎ 474 0900), **Budget** (☎ 474 0855) and **National** (☎ 907 451 7368) may also allow use on the Dalton Hwy.

TRAIN

Alaska Railroad (☎ 458 6025, 800-895 7245; www.alaska-railroad.com) has daily departures for Anchorage (US\$125) from mid-May to mid-September and four trips a week in winter.

FAIRBANKS TO THE YUKON RIVER

208km (130 miles)

It's 118km (74 miles) up the Steese and Elliott Hwys before you reach the start of the Dalton Hwy. Roadside services are few and far between on this route. Once you leave Fairbanks, your next stop for gas will be at the Yukon River Crossing (mile 56; that's 208km - 130 miles - from Fairbanks), and after that it's Coldfoot (mile 175). You will need to bring extra petrol, a couple of spare tyres, food, water, blankets and insect repellent.

You'll join the Elliott Hwy at Fox and soon pass the **Lower Chatanika River State Recreation Area** (mile 11), a 570-acre park offering fishing, boating and camping opportunities. The area has two camp sites: Whitefish (US\$5) and Olnes Pond (US\$10).

At mile 28 of the Elliott Hwy are the Wick-ersham Dome Trailhead parking lot and an information box. From here, trails lead to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) cabins at Borealis-Le Fevre (30km; US\$25) and Lee's Cabin (11km; US\$25). The hikes have fantastic views overlooking the White Mountains.

SIDE TRIP: ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge** (ANWR; <http://arctic.fws.gov>) is one of the last great wilderness areas in the USA, but oil-company officials and Alaskan politicians are pushing hard to open up this 1.5-million-acre refuge to oil and gas drilling (see p47). For visitors the main attraction here is the profuse wildlife; the sheer numbers have been compared to those of the Serengeti Plains in East Africa. The park is home to wolves, polar bears, grizzlies, muskoxen, Dall sheep, the vast herd of Porcupine caribou and thousands of migratory birds. It's also the habitat of the world's northernmost population of black bears, which makes it the only place where all three North American bear species are present. The landscape stretches from lagoons, beaches and salt marshes to coastal plain, alpine tundra, and the tall spruce, birch, and aspen of the boreal forest.

Wildlife buffs, birdwatchers, rafters, canoers and backpackers who make the effort necessary to get here will be greatly rewarded. You can visit the park yourself or with an organised tour. Visiting the Arctic Refuge on your own requires a great deal of planning, preparation and experience in remote areas. For tips on minimising your impact when hiking and camping, see p255. Air-taxi pilots are very helpful in suggesting routes and itineraries, though most people stick to a few choice locations such as the Sheenjek, Kongakut, the Canning and Hulahula Rivers, the Jago Valley, and the Arctic coast.

Access

Access to the park is by air only. Companies offering air-taxi services include **Brooks Range Aviation** (see p236), **Circle Air** (☎ 907-520 5223; www.circleair.com) and **Yukon Air Service** (☎ 907-479 3993; www.yukonair.com). For a full list, visit <http://Arctic.fws.gov/airtaxi.htm>. Budget on spending about US\$400 to US\$1000 per hour for three people.

Tours

A variety of companies offer tours in the ANWR including camping, fishing, wildlife viewing and float trips. Operators include **ABEC's Alaska Adventures** (see p256), **Alaska Alpine Adventures** (☎ 877-525 2577; www.alaskaalpineadventures.com), **Arctic Wild** (☎ 888-577 8203; www.arcticwild.com), **Chilkat Guides** (☎ 907-766 2491; www.raftalaska.com) and **Wilderness Alaska** (☎ 907-345 3567; www.wildernessalaska.com). To see the massive caribou migration you'll need to arrive in mid-June. Budget on spending roughly US\$2000 per week. For a full listing of approved companies, visit <http://Arctic.fws.gov/recguide.htm>.

Reserve through the BLM's **Fairbanks office** (☎ 474 2251, 474 2200; www.ak.blm.gov).

Next up is the service centre, Livengood (mile 71), where you'll find a small general store. At this point, the Elliott Hwy swings west, and in 3km you'll come to the turn-off for the start of your odyssey north. At mile zero of the Dalton Hwy is an information centre that has up-to-date details on road conditions, wildlife sightings and weather reports. The road winds through rolling hills and over small creeks, the largest of which is Hess Creek at mile 25. There's a lookout here with good views of the pipeline. In the trees near the Hess Creek Bridge there are unserviced camp sites, and good fishing for whitefish and grayling.

The highway begins to descend to the Yukon River at mile 47, providing views of

kilometres of pipeline. At mile 56 you'll hit the mighty Yukon River, which drains nearly half of Alaska and much of Canada's Yukon. It's the fifth-largest river in North America, beginning in the Yukon and flowing over 3040km (1900 miles) before it reaches the Bering Sea. The 687m (2290ft) wooden-decked bridge is the only one to cross the Yukon in Alaska. Just north of the bridge is the **Yukon Crossing Visitor Centre** (🕒 9am-6pm mid-May-mid-Sep), managed by the BLM. It has interpretive displays on the pipeline and the terrain you're about to enter. On the west side of the highway is **Yukon River Camp** (☎ 665 9001; d US\$89), which includes a motel, a restaurant, tyre repair and a phone.

Yukon River Tours (☎ 452 7162; www.mosquitonet.com/~dlacey/yr.html; adult/child US\$25/15) also operates from here and offers boat trips along

the Yukon three times a day. The trip takes you to an Athapaskan fish camp and cultural centre, and offers good opportunities to see wildlife.

Six kilometres north of the Yukon River is an old pipeline camp, now a BLM camp site with a pit toilet and a well. Nearby is the turnoff for **Hotspot Café** (☎ 451 7543), which includes rustic accommodation, a restaurant, tyre repair and a phone.

YUKON RIVER TO WISEMAN

211km (132 miles)

At mile 86.5 there is a lookout with a scenic view of granite tors to the northeast, Fort Hamlin Hills to the southeast and the oil pipeline over 150m below. In the next 16km the highway ascends above the tree line into an alpine area where there is good hiking and berry picking. As you reach the summit of Finger Mountain (mile 97.5) you'll see Finger Rock to the east of the highway and panoramic views of the whole area. The road stays in this alpine section for another 8km before the terrain turns rugged.

The **Arctic Circle**, near mile 115 of Dalton Hwy, is the site of an impressive BLM display. The exhibit includes a large, brightly coloured circumpolar map of the imaginary line, and four panels explaining the basis for the seasons and what it means to Arctic plants and animals. There are also picnic tables, a viewing deck, and a road leading a kilometre or so to rustic camp sites.

Keep in mind, however, that you can't really see the midnight sun here, because it

ducks behind the mountains on the northern horizon at that magical moment. To view the sun all night long (having driven this far north, you might as well do it), continue on to **Gobbler's Knob**, a hilltop viewpoint at mile 132, where there's a pullover (lay-by) with an outhouse.

From this turnoff the road passes six streams and the small **Lake Grayling** (mile 150) in the next 80km (50 miles), all of which offer superb grayling fishing. At Lake Grayling there's a U-shaped trough gouged out by a glacier 1.5 million years ago. It's a good place to spot water birds and moose.

The next major milestone is Coldfoot (mile 175), a historic mining camp and your halfway point. The lowest temperature in North America (-63°C) was recorded here on 26 January 1989. Originally named Slate Creek, the area was first settled by miners in 1898. When a group of green stampedeers got 'cold feet' at the thought of wintering in the district, they headed south and the town was renamed accordingly. In 1981 Iditarod musher Dick Mackey set up an old school bus at Coldfoot and began selling hamburgers to truck drivers heading for Prudhoe Bay. The truckers liked the location so much they helped Mackey build the present truck stop, including raising the centre pole of the building and engraving their names on it.

Services at **Coldfoot Camp** (☎ 866-474 3400; www.coldfootcamp.com; Mile 175 Dalton Hwy; tents/RVs/r US\$15/35/165) include petrol, tyre repair, a laundry and the 'furthest north saloon in North America'. The restaurant is open 24 hours,

ARCTIC HIKING TIPS

Regardless of where you hike in the Arctic, trekking is a challenge. Hiking across boggy ground and tussock, inevitable on almost any trip, has been described by one guide as 'walking on basketballs'. A good day's hike will see you cover only 8km to 10km. Extended treks require outdoor experience, a good map and excellent compass skills.

If travelling independently, always leave your itinerary with a dependable person and make firm arrangements with an air-taxi operator. Planes can be delayed several days due to bad weather, so carry extra food.

The Arctic ecosystem is very fragile and easily damaged, even by the most sensitive backpackers. It requires years to regenerate, due to the permafrost and the short growing season. For these reasons the National Park Service (NPS) puts a six-person limit on trekking parties.

Camp-site selection is your most important decision when trying to minimise impact. Gravel bars along rivers and creeks are the best choice, due to their durable and well-drained nature. If you must choose a vegetated site, select one with a hardier species such as moss or heath, rather than the more fragile lichens. Avoid building fires at all costs; tree growth in the Arctic is extremely slow, and a spruce which is only inches in diameter may be several hundred years old.

SIDE TRIP: GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK

One of Alaska's remotest national parks and one of the finest wilderness areas in the world, **Gates of the Arctic National Park** (www.nps.gov/gaar) covers 21,122 sq km (13,125 sq miles) from the southern foothills of the Brooks Range, across the ragged peaks and down onto the North Slope. The park gets its name from the peaks of Boreal Mountain and Frigid Crags that flank the north fork of the Koyukuk River.

The park is home to grizzly bears, wolves, Dall sheep, moose, caribou and wolverines. Fishing is also considered superb, with grayling and Arctic char in the clear streams and lake trout in the larger, deeper lakes.

There are dozens of rivers to run and miles of valleys and tundra slopes to hike. However, there are no maintained trails and the hiking is pretty strenuous. The park is accessible only by chartered aeroplane or on foot from the Dalton Hwy. Prospective backcountry visitors must participate in a mandatory orientation programme at Bettles or Coldfoot.

Hiking

The park has no facilities for visitors. Many backpackers follow the long, open valleys for extended treks, or work their way to higher elevations where open tundra and sparse shrubs provide good hiking terrain. One of the more popular treks is the four- to five-day hike from Lake Summit through the Gates to Lake Redstar. Less experienced backpackers often choose to be dropped off and picked up at the same lake and explore the surrounding region on day hikes from there. Lakes ideal for this include Lake Summit, the Karupa lakes region, Lake Redstar, Lake Hunt Fork and Lake Chimney.

For hiking tips, see p255.

Paddling

Paddlers should head for the John, the north fork of the Koyukuk, the Tinayguk, the Alatna, and the middle fork of the Koyukuk River from Wiseman to Bettles. The headwaters of the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers are in the park. The waterways range from class I to class III in difficulty. Of the various rivers, the north fork of the Koyukuk River is one of the most popular – the float begins in the shadow of the Gates and continues downstream 160km (100 miles) to Bettles through class I and class II waters. Canoes and rafts can be hired in Bettles and then floated downstream back to the village.

However, the best-known river and the most popular for paddlers is the upper portion of the Noatak. This is because of the spectacular scenery as you float through the sharp peaks of the Brooks Range and also because it is a relatively mild river that can be handled by many canoeists on an unguided trip. The most common trip is a 96km (60-mile) float that begins near Portage Creek and ends at a riverside lake near Kacachurak Creek, just outside the park boundary. This float is usually completed in five to seven days. It involves some class II and possible class III stretches of rapids toward the end.

and its photo collection of jackknifed and overturned semitrailers will make you think twice about driving any further. The food is surprisingly good. Fill your tank – the next available services are 390km (244 miles) to the north.

Coldfoot is also a jumping-off point to Gates of the Arctic National Park, which has no road access. The new **Arctic Intergency Visitor Centre** (☎ 678 5209; 🕒 10am-10pm mid-May-mid-Sep) has interpretive displays, and information on fishing, backpacking, gold

panning and camping in the park and surrounding wilderness areas. The park boundary is just to the west of the road.

Beyond Coldfoot, the road enters the **Brooks Range**, a northern spur of the Rocky Mountains with peaks ranging from 1200m to 2700m (4000ft to 9000 feet). Eight kilometres north of Coldfoot, at mile 180, is the Marion Creek camp site (sites US\$8), situated in an open spruce forest with stunning views of the Brooks Range. A 3km hike upstream leads to a 6m (20-foot) waterfall.

Bettles

This small village (population 50) serves as the major departure point to the Gates of the Arctic National Park.

The **Bettles Ranger Station** (☎ 692 5494; 🕒 8am-5pm Jun-Sep) also serves as a visitor centre, and has displays depicting the flora and fauna of the Brooks Range, a small library, and books and maps for sale.

Camping is allowed behind the Bettles Flight Service building, off the runway at the north edge of the aircraft parking area, where you'll find barbecue grills. It would be just as easy to pitch a tent on the gravel bars along the middle fork of the Koyukuk River.

Bettles Lodge (☎ 692 5111; www.bettleslodge.com; dm/s/d US\$15/115/135) has a variety of accommodation available in a classic Alaskan log lodge. There's also a small tavern with bush pilots constantly wandering through in their hip boots.

Sourdough Outfitters (☎ 692 5252; www.sourdoughoutfitters.com; dm/s/d US\$30/75/80) has a range of comfy rooms, and there's access to showers (US\$4) for campers.

A meal at either hotel will cost US\$12 to US\$15.

Access

Access to the park's backcountry is by either walking in from the Dalton Hwy or catching a flight from Fairbanks to Bettles (\$270) with **Bettles Air Service** (☎ 800-770 5111; www.bettleslodge.com). From Bettles you can charter an air taxi to take you further into the backcountry. Both Bettles Air Service and **Brooks Range Aviation** (☎ 800-692 5444; www.brooksrange.com) run air charters. Sample fares (per plane load, not per person) are US\$650 for drop off at the North Fork of the Koyukuk River or US\$1216 for drop-off at Lake Summit.

If you're walking, head west at the Wiseman exit just before you reach mile 189 of the Dalton Hwy and continue hiking along the Nolan Rd, which passes through Nolan, a hamlet of a few families, and ends at Nolan Creek. From here you can reach Wiseman Creek and Lake Nolan Creek, at the foot of three passes: Glacier, Pasco and Snowshoes. You can hike from any of these passes to Glacier River, which can be followed to the north fork of the Koyukuk for a more extensive hike.

Otherwise, continue north from Wiseman by hiking along the Hammond Rd, which can be followed for quite a way along the Hammond River. From the river you can further explore the park by following one of several drainage areas, including Vermont, Canyon and Jenny Creeks. The latter heads east to Lake Jenny Creek.

Tours

A number of guide companies run hiking and paddling trips in the park, including **ABEC's Alaska Adventures** (☎ 457-8907; www.abecalaska.com), **Arctic Wild** (☎ 888-577 8203; www.arcticwild.com) and **Sourdough Outfitters** (☎ 692 5252; www.sourdoughoutfitters.com). Typical one-week costs are about US\$2000.

After you pass mile 186 there's a lookout where you can view the historical mining community of **Wiseman**, west of the highway across the Koyukuk River, which can now be reached by an improved road at mile 188.6. The town's heyday was in 1910, when it replaced Coldfoot as a service centre for gold miners. Many buildings from that era still stand, including the **Wiseman Trading Company**. The building doubles as the general store and the town's **museum**, with historic photos and mining equipment. Wiseman also has a

public phone and a camp site. More comfortable accommodation is available in beautiful log cabins at the **Arctic Getaway** (☎ 678 4456; www.arcticgetaway.com; cabins US\$90) or at the **Boreal Lodge** (☎ 678 4566; www.boreallodge.com; s/d US\$55/75), which also has a choice of cabins available for US\$125 per night.

WISEMAN TO DEADHORSE

362km (226 miles)

More spectacular mountain scenery begins around mile 194, with the first views

of Sukakpak Mountain to the north and Wiehl Mountain to the east, both over 1200m (4000ft) in elevation. Poss Mountain (1857m/6189ft) comes into view to the east after another 4km, and the Koyukuk River, a heavily braided stream, is seen near mile 201.

Just before mile 204 is a lookout with an 800m trail leading to Sukakpak Mountain. You'll pass another lookout after mile 206, where there are good views of Snowden Mountain (1733m/5775ft), and reach Disaster Creek after another 10km.

Even if you have no desire to see the North Slope, continue on to **Atigun Pass** and some of the most spectacular scenery of the trip. At an elevation of 1422m (4739ft), this is the highest highway pass in Alaska and marks the continental divide. The steep 3km climb to the pass begins at mile 242.5, and the pullover at the top is an excellent place for spotting Dall sheep and grizzlies. On the north side of the Brooks Range you may spot caribou and muskoxen. To the east are the Phillip Smith Mountains, to the west the Endicott Mountains, and beyond the pass is the flat, treeless coastal plain known as the North Slope.

The Galbraith camp site at mile 275 is located on an old pipeline camp work pad at Lake Galbraith, where both the BLM and the US Fish and Wildlife Service maintain field stations. There is no potable water available at this site, but there are spectacular views of the lake and Brooks Range, and good hiking nearby.

You'll pass three more scenic lookouts on the way to Deadhorse. Ice Cut, at mile 326, is a good place to see peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons and other raptors hunting along the rocky cliffs.

Deadhorse, at mile 414, is the end of the highway, a few kilometres short of the Prudhoe Bay oil fields and the Arctic Ocean. Surprisingly, the town has a population that ranges from 3000 to more than 8000, depending on the season, and three motels, none of which is anything to write home about. Slightly the better of the three is the sprawling **Arctic Caribou Inn** (☎ 877-659 2368; www.arcticcaribouinn.com; r US\$125; ☹ Jun-Sep). Other options include the **Prudhoe Bay Hotel** (☎ 659 2449; www.prudhoebayhotel.com) and the **Arctic Oilfield Hotel** (☎ 659 2614). There are also restaurants, fuel, a general store and a post office.

For security reasons, you can't drive into the massive oil complex. If you want to see it, join a commercial tour. Arctic Caribou Inn offers a two-hour bus tour (\$37 per person) that includes a brief stop at the Arctic Ocean, where you are allowed to stroll along the beach. On the tour you'll also visit Pump Station 1 and the Oilfield Visitors Center.

Dalton Highway Express (see p237) runs shuttles to the Arctic Ocean for US\$39. **Northern Alaska Tour Company** (☎ 474 8600; www.northernalaska.com) offers a three-day trip to Prudhoe Bay from Fairbanks (\$749) that includes lodging at Wiseman and Deadhorse, some meals and the flight back to Fairbanks.

ITINERARY 4: NORTHWEST ALASKA

This aerial tour departs from Fairbanks and heads for the traditional Inupiat community of Kotzebue before hitting the incredible wilderness parks of northwest Alaska and Alaska's northernmost town, the whaling community of Barrow.

The vast, flat treeless plains of northwestern Alaska are pitted with mountain ranges, millions of lakes and slow-moving rivers. It's a pristine wilderness with only a handful of settlements and some of the most remote and untouched scenery in the state. Two large indigenous communities, Kotzebue and Barrow, carry on traditional life much as it was in years gone past, and there's fantastic hiking, wildlife watching and canoeing in the Noatak National Preserve and the Kobuk Valley National Park. Incredible desert-like landscapes, thousands of migrating caribou and a real sense of the far north await you if you choose this route. Fairbanks acts as an air hub for the whole area, so you may have to do some backtracking to see all the sights on this itinerary.

FAIRBANKS

For information on Fairbanks, see p250.

KOTZEBUE

☎ 907 / 3600

The traditional Inupiat community of Kotzebue is the transportation and commerce centre for Northwest Alaska. Even so it's extremely difficult for an independent traveller to visit on a limited budget. Most travellers to



Kotzebue are either part of a tour group on a day trip from Anchorage or are just passing through on their way to a wilderness expedition in the surrounding national parks and reserves. To make the best of a trip you have to get out and explore these remote national parklands and enjoy the warm welcome received by those who want to learn about the local Inupiat culture.

Many residents still depend on subsistence hunting and fishing to survive, but Red Dog Mine, 144km (90 miles) north of town, has boosted the local economy. The mine holds some of the richest zinc deposits in North America and is expected to produce 5% of the world's supply of zinc when it's running at full capacity.

Information

Kotzebue City Hall (☎ 442 3401; 258 3rd Ave) Your best bet for tourist information.

Maniilaq Health Centre (☎ 442 3321; 436 5th Ave)

Post office (Shore Ave)

Wells Fargo Bank (☎ 442 3258; cnr 2nd Ave & Lagoon St)

Western Arctic National Parklands Visitors

Centre (☎ 442 3890; cnr 2nd Ave & Lakes St;

☹ 8am-7pm Jun-Sep)

Sights & Activities

Kotzebue is named after Polish explorer Otto von Kotzebue, who stumbled onto the village in 1816 while searching for the Northwest Passage (see p20) on behalf of the Russians. Much of the town's history and culture can be viewed at the **NANA Museum of the Arctic**

(☎ 442 3441; cnr 2nd & 3rd Aves; admission US\$20), at the western end of town. The centre is owned and operated by the Northwest Alaska Native Association (NANA), and a two-hour programme of indigenous culture is held at 4pm and 6.30pm daily in summer. The programme includes demonstrations of Inupiat handicrafts and a *nalukataq*, the traditional blanket toss, which historically allowed people to gain enough elevation to observe vast distances of terrain. Although the presentation is scheduled to accommodate day tours from Anchorage, walk-ins are welcome.

FAST FACTS

- **Access for independent travellers** Expensive
- **Best time to travel** June to September
- **Difficulty level** Moderate
- **Don't forget** Camera, plenty of film, plenty of cash, binoculars
- **Don't miss** Paddling the Noatak River, Kobuk's magnificent sand dunes
- **Gateway city** Fairbanks, Alaska
- **Length of route** 1760km (1100 miles)
- **Mode of travel** Air
- **Recommended map** International Travel Maps *Alaska* (1:1,500,000)
- **Time needed** At least one week

Perhaps the most interesting thing to do in Kotzebue is just stroll down Shore Ave (also known as Front St), a narrow gravel road only a few metres from the water at the northern edge of town, and appreciate the historic wooden architecture. Here fishing boats crowd the beach and salmon dries on racks as locals prepare for the long winter ahead. From early June the sun doesn't set for almost six weeks, and this is best place to watch the midnight sun roll along the horizon, painting the sea reddish gold with reflected light.

Also of interest is the large **cemetery** in the centre of town, where spirit houses have been erected over many of the graves.

Sleeping & Eating

Kotzebue does not have a public camp site or hostel. The best bet is to hike south of town well past the airport and pitch your tent on the beach. Much of the beach is narrow and sloping or privately owned, so you may have to scout around for a suitable spot.

Lagoon B&B (☎ 442 3723; 227 Lagoon St; d US\$100) This small place has four comfortable rooms

and may feel a little less overrun than the larger hotels.

Nullagvik Hotel (☎ 442 3331; www.nullagvik.com; 308 Shore Ave; d US\$149) The Nullagvik is aimed at group tours and offers comfortable corporate-style rooms and decent nosh (mains US\$15 to US\$25). The hotel is built on pilings to keep the heat and weight of the three-storey building from melting the permafrost.

Bayside Hotel (☎ 442 3600; 303 Shore Ave; d US\$115) Just next door to the Nullagvik, this smaller hotel offers slightly cheaper rooms and has a good restaurant (mains US\$13 to US\$22) serving Chinese and American fare.

Getting There & Away

A return ticket with **Alaska Airlines** (☎ 800-426 0333; www.alaskaair.com) to Kotzebue from Fairbanks usually costs between US\$300 and US\$400. You can also purchase a return ticket from Anchorage with stopovers in both Nome and Kotzebue.

Tour Arctic (☎ 800-468 2248; www.tour-Arctic.com) offers day trips to Kotzebue from Fairbanks for US\$385. You may as well include an

ACTIVITIES: PADDLING

Kotzebue provides access to some of the finest river-running in Arctic Alaska. Most trips are self-guided, so you should have plenty of experience and come fully equipped. Popular excursions include those along the Noatak River, the Kobuk River, the Salmon River (which flows into the Kobuk) and the Selawik River.

Trips along the Kobuk National Wild River begin at Lake Walker and travel 224km (140 miles) downstream to the villages of Kobuk or Ambler. From these villages there are scheduled flights to both Kotzebue and Bettles, another departure point for the river. **Bering Air Service** (☎ 442 3943; www.beringair.com) charges US\$185 for a one-way flight from either Kobuk or Ambler to Kotzebue. Most of the river is class I, but some lining of boats may be required just below Lake Walker and for 2km or so through Lower Kobuk Canyon. Paddlers usually plan on six to eight days for the float.

The Noatak National Wild River is a 16-day, 560km (350-mile) float from Lake Matcharak to the village of Noatak, where Bering Air has scheduled flights to Kotzebue for US\$110 per person one way. However, the numerous access lakes on the river allow it to be broken down into shorter paddles. The entire river is rated from class I to class II. The upper portion, in the Brooks Range, offers much more dramatic scenery and is usually accessed from Bettles (see p256). The lower half, accessed through Kotzebue, flows through a broad, gently sloping valley where hills replace the sharp peaks of the Brooks Range. The most common trip here is to put in at Nimiuktuk River where, within an hour of paddling, you enter the 104km (65-mile) Grand Canyon of the Noatak, followed by the 11km Noatak Canyon. Most paddlers pull out at Kelly River, where there is a ranger station with a radio. Below the confluence with the Kelly River, the Noatak becomes heavily braided.

For more information, contact the National Park Service (www.nps.gov/akso) before you depart for Alaska. Canoes can be hired in Kotzebue through **Arctic Air Guides** (☎ 442 3030; per day US\$35), which can also drop you off at remote locations. Air charter costs US\$350 per hour.

overnight stay, though, as the cost, including hotel accommodation, is only US\$415.

BARROW

☎ 907 / pop 4600

Barrow is the largest Inupiat community in Alaska and retains much of its traditional culture thanks to its isolated location. This is best symbolised by the spring whale hunts and the Nalukataq Festival, staged in June to celebrate a successful hunt.

The scruffy little town, the northernmost community in the USA, lies 528km (330 miles) north of the Arctic Circle and less than 2080km (1300 miles) from the North Pole. Once known as a commercial whaling centre for European and American ships, Barrow is now famous for the midnight sun, and most visitors arrive to set their own farthest-north record. The sun here doesn't set for 82 days from May to early August.

The vast majority of the 8000 tourists who arrive every summer are travelling as part of a package tour. Like Kotzebue, Barrow is an expensive side trip for independent travellers.

Information

Barrow City Tourism (☎ 852 5211; at Momegana & Ahkovak Sts; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug)

Post office (cnr Cunningham & Kongosak Sts)

Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital (☎ 852 4611; 1296 Agvik St)

Wells Fargo Bank (☎ 852 6200; cnr Agvik & Kiogak Sts)

Sights & Activities

The main thing to do at the top of the world is to stand on the shore of the Arctic Ocean and look towards the North Pole. You can stroll the gravel road that parallels the sea to view *umiaks* (Inupiat skin boats), giant jawbones of bowhead whales, fish-drying racks, and the jumbled Arctic pack ice that still litters the sandy shoreline in June and can be seen stretched across the horizon even in July.

Within town there's the **Inupiat Heritage Centre** (www.nps.gov/inup; Ahkovak St; admission US\$5; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat Jun-Aug). The nearly 7.5-sq-km (24,000-sq-ft) centre houses a museum, a library and a large room designed for traditional dance performances. The museum features exhibits on the Inupiat culture and commercial whaling, as well as displays

on ice-age animals – mammoths, ancient horses, lions and giant bears – that inhabited the parts of Alaska and Siberia known as Beringia. Each afternoon in summer, local people present a cultural programme that features traditional singing, dancing and drumming.

More Inupiat culture and art is on display in the lobby of the **North Slope Borough Building** (1274 Agvik St). A gift shop here has baleen baskets, sealskin bags and ivory carvings for sale.

Perhaps the biggest attraction in the area is **Point Barrow**, a narrow spit of land about 21km northeast of the city. The spit is the northernmost point of land in mainland North America, dividing the Chukchi Sea to the west from the Beaufort Sea to the east. In winter and spring Point Barrow is where polar bears den; in summer it's the featured stop of organised tours. The buses never actually reach the tip of the point, as the road ends several kilometres short of it. To continue, you must walk or rent an ATV.

East of town, along Gas Well Rd, hikers can observe wildlife such as Arctic foxes, caribou, swans, snowy owls, jaegers, typically testy Arctic terns and numerous other bird species, as well as the untold zillions of mosquitoes that provide nourishment for all the bird life.

Tours

Tundra Tours (☎ 852 3900; www.alaskaone.com/top world) is an Inupiat-owned company offering tours of the town, the Arctic Ocean and the surrounding tundra. A blanket toss and drumming and dance performance is also included in the six-hour tour, which costs US\$60 per person and includes lunch.

Arctic Adventure Tours (☎ 852 3800) offers a two-hour wildlife tour to Point Barrow to look for polar bears, marine life such as walrus and a variety of migrating birds (US\$60).

Festivals & Events

If you dare to visit off-season, you can experience the dark days of winter at **Kivgiq**, the Messenger Feast, a three-day celebration in January or February that takes place every three years and gathers Inuit from around northern Alaska, Canada and Russia.

Piuraagiaqta is the festival of spring. It's held in April, when the days begin to grow

SIDE TRIP: NORTHWEST ARCTIC NATIONAL PARKLANDS

Kotzebue makes an excellent base to visit the outlying villages of the region and the four national parks and monuments in the area. Eleven small settlements are accessible with Bering Air (see p236), but two of the most interesting are Noatak and Kobuk.

Cape Krusenstern National Monument

The broad coastal plain that makes up Cape Krusenstern National Monument consists of alternating beaches, ice-carved lagoons, and 114 parallel limestone bluffs and ridges that define the changing shorelines of the Chukchi Sea. In autumn migrating waterfowl are drawn to Cape Krusenstern by the watery habitats and rich insect life. Most visitors to the park are on kayaking trips along the coast and through the lagoons, or they come for the hiking, backpacking and wildlife viewing across the wetland landscapes.

Noatak National Preserve

Although stark, the vast open landscapes of the Noatak National Preserve make up what are surely the most beautiful scenes in northern Alaska. This huge, mountain-ringed river basin, bounded by the Baird, De Long and Brooks Ranges, is not only home to the gamut of Arctic wildlife but also straddles the boundary between the *taiga* and tundra ecosystems.

The park has no facilities but makes an excellent destination for canoeists (see p260), who can travel from deep in the Brooks Range to the tidewater of the Chukchi Sea. The park is also popular with wildlife watchers, who come to see the great caribou migrations in late summer and early autumn. The pristine ecosystem here protects some of the Arctic's finest arrays of plants and animals.

Kobuk Valley National Park

Just south of Noatak is the **Kobuk Valley National Park** (www.nps.gov/akso), encircled by the Baird and Waring mountain ranges. The most fascinating aspect of the park landscape is the **Great Kobuk Sand Dunes**, on the southern side of the Kobuk River. This desert-like area of shifting 30m (100ft) dunes is a spectacular sight from the air. Other smaller dune areas exist along the riverside, and older, vegetated dunes cover much of the southern portion of the

longer. There are parades, foot and snow-machine races, dog mushing and *igloo*-building contests.

When the spring whaling hunt has been completed in late June, the whalers celebrate the **Nalukataq Festival** for anything from a few days to more than a week, depending on the success of the hunt. The festival is a rare cultural experience. One Inupiat tradition calls for the whaling crews to share their bounty with the village, and during the festival you'll see families carry off platters and plastic bags full of raw whale meat. The main event of the festival is the blanket toss, in which locals gather around a sealskin tarp and pull it tight to toss people into the air – the effect is much like bouncing on a trampoline. The object is to jump as high as possible, and inevitably there are a number of sprains and fractures at every Nalukataq.

Sleeping & Eating

King Eider Inn (☎ 852 4700; www.kingeider.net; 1752 Ahkovak St; s/d US\$175/195; ☒) The newest and nicest hotel in Barrow has bright, comfortable rooms with fairly standard Alaskan décor. The place is so immaculately kept that you must take your shoes off at the door.

Top of the World Hotel (☎ 852 3900; www.topoftheworldhotel.com; 1200 Agvik St; d US\$175) Outpost for the package tourists, this place can get booked during the short summer months. The rooms are decked out in wooden furniture and understated floral patterns, and are pretty spacious.

Barrow Airport Inn (☎ 852 2525; 1815 Momegana St; d US\$125) The rooms at this place are fairly functional but include fridges, microwaves and kitchenettes, so you could offset some of your costs by self-catering.

UIC-NARL Hostel (☎ 852 7800; s US\$75) The former Naval Arctic Research Lab (NARL) east

valley. The most dramatic dunes are accessible on foot along Kavet Creek, about 5km south of the Kobuk River.

The sand was created by the grinding action of ancient glaciers and has been carried to the Kobuk Valley by wind and water. Sand river bluffs, standing as high as 45m (150ft), hold permafrost ice wedges and the fossils of Ice Age mammals.

The placid Kobuk River, which reaches widths of up to 500m (1640ft), slides along at a negligible gradient of about 6cm per kilometre. An excellent lazy float trip will take you between the villages of Ambler and Kianna. At the Onion Portage archaeological site (where there's a seasonal ranger station), you'll find evidence of the Inupiat cultures that have occupied this area for at least 12,000 years. Caribou migrations pass through between August and October.

Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

It's approximately 90km (56 miles) from the easternmost tip of Russia across the Bering Strait to the North American continent, but in the period from 40,000 to 13,000 years ago so much of the earth's water was locked up as ice that the sea level was considerably lower than it is today. As a result, the two continents were connected by a 1600km (1000-mile) bridge of land that facilitated travel between them. It's generally accepted that this was the crossing point for the Athapaskans and other waves of migrants that would eventually populate much of both American continents.

The bleak and barren landscapes along the northern shore of the Seward Peninsula are now protected in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. Evidence of the early human migration can be seen in the area, as well as more than 170 species of birds and relics from the gold rush at the start of the 20th century. Scattered across the reserve are six shelter cabins. The most popular, in a haunting setting at Serpentine Hot Springs, sleeps up to 20 people.

Getting There & Away

The only access to these parks is by air from Kotzebue or, in the case of the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, from Nome. Bering Air (see p236) has flights to Kobuk and Noatak (US\$185).

Cape Smythe Air (☎ 442 3020; www.capesmythe.com) provides charter flights to villages surrounding the Kobuk National Park (US\$141).

of town was transferred to Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corp in the 1980s and is mainly used as the local community college. It's the cheapest place to stay, but the rooms are basic and have shared facilities.

Pepe's North of the Border (☎ 852 8200; 1204 Agvik St; dinner US\$17-22; ☒ 6am-10pm) Barrow's top restaurant is the 'northernmost Mexican restaurant in the world'. Pepe's has good Mexican food, steaks and seafood, and décor that will make you forget you're in Barrow.

Arctic Pizza (☎ 852 4222; 125 Upper Apayauk St; pizzas from US\$18; ☒ 11.30am-11.30pm) Huge portions of tasty food are dished up at the buzzing pizzeria on the 1st floor, while you'll find something like a fine-dining Italian restaurant upstairs, with wonderful views of the Arctic Ocean.

Brower's Café (☎ 852 5800; 3220 Brower Hill; sandwiches US\$8-11, dinner US\$17-24; ☒ 7am-midnight) A

former home for stranded whalers, this late-19th-century building now houses an interesting restaurant that resembles a museum. The food's good, and if the artefacts and photos don't keep you entertained the views over the beach will.

Getting There & Away

The only way to reach Barrow is to fly. An advance-purchase return ticket from Fairbanks to Barrow with Alaska Airlines costs between US\$310 and US\$350.

Such fares make package tours an attractive option. A one-day trip, including airfare from Fairbanks and a village tour, but not meals, is US\$373 through Tundra Tours (see p261). You can stay overnight for US\$525. The **Northern Alaska Tour Company** (☎ 800-474 1986; www.northernalaska.com) offers single-day/overnight trips departing from Fairbanks for US\$399/450.

ESSENTIAL FACTS

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Hypothermia

For information on how to prevent and deal with hypothermia, see p332.

Insects

Insects are the creatures most likely to torture you while you're in the woods. You might hear tales of lost hikers going insane from being incessantly swarmed by blackflies and mosquitoes. Blackflies are at their peskiest from late May through to the end of June, while mosquitoes can be a bother from early spring until early autumn. Ticks are an issue from March to June.

Generally, insect populations are greatest deep in the woods and near water, and they increase the further north you go. You'll be fairly safe in clearings, along shorelines or anywhere there's a breeze. Mosquitoes are at their peskiest around sundown; building a fire will help keep them away. A tent with a zipped screen is pretty much essential while camping.

Minimize skin exposure by wearing long-sleeved shirts tucked into long pants tucked into your socks and/or boots, as well as a close-fitting hat or cap. As a rule, darker clothes attract biting insects more so than lighter ones. Perfume, too, evidently draws

the wrong kind of attention. If you're venturing into the backcountry, a bug jacket (essentially a mesh jacket/head-net), available at most camping stores, is recommended.

Take plenty of insect repellent and, to enhance protection, also apply the spray to your clothing, shoes, backpack and tent. For additional information, see p332.

Wildlife

Animals are among the Arctic's greatest assets, but they can also represent serious danger if you invade their turf. Feeding animals or getting too close will make them lose their innate fear of people, which makes it more likely that they'll have to be shot by park rangers.

Bears – always on the lookout for an easy snack – often find camp sites simply irresistible. If you're camping it's wise to cook and eat in one place and sleep well away from it. If you do encounter a bear and it doesn't see you, move a safe distance downwind and make noise to alert it to your presence. If the bear sees you, slowly back out of its path, avoid eye contact, speak softly and wave your hands above your head slowly. Never turn your back to the bear and never kneel down. On all accounts do not come between a female and her cubs.

If a grizzly bear charges, do not run and do not scream (which may frighten the bear and make it more aggressive), because the bear

may only be charging as a bluff. Drop to the ground, crouch face down in a ball and play dead, covering the back of your neck with your hands and your chest and stomach with your knees. Do not resist the bear's inquisitive pawing – it may get bored and go away. The best way to identify a grizzly is from its large shoulder hump.

If a grizzly attacks you in your tent at night, you're likely dealing with a predatory bear that perceives you as a food source. In this extremely rare scenario, you should fight back aggressively with anything you can find – don't play dead.

Attacks by black bears are extremely rare; they usually occur only if the animal is starving. If a black bear should charge you, make yourself look as big and intimidating as possible, raise your arms or your coat, jump up and down and shout. If the bear attacks, fight back with anything to hand.

Elk, moose and muskoxen are potential dangers whenever you encounter them. Always stay at a safe distance. Females are generally at their fiercest during calving season (mid-May to late June), while bulls are most aggressive during mating season (from mid-September to late October).

The likelihood of being attacked by an animal is extremely slight, and you shouldn't spend too much time thinking about it. It's more important to think about the impact you have on the animal's habitat. Give wildlife respect and space. If you see an animal on the side of the road, consider not stopping. If you do decide to pull over, move on after a few minutes. For comprehensive information on attacks by Arctic animals, visit www.dpc.dk/wildlife.

FURTHER READING

For more in-depth coverage, Lonely Planet publishes individual guides to Alaska and Canada, as well as *Hiking in Alaska*, which discusses hikes around the state.

Another essential companion is the **Milepost** (☎ 1-800 726 4707; www.themilepost.com), which has been through over 50 editions and covers practically every business, service and wide spot in the road along every step of the way. If you're heading beyond the highways, the same publisher also produces the *Alaska Wilderness Guide*, which presents an exhaustive array of possibilities in Alaska's roadless areas.

If you're heading further east in Arctic Canada, be sure to get hold of the comprehensive *Nunavut Handbook*, which can be ordered from **Nunavut Tourism** (www.nunatour.nt.ca).

Anyone hoping to strike off into the Arctic wilderness on their own will thoroughly appreciate a copy of *Planning a Wilderness Trip in Canada & Alaska*, by Keith Morton. It contains information on everything you'll want to know, from chartering a bush flight and surviving bears, insects and inclement weather to gutting fish, cooking a palatable meal and dealing with such wilderness plagues as constipation and flatulence. It focuses on the wilderness areas of Alaska and Canada, but the information is applicable anywhere in the Arctic.

MONEY

At the time of writing US\$1 equalled C\$1.20. Despite the isolated nature of the communities in Arctic Alaska and Canada, practically every community has an ATM accepting major credit cards.

In restaurants leaving a tip of about 15% of the pretax bill is standard. On the rare occasion that restaurants tack the service charge onto the bill (this is usually done for groups of eight or more), no extra tip is required. When tipping you can either hand the money directly to the server or leave it on the table. Tipping is expected for bar service, too.

Alaska

Alaska uses the American dollar only – if you've just crossed over from the Yukon, don't troll up with Canadian dollars and expect them to be accepted. Changing foreign currency in Alaska – especially Arctic Alaska – is a real headache.

Canada

The Canadian dollar is worth slightly less than the American, so you may feel like you're spending more, but prices in the Arctic regions are pretty much on par across the two countries. Canada's federal goods and services tax (GST) adds 7% to just about every transaction. There's no PST (provincial sales tax) in the Yukon, the NWT or Nunavut.

TELEPHONE

Every Arctic community has a least one payphone, often in the post office or the largest shop. Generally, these accept both coins and

GATEWAY CITIES

Getting to Dawson

Air North (☎ 800-764 0407; www.flyairnorth.com) flies from Whitehorse to Dawson. To get to Whitehorse by air you can pick up an **Air Canada** (☎ 1-888 247 2262; www.aircanada.ca) flight in Vancouver, or an Air North service from Vancouver, Edmonton or Calgary.

Alternatively, bus it to Whitehorse with **Greyhound** (☎ 1-800 661 8747; www.greyhound.ca) and then hop on the **Dawson City Courier** (☎ 1-867 993 6688; www.dawsonbus.ca) to Dawson.

Getting to Iqaluit

Iqaluit has nearly daily arrivals from Montréal and Ottawa aboard **First Air** (☎ 1-800 267 1247; www.firstair.ca) and **Canadian North** (☎ 1-800 661 1505; www.cdn-north.com). Both airlines also serve Iqaluit from Yellowknife.

Getting to Fairbanks

Alaska Airlines (☎ 1-800 252 7522; www.alaskaair.com) flies daily from Anchorage (where there are connections to the rest of the states) and Seattle.

To bus it to Fairbanks you'll need to take the Greyhound service to Whitehorse (see above) and then hop on an **Alaska Direct Bus Lines** (☎ 1-800 770 6652) bus to Fairbanks.

prepaid phonecards. Local libraries almost always have Internet access.

Mobile Phones

The only foreign phones that will work in North America are triband models, operating on GSM 1900 as well as other frequencies. If you don't have one your best bet may be to buy a pay-as-you-go phone when you get there. Most cost under \$100 (in either the US or Canada), including some prepaid call time. However, the GSM/GPRS network is sparse, and between towns in the far north it's unlikely there will be any reception at all. Most outfitters will hire out radio equipment if you're planning a wilderness trip and want emergency cover.

Phonecards

Prepaid phonecards usually offer the best per-minute rates for long-distance and international calling in North America. They come in denominations of \$5, \$10 and \$20 in both the US and Canada, and are widely sold in shops.

Phone Codes

Area codes Alaska ☎ 907, Yukon/NWT/
Nunavut ☎ 867

Country code ☎ 1 (Long-distance domestic calls must also be preceded by ☎ 1)

Directory assistance ☎ 411

Emergency ☎ 911

International access code ☎ 011

Operator ☎ 0

Toll-free numbers: ☎ 800, ☎ 866, ☎ 877, ☎ 888

TIME

Arctic North America spans five time zones. Alaska Time is one hour earlier than Pacific Daylight Time – the zone in which the Yukon falls. The NWT and Nunavut stretch across three time zones: Mountain Daylight Time, Central Daylight Time and Eastern Daylight Time. When it's noon in Fairbanks, it's 1pm in Dawson, 2pm in Inuvik, 4pm in Iqaluit, 9pm in London and 7am the following day in Melbourne. For more detailed information, see the World Time Zones map on p334.

Both Alaska and Canada observe daylight-saving time, which comes into effect on the first Sunday in April, when clocks are put forward one hour, and ends on the last Sunday in October, when they're put back one hour.

TOURIST INFORMATION

All larger Arctic communities have a tourist office, and information for travellers is generally available from the town council in smaller villages.

Useful planning contacts for a trip north:

Alaska

Alaska Department of Natural Resources (www.alaskastateparks.org) Information on all state parks, including camp sites, cabins for hire and outdoor activities.

Alaska National Park Service (www.nps.gov/akso) Information on national parks, facilities and fees.

Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA; www.travelalaska.com) The official tourism marketing arm for the state, with listings of hundreds of B&Bs, motels, camp sites, activities and transport services.

Canada

Canadian Tourism Commission (www.travelcanada.ca) Loads of general information, packages and links.

Northwest Territories (www.nwttravel.nt.ca) NWT Arctic tourism.

Nunavut Tourism (www.nunatour.nt.ca)

Parks Canada (www.parksCanada.ca) Information on all national parks, national historic sites and national marine-conservation areas.

Yukon Department of Tourism (www.touryukon.com)

VISAS

Alaska

Under the US visa-waiver programme, visas are not currently required for citizens of the EU, Australia and New Zealand for visits of up to 90 days, although you must have a valid machine-readable passport. Canadian citizens are exempt from both visa and passport requirements but must show proof of citizenship. Everyone else needs to apply for a US visa in their home country.

Admission requirements to the United States are subject to rapid change. Check with a US consulate in your home country or the **US Department of State** (www.unitedstatesvisas.gov) for the latest requirements. Even those visitors who don't need a visa are subject to a US\$6 entry fee at land border crossings.

In 2004 the US Department of Homeland Security introduced a new set of security measures called **US-VISIT** (www.dhs.gov/us-visit). When you arrive by air or sea, you will be photographed and have your two index fingers scanned. This biometric data will be matched when you leave the US. The goals are to ensure that the person who entered

the US is the same as the one leaving it, and to catch people who've overstayed the terms of their admission. At the time of writing, this procedure was also being implemented at the busiest land border crossings, including many with Canada, with the goal of extending it to all entry points by the end of 2005. Visitors from visa-waiver countries are currently exempt from being finger-scanned and photographed at land borders, although this may well change at any time.

Canada

Citizens of dozens of countries – including the US, most Western European and Commonwealth countries as well as Mexico,

Japan, South Korea and Israel – don't need visas to enter Canada for stays of up to 180 days. US permanent residents are also exempt from obtaining visas, regardless of their nationality.

Nationals of around 150 other countries, including South Africa, Hong Kong and Poland, need to apply for a 'temporary resident visa' (TRV) with the Canadian visa office in their home country (usually at the embassy, high commission or consulate). The website maintained by **Citizenship and Immigration Canada** (CIC; www.cic.gc.ca) has full details, including office addresses and the latest requirements. A separate visa is required if you plan to study or work in Canada.

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