

ADVENTURELAND: ALASKA

LAND OF ICE AND FIRE

This month, the National Parks Service turns 100, and visitors are pouring into the parks to celebrate. Want a wilderness escape without the crowds? Look north: Alaska's parks promise solitude and grandeur. We picked three (of The Last Frontier's eight) filled with lunar landscapes, towering glaciers, and old mining towns. *By Renee Brincks*

| | PARK NAME: GATES OF THE ARCTIC | KATMAI | WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS |
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| | SOLITUDE SCALE: NO ROADS, NO TRAILS | NO ROADS, FEW TRAILS | TWO ROADS, DOZENS OF TRAILS |
| Only here | Go wildlife-peeping near midnight—or 6 a.m. (The sun shines 15 to 18 hours a day here in August.) Wolverines, Dall sheep, and 500,000 caribou roam this northerly park. |  Watch America's largest concentration of brown bears (2,200) feast on salmon in Brooks River. July and September are the best times to see them. |  Drive 60-mile McCarthy Road, past glaciers and volcanoes, right into America's largest national park. Then fly in a bush plane to see 18,008-foot Mount St. Elias, the nation's second highest peak. |
| Your arrival |  By plane to Bettles, Alaska's tiniest town (pop. 10), which sits 35 miles north of the Arctic Circle. | By floatplane from access town King Salmon to Brooks Camp, aka Bear Central.  | By car, bus, or shuttle from Anchorage to the gateway town of Copper Center. |
| Star attraction | North Fork of the Koyukuk River , where two peaks, the eponymous "Gates of the Arctic," loom. Raft all 85 miles, alongside caribou migration routes. \$4,200/8 days; arcticwild.com .  | Valley of 10,000 Smokes , a moonlike landscape once buried in 700 feet of volcano ash. Day tours and backcountry hikes. From \$51; katmailand.com . | Blue pools on the Root Glacier . Don crampons and hike it; anyone fit enough to walk 5 miles can go. \$80/half-day; steliassguides.com .  |
| Your base camp | The 1950s log-and-antler Bettles Lodge , built for bush pilots and dogsledders, has a billiards room. From \$195; bettleslodge.com .  | Brooks Lodge , a rustic 1950s fishing camp, rents 16 rooms on Naknek Lake. From \$800; katmailand.com/brooks-lodge .  | Charming 20-room Ma Johnson's Hotel preserves mining artifacts and pours Alaskan beers at its Golden Saloon. From \$229; mccarthylodge.com . |
| Way out there | Trek beneath the remote Arrigetch Peaks , jagged spires reminiscent of <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> . \$4,195/10 days; alaskaalpineadventures.com .  | Boat 20 miles from Brooks Camp to Fure's, a 1926 trapper's cabin built on the shore of Naknek Lake from hand-hewn logs. \$45 Jun 1–Sep 17, free other times; nps.gov/katm . | Pack-raft into backcountry and float past ice arches on Nizina Lake . Trips leave from McCarthy-Kennicott. From \$1,275/person/3 days, including airfare to backcountry; kennicotiguides.com/multi-day-trip-overview/nizina-glacier . |
| The lowdown | Slightly larger than Maryland, with a visitor center in Bettles. Visitors last year: 10,745 | This Connecticut-size park has only 5 miles of maintained trails. Park info available at Brooks Camp. Visitors last year: 37,818 | The size of Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Switzerland combined, with visitor info at Copper Center, Chitina, Kennicott, and Slana. Visitors last year: 80,366 |

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