

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
	SOLITUDE SCALE:	NO ROADS, NO TRAILS	NO ROADS, FEW TRAILS	TWO ROADS, DOZENS OF TRAILS
Only here		Go wildlife-peeking 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. Nps tours and backcountry hikes. <i>From \$51; katmailand.com.</i>	 Blue pools on the Root Glacier . Don crampons and hike it; anyone fit enough to walk 5 miles can go. \$80/half-day; steliastudies.com .
Your base camp		The 1950s log-and-antler Bettles Lodge , built for bush pilots and dogsledders, has a billiards room. <i>From \$195; bettleslodge.com.</i>	 Brooks Lodge , a rustic 1950s fishing camp, rents 16 rooms on Naknek Lake. <i>From \$800; katmailand.com/brooks-lodge.</i>	 Charming 20-room Ma Johnson's Hotel preserves mining artifacts and pours Alaskan beers at its Golden Saloon. <i>From \$229; mccarthylodge.com.</i>
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. <i>From \$1,275/person/3 days, including airfare to backcountry; kennicottguides.com/multi-day-trip-overview/nizina-glacier.</i>
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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