

FAQ's For Glacier Bay Trips

What is the difference between the East Arm and the West Arm?

The main differences in the East and the West arm lie in the wildlife to be seen, proximity to tidewater glaciers, and the amount of kayak and motor boat traffic. Both arms of Glacier Bay offer the opportunity to view and paddle near glaciers. The west arm has a higher concentration of, and easier access to many tide water glaciers, and therefore sees considerably more kayak and cruise ship traffic. The East Arm offers a different, possibly more "remote" of an experience, with far less motor traffic if any at all. You can expect to see 2 large ships a day, 2-4 smaller cruise ships a day, and a number of smaller commercial, research, and private motor vessels in the West Arm. Much of the East Arm is closed entirely to motor traffic in the summer months, although some smaller cruise ships and private boats may enter the East Arm as far north as McBride Inlet.

What wildlife will we see in Glacier Bay?

The wildlife encountered in Glacier Bay's East and West Arms can be vastly different, but some species will be found both places. The East Arm offers a wider variety of land mammals such as moose, both Brown and Black bear, Mountain Goat, Wolves, Sea and Freshwater Otter, and numerous rare birds such as Black Oyster Catchers, Arctic Terns, and varieties of sea ducks such as Scooters, Harliquins, etc. It would be common to see Humpback Whales in the more southern areas of the East Arm, especially in Sitakaday Narrows and around the Beardslee Islands. It would be possible to see Orcas in the East or West Arms, although on a much lower frequency than that of Humpbacks. If you place a higher priority on viewing a variety of wildlife over paddling around glaciers, the East arm is recommended.

The West Arm is known for its' often high concentrations of Brown Bear, but for the most part is free from the Black Bears that inhabit the southern and eastern shores of the bay. You would be lucky to see a moose in the West Arm, although they may be found. Mountain Goats may be seen in high numbers here, as well as in the East Arm. The West Arm is largely free from marine mammals such as Humpbacks, Orcas, and Sea Lions. Humpbacks do frequent Queen Inlet and the Russell Island area in the West Arm, and the high numbers of Harbor Seals do give the Orca something to come in for. Spotting an Orca in the West Arm would be rare. Similar birds inhabit the West Arm, but the areas near tidewater glaciers such as the Margerie and John Hopkins Glaciers are excellent spots to see Tufted Puffins, Black Leg Kittiwakes, and endangered Kitzlitz and Marbled Murrelets. The West Arm has a much lower salinity due to freshwater influx, and generally mammals such as humpbacks and sea lions avoid the silty waters near tidewater glaciers. The Brown Bears really will be the most likely and often seen in the West Arm.

If viewing/ paddling near glaciers is your priority, head for the West Arm. A higher number of both tidewater and other varieties of glaciers exist in closer proximity.

It is worth noting, that the motor boat ride in/out is a great opportunity to view wildlife and compare the various parts of the Bay. You may see many varieties of marine mammals such as Humpbacks, Orca, Sea Otter in the lower sections of the Bay.

What is the weather like in Glacier Bay? What are the best months to go?

Weather in Glacier Bay is similar to the rest of Southeast Alaska, often experiencing cooler temperatures and frequent rain fall. May and June offer the least average rain fall of any months, with July and August precipitation steadily increasing up to the rather wet September and October. Some areas of the Bay, such as the West Arm, are traditionally drier than other areas due to the rainshadow effect produced by the high mountain range (fairweathers) to the west. Day time temps are in the 50's more often than not. Paddling/camping near glaciers can be colder, possibly dipping into the low 40's at night.

What are the paddling conditions like in Glacier Bay?

Generally Glacier Bay offers protected paddling in most areas. Lower sections of the bay can experience stronger tides and more wind than upper reaches of the East and West Arms. Although winds may be encountered in all areas of the bay, we emphasize conservative judgment in regards to paddling in such conditions. Glacier Bay is generally an inland sea, and rarely encounters swell or surf conditions from wind found on more exposed coastlines.

What is the Camping like in Glacier Bay? Are there any facilities?

Glacier Bay National Park is a 3.3 million acre designated wilderness area, and offers no facilities or improvements outside of Bartlett Cove, the start and end of our trips. Bartlett Cove has an established primitive camping area, visitor center, lodge, and hiking trails. The Glacier Bay Lodge has rooms, dining, showers, and laundry.

Camping in Glacier Bay is primitive and done in practice with leave no trace principles. Campsites are often in the intertidal zone on sand or small rocks and gravel. Glacial outwash plains offer flat tenting and good views up and down beaches. You will rarely camp in the forest or among trees in Glacier Bay, except maybe in the lower sections of the Bay. No improvements of any kind have been made, and disposing of waste happens in the intertidal zone (beaches) according to LNT practices and Park Service policy. Glacier Bay has a high number of amazing camps with breathtaking vistas, or you may get crammed on a rocky beach if the wind picks up and we have to compromise on a spot. Most sites offer plenty of room to wander on beaches, have a flat well drained site for your tent, and plenty of things and vistas to keep you interested.

Expeditions will move camp most days, while shorter trips will take advantage of base camps.

What about Restrooms?

Waste is disposed of in the intertidal zone (beaches) according to park service and Leave No Trace Guidelines. All toilet paper is packed out with the group. Large rock outcrops and boulders provide privacy, and bathroom areas are hundreds of yards away from tent sites and even further away from cooking areas and water sources.

What is a typical day like on a trip?

On an expedition, each night will end with a discussion of the next day plans. The route for the day will dictate your wake up time. The guides will greet you for drinks and breakfast, and you can begin to pack up your personal belongings. After breakfast we will break camp, pack the kayaks, and depart for the days paddle. We may stop to check out certain places on shore, or float around and view wildlife or glaciers in one spot for a while. We will stop for lunch, and continue on to our next camp. Sometimes we may scout for camps, and keep paddling due to bear activity or site occupants. Certain days we may base camp and take advantage of lighter boats on day paddles to cover larger distances, or to have a more relaxing down day.

The Escape will likely only move camp 1 time, and take advantage of paddling lighter boats and returning to a camp set up already.

How close do we get to glaciers?

Sometimes we may paddle to within a quarter mile of glaciers, exercising much caution at all times. More often than not we will stay 1/3 to 1/2 mile away from tidewater glaciers, but we may elect to paddle closer to non-tidewater glaciers. Glaciers such as the Lamplugh and Reid, offer good opportunity for getting closer to ice in kayaks and on foot. Good hikes exist near these glaciers, and the risk of calving ice producing waves is much less. Glaciers such as Margerie and John Hopkins actively calve into saltwater and produce large surge and will be given a wide buffer. Getting trapped in floating ice is also a risk to be avoided by not approaching too close.

How do we access the east/west arms of Glacier Bay?

All of our guided trips less than 8 days will utilize the Glacier Bay Lodge Catamaran to access or return from the arms of the Bay. This is a large high speed site-seeing vessel that also provides drop off for kayakers in Glacier Bay. It is not a private charter, and kayakers will be vastly outnumbered by sightseers. It provides lunch and hot drinks if you are on the boat when being served. Wildlife and glacier viewing from the boat is the #1 activity in Glacier Bay for park visitors, and rounds out a kayak trip very nicely.

How much paddling will we do each day?

The desires of the group largely control how much paddling is done. 7 & 8 day Expeditions generally cover 8-10 miles of paddling in 4-5 hours on the water each day, not including time for breaks and lunch. Longer days of up to 12-14 miles may be encountered, but generally we try to plan shorter days and take advantage of tides when covering long distances.

Shorter trips, like our GB Escape, offer a more relaxed paddling pace with less daily mileage to be covered. On these trips you can expect to paddle up to 5 hours a day, but daily mileage could be as low as 5-6 miles a day. On shorter trips, we take advantage of base camping so we can paddle lighter boats on day paddles.

Are there hiking opportunities on trips in Glacier Bay?

The only established trails in the park are in Bartlett Cove near the lodge and park headquarters. Glacier Bay provides some limited great hiking on glacial outwash plains, beaches, and rock formations up Bay. Generally, foot travel does not come easily in the Bay, and most hikes will be short hikes to take advantage of a view or stretch the legs. Beach walks provide a great way to pass the time in camp. Bushwhacking is sometimes an option for the hardier folks with patience and tenacity.

Most hikes can be done in the rubber boots we provide, but having light weight easily packable day hiking shoes can be a good idea.

What type of food will we eat on kayak trips? Can you handle special dietary needs?

All food for Glacier Bay trips must be packed in bear cans, so this somewhat limits the menu for a trip. Although we use NO Freeze Dried or pre-prepared meals, you can expect to eat meals with bases such as rice, pasta, and other grains on a nightly basis. Fresh fruits and vegetables can be had most days, and canned and smoked meats and fish add a great source of protein. Meals will be very similar to what you would cook at home, and we definitely aim to please with interested and varied menus and good presentation.

How do you get fresh water on trips?

All water comes from streams or glacial melt and will be treated with iodine or boiled for purification. There is no shortage of pristine drinkable water in the Bay, but all water is treated.

Do I need previous kayaking experience for this trip?

No previous kayaking experience is required, but different trips may require varying levels of fitness. We can suggest a trip to best fit your experience and fitness level, and make every accommodation for you to have a successful and rewarding trip. If you are new to kayaking and wilderness camping, the Glacier Bay Escape may be a good introductory trip with a more relaxed pace.

How difficult will this trip be? What physical fitness level do I need for this trip?

Sea kayaking is not reliant on great upper body strength, but expeditions will require a person to be physically active for up to 5-8 hours each day. In addition to kayaking, you can expect to assist with carrying kayaks over uneven terrain, shuttling gear and bear cans up beaches, and setting up and taking down camp. Shorter trips such as the Escape, offer a more relaxed kayaking pace and less work in the way of making and breaking camp every day. We can recommend a fitness plan to help you prepare for the trip.

FAQ's On Gear

Will we need hiking boots on our kayak trip?

Most hikes done on kayak trips can be done comfortably in the rubber boots we will provide. You may choose to bring a lightweight pair of day hiking shoes if space allows. Having this additional pair of shoes is a nice change for hanging out in camp as well. The main concern should be space, and bringing appropriate footwear that will back easily. Salt water and nice leather boots/shoes do not mix well.

How much space will we have?

On shorter trips such as the Escape and Pt. Adolphus trips, space is not as critical of an issue. Generally, your personal gear should all fit into 2-20liter dry bags that are provided. This does not include your sleeping bag and pad which will be packed separate. Any **toiletry items** will need to be packed in bear cans, and should all fit into **1-Quart sized zip lock bag**. Any **snacks or bars** brought by participants should fit into a **1-Quart sized zip lock bag**. Please restrict toiletry and personal food quantities to fit into one 1-Qt. Ziplock Bag.

What kind of rain gear will we need?

Quality raingear, both tops and bottoms, is essential on a trip. You should plan on bringing high quality, lightweight, breathable raingear. Buy the best you can afford, and will use again some day. We will provide heavy duty rubberized rain gear to supplement your lighter weight gear if needed. If you have a paddling jacket, bring it along as well as your rain gear tops and bottoms.

FAQ's for Pt. Adolphus Trips

What wildlife will we see at Pt. Adolphus?

You will likely see high concentrations of Humpback Whales and Stellar Sea Lions. You may see harbor seals, porpoise, sea otters, freshwater otters, and a variety of bird life. Seeing Orca is a possibility at Pt. Adolphus as well. It would be rare to see land mammals such as moose or bear, but Sitka Black Tail Deer inhabit the area in high numbers.

Why are there so many whales at Pt. Adolphus? What makes whale viewing so good there?

A unique combination of strong tidal current, underwater topography, and close proximity to the Gulf of Alaska and its' great food supply, make Pt. Adolphus arguably the best place in the world to view Humpback Whales. Whales congregate here each summer in high numbers to feed, prior to heading south in the winter. Whales often swim and feed within 100 yards of shore, and viewing is just as good from shore as it is on the water.

How close will we get to paddle to whales on these trips?

We try to stay 100 yards from whales at all times, but whales may approach us closer. Marine laws prohibit pursuing whales and coming within 100 yards. Marine mammals can pose serious risk to kayakers paddling too close.

Where is Pt. Adolphus?

Pt. Adolphus is on Chichagof Island, on Icy Straight. It is approximately a 5 mile crossing from Gustavus, done on a motor boat. Pt. Adolphus/Chichagof Island is within the Tongass National Forest.

What is the weather like? When is the best time to go?

Weather in Icy Straight is similar to the rest of Southeast Alaska, often experiencing cooler temperatures and frequent rain fall. May and June offer the least average rain fall of any months, with July and August precipitation steadily increasing up to the rather wet September and October. Day time temps are in the 50's more often than not.

What is the camping like at Pt. Adolphus? Are there any facilities?

Camping at Pt. Adolphus takes place at established campsites on Forest Service land. It is primitive camping, with little improvements. Camps have been cleared and offer flat tent sites in the forest. Cooking and eating occurs in the intertidal zone (beaches). Certain sites have latrine style toilets. We utilize base camps on most trips, and take advantage of day trips from one camp.

What previous experience do I need for this trip?

No previous experience is required, and Pt. Adolphus offers a great introduction to sea kayaking and wilderness style camping. Trips offer a relaxed pace and focus on wildlife viewing rather than kayaking great distances. Icy Straight offers plenty of shoreline to paddle for more energetic groups.

What is the difficulty/ fitness level of this trip?

Kayaking does not require great upper body strength, and this trip offers a great introductory to sea kayaking. You can expect moderate paddling for short durations, and to assist with carrying unloaded kayaks and camping gear up the beach.

How much will we paddle each day?

Motor vessels take us to our camps on Chichagof Island. Paddling great distances is not required because often wildlife is encountered close to camp and directly off shore. You can expect to paddle 3-5 hours each day, but trips focus on a quality experience over paddling great distances. Having 2 guides on larger groups enables more freedom for those who do like to go the extra distance.

How do we get to Pt. Adolphus?

A charter vessel takes us to Pt. Adolphus. This is approximately a 20 minute ride across Icy Straight from Gustavus.

What is the best way to photograph whales on kayak trips to Pt. Adolphus?

Tandem kayaks offer a reasonable platform for photography, but avid photographers with specialized equipment will get their best shots from shore with tripods and zoom lenses. Whales often come close to shore to enable steadier shots with cameras more readily usable. Actively kayaking and taking photos may prove difficult, and we suggest water proof cameras or housings for taking pictures from kayaks. Point and shoot cameras work the best from kayaks.

What are the waters/ paddling conditions like at Pt. Adolphus/Icy Straight?

Icy Straight is a large body of water, but usually offers reasonably protected paddling. A large kelp bed just off shore often provides relief from wind driven waves.

FAQ's for Gustavus

How can we get to Gustavus/ Glacier Bay?

Air is the primary way to get to Gustavus, and a number of carriers offer service direct from Juneau and other Southeast Alaska communities. Alaska Air provides jet service only in the summer months. Air Excursions is our recommended carrier, however LAB, Wings, Fjord Flying, and other companies provide seat and charter fares.

The Glacier bay Lodge does offer sporadic ferry service in the summer between Auk Bay in Juneau and Bartlett Cove at Glacier Bay National Park. Currently this ferry only operates on Friday and Sunday evenings, and service may be canceled due to lack of riders.

How large is Gustavus?

Gustavus is a small community of under 500 people in the summer, with considerably less in other seasons. Everything in Gustavus lies off of approximately 14 miles of paved roads, and a number of unpaved roads. Gustavus is spread out, however it is flat and bikes provide a great means for transportation.

What services are available in Gustavus? What else is there to do there?

Gustavus has an airport, a grocery store, hardware store, a new natural food store, gas station, a dozen or so B&B's and lodges, Glacier Bay National Park, a golf course, and a number of sea kayaking outfitters and sport fishing businesses.

Gustavus offers world class wildlife viewing, sea kayaking, and sport fishing. Biking and hiking are great ways to independently explore Gustavus, and most lodges and accommodations provide or rent bikes to their guest.

If you are coming to Gustavus for a Glacier Bay trip, we highly recommend checking out Pt. Adolphus on a day long kayaking trip, or whale watching trip on the Taz after your kayak trip. If you are coming to Gustavus for a Pt. Adolphus trip, we highly recommend the Day long cruise up Glacier Bay provided by the Glacier Bay Lodge.

Where should we stay in Gustavus?

Gustavus offers a variety of accommodations for every budget. Camping at the park is the cheapest (free) option, and a number of options exist in the \$125 a night range. Our recommendation are as follows, in the corresponding order or recommendation:

Annie Mae Lodge: 697-2346

Blue Heron B&B: 697-2337

Glacier Bay Lodge: 697-4000

How will we get around in Gustavus?

AMG will provide all transportation associated with your kayaking trip. Most accommodations provide pick up and drop off at the airport, and we are happy to assist if you stay at a place that does not. We will pick you up for a pre-trip meeting and return you at the end, as well as provide pick up and drop off before and after your trip.

Bikes are the best way to independently explore Gustavus, and most lodges and Inns provide bikes for their guest. There is a local taxi and the Glacier Bay Lodge to provide vehicle transportation, but at a rather high cost. Buds Rent a Car is a reasonable way to move around groups of people. Bud will drop a car at the airport, or at your accommodations, and currently charges about \$65 a day for a car.

Can I take a ferry to Gustavus?

The only ferry service is provided by Glacier Bay Lodge on Friday and Sunday evenings, and is not very reliable. It may be canceled at any time due to lack of passengers.

What do I do when I arrive?

Our office staff should pass on your arrival information and where you will be staying. Once you are settled in your accommodations, we will give you a call and let you know the specifics about pre-trip meetings and departure. If your lodging does not provide transportation, give us a call and we can help out. Most accommodations provide shuttles from the airport. Office staff should pass on phone numbers so guest have a go to number locally in Gustavus.

You will need to arrive in Gustavus the night prior to your departure.

Where & when will my pre-trip meeting be?

If you are going on a Glacier Bay trip, you will have a pre-trip meeting the night PRIOR to your departure date. This meeting usually happens at 6:30pm, but we will let you know the exact time when we check in with you upon arrival.

If you are joining us on a Pt. Adolphus trip, your pre-trip meeting will most likely be the morning of your departure at 8am. We will let you know this specific time upon your arrival.

Regardless of what trip you are on, our staff will contact you (or vice versa) and confirm pre-trip meeting times. Depending on where a majority of guests are staying, we may choose between lodges to have our pre-trip meeting at. We may have the pre-trip meeting at our facility in Gustavus. Regardless of the time and place of the pre-trip meeting, our staff will transport you to and from the meeting.