

DESTINATION FISH





AMERICA'S

LAST FRONTIER

FOR TRAVELING ANGLERS
THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE

Alaska

PAT FORD

LAST FRONTIER



The first question you need to ask yourself is what you want to experience. I've never been a fan of roughing it, so I never even considered a float trip down a river. However, if this is your style you'll be happy to know there are numerous outfitters that will provide an Alaskan wilderness experience like no other. I, on the other hand, enjoy returning to a hot shower and warm meal every night, so I am a big fan of well-appointed fishing lodges.

One of my favorites is Rainbow King Lodge in Iliamna, which is an hour flight from the state's largest city, Anchorage.

▶ **ALTHOUGH IT REQUIRES** substantial travel time to reach from the lower 48, Alaska has some of the most varied sport fishing opportunities of anywhere in the world. In fact, there are over three thousand rivers, three million lakes and thirty-three thousand miles of shoreline in the remote wilderness of Alaska, so the most difficult decision when planning a trip can be determining what type of angling experience you are looking for.



My first trip to Alaska was in 1993, and I've probably spent over 30 weeks there since then...and I can't wait to go back. I've spent time at many different lodges across the region and they all offer their own unique charm and experiences. With that being said, I suppose it is possible to find a less than spectacular lodge, but

hopefully the following guidelines will help streamline the process of planning your first trip to Alaska. Unless you are interested in ice fishing, the lodges have all shut down for the winter season, but that is okay because this isn't the kind of trip you'll want to book last minute and one that requires careful planning and consideration.

As one of the premier fishing lodges in all of Alaska, Rainbow King provides fly out trips daily, weather permitting, which lets you target a variety of sport fish in both fresh and saltwater. Whether you want to

catch rainbow trout, halibut, grayling or salmon, you can do it all and visit an entirely different area each day. Rainbow King is unique in that it has private leases on several

▼ Spawning salmon return to the same rivers and streams in which they were born to complete the fascinating cycle.



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◀ Fly out operations provide anglers with the unique ability to experience a different fishery every day.

streams that gives visitors the privacy and action many other lodges cannot provide. Whatever you want to do is only a short plane ride away. Unfortunately, fly out lodges are expensive, but considering the circumstances it's money well spent. You definitely don't want a lodge that cuts corners on aircraft maintenance.

Another lodge I highly recommend has a completely different feel. Hoodoo Lodge is the only lodge on the Hoodoo River, about 70 miles northeast of Cold Bay in the remote Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge, which is about 800 miles by plane

▼ Remote rivers set the stage for extraordinary salmon fishing.

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Unlike many salmon fisheries, these are not lazy spawning fish, rather bright ocean salmon that provide challenging pursuits.

from Anchorage. The Hoodoo River is perfect for wading and has one of the best runs of king salmon anywhere. Visitors to this extreme outpost come purely for the salmon fishery. Unlike many salmon fisheries, these are not lazy spawning fish,

rather bright ocean salmon that provide challenging pursuits.

After you've decided on the type of lodge and experience you are looking for, the next question is what time of the year to go, which also depends on the type of fish you'd like to catch. The season typically runs from June through September when five salmon species occupy area waters. King salmon are the first to arrive in early June and they remain active until late July. Sockeye salmon show up next, around the 1st of July, and are great fun and good eating when they are fresh from the ocean. Sockeye stay in the rivers and spawn through September, turning candy-apple red with green heads. Chum salmon also show up in July and are great sport on fly, but not that great on a plate. Pink salmon are also around this time of the year, but they are the smallest of all salmon and usually considered bycatch. In late August, silver salmon show up and hang around through September. In my opinion, these are the most fun of all. Remember the timing varies a little from year to year, so booking in the middle of the season is generally your best bet.

While the salmon opportunities are unrivaled, the real prize in Alaska is the abundance of wild rainbow trout. There's some dry-fly fishing in June before the salmon start laying eggs, but after that the fly of choice for rainbows is actually a plastic



Notes of Interest About Alaska

Capital: Juneau
Population: 735,132
Area: 586,000 sq. mi.

- ▶ Alaska officially became the 49th state in 1959.
- ▶ Of the 20 highest peaks in the United States, 17 are in Alaska.
- ▶ Alaska is one-fifth the size of the lower 48 combined.

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bead that resembles a small salmon egg. My favorite time is September when the biggest rainbows come into the streams from the lakes to fatten up on eggs and salmon scraps before winter approaches. If you want a 30-inch rainbow, September is the time!

Tackle is pretty simple and you'll want to bring a 5-weight and a 8-weight, with a 6-weight packed as a spare. If you are strictly chasing big king salmon you'll want a 10-weight and no matter what salmon species you're targeting, sinking lines like the Teeny 200 or 300 are

► Salmon egg imitations fool trophy rainbow trout.



the way to go. Most lodges provide all the flies you'll need, but if you prefer to tie your own a call to the lodge manager will point you in the right direction for proven fly recipes. My favorite pattern for salmon is a purple and black creation that's very similar to what we use for tarpon in Everglades National Park's tannin-tinted waters. On my last trip to Hoodoo Lodge I caught five species of salmon on

▼ Alaska's reputation for spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife won't let you down.

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The most important article of clothing is your rain jacket...get the best you can afford and you won't regret it.

this pattern on the same day. Nevertheless, I am still in awe of some of the more exotic salmon patterns tied by the local guides.

The last aspect to consider, and quite possibly the most important to ensure an enjoyable trip, is your clothing. Weather can change from sunny and 70 degrees to rainy and 35 degrees in a matter of minutes. You'll most certainly need long underwear, wader liners and several layers for your upper body. The most important article of clothing is your rain jacket...get the best you can afford and you won't regret it. Being cold and wet all day is no fun and 40 degree temperatures can be painful

if you aren't dressed right. Before purchasing a bunch of gear be sure to contact your lodge, because most have waders and boots for rent. You'll also want a backpack to carry extra clothes, equipment and most definitely don't forget your camera. Alaska is one of the most amazing places left on earth, and each trip will create lasting memories you will cherish for years to come. **FSF**

▼ Avid fly anglers will come to realize that Alaska really is heaven on earth.



Bear Safety

When fishing in bear country anglers must be fully aware of their surroundings. If you are fishing along a bank you should be sure the area provides the ability to spot approaching bears. If you spot a bear be sure to give it a wide berth and move along. Bears don't like to be startled, so by clapping or speaking loudly you will alert nearby bears of your presence.

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