



Shoulder Season in Alaska

The first cruise ships sail to Alaska in May and the last ones depart in September. And though the weather can be unpredictable during the months that mark the bookends of the Alaska cruise season, shoulder season is a good time to visit for a variety of reasons, according to Tania Hancock, tourism sales manager with the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"I particularly enjoy the shoulder seasons," Hancock says. "May and September are my favorite months, and of the two, September in particular, because I love fall foliage. It's a short season, but it's an absolutely beautiful season. The tundra is red and orange and gold in Denali, and that backdrop to the wildlife is pretty spectacular. We also see a lot more wildlife in our shoulder seasons than in the middle of high season. The wildlife tends to come out more on cloudy days, when it's a little bit cooler, maybe a little bit misty. We see a lot more of the bears, and a lot more of our moose and caribou. And certainly the same thing rings true in Spring. Of course, the foliage is very different. It's that beautiful bright spring green, and once again, it's an amazing backdrop to all of the wildlife that you see in Anchorage and South Central Alaska and in the interior as well."

The shorter daylight hours during May and September (as opposed to the nearly 16 to 18 hours of daylight in mid-summer) also means that you're more likely to see animals. Midsummer, moose bed down underneath trees, out of sight of visitors. But in cooler weather, "we see them at 5 o'clock in the evening," Hancock says, "as opposed to having to wait until 10 o'clock at night in the middle of June."

And don't think you have to run off to Denali to see moose and other wildlife. "The biggest misconception about Anchorage," Hancock says, "is that it's just like any other city in the lower 48, like a mini-Seattle, for example. What a lot of visitors don't realize until they get to Alaska, is that Anchorage actually has a lot of wilderness and wildlife right in the city, and it is uniquely Alaskan. Without realizing how uniquely Alaskan the city, a lot of visitors will just breeze right through. They think they need to continue on to get to the real Alaska, but Anchorage is the real Alaska."

Anchorage boasts a few thousand moose. And they can be just as spectacular as bear, Hancock says, plus moose are vegetarians, meaning that, unlike bear, they don't

consider cruise passengers part of the food chain. "When it comes to watchable wildlife," Hancock says, "moose are definitely at the top of my list."

Anchorage is situated more than 200 miles south of Denali National Park. On the clear days during shoulder season, you can see Mt. McKinley from Alaska's largest city. "Riding a bicycle or just walking along our Coastal Trail, which starts on 2nd Avenue in downtown Anchorage, is a wonderful way to spend a few hours in my city," Hancock says. "Once again, you've got view of gorgeous mountain ranges like Mt. McKinley, you've got a lot of wildlife opportunities and you're right on the edge of the water."

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