

Denali with Kids



Family Fun Travel Guide
Denali National Park and Preserve

Credits

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Many thanks to the families who provided photographs, quotes, and inspiration for sharing Denali with others. May children everywhere get to experience special outdoor places.

Front Cover: Family Photo

This guide was produced by the National Park Service and Alaska Geographic working in partnership through the Murie Science and Learning Center.



NPS Photo

Produced in 2015

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How To Use This Book

Whether you've already reached the park or you're dreaming about a trip, we've compiled some important tips to consider as you prepare to explore Denali with your kids. The first two sections of the book focus on trip planning and should be read before you arrive.

- **Planning Your Trip** answers many of the most frequently asked questions and offers important parental details to consider before you arrive.
- **Experience Denali** presents a good overview of the park and what to expect if you plan to camp, hike, bike or ride the bus while you are here.

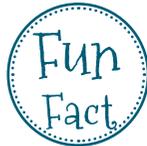
The second part of the book leads you to the **Family Fun** you can have in Denali. This is where you'll learn where to camp, the best trails for hiking or biking, and what to see and do in each area of the park. The section is divided into five areas, moving further into the park as you go: the Entrance Area, Savage River, Beyond Mile 15, Eielson, and Wonder Lake.

We want you to travel smart and have fun. To enhance your experience, take this book along with you so you won't forget to talk about the **special call-out features**. ●●●●



Science facts so you can learn all about the park.

Fun facts that kids will love.



Specially written with kids in mind.

Hint
Important tips for adults traveling with kids.



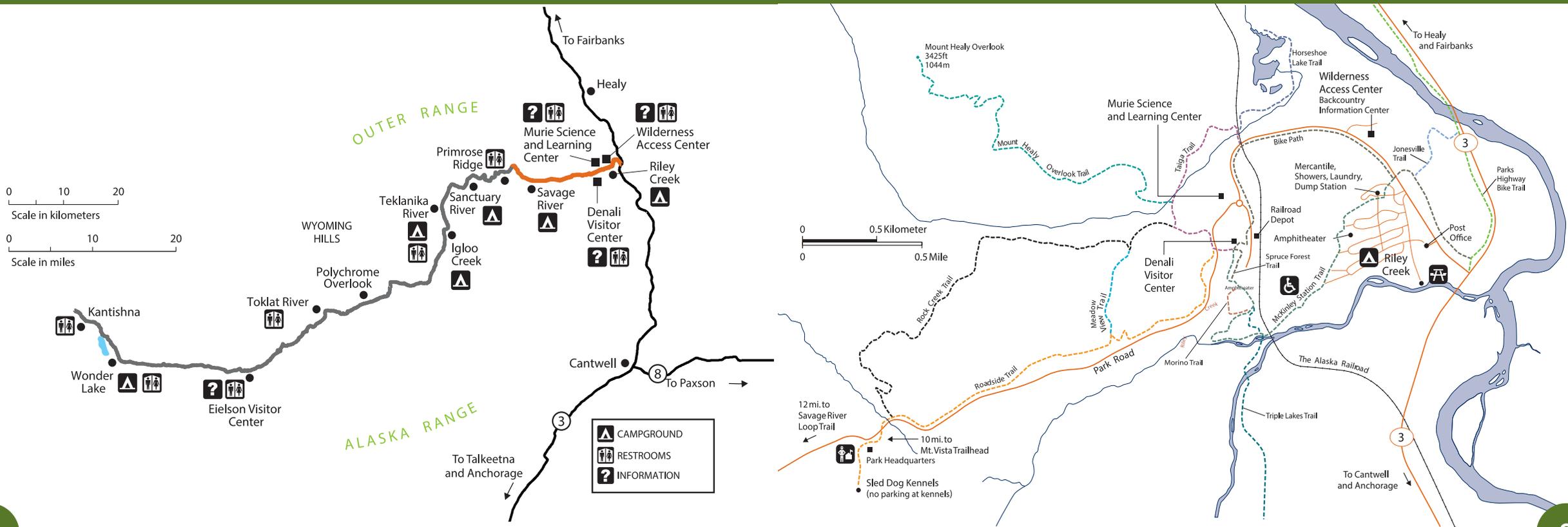
There are also **Parent Information** sections featured throughout the guide, offering tips on everything from bathroom breaks to food and picnic areas. Explore the resources listed in the **Extending Your Visit** and **Staying Connected** sections at the back of the book where you'll find ideas to keep your Denali adventure alive after you arrive home.



NPS Photo / Nathan Kostegian



Entrance Area, Trails, and Park Road





Family Photo

Denali National Park and Preserve is a vast wilderness in the Alaskan Interior. Here, visitors are encouraged to forge their own paths through wilderness and to make their own discoveries. The only thing more exciting than seeing a grizzly bear or moose in the wild is being there when your child experiences that special moment. Whether your child is five or twelve, the memories made here will linger forever.

Spending time in the wilderness is an experience that can shape the life of a child and a family. Today's children spend more time in front of televisions and computer screens than in their backyards.

In a groundbreaking book called ***Last Child in the Woods***, author Richard Louv describes how our children are less connected to the natural world than at any other time in history. The implications of this, particularly for their physical and mental health, are immense. Exposure to nature is essential to healthy childhood development.

The wilderness of Denali can provide an extraordinary experience that lasts a lifetime. Remember how free it feels to run through a field or a patch of woods? Imagine having six million acres to explore. Denali National Park and Preserve offers children and families

the chance to unplug and explore a vast wilderness offering endless opportunities.

Denali with Kids is intended for anyone responsible for planning activities in and around Denali for children ages 0-12. It is primarily intended for independent travelers who set their own itineraries, and focuses on the summer and shoulder seasons. The book offers suggestions for hikes, special spots to explore, and kid-friendly ways to experience Denali. You'll find suggestions for planning your trip, what kind of gear to bring, important safety information, and ideas for family-friendly hiking, biking, transportation, and camping.

Like the wilderness here, the choices are vast. Once you arrive, make the Denali Visitor Center your first stop before starting any activity. Information and schedules change, so take the time to check in with us before you and your little ones head out to explore nature at its finest.

Planning Your Trip

All trips involve careful planning. When traveling with kids, that careful planning can make the difference between a trip of a lifetime and a disaster.

Whether you've already reached the park entrance area or you're dreaming about a trip, we've compiled some important tips to consider as you prepare to explore Denali with your kids. If you don't find your answer here, explore the resources listed on page 82 or talk to a park ranger at one of our visitor centers..

Before you go

Your stay

There are many decisions to make before your trip. One of the most important is deciding how long you will have at the park to explore. Some visitors come for only half a day, some for several days, and still others for a week or more. It's a long way to Denali even if you are already in Alaska, so make sure you allow enough time to relax and enjoy the experience. Check out the suggestions below to help plan your trip.

If you have 1 day

Stick to the entrance area and visit the Denali Visitor Center and the sled dog kennels. Hike one of the entrance area trails and camp at Riley Creek Campground.

If you have 2-3 days

Explore the entrance area! Visit the sled dog kennels, and then take the free shuttle to Savage River and hike around. Spend one full day on the bus past mile 15, and exploring stops along the way.

If you have more than 3 days

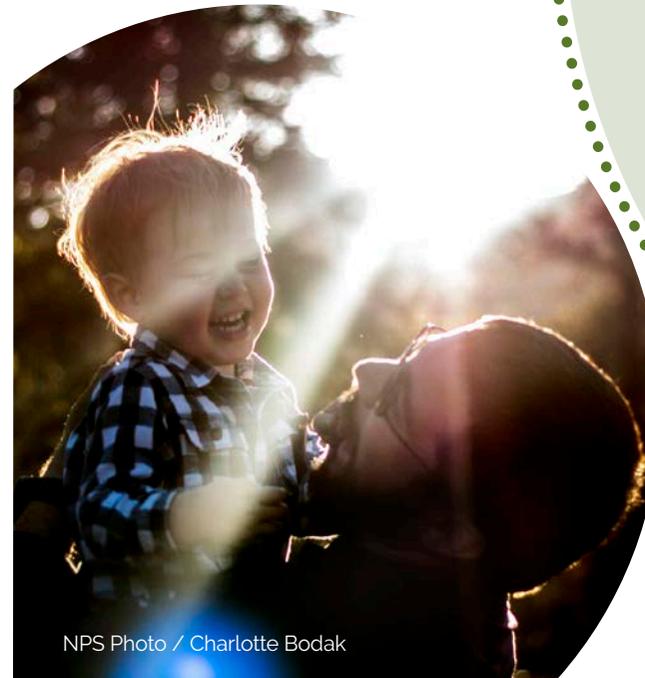
Explore the entrance area, then camp at Savage River or Teklanika and take the shuttle bus to Eielson or Wonder Lake.



More than 400,000 visitors make their way to Denali each year.



Denali is home to Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America at 20,320 feet. Native Athabascan people call the mountain Denali, which means the "High One."



NPS Photo / Charlotte Bodak

Parent Information

Medical

The closest physicians and hospitals are in Fairbanks, 120 miles away. For emergency care one mile north of the park in summer, contact Canyon Clinic at 907-683-4433.

Emergency: Dial 911

Report emergencies to park rangers, campground hosts, or bus drivers.

Banks

The closest bank is in Healy, 13 miles north of the park entrance. ATMs are located one mile north of the entrance at area businesses.

Fuel

In summer there is a gas station one mile north of the park. Year-round gas stations are also located 13 miles north in Healy and 30 miles south in Cantwell.

Grocery, Laundry, Showers

These essentials can be found at the Riley Creek Mercantile, adjacent to Riley Creek Campground.

Lost & Found

Contact a ranger or call 907-683-9275.

Frequently Asked Questions

How far is it to the park?

- From Anchorage: 237 miles, 5 hours by car, 7.5 hours by train
- From Fairbanks: 120 miles, 2 hours by car, 4 hours by train
- From Talkeetna: 137 miles, 2 hours by car, 4.5 hours by train
- From Seward: 363 miles, 7 hours by car, 11.5 hours by train

When to come?

Most people visit Denali during the summer season or the shoulder seasons. The summer season lasts from roughly mid-May through mid-September. The shoulder seasons runs for a few weeks before and after the summer season. Summer is the time when most visitors come to Denali and when the widest variety of services and activities are possible.

How long should we stay?

That depends on your plans and sense of adventure. You can find advice for making the most of your visit in a day or several days in the park newspaper, the *Alpenglow*. Pick up a copy of the *Alpenglow* or read it online at the parks website, www.nps.gov/dena

Should we visit in the shoulder seasons?

The benefit is you have more of the park to yourself and you might be able to drive your own vehicle partway into the park—a plus if traveling with young kids. In spring you can bike on the park road without much if any traffic going by. In the fall, you can apply for a Road Lottery permit (see page 69) to drive your own vehicle into the park right after the summer season ends in September.

Where can we sleep?

There are no hotels inside the park, only campgrounds. Accommodations can be found in Healy, Cantwell, and along the George Parks Highway. For hotel information, contact the Denali Chamber of Commerce at 907-683-4636.

What about bears?

Denali has lots of bears—both black bears and grizzlies. If you are lucky, you will see one. Our bears are wild, but sometimes they wander into campgrounds, onto trails, and along the roads. Most of the time, bears will run the other way when they see you. The best way to keep your family safe and to enjoy your visit is to learn how to act around bears. Talk to a ranger about bear safety before you and your family head into the park. See page 31 for more information on bear safety.

Should we make reservations in advance?

Yes. For camping and bus reservations, visit www.reservedenali.com or call 1-800-622-7275.

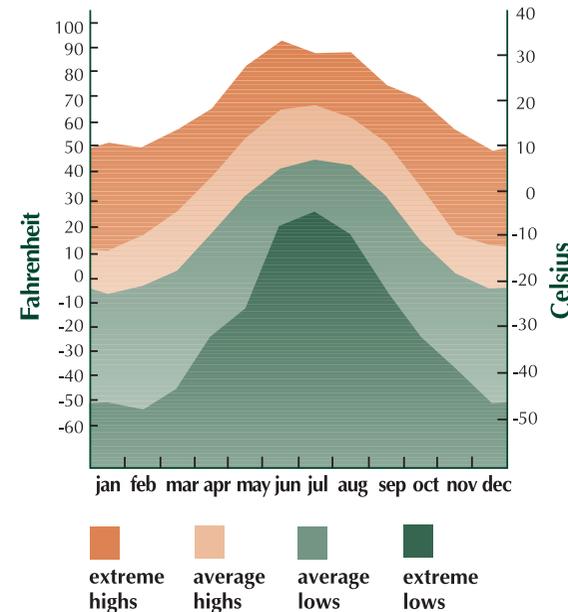
How much does it cost?

Check the park website for current pricing, but here is a sampling of fees.

- Entrance: \$10 per person (good for 7 days), ages 15 and under are free.
- Shuttle Buses: \$27-55 (depending on destination), ages 15 and under are free.
- Camping: \$15-30 per night, depending on site and tent/RV.

What's the weather like?

Like the rest of Alaska, weather in Denali is extremely variable. Rangers tell visitors to expect sun, wind, rain, clouds—and even snow—all on the same day! Average summer temperatures range from 33 to 75°F.



Parent Information

Bathrooms

Restroom facilities are located throughout the entrance area at the Denali Visitor Center, the Wilderness Access Center, the Murie Science and Learning Center, Riley Creek Campground, and at the Riley Creek Mercantile. Buses along the Park Road stop about every 90 minutes for a bathroom break.

Food

There is only one restaurant in the park, the Morino Grill, located next to the Denali Visitor Center. The Riley Creek Mercantile, in Riley Creek Campground, sells sandwiches and some pre-packaged food. The Wilderness Access Center sells snacks and coffee. There are some restaurants and convenience stores located just outside the park, but your best bet is to bring as much as you can with you.

Picnic Areas

- Riley Creek Campground (entrance area),
- Morino Grill (near the visitor center),
- Mountain Vista Rest Area (Mile 13),
- Savage River Turnout (Mile 15).

Child Care

Denali Preschool and Learning Center has drop-off service and is fully licensed and accredited. Please check at the Denali Visitor Center for more information.

Pets

Pets are not allowed on most park trails, on the bus, or in the backcountry. They may be walked on the road and the Roadside Trail, but must be on a leash at all times. Pets must never be left unattended. Pet boarding facilities are available near the park entrance area most summers. Please check at the Denali Visitor Center for information.

Safety

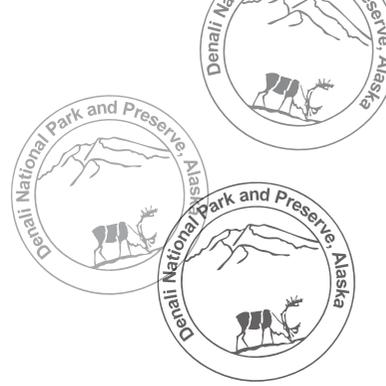
Denali is a wilderness area, so brush up on safety information before you venture out. Talk to a ranger at the visitor center and read the *Alpenglow* visitor guide. Moose and bears can be dangerous, so know what to do if you encounter one. Crossing rivers and traveling without the appropriate gear can also be treacherous.

Phones

Cell phones work in the park entrance area only to Mile 4. There are no pay phones in the park.

Post Office

For the Denali National Park postmark, take your cards to the post office near the Riley Creek Campground.



If you plan to camp

- Bring a three-season, rainproof tent.
- Bring a warm sleeping bag and warm clothing.
- Bring all your own food; there are not many stores in the area.
- Make a reservation in advance. Each campsite is limited to no more than 8 people per site, except Wonder Lake, which is limited to 4 per site. Some campgrounds are tent-only, and some accommodate RVs. There are no electrical or water hookups for RVs in the park.

What to wear

Bring good rain gear—tops and bottoms, a winter hat (even in the summer it can drop to below freezing at night!), mittens or gloves, a hat (for sun or rain), several layers of clothing (wool or fleece is better than cotton), extra socks, good hiking shoes or boots, and a little extra of everything!



Hint

Figuring out what to pack for your trip is important. Remember that summer in Alaska brings everything from sun to rain to snow—yes, it can snow in Denali in the summer. Denali National Park and Preserve is a wilderness park two to four hours from a large city, so if you need it, bring it with you.

“A trip out to Eielson Visitor Center is a supreme family adventure. Opportunities for learning, discovery, and enrichment abound. But there is also ample opportunity for just having fun!”



Family Photo

Experience Denali information

To get the most out of your visit to Denali, you will need to figure out what activities are best for your family. Luckily that information is available before you ever step foot into the wilderness, at one of the six visitor centers located throughout the park.

Denali Visitor Center

Located in the park entrance area, this is a must stop for all visitors. There is a lot to see and do here, and the center provides a great introduction to the park. You'll find general information, bus schedules, exhibits, interpretive programs, a park film, a bookstore, and ranger-guided walks. See page 41 for more information.

Murie Science and Learning Center

Located in the park entrance area, this is another must stop for all visitors. This science center is open year-round and has exhibits, hands-on activities for kids, and information on research taking place in the park. See page 44 for details.

Backcountry Information Center

Stop here if you are planning to camp overnight in the backcountry. You must obtain a free backcountry permit and attend a safety talk. This center is located in the entrance area, next to the Wilderness Access Center.

Wilderness Access Center

Located in the park entrance area, all shuttle buses depart from here. You can also obtain general information, bus tickets, and campground information here.

Toklat Rest Stop

Get off the bus here at Mile 53 to stretch your legs and enjoy views of the Toklat River, use the rest room, shop at the bookstore, and obtain information at the Toklat tent.

Eielson Visitor Center

Located at Mile 66 on the Park Road, this is another must stop if you are traveling this far into the park. Get off the bus and stretch your legs on one of the hiking trails, check out the exhibits, and talk to a ranger. See page 71 for more information.

Denali Park Road

The Denali Park Road stretches 92 miles from the George Parks Highway to the mining camp of Kantishna. The first 15 miles are accessible to private vehicles but beyond that, visitors must use the park bus system. Throughout this guide and during your visit here, you will frequently hear sections of the road referred to by the mile number, although in most instances there is no visual mile marker.

The Park Road is a narrow, gravel road where the bus travels at a moderate pace, giving visitors plenty of time to enjoy the view. The first 15 miles are paved; this is a good place to look for moose or fox. Take a look at the streambeds as you pass because animals like walking along those gravel bars and are easy to spot. After Savage River at Mile 15, you start to leave the trees behind and the country opens up to tundra and mountains. Children can get impatient when wildlife sightings are sporadic, or if that grizzly bear is too far away to see with the naked eye. If you have binoculars be sure to bring them for far-away sightings. Your chances of seeing a bear improve if you go as far as Toklat at Mile 53. Another 13 miles takes you to the Eielson Visitor Center. There's plenty of room to stretch your legs here and for children to run around outside.



NPS Photo



Experience Denali camping

One of the best ways for many families to enjoy the wilderness of Denali National Park and Preserve is to go camping. You may choose an established campground or you can backpack until you find a great place in the wilderness to spend the night. Backcountry camping takes more planning, especially with children, but it can be done, and it's a fantastic way to teach children self-reliance, leave-no-trace values, and the awe of discovery.

All six of the park's campgrounds are described in more detail later, but here is a quick overview of each.

Riley Creek, Mile 1

The largest campground in the park is perfect for families on a tight schedule and needing easy access to park amenities. There's good hiking and many activities in the area. There are sites for RVs and tents, flush toilets, running water, and a campground program.

Savage River, Mile 13

This smaller campground is close to the entrance area with sites for RVs and tents, flush toilets, and running water. You can drive your own vehicle to the campground and feel a little closer to the wilderness. There's also good hiking in the area.

Sanctuary River, Mile 23

This is one of the smallest campgrounds in the park with only seven tent sites and no treated water. No vehicles are allowed here, so you must take the park shuttle bus. A good choice for families with some camping experience.



Denali National Park and Preserve is only 300 miles south of the Arctic Circle.

Teklanika River, Mile 29

Great family campground for those wanting to get farther into the park and looking for a wilderness experience. You can drive your own vehicle to the campground, but you must stay a minimum of three nights.

Igloo Creek, Mile 34

Like Sanctuary, this is one of the smallest campgrounds with only seven tent sites and no water. No vehicles are allowed here, so you must take the park shuttle bus.

Wonder Lake, Mile 85

For those wanting to see it all! Tents only, no vehicles. A good choice if you have the time. Water and toilets are available at this campground.



Backcountry Camping

Don't be afraid to venture beyond the established campgrounds. This could be a memorable experience for your family. It does require some pre-planning and perhaps some backcountry experience.

When you arrive, go to the Backcountry Information Center (BIC) in the park entrance area to choose a destination area for your trek, and to obtain a backcountry permit. Permits cannot be reserved in advance. Depending on when you arrive and where you plan to go, you may be able to begin your backpacking adventure the same day. Most likely, though, you'll spend the night in the entrance area before you board the bus and head into the wilderness.

With children, you might not have to hike far to have amazing new experiences. However, you do have to camp at least one-half mile away from and out of sight of the Park Road. That can be harder than it looks in the vast open tundra. Experts at the BIC can suggest areas that might be most appropriate for your family to camp.

How to not feed bears

Bear-proof food storage is a requirement while camping in Denali. Permanent food storage containers are available at all campgrounds. For backcountry camping, rangers at the Backcountry Information Center will be happy to provide you with as many bear-resistant food containers as you need, so ask for extras if you anticipate needing to store food-soiled clothing or diapers. They are bulky, so you might need to use larger backpacks than you normally would.



Hint

Allow plenty of time at the BIC— the permitting process regularly takes up to an hour. You and your children will need to watch a safety video preparing you for your trip.

“Kids have tons of fun exploring nooks and crannies, scrambling over rocks, discovering new things, and dreaming up grand stories that take place in majestic mountain country.”



Family Photo

The Backcountry

An off-trail wilderness hike can be an unforgettable experience for the whole family. Where you go depends on the ages of your children and how far you can travel while carrying backpacks. Just get off the bus and start hiking—anywhere. You may hike a bit, stop at a river for a while to play, hike a little more, then have a snack and relax. The rewards are worth the effort, and you'll generally find yourselves alone in the wilderness, even if you never leave sight of the Park Road.

Leave No Trace

Leave no trace is an ethic that helps people enjoy the outdoors responsibly. Allow others to appreciate the wilderness by leaving no trace that you have been there. Try walking on hard surfaces and avoid leaving signs of your passage when possible so the next visitor can experience that same feeling of discovery that you did.

When you stop for a snack, be sure to pick up all your trash and bring it back with you to throw away. Don't leave any food scraps behind. Ground squirrels or birds might look like they want a handout, but don't give it to them. By not feeding animals you can help keep wildlife wild.

Take lots of photographs, but leave rocks, flowers, feathers and other items right where you found them for others to enjoy.



Experience Denali hiking

There are lots of trails near the entrance to the park, or a short distance away. The Family Fun sections of this book describes the best trails for each age group, detailing where to access the trail, hiking distance, level of difficulty, and interesting things to see and talk about with kids along the way. The hiking times provided are for an average adult walker, so adjust the time accordingly for your group—double it if hiking with kids under age 5.

Hiking Checklist

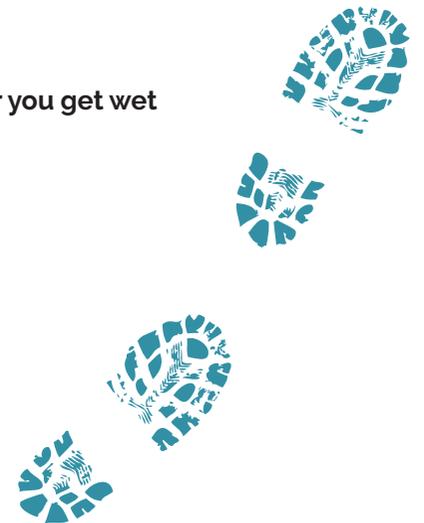
Here's a list of important items to include in your pack. Remember to dress in layers of non-absorbent clothing, such as fleece or wool. Avoid cotton because when it gets wet, it stays wet. For hikes longer than an hour, tell someone where you're going.

- Water and snacks—lots of snacks
- Sturdy hiking boots or shoes and extra socks
- Rain gear—the weather changes fast
- Hat and gloves—yes, even in summer
- Extra layers of clothing in case it gets colder or you get wet
- Map and/or trail guide
- Binoculars and camera
- Sunscreen and sunhat
- Insect repellent and/or head nets
- First aid kit, knife, whistle, and compass or GPS
- Bear spray
- Toilet paper and a plastic bag to pack it all out



Denali National Park and Preserve has more than six million acres of wilderness to explore. This is a wild place where you get to find your own way, because in much of the park there are no trails. If there is an established trail, please stay on it.

Family Photo





Bear Safety

Denali is home to both black bears and grizzly bears. Black bears usually are found in forested areas of the park, while grizzly bears live on the tundra. Give bears a wide berth (a minimum of 300 yards) and consider yourself lucky if you see one in the wild.

To keep your family safe in bear country, follow these safety rules:

- Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Watch for bear tracks and scat.
- Never get between a sow and its cubs.
- Never approach a bear.
- Never leave food out for a bear to find.
- Make lots of noise when hiking on trails or in the backcountry. Sing or talk with your companions as you walk. Be especially vigilant in dense brush, along rivers, and when walking into the wind.



If a bear approaches you, do not run. That can elicit a chase response and bears can run faster than people. Just quietly back away.

If the bear sees you, back away slowly, speaking in a low, calm voice while waving your arms over your head. If the bear stands up on its hind legs, it is only trying to identify you.

If a bear charges, stand your ground and it will usually come to an abrupt stop a few feet from you. Then slowly move away.



Family Photo

“The park road can be an exciting trip for kids with solid biking skills, yet the multi-use bike path in the entrance area is excellent for bikers of all ages and abilities. You can even ride to the local ice cream shop!”

Experience Denali biking

If you have room and the inclination, bring your bikes with you. Biking in Denali can be a fantastic family experience, though conditions in some areas may not be ideal for younger riders. The entrance area and first 15 miles of the Park Road are paved, but shoulders are narrow and these areas have more vehicle traffic. West of Savage River, biking the unpaved road can feel like a wilderness experience, though it is still important to watch for traffic—and wildlife!

The Family Fun sections of this book highlight the best biking areas for each age group, detailing where to access bike trails, distance, level of difficulty, and interesting things to see and talk about with kids along the way.

Biking Checklist

You want to go light, but you also want to be prepared for a change in the weather.

Don't forget to take...

- Water and snacks**
- Rain gear**
- Hats and gloves**
- Layers of clothes**
- First aid kit**
- Bike repair kit**

If you have a bike problem that you can't repair, flag down a shuttle bus heading back to the entrance area.



Experience Denali by bus

All visitors to Denali wishing to venture past Mile 15 into the heart of the park must ride a bus. Visitors are encouraged to get on and off shuttle buses to explore the park at their own pace. How far you ride the bus into the park depends on the time you have, the ages of the children you are traveling with, and your sense of adventure.

The good news is, you don't have to spend all day on the bus. There are many options for families traveling with children, and you can get off at any time and take a break.

Bus Checklist

- Car or booster seat
- Water, lunch, and lots of snacks—once you leave the park entrance area, there is no food service or water available.
- Sturdy walking shoes
- Warm clothing and raingear, even if the weather looks great
- Insect repellent, sunscreen
- Binoculars, camera, magnifying glass
- Reading books, coloring books and crayons
- Junior Ranger book, small toys to keep children entertained



By riding the bus, you reduce traffic problems and help protect the natural resources of the park. As a result, wildlife is comfortable wandering near the road, providing excellent sightings for visitors. There's nothing like seeing a grizzly bear with only a bus window between you and the bear.

NPS Photo / Alex Vanderstuyf



Hint
Make bus reservations in advance online or at the Wilderness Access Center. Kids under the age of four need a car seat to ride the bus.

Which bus?

Shuttle to Savage

Mile 15, 2 hours roundtrip

Not sure your family will tolerate a long bus ride? Try a shorter ride first. Take the **free shuttle** to Savage River, where there is a small parking area, picnic tables, restrooms, and trails (see hiking tips). The shuttle leaves from various locations in the entrance area regularly and runs back and forth all day long.

Narrated Tours

Denali has several tour buses with narration and guides. These trips are not specifically geared for children, so younger ones might be better off on a shuttle bus where they can get off and on—or return to the park entrance—as necessary. Tours range from 4 to 12 hours in length and vary in price accordingly.

Shuttle into the Park

Shuttles start from the Wilderness Access Center and head out to many destinations in the park. You can choose the perfect distance for your family and get off the bus at any time to take a break or wave down a bus heading in the opposite direction.

Wondering where to go? Here is the basic breakdown of each bus trip:

- Mile 53: Toklat River (6hrs)
- Mile 66: Eielson (8 hrs)
- Mile 85: Wonder Lake (11hrs)
- Mile 92: Kantishna (12hrs)

Eat on the bus

Drivers encourage all passengers to eat on the bus rather than outside at rest stops. This keeps food scraps from remaining behind and attracting wildlife, and gives you more time to enjoy the stops along the way. There is no food allowed inside the tent at the Toklat Rest Stop. The Eielson Visitor Center has a small indoor eating area, but it fills fast when the weather is bad.



Hint

Bring pictures of the animals you are trying to spot—bear, moose, Dall sheep, caribou, wolf, and fox.



Hint

Take crayons and paper with you on the bus, so kids can draw or play tic-tac-toe if they get bored. Don't forget to pick up a Junior Ranger booklet and Discovery Pack at the Denali Visitor Center. Kids can work through the book in between stops and sightings.

Parent Information

Designated bathroom breaks are at Teklanika Rest Stop (Mile 30, 90 minutes), Toklat River (Mile 53, 3 hours) Eielson Visitor Center (Mile 66, 4 hours) and Wonder Lake Campground (Mile 84, 5.5 hours). If your child needs to go in between these stops, or feels nauseated, just let the driver know.

Bus Etiquette

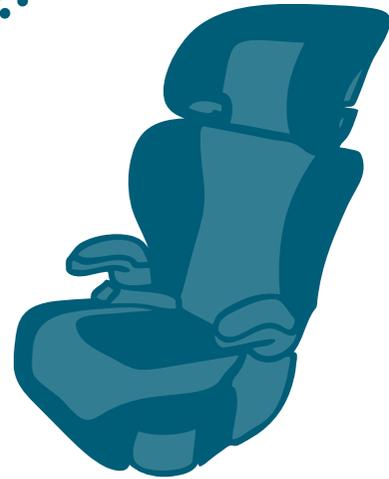
During a wildlife stop, try to be as quiet as possible—this is hard for adults and harder still for children. Disturbing a wild animal might make it reluctant to return to the road. Your voice could also acclimate a bear to the human voice, making a human voice much less likely to deter a curious bear in the backcountry.

Keep heads, arms, and cameras inside the bus. Share your window with a neighbor from the other side of the aisle. Always keep looking. The Denali landscape is vast, filled with gullies and small hills. Sometimes wildlife can emerge or disappear right before your eyes.



Car Seat

If your child is 4 years old or younger, a car seat is required when riding the bus and you must bring your own. If families want to get off the bus and hike with children this young, they should do it at designated points along the Park Road where the car seat can remain behind and out of reach of animals—Eielson Visitor Center, any of the campgrounds, or the Toklat Rest Stop. Each of these areas has storage facilities to house the car seat safely while you are gone. Child car seats tend to be laden with odors that may attract animals looking for food. If you stash the car seat in a bush or on the tundra, you may come back to a demolished seat. In the long run, you may also teach bears to associate the smells of children with the smells of food. So please store your car seat properly.



Hint
Before you hop on the bus, attach a rope to your car seat to make it easier to handle. Also, tuck a garbage bag into the seat so that if it's raining when you step off the bus, you can keep the seat dry.





Family Fun in the entrance area

This is the busiest place in the park for families, and the first place to stop. Take your time here, because there is a lot to see and do here with kids. Check out the Denali Visitor Center, the Murie Science and Learning Center, and the Sled Dog Kennels—every one of these places pays special attention to the youngest visitors. Taking the time to get an overview of the park here will enrich your visit and guide you to activities that your family will most enjoy.

Denali Visitor Center

Mile 1.5 Park Road

The Denali Visitor Center is the main source of visitor information in the summer, and should be your first stop. The world-class visitor center provides an overall look at the six million acres waiting to be explored, and how families can best enjoy it. There is something for everyone here—information on Mount McKinley, wildlife, history, weather, and anything else having to do with the park—lots of things to see and to touch.



There are more than 750 species of plants in Denali including Alaska's state flower, the alpine forget-me-not.

Alaska Geographic Photo



Hint

For a good introduction to the park, watch the award-winning film *Heartbeats of Denali*. The movie follows the seasons and wildlife throughout the park and will entertain viewers of all ages—even the youngest viewers will enjoy this 18-minute film.

NPS Photo

Denali Visitor Center Exhibits

The first exhibit to grab kids' attention is the diorama of the park and the mountain. Nearby, you'll find life-size models of what can be found here—a moose, a bear digging up roots, and a wolf sauntering through the tundra.

Throughout this big wild room, there are drawers to open and lots of hands-on displays to fascinate visitors of all ages. Run the back of your hand down a beaver pelt and a wolf hide, and feel the difference. Discover an owl pellet, dissected to show what the predator has eaten—a tiny vole skull. Try to piece together a giant moose puzzle that divides the animal into sections and describes how Alaska Natives use each part of the moose.

A model of a Kantishna miner's cabin is in another room, with a wood stove and frying pans hanging on the wall behind it. Read about Fannie Quigley and the miners who searched for gold at what is now the far end of the Park Road.

Ride the Bear

Go ahead and climb on it, ride it, and pose for a photo on this bronze statue in front of the Denali Visitor Center. Denali artist William D. Berry lived, worked, and raised his family in and around the park. During his life, Berry created many pieces of art that reflect the park's wildlife and landscapes.



Ask a ranger at the front desk for a Scavenger Hunt. While you explore the Visitor Center, hunt for each of the items on the list—what type of bird is hanging from the ceiling, what's the Athabascan name for a moose shoulder blade, and more.



Ranger Programs

Guided walks, chats, and theater programs take place daily at the Denali Visitor Center throughout the summer. Topics and timing can vary, so look for schedules posted on bulletin boards or check at the front desk.

Become a Junior Ranger! Ask for a free Junior Ranger book at the front counter and keep it with you during your visit. Inside the guides are games, scavenger hunts, and puzzles that can keep children busy at a picnic table, in the tent or RV, and on the bus. By completing activities in the book, you earn a Junior Ranger Badge to take home. Check in with a ranger before you leave, or you can mail your book in later to receive a badge.



Before you leave the visitor center, check out a Discovery Pack at the front desk. It contains a thermometer, a small net, an orienteering compass, a vial, a magnifying glass, crayons, and more. Take the pack of tools and start exploring the area right around your campsite or along a trail.



Murie Science and Learning Center

Located a short walk from the Denali Visitor Center, the Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC) is open year-round and serves as the park's Winter Visitor Center.

The MSLC offers free daily science presentations, as well as occasional kid's programs throughout the summer. Call or check at the front desk to see if a kid-friendly presentation will be taking place during your visit.

Wolf Display

A central exhibit at the Murie Science and Learning Center is a real wolf skeleton, articulated as a class project by local students from Cantwell. This wolf was trapped legally by an Alaska trapper, who donated the animal to the school for this project. With the help of a park expert, the students carefully dissected the carcass and subsequently rebuilt the wolf skeleton as an educational project. See the skeleton and feel the fur hide of the wolf, while you learn about the animals that make Denali their home.

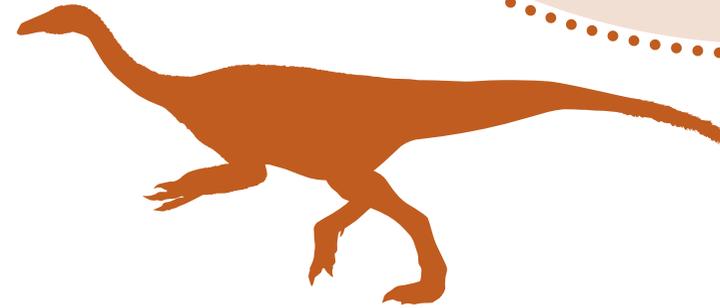


Wolf researchers in Denali use radio collars to track the movements of wolf packs that live in the park. Both airplanes and satellites are used to track the data from the collars. The researchers use this information to find out where the wolf packs live, how far they travel each year, and what they eat.



Denali's Dinosaurs

An amazing discovery occurred near Igloo Creek on June 27, 2005. A student on a field trip spotted a three-toed dinosaur track. The dinosaur that left behind the track was a smaller relative of *Tyrannosaurus rex*! Since then, thousands of prehistoric tracks and other trace fossils have been found of dinosaurs, birds, and plants. You can see these critters in a mural and touch real fossils at the MSLC. That will help you imagine what it was like in Denali millions of years ago. Ask at the front desk for the kids' paleontology activity pamphlet.



Kids Corner

The drawers are filled with activities and things for young children to feel, listen to, and figure out! There could be a drawer filled with different patches of fur, or another filled with track casts.

There are also lots of children's books and magazines to leaf through while sitting in comfortable seats on a rainy day. A tiny table and chairs beckons the littlest visitors to draw pictures of what they see at Denali.



Denali Sled Dog Kennel

The Sled Dog Kennels are one of the most popular stops at Denali and provide a chance for kids to meet the dogs who patrol the park during winter months. Denali is the only national park in America with a sled dog kennel and dogs that work to protect the park. The dogs help us to contact winter visitors, haul supplies, transport wildlife researchers, and ensure that no illegal activities happen within the park, such as poaching or snowmachines entering into wilderness areas. Visitors can meet the dogs and see them in action, pulling a dog sled on wheels at top speed around a looped trail as a park ranger hangs on.

Sled dog demonstrations are 30 minutes long and take place several times each day throughout the peak summer season, and at least once a day during shoulder seasons. Because of limited parking, most people visit the demonstrations via shuttle buses that leave from the Denali Visitor Center. Confirm times and bus information at the Denali Visitor Center. There is no fee for the bus ride or program.

Hint
Come early, so kids can meet and pet the sled dogs. This is a must-see stop in the park and it's free!



Fun Fact
It's not easy naming all the new puppies every year. One litter was named after climbing knots—Clove, Munter, and Prusik. Another was named after bumblebees—Lucor, Sitken, and Mixtus. Look at the names on the doghouses and see if you can guess which dogs are from the same litter! To see names of retired sled dogs from past years, go into the Kennels Building and look at all the nametags on the walls.

“The Denali kennels offer a place for a boy and “his” dog to plan exciting adventures into wild places...and a few naps in the sun along the way.”



Sled dogs have many adaptations that help them survive the extremely cold winter temperatures here in Denali. Did you know that sled dogs are adapted to have two different kinds of fur? They have a layer of guard hairs on the outside of their coats that acts like a water-resistant rain jacket, and a layer of under fur underneath that acts like a warm fleece jacket.

Camping in the entrance area

Riley Creek Campground

All Ages

This is an excellent stop when you arrive at Denali. It is in the entrance area—close to the Denali Visitor Center and trails—and it has flush toilets and running water in the summer. This is the largest campground in the park and is certainly not wilderness camping, but it can provide a comfortable spot to use as a home base. There is plenty for a family to do near here before you extend your visit further into the park. Visit the Denali Visitor Center, the Sled Dog Kennels, and attend an evening ranger program.



NPS Photo / Nathan Kostegian



Keep your eyes open around camp—red squirrels and snowshoe hare are commonly seen in Riley Creek Campground. Large animals, like moose and bear, also occasionally wander through.



You can camp here during the winter season, too—for free! There are no amenities other than pit toilets during the winter, but you can visit the Murie Science and Learning Center for water, flush toilets, and visitor information.

Family Photo

Hiking in the entrance area

The wilderness is never far away at Denali. A short walk can take you away from the highway, the visitor center, and civilization. On some of these trails, the only sounds will be rushing rivers, chirping squirrels, and squawking birds. A display outside the back door of the visitor center provides information about all the nearby trails. Here are a few worth checking out, and how to find them.

Spruce Forest Trail

Ages 0-5

Easy, 0.27 miles, 15 minutes roundtrip

Access: From the Denali Visitor Center

Let your toddler explore the trail on foot, or carry a little one yourself on this short loop. The trail is wide and flat, and there are usually lots of red squirrels and gray jays to see along the way. This is a mature spruce forest, so you'll see lots of spruce cones on the ground and perhaps piles of them hoarded by squirrels. These piles are called middens. If you spot any blueberries growing along the trail, feel free to eat them. But please leave the wildflowers for the next visitor to enjoy.

Hint

If you haven't hiked here before, try hiking with a ranger. Ranger-led Discovery Hikes are offered daily during the summer. Topics and difficulty levels vary, so check with the Denali Visitor Center to find a hike that matches your group's age and ability.



“Exploring the park with kids is an endless quest. There are so many trails to hike and the kids just love being outside. I always try to remember that it's not the distance you cover but the memories you are making.”

Horseshoe Lake Trail

Ages 5 and up

Easy to moderate, 1.5 miles, 1.5 hours roundtrip if you walk to the lake and back, longer if you walk the path around the lake. Access: Take the Taiga Trail from the Denali Visitor Center, past the Mount Healy Overlook Trail junction. This trail can also be accessed from the Bike Path.

This is one of the most popular trails in the park because it is easily accessible and quite scenic. It does have one long, steep section and some short, steep hills. The reward? You might get to see a family of beavers or a moose. At the edge of the lake, beavers have constructed a lodge, excavating underwater tunnels and rooms. Notice the chewed patches in the bark of spruce trees along the trail. This is the work of gnawing porcupines.



NPS Photo / Alex Vanderstuyf

McKinley Station Trail

Ages 6 and up

Moderate, 1.6 miles, 1 hour one way
Access: From the Denali Visitor Center or Riley Creek Campground

This trail connects the Denali Visitor Center with the Riley Creek Campground and Mercantile. You can hike part way and return to the visitor center, or hike the whole trail and catch a free bus back. Check at the visitor center for the bus schedule.

The trail goes down two steep hills (100 foot elevation change) to Hines Creek. From the trail, you'll see a bridge across Hines Creek to your right, and a wide gravel bar that is great for digging in the dirt and playing at the edge of the creek. There's even a big rock to sit on at the other end of the bridge. To your left is the Alaska Railroad trestle. If timing is right, you can watch the train go by. This is a good spot to relax, have a snack, and if you want, turn around and head back to the Denali Visitor Center.

Cross the bridge over Hines Creek and follow the trail for another five minutes. You'll come to a suspension bridge that spans Riley Creek. It's quite impressive with tall supports at both ends and cables holding it all together. Look downstream—you can still see the Alaska Railroad trestle.

You can stand on the bridge and sometimes see animal tracks in the mud next to the creek. The bridge can be an exciting destination for kids.

Mount Healy Overlook Trail

Ages 9 and up

Strenuous, 4.5 miles, 3-4 hours roundtrip
Access: Take the Taiga Trail from the Denali Visitor Center for 0.3 miles and look for the Mount Healy Overlook Trail junction.

This strenuous hike will wear out any preteen. The first mile is mildly steep and takes you to an overlook with benches. The rest of the trail is much steeper. On this hike, you'll have the opportunity to experience most of the ecosystems in the park on one trail, and then enjoy a spectacular view at the top.



Family Photo



Family Photo



On a clear day, you can see Mount McKinley, from the top of the Mount Healy Overlook trail.



Keep your eyes peeled for moose in the entrance area. They often graze in a clearing off the highway just north of the park. When traffic piles up as drivers spot the moose, it creates what locals call a "moose jam."

Family Photo

From the George Park Highway

There are two family hiking options that begin at Mile 231 of the George Parks Highway, just six miles south of the park entrance. If you are driving your own vehicle, turn south (right) on the Parks Highway as you leave the Park Road. Just before you reach the bridge over the Nenana River, you'll see a small pullout on the west side of the road where you can park.

Oxbow Trail

All ages
Easy, 1.7 mile loop, 1 hour
Access: Mile 231 George Parks Highway

The Oxbow Trail begins across the Parks Highway from the pullout, on the east side of the road. Watch for traffic while crossing the highway.

This flat trail loops through a mature spruce forest. The turnaround point is a spacious gravel bar right at the curve of the Nenana River. This is a great spot for kids to run around, enjoy a picnic lunch, throw rocks in the river, and wave to the rafts as they bounce by.

Triple Lakes Trail

Ages 6 and up
Moderately strenuous, 8.6 miles one way, 5 hours one-way
Access: Mile 231 George Parks Highway

The trail begins on the same side of the road as where you parked. It's a steep uphill climb for about the first 15 minutes. The trail crosses the railroad tracks and then evens out as it rounds the side of the mountain. There are great southern views here of the river, the mountains, and the McKinley Village area—one of the few neighborhoods where local residents have their homes.

The trail loops back to the north and quickly reaches the first of three lakes. If you follow the trail further, you'll find two other lakes, one right after the other. The trail then moves to Riley Creek and heads north toward the Denali Visitor Center, about 8 miles away.

The first lake is a perfect destination for younger children, while those 8 and up may be able to hike the entire trail. Once you reach the first lake, enjoy a picnic, climb up the hillside for a panoramic view, or keep walking until you feel like turning around.



If you see a large boulder on the hillside looking like it fell from the sky, it's a glacial erratic. These large rocks were deposited by retreating glaciers.

Biking in the Entrance Area

Riley Creek Campground

Ages 5 and up
Easy, 5-10 minutes around each loop, longer with little bikers

The Riley Creek Campground is a great loop for young cyclists, as long as they keep an eye peeled for traffic. From here, you can ride the Bike Path to the Denali Park Post Office, to the Riley Creek Mercantile, the Denali Visitor Center, the Alaska Geographic Bookstore, the Morino Grill, and all the way to the Nenana River.

Ride to the Nenana River

Ages 5 and up
Easy, 1.7 miles

Head back toward the main highway and stop for a photo at the Denali National Park entrance sign, located at the turn-off from the George Parks Highway. There's a pullout so you can safely stop and take a break.

Just after the Denali National Park sign, the trail turns left and runs beside the highway north toward the Nenana Canyon businesses. A short ride to the footbridge may provide views of rafts floating below you on the Nenana River.

Bike Path

- Ages 5 and up
- Denali Visitor Center to Wilderness Access Center: 1 mile
 - Riley Creek Campground to Denali Visitor Center: 1.3 miles

The Bike Path is well marked and easy to follow. It is a great connecting trail around the entrance area and offers the chance to walk or ride. As it continues toward the Parks Highway, it offers older riders a longer, more wilderness route. The Bike Path connects the Denali Visitor Center to the Wilderness Access Center, Riley Creek Campground area, and the park entrance. Many people also hike the Bike Path, so watch for walkers.



Hint
Bike racks are provided at campgrounds, rest areas, and the visitor centers. If you go day hiking from the road, just carry your bike 25 yards from the roadway and hide it from view.

Winterfest

The last weekend of February, Denali Borough communities and Denali National Park and Preserve celebrate winter with a weekend-long event called Winterfest. There is ice carving, snow sculpting, skiing, dog mushing, and many community events. Denali's education staff offer fun activities designed for kids that range from wintery obstacle courses to snow themed arts and crafts. Participants come from around the state and even around the nation.



Family Photo



Family Fun in the Savage River area

Located near the end of the paved and publicly accessible portion of the Park Road (miles 1-15), families can easily spend the entire day in the Savage River area. It's a great introduction to what lies further west and gives a taste of what Denali's wilderness has to offer. You can drive or take the free Savage River Shuttle—a good option since parking is limited.

There's a nice campground, lots of easy hiking both on and off trail, excellent wildlife viewing opportunities, and a chance to see Mount McKinley.

Camping in the Savage River Area

Savage River Campground

All Ages, Mile 13

This is a comfortable campground for families and children, away from the hustle and bustle of the park entrance area. It has great views, some creature comforts like running water and toilets, evening ranger programs, and lots of room to roam. Families can drive here in their own vehicles, or ride a park bus.

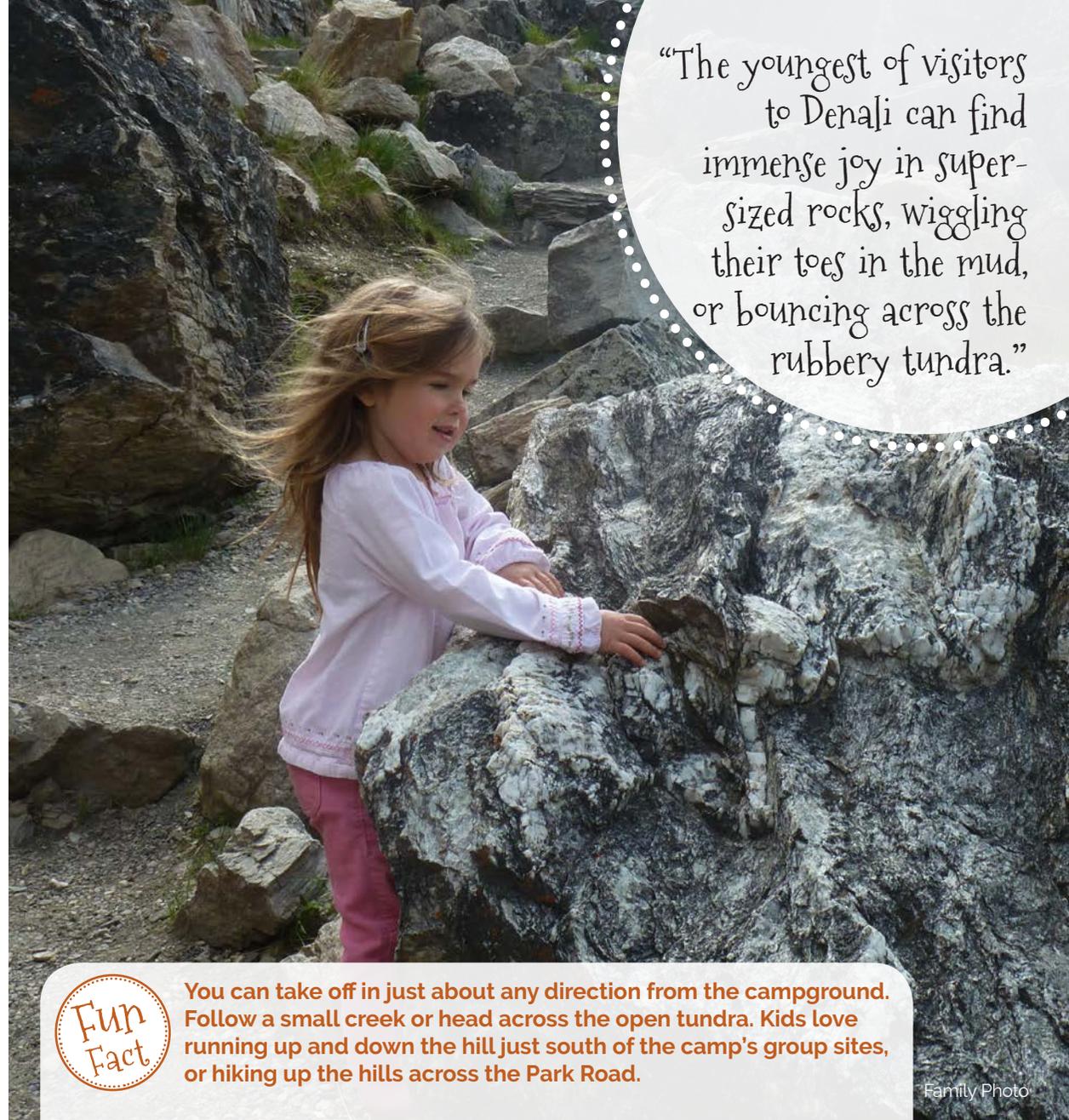
Fun
Fact

Only two campgrounds in Denali boast a view of Mount McKinley—Savage River at Mile 13 and Wonder Lake at Mile 85.

Fun
Fact

You can take off in just about any direction from the campground. Follow a small creek or head across the open tundra. Kids love running up and down the hill just south of the camp's group sites, or hiking up the hills across the Park Road.

“The youngest of visitors to Denali can find immense joy in super-sized rocks, wiggling their toes in the mud, or bouncing across the rubbery tundra.”



Hiking in the Savage River Area

Mountain Vista Loop Trail

All Ages
Easy, 0.6-mile loop, 30 minutes
Access: Mountain Vista Trailhead (Mile 13)

This trail near Savage Campground features a short loop that leads to a historic road and airstrip. Early visitors to the park (1923-1939) would overnight at Savage Camp, explore the area, and observe wildlife. Now families can do the same, but with a trail to follow. This is a great picnic area for families, with picnic tables, benches, and restrooms.

Savage Cabin Interpretive Trail

All Ages
Easy, 0.3 miles, 30 minutes
Access: Savage Campground (Mile 13)

Located just across from the Savage River Campground, this flat gravel path is a fun and easy walk for all ages. Interpretive panels along the trail show the area in wintertime and feature historical photographs.

The trail leads to a historic cabin which used to be a cookhouse for road workers. The cabin is used in the summer as a stop for bus tour visitors to view a living history talk, and in the winter as a patrol cabin.

Savage River Bar Trail

All ages
Easy, 0.2 miles, 10 minutes roundtrip

Starting from the west side of the Savage River Bridge, this trail is wide and flat, and a fun place for children to explore. All the vegetation here is close to the ground, so children are always visible. Instead of heading downstream toward the canyon, the path leads to the large gravel bar at the edge of the river. There is often a flock of mew gulls strutting around, feeding on insects and voles.

Savage River Loop Trail

Ages 5 and up
Moderate, 1.6 miles, 1.5 hours

There is negligible elevation gain on this trail, but footing can occasionally be tricky, so think carefully before taking toddlers along. The trail goes down one side of the river, crosses a footbridge less than a mile downstream, and then comes back on the other side.

This is one of the most popular trails in the park and a good area for spotting wildlife including marmots, Dall sheep, and American dippers. More than one visitor has watched Dall sheep trot down one side of the mountain, leap across the river, and climb up the other side.

Savage Rock

Ages 5 and up
Easy, 15 minutes to the top

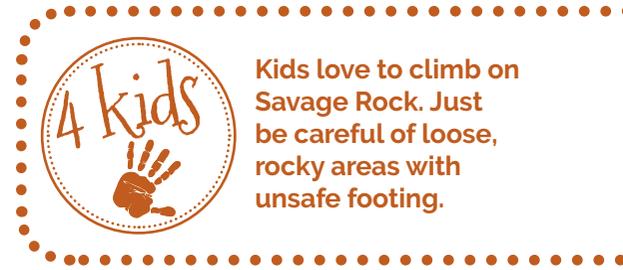
The trail to Savage Rock is all uphill, which is why children like it. The gravel trail takes you around one side of Savage Rock, with steps in place between large boulders and a grove of Balsam poplar trees as a resting point.

Savage Alpine Trail

Ages 8 and up
Difficult, 4 miles, 3-4 hours one-way

The trail is great for a family that wants a bit of a challenge. This hike is an nice uphill jaunt that offers views of Mount McKinley on a clear day.

Start this trail at the Mountain Vista trailhead and hike up the side of Healy ridge before descending towards Savage River. Once you are down by the river, flag down a shuttle bus heading east to take you back to the park entrance.



Kids love to climb on Savage Rock. Just be careful of loose, rocky areas with unsafe footing.



Watch for wildlife closure signs while hiking. Areas are sometimes closed to protect wolf dens and other wildlife.



Biking in the Savage River Area

Mountain Vista to the Denali Visitor Center

Ages 9 and up
Moderate, 10 miles, 90 minutes

Take the free Savage River Shuttle from the Denali Visitor Center to Mountain Vista Rest Stop at Mile 13, and then ride the road back the way you came. This ride has more uphill than you think! Try to ride later in the evening when there are fewer buses on the road. Don't forget private vehicles can drive this stretch as well, so be careful.

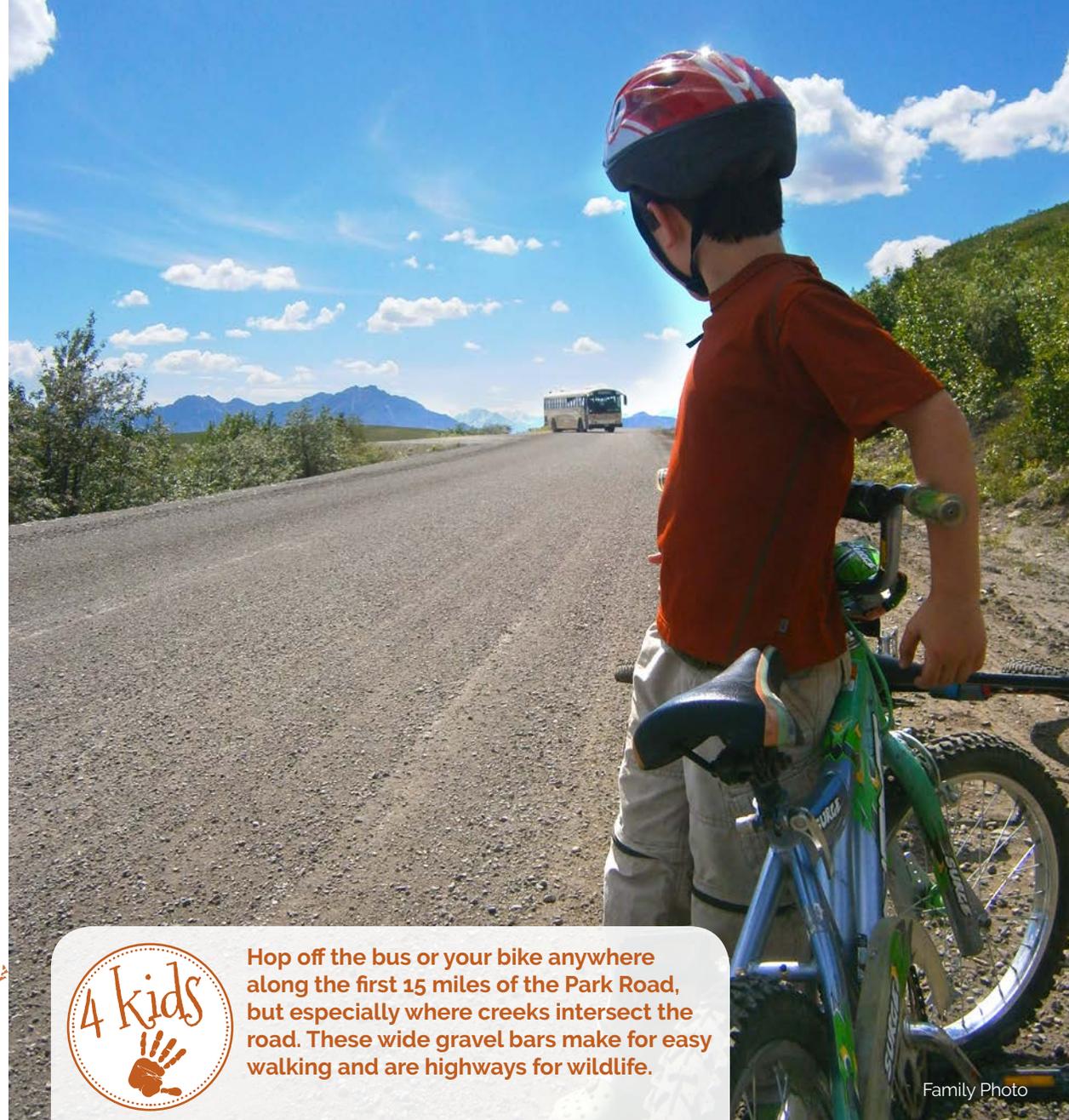
If you ride east of Park Headquarters, be prepared for the steep drop down Government Hill around Mile 2 on the Park Road. If you descend safely and slowly, you'll be rewarded with beautiful views before you reach the visitor center.



Those squawking white birds are mew gulls. This seabird visits Denali during the summer season and seems to gather wherever people congregate in the park. Savage River is one of their favorite hangouts.



Hop off the bus or your bike anywhere along the first 15 miles of the Park Road, but especially where creeks intersect the road. These wide gravel bars make for easy walking and are highways for wildlife.



Family Photo

“You can guarantee your family will be touched by this place...”

Family Fun beyond Mile 15

As you head further into the park, opportunities to get away from the crowds and get into the heart of the backcountry increase. To travel beyond Savage River, visitors must have a ticket to ride the bus further into the park and must board from the Wilderness Access Center.

Camping

Sanctuary and Igloo Campgrounds

Ages 6 and up, Mile 23 and 34

Both of these campgrounds are primitive and for tents only. They have pit toilets, picnic tables, and bear-resistant food lockers. The large, bear-proof lockers also provide a great place to stash child car seats if you decide to backcountry camp from this area.

Teklanika Campground

All Ages, Mile 29

You can drive here in your personal vehicle, but you have to stay at least three nights. You cannot drive any further into the park and you forfeit your site if you choose to drive out of the park during your reservation dates. This campground is truly in the wilderness, on the banks of the Teklanika River. There is a lot of space for children to run around here. The riverbed of the Teklanika is braided and has many swift channels so children should not be allowed to wander too far.

Teklanika is a great base for delving deeper into the park. When you buy or pick up your campground tickets at the Wilderness Access Center, purchase a specially priced “Tek Pass” that gives you three days of bus access further into the park. By staying at Teklanika, you can spend more time in the heart of the park because you begin your trip considerably west of the park entrance.



Hint

If you plan on camping at Teklanika purchase a Tek Pass and reserve seats for one day and ride “standby” the other two. This way you don’t have to decide which days you want to travel further into the park, allowing you the flexibility to relax and explore camp.

NPS Photo / Alex Vanderstyuf

Hiking Beyond Mile 15

Mile 17 Primrose Ridge

This is just past Savage River. Hiking is primarily through open tundra, and views are grand. You don't have to go all the way to the top, although sometimes children scamper uphill more quickly than their parents. Walk as much as you want, then stop, sit down, and enjoy the view with lunch.

Mile 29 Teklanika River

Get off the bus here and head to the river. You can either walk on the riverbed itself or on a trail that follows the river to a nearby bluff.

Mile 34 Igloo

Between Igloo Creek and Sable Pass, there are a number of easy hikes in the Igloo, Cathedral and Sable Pass area. Ask your bus driver for suggestions of where to get off and start hiking. This is a good place to look for raptors such as golden eagles.

Mile 46 Polychrome

This is a spectacular viewing stop and a great place to stretch your legs. It's a short stop on the shuttle bus, but that's plenty of time to climb the stairs and follow the path uphill. In moments, the bus, the road, and the roof of the shelter are all far below and the view is a 360-degree panorama. If you walk slowly, the loop trail only takes about 15 minutes.

Mile 54 Toklat

Walking along the Toklat River can offer surprising wildlife sightings for such easy hiking. This is the heart of wilderness at Denali, and is a great spot for kids to get rid of pent-up energy and run around.

Mile 58 Highway Pass

If you've made it this far, it's a good spot to get out and explore the tundra. If weather cooperates and is clear, the horizon is dominated by Mount McKinley. The road is always within view and open tundra means you should be able to spot wildlife from a distance.

Mile 66 Eielson Visitor Center

If you make it this far with children, take full advantage of your time here. There's a lot to see and do, from activities in the visitor center to hiking around the surrounding trails (see page 71 for more information).



Hint
It can be very windy near Polychrome. Wear warm clothes, especially a wind-breaker and a hat.



Take only pictures

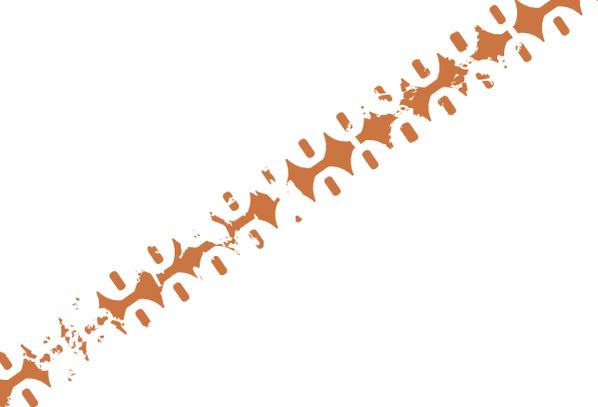
If you find something that you think might be an artifact (an item 50 years or older), leave it where you found it. If you want to remember your find AND help park archeologists, take a photograph of your discovery. When you return to the park entrance, notify a ranger at the Denali Visitor Center, and describe where the artifact is located, and show them your photo. Sometimes where an artifact is located is as important as what it is. Park archeologists learn about early park visitors with these kinds of exciting discoveries.



Not long ago, a preschooler found an unusual looking stick on the braided riverbed. It turned out to be an artifact made of caribou antler, hundreds of years old. This discovery helped archeologists document use of this area by Native Athabascans.



Family Photo



Hint

If you plan on riding past Mile 15 (Savage River), bring a mountain bike or a hybrid.

The road is only paved for the first 15 miles. Beyond Mile 15 the road is dirt, and beyond Mile 31 the road is narrow and there are no shoulders.

Biking Beyond Mile 15

Ages 9 and up
Moderate to Difficult

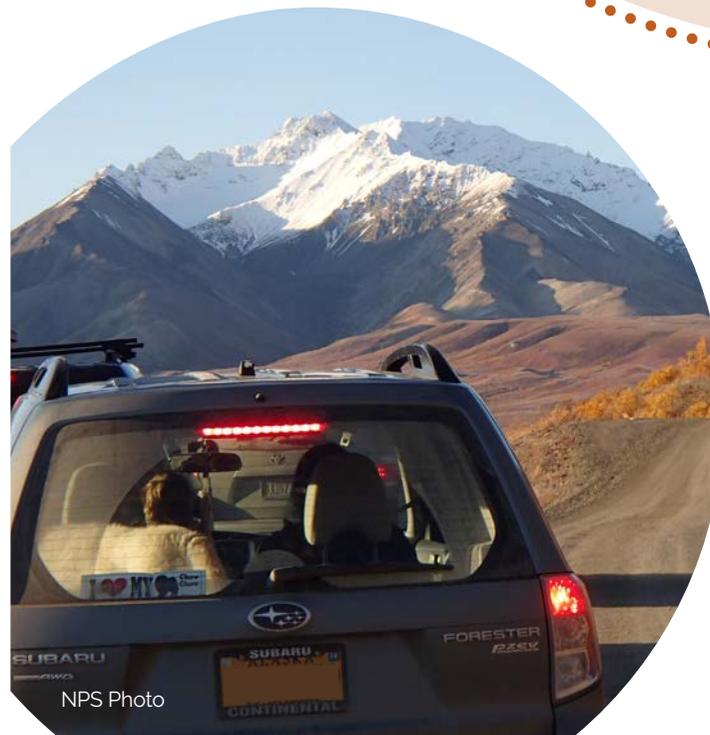
Choose your own section of the Park Road by taking a camper bus into the park with your bike. Get off anywhere you want, bike for a while, and then get back on a bus and head back to the entrance area.

Road Lottery

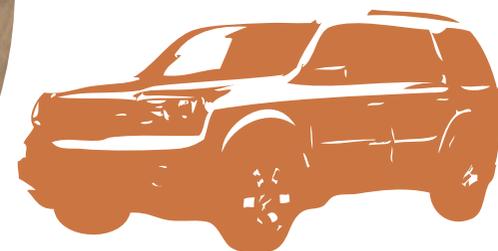
Starting the second Friday after Labor Day in September, lottery winners are allowed to drive personal vehicles into the park beyond mile 15 for one day. Families who win a permit can drive into the park on one of four days, and set their own pace. Apply for this privilege in the spring at www.recreation.gov. Winners are notified the second week of July. Be warned, the road can close at any time due to bad weather

Secret Ride

Visitors to the park in the shoulder seasons, April through early May and late September, can take advantage of the fact that buses are not running. Depending on the weather, the park will open the road to private vehicles as far as Teklanika River Rest Stop (Mile 30). You can drive to Tek, unload bikes, and ride west of the gate with almost no traffic. Watch for wildlife, use caution on muddy sections of road, and be aware that occasional park vehicles may pass by.



NPS Photo





Family Fun at Eielson

On a clear day, this eight-hour round-trip into the park offers outstanding views of Mount McKinley and the Alaska Range, and numerous wildlife viewing opportunities. The chance to see caribou, bears, raptors, and even wolves increases dramatically along this section of road.

Eielson Visitor Center

Mile 66 Park Road

Eielson Visitor Center boasts spectacular views of Mount McKinley, hiking trails, wildlife, exhibits, hands-on activities for kids, and several ranger-led activities. There is no food at Eielson, only a water fountain, so bring it with you.

Visit the rangers at the information desk and ask to see their collection of tracks, pelts, and skulls. If it's cloudy, rainy or snowy, ask the rangers to show you the window exhibit where you can "see" the peaks even on a cloudy day.



Fun
Fact

It will be hard to miss the Arctic ground squirrels that scurry about from hole to hole, occasionally stopping to stand at attention on their hind legs. These creatures hibernate underground during the winter.

Hiking at Eielson

Get out and stretch after the long bus ride! There are two trails leading from the visitor center: a short loop for all ages, and a longer route up the ridge for older kids. Or, find a ranger and see if you can go on a guided mid-day hike or listen to a short talk. Check at the information desk for more information on hiking and ranger presentations.

Tundra Loop Trail

All ages
Easy, 0.4 miles roundtrip, 30 minutes

The loop begins and ends at the visitor center, winding through the tundra with expansive views. If the mountain is out it will hold your full attention, but pull your eyes away and check out the wildflowers at your feet. Take the time to check out the Tundra Spur Trail, a short side trail that leads to the edge of the bench overlooking the valley below.

Alpine Trail

Ages 8 and up
Strenuous, 2.2 miles, 2 hours roundtrip

This trail starts directly across from Eielson Visitor Center, and is one of those steep switchback trails that older children usually like to attack because sometimes parents can't keep up. You don't have to go all the way to Thorofare Ridge at the top; the trail also has long gradual uphill and even some human-made steps to make the walking easier. Before long, those tan and green buses look like toys and the view extends for miles beyond the visitor center.



An off-trail wilderness hike can be an unforgettable experience for the whole family. Just get off the bus and start hiking—anywhere. The rewards are worth the effort, and you'll generally find yourselves alone in the wilderness, even if you never leave sight of the Park Road.

“Rolling down hills of bouncy micro plants is a bit exhausting, so a tundra nap accompanied by a satisfied smile is always in order.”



Family Photo



Family Fun at Wonder Lake

Everyone loves the idea of camping at Wonder Lake, with Mount McKinley towering over the campground, just 27 miles away. The campground not only boasts some excellent views but also provides evening ranger programs that are great for kids. Sometimes, staying here is worth the six-hour bus ride one way. And if you stay more than one day, you might be lucky enough to get a campsite with a view of "The Mountain". Nab that choice spot when previous campers leave in the morning and before other campers arrive on the bus.

Camping at Wonder Lake

Wonder Lake Campground

Mile 85

Ages 8 and up

There is a central covered area with bear-resistant food storage lockers and tables, where campers can prepare food and visit with each other. If you want to be social, stay near here. If you prefer privacy, find a spot further away from this gathering point. No matter what, do not go to Wonder Lake without mosquito head nets! Mosquitoes can be quite persistent here until mid-August



Hint

You probably don't need to go all the way to Wonder Lake to get good views—especially with young children. The bus ride is another 3 hours roundtrip from Eielson, and you will have already passed some excellent wildlife and mountain viewing areas. If you do decide to go, you should try to camp there.



You can fish for trout in Wonder Lake. The Lake is 2.5 miles long, a half mile wide and 280 feet deep.

NPS Photo

Hiking at Wonder Lake

Campground Hikes

All Ages
Easy

Easy walks from the campground include a five-minute walk to the lake, and a 2.5 mile hike to McKinley River on the McKinley Bar Trail. Hiking off-trail in the area is fine, but it can be boggy! You can request a Discovery Pack from a park ranger and take it with you on your hike.

Blueberry Hill Trail

Ages 6 and up
Easy, 0.6 miles, 30 minutes

Take the bus to the north end of Wonder Lake and find the trailhead at the base of the hill, at the section of road built over the lake inlet. The trail winds through spruce trees to dry alpine tundra, then leads back to the road. Boardwalks allow easy access to the knoll, keeping feet above the wet tundra. This is a narrow trail, so you'll have to walk single file.

McKinley Bar Trail

Ages 6 and up
Easy, 2.5 miles one-way

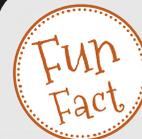
This flat trail is perfect for slightly older kids who don't mind a long walk with beautiful views. The trail takes you through spruce forests and over bogs to bring you to the banks of the McKinley River. If you are lucky and Denali is out, then it will look like you are hiking straight into the mountain.



Hint

Bring along binoculars and settle in at the top of the Blueberry Hill to see if you can spot and identify some of the birds that call Wonder Lake home. There are usually grebes, pintails, a pair of nesting red-throated loons, and other ducks.

“It’s fun to watch children creating their own adventures and having first time experiences with nature.”



In August and September, Blueberry Hill is covered with—you guessed it—blueberries. Munch on the sweet berries while admiring views of Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake.



Extending your Visit

While most visitors only have a few days in Denali, there are opportunities for families with more time to dig deeper into the park and its surroundings. Here are a few.

Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC)

The MSLC offers family and youth programs and camps throughout the summer. Programs last from several hours to several days. Past programs have included family explorations of birds, wolves, dinosaurs, and wildflowers, and an hour-long program on climate change in Denali. Annual summer camps include Denali Discovery Camp and Denali Backcountry Adventures, both of which are made available to local youth before being opened to the general public. Some offerings are fee-based and require registration, while others are free of charge. For an updated schedule, stop by the MSLC when you arrive in the park, or check the MSLC website, www.nps.gov/rlc/murie.

Bring Your Classroom to Denali

Teachers wanting to bring their classes to Denali are encouraged to read the "Education" portion of the park website for current information. Rangers are available to provide programs for curriculum-based student groups, but this must be arranged in advance of the visit. There are restrictions regarding use of campgrounds and hiking for non-family field trips.

Science Camp

Visit the MSLC website, www.nps.gov/rlc/murie to find out when family field courses or camps for kids are available during the summer.

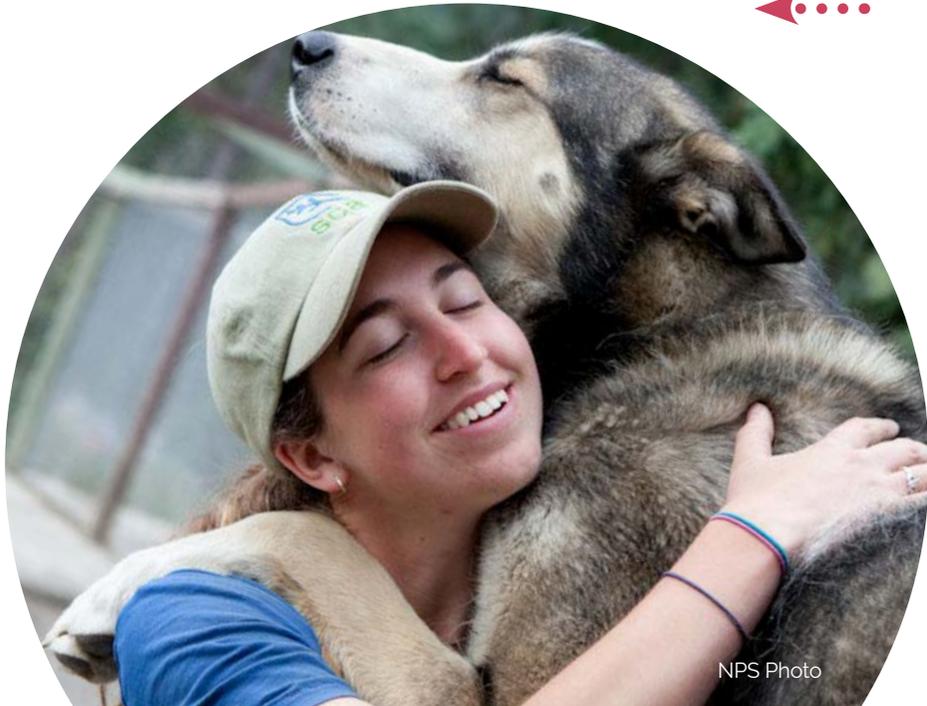
Teens at Denali

Youth Conservation Corps (YCC)

This 8-10 week program for high-school students is a great way to get a taste of what it is like to work for the National Park Service. These young rangers do everything from helping to build trails to answering questions at the visitor center. The best part of the program, is that these rangers in training get paid to help protect our public lands. Visit the YCC website, www.nps.gov/gettinginvolved/youthprograms/ycc, for more information.

Student Conservation Association (SCA)

This national program offers college and high school students the opportunity to participate in hands-on conservation programs. In Denali, participants can work as part of a trail crew, intern at the sled dog kennels, or assist park rangers with visitor services. Visit the SCA website, www.thesca.org, for more information.



NPS Photo

Visit Talkeetna

Talkeetna is the jumping-off spot for climbers who want to work their way up the slopes of Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America. This roadside town, located on a spur road off the main highway, is a two-hour drive south of the park entrance.

Talkeetna offers fantastic views of "The Mountain" because weather is usually better on the south side than the north side of the park. Many mountain climbers donate their expedition "flags" for display on the walls of the Talkeetna Visitor Center. Children can also explore the three-dimensional map of Mount McKinley at the Talkeetna Historical Association.



NPS Photo

Staying Connected

Get regular updates on what is happening here year-round, from weather to wolves to the first flower poking out of the spring snow.

- Denali NPS**www.nps.gov/dena
- Twitter**twitter.com/DenaliNPS
- Facebook**www.facebook.com/DenaliNPS
- YouTube**www.youtube.com/user/DenaliNPS
- Flickr**www.flickr.com/photos/DenaliNPS
- iTunes**itunes.apple.com/podcast/denali-new-expeditions/id295401153

Bring Denali to Your Classroom

If Denali is too far away to bring your class then consider signing up for one of the free, interactive distance learning programs offered by the park. Your class can learn about the science of sled dogs or learn why exactly Denali is so tall. Find out more on the park website under 'Education', www.nps.gov/dena/learn/education.

Junior Ranger Program

You don't have to come to the park to become a Junior Ranger. Go to the park website and download the Virtual Visit Activity Page. All the information you need to answer the questions can be found on the park website. Complete the form, send it in, and receive your very own badge.



Web Ranger Program

Go to www.nps.gov/webrangers to find games, puzzles, stories, and more. Search for "Denali" to find activities that are related to the park.



NPS Photo / Alex Vanderstuyf

Denali with Kids

It can be daunting to plan a trip that will be fun for the whole family. Especially when your destination is a vast wilderness in the Alaskan Interior. Whether you've already reached Denali or you're still dreaming about your perfect trip, enclosed you will find tips to make your visit easier and more fun. This guide is for parents and guardians who want their kids to take home happy memories from a Denali adventure.



Family Photo

