



Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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Nick Harris

Alaska

Wild and Free

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By Nick Harris

CHAPTER ONE

Welcome to Alaska

WHERE IS ALASKA? HOW BIG IS IT? WHO LIVES THERE?

Eskimos first lived in Alaska more than 7,000 years ago. Today, about 16% of all Alaskans are Eskimos. These people are really three groups: the Inupiaq, the Yupik, and the Alutiiq. These groups are not very different, but they speak different languages.

Alaska was a part of Russia for a long time. Then in 1867, the United States bought it from Russia for \$7.2 million. Many people thought this was too much money. But in the late 1840s, the Americans found gold in Alaska. Then in 1901, they found some oil there. Later, in the 1950s, they found lots of oil.

Alaska is a very big place. It's the biggest state - more than twice as big as Texas, the next biggest state. But not many people live there. Over 8 million people live in New York City, but only 730,000 live in all of Alaska. And about half of them live in the city of Anchorage.

Alaska has many mountains and glaciers. A glacier is like a river of ice. The Matanuska glacier is one of the most beautiful.

The winters are freezing with a lot of snow storms. In winter, it is also very dark because there is no sun in the far northern part of the state, and in other areas, it comes out for only two to seven hours every day.

CHAPTER TWO

Visit Kodiak Island

There is a lot of outdoor fun on Kodiak island.

Kodiak Island is in the southern part of Alaska. It is the second largest island in the United States, but it has less than 160 kilometres of roads. There are lots of high mountains, green forests, rivers, and lakes. About 30,000 visitors come to Kodiak every year. They come to climb mountains, catch fish, watch whales jump in the sea, and go camping. Bear watching is also very popular.

The island gets its name from the big Kodiak bear. There are over 3,500 of these wonderful animals living in the forests. But you must be very quiet if you want to see one!

About 13,000 people live on Kodiak Island all year, and half of them live in Kodiak City. The others live in small villages by the sea. The Alutiiq people were the first to live on the island. They came 7,500 years ago and they stayed.

Today, about 17 percent of all the people on Kodiak Island are Alutiiqs. They speak English and Alutiiq. In 2010, only 50 people spoke the Alutiiq language! But now schools are teaching the language because they don't want it to die.

The most important businesses here are fishing and tourism. There are seven hotels, 17 places to eat, and many shops in Kodiak City. The shops sell things made on the island.

CHAPTER THREE

Enjoy Outside Sports

DO YOU LOVE DOING SPORTS OUTSIDE? THEN ALASKA IS THE PLACE FOR YOU.

Many tourists come to Alaska to enjoy walking outside in the clean, cold air. And they come to do extreme sports - sports that are exciting but also dangerous.

Some people come to Alaska to climb Mount McKinley in Denali National Park. This mountain is 6,194 meters high, the highest in North America.

It isn't easy to climb to the top of Mount McKinley. It takes about three weeks! It's really cold when you get to the top, so most people stay there for only a short time. You need very warm clothes. And you must be careful.

Between 1932 and 2012, 120 climbers died on the mountain. In June 2012, four Japanese climbers died in an avalanche.

White-water rafting is also a popular sport. The Nenana River, also in Denali National Park, is very fast in some places.

Mount Alyeska is a good place to go paragliding. Don't worry if you don't know how to paraglide.

A teacher goes on the paraglider with you so you can enjoy the beautiful mountain and forests below you.

Skiing is popular in Alaska. There is a lot of snow and there are many good places to ski. Eagle Crest, only 20 kilometres from the state capital, Juneau, is an excellent mountain for skiing.

There are many other interesting things to do in Alaska. Some of these are less exciting than paragliding or white-water rafting, but they are great fun:

- look for gold in the rivers in the Kenai Peninsula

- fly over the glaciers in a plane or a helicopter

- visit the Sea Life Centre in Seward. You can see wonderful sea animals only a meter from where you are standing.

Some people enjoy traveling across Alaska as well. In 2010, Andrew Skurka travelled 7,600 kilometres across Alaska and the Yukon in 176 days. That's 43 kilometres a day! Most of the time he walked. He used six pairs of boots! But he also went on rivers on a raft, and he skied, too. He slept in a tent.

When Andrew skied in Denali Park, he was very worried about avalanches and snowstorms. He didn't see any avalanches, but one night, there was a really bad storm and his tent blew away! Andrew has travelled 48,000 kilometres in his life, and he doesn't want to stop. When he isn't working, he writes books about his travels.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Iditarod

IN THE PAST, ALASKANS NEEDED TO USE DOGS AND SLEDS TO TRAVEL. NOW THEY DON'T. BUT IN 1973, A DOGSLED RACE BEGAN, THE IDITAROD.

The Iditarod is a really hard race. The dogsled teams have to travel about 1,600 kilometres, from Anchorage to Nome. And the weather can be very bad, with freezing temperatures of -20C and dangerous snow storms.

Each team has one person, called a musher, and 12 to 20 dogs. The mushers have to think about many things. When is the best time to travel, at night or in the day? What clothes are best to wear? What food is best for the dogs? When is the best time to put the boots on the dogs? If the dogs don't wear boots, the ice can cut their feet.

It usually takes 10 to 15 days to finish the Iditarod. The team that gets to Nome first wins! John Baker did the Iditarod in the fastest time in 2011 - 8 days and 19 hours. Carl Huntington did the slowest time in 1974 - 20 days and 15 hours.

The Iditarod is very popular. It's an important part of Alaskan life. Before the race starts, there's a big party in Anchorage. Then, thousands of people watch the race. Many more people follow it for days on TV, the Internet, or in newspapers.

In the first Iditarod, there were 34 teams. Now every year in March about 55 teams do the race. Why is it so popular? Maybe because the winner gets a lot of money - about \$50,000!

CHAPTER FIVE

Green Tourism in Alaska

TOURISTS CAN BE VERY GOOD FOR COUNTRIES. BUT TOURISTS CAN ALSO BRING PROBLEMS.

Tourists spend a lot of money. They stay at hotels, eat in restaurants, and buy things in shops. This is good for Alaska and its people. But a lot of people in one place can make a lot of noise. And that can be difficult for Alaska's animals. And tourists leave trash in the forests and rivers, and in the sea. Animals and fish can eat this trash and get sick.

The people at the Alaskan tourist office want the state to stay clean. They want the animals to be safe and to live their normal lives. This is why they want people to do "green tourism."

Green tourism doesn't hurt the forests, the rivers, the sea, or the animals that live in them. Green tourists don't travel in big groups. They go around in small groups, so they don't disturb the animals. And the tourist office asks people to take their trash with them when they leave.

Many tourists in Alaska take boat trips to see life in the sea. Whales are their favourite animal. The tourists go out on small boats and travel slowly and quietly. This way, they do not disturb the whales and the fish.

CHAPTER SIX

The City of Anchorage

ANCHORAGE BEGAN AS A CITY OF TENTS IN 1915.

From 1915 to 1923, people went to live in Alaska to help build the railroad. At that time, about 2,000 people lived in Anchorage. They all lived in tents, but only one tent had a bath in it!

By 1940, Anchorage had about 4,000 people, and in 2012, Anchorage was the biggest city in Alaska with 300,000 people. Anchorage is small, quiet, and pretty. Normally it's a safe place, too. But it wasn't on March 27, 1964.

That was a bad day in Anchorage. The ground under everyone's feet started to move. It didn't stop moving for four minutes. Houses fell and 115 people died. It was an earthquake, a big earthquake, the second biggest earthquake in the world.

Today, Anchorage is an interesting city. During the day, you can visit the Anchorage Museum. You can learn about the Eskimo people and life in the town many years ago. There are also many places to look at different kinds of art. The H2Oasis Waterpark is a fun place to take children. And Kincaid Park is a good place to go to see animals.

At night you can go to a play at the theatre, a concert, or out to dinner. Anchorage has some fantastic restaurants. Fish is the favourite of most people here, and many people say it is the best in the world.

CHAPTER SEVEN

What Do You Think?

YOU ARE GOING WITH YOUR FAMILY TO VISIT ALASKA. THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT ALASKA AND PLAN YOUR TRIP.

Answer these questions to help you plan your Alaska vacation.

Would you like to stay in a tent, a hotel, or a house with an Alaskan family? Why?

What clothes do you need to take for the weather in Alaska?

On Kodiak Island, would you like to go bear watching, paragliding, or mountain climbing? Which do you think is the most dangerous?

Would you like to walk across Alaska, like Andrew Skurka? Do you think you can do it? What do you need to take with you?

What kinds of green tourism do you want to try?

Would you like to visit Anchorage? What would you like to do there?

What would you like to buy to take home with you from Alaska? Some Alaskan fish? A jacket that the Eskimos wear? Some art from Kodiak Island?

Have a good trip!

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