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On the cover: Young whale breaching with joy, and one of our photo contest winners.

FATIMA DUGGAL

DISCOVER



TRAVEL

ADVENTURES FOR ALL

JUNEAU'S NORRIS GLACIER by Brianna Randall



THE TURQUOISE WALL of Taku Glacier was almost too blue to be real. My dad and I snapped dozens of photos as we buzzed above a section that had calved into the ocean the night before. We were checking off a bucket-list trip to celebrate his 70th birthday: flying in a float plane to hike atop a glacier.

As we banked toward a glittering mountain lake, our pilot explained that Taku—nearly a mile deep—is one of the world's thickest alpine glaciers. While we appreciated seeing Taku's immensity, it wasn't the main attraction for our tour. We were heading to neighboring Norris Glacier to hike atop its icy ridges.

The Norris Glacier tour is a new offering by Above and Beyond Alaska (ABAK), a Juneau-based company that specializes in intimate backcountry adventures including sea kayaking to watch whales. "Our trips focus on glaciers, bears, or whales, and they're unique because we have a six-to-one client ratio," said Becky Janes, general manager of ABAK who co-founded the company with her husband in 2002.

One of the company's most popular trips has been canoeing out to Juneau's Mendenhall Glacier to hike on its surface. But with Alaska's glaciers retreating, clients can no longer get on

Above: Hiking toward the rafts en route to Norris Glacier. **Right:** Paddling around the bergy bits to the toe of the glacier.

anna Randa

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top of Mendenhall, Janes said. "We started looking for an alternative way people could experience a glacier." ABAK launched the Norris Glacier trip in June 2023 after years of research, planning details with Alaska Seaplanes, and securing permits from the Tongass National Forest.

My dad and I joined two other guests as the second-ever group to test out the six-hour backcountry itinerary, which included paddling and hiking after a scenic half-hour flight. Before boarding the seaplane, we were outfitted in the ABAK office with rubber boots, rain gear, and a souvenir water bottle. Our paddles, helmets, and ice spikes for our boots would be waiting below the

OUR COLLEGE-AGED GUIDE SMILED AT OUR LOOKS OF WONDER. "I PINCH MYSELF 10 TIMES A DAY," SHE CONFESSED. "IT'S A DREAM JOB."

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glacier, along with snacks.

The sun broke free from the clouds just as Juneau's icefield came into view.

After our fly-by of Taku, we touched down on a stunning wilderness lake below craggy mountain peaks. Two guides waved to us from shore, then held the plane steady as we hopped into shin-deep water and waded to shore. I gawked at the rainbow-hued array of wildflowers spread across the tundra before us. My dad pointed at

a waterfall tumbling down a cliff. A fresh track in the mud showed that grizzlies were common visitors here.

Our college-aged guide smiled at our looks of wonder. "I pinch myself 10 times a day," she confessed. "It's a dream job." She led us through the tundra for a 15-minute hike to "Packraft Cove", a gravel beach on a small lake where a halfdozen inflatable kayaks were lined up on shore. Paddling these little boats across was

Travel Logistics

WHO SHOULD GO

This trip is for ages 10 and up, with a 250-pound weight limit per person on the float plane. No experience is necessary, but participants should be able to walk up to two miles on uneven terrain and paddle for one hour roundtrip.

WHEN TO GO

June through September

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Make reservations at beyondak.com, 907-318-8746 or info@beyondak.com

WHAT TO BRING

- Plenty of layers, since the trip runs rain or shine
- Sunscreen and hat
- · Camera and binoculars

WHAT'S PROVIDED

- · Professional guide
- Roundtrip van and float plane transportation
- All paddling and trekking equipment and gear
- Rain gear including hooded jacket, rubber boots, and pants
- Hearty snacks
- Souvenir water bottle

the only way to access Norris Glacier. We donned life vests and helmets, then giddily stroked through the clear water to take photos next to floating bergy bits of ice.

On the other side, we strapped spikes to the soles of our boots and grabbed trekking poles to scale the foot of Norris Glacier. I marveled at the tinkling sound

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of water trickling below, beside and behind us. The solstice sun glared off the ice. Compared to the crowded trails near Mendenhall Glacier a few dozen miles north, it felt like we had the whole world to ourselves.

We moved slowly and carefully across the glacier, peering into crevasses and pausing often to take in the epic views.

Our guide explained how glaciers form and move, as well as why certain pockets were so shockingly blue: because ice absorbs long wavelengths of light like red and transmits short wavelengths like blue. The longer the light travels through ice, the more blue it appears. We took turns cupping our hands to drink from one of the bluest puddles.

After an hour exploring

Right: On the glacier at last and peering into a crevasse.

the glacier, we headed back to the packrafts, excited to reverse our paddle-hike-fly adventure. The pilot pointed out a black bear as we took off from the lake. My dad gave me a thumbs-up from the plane's front seat, his grin almost as blinding as the glacier beneath us. One of the best parts about our backcountry triathlon? We were back in plenty of time to enjoy happy hour at the Forbidden Peak Brewery in Auke Bay. 4

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Hunt on Kodiak Game Ranch, Kodiak Island Guaranteed Hunt includes a 2-4 year old bull (head, meat & hide) with 3 days meals & lodging & ground transport during hunt. No hunt license needed. Scheduling to be arranged by winner. Optimum period is Sept - Jan. Travel to Kodiak is not included. Winners may opt for \$3500 cash prize. Prizes are transferable. One prize drawing for every 1300 tickets sold! Five winners last year. Proceeds benefit Knights of Columbus charitable work in Alaska. Drawing 10:00 AM May 11, 2025, at St. Ann's Hall, Cathedral of Nativity of BVM, Juneau. For winners see News at www.alaskakofcstate.com



To buy tickets, send check or money order payable to

KofC Council 1760 Gaming, P.O. Box 21026, Juneau, AK 99802-1026.

Ticket Price \$20 each. Need not be present to win. Alaska Permit #1631

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