

Choosing a Lodge in Bristol Bay Alaska

You have seen enough, you just can't take it anymore, its time to finally pull the trigger and do that trip to Alaska you have been dreaming about since you were a child. You have purchased every magazine article ever written about Alaska from Kenai to Becharof. You have been bombarded with brochures filled with fantastic photos of incredible scenery, enormous grizzlies and monster leopard trout. Often you mumble to yourself, "I want to be right there" pointing at a photo of a guy sight casting to a fish with a mountain watching his every move.

Once you make up your mind that you are going to Alaska, the hard part really starts. Making the next few decisions will make or break your trip. What species will you target? Which month will you select? and most important of all which lodge will you choose? Your trip can prove to be the ultimate fishing experience, one that you will talk about for years. Your friends will be sick of "the slide show" that you pull out at every get together, or anytime you meet someone new.

Will it be as good as you've fantasized for all these years? Or will it be a complete disaster. Imagine old broken down boats, cabins on their last legs, 18 year old guides who have no clue what they are doing, and an inconsistent fishery. Just the thought sends chills down my spine. The best thing you can do is research. Get 2 opinions of everything before you make the commitment. Do not rely on what the lodge owner has on the website or what they told you at the sports shows. There are too many BS specialists that can draw you into a program that is not right for you

Asking a travel specialist that you trust is always a good starting point. it's their job to ask all the prudent questions and provide the answers to all those questions. They will try to choose the Alaska lodge that is best for you.

If you are set on going to Alaska in August you will have to book at least 1 year in advance. All the lodges are fully booked in Alaska in

August usually by the end of the previous season. The best lodges have high rates of re-booking clientele, and August is always the most popular. This is because it tends to be the best time to catch rainbows. Let me rephrase that, it tends to be the easiest time to catch rainbows. Plus the big rainbows from the lakes have all entered the rivers to feed on salmon eggs. Your best chance at acquiring high demand dates is to book your trip a year in advance. This gives you first shot at any openings.

Tent Camp Options

Some operations offer float trips, providing rafts, equipment, meals and guides for a weeklong drift down a wilderness river. If you are up for the adventure this is a great way to experience Alaska. Most of the good floats start from a lake meaning they are not prone to blowouts. The guides are typically used to inexperienced outdoorsmen and take care of all the details. If you don't mind, damp clothes, an absence of bathroom facilities for a week you will fit right in. Lots of research has to go into choosing a float trip. You want to select a reputable operator because your safety should be the utmost importance. Secondly the river you chose and the week you choose are of the utmost importance. Many rivers fish incredible in August but you can't buy a fish in them in September. Or if you want trout, and you show up and the river is infested with millions of fresh sockeye pushing upstream. This negatively effects the trout fishing, and snagging sockeye gets old real fast.

An often overlooked, but wonderful, option are the discounts that some lodges offer on bookend weeks. Almost all the lodges in Bristol Bay offer lower rates for early- to mid-June dates. Some years this is the best time for rainbows on dry flies and surface-fished smolt imitations. The risk on the early weeks is the river conditions. Typically one in every five years the spring is extremely late. This causes terrible river conditions with some of the lake still being frozen. Rivers are high, and off colored and too cold to provide dry fly fishing. This limits your options. However a fly out operation can still put you on some good fishing. When the spring comes early and the high waters have passed the early weeks are incredible. Fishing dropping

crystal clear rivers with bugs popping everywhere, and little to no traffic is a tremendous experience.

Generally speaking, after a partial week, or a discount week, the next most affordable option is a week spent at a fixed base wilderness camp. At one time the mainstay of Alaskan operations, these camps are now a vanishing breed. The best are often located on remote reaches of rivers rarely accessed by other lodges. A good wilderness camp puts you right on top of the best water at the most affordable price. You will be comfortable, and close enough to the water to fish all day.

Using jet boats, you'll cover seemingly endless miles of river, each day fishing water that sees only a handful of anglers annually. Should you decide on a wilderness camp, understand that they usually place a higher emphasis on the angling than the creature comforts. Will you take a hot shower and sleep in a comfortable bed every night? Absolutely. Will the toilet flush and meals be served on fine china? Not likely.

Short on luxury, these camps are long on fishing. Normally, camp owners carefully choose their camps location, making sure they sit dead center in the region's best fishing water. In the unlikely event you don't get enough during your guided day, the river always beckons just a long roll cast away.

FLY OUT LODGES

In my opinion Bristol Bay fly out lodges offer the finest fishing trips in Alaska. Many Lodges have wonderful accommodations and world class fishing and will help make your trip an unforgettable vacation experience. However there is no doubt that not all Bristol Bay Lodges are created equal. Many factors have to be considered. It all stems from the fishing program because that is what you are going up there to do. How far does the lodge have to fly each day is a good barometer. Do they have at least 6 rivers within a half hour flight, if not they should. Management is probably the second most important factor. Organization should be evident from the first moment you contact the lodge. A top lodge should have a top

staff. That means a group of guides that have been fishing Alaska for many years. Finding a lodge that has the same pilots and guides each year speaks volumes about an operation. Safety is the most important concern when you are talking about planes. Good equipment, new boats and motors are a good indicator of how important safety is to a lodge. Any lodge still using 1970's Johnson outboards have to be examined.

If you are going to pay the money for a fly out lodge you should look for the best. An extra \$500 - \$1000 dollars to ensure your trip is the best there is to offer is well worth its value. You want to know that you will be safe, and that you will be consistently fishing the most productive waters in the area. You want to feel like you have input in where you fish each day and are not being herded around like cattle. The size is a key factor as well. The lodges typically range from 12-24 people people per week now a days.

Some factors can be bit overrated when selecting your lodge. Most Fly out lodges lose very few days of fishing over a season. On any given year maybe 1 or 2 days. Therefore "home water" isn't as important as you think it will be. However with that said, having fisheries extremely close to the lodge make all the difference in the world. If the weather is really bad a lodge will not be making any long flights. To have a couple fisheries within 5 minutes flight is just as good as having "home water". All fly out lodges will hype up the river they are located on, but very few of these rivers have great fishing all summer long. There are of course a few exceptions to this. I would be more keen to attend a lodge that is centrally located and close to a diverse fishing program, than to a great home river.

If you have any questions about selecting a lodge in Bristol Bay Alaska please write to us. We have an interesting service that we offer. We will forward your question to 3 guides from that area who will give you their honest and unbiased answers. Feel free to ask any question as it is all

kept anonymous. Just go to our contact page and title your question
Alaska.