

INTRODUCTION

Our family moved to Anchorage, Alaska, three days after Christmas 2005. The day was so cold I could see frost on the mustache of a ground crew member who patiently waited near the aircraft's door while I struggled to stuff my squirming youngest child into fleece overalls, snowsuit, boots, hat, and mittens to walk 50 feet into the terminal of Ted Stevens International Airport. We slogged our overheated selves into the airport's depths, where a mountain of suitcases and boxes waited as a sobering reminder of our new permanent-resident status. Unlike the 1.5 million annual visitors who spend a week or two in the Last Frontier, Alaska was now our home, for better or worse. We watched wearily as the sun set, coloring the Chugach Mountains to the east a delicate shade of pink, offering promise of certain good fortune in this cold new place. That is, until our 11-year-old shouted from his perch atop a Samsonite, "Hey! It's only three o'clock! What's wrong with this place?" Welcome to Alaska.

In the eight years since, our entire family learned to love the 49th state, to embrace even its frigid winters and sometimes-rainy summers. We camp, hike, fish, and gaze daily upon a landscape that fits perfectly, as if Alaska was made specifically for us. It is and always will be home.

I've had this book in mind ever since my feet hit the frozen sidewalks of Anchorage back in 2005. As mothers often do, I created a mental list of things I wish someone had told me, vowing to make these nuggets

of information available to other parents before they decide to pack up kids and caboodle and head north for the trip of a lifetime.

It took time, effort, and a whole lot of travel on our part to bring you this comprehensive, investigative, and, we hope, interesting Alaska family travel guide. It's full of honest reviews, hot tips, and easily found facts to impress your spouse and wow your kids (maybe even the teenagers) as you drive, fly, or sail your way around the Last Frontier. It's meant to be used. Scribble in the margins. Fold down the pages. Use it for a pillow. But above all, enjoy this unique corner of the world. We're glad you came.

Note: By nature, tourism is a fluid industry, with ebb and flow as consistent as an Alaska tide; attractions, hotels, transportation, and their pricing or availability may change with little notice. While I have made every effort to make certain the information contained in this book is timely and accurate, please contact business owners before you embark upon your Alaska adventure.