

COVID-19 Response

Following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local public health authorities, park operations continue to adapt to changing conditions while maintaining public access, particularly outdoor spaces. Before visiting a park, please check the [park website](#) to determine its operating status. Updates about the overall NPS response to COVID-19, including safety information, are posted on www.nps.gov/coronavirus. Please [recreate responsibly](#).

National Park Service

Denali

National Park & Preserve
Alaska

NPS.gov / Park Home / Plan Your Visit / Bus Trips: How to Sightsee in Denali

How to Explore Denali National Park and Preserve

Choose Your Adventure

Do you already know what bus trip you want? Head over to our concessionaire's website. They manage most of the buses in the park (both narrated and non-narrated types), and you'll reserve your tickets through them.

Otherwise, read the rest of this page to decide which bus is for you.

[Reserve A Bus Now](#)

☒ Know Before You Come

There is only one road in Denali. Private vehicles can drive a small part of it, but most of the road is open only to bus traffic.

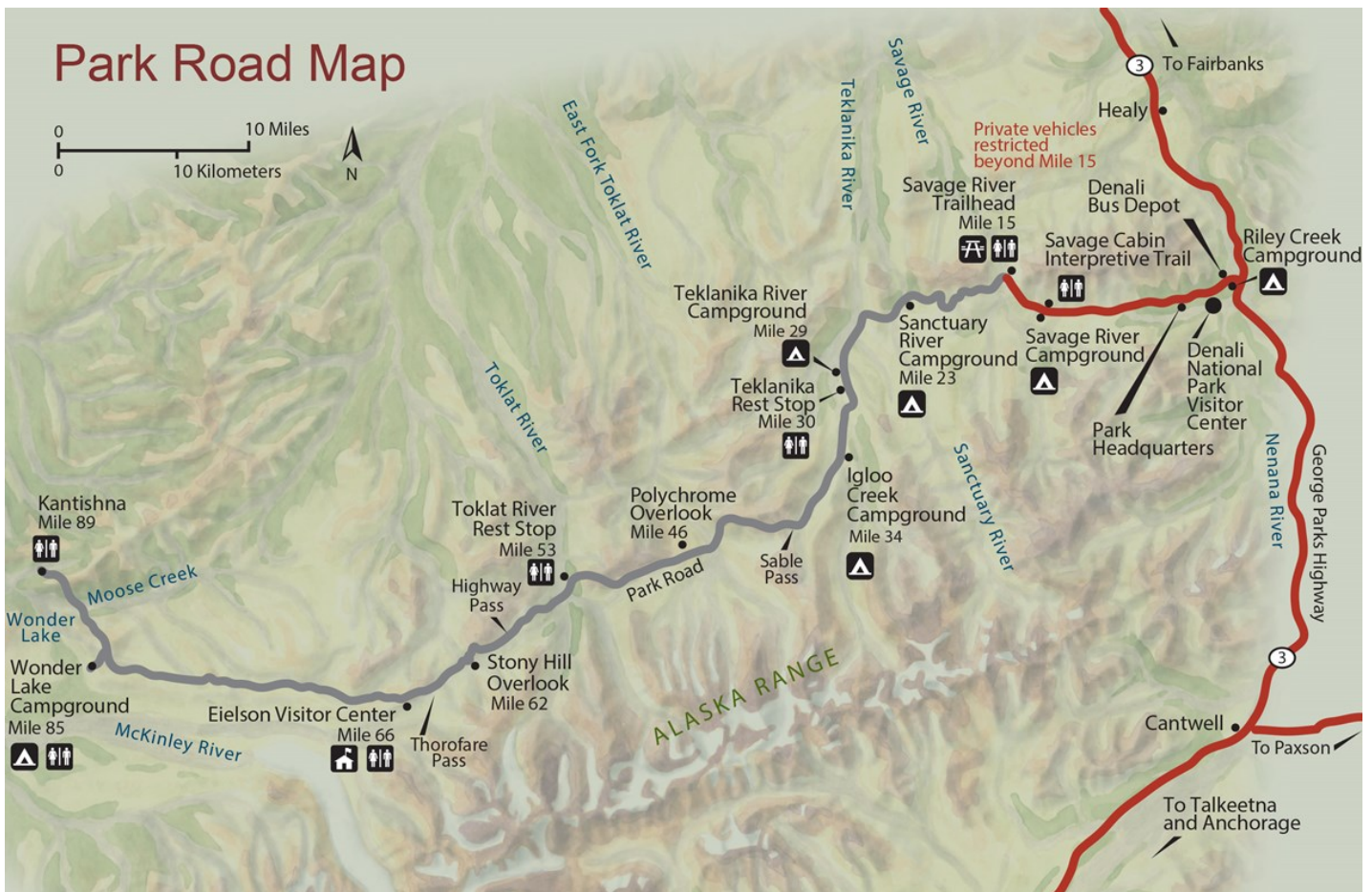
Bus trips are available only in summer (roughly mid-May through mid-September). All bus trips are operated by a private company with a contract to do so - not by the National Park Service.

Advance reservations aren't always necessary, but are strongly encouraged if you are only visiting for a short time (less than 2 full days).

An Introduction to Denali

92 miles long, the Denali Park Road parallels the Alaska Range and travels through low valleys and high mountain passes. It is the only road in the park. Along its route, beautiful landscapes can be seen at every turn, and there are many opportunities to view Denali - if the normally cloudy skies permit. Wildlife can often be seen, too, though sightings are not guaranteed - they are, after all, wild animals roaming an unfenced land.

During summer, roughly late May through early September, private vehicles may drive the first fifteen miles of this road, to a place called Savage River. The road to Savage River is paved, and features numerous pull-outs for folks to stop and snap some scenic photos. "The Mountain" can be seen as early as Mile 9, if the day isn't too overcast, and animals of all sorts can sometimes be seen on this stretch of road - although chances to see wildlife increase greatly with a bus trip farther down the Park Road.



The Denali Park Road parallels the Alaska Range. The park entrance, where the Denali Park Road meets Highway 3 (the "George Parks Highway") is 237 miles north of Anchorage, and 120 miles south of Fairbanks. Click on the map above to find more maps of the Denali area.

NPS Image

Types of Bus Trips: Tour vs. Transit

You should understand the nature of bus trips in Denali before booking anything.

There are two main types of buses in Denali - narrated trips (*tour* buses) and non-narrated trips (*transit* buses). In addition, a few free buses travel routes around the park entrance, connecting visitor centers and points of interest in the same area where visitors may drive their own vehicles.

. Non-narrated transit buses

Cheaper than tour buses, and more flexible in that you may disembark / re-board anywhere along the road, these are called **transit** buses. Transit bus drivers aim to help you experience the park on your own terms. These buses stop for wildlife viewing, restroom stops and beautiful scenery, just like tour buses. There are four choices of non-narrated trips, of varying length.

[Read more about non-narrated transit bus options](#)

. Narrated tour buses

Your driver is your narrator on the tour buses, and he or she will provide a detailed and captivating program to accompany your journey along the Denali Park Road. Tour buses make the same restroom stops as the non-narrated buses, and of course will pause for views of wildlife and scenery. All tours offer either a snack or full lunch. There are three tour bus options, of varying length.

[Read more about narrated tour bus options](#)

. Free buses

Three types of free buses operate on the publicly-driveable portion of the Denali Park Road. These enable visitors without vehicles, or those who wish to leave their vehicle behind, to travel between various facilities, trails, campgrounds and day-use areas. All of these are free, and none require reservations.

[Learn more about free buses](#)

Which Bus Do I Choose?

While simplistic, this matrix may help you decide which bus trip is right for you.

Bus Type	Good for Hiking or Camping?	Good for Learning About the Park?	Good for Seeing Wildlife?	Round Trip Duration
Natural History Tour	No	Yes	No; wildlife viewing may occur, but chances are slimmer than with other trips	4.5 hours
Tundra Wilderness Tour	No	Yes	Yes	8 hours

Kantishna Experience Tour	No	Yes	Yes	12 hours
Transit Bus	Yes; passengers may disembark to day hike	No; drivers are not required to narrate	Yes; the longer the trip, the better your odds of seeing wildlife	Several choices, ranging from 6 to 12 hours
Camper Bus	Yes; only passengers camping or backpacking in the park can use this bus	No	Varies depending on how long you spend on the bus before disembarking to camp.	Variable

Note: Several buses each day are equipped with a wheelchair lift. Learn about **accessibility of bus trips and other park buildings, trails and activities**.

Child Restraint Information

Alaska State Law requires children to be in a car or booster seat as follows:

- Children younger than 12 months of age or less than 20 pounds (9 kilograms) must be in a rear facing infant seat.
- Children older than 12 months and younger than 4 years, and at least 20 pounds (9 kilograms), must be in a child restraint.
- Children aged 4 through 7 years who are less than 57 inches (1.4 meters) tall or less than 65 pounds (30 kilograms) must be in a booster seat. Booster seats are no longer required for children of this age once they reach 57 inches (1.4 meters) tall or weigh 65+ pounds (30 kilograms).
- Parents are responsible for providing the appropriate car seat.

Day hiking or backpacking may require extra logistical planning if your children require a car seat.

Why Buses?

Beyond the **Savage River Check Station** at mile 15 of the Park Road, you'll need to be on a bus, bicycle, or on foot.

Prior to the 1972 completion of the George Parks Highway (Alaska Route 3), which is the main travel artery into interior Alaska, visitation to Denali National Park and Preserve was fairly low. Anticipation of major increases in traffic resulting from a direct route to the park prompted park officials to implement a mass transit system beyond Mile 15 on the Denali Park Road. To provide for visitor access and enjoyment of the world class resources, our concessioner, **Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture**, offers several types of bus services along the park road.

Extending 92 miles from the park entrance to its terminus in the old mining community of Kantishna, this mostly-gravel road traverses boreal forests and sub-arctic tundra. Crossing rolling mountainsides and sheer cliffs, the road meanders through scenic vistas and prime wildlife viewing areas.

By riding a bus, you help to reduce traffic congestion and to protect the natural resources of the park. Even more information on how the park road is managed, as it relates to vehicle traffic, can be found in the Denali Park Road **Vehicle Management Plan**.

Beyond Buses: Recommended Itineraries

Planning a trip to Denali can be a big undertaking! Just **getting to the park** can take quite a while, and it is distinctly different from many national parks, so even seasoned park travelers can be unsure how to plan their trip.

Use the simplistic table below to start thinking about what might work well for you, given the amount of time you'll be here. There are plenty of **other things to do** than what is listed below - this is just a starting point.

Duration of Visit	Recommended for Everyone	High-energy Activities	Low-energy Activities	Notes, Other Thoughts
Half a day or less	Visit Savage River Stop in the Denali Visitor Center watch the park film and chat with a ranger	Go hiking on one or more trails from the visitor center or at Savage River (note: Triple Lakes and the Savage Alpine Trail are potentially too long for a short visit)	Attend a ranger program at the visitor center or sled dog kennels Hike some of the short trails around the visitor center	More time is highly recommended. A visit this short isn't likely to see a ton of wildlife, but you'll have a chance to experience the frontcountry of the park and hopefully be inspired for a longer visit in the future!

One full day or part of two days (i.e., one night in the area)	Ride a transit or tour bus on the full day stop in the Denali Visitor Center	Hike , especially Triple Lakes Trail, the trails around Savage River and/or hike off-trail join a ranger-led discovery hike	Attend a ranger program at the visitor center or sled dog kennels Walk some of the short trails around the visitor center	This is the real minimum for a visit. If you can stay another night, it is recommended.
One full day and part of two others (i.e., two nights)	Ride a transit or tour bus on the full day stop in the Denali Visitor Center visit Savage River	Hike , especially on the half-days or hike off-trail while taking a transit bus trip join a ranger-led discovery hike on the full day (in lieu of any other bus ride)	Attend a ranger program at the visitor center or sled dog kennels Walk some of the short trails around the visitor center consider a short tour or transit ride on one of the partial days	This is a common length of visit. More time is recommended, but this gives you a full day for one of the bus rides, and partial days for other activities, like hiking or joining ranger talks or hikes.
Two full days (i.e., three nights)	At least one tour or transit bus trip visit Savage River	Hike , especially Triple Lakes Trail, the trails around Savage River, around Eielson Visitor Center and/or hike off-trail join a ranger-led discovery hike go backpacking	Attend a ranger program at the visitor center or sled dog kennels walk some of the short trails around the visitor center	This is a nice amount of time in the area. You have at least one full day for a bus trip. Consider a second bus trip if you want to maximize your chances to see wildlife.
Three or more full days	At least one tour or transit bus trip visit Savage River	Hike , especially Triple Lakes, around Savage River and Eielson, and/or off-trail join one or more ranger-led discovery hikes go backpacking	Attend a ranger program at the visitor center or sled dog kennels Walk some of the short trails around the visitor center	You have chosen wisely! Denali is a big place with unpredictable weather. Having three or more days lets you make the most of your good-weather days (bus rides, hiking) and bad-weather days (ranger talks, time at the visitor centers, etc)

CONTACT THE PARK

Mailing Address:

PO Box 9
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Phone:

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A ranger is available 9 am—4 pm daily (except on major holidays). If you get to the voicemail, please leave a message and we'll call you back as soon as we finish with the previous caller.