

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



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This segment of Alaska's Marine Highway extends from the western portion of the *Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula* region at the City of Homer and extends to the west to include Kodiak Island, along the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Chain to the port community of Unalaska. The Marine Highway serves ten port communities for this segment and has a linear distance of over 1,000 miles. Homer falls into both this region and the *Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula* region due to the ship routing and the community's roles as a starting terminal for each region due to its road access to the mainland and the Marine System. As such, Homer will be discussed here as well as in the *Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula* Region Plan.

Many of the communities along this segment have very small populations; do not have terminals, and have limited or no visitor services or accommodations. The sailing schedule is also restrictive as it provides only monthly sailings to the seven communities west of Kodiak during the summer months. The ships typically call at these western communities for one to two hours providing limited time in the communities and making stop-overs difficult unless travelers are willing to catch the return sailing (usually one or two days later) or fly out. Many travelers typically '*sail out and back*' on the

ship with only limited time in each community with the exception of Kodiak and Unalaska which have longer times in port. Given these limitations, most byway communities are not set up for a large influx of visitors. Visitors who travel this segment and are not swayed by the limited services get to enjoy a once in a lifetime experience seeing true rural coastal communities, Alaskan culture, history, world class birding and wildlife viewing, and breathtaking views of sea and landscape.

The community of Unalaska is nestled between the ocean and mountains and is the largest community in the Aleutians. It maintains its Russian Orthodox and fishing heritage.



ACCESS AND SHIP SERVICE

Access to *Kodiak and the Aleutians* is typically from the Homer ferry terminal with road access from the Kenai Peninsula and Anchorage, or via air from Anchorage to Kodiak or Unalaska. Scheduled commercial air service is available to all ten port communities. Kodiak and Unalaska have daily service to Anchorage and other communities have frequent air service via local airlines and charters. Due to the three-day length of a one way Aleutian sailing, visitors can build their itinerary around a 'fly and ferry package'; flying one way and sailing the other direction. Those with more time will board the ship at either Homer or Kodiak and sail to Unalaska and back to their originating port.

The *M/V Tustumena* provides service to the western portion of the *Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula* region and includes Homer and Kodiak as part of its year round sailing schedule. The *M/V Tustumena* also serves *Kodiak and the Aleutians* by providing monthly sailings April thru October to the nine port communities between Kodiak and Unalaska. Upon arrival in Unalaska, the *Tustumena* returns to Kodiak calling at the port communities in reverse order. During this five day round-trip period, there are no port calls between Kodiak and the mainland as the *Tustumena* is on the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* sailing.

Erskine House in Kodiak, now an Early Russian cultural museum, is the oldest Russian structure in Alaska. It is adjacent to the Alutiiq Museum; together they tell a complete cultural story of the area.



STATUS OF COMMUNITIES

The communities in this segment, from east to west are: Homer, Kodiak, Port Lions, Chignik, Sand Point, King Cove, Cold Bay, False Pass, Akutan, and Unalaska. Homer, though located on the Kenai Peninsula, is included here as it is an important vehicle link to this region. Each community is briefly described below.

Homer is the most westerly port of call with road access to the mainland and lies at the end of the Sterling Highway, a state scenic byway. It is a quaint fishing and tourist community and popular recreation destination on Kachemak Bay. The community is home to the newly opened US Fish and Wildlife Service's **Oceans and Islands Visitors Center**, a state-of-the-art interpretive, educational, & research facility highlighting the **Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge** and the **Kachemak Bay Research Reserve** and provides a wonderful introduction to the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* region. Given the community's locations on the popular recreation destination of the Kenai Peninsula and easy highway access to Anchorage, Homer is a staging area for many visitors sailing to *Kodiak and the Aleutians* region. A new terminal was built in 1999, and ships currently dock at the adjacent City dock.

Kodiak is one of the nation's largest commercial fishing ports, was the first capital of Russian America, and has been inhabited by the Alutiiq people for millennia. The town offers exceptional museums, historic sites, and a variety of visitor activities. The City of Kodiak serves as a gateway to numerous outdoor adventure, wildlife viewing, and sportfishing excursions. Bear viewing opportunities to the **Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge** and **Katmai National Park** are outstanding, but require a float plane trip out of the city. The ferry terminal is located downtown within easy walking distance to sites of interest and services. Funding for a new terminal was recently appropriated by the U.S. Congress and is currently in the planning stages.

Port Lions was established in 1964 by the residents of Old Afognak Village whose village was decimated by earthquake-generated tsunamis. Located off of Kizhuyak Bay on the northeast coast of Kodiak Island, Port Lions is situated on Settlers Cove. Several local lodges offer accommodations and recreational services including sport fishing, hunting, beachcombing, kayaking, birding and wildlife viewing. Year round, scheduled flight service is available via Kodiak.

Chignik, a community of less than 100 residents, is located on Anchorage Bay on the south shore of the Alaska Peninsula. Chignik, meaning "big wind," has been inhabited by the Alutiiq for millennia. It has a colorful past as a Russian fur trading outpost and commercial fishing port. Fishing for salmon, halibut, and other species continues to serve as the basis for the local economy. A lodge, guide service, and rental agency offer accommodations and recreational activities. Daily scheduled air service is available from Anchorage via King Salmon.

Sand Point, located on Popof Island, off the Alaska Peninsula, receives direct daily scheduled air service from Anchorage. Visitors have several choices for accommodations, and car rentals and other services are available. A lucrative cod fishery attracted Unangan settlers (known since the Russian era as "Aleuts") from surrounding villages and Scandinavian fishermen in the 1800s. The Russian Orthodox **St. Nicholas Chapel** is on the National Register of Historical Places. Sand Point is home to one of the largest Aleutian fishing fleets, which continues to harvest salmon, halibut, groundfish, and more.

King Cove is located on a sand spit wedged between the dramatic peaks of the Aleutian Range and the Pacific Ocean. Established by an English immigrant and his Unangan wife in the 1880s, the development of commercial fishing soon brought early settlers from Scandinavia, Europe and surrounding Unangan villages. The community continues to serve as a seafood harvesting and processing port. Daily scheduled air service is available via Cold Bay from Anchorage. Accommodations, taxi service, and other limited visitor services are available.

Not just another fish tale. All port communities along this segment have exceptional sport fishing opportunities.



Cold Bay, a small community of 100 people, is located in the **Izembek National Wildlife Refuge** at the western end of the Alaska Peninsula. The refuge is the site of the largest eelgrass system in North America and provides an important stop over for hundreds of thousands of migrating waterfowl, and sea and shore birds. Virtually the entire population of Pacific black brant, Taverner's Canada goose, and Emperor goose inhabit Izembek Lagoon each fall. Approximately 23,000 threatened Steller's Eiders also molt, rest, and feed at Izembek each autumn. During WWII, Fort Randall was established and an extensive runway was built. Today the Cold Bay airport continues to serve as an important regional transportation hub, including its designation as an alternate landing site for the NASA Space Shuttle. Daily scheduled air service is available from Anchorage.

False Pass, located on the eastern shore of Unimak Island, is situated on Isanotski Strait, which connects the North Pacific to the Bering Sea. The area was originally settled in the early 1900s, and grew with the establishment of a cannery. Scheduled air service is available via Cold Bay from Anchorage. Visitor services are limited.

Akutan is located on Akutan Island, a volcanic island that last erupted in 1976. Unique geological features created from lava flows can be found throughout the island. Fur trading, whaling and cod fishing lured Unangan, Russian, and European settlers to establish the community in the 1870s. Today, Akutan continues to be one of the nation's most productive fishing ports. The Russian Orthodox Church stands as a reminder of the Russian colonial period. Limited visitor services are available. Akutan is accessible via scheduled daily flights from Unalaska on amphibious planes. Visitor services are limited.

Unalaska is the westernmost terminus of Alaska's Marine Highway. The Unangan have inhabited Unalaska Island for more than millennia. A local museum documents the Unangan culture and local history. The fur trade brought Russian colonization in 1768. **Holy Ascension of Christ Russian Orthodox Church** is a prominent community landmark and is the oldest cruciform-style church in North America. During World War II, the town was bombed by the Japanese. The **Aleutian World War II Interpretive Center and National Historic Area** documents the Aleutian campaign, Japanese occupation, and the lasting impact on the region and the Unangan people. Unalaska is the most productive seafood harvesting and processing port in the nation. Crab, halibut, cod, pollock and other groundfish fisheries are the foundation of the local economy. Daily, nonstop scheduled air service from Anchorage and complete visitor services are available. Federal funding for a new ferry terminal was recently approved.

All communities along this segment have a vibrant fish industry. Some communities offer tours of their fish processing plants providing a great interpretation opportunity. This segment alone produces over half of the domestic seafood in the United States.



In addition to Homer, Kodiak and Anchorage, the other port communities within the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment provide road access and services for byway visitors who may be using these ports to gain access to the *Kodiak and the Aleutian* portion of the Marine Highway. All visitors should be encouraged to explore these partner communities in order to lengthen stays and increase in-state expenditures.

Public land management agencies are critical partners in this effort as well. They include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge and Izembek National Wildlife Refuge), National Park Service (Katmai National Park and Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve) Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks (Afognak Island State Park, Shuyak Island State Park, Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park, Buskin River State Recreation Site) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. These agencies manage, interpret and promote some of the key visitor resources and attractions along the byway.

In addition, there are many organizations across Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutians that will be significant players and partners in the byway effort. These organizations are involved in community and economic development, tourism, culture and history, tribal governance, local government, and business development. A partial list of partners includes: the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, City of Homer, Homer Chamber of Commerce, Kodiak Island Convention & Visitors Bureau, Kodiak Chamber of Commerce, Kodiak Island Borough, City of Kodiak, City of Port Lions, Koniag, Inc., Natives of Kodiak, Afognak Native Corporation, Village of Port Lions, Native Village of Afognak, Shoonaq Tribe of Kodiak, Lake & Peninsula Borough, City of Chignik, Chignik

Bay Village Council, Far West, Inc., Aleutians East Borough, City of Akutan, Akutan Corporation, Akutan Traditional Council, City of Cold Bay, City of False Pass, Isanotski Corporation, False Pass Village Council, City of King Cove, King Cove Corporation, Agdaagux Tribal Council, City of Sand Point, Shumagin Corporation, Unga Corporation, Qagan Tayagungin Tribe of Sand Point, Unga Village Council, Aleutians West CRSA, City of Unalaska, Ounalashka Corporation, Qawalangin Tribal Council of Unalaska, and the Russian Orthodox Church of Alaska. There are also not-for-profit entities such as museums and educational institutions that are likely to be involved in this byway. Successful implementation will require coordination with existing organizations' activities to make best use of existing staffing and financial resources.

The community of Unalaska was bombed by the Japanese in World War II and several neighboring islands were occupied. The Aleutians WWII Visitor Center tells this unique story.



