

High School Benchmark Studies

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the mission?

Alaska Endeavour runs 12-day natural history research expeditions for high school students (in teams of six on our historic 72-foot research vessel the *Endeavour*. We pick a well-defined wilderness site – an island, a lagoon, a glacier, or a river mouth – go there, and conduct a census, with each student focusing on one aspect of natural history – land mammals, marine mammals, birds, fish, botany, geology, paleontology, and so on.

At the end of the expedition, you contribute your data and observations to the study, which is completed by our naturalist and a professional editor. We then publish the study in scientific channels.

This is real, valuable science. A benchmark study is a snapshot of the location at a certain point in time. It tells other researchers what is there now and gives future researchers a way to measure the effects of logging, fishing, mining, pollution, and global warming over time. Benchmark studies are important tools in conservation.

See [here](#) for sample benchmark study.

How will it benefit the student?

You will learn how the natural world works, and how it's all connected.

You will learn key techniques for scientific observation and data collection.

You will earn an author credit on a scientific paper.

Most importantly, you will get an appreciation of wilderness that will last the rest of your life.

How do we make travel arrangements?

Once your place on the team is confirmed, we'll send you the last-leg flight information to our departure port and first-leg flight information from our return port. We leave it to you find and pay for the flights to need to make those connections.

Alaska Airlines and others have unaccompanied minor programs.

We will meet you at the airport when you arrive and deliver you to the airport when you depart.

What does a student have to do?

Before the expedition, we have a video conference call with you and your teammates to brief you on the study site, the study process, and life on board. Parents are encouraged to attend!

Depending on the natural history specialty you choose (birds, mammals, fish, plants, etc) we will help them develop your individual research plan.

We will also send you a reading list and a link to our online library of field guides, checklists, maps, and other resources.

Finally, we'll brief you and everyone else on safety protocols (once on board, we'll go into them in more detail).

Once at the study site, you'll take observations according to your research plan.

While on board, you and a partner will be responsible for certain chores rotating daily: galley (cooking and cleanup), watch (weather and tide check, lookout, and deck patrol), and deck (fender and line handling). Everyone learns basic knots. Everyone also has time to fish, kayak, and even read a book.

At the end of the expedition, you will contribute your data and a description of your methodology to a research paper, which will be assembled into final paper by our naturalist and polished by a professional editor.

Who will be on board?

The expedition will include six students (you and five others), the captain, and two crew members. The bios of the crew and captain are on here: www.AlaskaEndeavour.org/Personnel/

What are the sleeping accommodations?

Typically, all six students share a bunk room in the forward part of the ship. If necessary, two students can share a second bunkroom.

There are two heads (bathrooms), each with a shower.

We provide sleeping bags and liners, pillows, towels, and soap and shampoo.

For more on the boat, see here www.AlaskaEndeavour.org/Ship/.

What personal gear should the student bring?

We attach a detailed gear checklist attached to the enrollment agreement. In short, though, you'll want to bring a rain jacket and rain pants, a merino wool or similar top and bottom base layer, 15" rubber boots (Xtratuf or Grunden's), a day pack, water bottle, toiletries, clothes for 12 days (2 pairs of pants, 4 shirts, 4 sets of underwear), all in a soft-sided pack or duffle bag (no hard-sided suitcases, please!).

What research gear should the student bring?

We recommend you bring a smartphone or tablet.

What research gear do you provide?

We provide a pair of binoculars, a waterproof notebook and pen, and bear spray.

We provide you and your partner (on shore, students work in teams of two) a GPS device and a radio.

Depending on your specialty, we provide more specialized research equipment including a long-lens camera, trail cameras, an underwater camera, casting plaster, rock hammers, loupes, an aerial drone, and a hydrophone.

How do you pick study sites?

A study site needs to be reasonably well-defined geographically and have some conservation importance. It also needs to have all-weather anchorages, be interesting to get to, and not require long open-water passages.

It also needs to be within two or three days sailing of a commercial airport, to keep travel to and from Alaska as inexpensive and simple as possible.

Will we be able to do laundry on board?

Yes. Normally, we do laundry once, mid-expedition. We ask that you wash only the essentials. Lightly-soiled sweatshirts and similar bulky clothing take a lot of water and a lot of dry time and can be worn again.

Can I bring my guitar?

Better not. It's bulky and prone to damage in transit. Piccolos are fine.

What is the weather going to be like?

During the summer, the temperature is likely to be 55 to 65 degrees. Rain is always possible but this time of year where we'll be it is usually a drizzle. A little rain never slows us down.

In high winds or rough seas we stay put in a safe anchorage.

Is seasickness an issue?

Usually not. We avoid rough conditions, and the ship has a stabilization system (paravanes) if the conditions require it.

For sensitive expedition members, we recommend you bring non-drowsy Dramamine or similar.

What happens if someone gets hurt?

The crew has Red Cross first aid training and there is a comprehensive medical kit on board.

We have satellite videoconferencing if we need to consult with doctor or parents. As part of our intake we ask for the name and contact information of your doctor.

If the condition is serious, we can call for a medical evacuation by helicopter or float plane from anywhere.

What about dangerous wildlife?

We teach wildlife safety – how to act in the woods and avoid trouble with a bear, wolf, or moose.

We also issue you bear spray and teach you how to use it, and we travel in groups.

Where there are brown bears (grizzly bears), the captain or the naturalist carries a rifle.

We have never had an adverse encounter with wildlife on any of our expeditions.

What safety gear do you have on board?

The *Endeavour* carries all of the US Guard-required safety gear and more. This includes life jackets, immersion suits, an automatic life raft, a self-deploying EPIRB (emergency locator beacon), a go-bag (with emergency supplies), and radios and satellite communications.

We also stay in daily touch with our shore crew.

What safety training do you provide?

Part of our pre-expedition curriculum is teaching the expedition mindset, which goes a very long way in keeping you safe (we follow it ourselves).

Once on board, you'll practice emergency responses, including finding and getting into life jackets and immersion suits.

How do you decide to accept a student?

We have a brief video interview with you and your parent or guardian.

Can you accommodate a special diet?

Vegetarian and vegan, yes. Kosher or Hallal, unfortunately no.

Can you accommodate a physical disability?

Probably not. The *Endeavour* is a research vessel, not a passenger ship, and since we're doing research there is a lot of getting in and out of shore boats and hiking on land.

Is there anything else I should know?

There is a small dog on board. This dog is a valuable member of the crew, letting us know when whales are near and keeping bears away. If you have severe allergies, bring your meds.

Will we have internet access on board?

Yes. We have satellite service, and if your phone is properly configured, phone access.

That said, we strongly discourage surfing the web, personal calls, or video conferencing while on board. Most of our students appreciate the break.

Contact

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