



Alaska Crossings Frequently Asked Questions (about being a field guide)

Wilderness Therapy programs are becoming more and more diverse. This diversity affects everything from how long you are in the field at a time and therapeutic involvement to pay scales and technical skills required. This can make seeking a field position exciting and challenging as you search for the company that will be right for you. In addition, we find that Alaska seems to conjure up all sorts of images and questions for potential staff that may or may not be true. Hopefully, this document will help to answer some questions, ease some apprehensions and help you figure out if Alaska Crossings is truly the right place for you to work. The following are some frequently asked questions from potential staff:

1. Where is Wrangell?

Wrangell is on the north end of Wrangell Island in the Southeast Panhandle of Alaska. The mouth of the Stikine River is just north of town, and the Canadian border is only 30 miles up river.



2. How Long has Alaska Crossings been in operation?

Alaska Crossings ran 2 pilot programs in 2001 with a total of 14 participants and 3 staff. In 2006 we ran 16 programs with 143 total participants. We have close to 50 staff (both part time and full time). Alaska Crossings is a division of Alaska Island Community Services (AICS). AICS runs the medical clinic, Behavioral Health, Drug and Alcohol, Older Alaskans and Developmental Disability services (www.akics.org). 2007 will be our 7th year in operation.

As a program, we are still young and evolving. Change is a way of life for us which can be invigorating and/or frustrating. We have definitely found that staff who are able to 'roll with the punches' and adapt to change find it easier to work here.

3. What is the town of Wrangell like?

Wrangell is a small resource based community in the SE panhandle. The climate is mild and coastal. It occasionally drops below freezing from November – March and if it's not raining, it's drizzling (ie we get lots of rain here, 90+ inches per year). The current population fluctuates around 2000 people with more people living here in the summer. The city's main industries are commercial fishing, sport fishing, logging, and tourism. For more information check out the following links www.wrangell.com and www.wrangellchamber.org.

The following are some of the amenities in town: 2 grocery stores, 1 organic veggie van (on Tuesday's), a swimming pool, 2 exercise gyms, 2 gymnasiums, a 9 hole golf course, a shooting range, Volunteer Park (including a nature trail, 2 baseball diamonds, a t-ball diamond, tennis courts and covered basketball court, museum/civic centre w/ movie theatre, 3 bars, 4 restaurants, 1 take out burger joint, 3 coffee bars, 2 Laundromats, a Salvation army store (open Fri/Sat), 2 hardware stores, NAPA and 1 sporting goods store. No McDonalds.

Wrangell Island is quite large and you can take the Zimovia Highway south of town about 15 miles and provides access to beaches, hiking trails and logging roads. There are hundreds of miles of logging roads on the island too which provide further access to hiking, campgrounds, picnic areas, forest service cabins and other recreational activities.

The Stikine River is a major recreation area for residents of Wrangell and Petersburg. There are hot springs (Chief Shakes hot tubs), Shakes Lake and Shakes Glacier, Garnet Ledge, Twin Lakes, Forest Service cabins, etc. Many people head up river in their boats on evenings and weekends to fish, hunt or just hang out with friends and family. It is also a great river to canoe!

4. Do I have to move to Wrangell?

Field staff are not expected to move to Wrangell. Some staff chose to move here and share apartments or houses with other staff and some staff travel to Wrangell just to work their programs. If you choose to move to Wrangell, vacancy rates in Jan/Feb are high so finding a place to live is not hard. We can provide a list of names of local landlords and vacancies are also posted on the notice boards outside the grocery stores in town and in the weekly local paper. Living in Wrangell provides you with a unique chance to experience rural Alaska living and also the potential to earn additional income between programs.

Staff who commute understand the following: First, all staff, regardless if they commute or not, must be in town for their pre-trip planning with their staff team. You must be in town, ready to work at 8:00 am on the Friday before your program. Programs start on Tuesdays. Second, we do not pay for, or reimburse for travel to Wrangell. If a program is delayed or cancelled you are responsible for any change or cancellation fees to your tickets. We strongly recommend that staff buy tickets which allow you more flexibility if you need to make changes to your travel plans.

5. How do I get to Wrangell?

There are no roads to Wrangell. To get here you have 2 choices: 1. Fly on Alaska Airlines (www.alaskaair.com). There are 2 flights a day through Wrangell. Flight 65 northbound which leaves Seattle around 8am, stops in Ketchikan and then arrives around 10:30. Or flight 75 to Juneau leaving Seattle around 11:30 connecting to flight 64 southbound, arriving Wrangell in the late afternoon/early evening. You can also take the Alaska Marine Highway (www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs/). You can catch the ferry from Bellingham, Washington or Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Plane and ferry schedules change seasonally and fares go up around the end of April. Make sure you leave some buffer room for weather. It's not unusual for ferries to be late or for planes to overhead Wrangell and end up in Juneau.

6. Do you provide housing for field staff?

No. Staff who live here will often find a house or apartment to rent together. We can help put you in touch with people who have places to rent in town.

During the summer months, the Presbyterian church runs a hostel which is the cheapest place to stay in town. It's \$18/night for a 'dorm' room with air mattresses on the floor, and \$40 night for a private room. They have showers, a full kitchen, and a common room. There is no lock out but they ask everyone to be in at 11:00pm. Their number is 907-874-3534.

7. How many programs do I have to work per year?

We ask staff who to commit to staff training in February and then 2 programs between March and September. Our fall programs (program starting after mid August) are often staffed by guides who want to work 3 programs.

8. When do I move up a staff level?

Please refer to the CCA requirements document on the website for information on the level system and staff advancement.

9. Can I bring my dog in the field?

No. While we are big dog fans up here, field guides are not permitted to bring their dogs in the field.

10. Can I bring my car to Wrangell?

Sure. It's great to be able to get 'out the road' and go hiking and explore the island. Having a car also allows you access to the hiking trails and camping out the road.

11. How old are the kids in program?

Kids are 13-18. We take 12 year olds on a case by case basis.

12. Where do your kids come from?

All our participants come from Alaska; Anywhere and everywhere in Alaska. Sometimes it's a 2 day trip for kids to get to Wrangell and for many of our village kids, it's the furthest south they've ever been! Kids are referred by parents, teachers, Office of Children's Services (OCS), counselors,

13. Are your kids Alaskan Native?

Many of our participants are Native or part Native. We also have participants with other cultural backgrounds and mixed cultural backgrounds. There are many different and distinct Native groups in Alaska. Many kids speak in their native language and for a few, English is their second language. Some kids come from tiny remote villages with only a few hundred people. Subsistence lifestyles are prevalent in Alaska and many of our participants actively hunt and gather to help feed their family and village. This includes hunting deer, elk, moose, caribou, whale, seal, walrus, and many kinds of fish and shellfish.

14. Are your programs co-ed?

No. Crossings programs are single sex. Staff teams may be co-ed but the participants are the same sex. If a staff team is co-ed then only 1 member of the staff team will be of the opposite sex of the group (ie. A boys group would have 2 male and 1 female staff and a girls group would have 2 female and 1 male staff).

15. How many staff and kids on each program?

We usually operate with a staff : participant ratio of 1:3 with a maximum group size of 12 (3 staff, 9 participants). If we only have 6 kids, we only have 2 staff in the field. We need 7 participants before we use a 3rd staff member however, we'll put 3 staff in the field for 10 days and continue to do intake for 10 days after program starts.

16. Is staff training paid?

Yes. Certain parts of staff training are paid and others are not. Technical and hard skill training is not paid (ie: Swift water rescue, moving water instructor etc) In addition, courses that offer certifications you may have to pay for.

17. When is staff training?

Staff training is scheduled in early to mid February for approximately 3 weeks.

18. How long is your season?

Our first program usually leaves in early March and our last program ends in late October. We also have FLOAT school programming in Oct – Jan. Float School is our experiential education program for native kids in SE Alaska.

19. How do I manage food if I'm a vegetarian or have special dietary needs?

Eating family style meals is a fundamental component of the Crossings program. This means eating together as a group and eating the same meal. If there is meat in a meal, it can be cooked separately and you have the option of adding it or not. There are also 5 scheduled re-supplies throughout the program and you can buy food from the local grocery stores to have it sent in during program. Again, keep in mind that staff shouldn't eat different meals from the kids.

20. Where can I have my mail sent to?

Staff should send mail to General Delivery, Wrangell, AK 99929. Do not send personal mail c/o Alaska Crossings. If you rent a house or apartment in town you can get a PO Box for free at the post office. You may receive mail on program and staff often help each other by checking each other's mail when on program and bringing it in to be sent out on program re-supplies.

21. Can I access email at the Alaska Crossings office?

We don't allow staff to access email through work computers. However, if you have a personal laptop, we can provide you with the code to access the wireless network. If you don't have a laptop, there is free computer access through the public library and also a number of internet café's in town at the drugstore and at the Stikine Inn. If you rent an apartment, you can have cable, DSL, or dial up installed.

22. Do you hire International Staff?

At this point we are able to hire Canadians, who have an Outdoor Recreation or Physical Education Degree, under the NAFTA TN Visa. There is also an E3-Australian Visa that seems promising for Australian Residents. If you are from another country and have a work visa and meet our minimum requirements, feel free to apply.

23. What benefits do you provide?

We do not provide medical benefits but staff are covered by Worker's Compensation for injuries sustained on the job. Staff are eligible for our retirement plan after working for AICS for 1 year. We have many prodeals available to staff and AICS staff receive a free membership to the community pool and gym.