

Alaska: Where Fantasy Becomes Reality

In his 'His Dark Materials' trilogy, author Philip Pullman imagines an enchanted fantasy world of strange and familiar creatures; of cities nestled between glacial oceans and plains of tundra; of snow-capped mountains and phenomenal lights in the nights' sky.

This phenomenon, the Aurora Borealis, or 'Northern Lights', is the subject of the first book of Pullman's series (from which it takes its title), and Pullman's idea behind these magical night-time occurrences is that they can be used to open a portal to another world. When witnessed first hand, you begin to understand why Pullman created the idea – and when seen from among the snow-capped mountains, tundra plains and glacier-strewn oceans of mystical and magical Alaska, you begin to think that maybe Pullman had visited here before he began writing the books!

At the heart of this fantastical setting is found the city of Anchorage; a city surrounded by six different mountain ranges (with two active volcanoes and the highest peak in the whole of North America, Mt. McKinley), various National and State Parks (including Chugach State Park, the third-largest State Park in the United States and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, the largest expanse of wilderness in the whole US) and a glacier-coated ocean.

This great variety of environments is home to a massive array of wild and wonderful creatures, as simultaneously strange and familiar as anything conjured up in fantasy-fiction. On the snowy, misty mountaintops and the deep, dense forests that line the bottom of the mountain ranges, often-seen creatures include moose, caribou, wolves and bears (Black, Brown and Grizzly!), while marine life among the glaciers of Anchorage Bay includes sea lions, seals, porpoises, puffins and whales (beluga, orca and gray!).

Anchorage, then, serves not only as a fantastic base for those wishing to step through a portal into the beautiful wilderness of the natural world, but also offers opportunities to see wildlife close-up in the safer surroundings of the Alaska Zoo and the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, where injured animals, who would not survive in the wild, are kept and cared for. But, for those of you who don't wish to catch salmon in your mouths like the grizzlies further out of town, or don't wish to curl up in a den of wolves, there are also superb (and in their own way, magical) restaurants and [hotels in Anchorage](#) offering safe haven from Alaska's indigenous wildlife.

But be sure not to go to bed too early, or you may miss the treat that truly makes Anchorage one of the most magical places in the world – the northern lights, the soundless fireworks that dust the nights' sky in fabulous, instantly unique mixtures of colour.

About the Author

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