

[Travel Guru](#)

Resolution: Visiting remote Alaska in 2011

Scott McMurren | Jan 6, 2011



Get out your map of Alaska and look at those out-of-the-way places you'd like to explore. Think about the Pribilof Islands. Or Glacier Bay National Park. How about a trip to Kaktovik, or an expedition to the Gates of the Arctic National Park?

Think about it: those Alaska Airlines 737s connect many of the dots to "big" cities like Nome, Juneau or Cordova. But after that, chances are good you'll end up on one of Alaska's commuter airlines, or an air taxi.



Scott McMurren photos

Flying with Katmai Air over Kulik Lake near Katmai National Park.

For the sophisticated jet-city traveler, many of these operations can appear shocking. Forget about overhead bins, in-flight restrooms or flight attendants. Your weight, the weight of your luggage and where you sit really do matter.

And these smaller carriers provide the "last mile" to much of Alaska's wilderness. Let's take a look at some of the big players:

A. [Era Alaska](#). Be sure and watch the new Discovery Channel show, "Flying Wild Alaska," which starts on Jan. 14, 2011. The series will showcase some of Era's operations in Unalakleet, on Alaska's west coast, just a little southeast of Nome.

But Era is really the compilation of three commuter airlines: Hageland Aviation, Era Aviation and Frontier Flying Service. Together, they fly to more than 100 communities around the state: Ft. Yukon, Kotzebue, St. Mary's, Aniak -- lots of communities. The fleets consist of 37-passenger deHavilland Dash-8s, 19-passenger Beechcraft 1900s and a combination of smaller aircraft. From Anchorage, Era flies nonstop to Kodiak, Cordova, Valdez, Homer, Aniak, Bethel and Fairbanks. On many flights, but not all of them, travelers can earn Alaska Airlines mileage points. Alternatively, Era has its own frequent-flyer plan.

B. [Peninsula Airways](#). Known better as "PenAir," this carrier operates primarily between Anchorage and the Alaska Peninsula. Count on PenAir for flights out to the Pribilof Islands, known as "The Galapagos of the North" for the abundant wildlife and seabirds.

PenAir is a mileage partner with Alaska Airlines -- and even offers Alaska's flights to and from Dutch Harbor. If you're headed to Cold Bay for bird hunting, fishing, or a visit to the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, you'll be flying on



Flying Island Air to Kodiak from Larsen Bay, we chased this vintage Stearman bi-plane. PenAir. Frequent flights to King Salmon, Dillingham and other communities on the Alaska Peninsula are PenAir's specialties. PenAir flies a variety of aircraft, including the Saab 340, which can accommodate up to 30 passengers. The Fairchild Metroliner can accommodate up to 17 passengers. PenAir also operates the Grumman Goose -- an amphibious aircraft that can accommodate up to nine passengers. There's also a collection of Cessna Caravans, Piper Cherokees and other small aircraft to balance out the fleet.

C. [Wings Airways](#). Based in Juneau, Wings provides frequent flights to Skagway, Haines, Kake and Hoonah. Like other smaller carriers, Wings offers charter service if you want the whole plane for cargo, a small group -- or just lots of luggage. I've flown on a Wings charter up the Taku River.

D. [Taquan Air](#). Down in Ketchikan, check in with Taquan Air for flights over to the communities on Prince of Wales Island, including Craig, Coffman Cove and Thorne Bay. In the summer, Taquan Air offers flightseeing tours in the Misty Fjords National Monument.

E. [Grant Aviation](#). Grant is a more familiar name in Southwest Alaska, but now offers daily flights between Anchorage and Kenai, Homer and Valdez. In addition to its collection of six-passenger Cessna 207s, Grant operates the larger Cessna 208 "Caravan," plus the nine-passenger Piper Navajo or the Cessna King Air.

These are just a few of the primary carriers in the state. Other carriers like Bering Air in Nome, Warbelow's in Fairbanks, AirEx in Juneau, Yute Air in Bethel and Island Air in Kodiak make up the thick tapestry of aviation services that link the communities around the state.

Take a look at some of these companies' websites. Honestly, there are many names I cannot pronounce. The folks who live there are Alaskans, though. And I'm interested in exploring that country in 2011. How about you?

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