

Alaska

Eagles Tour

June 22nd - 27th 2025



CONTENTS

Welcome

Tour Overview

McKay Tour Team
Itinerary
Arrival and Departure
Accommodations
Tour Expectations

Travel Related

Travel Insurance
Health and Safety
General Travel Tips
Gratuities
Communication

Photography Gear

General Gear Needs
Lenses
Filters
Tripods/Misc Gear
Tour Specific Needs
Gear Purchases
Gear Rental

Clothing

Tour Specific



Welcome

Hello McKay Photography Tour Participants!

Welcome to your upcoming photography expedition!

This tour packet is your go-to reference, loaded with valuable information on photographic gear suggestions, travel and packing tips, and practical details for a fantastic photo tour experience. This tour pack has specifics for your upcoming tour and is also filled with general travel tips regardless of the tour itself.

In the past months, we've sent you emails with flight recommendations, itinerary updates, and essential information. Please note that due to possible changes in planning, some information in this packet may not be the most up to date. Be sure to always read the latest emails sent regarding this tour.

Our aim is to always keep you well-informed. Please feel free to reach out to our team with any questions (keep in mind that we might refer you back to the tour packet if we've already covered the subject). We suggest downloading the PDF version of this packet onto your smartphone or tablet, so it's easily accessible during the tour.

Embrace the spirit of adventure as we embark on this photography tour! While we have a planned itinerary, **expect the unexpected and be open to change**. Our goal is to maximize your photographic experiences by ensuring flexibility for capturing ideal light and weather conditions while accommodating preset commitments with hotels, guides, etc.

Please note that touring in such locations may require adjustments based on various unforeseen circumstances. Trust that our team's commitment is to provide an exceptional experience even if there's a need to alter the itinerary without prior announcement.

Throughout the trip, remember that "flexibility" is our guiding principle. Capture incredible images and immerse yourself in spontaneous moments without fixating on strict schedules. When you embrace flexibility and maintain a positive attitude, you'll discover a photographic adventure like no other!

Do not hesitate to contact us at hello@mckaylive.com for any inquiries or assistance. At McKay Photography Academy (MPA), we are dedicated to offering unparalleled experiences and exceptional photographic education worldwide.

Happy adventuring!
The MPA Team

MPA Tour Team

Steve Scurich



Frank Stelges



Instruction team is planned but may be changed if needed due to certain situations that can occur.

Tour Expectations

Below is a set of guidelines on what to expect on MPA tours. Please review and remember to follow so that we can make sure everyone is on the same page and ready for this wonderful adventure together! One thing we can guarantee, is that not everything will go according to plan on a tour like this. "F" for flexibility is key and we as a team need the group to understand this and have a positive energy throughout the tour.

MPA has had the pleasure of guiding photography enthusiasts across all corners of the globe, spanning every continent, with a community that has now grown to over 3000 clients! Our journey has been nothing short of remarkable, and we feel incredibly lucky to pursue our passion and share it with those who choose to join us.

Our team at MPA is deeply committed to delivering a memorable and enriching experience on every tour we conduct. While it's a rare occurrence, there are moments when a client's expectations don't align with the services we provide. We understand that for some, embarking on a photography tour with us may be a first-time adventure, filled with uncertainties. Others may have a repertoire of similar experiences to compare with. Then there are many among you who have journeyed with us on multiple occasions, who are well-acquainted with our ethos and approach.

In light of this diversity, we aim to establish clear expectations, to help you understand what we stand for and what we will offer during your time with us.

- Clients should expect that all MPA instructors will do their very best to help you achieve excellent photography education. We will pour ourselves into you. We do not take that lightly and we ask you to do the same.
- Flexibility stands as the cornerstone of our excursions, often fondly referred to as the McKay "F" word. It's crucial to acknowledge that each day brings its own set of unforeseen events and challenges, many times behind the scenes that the team has to deal with very unexpectedly. Thus, an adaptable mindset and positive outlook are essential for both the MPA instruction team and our clients during a tour. Embracing flexibility enhances the learning experience and fosters a more enjoyable atmosphere for everyone involved. Be prepared for the journey to possibly deviate from the itinerary, have unexpected changes, and the need to be flexible at certain times – it's all part of the adventure!
- We choose to describe our offerings as "tours" rather than "workshops." This is an intentional choice that reflects the depth of our experiences. Yes, photography is the catalyst that unites us, but a tour encompasses so much more. It's not solely about capturing stunning images or honing your technical skills. It's about embarking on an unforgettable journey that enriches your life. These moments have the power to nourish your spirit and enhance your photographic perspective, contributing positively to the world around us. Although photography has united us, it is not our sole purpose in doing what we do.
- At our core, we view the connections with our clients as deeply collaborative and reciprocal partnerships, rather than mere client/instructor/guide interactions. We embrace a shared journey of growth, learning, and appreciation for the wonders of our world. Our collective aim is to enact positive change, leaving an environment that's more enlightened than we found it. Our hope is that MPA transcends the traditional boundaries of photographic educational tours; and our tours become an enriching life adventure.
- Traveling can often be a taxing experience. Especially internationally. It's common for some to become fatigued and encounter moments of stress. We're here to provide support and assistance where possible. However, let's remember to embrace the spirit of exploration and adventure that comes with your journey.
- We'd like to remind you that while we diligently organize your tours, there are aspects like airline timetables, regulations, and various other elements that are beyond our sphere of influence in travel and logistics. We're committed to ensuring you're well-prepared for your journey, yet we urge you to embrace adaptability and maintain a flexible mindset throughout your travels.

Tour Expectations

- It is not feasible for us to possess knowledge of every camera system or photography product available. Nonetheless, we are committed to doing everything within our power to provide solutions for our clients and to collaborate with our colleagues to achieve this goal.
- We are here to serve, but we are not here to be your servants. This is the same for anyone we encounter such as guides, waitstaff etc. We hold our clients in high regard and request that they reciprocate with respect. not only to us, but all those we encounter on our journey.
- We do not know it all nor do we or others enjoy it when people like to be “know it all’s”.
- We will put in a lot of effort for every tour. However, it is important to note that we cannot be available 24/7. Since photography tours are dynamic in nature, we do not adhere to regular office hours. The instruction time must be flexible, adapting to the unfolding events of each day.
- We will be available to provide instruction and assistance during all photography sessions. We will have various times available for image reviews, editing, and other informal gathering times, depending on the specific tour length. These times will also be flexible, considering the nature of running a tour like this.
- Clients should understand that during tours, there is a mutual exchange of questions and information. We will ask questions of our clients, and it is important for our clients to also ask us questions. This applies not only to photography instruction but also to any needs or issues that we may be able to assist with. By doing so, we can ensure that we address any issues and find suitable solutions if possible. Otherwise, without open communication, we won't even know if there is an issue to address. Communication is always a "two-way street".
- Having a positive attitude daily is key. Overall negative attitudes, complaining, whining, and trying to get others to be a part of negative thoughts and behavior, as well as comments such as "everyone thinks this or that" will not be tolerated and "called out" if need be. Bottom line - this is supposed to be a great, fun, and exciting time together. Let's make sure it is for everyone!
- At MPA, we operate as a cohesive team. We are not only business owners and professional photographers, but we are also good friends. With each of us having extensive experience in the field, we relentlessly focus on enhancing our skills through continuous education and self-improvement, both as photographers and educators.
- We value the fact that each of us has a unique approach to teaching. This allows our clients to benefit from different perspectives and thought processes that aid in their learning. Rather than imposing "our" way, the MPA goal is to assist you in discovering and understanding what works best for you as an individual. Our aim is to help you find "your" way.
- We as human beings, possess a strong sense of concern for our actions and strive to achieve excellence. Our utmost effort is all that we can offer, and we anticipate a remarkable collective experience together.
- Our goal is to provide an inclusive experience for all types of photographers with varying skills and personalities on our tours. We strive to cater to diverse photographic abilities within a group setting and accommodate everyone's unique needs. We are passionate about making sure all participants benefit from our tours. We welcome everyone!
- Let's have an AMAZING time together!

-Thank you - The MPA Team

Travel Itinerary

ALASKA

Jun 22nd

Arrival and Overnight

- Arrive in Anchorage , AK
- Overnight

June 23rd

Eagles Tour

- Drive to Homer
- Water Taxi to Between Beaches
- Eagles Session

June 24th, 25th, 26th

Eagles Tour

- Eagles and Wildlife Sessions

June 27th

Depart or Bear Extension

- Water Taxi to Homer
- Depart for Anchorage on your own (Those not on Bear Ext.)
- Overnight Homer

June 28th

Bear Extension

June 29th

Depart for ANC

*Each day will present various photographic opportunities. Based on a number of factors, each day will be flexible to where we go and exactly what we photograph as well as times. This keeps everything fresh and exciting! Plan to experience VERY full days of photography

Travel Itinerary

ALASKA

Flight Information

Anchorage Intl Airport

ARRIVAL - June 22nd -Overnight

DEPART - June 28th if *not on bear extension 28th*

DEPART on June 30th for those on bear extension.

- June 23rd - The group will be picked up the morning of June 23rd and driven to Homer
- June 27th - For those NOT on bear viewing. You need to arrange transportation BACK to A.NC
- June 29th - Those on bear viewing, will be driven back to ANC.
- It is recommended that flights should be arranged the following day back home. It is a long but beautiful drive to and from Homer. In case of delays, do not book an early flight the same day you are going back to Homer.

ACCOMODATIONS

June 22- MPA is at Four Points Sheraton - ANC

June 27, 28 - MPA is at Lands End - Homer

June 29 - MPA is at Four Points Sheraton - ANC

BOOK YOUR HOTELS ASAP!

For those NOT going on bear viewing. The Alaska Bus Company offers one way shuttle back to ANC <https://www.alaskabuscompany.com/>

Health Info

Vaccinations

Some international destinations require certain vaccinations such as Yellow Fever. Please check with your Doctor or travel clinic as well as the country specific web sites about what vaccinations are required. This can also vary depending on where you are originating your flight from if outside of the US. (No vaccinations are required for this tour)

Medications

You should carry an adequate supply of any prescribed medications you may require while traveling. Prescription medicines should always be carried in your hand luggage (not in checked baggage). You should have proof of prescription and if you have a narcotic, be sure to have a doctors note clearly stating you have been prescribed the medication.

Motion Sickness

You may encounter winding roads, waves, and other situations that can cause motion sickness. As we cannot guarantee front seats in vehicles, please be prepared with your own medications that work for you. Ask your doctor for advice.

CBD and Hemp Products

Please note that YOU are responsible for carrying any products which may be illegal in some states or countries. In many countries, the punishment even for CBD oils is SEVERE! Be sure to check your packed items if you regularly use CBD PRIOR TO LEAVING!

Fruit, Animal Products, Foods

These products may also be illegal to carry across state lines and from country to country. BE SURE TO DECLARE ANY ITEMS YOU MAY HAVE. Keep in mind, it is very easy to forget that banana that was handed to you on the plane! This can cause great difficulty for you while traveling. Especially abroad!

Physical Disabilities and Mobility Issues

Travelers with physical disabilities and those who require frequent or ongoing medical attention should advise us of their health situation at the time of booking.

Smoking

Smoking is permitted in designated areas only. We kindly ask you to be patient to this feature and respectful of non - smokers. Especially if you have a roommate that does not smoke. Also, PLEASE bring a small disposable bag(s) to place used cigarette butts in. Do NOT under any circumstances, throw it away on the ground.

Basic Health and Safety

It is important for your own safety that you are in good health and have taken all appropriate precautions. We cannot be responsible for your own health related issues. PLEASE take all needed precautions.

Safety

As participants in our photography tour, we trust that you will exercise caution to avoid putting yourself in danger. It's a universal truth that accidents or health issues can occur anywhere in the world, but deliberately seeking out danger not only endangers you but also burdens the tour guides and fellow travelers. You've acknowledged and accepted these risks by signing a liability waiver agreement, understanding that you are joining this tour at your own risk. This, however, doesn't entitle you to reckless behavior that might jeopardize your safety, disrupt the group, or endanger others.

We urge you to avoid unnecessary risks. Over the years, we have witnessed clients and others in risky environments making unwise decisions—like venturing too close to cliff edges, standing on exposed rocks by turbulent seas, or loitering in the roads. Such actions are not only dangerous; they're ill-advised.

If we, as tour leaders, observe any behavior that we deem unsafe for you or others, we will intervene. Nevertheless, remember that you are primarily responsible for your own safety. It's essential to remain mindful of your environment and not let the pursuit of the perfect photograph cloud your judgment. The pursuit of photography should never come at the cost of your well-being or life. Please prioritize safety above all.

Please avoid these items below and use common sense.

Standing too close to edges of cliffs or in places, you could easily fall or be swept out to sea, being seriously injured or dying.

Standing in or too close to the road.

Carrying too much gear while hiking and/or climbing.

Hiking trails that are too difficult for your ability.

Not being aware of your surroundings at all times.

Not knowing your own limits.

Wearing shoes that are not meant for the task at hand.

Using drugs/and or alcohol that alters the mind and your safety.

Going out alone or without letting the tour leaders know where you are at.



These are just some of the items we have seen and are asking you to avoid. As you are an adult, it is your responsibility to be safety conscious and minimize risk. Please use common sense.

Travel Insurance

PLEASE READ. YES YOU NEED IT!

We are SO EXCITED and are sure you must be as well about your upcoming trip! You are joining us on this amazing photographic adventure! In our experience leading trips, we have seen a lot of things come up, and in many cases, LAST MINUTE. For this reason, it is HIGHLY recommended to have trip insurance.

Remember, airfare, hotels, tours, as well as our policies are non-refundable. Trip insurance can help in the event of any unforeseen legitimate issue before OR during a trip. You MUST understand the importance of this and why we constantly tell people to get insurance!

Protect yourself~protect your investment. You would never imagine that you would not be taking the wonderful trip you are planning! Life happens! There are so many things that can change before your travel dates that might prevent you from traveling. There are also events that can change your plans while you are traveling that might require you to alter your trip, return home early or be delayed due to accident or illness. Lost luggage, lost documents or lost belongs can also hamper your well- made plans!

We are NOT an insurance provider, and we can simply refer you to someone that can help you obtain coverage. There are several trip insurance carriers, and it can be confusing to know where to get the best coverage and rates. For this reason, we are working with Brandon Hughbanks of Travel Insurance Center. Brandon represents most of the top travel insurance carriers and can help you get the best rate for the options you need based on where you live as well.

We LOVE our tours, and we LOVE what we do. For them to be the very best available anywhere, we must clarify once again, McKay Photography Academy policies. To make sure that as a photography tour participant, our policies are understood with-out question.

Due to an influx of people contacting us asking us for help, understanding, refunds, credit and more when something unexpected happens and they are unable to attend, we need to address this once again. This is written notice that if for ANY REASON you are unable to attend, that we are unable to refund or credit your trip.

We are being very clear as stated in our policies, contracts, web site, emails, and conversations that trip insurance IS your security for the unexpected. We are not and cannot be responsible to do much when a choice is made by someone to not obtain insurance especially considering the amount of time we spend informing people to obtain it.

EVERY tour there is a situation, and we cannot stress enough, PLEASE get insurance. If something happens and you are unable to attend for a variety of possible covered reasons, proper trip insurance will help you. IF YOU WERE TO GET HURT ABROAD, YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE WITHOUT IT!

Of course, we would never want or expect something like that to happen, but it is best to be covered and prepared! Any specific questions about insurance coverage, provisions, claims, etc. MUST be answered by your chosen provider as McKay Photography Academy or any of their team, is unable to do more than give you the facts of our policies and that we highly recommend trip insurance.

**Contact Brandon Hughbanks directly at: Toll Free: 1-866-979-6753 Ext. 3636 Direct: 402-343-3636
email - bhughbanks@travelinsurancecenter.com**



Culture and Respect

Culture, Differences, Respect

- Please respect the customs and traditions of the places you visit and be appreciative of any help you are given.
- Treat everyone including those serving you with kindness , grace and without ordering them to do what you need.
- BE FLEXIBLE, because you will NEED to be! It is exciting and fun to have things different from our days at home. The reality of travel is that schedules and time frames WILL change. The more you can just go with the flow, the better off you will be!
- If you are set on knowing everything two days in advance, you will find that you will be frustrated with the tour and with us.
- For many reasons, we sometimes change itinerary. Please trust that we know what we are doing, we are working on your behalf, and to have the best experience possible for everyone.

Food

- We will accommodate those with food allergies, vegetarians, and various dietary needs if we know in advance. We will do our best to do so, but please understand, sometimes in foreign countries, communication is difficult.
- Please note that in many places in the world, beef is not what's for dinner!
- Traveling means trying new things and that includes food!
- Do not under any circumstances say "ewwww, that's gross, I'm not eating that" when someone brings out food. It is rude and disrespectful. Simply pass and try something else.



General Travel Tips

Reusable Water Bottle

In an effort to do our part reducing plastic, we ask clients to consider bringing reusable water bottles. We will provide jugs of water to all guest when traveling in vehicles for photography sessions.

Travel Adapter

We recommend carrying a simple "All in One" adapter that works with various outlets around the world. There are several brands. We use the picka and have found it works great. On international tours, there is no need to bring a heavy and bulky power converter, they tend to not work well. Most electronics run between 110 and 220/240 volts. We always travel with a small extension cord with USB outlets as well.



Extra Glasses

If you need glasses too function, be sure to bring an extra pair of glasses. Remember your sunglasses.

Passport/Visa

International Travel - Make sure your passport is valid for a minimum of 6 months from time you depart the tour. Please make sure you have at LEAST two empty pages in your passport for stamps and VISA



General Travel Tips

Air Travel

To avoid jet-lag try to stay hydrated on the plane, and if possible avoid alcohol. Getting up, stretching and muscle flexing exercises can help circulation. Some people find it helpful to bring sleeping pills for the longest flight.

“Pick me ups” can be helpful such as Vitamin B. Drink mixes like Zipfiz, Emergen-c, Airborn and No-Jet-Lag tabs can be good to have handy as well. Some people experience constipation after long flights so you may want to bring along something for that as well.

Batteries

All lithium and camera batteries should ONLY be with you as carry-on. Do not pack in your regular luggage. Keep camera batteries and any lithium batteries in carry on. DO NOT store in camera in flight as electronics at altitude can result in dead pixels”in your sensor.

Luggage

Please limit to ONE soft sided duffel bag for transport purposes.

Camera Bag
One Carry on and personal item

It is a good idea to place your contact info in your luggage as well, just in case a luggage tag comes off.

Use TSA approved luggage locks.

Place an air tag or tracking in each piece of luggage

Change of clothes in carry-on

An extra day or two of change of clothes in a carry on, is also advised in case luggage gets misplaced by airlines.

Extra Collapsible Bag

If you bring an extra ‘collapsible bag’ with you then you might have extra room to hand-carry something home with you and/or bring souvenirs. It is not recommended to put any breakables in your checked luggage if it can be avoided.

Weather

Check the weather a couple weeks prior to travel and again every 3-4 days to see the trend. Weather can always be unpredictable. In Tanzania expect avg temps to be around 75f- 80f during the day.

- Have good rain hooded lightweight jacket is best and a pair of water proof shoes. Strong rain showers can come in.

- Please do not ask us each day what the weather will be like. Everyone has their own comfort and temperature levels. We simply go outside and see and use the weather app.

Debit/Credit Cards/Cash

ATMS/Currency Exchange

ATMs are in most locations in cities now throughout the world. though not all ATMs are accessible 24 hours. ATMs generally accept all major debit, credit, and cash-only cards. Cirrus (tel. 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and PLUS (tel. 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) cards are almost universally accepted in ATMs.

PLEASE check with your bank ahead of the tour to make sure your debit/credit card can be used at an ATM and that you have the correct PIN number. Let your financial institution know you are traveling and the locations so they do not place "hold" on your card thinking it is fraud.

If you try to get monies out of an ATM, and it does not work, DO NOT ATTEMPT MORE THAN THREE TIMES as the machine may keep your card.

Debit vs Credit Cards

We recommend avoiding using a debit card whenever possible for security reasons. ALWAYS travel with at least two different credit cards. One is for back-up if it does not work or if fraud/theft happens. American Express is not as widely accepted in many locations around the world. Be sure to have a VISA and Mastercard.

Cash to Bring

The question of how much cash to bring is asked of us often. This is a difficult question as everyone has different spending habits and preferences of how they spend. This also varies greatly depending on where the tour is taking place.

It is always a good idea to have some cash on you for emergencies.



Gratuities

We often receive a multitude of thoughts and feedback from our clients about tipping. The range of perspectives is as broad as the spectrum of weather patterns! We acknowledge that the topic of tipping is sensitive, and it holds significance for us too. There are intricate reasons behind our established tipping policies. Below are some common inquiries we've addressed.

Q: Factoring in the cost of travel, flights, and tipping for the driver and guides, the expenses add up. Isn't that costly?

A: Indeed, it can be costly, and we are empathetic to that. But the truth is, in much of the tourism sector, individuals who work to ensure your trip is memorable put in tremendous effort and largely depend on tips to support their families and cover their living expenses.

Q: Shouldn't the tips for drivers and guides be included in the overall trip cost? I've seen this practice with other travel companies.

A: We've explored various approaches to this issue, and regardless of our efforts, there's always a divergence in opinion. While larger organizations might include tipping in their pricing, it often results in modest tips that do not truly reward the effort put in by the service providers. We believe that offering generous tips is a meaningful way to show appreciation for the dedicated work of those who serve you during your trip.

Q: Is it possible to provide you with the tips in advance?

A: Regrettably, we cannot accept and carry the sum of everyone's tips into a destination country. The tourism industry has stringent legal requirements to account for every cent received prior to a tour and its allocation. This creates logistical challenges. However, for some tours, we may collect a predetermined tipping amount after arrival, so individuals are not burdened with the need to tip continuously, except for minor gratuities like someone assisting with luggage.

For MPA, having people just choose on their own has worked the best. If someone doesn't want to tip, that is also their prerogative.

Domestic Tours - Domestic tours have no tipping guidelines unless specified.

International Tours - International tours will each have specifics that will be shared ahead of time regarding the tour and amounts needed as well as type of currency, and protocol for handling. This will be shared a few weeks ahead of arrival.

THE MPA TEAM:

This is totally at your discretion and a suggested amount. You are of course welcome to do more if you desire and know that the team truly appreciates it and will do all they can to help you with anything on this tour!

Suggested minimum amounts for MPA team members.

- A short 3-4 day domestic tour - \$50-\$60 per person per instructor
- A longer 5-7 day domestic tour \$80 - \$100 per photographer to each instructor.
- International Tour - We find the average person as a photographer tends to give \$100-\$150 per photographer to each instructor for the tour for an average 10 day tour.

Security

Have you ever mentioned an upcoming trip to your friends and received a response like the one below?

"I've talked to some other friends about it, and they're all advising against my trip. They've mentioned concerns like gun violence, potential racism (mentioning that just wandering into the wrong neighborhood could be dangerous), and overly aggressive police. Is this really such a widespread issue? What steps should I take to ensure my trip is safe? Are the negative aspects just overrepresented in the media, or are these genuine concerns for tourists?"

This is a real of inquiry from a Dutch tourists considering a visit to the United States. For those of us living here, it's easy to grow accustomed to our everyday environment and overlook potential risks. While it's true that fear should not deter you from exploring new places, it's still crucial to be conscious and prepared. Being vigilant and aware of your surroundings is sound advice for any traveler, regardless of their destination.

Here are a few practical safety and security tips while traveling.

- Do not use your debit card for purchases.
- Keep your passport on you at all times or in a hotel safe.
- Keep an extra Credit Card available.
- Leave expensive valuables such as jewelry at home.
- Make sure to have copies of all important documents (Passport, Driver's license, Travel Insurance Documents, Itinerary etc.) A digital copy on your phone AND stored via digital so you can retrieve is also recommended.
- Make sure your family and friends have emergency contact information for you.
- Use TSA approved travel locks on your luggage.
- NEVER leave your camera gear on the ground behind you!
- Use the buddy system.
- Please be sure to let people know where you are going and go with a friend!
- Make sure your phone is charged and carry a spare phone charger with you.
- Keep aware of where you are and all your surroundings.
- Be aware of pick pockets and those looking to exploit tourists, especially in larger cities.
- When leaving a hotel, take a business card with you so you can give that to a taxi driver to get you back safely.
- Be observant of what is happening around you and use common sense. Trust your gut if something doesn't feel right.

Group Dynamics

Embarking on a journey with a photography group is often a remarkable experience. It comes with numerous benefits, as we've observed that virtually all group members form strong bonds and lasting friendships. The conclusion of our tours is often marked by heartfelt farewells, underscoring the sense of camaraderie that develops during our shared adventures.

We anticipate that this tour will be engaging, adaptable, and a superb chance for everyone to enhance their photography skills while exploring new places together. Our commitment is to uphold the McKay ethos of Photography, Travel, Friendship, and Adventure.

However, there is the occasional time when someone may struggle with group dynamics or exhibit a consistently negative demeanor. In such cases, we encourage kindness and respect among all participants. It's natural to connect with certain individuals more than others, and that's perfectly fine. Should you find yourself not resonating with someone, we advise maintaining peace and steering clear of confrontations.

The secret to a fulfilling group experience is to embrace the moment, engage with fellow travelers, stay calm, and be adaptable – allowing yourself to enjoy the trip without worrying about minor details like the logistics of transportation or seating arrangements. Letting trivial issues get under your skin not only diminishes your own enjoyment but can also cast a shadow over the group's collective mood. We are committed to preventing such negativity from affecting the tour.

On the flip side, carrying a positive, laid-back, and enthusiastic attitude can have an infectious effect on the group, enhancing the overall experience. Tours characterized by vibrant energy, enjoyable interactions, and a willingness to go with the flow often result in the most memorable and satisfying adventures for everyone involved.

At McKay Photography Academy (MPA), we take pride in delivering outstanding photography tours. With a track record of guiding hundreds of clients across the globe, our passion for what we do shines through. It's important to recognize that not all aspects of touring can be controlled; unexpected changes and unforeseen events are part of the adventure.

This tour is your opportunity to unwind, relish your time with us, and fully immerse yourself in the experience you're about to undertake. Allow the MPA team to assist and educate you in your photography pursuits. In short, cherish the company of your fellow travelers as we embark on this journey of photography and exploration together.



Communication

Group Communication

Approximately 2-3 weeks prior to the tour and during our tour we will utilize the app "GroupMe" to stay in touch and provide you with updates throughout our time together. GroupMe provides free group messaging - like a private chat room for a small group.

This is a great way for you to also communicate with your fellow photographers and tour members. We recommend installing the app on your phone and signing up for the free service prior to the start of the tour. We will send out invitations to join the chat in the weeks leading up to the tour.

Saying hello via the Groupme app ahead of time, is an excellent way to start getting to know and bonding with the group ahead of the tour! GroupMe works over cell networks, wifi and via SMS.

You can find more information here. <https://groupme.com/apps>

Communication with MPA

Clients try to reach us in many ways. Please note that we cannot be available 24 hrs a day on all forms of communication apps . Due to our heavy travel schedule, we ask you to use the following protocols to communicate with us to get the quickest response.

Prior and after a tour - Please use the email hello@mckaylive.com as the primary form of communication prior to each tour. The MPA team all have access and this allows for a quick response.

During a tour - Please use the tour groupme messaging. If it needs to be private, please ask the tour leader to reach out to you. They will set up a time to meet with you or to communicate separately via preferred methods of each person.

Please also note that while groupme allows for PM's. The team does not always see a private message. Those easily get buried in the communication happening with all of the various tour groups going on and many times get missed.

Emergency /Flight Delays/ Assistance

- 1- Use the hello@mckaylive.com email address.
- 2- Send a message on groupme.

Photography Gear



Photography Gear

Learning and Fun

For many of you, this may be your first photography tour and not only are you unsure of what to do and how this will go, you may be overwhelmed with what to bring! Do not worry, we are here to help.

Please understand there will be various levels of photo participants on this trip. If you are a beginning photographer, we will help you every step of the way! If all this seems a little daunting for you, no worries, we will help you get what you want/ need for this trip. There is no need for you to feel intimidated or out of place if this is your first trip with McKay Photography Academy. Our goal is to make sure you learn and have a great time no matter what level you are at.

General Photography Tour Suggested Gear List

- Manual Setting Capable Camera(s)* (Having a backup body is recommended - at the minimum a point and shoot or a newer phone could be used as a backup)
- Camera Lenses (See Lenses Page)
- Camera Bag (We love ThinkTank and Mindshift Gear-(See Upcoming Pages)
- Plenty of Memory Cards (Multiple 128GB/256 GB cards)
- Batteries & Charger Minimum 2 batteries- Cold Weather Tours - 3
- Sturdy Tripod AND an extra plate
- Cable Release - You can also use the built in self-timer for long exposures.
- Laptop - Optional but recommended.
- External hard drive - For images storage & backup
- Rain Sleeve - Covers your camera and allows for shooting in rain/heavy snow.
- Small Flashlight / Headlamp
- Lens cloth or lens wipes

A specific gear suggestion list for your tour will follow in the upcoming pages.

Lenses

Lens Choice

Selecting the ideal camera lens is a personal choice, as there's no single lens that excels in every situation. Often, we're asked for lens recommendations, and our advice remains consistent: consider what you're trying to capture. Your vision, the desired perspective, and the intent behind your photograph will guide your selection of lenses.

For a well-rounded kit, consider including a wide-angle lens for expansive scenes, a mid-range lens for general use, and a telephoto lens for distant subjects. Everyone has a unique way of seeing the world, and there's no incorrect lens choice—it's about how you wish to interpret and capture your surroundings.

Lenses vary significantly in price, from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, based on their quality, focal length, and aperture capabilities. As you grow in your craft, you'll discover the lenses that align best with your preferences and budget.

When preparing for a photographic tour, consider the weight of your equipment. We find that many people carry too much gear, and complicate what they really need to have. It is preferable not to carry all gear during hikes or urban explorations, yet on tours where transportation is readily available, it is easy to have most lenses within reach in the vehicle.

However, weight is always an essential consideration. For tours focused on wildlife, a long telephoto lens is indispensable. Conversely, for astrophotography, a wide-angle lens with a small f-stop such as 2.8 is more suitable.

If you're ever uncertain about what gear to buy or rent, or need advice on lens selection, don't hesitate to reach out for guidance. We have some specific lens recommendations for this tour in the following pages.



Filters

Lens Hood/Shade

Don't waste money on UV filters. In general, we are not a fan of UV filters, as they offer little protection from a fall, and they reduce the quality of your lens. People will spend thousands of dollars to have very sharp glass, only to place a \$35 filter over it. Use a lens hood!

We prefer lens hoods as they do offer some protection from falls and nicely protect the end of the lens from coming into contact with random objects without degrading image quality. We do prefer camera brand lens hoods/shades. We have tried a few of the third party lens hoods and they often fit just a bit awkwardly making the putting on and taking off just a bit slower.



Circular Polarizer filters are useful.

Benefits of a CP filter include:

- A reduction of reflections and glare
- A reduction of haze and blue cast in landscapes
- Adds saturation to your sky and greenery



Recommended Brands for thread mount to your lens.

- Budget (Tiffen)
- Middle (Hoya)
- High-end (B+W)

With all filters, be sure to get the right size screw on for your lens. Ex 77mm. 72mm etc

Filters

Specialty Filters

ND Filters: ND (Neutral Density) filters are used to take away light in the middle of the day to create longer exposures. As an example, if you want a waterfall to have that silky smooth look, but it is the middle of the day, it will be difficult to take a long exposure as too much light is coming in over-exposing the image.

By placing a ND filter on, you reduce light and therefore can do longer exposures. You can do this for other images as well such as clouds moving and smoothing out a lake.

We recommend AVOIDING a Variable ND filter. No matter what the store says to get! The reason is that at higher aperture settings, you can see where the variance changes in your image. It tends to look like a weird X through the image.

ND Filters come in all types of numbers that represent how much light is taken away. From very little (1 stop) to totally dark (10 stop). This is why salespeople like to recommend the variable all in one. The darker the filter, the more light you can take away thus creating even longer exposures.

However, rather than that, using just one or two will usually get the results you like. If you want to choose one for now, start with a 6 Stop ND filter. This will take away 6 stops of light and get you results for most situations you may want.



Tripods

A tripod is essential for capturing clear images during night photography and when utilizing long exposures. It's important to choose a tripod that is both light for easy transport and robust enough to ensure stability.

On every tour, we encounter participants struggling with tripods that are too weak to support their cameras properly. It's crucial to have a reliable tripod, but this does not necessarily mean spending a lot of money. However, inexpensive video tripods, like those for \$39 from electronics stores, or second-hand ones that might come from a relative, are inadequate.

The whole point of taking long exposure photos is to keep your camera perfectly still. If you're in need of a tripod or are contemplating getting one, don't hesitate to reach out to us via email for advice.

Here is a budget friendly tripod we recommend:

- MeFoto Road Trip (Titanium) is an excellent and very reasonable priced tripod. It is lightweight and yet sturdy for most applications.



Memory Cards

Memory Cards

You will shoot WAY more images than you would ever expect on this trip. Because we are photographing almost the entire time and you will want to shoot A LOT to get the best images, have EXTRA CARDS!

We will also be teaching you to shoot in RAW mode, which is the highest quality but also uses the most memory. We cannot stress enough the importance of having enough memory cards as there are no stores always available out on the tour! We recommend 128gb and 256gb cards.

Do not try to shoot everything on a single big memory card UNLESS YOU BACK UP daily to at least two locations. If that card goes bad, your camera gets stolen, and all your images are in one place, that would be a painful lesson to learn! Even if you choose to do this, ALWAYS HAVE A BACK UP CARD ALONG!

We also recommend that until you are certain that your memory card has been backed up in two locations, when it is not in use, to turn it over in the card holder case to indicate it has not yet been backed up and should not be used.

Preparing and Formatting Memory Cards for Use

To clean cards, it is best to format your cards in camera vs hitting delete. This entirely cleans the card and leaves no hidden memory. **Make sure all cards, including new ones, are formatted and READY BEFORE arriving!**

Downloading & Backup tips

Download your cards each day to your laptop AND to an external drive OR download cards to a computer and save exposed memory cards as is. The key is to have your images in 2 places and packed separately from each other.

Be sure ALL images have transferred to TWO locations before formatting a card for reuse!

Your equipment can be replaced, however your memories and images cannot. You will want to back up EVERYTHING each day! Store your external drive in your suitcase and used memory cards in your carry-on.

Online backup can seem like a good option but can take too long to upload raw images in the field and where no Internet is available.

iPad - We have had several guests try to work with their iPads on tour for a back up solution. We have seen a lot of frustration with this and still recommend bringing a laptop.

Other Gear

Filter Systems

For those that are ready to take their images with filters to the next level and have worked with filters in the past, filter systems such as the Maven quick and easy magnetic system is excellent and high-end for the serious photographer. They are expensive but the best.



Rain Sleeve

Buy an inexpensive plastic one, which should cost less than \$10. You can also cut a hole in a shower cap from your hotel room for free! This is a great option in a pinch if the weather is going bad.

Our friends at ThinkTank Photo have released a new new concept in weather protection, the Emergency Rain Cover. It can be quickly and easily deployed when outdoor conditions change. They will be a welcome small and lightweight addition to the kits of any photographer shooting out of doors.



Head Lamp

Bringing a head lamp so that you can work at night/early mornings with your hands free is also invaluable. Be sure to have one that has the red lamp on it as well as this helps keep bring light down to a minimum while we are shooting.

Make sure you can operate the red light function easily as you will use this to not distract other photographers as much.

Batteries and Charger

Make sure your batteries are all FULLY CHARGED before we go out to shoot! We recommend having at least 3 batteries with you.

Remember, travel with your batteries in your camera bag and NOT in your camera body. They cannot be in your checked in luggage and do not keep them in the camera.

ALASKA GEAR

- Camera & Back-Up Camera (A must have)
- A long tele-photo such as a 100-500 is a MUST!
- Plenty of memory cards and/or back up options to re-use cards if need.
- Circular Polarizer filter may be helpful but optional.
- Three Camera Batteries
- Battery Charger
- Comfortable Camera strap
- Camera Bag that can be carried over the shoulders while walking.
- Hiking Poles (if you struggle with uneven ground)



Clothing

Expect that it will be cool during the day and very cool in the evenings and at night. You will be on the coast! Check the weather prior to leaving, but be prepared as rain can come in extremely fast.

LAYERS ARE KEY

Alaska can have weather that changes **DRASTICALLY** within hours. Layers will be important as it can get cool in the evenings especially at any of the higher elevations.

IMPORTANT - You may need a rain jacket. We also recommend in case it rains, to have an outer water proof shell pant available.

Footwear

Water-Proof hiking style shoes or boots are recommended.

Light Gloves

Hat/Beanie

Bathing suit (there is a hot tub at Between Beaches)

If you struggle with uneven ground, hiking poles can be very useful



Gear Advice

Toby Gelston, Photorec.tv and MPA Lead Instructor

We have a very special relationship and partnership with Tobias Gelston of PhotoRec.tv. Toby runs a VERY COOL YouTube channel focusing on camera gear and equipment. He has over 300k subscribers! Toby is also one of our main instructors and an integral part of MPA.

Toby's goal is simple: He wants to help you be a better photographer by helping you find the gear you need and the know-how to use it. If you have any questions about gear, you can email Toby directly via Toby@mckaylive.com and he will help you get what you need.

He knows TONS of gear info.

Toby is a participant in the Amazon Services LLC Associates Program, an affiliate advertising program designed to provide a means for sites to earn advertising fees by advertising and linking to [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Toby also participates with B&H Photo Video. If you use Toby for advice, and even if you don't, please purchase through his links to either Amazon or B&H. You will get the best prices and help him out as well! This costs no more for you and helps support our friend Toby, which in turn, helps us give you even better photographic education!



Here are the links:

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

[B&H Photo](https://www.bhphotovideo.com)

Tour Prep



The more you are prepared with your gear, the better your experience will be.

We have many videos and written tutorials to help you prepare and understand getting around your camera and tripods.

Please visit the Tour Resource and Preparation page prior to your tour. If you are unfamiliar with how to change your settings such as your Shutter, Aperture and ISO, the videos here will help you so you are much more prepared for the learning process in the field.

<https://mckaylive.com/tour-resources/>



PHOTO ENTHUSIAST
NETWORK

Interested in starting your photographic education before the tour and are not yet a member of Photo Enthusiast Network?

We encourage you to join today. This is a great place for you to grow, learn and belong in a wonderful photographic community run by the MPA team! Not only that, as an annual member you receive a tour discount voucher that more than pays for the membership!

Photo Enthusiast Network is the educational and fun photography community run by David and Ally McKay, and Toby Gelston. FILLED with educational tutorials, videos, and weekly education as well as an amazing community of Photo Enthusiast to help share in your passion for photography!

We are SO PROUD of the community of over 500 members we have built and this is such a great resource. PLUS, as a member after your first year you get a \$150 discount once a year for any MPA tour of your choosing!

[JOIN TODAY HERE!](#)



We LOVE working with ThinkTank & MindShift Gear and sharing their gear with our clients. When ordering cases and packs through our links you receive a free gift when you purchase at least \$50 of gear, free ground shipping, and the best customer service in the industry!

[Click here to order directly from ThinkTank and MindShift.](#)

Ally and David currently use the ThinkTank Airport Roller Derby bag to fit all their gear in while GETTING to the location. Their Roller Derby's have traveled to all 7 continents more than once and continue to stand up to the hardest of travel conditions. Once there, the McKay's prefer to travel lighter and do NOT want to carry everything all the time so they use smaller bags for daily excursions.

For people who prefer a larger backpack based on what they are carrying and how it fits their body shape. The preferred camera bag of Toby is the Mindshift 26L backpack. An awesome choice.



[Order Here!](#)

LENS PRO

TO GO

We have partnered with LensProToGo for camera and lens rentals! Can't afford to buy or want to try it out first? Then RENT IT! Visit LensProToGo.com today! You can rent TOP OF THE LINE cameras and lenses and tripods for very little money.

Let them know you will be on this tour with us! You can use the code below from Photo Enthusiast Network for 15% off any order. Sometimes, they have a special going as well, so always call, let them know you are going on our tour, and see what they have available. They are always very helpful!

[USE CODE PEN15 at anytime for 15% off your order!](#)

As an example, this Canon 100-500mm lens that cost \$2900 can be rented for 25 days for \$275 with the 15% off code!



SPIDER CAMERA HOLSTER

The SpiderPro Camera Holster is Spider Holster's breakthrough product, offering unique, unparalleled comfort and safety. Mounting your camera to your belt is a great way to relieve the weight and stress a camera with a heavy lens can add to your neck and back with a traditional camera strap. The leather hand strap is also very comfortable and feels safe around your hand.



[Order Here!](#)



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GLACIER NAT'L PARK
GRAND CANYON NAT'L PARK
SMOKY MOUNTAINS NAT'L PARK
KATMAI NAT'L PARK
KAUAI, HI
MT. RAINIER NAT'L PARK
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