There’s only one way to really experience the Kenai Peninsula: Expedition Style.

Above: The aluminum-hulled Sea Star navigates the ice field near Northwestern Glacier of Kenai Fjords National Park.

A lone man walked into a Texas office building with two roses and a gun. Allegedly, he greeted the secretary with swarthly good boy charm and offered her the first rose. Probably flattered by his gentlemanly rancher demeanor, she let him pass to the office of an old tycoon who was working at his desk and the name was emblazoned on his new yacht Aquarius that he acquired from a Pacific Northwest boatyard owner. The yacht was covered and waiting for him on the shores of Lake Union, and the tycoon was likely fixing to take cues from John Wayne with plans of cruising Puget Sound and beyond.

The lone man tossed the second rose on the desk, causing the tycoon to stir from his thoughts and stare at the flower. The lone man drew his gun on his target’s exposed head. Before he could pull the trigger in revenge for a land dispute, the victim glanced up. The upward glance spared his life, but he still took a bullet to the head. Before he could pull the trigger in revenge for a land dispute, the victim glanced up. The upward glance spared his life, but he still took a bullet to the head.

“Surprisingly, there just aren’t that many people up there doing what we’re trying to do,” said Captain Meyer. “If you want to actually experience Prince William Sound or the Kenai Peninsula and get a real boating experience, your options are super limited.”

Additionally, I was keen to experience a proper expedition-style charter aboard the singular Sea Star. I’ve plied Alaskan waters as an exhausted Race to Alaska (R2AK) sailor, aboard a boat-style charter with Northwest Explorations, and as a commercial deckhand trying to fill the hold with salmon in Prince William Sound. But never had I experienced a private berth with an suite head (complete with shower) and a professional chef taking care of the meals, while also seeking that more intimate, fewer-than-a-dozen-clients feel. A challenge for this hybrid chartering world I was entering would be to balance the luxurious and rugged, relaxation and adventure. Could the balance be struck, especially with the lack of an official standard to lean on?

Of course, my thoughts turned to my own selfish boating aspirations. What would it take to explore this remarkable part of the world on my own hull someday? Be it sail or power? When talking about The Kenai, we’re talking about hard work in terms of effort and preparation but also big rewards with world-class experiences. How would I grow as a mariner with this trip? I vowed to keep my notepad close.

Finally, and most pressing, I felt a deep yearning to know what The Kenai experience was all about. For all my love for and travels of the 49th state, I had yet to visit this famous part of it. Captain Meyer was correct in that there really is no easy way to get out there. While it’s simple enough
to take a train from Anchorage to Seward or to fly into Homer, the protected wilderness in between has precious few access roads. Seaplane drop-offs for anglers and kayakers, or day tours from Seward to the glaciers and back are the most common ways. I'll confess, to have a shot with one of the few chartered vessels that go to those wild waters and lay anchor made me salivate.

My curiosity could only be sated one way; to strike north with Sea Star and experience it all for myself.

**Homer to Kachemak**

You know you're taking a plane Alaska-style when there's no security checkpoint for the walk-on dual prop and Senator Lisa Murkowski is talking policy in hushed tones on her cell phone in the terminal. After a for the walk-on dual prop and Senator Lisa Murkowski is talking policy in hushed tones. I'll confess, to have a shot with one of the few chartered vessels that go to those wild waters and lay anchor made me salivate.

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at high tide. A sleeping mother otter with pup almost drifted to us before she awoke. With an indignant squeak and giant black eyes wide open, she paddled slowly away.

ON TO THE FJORDS

The Homer to Seward direction ramps up the intensity as the terrain becomes more and more fjord-like. The first glacier we saw was the Petrof Glacier on day four, a non-tidewater glacier tucked in the mountainous backdrop. A tease of what was to come.

It was also on day four that we steamed through Nuka Passage, Nuka Island to starboard, and left Kachemak Bay State Park behind. We were officially in Kenai Fjords National Park. The feeling of being in the big leagues settled over us as mountains stopped gracefully dipping into the sea and started diving with utter abandon. Any moment not spent on the foredeck soaking it all in felt like a crime, a guarantee to miss something truly spectacular be it flocks of puffins, more humpback whales, or yet another stretch of the nonstop landscape masterpiece painting we navigated through.

A highlight of the day was always the family-style dinner at sheltered anchorages. Talk wandered naturally from what we were going to see tomorrow to Turkish politics and continued until the summer sun set around midnight.

A little over halfway through the trip we reached Northwestern Glacier, our first tidewater glacier. In true expedition-style, Sea Star didn’t shy away from the action, edging close in the ice field. We arrived mid-afternoon and had the whole place to ourselves.

“The day trips from Seward literally have 30 to 45 minutes scheduled for the glacier,” explained Captain Meyer. “We can stay here for hours if we want.” Turns out, we did want. You miss much of a glacier’s behavior when it’s treated as a thing to gawk at for a few minutes and get bored by. To appreciate a glacier you need hours to let your eyes be tricked by the scale of the ice; the different textures from smooth surfaces to spikey towers. When you see ice calve, you need to feel the wake under the hull and wonder where the next weakness in the structure lies. You need to worry about the great ice giant’s future, the moraine sandbar representing the glacier’s ancient maximum several nautical miles behind.

The journey through Kenai Fjords National Park included Aialik and Holgate glaciers, also epically sized tidewater glaciers. A trio of orcas, two females and a calf, distracted us for hours as they worked the shore for salmon. Cataract Cove was another incredible visit, essentially a massive granite wall over which several waterfalls cascaded, fed by an alpine glacier hidden from view. Captain Teevin push Sea Star’s nose right into the spray, the expedition-style way.

DOES IT WORK?

As I nursed a farewell beer with Engin at the Seward Brewing Company on day seven, I started to reflect on whether I found the answers I originally sought.

As far as the cast of characters was concerned, I was not disappointed. Somehow juggling the conflicting roles of being at their client’s service while also acting as leaders and stewards is no easy feat. In more ways than one, that Captain Meyer both drives Sea Star and acts as sommelier with wine recommendations aboard perfectly encapsulates how NPE rolls. That these professionals (varied resumes abound) have coalesced somehow does it all without making hard concessions. If you’re a creature of comfort, the luxurious salon, your private stateroom with shower, and the chef’s diligence will be much appreciated as you dip your toes in the unfamiliar. If you’re after the rugged experience, Sea Star still plies through 30-knot winds like the commercial fishermen and the kayaks are at your beck and call. Even gluttons for punishment will appreciate the

IN COMMAND

CAPTAIN ERIK TEEVIN

Captain Erick Teevin is the founder and owner of North Pacific Expeditions. His background includes decades at Boeing as a software and electrical engineer, a professional mariner with stints captaining the North American commercial tender for Ocean Beauty Seafoods, lift manager at Telluride Ski Resort, Colorado, and more. You can find Captain Teevin in the off season as a volunteer skipper aboard the historic wooden steamship vessel Virginia V in Seattle.

CAPTAIN TRACY MEYER

Captain Tracy Meyer has spent the bulk of her life as a mariner, first on the University of Washington sailing team and then as a Surface Warfare Officer in the U.S. Navy for eight years. Meyer brings a lot to the table aboard Sea Star with her 100 Ton Masters License, 200 Ton Mates License, NOLS Wilderness First Responder credentials, and countless other skills including acting as naturalist and sommelier.

CHEF GREG CLAUS

Claus is a rotating chef aboard Sea Star. Originally from the Mansfield, Ohio area, his culinary career has taken him all over the country and ultimately to the Pacific Northwest where he’s been a part of many high-profile culinary projects. “I do all the cooking at home too,” he said, “I learn something new every time. That’s part of the fun!” The author of this article vouches for his excellent meals ranging from themes like “ode to the spruce tip” and decadent desserts. You can reach him at chefclaus@gmail.com.
As far as growing my own knowledge, I feel far more informed than I would’ve thought. Not only will captains Teevin and Meyer eagerly talk boat with you, but they’ll even show you how to start the engines and weigh anchor if you ask them. They have that instructor bent, further reinforced by their new boating operations workshops during relocation runs and in Puget Sound during the off-season. A scouting trip with NPE combined with extensive preparation and resources like the book Exploring Alaska’s Kenai Fjords by David WM. Miller should set you, and me, up for cruising success.

To my most pressing questions about what The Kenai experience was all about, it was mid-beer sip in Seward when I realized this was a place to be felt, not explained. Descriptors like rugged, wild, and the like are apt, but my attempts at such prose are inadequate. In isolation, other artistic mediums aren’t up to task either. It’s easy to find jaw-dropping photography of the region, but even the most excellent of them seem lacking. What is the visual of a feeding humpback mother without the sound of her calf’s breath? What is the sound of its breath without the old fish smell? To wax poetic of calving glaciers is a start, but what is the description of a fjord without the funneled gusts of chilled wind sending sensual goosebumps up your arms? What are the goosebumps without the dread that the glaciers could be gone in our lifetimes?

Finally, no description of Sea Star is complete without the good-natured banter of the crew, the post-dinner chats of whatever you please, and being on the hook under the midnight sun. A morning beer ritual with a friendly Turk aboard. The inner body high when appreciating that you haven’t seen any other boats in days. Experiencing The Kenai expedition-style hits a person at every level and left me both speechless and with so much to say. If you have a shot, I say go for it. Just leave the guns and roses in Texas.

Norris Comer is the managing editor of Northwest Yachting magazine. Say hi on Facebook at Norris Nelson Comer, follow on Instagram @norriscomer, or send an email at norris@nwyachting.com.

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**Boat Names**
- Since 1976
- Completely Custom
- 10+ Year Lifespan

**Wraps**
- Cost-Saving Alternative to Paint
- Easily Repaired
- 7-10+ Year Lifespan

**Striping**
- Multiple Sizes and Colors
- Quick & Easy Upgrade
- 10+ Year Lifespan