

Running Towards Home

Story and photos by Melissa Norris

The famed journalist William Bolitho once said, "Adventure must start with running away from home." That statement certainly has merit. In fact, it holds as much water as the Kenai River on any given day, but sometimes an adventure can take place while running towards home, or more accurately, running towards your home away from home.

Located on Midway Drive in Sterling, set on a hill overlooking the turquoise aquatic wonder known as the Kenai, Eagle's Eye Vacation Rentals is that perfect home away from home and an ideal jumping-off point for a Kenai Peninsula adventure. For those of you who don't have the full grasp on the geography yet, their location on the Kenai is known as the middle river. It's central for anyone fishing any section of the river and also for driving down to Ninilchik or Homer for a day in the saltwater.

Eagle's Eye Vacation Rentals is owned by a loving couple, Ron and Katya Kruckenberg, and features four fully furnished rental units and a new two-bedroom vacation rental is being built now. The Kruckenbergs are jovial hosts. You are likely to get a little face time with Ron during your stay as he putters around the property keeping it spotless. He will offer a word of advice for do-it-yourself (DIY) anglers who come when the salmon are running right in front of the lodge and can also refer you to a couple fishing guides he trusts to show clients a good day.

There are a couple things I can almost guarantee if you choose this location for your lodging needs. First, your private lodging will be very clean! I was impressed with how immaculate the Eagle's Nest was when I stayed there last summer. Second, the accommodations are very well stocked with cooking utensils, pots and pans, and dishes, beyond what you normally see in a vacation rental. I love



Avery's first fish in Alaska is a beauty.

to cook, plus my preferred nutrition limits where I can dine out, so having this resource is a major plus for someone like me. For others, the benefit is the cost savings of preparing your own food on vacation, and even more, the joy of eating your own fresh catch! Each of the lodging options available through Eagle's Eye has a full kitchen, private bath and seating area. Most also have a gorgeous view of the river.

If you time your trip during a time when salmon run in full force, you'll have a shot at catching sockeyes, silvers, or pinks, and possibly rainbow trout and Dolly Varden, directly in front of the property. Riverfront platforms along the property line are available for guests to cast until their hearts are content.

Lodging options include the Eagle's Nest and Bear's Den, each a one-bedroom, apartment-style rental. The Wolf's Den is a dry cabin that provides extra sleeping options for a slightly larger group. The Klondike House is a full home for rent that is located away from the main property, across the road. A new two-bedroom rental called The Moose Cabin will be on the main property that overlooks the river beginning this season.

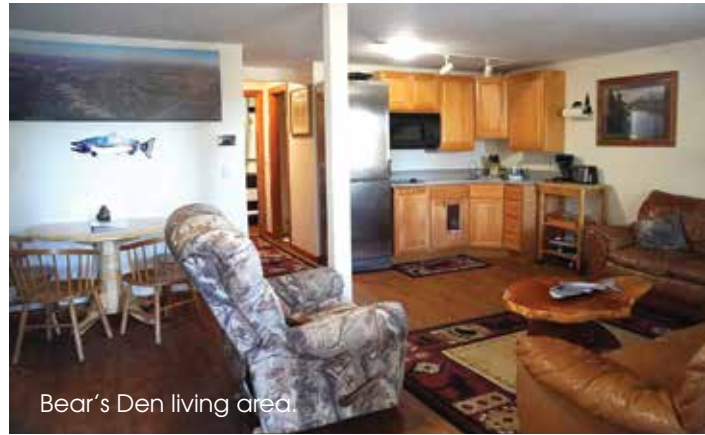
What makes this place extra special is the meticulous care that is taken to maintain it, but it is also the artistry put into the build. Ron and his son are both talented wood-working artists and you'll find hints of that

Eagle's Eye.





Eagle's Nest Bedroom.



Bear's Den living area.



Eagle's Nest kitchen.



Bear's Den bedroom.

in the Alaska-themed carvings around the property. Katya has spent many hours behind the scenes to decorate and make their place warm and homey for guests. The crowning achievement of the property is the large, enclosed, shared guest pavilion which features what might be the best campfire on the Kenai. Handcrafted tables and chairs make the space usable for family game night, dining in groups and more. Everything is beautifully designed and well made. Eagle's Rest Vacation Rentals would even be a lovely place for a small, private wedding event.

When you stay here in the heart of the Kenai Peninsula, aptly coined Alaska's Playground, you should take advantage of all the outstanding fishing that takes place in nearly all directions. As mentioned, right in front of the lodge is one option, with fishing gear and loaner equipment

Sean Smart prepares to launch the drift boat for an upper river float.



Eagle's Eye riverfront fishing platforms.

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Ron and Katya Kruckenberg.

available to guests as well as a few pointers from Ron, a fishing fan himself. This is an unguided experience for those who fish a fair amount or are ready to tackle something new. Another option is to spend a day or more on the river with one of the area guides. Ron likes to refer his guests to Jeff Moore at Wet & Wild Alaska Fishing and Sean Smart of Kenai River Recon. Both are good guys with plenty of experience and they love to fish!

When I stayed with Eagle's Eye last summer, I had the opportunity to spend the day fishing with each guide and for different reasons I was really looking forward to meeting both. Fishing with Jeff Moore was quite enjoyable. Right away I liked his pleasant demeanor, the consistent grin on his face, and our similar perspective of fishing and life. Jeff is a happy and grateful guy, as far as I can see, and those are the best kinds of people to be around to me. He's owned his guide business on the Kenai for over 20 years and before that he guided for a known lodge, so he has three decades of Kenai River knowledge and perspective. The rest of the boat was filled with one of my buddies, and Jason Roy and his son Avery from Nashville, who were on vacation with their extended relatives and having a blast. It's always enjoyable to witness someone's Alaska experience, especially for the first time and under special circumstances.

Jeff pulled into a short channel that rounded a small island in the middle river and rigged rods for us all. It was a still morning and the golden sunlight that showed around 6 a.m. was glorious. It was going to be a beautiful day. A moose stepped out of the woods, his brown hair lit to red in the illuminating sun. Every color popped as the moose strode into the river and swam across. This was young Avery's first trip to Alaska and the scene unfolded perfectly for this blessed group.

Jeff slowly trolled the boat through the slough and Avery connected with a rainbow trout. I caught a glimpse of it and we started getting pumped. Jeff and I could tell it was a good fish. Following Jeff's instructions to the tee to bring the trout to the boat, that boy's first fish in Alaska was a 27-ish rainbow trout. It was a healthy, girthy toad, especially for the first day in July! I hope Avery really realizes how lucky he is.

The next day we joined Sean Smart from Kenai River Recon to float the upper river from the Cooper Landing bridge to Sportsman's. Born and raised on the Kenai Peninsula, Sean



Kenai River salmon fishing.





Jeff carefully handles this trout for release.

grew up fishing the area rivers and lakes. He also happens to be the brother of my cherished friend, Shannon Martin, who I have known for over 15 years. We were neighbors in Anchorage for a spell and she and her husband played on the Fish Alaska softball and volleyball teams back in the day. Fast forward all these years later and she is the rockstar Executive Director of the Kenai River Sportfishing Association, leading the charge in fisheries conservation for the river. I am super proud of her and was really psyched she could join us for that day on the river. We hadn't fished together in years, and it was delightful to see how sweet she and her brother are together. It reminds me of the treasured brother/sister relationship I have with Marcus.

Trout were scarce that day on the upper. We knew we were rolling the dice to make that float but we wanted to try anyway. Still, it was a ton of fun with friends. Sean's business offers day trips on the Kenai and Kaslof rivers. He guides clients to kings, sockeyes, and silvers, as well as rainbow trout and dollies. Sean loves flyfishing but he also guides clients with conventional gear. Sean has great energy and is fun to be around.

Nearly any adventure you want to have for your memory bank is doable in Alaska's Playground, but your trip will not feel complete without the right place to hang your hat at the end of the day. Eagle's Eye Vacation Rentals certainly covers that need and more. Give Ron a shout to book your stay and he can help you get lined out with Jeff or Sean and advise you on a number of other activities you might want to try. If you want to run away from home and head towards adventure, visit eagleseyevacationrentals.com or call Ron directly at 907-244-4300 and head towards your home away from home.



Melissa Norris is the Publisher and Founder of Fish Alaska magazine. Fishing the Kenai River any chance she gets is in her make up.

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