

Denali Backcountry Adventures

– Participant Information Packet –



Welcome to Denali Backcountry Adventures (DBA)! This program is offered by the Denali Education Center in partnership with Denali National Park and Preserve. We have partnered to run DBA for over a decade. We are excited that you are interested in learning more and joining one of our programs.



Please read this document thoroughly when you register for Denali Backcountry Adventure, and again before participating in the program. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Course Overview

Denali Backcountry Adventure (DBA) is for high school and higher education-aged students eager to explore the wilderness of Denali National Park and Preserve. During these six-day programs, students develop and advance their outdoor skills aligning with the Leave No Trace ethics involving wildlife safety, camping, and backcountry navigation. In doing so, they grow as leaders and teammates within an emotionally supportive and safe team environment. Participants will also gain a new understanding and appreciation of public lands and the subarctic ecosystem.

Here is an overview of the course itinerary:

- **Arrival and orientation (days 1-2):** Team-building and preparatory activities in Denali's frontcountry area.
- **Backcountry adventure (days 3-5):** Backpacking in the wilderness of Denali National Park and Preserve, typically traveling 2-5 miles per day in trail-less terrain.
- **Program culmination (day 6):** Participate in reflective activities, return to the park entrance area, and depart with new friends and memories.

Tent camping experience is required, but backpacking experience is not necessary to participate in this program. Group sizes are limited to 10 students and 2-3 instructors.

Detailed Course Itinerary

Day 1- Arrival and Orientation

Participants arrive at the Denali Education Center (DEC) campus or the Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC) by 3:30 pm - please see your registration form for your group's itinerary.

- DEC's campus is located at Milepost 231 of the George Parks Highway. At MP 231 turn East into the Denali Park Village complex. Head straight down the 'ramp' and continue straight into the Village complex and follow the "Main Lobby" sign. The road curves to the left slightly. After about 800 yards the road forks, take the right fork. You will see a large sign with the DEC logo and our blue educational yurt. Please park in the parking area across from the yurt.
- The MSLC is located at Mile 1.3 of the Denali Park Road at the entrance of Denali National Park and Preserve at Milepost 237 of the George Parks Highway.

Orientation begins at 4 pm. For open-enrollment programs, parents or guardians are free to leave after the first hour. The group begins to bond and build the skills of team travel and backcountry camping.

Day 2- Getting to Know Denali

This day is a crash course in preparing for a backcountry team expedition in Denali. Activities include an orientation to Denali, gear review and packing, getting to know the group and our instructors, and learning how to stay safe and have fun while traveling in the Denali backcountry.

Day 3 through 5- Into the Backcountry

We board a camper bus from the Denali Bus Depot that transports us to the starting point for our expedition. No matter what the conditions are, we function as a self-sufficient team, depending on ourselves and each other as we navigate and traverse Denali's wilderness.

This program is designed to help participants build a foundation for living comfortably outdoors. Expect to work hard – to find your pace, manage your pack weight, and break in your hiking muscles – but expect to play just as hard – climb high into alpine tundra, cook on single burner stoves, and explore remote wilderness safely as a team.

The pace will be slow at first as everyone adjusts to their packs and the terrain. Hiking on alpine tundra and glacial river bars is slow-going and the group will not cover many miles the first day. Tundra and gravel bar hiking can be difficult and not conducive to a quick pace regardless of your skill level, but it is an experience you will always remember and grow from!

The group practices expedition-style backcountry travel, often breaking and moving camp daily. As the group learns to work, travel, and live together, the instructors continue to facilitate students' leadership responsibilities including navigating, teaching, team building, cooking, and cleaning.

Day 6- Out of the Wilderness

This morning we wake up early and eat breakfast before 'breaking' camp and heading towards the park road. When we get to the road we'll board a park bus that will take us back to the entrance area. Once there we'll clean, organize, and sort our gear. Depending on our specific itinerary, we enjoy either lunch or an afternoon snack before departure.

Expectations and Preparations

Please read through the following paragraphs carefully before attending a DBA program. It will give you an idea of what to expect from the program, and help you prepare yourself mentally prior to the start of the trip. Please keep in mind that DBA is not just a hiking program. One of its primary goals is to explore Denali National Park and Preserve – both as a protected and long inhabited place, and as a subject for ongoing research.

Goals of Denali Backcountry Adventures

- Provide an opportunity for students to be immersed in, challenged by, and inspired by the wilderness of Denali National Park and Preserve.
- Develop an atmosphere that encourages students to equate curiosity and learning with fun.
- Create a physically, mentally, and emotionally safe environment for students to challenge themselves and grow as group members and young explorers/scientists.
- Strengthen common sense, good judgment, decision-making skills, and teamwork.
- Promote understanding, appreciation and stewardship of subarctic ecosystems and public lands, with an emphasis on current park science.
- Acknowledge the indigenous heritage of the lands that the programs utilize.

- Help students develop and hone outdoor skills including Leave No Trace, wildlife safety, camping and navigation.
- Create adult anchors of support.
- Cultivate skills of observation, awareness, and reflection about our environment.
- Convey the significance of Denali National Park and Preserve as a protected ecosystem.
- Foster stewardship of wilderness and wild places.
- Cultivate knowledge and emotional connections between Denali and each participant's home.

Student Expectations

Denali Backcountry Adventures is a physically and mentally active learning experience. Participants must meet the following prerequisites in order to participate:

- Participants must have spent at least 4-6 nights tent camping or similar (including sleeping on the ground and cooking outdoors - the camping nights do not need to have been consecutive)
- Participants must have hiked 3+ miles on a trail while wearing a heavy backpack

During the program, participants must be ready to:

- Actively and positively contribute to the expedition by showing respect to themselves, each other, and the program instructors
- Hike up to 5 miles per day while carrying a 35 pound backpack
- Learn to travel and navigate across uneven and steep trail-less terrain and stay safe in bear and moose country
- Hike, explore, learn about science, gain camping skills, use self and team-care skills, and stay positive in challenging environmental conditions, including inclement weather
- Sleep in a tent, in a sleeping bag, on a camp pad on the ground, eat camping food, and drink purified water while camping away from amenities such as toilets, running water, and cell coverage in the wilderness of Denali
- Have no showers until you get home

The group will be continuously supervised and instructed, but each individual is responsible for regulating their own physical and mental wellbeing. Participants are expected to actively participate in group discussions, be present during projects, respond willingly to instructions, and practice group-focused expedition behavior. Participants will be expected to participate in building a fun, effective, and inspiring team of peers.

Unique in its backcountry management protocols, Denali National Park and Preserve has no established routes or backcountry campsites. The group designs their own adventure, unhindered by trails or established camping destinations. With this privilege comes a significant responsibility to help protect the wilderness resource for future users by adhering to the principles of Leave No Trace. Denali Backcountry Adventures takes this responsibility seriously; Leave No Trace principles are introduced and applied throughout the program.

Group Travel and Living

DBA is first and foremost an experience in community living and teamwork. The group operates as a self-sustaining, mutually-supported team. It is important to remember that everyone is coming to the expedition with different experiences, motivations, skill sets, and varying levels of physical and mental capabilities. You might find that you need to make compromises and sacrifices in your own expectations to support the other members of the group.

On arrival day, the group writes their own "Group Contract". Instructors facilitate this process, but the participants come to a consensus on what expectations they set for camp. Every participant, including the instructors, signs the contract indicating they agree to honor it.

Weather and Other Conditions

Weather in Denali National Park and the subarctic is unpredictable and variable. While average summer temperatures are between 50 degrees Fahrenheit and 80 degrees Fahrenheit, they can and do vary widely. For example, temperatures can be below 32 degrees Fahrenheit and snow is possible any month of the year. Rain is also a constant companion within the subarctic. While it might not rain all day, every day, the potential of our groups experiencing multiple rain events during their program is high. Though we may adapt our itineraries based on projected weather, our courses continue in the rain or shine. Mosquitoes will be present at times during our trips and travels.

Dressing in layers helps participants remain comfortable throughout the program. Please see the packing list for more information on what to bring so you remain comfortable throughout your program.

Food

DBA groups use small backpacking stoves to prepare tasty and nutritious meals. A typical food list for this program consists of backpacking meals (i.e. just add water options), pasta, rice, beans, cereals (granola, oatmeal), grains, butter, cheese, nuts, peanut butter, dried fruits, etc. The menu can have more fats and protein than what one might be used to. We are able to accommodate most dietary restrictions and allergies. Please describe any needs or possible concerns upon registration.

Gear and Clothing

All group camping gear (tents, cookware, et cetera.) is provided. Participants are required to bring their own personal gear and clothing listed in the packing list on the last page of this packet. Essential gear and apparel include a good-quality rain jacket, rain pants, sturdy shoes, sturdy day pack, sleeping bag, and sleeping pad. We may be able to contribute to participants who might not have an item; please inquire as early as possible.

Technology Agreement

Students are allowed to bring camera phones and/or cameras on the trip to help document the science we are participating in. Participants have to assume risks to phones and cameras as we will be hiking

possibly in the rain and through river crossings. Phones can be used for travel to and from the park, but are not to be used for texting, making calls, listening to music or playing games during the program. Students will be asked to refrain from using their devices for anything that will distract them from the program and the group. A few days without texting is a worthy experience.

Risk Management Information for Guardians

Insurance and Liability

We have excellent records of operating safe outdoor programs. Though no outdoor program can remove all risk, we strive to carefully manage and reduce the risks our students face on our programs.

- Open-enrollment courses: Upon registration, you will receive an email linking to required authorization, and health forms.
- Custom-group courses: We will work directly with each group to manage registration, authorization, and health forms.

Emergency Communication

If you need to convey a message to a participant during the program, you may text or call Denali Education Center's main office at 907-683-2597, or the DBA on-call administrator whose name and number will be provided to guardians upon arrival. DEC and NPS instructors carry multiple two-way communication devices at all times, so the on-call person can relay short messages to the group if necessary. Please note, we ask that this system be used only in case of emergencies as we strive to provide an immersive experience for our groups.

Covid-19 Policies

Covid-19 vaccinations are not required for DBA participants. Covid testing may be required using test kits supplied by DEC. Mask requirements will mirror current federal, state, or organizational policies for vehicles and indoor spaces.

Cancellation Policies

If your student or group is unable to take part in our DBA program and you must cancel, please let DEC know immediately as another student, group, or organization may be able to take part in our DBA program with little notice. Cancellation policies for group reservations will be determined on a case by case basis.

Cancellations from our Open Enrollment DBA programs DEC adheres to the following timeline:

- 5 weeks before course – Full refund
- 4 weeks before course – 75% refund
- 3 weeks before course – 50% refund
- 2 weeks before course – No refund