

Ep #245: Why Running in Alaska Should Be On Your Bucket List with Kim Ryals



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach, and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. And now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey runners, so I am here this week with a super fun guest. You are going to love her, her name is Kim Ryals and she is the owner and founder of a company called Run Alaska Trails. And we're going to talk all things Alaskan running today. And Kim is very much a not your average runner, she's a late onset athlete and can totally relate to a lot of things that we talk about on this podcast.

So, Kim, welcome to the show, I'm so happy you're here.

Kim: Thanks, Jill, I'm glad to be here, we've got a lot of ground to cover in our Alaska.

Jill: We do, no pun intended, right? So let's start with a little bit about you. How did you come to running? How did you come to be a runner in Alaska? Tell us all the things.

Kim: Okay, so I moved up to Alaska about 10 years ago to be the executive director of the Copper River Prince William Sound Regional Seafood Development Association. Basically it's a fleet of commercial fisherman who bring Copper River salmon to market every year.

I went directly from the lower 48 to live in a bush community, Cordova, on the Prince William Sound, only accessible by plane or boat. It's a community of about 2,000 people tucked up against the mountain out in the

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sound. And I love it and I learned so much. And I've always loved salmon fish, that's my number one go-to protein.

And I had a long career in nonprofit executive development, food, marketing, got a little fisheries biology in the distant past and all sorts of interesting things. So I took that job and got used to being in Alaska. And at some point I decided I needed to move over to the road system.

We say the road system a lot in Alaska. Alaska is about a third of the size of the US and there's only kind of a few roads that loop around, kind of in the central of it. So I wanted to be on the road system and I moved to Matanuska-Susitna Borough back in 2015, I think. And there I took a job as the executive director for the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation.

I was charged with helping develop the trails in the Mat-Su Borough, which is a 25,000 square mile area north of Anchorage. Everyone says it's the size of West Virginia, so there you go. I've always loved trails and I took a job in the professional development of trails in Alaska. And I was the first ED and I got everybody started and at some point I decided I wanted to go out and be on my own.

And at the same time I recognized that even if you lived in Alaska and wanted to enjoy the trails, sometimes it was hard. Sometimes there was a barrier to getting out on them because Alaska has few people, few resources. We're not talking about finely maintained, well signed, huge parking lots in our trails. You kind of have to know where you're going and what you're doing to have a safe and fun experience.

So I started Run Alaska Trails in, I think I incorporated in 2018. We had our first wonderful season in 2019 where we had several trips, we entertained people from Colorado, California, and thanks to the magic of Facebook,

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Paraguay. And we had a great season and I knew I was onto something. And then, of course, you know what happened. There's nothing like opening a business that requires people to gather in person in small groups right before a pandemic.

So we've kind of been sitting on high idle for a couple of years and we're back in 2022 and there's a whole bunch of interest and somewhere along the way I was listening to my little inner voice and I just thought not only do I want to share the trails of Alaska with everybody, I really want to bring a bunch of women up here. And so there you go, that brought me to your office, Jill.

Jill: I love this. So there's so much I want to dive into from what you just said. But I think the first thing that stands out to me is the size of Alaska is about a third the size of the lower 48. So if you were to divide the main part of the US into thirds, we're talking Alaska is like California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, right? Like that whole sort of west and California. That's fucking huge.

Kim: Okay, and if you want to get kind of greedy about it, I like to take the silhouette of Alaska and put it in the center of the US because then if you watch the tail ends, the southeast part that comes almost all the way down to, you know, it comes down the entire coast. And then the Aleutian Islands out to the west, you can just about, like you are almost spread across the entire lower 48.

Jill: That's fascinating. That is fascinating to me.

Kim: Oh, and 40% is wetlands.

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Jill: And so what does this mean? That we're not running on wetlands, right?

Kim: No, that means a lot of it is just you can't get there, you can't build there, you can't travel there unless it's winter and you're on a snow machine.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: And so it really reduces the amount of the state that is accessible by humans. Again, until everything ices over and then you have the ability to possibly go out in parts of Alaska that you normally wouldn't otherwise see on snow machine and skis. Yeah, it's vast. The rest of it, like I mentioned, has the road system kind of in the center that has all, okay, so south central Alaska and then down into the Kenai Peninsula.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: And we'll see, and a great thing is you can't get lost, there's really no turns to take. You've got a couple of loops going throughout the whole South Central. So lots of territory to explore and not a real easy way to get lost.

Jill: Unless you go off the road, in which case...

Kim: Unless you go off the path, yeah.

Jill: It sounds to me like you probably need to be real careful if you do that.

Kim: Absolutely.

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Jill: So okay, so Alaska, land wise, is enormous. And the way I understand it, from your chatting earlier, is that there's less than a million people that live in Alaska.

Kim: There's 735,000 people who live in this vast territory.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Kim: I think the density analogy is if the same density was applied to, I think, New York City, there would be like one person per 10 or 12 miles or something.

Jill: So there would be like one person in Manhattan.

Kim: Yeah.

Jill: One person in Brooklyn. So there would be five people, one person per borough, basically. That's mind blowing. And I think it's important for us to set the scene because since there's only 700,000 people in Alaska, that means most of us, you know, who might be US citizens who are listening to this, we're trying to get a sense of truly how remote but also kind of like unspoiled.

Kim: It is so intact, it's unbelievable. You really can get out to some places really quickly that you are not only the only person there but, for instance, I guess I have to circle back to my love of salmon. If you're listening on the west coast, and maybe even if you have a little bit of knowledge about salmon running in the Atlantic, you know that there's no more salmon in the Atlantic. Well lots of conservation efforts in the west for Pacific salmon in California, Oregon, Washington.

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Pacific salmon runs thick, all five species in Alaska because the watersheds are completely intact. They're just, they're just gorgeous. There's some places I've been where I've been standing on a bridge and a salmon run has come in and had I jumped off the bridge, my fall would have been broken by the fish.

Jill: Oh my goodness.

Kim: Yeah, I mean, it's the water was just thick with moving bodies and tails and everything. To see a place that's so intact and so unspoiled, it's just amazing.

You know that I have a couple of dogs and they both like to run too. Running with dogs is a big thing in Alaska. I try to never take it for granted, I'm out and running my dogs on the trails in Alaska and looking at some of the backdrops and it's equivalent to being out and about and playing in any one of our national parks, you know?

Jill: Yeah.

Kim: Yellowstone, like I get to wake up and look at Yellowstone in my backyard with my dogs in Alaska.

Jill: I mean, the pictures that you've sent me of running the trails are amazing. And what kind of has struck me about it is I guess I imagined that Alaska was either glaciers or wilderness, right, and like deep, thick woods. But what I've seen from some of what you've sent me is a lot of just like, running on, I mean, I wouldn't call them meadows. But like you're just kind of running trails that aren't deeply wooded.

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So you can see just for miles and miles and miles these fantastic views of distant mountains without having to like climb to the top of a mountain to actually see all this stuff.

Kim: Yeah, it's one of my favorite things about hiking and running in Alaska, and you nailed it. I think you might have heard me before, and I'm sure we'll touch on this later, I have a little touch of bearanoia. So when I go out into the woods I like to run above treeline, which I can do super fast, because it's all right there.

So you can get into these places where you just feel like you're on top of the world. Very, very long distance views. Not another human made structure or person within those views. And there are lots of meadows that you can get in once you've gone through forests and whatnot that are between mountains. It's hard to explain how vast and expansive it is until you see it.

Those top of the world views, I'm in love with. I just turned 57 this past week, and like you mentioned, I'm an adult onset runner. And my weight has fluctuated over the years and I'm able to, when I see those people in Colorado that are running at 12,000 feet, I probably won't ever be altitude trained.

I'm not saying anything about my age or my fitness, but just the sheer altitude training of having to get up there to see those things. You can get those types of views in Alaska for 2 or 3,000 feet and you feel like you're on top of the world.

Jill: I love that. For the bargain price of 2 or 3,000 feet.

Kim: Yeah.

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Jill: I think that's, like that's what entices me the most, is I feel like Alaska is so much the polar opposite of New Jersey. And spoiler alert for anybody listening, I'm going to be in Alaska with Kim in July for a couple of weeks. And I'm just like, I don't know, like even around here you have to hike through a lot of dense forest. I did see a bear one time around here. So I was kind of like, ooh, that's weird. I'd never seen a bear that close in my life. And I also probably don't ever want to do it again, it was very unsettling.

But again, you hike and you hike and you hike through all this dense forest, and then like boom, you emerge and you're at the top of the mountain and you can see some stuff. But you don't see, you know, like around here you don't see just these vistas of like these absolutely gorgeous snowcapped peaks stretching for miles and miles. Because, like you said, you got to really hike to 10,000 feet or more to kind of see those kinds of views, and that's like out in the Rockies.

But here in New Jersey you're going to get to the top of a mountain and you're probably going to see other small mountains around you and that's it. It's like there's no just spectacular vista. So that's one of the things I'm looking forward to the most, I think, in Alaska, is just being able to see for miles and miles.

And being able to see for miles and miles and not have another person in that view. Because even here in New Jersey, you go to the top of a mountain, there's 20 other people there having lunch, whatever. You look down you can see a highway in the distance, right? Like it's not isolated at all.

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So what's it like to run, can you give us an example of like say you were to go for like a five mile trail run, what are some of the different types of things that you might see on that kind of adventure?

Kim: So most of my running takes place in the summer, although people do run year round in Alaska. And still the summer is short, but it still has its little micro seasons inside the summer. So obviously you're going to see like we were talking about mountains, and meadows, and forests, lakes, Alaska has a lot of lakes. Berries, wildflowers, coastline.

I didn't quite get all the numbers together of the coastline, but Alaska has thousands and thousands of miles of coast land because you're talking about the entire perimeter of the state and then there's inlets and then there's islands. And I think all told with the inlets, islands, the perimeter and everything we're talking like 45,000 miles of where land meets water.

Jill: Oh my God.

Kim: You're going to see wildlife. You know, eagles abound, you could bump into a bear or a moose. When you go south of Anchorage on Turnagain Arm and you can get up, once again, pretty high, pretty quick and you are in kind of a heavily, not heavily but pretty good forest area. You can look down and see the road that goes to the Kenai Peninsula. And if the timing is right you might be able to see some whales.

And Alaska has beluga whales, you know the little white ones and stuff. I've actually seen one of those from the beach while I've been out. So, you know, all the things that you're seeing on Discovery Channel, the landscapes, the flora, the fauna, it's all there.

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Jill: Oh my God, that just sounds like spectacular. Can you see a narwhal out there? Are those cold weather animals?

Kim: Yeah, you know I've looked before and I haven't seen one in my travels so far.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: Yeah.

Jill: Fun fact, I did not know that narwhals were real until a couple of years ago when I saw one on Discovery. And I'm like, "Wait, that's a real thing?" I thought it was like a, I'm just showing my ignorance here, I thought it was like a made up thing. I'm like, oh, right, a unicorn whale, ha ha ha, right? And like, no, it's actually a real thing.

So now I'm obsessed with like I must see a narwhal somewhere, so I will be on the lookout. But obviously, I probably won't see one because we're going to be in the woods, not on the ocean. If we see a narwhal in the woods, then maybe we need to check what's been in the water.

So I know that people are going to have a lot of questions like is running in Alaska, like is it too rugged for somebody who's brand new to running? Or is it too rugged for somebody who's maybe a like a slower runner? Like a lot of the people who listen here are more of like, 15, 16, 17, 18 minute mile and I know there's gonna be questions like, oh, well, is Alaska for me or should I just leave it to the people that I consider to be more athletic? Not me personally, but you know what I mean.

Kim: Sure, yeah. So far some of the theme of our conversation here has been diversity, right? Diversity of things you can see, and the places you

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can go, the diverse ecosystems, tundra, forest and everything. You can find places to run that are suitable for you. You can find places that you hop out of your car in a tiny parking lot and go straight up a mountain, and then maybe over a ridge and down over another mountain. But there are some groomed recreational places that are flat, or flatter.

My favorite ones when I want to be gentle on myself is finding the places that are also used in winter for cross country skiing. Think about that. So they're really big parks and they're groomed and the trails are very wide and very gentle and sloping. And anything in between.

So the diversity of the landscape is definitely a plus when you're talking about hosting or entertaining runners from all over the world and fulfilling their expectations, yeah. I think you and I had talked earlier about the racing scene up there.

Jill: Yeah.

Kim: So in preparing for our conversation, I'm no stranger to Google, I started looking into things. I've learned stuff for this conversation. Number one, I went on, and this is not the only resource out there. I think it's runningintheusa.com.

Jill: Yes.

Kim: I didn't know that according to that resource we will have 135 races planned this year in 2022.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Kim: 135 races.

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Jill: And that's for like 700,000 people. So there must be a lot of people coming in from out of town for these.

Kim: There's some of that, but Alaskans are runners.

Jill: I love this.

Kim: Okay, and they vary from anywhere, I was like, oh my gosh, 135. Okay, what's everybody doing? Continuing on our theme of diversity, I found a one mile run for St. Patty's Day in Ketchikan. And since that's in March, I'll just have you know, okay, Alaska is all about festivals as well and they go year round. We're all about a good party.

But all small villages have festivals like in February and March to help us hang on. Hang on, you got the Ice World Festival in Cordova. Clearly this is probably a pub run in Ketchikan, you know, walk, run for a mile, maybe it's a half a mile I don't know. On the other end of the spectrum you've got 135 mile run outside of Denali with 9,000 foot elevation gain.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Kim: A couple of other, you know, to just paint all the corners, what about the Susitna 100, it's done in the dead of winter? Up the Iditarod trail over frozen lakes and rivers that were never meant to be traversed by even skis or sleds or anything. But people are biking and running for the 100 mile.

Jill: In the dark the whole time, right?

Kim: Most of the time, yes. With a temperature variation of, the website will tell you anywhere from 40 below to 40 above. And they're dragging their aid stations behind them.

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Jill: Oh my gosh.

Kim: They're on a sled, even the runners.

Jill: The runners are dragging the sled behind them?

Kim: Yes.

Jill: Oh my gosh. Okay, wow, this is mind blowing.

Kim: Okay, so that's hard core.

Jill: Yeah.

Kim: I'm not doing that, you're welcome to do that if you want to.

Jill: No, I will not be doing that. But I will look at pictures of other people doing it.

Kim: And then go back to the other corner and then you've got, for instance in Palmer, it's a town of 5,000 people north of Anchorage. It's a great community, it's one of my favorite little towns. You've got the happy run every Monday night. Every Monday night year round, 6pm. It's a couple miles around town.

We start at one of our favorite and only shoe stores in town and then we run around town. People walk, people push baby strollers, we end at the Palmer Ale House and we have a raffle. And the Palmer Ale House provides pasta salad and maybe a beer for the ticket. But anyway, the whole town is out there. It's about running and it's also about seeing everybody Monday night.

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You know, sometimes it can be a challenge in the winter because if it's become dark at 3:30 in the afternoon, the run doesn't start till 6pm, it's kind of interesting. But there's a lot of different diverse events to learn about, participate in, cheer people on. It's a very big running community.

Segue before I lose it, 81% of Alaskans participate in outdoor recreation, compared to 48% national average. So it's almost double.

Jill: Yeah, that's amazing.

Kim: 8 out of 10 people are going to recreate outdoors. We're tied for first place with that figure with Montana. And the outdoor, buckle your seatbelt for this one. Those 735,000 people, now I'd like to dig a little bit deeper and see if this maybe includes tourism, outdoor recreational spending in Alaska is \$3.2 billion a year.

Jill: Oh my gosh. So Alaska is vacation land, really. Fuck Maine, Alaska seems to have the title of vacation land now.

Kim: So people come to Alaska for a number of reasons. The big job sectors, work arenas, are seafood, and tourism, and oil, and there's military. And then a lot of us, I mean, in Alaska in my mind if you're not going to outdoor recreate, so your jobs are kind of supporting your habit to get outside whether it's year round.

And it's really good, it's worth mentioning that for your mental health during the long days of winter that you got to do it. You got to recreate outside. You got to get those microspikes on your shoes, you got to get your blood moving and your heart pumping.

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Jill: Yeah. Right, just to combat the seasonal affective disorder, I think, that comes from having no sun. Because let's talk about the difference in the seasons. So in July, when I'm coming up, is sort of the time of year where there's not a lot of darkness.

Kim: Right, June 21st, summer solstice is when it's almost daylight year round where we will be. Mid July starts to taper off a little bit. I mean it's going to it's going to be kind of Twilight-y maybe around four. We're going to have to, you know, you have to self-meter and regulate and think about hey, you know, it's 11:30 at night, I really should think about winding this up and going to bed. You're going to have plenty of daylight.

Jill: Wow, wait, say that again. So it starts to get twilight around 4pm? Oh, 4am.

Kim: Yeah, 4am.

Jill: I'm sorry.

Kim: Dawn, but the color is kind of- In the top of summer you're not going to have pitch black in the middle of the night.

Jill: Wow, that's fascinating to me. So we could go running in the woods or anywhere without headlamps at like two o'clock in the morning, no problem?

Kim: Probably.

Jill: Oh my gosh, that's mind blowing.

Kim: Definitely in June.

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Jill: Yeah.

Kim: If you're sensitive to daylight, like me, and we need to remember to make sure that we put this on our packing list, if you have a problem sleeping when it's not completely dark outside, I'm all about the eye shades.

Jill: Yeah.

Kim: I call that Alaska's, I've taken pictures of my face before with the sleeping mask and I call it it is summer and it is Alaska's bikini season.

Jill: Oh that's awesome. That's so awesome. So okay, I'm kind of fascinated by all the things that you've talked about so far, all the things there are to do there. I mean, it sounds to me like Alaska is kind of like a big party sort of place. That people are like really social and like to have fun. So Anchorage is the biggest city, is that correct?

Kim: Correct, yeah.

Jill: And how many people live in Anchorage?

Kim: It's almost half, it's over 300,000 people.

Jill: Wow. Okay. And so all these little towns are like tiny little towns then, aren't they?

Kim: They are tiny towns. Some of the towns that we'll be visiting, you know, for instance, Talkeetna, which is across the river from Denali has 800 full time residents. It's native log cabins and dirt roads. And people

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come from all over the world right now in the spring to climb Denali and they use Talkeetna, the only town around as a base camp.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: So you meet people from all over the world doing those outdoor sports. We're actually going to stay in Hope as well, and the Hope has 200 residents. We'll be taking over all of their lodging.

Jill: Will we be meeting all of them?

Kim: We will be meeting all of them.

Kim: Do they just like lineup when you show up? They're like, "Okay, all 200 of us, we have a guest this week."

Kim: Absolutely. They've got a one room schoolhouse for K through 12 kids and I think that's like eight kids at a time or something.

Jill: Oh my gosh. Oh this is so awesome, I can't wait. What's the typical thing, like if somebody comes to Philadelphia and they're like, "What should I try?" I'm like cheesesteak. So if somebody is going to go to Alaska, what should they try? What's the food that you should eat when you're there if you eat nothing else?

Kim: You know, I'm so biased. Salmon is going to come right out of my mouth. You haven't had great salmon until you've had it pulled right out of the water. But here's another fun little thing, and people can look at this offline if they want to. The Matanuska area was a project in the 40s. The President, was it Roosevelt, wanted to settle Alaska and he offered people of hard working farming stock from the Upper Midwest if they would go up

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there and start a farm. He would give people 40 acres, parcels and everything.

The Matanuska valley with his rich glacier rivers, just north of Anchorage, has been growing spectacular vegetables since the 40s. Now they can grow everything, it's a short season, but since the sun rarely goes down all the vegetables and produce comes in really quick. And then we have the State Fair at the end of August where you show off that produce and we regularly grow cabbages that are over 100 pounds.

Jill: Oh my god. How do you even pick up a 100 pound cabbage? Like how do you get your hands around it? It must be enormous.

Kim: It's a crane, you have to use like a crane, machinery.

Jill: You have to use a crane. Oh, that's so awesome. I just love that. Alaska doesn't fuck around, they're like, "We grow our cabbages so big you need a crane to pick them up." I love this.

Kim: We're big and fast. So the produce up there is delicious in the summer in the Mat-Su Valley. And it has a long history, they're called the colonists, the Mat-Su Colony days. And they brought them out by train to San Francisco and then boated them up to Alaska and built canvas tents for everyone to stay in. It's a great story, they've got a documentary on it. I love watching it myself, it's super amazing.

There's a lot of self-sufficiency up there. Growing stuff, farming stuff, and that includes, you know, cows and chickens and exotic livestock and that kind of thing. Lots of self-sufficiency, the highest per capita ownership of planes and piloting because you can't get out to a lot of places without having small planes.

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Jill: Yeah, wow.

Kim: So a lot of people have planes, you can homestead, you can have a fine dining meal in Anchorage. Farming is huge, dog mushing, of course. I mentioned the festivals. I'm sorry, but I'm just going to, I have not been to all 50 of them but you can't talk me off this, Alaska has the best state fair in the country.

Jill: Yeah, I mean, it kind of sounds like it's going to be a pretty good one, just with everything that we've discussed.

Kim: All this home done stuff.

Jill: So what what about like precipitation? I mean, I know Alaska gets a fair amount of snow in the wintertime. But like what about the summertime? Is it humid up there or is it more dry? Like is it more desert like or is it more...

Kim: The humidity is perfect. It's not wet, it's not super dry, it's just right. It's so comfortable. The temperatures in the summer, especially like in July, they're going to probably as a very general range be from 50 to 70 degrees.

Jill: Yeah.

Kim: The rain doesn't start to come in really until mid-August, typically mid-August or definitely towards September. There won't be any snow. If we get high enough on certain mountain faces facing certain ways we might see leftover patches. But it's like a spectacular summer in almost any other, it's a spectacular Colorado summer.

Jill: Yeah, wow.

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Kim: Yeah. And people will be very busy and very friendly because it's the whole solar power. I mean, we know what we went through from October to March. So when the sun's out, it's time to play. The community is so much about getting outside in the summer that a lot of times in these small towns you'll see a store, a little teeny tiny market or something will be closed and have a note on the door that says, you know, the fish are running.

Jill: Sorry, I had to go, the fish are running. I love that. I love that so much.

If somebody's going to come to Alaska for a running trip, whether it's to come for a race or to come for a retreat or something like that, what is the one thing that you think they absolutely must do? Like is there one trail that's a must see? Or is there one activity that's a must do when somebody comes up that you're like, don't leave without doing this thing?

Kim: My favorite, and it's iconic, is Hatcher Pass.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: It's like 50 or 60 miles, you can drive over it from the Willow area to Palmer. It's gorgeous, almost all of it is dirt roads. It's super high, depending on the season you can stop and pick blueberries. Iconic Hatcher Pass is the thing to do in my opinion.

So we got the thing to do, and then also I'd like to mention the thing to be is flexible.

Jill: Okay, why is that?

Kim: Flexible and adventuresome. Alaska really doesn't care about our timetables. And I am a planner and I like to try to be a little bit in control of

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things. One thing that Alaska has taught me is that things will happen. Say there's a mudslide on this trail and you have to go 20 miles this way to go to another trail. Let's say one of those pilots of a small bush plane decided he needed to land on the highway this afternoon instead of his own airport because he's running out of gas.

You just need to go, you know, everything is always okay here. And maybe the store is closed, we can't go down that road because that pilot is having issues. Someone said there was a real mad moose up here on this mountain, so let's change our plans and go to this one. You got to go with the flow and you'll be so happy. And it teaches you a lot. It's always okay, you're in Alaska. You are in Alaska, how can it not be okay?

Jill: Yeah, that's how I feel about certain places on this planet. Like when I go to Paris, it doesn't matter what I'm doing. I'm in Paris, everything is okay.

Kim: Everything is fine.

Jill: I feel like Alaska has kind of got the same thing. Okay. Well, I'm sold. I'll come to Alaska with you.

Kim: I can't wait for you to get up here.

Jill: Let's talk about it a little bit in the last couple of minutes that we have here, because you do have two running retreats that were designed specifically for the Not Your Average Runner community and running style.

And I know there are like just a couple spots left, so if anybody's listening to this and is interested in joining us, do you want to say a little bit about these retreats? And then we could like tell people where to go to look up all the information.

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Kim: Sure. We've got two of them with the not average runners this summer. And the first one is July 14th, and the second one is July 21st.

Jill: And they're a weeklong each, right?

Kim: Seven days, six nights.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: They're all inclusive. My tagline has been lately, you get yourself safely to Anchorage, we'll get you safely outside. So you need a round trip ticket to Anchorage and back, other than that we've got it all covered. We pick you up at the airport, we provide the transportation, the lodging, the guides, the food, the meals, everything.

And each trip goes to two different places. The first trip is going, and it's split evenly, three nights here, three nights there. The first trip is going to see the first three nights in Talkeetna, across the street from Denali. You'll understand why that's funny when you see it across the street from Denali. The first three nights on the first trip are in Talkeetna. The second three nights are in Hope. On the second trip, the first three nights are in Palmer and then the second three nights are in Hope.

Jill: Okay.

Kim: Yeah, so they're at runalaskatrails.com. Everything is up there that you could possibly want to know, need to ask, lots of information. The summary stuff is on the book it page where you can see the things that are included in your trip.

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And you were the first person I was interested in reaching out to when I thought about having a bunch of great ladies come up and do some all women things. And it's very inclusive, just we're all about we've all been through a lot in the last several years and girls just want to have fun, let's face it.

Jill: Do we get bonus points if we dress like Cyndi Lauper when we show up?

Yeah, and so one of the questions that I've been asked a lot about this trip is am I going to be too slow? Is everybody going to be, I don't want people to have to wait for me. And also, am I going to be able to navigate these trails? Like am I going to have the skills? And so can you speak to that a little bit, like the level of experience that people need to have on the trails? And then also like the guides and the pacing and all of that.

Kim: Okay, so we are limiting these trips. First of all, we've got you covered on numerous levels on this question, this inquiry. Number one, the trips are limited to 10 guests. Number two, once you sign up we send out a survey to learn more about your style, your expectations, your goals, your experience. Number three, we have our three women guides, and we have you in the mix as well.

So now you're talking about 10 people and a potential of like up to four running professional partner guides. We can break the trip into subgroups depending on people's needs and experience. So we do this so that we have the ability to tailor each day to the group who's coming along.

My guides, like I mentioned, are all ladies. We've got somebody in their early 20s, mid 30s, well, I we used to say early 50s with Wendy, but now it's mid-50s. They are incredible athletes, but more importantly they're

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wonderful people and women. And they love that we're doing this this way this year, doing some all-women's trips. And they're just super supportive and they're fun, too.

And then we have me too, we can count me. So we got three guides, you, me, that's five people who have guiding abilities and 10 guests. I mean, two to one guest to guide ratio, there's not going to be any left behind.

Jill: Right, and we can break people into, like some people might want to do like two or three miles and other people might want to do 10 miles. So we'll have like different groups based on the mileage that you want to do. So it's almost like you've got a personal guide to Alaska.

Kim: You do have a personal guide.

Jill: Yeah.

Kim: This is all going to be tailored to who is going to get in the van with us.

Jill: Yes, I love this.

Kim: Our survey is extensive, we're asking about all the things about running. The details about pace, and length, and terrain and all that kind of stuff we're collecting. And then we ask you at the end, what is your dream trail? Because if we get a whole bunch of response on what dream trails are for who, we'll try to go out and find them.

Jill: Oh, I love this. And we're all staying together in a lodge, right? Or some sort of like, it's not like people are in Airbnbs all over the town. Like we're all kind of together in one location.

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Kim: All for one, one for all.

Jill: Yeah. But there's some private rooms, there's some shared rooms. So you could kind of like, depending on if, you know, if you're coming with a friend and you want to room together, that's great. If you're coming in by yourself and you're like, you know what, I love strangers, but not in my sleeping space, there's so many options.

And there's like things to do in the towns that we're going to be in as well. So it's not just going to be all running all the time, right? There's like plenty of stuff to do and see, or you can just sit there in a chair and stare at Denali.

Kim: It's all up to you.

Jill: Which I, for one, plan to do that exact thing.

Kim: These little towns are used to having lots of guests over the summer and they like to party. So I've picked our locations so that people could conceivably walk out of their lodging and walk downtown and go catch some bluegrass by the ocean overlooking the mountains.

Jill: I love this so much. Amazing. Well, okay, so again, runalaskatrails.com and click on book it, and that will give you all of the trips that are available. And you'll see the Not Your Average Runner trips there. How can people follow you on Instagram, Kim?

Kim: My handle is Run Alaska Trails.

Jill: Okay, I love this.

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Kim: And be patient with me, I tell people set your watch back about 40 years when you come up to Alaska. I am just now getting my Instagram game on, but please follow us. If this is too short of notice for people to come up in July, get on our Instagram and follow us and see what we're doing for next year because we'll be announcing our next our 2023 soon.

Jill: Exactly, I love it. All right, well, thank you so much for joining me today. And I mean I'm excited to hang out in person in July, but I can't wait to see who else we have on this adventure with us.

Kim: It's going to be too much fun.

Jill: Yes.

Kim: I'm envious of our trip and I'm going on it.

Jill: I know, I love that. That's so fun. All right, thank you so much for joining me today, Kim.

Kim: Thanks, Jill.

Hey, real quick before you go, if you enjoyed listening to this episode you have got to check out Up And Running. It's my 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrunning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.