

# Alaska Heritage Tours

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Scott McDonald, IT Manager, Alaska Heritage Tours

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## Challenge

Provide pay-for-access wireless internet to guests at a remote mountain lodge in Alaska

Replace existing, unreliable network, generating serious guest complaints and down time

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## Results

Ubiquitous wireless coverage across 35 acre resort property

Initial deployment in hours

High customer satisfaction: Virtually eliminated complaints

Leveraging Meraki's easy-to-use billing system, network paid for itself in less than 6 months through guest fees

Initial deployment so successful, added networks to 3 additional properties, and now uses more than 60 Meraki devices in total



Resting on 35 acres of a 640-acre site, the Talkeetna Lodge posed an interesting challenge for IT manager Scott McDonald when he set out to provide wireless Internet access across the grounds. The lodge itself is almost a quarter mile end-to-end, and three stories high, with multiple cabins scattered across the property. At first, he tried splitting a single DSL connection among a dozen or so NetGear access points to provide access in the lodge's common areas. But visitors complained of poor reliability and weak signals, and Scott constantly had to restart the wireless modems himself.

Furthermore, he was spending a lot of time addressing failures and complaints, and had no way to recoup any of his investment, because he could not work out a way to create a payment gateway to charge for access.

Scott was looking for a solution to address signal range, network maintenance, and revenue generation issues, but couldn't find an answer that made sense. That is, until a local reseller told him about Meraki.

McDonald started with a test deployment at one of his smaller resort properties. He plugged the Meraki devices in, and his network was up in hours. Pleased, he bought about 30 more Meraki devices and deployed them throughout the Talkeetna.

If there is a weak signal anywhere, he just asks one of the lodge's maintenance crew to plug in a repeater in that area.

"I continue to be amazed by the range and penetration of the Meraki signal, it has a way of reaching areas and places where I would have never thought possible," McDonald said.

Once the network was up and running, McDonald tested a few billing systems to enable his guests to pay for Internet access by credit card or PayPal. Dissatisfied with those options, he decided to leverage Meraki's integrated billing system which required no additional software or setup. "It was the simplest thing ever," McDonald explained, "I simply changed a few settings on the dashboard, Meraki's hosted management system, and the billing system was up and running."



Within six months, he says, the entire Talkeetna network had paid for itself. It garners about \$1,000 in usage revenue for Alaska Heritage Tours every month, which more than covers the \$200-per-month cost of broadband.

The Talkeetna deployment was so successful that McDonald created three more networks at other locations – one at the Seward Windsong Lodge, one on Fox Island in the Kenai Fjords, and one at the Alaskan Heritage Tours' headquarters. He now has more than 60 devices deployed across the various properties.

