

Alaska Packing Guide

Everything You Need to Pack for an Unforgettable Alaska Adventure



Packing for Alaska is different from packing for a Caribbean cruise—and that's part of the adventure! While many first-time visitors imagine freezing temperatures, Alaska's cruise season is generally mild. The key isn't packing heavy winter clothing—it's packing **smart layers** that keep you comfortable as the weather changes throughout the day.

It's not uncommon to experience sunshine, cool breezes, light rain, and even warmer temperatures all in the same afternoon. With the right clothing and gear, you'll be prepared to enjoy every glacier, wildlife sighting, and scenic viewpoint without worrying about the weather.

Dress in Layers

OUTDOOR CLOTHING LAYERING SYSTEM

VECTOR INFOGRAPHIC

- Outer layer**
 - Jacket
 - Pants
- Mid layer**
 - Fleece jacket
 - Shirt
- Base layer**
 - Thermal pants
 - Thermal top
 - Socks

BREATHABLE (indicated by upward arrows)
WIND & RAIN (indicated by downward arrows)
BODY HEAT (indicated by upward arrows)

Labels on layers:
OUTER LAYER WATERPROOF JACKET
MID LAYER FLEECE
BASE LAYER THERMAL PANTS & TOP

LAYERING FOR HIKING 101

HOW TO DRESS FOR CHANGING WEATHER ON THE TRAIL

- BASE LAYER**
 - Wicks moisture away from the skin and dries quickly
 - Synthetic or merino wool
 - Thickness varies by season
- MID LAYER**
 - Adds warmth
 - Fleece or Down Jackets
- OUTER LAYER**
 - Provides weather protection
 - Waterproof jacket and pants
 - Defend against rain and wind

TREKking WILD

The secret to staying comfortable in Alaska is the **three-layer system**.

Base Layer

Choose moisture-wicking clothing that helps keep you dry.

Recommended:

- Performance T-shirts
- Long-sleeve moisture-wicking shirts
- Thermal base layers (May & September)

Avoid cotton whenever possible, as it stays damp longer.

Middle Layer

Provides warmth while remaining lightweight.

Options include:

- Fleece jacket
 - Lightweight sweater
 - Light insulated vest
 - Quarter-zip pullover
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Outer Layer

Perhaps your most important item.

Bring a:

- Waterproof rain jacket
- Windproof shell
- Hooded jacket

A quality waterproof jacket will likely be your most-used piece of clothing during your trip.

Clothing Checklist

Pack:

- ✓ 5–7 casual shirts
- ✓ 2–3 pairs of jeans or hiking pants
- ✓ Comfortable shorts (for warmer days)
- ✓ Lightweight sweater
- ✓ Fleece jacket

- ✓ Waterproof rain jacket
 - ✓ Pajamas
 - ✓ Undergarments
 - ✓ Socks (including wool socks if visiting early or late season)
 - ✓ Casual evening attire for dinner
 - ✓ Formal attire (if your cruise includes formal nights and you wish to participate)
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Footwear



Comfortable shoes are essential.

Recommended:

- Waterproof walking shoes
- Hiking shoes or light hiking boots
- Comfortable sneakers
- Sandals for onboard use

If you're planning glacier hikes or rugged excursions, sturdy hiking boots are highly recommended.

Cold Weather Accessories

Even during summer, mornings and glacier viewing can feel chilly.

Bring:

- ✓ Warm knit hat
- ✓ Lightweight gloves
- ✓ Neck gaiter or scarf

- ✓ Baseball cap or sun hat

You'll appreciate these items while standing on deck during scenic cruising.

Rain Gear

Rain is part of the Alaska experience.

Don't forget:

- ✓ Waterproof rain jacket
- ✓ Small travel umbrella (optional)
- ✓ Waterproof backpack cover
- ✓ Waterproof phone pouch

Staying dry makes every excursion more enjoyable.

Electronics & Photography



Alaska offers incredible photography opportunities.

Bring:

- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Extra batteries
- ✓ Extra memory cards

- ✓ Phone charger
- ✓ Portable battery pack
- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Charging cables

Wildlife sightings can happen without warning, so always keep your camera nearby.

Wildlife Viewing Essentials

Many travelers say these become their favorite items:

- Binoculars
- Zoom camera lens (if available)
- Small backpack
- Refillable water bottle

Binoculars make whale watching and glacier viewing dramatically more enjoyable.

Health & Personal Items

Pack:

- ✓ Prescription medications
- ✓ Motion sickness medication
- ✓ Sunscreen
- ✓ Lip balm
- ✓ Moisturizer
- ✓ Sunglasses
- ✓ Hand sanitizer
- ✓ Small first-aid kit

The combination of cool air, wind, and sunshine can dry out your skin more than you might expect.

Cruise Day Essentials

Keep these items in your carry-on when boarding:

- ✓ Passport or required travel documents

- ✓ Cruise documents
- ✓ Medications
- ✓ Phone charger
- ✓ Wallet
- ✓ Swimsuit (if you want to enjoy the pool before luggage arrives)
- ✓ Change of clothes

Never pack important medications or travel documents in checked luggage.



If You're Taking a Cruise Tour

If your Alaska adventure includes a land tour, add:

- ✓ Daypack
- ✓ Hiking poles (optional)
- ✓ Bug spray (especially June–August)
- ✓ Reusable water bottle
- ✓ Casual outdoor clothing
- ✓ Extra socks

Land tours typically involve more walking than cruises alone.



Packing by Month



May

Pack extra warmth:

- Gloves
- Warm hat
- Thermal layer
- Heavier fleece

Snow is still visible in many areas.

June & July

Most comfortable months.

Bring:

- Lightweight layers
- Rain jacket
- Comfortable walking shoes

Expect changing weather throughout the day.

August

Similar to July but with slightly cooler evenings.

Continue packing:

- Layers
 - Waterproof clothing
 - Warm fleece
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September

Prepare for cooler temperatures.

Recommended:

- Gloves
- Warm hat
- Thermal layers
- Heavier fleece

You may even encounter early snowfall in the mountains.

What NOT to Pack

Save room in your suitcase by leaving these at home:

- Heavy winter coat (for most summer cruises)
- Snow boots (unless traveling well beyond cruise season)
- Bulky sweaters
- Too many formal outfits
- Large umbrellas

Instead, focus on versatile layers you can mix and match throughout your trip.

Premium Travel Group Tip

The biggest mistake first-time Alaska travelers make is packing for winter instead of packing for changing weather. A lightweight waterproof jacket layered over a fleece will usually keep you more comfortable than a heavy coat.

Another tip: keep your rain jacket handy every day, even if the forecast calls for sunshine. In Alaska, the weather can change quickly—but that's all part of the adventure.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska vacation with our other guides:

- Alaska Vacation Planning Guide
 - Alaska Cruise vs. CruiseTour Guide
 - Best Time to Visit Alaska
 - Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Glacier Viewing Guide
 - Alaska Railroad Guide
 - Denali National Park Guide
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Why Packing Matters

Packing well means you'll spend less time worrying about the weather and more time enjoying everything Alaska has to offer. With the right clothing, comfortable footwear, and a few thoughtful extras like binoculars and a waterproof jacket, you'll be ready for glacier viewing, wildlife encounters, scenic train rides, and unforgettable adventures—rain or shine.

Joe's Logbook

One of the most common questions I get is, "**Do I need to pack winter clothes for Alaska?**" My answer usually surprises people—**not really!**

The biggest secret to packing for Alaska isn't bringing heavier clothing—it's bringing **smarter clothing**. Layers are your best friend. I've found that a comfortable shirt, a fleece, and a waterproof jacket will handle almost every situation you'll encounter during cruise season.

If I could recommend just **three must-pack items**, they would be:

1. A quality waterproof rain jacket.
2. A good pair of binoculars.

3. Comfortable waterproof walking shoes.

Those three items alone will make your Alaska vacation far more enjoyable. And one final tip: leave a little extra room in your suitcase. Chances are you'll come home with some incredible souvenirs—and a camera full of memories you'll treasure for years to come.