

🐻 Alaska Bear Safety Guide

How to Stay Safe While Exploring Bear Country



One of the greatest thrills of visiting Alaska is the opportunity to see bears in the wild. Whether it's a brown bear fishing for salmon, a black bear wandering through a forest, or a mother bear with cubs, these incredible animals are among Alaska's most iconic residents.

The good news is that **bear encounters rarely become dangerous** when people follow basic safety guidelines. Bears generally prefer to avoid humans and are usually focused on feeding, resting, or caring for their young.

By respecting wildlife, maintaining a safe distance, and knowing how to react if you encounter a bear, you can safely enjoy one of Alaska's most unforgettable experiences.

🐻 Meet Alaska's Bears



Alaska is home to three types of bears.

Brown Bears (Grizzlies)

- Largest throughout most of Alaska
- Common near salmon streams
- Often found in coastal areas

Black Bears

- Smaller than brown bears
- Excellent climbers
- Found in forests across much of Alaska

Kodiak Bears

- Found only on Kodiak Island
- Largest brown bear subspecies
- Can exceed **1,400 pounds**

All deserve your respect—and plenty of space.



Give Bears Plenty of Space



The single most important rule:

Never approach a bear.

Recommended minimum distances:

- **At least 100 yards (300 feet)** from bears
- **At least 25 yards (75 feet)** from most other wildlife

If a bear changes its behavior because of your presence, you're already too close.

Use binoculars or a zoom lens instead of trying to get closer for a better photo.

Make Noise While Hiking



Most bears want to avoid people.

Help prevent surprise encounters by:

- Talking while hiking
- Hiking in groups
- Making noise around blind corners
- Announcing yourself near rushing streams where bears may not hear you

Avoid hiking alone whenever possible.

Never Feed Bears



Never intentionally—or accidentally—feed wildlife.

Store food securely:

- Use bear-resistant containers where required.

- Keep campsites clean.
- Never leave snacks unattended.
- Dispose of trash properly.

A fed bear can become a dangerous bear, often leading to the bear being euthanized to protect future visitors.

If You See a Bear



Stay calm.

- Stop where you are.
- Give the bear plenty of room.
- Speak calmly.
- Slowly back away.
- Never run.
- Keep children close.
- Keep dogs leashed where permitted (many bear areas prohibit pets).

Most bears simply continue on their way if given space.

If a Bear Notices You



If a bear looks at you:

- Remain calm.
- Stand your ground.
- Speak in a calm, steady voice.
- Slowly increase the distance.
- Do not make sudden movements.

A curious bear is not necessarily an aggressive bear.

Things You Should NEVER Do



Never:

- ✗ Run
- ✗ Feed a bear
- ✗ Approach cubs
- ✗ Stand between a mother and her cubs
- ✗ Try to take a selfie
- ✗ Throw objects to get the bear's attention
- ✗ Block the bear's path

Remember: you're a guest in the bear's home.



Bear Spray



If you're hiking independently in bear country, many experienced hikers carry bear spray.

Important reminders:

- Know how to use it before your hike.
- Keep it easily accessible—not buried in a backpack.
- Follow all airline and cruise line rules regarding bear spray. **Bear spray cannot be carried on commercial flights or brought aboard cruise ships by passengers.** If you need it for an independent land adventure, rent or purchase it locally after you arrive and dispose of it or return it before flying home.

If you're on a guided excursion, your guide will often carry bear spray and other safety equipment.



What About Cruise Excursions?



Professional bear-viewing excursions are extremely safe.

Guides:

- Understand bear behavior.

- Maintain safe viewing distances.
- Carry safety equipment.
- Know how to respond if bears approach.

Always follow your guide's instructions.



Photograph Bears Safely



The best bear photos come from patience—not proximity.

Use:

- Telephoto lenses
- Zoom
- Binoculars

Never sacrifice safety for a photograph.



Bear Safety Checklist

Before heading into bear country:

- ✓ Stay alert
- ✓ Keep your distance
- ✓ Travel with others when possible
- ✓ Carry binoculars
- ✓ Secure food properly
- ✓ Follow park regulations
- ✓ Listen to your guide
- ✓ Respect wildlife



Premium Travel Group Tip

Most Alaska cruise travelers see bears during professionally guided excursions, where experienced naturalists handle the planning and safety. Relax, listen to your guide, and enjoy the experience. You'll usually get fantastic views while the bears continue behaving naturally—exactly what makes the encounter so special.



Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Brown Bear Guide
 - Black Bear Guide
 - Kodiak Bear Guide
 - Best Places to See Wildlife Guide
 - Wildlife Photography Guide
 - Pacific Salmon Guide
 - Katmai National Park Guide (*future guide*)
 - Denali National Park Guide
 - Alaska Planning Guide
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Fun Facts

- Alaska is home to an estimated **30,000 brown bears** and **more than 100,000 black bears**.
 - A brown bear can run **up to 35 mph**, much faster than any human.
 - Bears have an incredible sense of smell and can detect food from miles away under the right conditions.
 - Most bear encounters end peacefully because bears usually prefer to avoid people.
 - The safest wildlife viewing happens when bears are allowed to behave naturally without human interference.
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Why Bear Safety Matters

Seeing a wild bear is often the highlight of an Alaska vacation, but it's also a reminder that Alaska is one of the few places where truly wild animals still roam freely. Respecting bears isn't just about protecting yourself—it's about protecting the bears and preserving the wild character that makes Alaska so extraordinary. By giving them space and following simple safety practices, you help ensure these incredible animals remain wild for future generations to enjoy.



Joe's Logbook

One of the biggest surprises for first-time visitors is how calm most bear encounters actually are. Television sometimes makes it seem like every bear is dangerous, but in reality, most bears are simply going about their day—fishing, feeding, or resting.

The key is respect. Every amazing bear photo you've seen was probably taken with a telephoto lens or from a safe viewing platform, not because someone walked up close. The best wildlife experiences happen when the animals don't even know—or don't care—that you're there.

If you're joining a guided bear excursion, relax and enjoy it. Alaska's guides do an incredible job of helping visitors experience these magnificent animals safely and responsibly. You'll leave with amazing memories, great photos, and a deeper appreciation for one of Alaska's true icons.