

🐻 Alaska Black Bear Guide

Your Complete Guide to Seeing Alaska's Curious Forest-Dwelling Bears



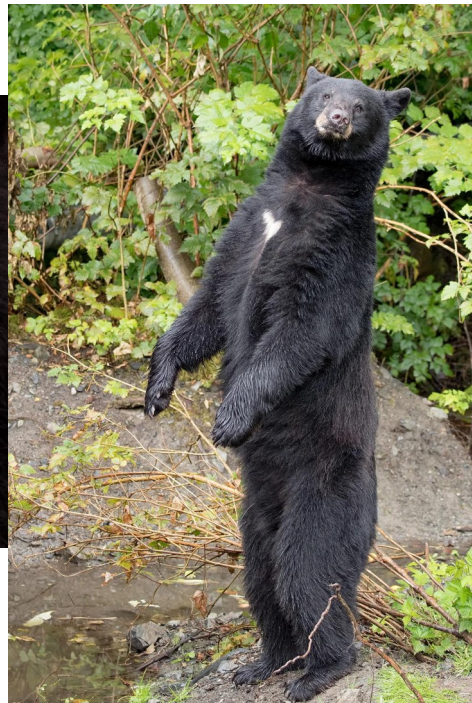
When people think of bears in Alaska, they often picture the massive coastal brown bear catching salmon. But **black bears** are actually the most common bear species seen by visitors throughout Southeast Alaska and are frequently spotted during Alaska cruises.

Smaller than brown bears but equally fascinating, black bears are excellent climbers, skilled foragers, and surprisingly adaptable. They spend much of their time searching for berries, grasses, insects, shellfish, and salmon while roaming Alaska's forests and coastlines.

Because many Alaska cruise ports are surrounded by dense temperate rainforest, black bears are often one of the easiest large mammals to spot during shore excursions.



Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Ursus americanus*

Height:

- Up to **6 feet** when standing on their hind legs

Weight:

- Females: **100–250 pounds**
- Males: **200–600 pounds**

Lifespan:

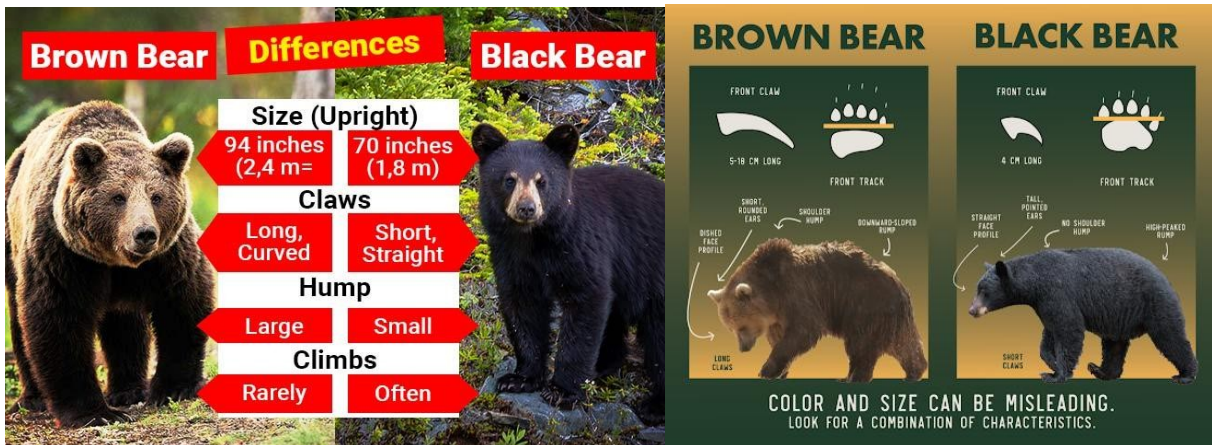
- 20–25 years in the wild

Diet:

- Berries
- Salmon
- Grasses
- Nuts
- Insects
- Shellfish
- Small mammals
- Carrion

Despite their name, black bears aren't always black. In Alaska, they may appear black, dark brown, cinnamon, or even blond.

● Black Bear vs. Brown Bear



Many visitors wonder how to tell the difference.

Black Bears

- Smaller body
- Straight facial profile
- Taller ears
- No pronounced shoulder hump
- Better tree climbers

Brown Bears

- Much larger
- Distinct shoulder hump
- Dish-shaped face
- Shorter rounded ears
- Rarely climb large trees as adults

Both species should always be observed from a safe distance.



Best Places to See Black Bears



Excellent places to spot black bears include:

Ketchikan

One of the best cruise ports for black bear sightings, especially during salmon season.

Sitka

Black bears are occasionally seen along forest edges and streams.

Icy Strait Point

Excellent wildlife excursions frequently include opportunities to spot black bears.

Anan Wildlife Observatory

One of the few places where visitors may observe **both black bears and coastal brown bears** feeding during the salmon run.

Wrangell

Guided excursions often include excellent bear-viewing opportunities.

Can You See Black Bears on an Alaska Cruise?

Yes!

Although it's uncommon to see bears from the cruise ship itself, many shore excursions travel into habitats where black bears are regularly observed.

Some travelers even spot bears from the ship while sailing through narrow fjords or along forested shorelines.

Always keep your binoculars nearby.

Masters of the Trees



Unlike large brown bears, black bears are exceptional climbers.

They climb trees to:

- Escape danger
- Rest
- Search for food
- Protect cubs

Young cubs can climb remarkably well and often scramble up trees when startled.

Salmon Season



During late summer, salmon become a major food source.

Black bears can often be seen:

- Waiting patiently along streams
- Catching spawning salmon
- Feeding near waterfalls
- Competing with other wildlife

These are some of the best opportunities for wildlife photography.

Photography Tips



For the best photographs:

- Bring a zoom lens (300mm or longer if possible).
- Stay with your guide.
- Focus on natural behavior rather than close-ups.
- Use burst mode during movement.
- Be patient and quiet.

Respect wildlife and never attempt to approach a bear.

Best Time to See Black Bears

May

Excellent.

Bears emerge from winter dens.

June

Excellent.

Plenty of fresh vegetation.

July

Outstanding.

Bears become increasingly active.

August

Peak viewing.

Salmon runs attract bears to rivers and streams.

September

Still excellent.

Bears continue feeding heavily before winter.



Bear Safety

Black bears are generally shy and prefer to avoid people.

If you encounter one:

- Stay calm.
- Give the bear plenty of space.
- Never feed wildlife.
- Stay with your group.
- Follow your guide's instructions.

Responsible wildlife viewing protects both visitors and bears.



What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Zoom lens
- ✓ Waterproof jacket
- ✓ Extra batteries

✓ Patience

Wildlife sightings happen naturally and cannot be guaranteed.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If you're hoping to photograph a black bear, choose an excursion that visits salmon streams or estuaries during late July, August, or early September. Those natural food sources dramatically increase your chances of seeing bears engaged in their most fascinating behaviors, such as fishing, foraging, or caring for cubs.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Brown Bear Guide
 - Kodiak Bear Guide (*future guide*)
 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Moose Guide (*future guide*)
 - Humpback Whale Guide (*future guide*)
 - Ketchikan Cruise Port Guide
 - Sitka Cruise Port Guide
 - Wrangell Cruise Port Guide
 - Icy Strait Point Cruise Port Guide
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Fun Facts

- Black bears have an excellent sense of smell—far stronger than a human's.
 - They can run **up to 30 mph** over short distances.
 - Black bears are strong swimmers and frequently cross rivers and lakes.
 - Cubs often stay with their mother for about **18 months** before becoming independent.
 - Despite their size, black bears are surprisingly agile and can climb trees with remarkable speed.
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Why Are Black Bears So Special?

Black bears are an important part of Alaska's rich ecosystem and one of the most commonly observed large mammals during an Alaska vacation. Their intelligence, adaptability, and curiosity make every sighting unique. Whether you're watching one forage for berries along a forest edge or patiently waiting

for salmon in a rushing stream, black bears offer visitors an unforgettable glimpse into Alaska's wild landscapes.



Joe's Logbook

Many travelers focus on seeing a giant brown bear, but don't overlook the black bears. In fact, if you're cruising through Southeast Alaska, you're actually more likely to spot a black bear than a brown bear.

One thing I find fascinating is how comfortable black bears are in the forest. They're excellent climbers, and it's not unusual to see a cub scramble up a tree while its mother keeps watch below. It's a reminder that these animals are incredibly intelligent and well adapted to their environment.

My advice is to always carry your binoculars during shore excursions. A black bear may appear quietly along the edge of the forest or beside a salmon stream when you least expect it. Those unexpected wildlife moments are often the ones you'll remember long after your Alaska adventure comes to an end.