

Alaska Dall's Porpoise Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Fastest Marine Mammal

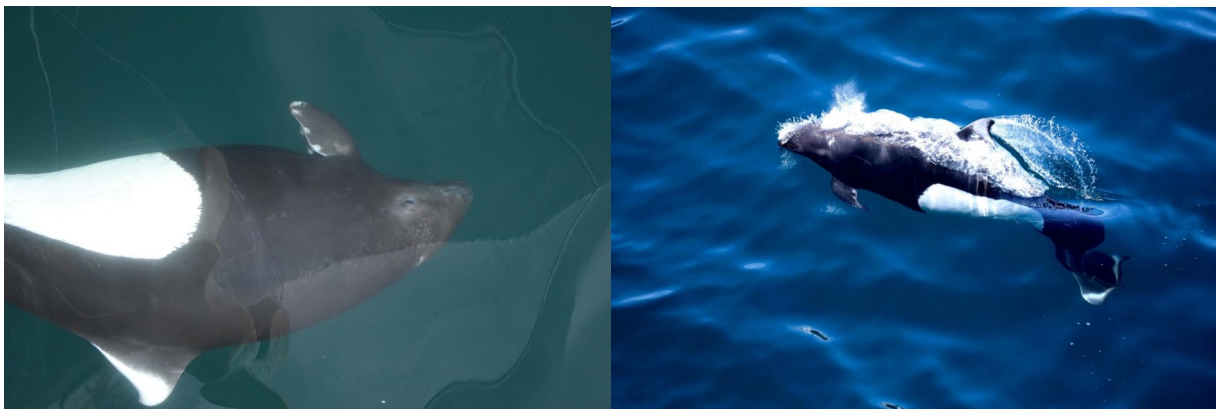


One of the most exciting—and often unexpected—marine wildlife encounters in Alaska is spotting a **Dall's porpoise** racing alongside your ship. Famous for their incredible speed and playful nature, these striking black-and-white marine mammals often appear out of nowhere, surfing the bow waves created by cruise ships and smaller boats.

Because of their coloring, Dall's porpoises are sometimes mistaken for young orcas. However, they're much smaller, much faster, and among the most energetic marine mammals in Alaska's coastal waters.

If you're lucky enough to have a pod join your ship, prepare for one of the most entertaining wildlife experiences of your Alaska vacation.

Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Phocoenoides dalli*

Length:

- 6–7 feet

Weight:

- 300–500 pounds

Lifespan:

- 15–20 years

Diet:

- Herring
- Squid
- Lanternfish
- Capelin
- Small schooling fish

Dall's porpoises are among the **fastest cetaceans** in the world, capable of reaching speeds of **35–40 mph**.

Where Can You See Dall's Porpoises?



Excellent places to spot Dall's porpoises include:

- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Prince William Sound
- Resurrection Bay
- Seward
- Glacier Bay National Park
- Inside Passage
- Sitka Sound
- Icy Strait

They're most commonly seen in deep coastal waters where fish are abundant.

★ Masters of Bow Riding



One of the reasons travelers love Dall's porpoises is their playful habit of **bow riding**.

Instead of avoiding boats, they often:

- Race toward moving vessels.
- Surf the pressure wave at the bow.
- Swim effortlessly just below the surface.
- Leap in and out of the water.

Sometimes they'll stay with a ship for several minutes before darting away.



Can You See Dall's Porpoises From a Cruise Ship?

Absolutely!

Cruise passengers occasionally enjoy incredible bow-riding displays without ever leaving the ship.

The best viewing locations are often:

- Near the front observation decks.
- Open outdoor decks with an unobstructed view of the bow.

Unlike whales, porpoises move extremely fast, so keep your eyes open.

Photography Tips



Capturing Dall's porpoises can be challenging because of their speed.

For the best photos:

- Use burst mode.
- Keep a fast shutter speed.
- Watch just ahead of the bow.
- Anticipate repeated jumps.
- Don't zoom too tightly—porpoises change direction quickly.

Patience and quick reflexes make all the difference.

Best Time to See Dall's Porpoises

May

Excellent.

June

Outstanding.

July

Outstanding.

August

Excellent.

September

Very good.

They are present throughout Alaska's cruise season.

Interesting Behaviors

Dall's porpoises are known for:

- Bow riding
- High-speed swimming
- Small group travel
- Quick directional changes
- Rooster-tail splashes created by their speed

Unlike many dolphins, they rarely perform dramatic high leaps, preferring to skim rapidly across the surface.

What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Waterproof jacket
- ✓ Polarized sunglasses
- ✓ Fast memory card

Because these animals move so quickly, every second counts.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If you're spending time on the open decks and suddenly notice small black-and-white shapes racing toward the front of the ship, head to the bow if it's accessible or find the best forward-facing viewing area available. Watching Dall's porpoises surf alongside a moving ship is one of Alaska's most exciting marine wildlife experiences—and it often happens with very little warning.

Continue Exploring Alaska

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 - Seward Cruise Port Guide
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Fun Facts

- Dall's porpoises can swim at speeds of **up to 40 mph**, making them among the fastest marine mammals in the world.
 - They create a distinctive "**rooster tail**" spray behind them as they skim across the water.
 - Despite looking similar, porpoises are **different from dolphins** and belong to a separate family.
 - They often travel in small groups of **2–12 animals**, though larger gatherings do occur.
 - Their striking black-and-white markings have earned them the nickname "**mini orcas**."
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Why Are Dall's Porpoises So Special?

Dall's porpoises bring excitement and energy to Alaska's coastal waters. Their incredible speed, playful bow-riding behavior, and striking appearance make every encounter unforgettable. While whales often steal the spotlight, many travelers remember these spirited little porpoises as one of the most delightful surprises of their Alaska cruise.

Joe's Logbook

Dall's porpoises are one of those wildlife sightings that usually catch everyone by surprise. One minute you're admiring the scenery, and the next, a group of black-and-white torpedoes comes racing toward the ship.

What I love most is how playful they seem. They almost look like they're having as much fun riding the ship's bow wave as we are watching them. Their speed is incredible, and trying to keep up with them using a camera is a challenge—but a fun one.

My advice is simple: spend some time outside on the open decks, especially while your ship is underway between ports. Some of Alaska's best wildlife moments don't happen during excursions—they happen while you're simply enjoying the journey. Seeing Dall's porpoises racing alongside the ship is a perfect example of that.