



Alaska Humpback Whale Guide

Your Complete Guide to Seeing Alaska's Gentle Giants



Few moments compare to the excitement of watching a **humpback whale** explode from the ocean in a spectacular breach or lift its massive tail high above the water before diving into the depths. For many travelers, seeing a humpback whale is the highlight of an Alaska cruise.

Every spring, thousands of humpback whales migrate from the warm waters of Hawaii and Mexico to Alaska's nutrient-rich seas to feed during the summer months. Here, they spend nearly six months building up energy reserves by consuming enormous amounts of krill and small fish before beginning their long journey south once again.

Whether you're watching from the deck of your cruise ship or on a dedicated whale-watching excursion, encountering a humpback whale is an experience you'll never forget.



Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Length:

- 40–60 feet (12–18 meters)

Weight:

- 25–40 tons

Lifespan:

- 45–90 years

Diet:

- Krill
- Herring
- Capelin
- Small schooling fish

Humpback whales are famous for their incredibly long pectoral fins, which can reach nearly one-third of their body length.

Where Can You See Humpback Whales?



Some of Alaska's best whale-watching locations include:

- Juneau
- Icy Strait Point
- Glacier Bay National Park
- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Seward
- Sitka
- Petersburg
- Frederick Sound
- Prince William Sound

These waters are among the best whale-watching destinations in the world.

★ Bubble-Net Feeding



One of the most remarkable wildlife behaviors found in Southeast Alaska is **bubble-net feeding**.

Working together, groups of humpback whales:

- Dive beneath schools of fish.
- Blow rings of bubbles to trap them.
- Swim upward together with mouths wide open.

This highly coordinated hunting technique is rarely seen elsewhere in the world and is one of Alaska's most extraordinary wildlife spectacles.



Can You See Humpback Whales From a Cruise Ship?

Absolutely!

One of the greatest things about an Alaska cruise is that whale sightings often happen without leaving the ship.

Keep watch while sailing through:

- Inside Passage
- Glacier Bay
- Icy Strait
- Lynn Canal
- Frederick Sound
- Prince William Sound

Cruise ships often slow down when whales are nearby, giving everyone a better opportunity to watch.

A dedicated whale-watching excursion, however, will usually provide closer and longer encounters.

Photography Tips



For the best whale photographs:

- Keep your camera ready at all times.
- Use burst mode.
- Focus on the area where the whale last surfaced.
- Watch for birds gathering, as they often indicate feeding activity.
- Don't spend the whole time behind the camera—take a moment to simply enjoy the experience.

Best Time to See Humpback Whales

May

Excellent.

Many whales have returned to Alaska.

June

Outstanding.

Whale activity increases throughout Southeast Alaska.

July

Peak season.

Large numbers of whales are feeding.

August

Excellent.

Bubble-net feeding is commonly observed.

September

Very good.

Interesting Behaviors

Humpback whales are known for:

- Breaching completely out of the water.
- Slapping their tails (tail lobbing).
- Slapping their pectoral fins.
- Bubble-net feeding.
- Singing complex songs (primarily males on breeding grounds).
- Raising their tails high before deep dives.

Every whale has a unique tail pattern, allowing researchers to identify individuals.

What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Extra memory cards
- ✓ Waterproof jacket
- ✓ Sunglasses
- ✓ Patience

Wildlife appears on nature's schedule, so always stay alert.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If whale watching is at the top of your Alaska bucket list, don't rely solely on sightings from the cruise ship. A dedicated whale-watching excursion in **Juneau** or **Icy Strait Point** will dramatically increase your chances of seeing whales up close, often with naturalists onboard who explain their fascinating behaviors.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
- Orca Guide (*future guide*)
- Sea Otter Guide (*future guide*)
- Harbor Seal Guide (*future guide*)

- Bald Eagle Guide
 - Glacier Bay National Park Guide
 - Kenai Fjords National Park Guide
 - Juneau Cruise Port Guide
 - Icy Strait Point Cruise Port Guide
 - Seward Cruise Port Guide
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Fun Facts

- Humpback whales migrate **up to 5,000 miles** each way between Alaska and their winter breeding grounds.
 - A single humpback can consume **up to 3,000 pounds of food per day** during the Alaska feeding season.
 - Their tail flukes are as unique as human fingerprints.
 - They can communicate using low-frequency sounds that travel for miles underwater.
 - A humpback whale's heart is about the size of a small car.
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Why Are Humpback Whales So Special?

Humpback whales are one of Alaska's greatest wildlife ambassadors. Their immense size, playful behavior, and incredible migrations inspire awe in everyone who sees them. Whether you're watching a whale breach beside your cruise ship or witnessing the rare teamwork of bubble-net feeding, these gentle giants create memories that last a lifetime.



Joe's Logbook

If someone asked me to name the one wildlife experience that defines an Alaska cruise, I'd probably say watching a humpback whale.

There's something magical about standing on the deck of a ship when someone suddenly shouts, "Whale off the starboard side!" Within seconds, everyone is gathered at the rail, cameras ready, waiting for that next breath or the unforgettable sight of a massive tail disappearing beneath the surface.

If you have the chance to book a whale-watching excursion in Juneau or Icy Strait Point, I highly recommend it. Getting closer to these incredible animals and learning about their migration, feeding habits, and behavior from experienced guides takes the experience to another level.

One final tip: don't watch your entire whale encounter through a camera screen. Take your photos, then put the camera down for a few moments and simply enjoy the experience. Those are often the memories that stay with you the longest.