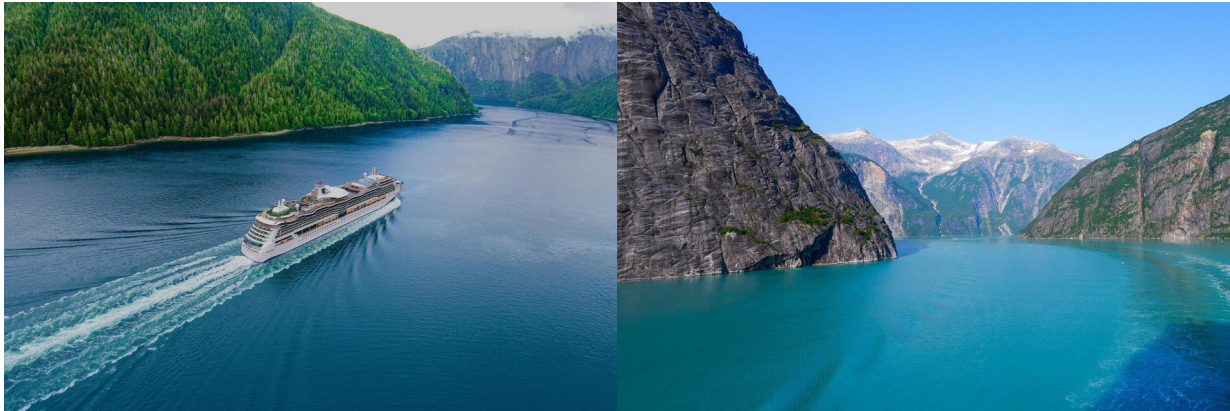




Alaska Inside Passage Guide

Your Complete Guide to One of the World's Most Spectacular Cruise Routes



The **Inside Passage** is one of the world's greatest cruise destinations and the route that introduces millions of travelers to Alaska each year. Stretching approximately **500 miles** along the rugged coastline of Southeast Alaska and western Canada, this protected waterway is famous for its towering mountains, ancient glaciers, lush rainforests, charming coastal towns, and incredible wildlife.

Unlike sailing across the open ocean, cruising the Inside Passage means you're almost always surrounded by land. Every hour brings new scenery, from snow-capped peaks and waterfalls cascading into the sea to bald eagles soaring overhead and humpback whales surfacing alongside the ship.

For many travelers, the journey through the Inside Passage is just as memorable as the ports themselves.



What Is the Inside Passage?



The Inside Passage is a network of protected waterways running from the Pacific Northwest through Southeast Alaska.

Most Alaska cruises travel through portions of the Inside Passage, passing:

- Forested islands
- Deep fjords
- Narrow channels
- Coastal communities
- Glacier-fed waterways

Because these waters are protected from the open Pacific Ocean, they are generally calmer than open-sea cruising, making them ideal for first-time cruisers.



Why Cruise the Inside Passage?

The Inside Passage offers an experience unlike anywhere else in the world.

Highlights include:

- Spectacular mountain scenery
- Massive glaciers
- Charming Alaska ports
- Calm cruising waters
- Incredible wildlife
- Waterfalls
- Historic Gold Rush towns
- Native Alaska culture

You'll spend as much time enjoying the scenery between ports as you do exploring the ports themselves.



Ports Along the Inside Passage



Depending on your itinerary, you may visit:

Juneau

Alaska's capital city.

Known for:

- Mendenhall Glacier
 - Whale watching
 - Mount Roberts Tramway
-

Ketchikan

The "Salmon Capital of the World."

Famous for:

- Creek Street
 - Totem poles
 - Fishing
 - Rainforest scenery
-

Skagway

A beautifully preserved Gold Rush town.

Highlights include:

- White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad
 - Historic downtown
 - Klondike history
-

Sitka

A unique blend of Russian and Native Alaskan history.

Known for:

- Sitka National Historical Park
 - Sea otters
 - Bald eagles
 - Marine wildlife
-

Icy Strait Point

One of Alaska's best wildlife destinations.

Famous for:

- Whale watching
 - Brown bears
 - ZipRider
 - Native culture
-

Scenic Cruising



Many Inside Passage cruises also include scenic cruising at:

- Glacier Bay National Park
- Hubbard Glacier
- Endicott Arm
- Dawes Glacier

These are often the highlights of the voyage.

Wildlife Along the Inside Passage



Keep your camera ready throughout your cruise.

Common wildlife sightings include:

- Humpback whales
- Orcas
- Harbor seals
- Sea otters
- Bald eagles
- Brown bears
- Black bears
- Mountain goats
- Porpoises

Even sea days become wildlife viewing opportunities.

Amazing Scenery

One of the greatest joys of the Inside Passage is simply watching Alaska drift by from your balcony or the ship's open decks.

Expect to see:

- Waterfalls
- Snow-covered peaks
- Dense temperate rainforest
- Small fishing villages
- Floating ice
- Remote islands
- Misty mountains

No two hours look exactly alike.

Photography Tips



Bring:

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

The best wildlife encounters often happen unexpectedly.



Weather

Summer temperatures generally range from:

50–65°F (10–18°C)

Expect:

- Occasional rain
- Cool mornings
- Comfortable afternoons
- Changing conditions

Layered clothing is the key to staying comfortable.



Northbound vs. Southbound Cruises

Many travelers wonder which direction is better.

Northbound Cruises

Typically sail:

- Vancouver → Seward/Whittier

Ideal if adding a land tour after the cruise.

Southbound Cruises

Typically sail:

- Seward/Whittier → Vancouver

Great if beginning with Denali or interior Alaska.

The scenery is spectacular in both directions.

Inside Passage vs. Gulf of Alaska

Some itineraries cruise only the Inside Passage, while others combine it with the Gulf of Alaska.

Inside Passage:

- Protected waters
- More ports
- Calmer seas

Gulf of Alaska:

- Open ocean
- One-way itineraries
- Access to Seward or Whittier
- Often paired with CruiseTours

Neither is "better"—it simply depends on the type of Alaska vacation you're planning.

Premium Travel Group Tip

Don't think of the Inside Passage as just transportation between ports. Some of your best Alaska memories will happen while your ship is underway.

Wake up early, spend time on the open decks, keep your binoculars nearby, and enjoy the scenery. It's not unusual to spot whales, sea otters, bald eagles, or even bears while simply sailing from one destination to the next.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- [Alaska Vacation Planning Guide](#)
- [Alaska Packing Guide](#)
- [Best Time to Visit Alaska](#)
- [Alaska Wildlife Guide](#)
- [Alaska Cruise vs. CruiseTour Guide](#)
- [Glacier Bay National Park Guide](#)
- [Hubbard Glacier Guide](#)
- [Endicott Arm & Dawes Glacier Guide](#)
- [Juneau Cruise Port Guide](#)
- [Ketchikan Cruise Port Guide](#)

- Skagway Cruise Port Guide
 - Sitka Cruise Port Guide
 - Icy Strait Point Cruise Port Guide
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Why Cruise the Inside Passage?

The Inside Passage isn't simply a route to Alaska—it's one of the destination's greatest attractions. Every mile offers breathtaking scenery, abundant wildlife, and a sense of peace that's hard to find anywhere else. Whether you're watching humpback whales surface beside your ship, photographing waterfalls cascading from towering cliffs, or enjoying the quiet beauty of a mist-covered fjord, the journey itself becomes one of the highlights of your Alaska adventure.



Joe's Logbook

One thing I always tell first-time Alaska cruisers is this: **don't wait until you reach port to start sightseeing.**

Some of the most incredible moments happen while your ship is quietly sailing through the Inside Passage. I've heard people say, "It was just a sea day," but in Alaska there really is no such thing. Every hour you're underway is another opportunity to see wildlife, glaciers in the distance, waterfalls, or mountain scenery that simply takes your breath away.

My advice is simple: spend as much time outside as you can. Grab a cup of coffee in the morning, head out on deck, and just watch Alaska unfold around you. The ports are amazing, but don't overlook the journey between them—it may become your favorite part of the entire cruise.