



Alaska Sea Otter Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Most Adorable Marine Mammal



If there's one Alaska animal guaranteed to make people smile, it's the **sea otter**. Often seen floating on their backs, wrapped in giant kelp, or holding paws while they rest, sea otters are among the most beloved wildlife species in the Last Frontier.

Don't let their playful appearance fool you—sea otters are incredibly important to Alaska's coastal ecosystems. As one of the ocean's top predators, they help maintain healthy kelp forests by feeding on sea urchins and other shellfish.

For many Alaska cruise travelers, spotting a raft of sea otters drifting peacefully through calm waters becomes one of the most memorable moments of their vacation.



Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Enhydra lutris*

Length:

- 3½–5 feet

Weight:

- Males: 50–100 pounds
- Females: 30–70 pounds

Lifespan:

- 10–20 years

Diet:

- Sea urchins
- Clams
- Mussels
- Crabs
- Abalone
- Octopus
- Fish

Sea otters are one of the few animals known to regularly use **tools**, often placing a rock on their chest to crack open shellfish.

Where Can You See Sea Otters?



Sea otters are commonly found in Alaska's sheltered coastal waters.

Excellent places to spot them include:

- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Prince William Sound
- Glacier Bay National Park
- Resurrection Bay
- Sitka

- Seward
- Valdez
- Kodiak
- Kachemak Bay

They're often seen resting in calm bays and protected coves.

★ Why Do Sea Otters Float on Their Backs?



Sea otters spend much of their lives floating on the surface.

They do this because:

- They eat while floating.
- They groom constantly to keep their fur waterproof.
- They rest between feeding sessions.
- They often wrap themselves in kelp to keep from drifting away with the current.

Groups of resting sea otters are called **rafts**.



Caring for Their Pups



Sea otter mothers are incredibly devoted.

Pups:

- Ride on their mother's chest.
- Float while mom dives for food.
- Learn to swim and forage over several months.
- Stay with their mother for about six months.

Watching a mother gently care for her pup is one of Alaska's most heartwarming wildlife experiences.



Can You See Sea Otters From a Cruise Ship?

Absolutely!

Sea otters are among the easiest marine mammals to spot during an Alaska cruise.

Watch for them while sailing through:

- Kenai Fjords
- Glacier Bay
- Prince William Sound
- Resurrection Bay
- Sitka Sound
- Icy Strait

Look for dark shapes floating on the water, especially near kelp beds.



Photography Tips



For the best photographs:

- Bring binoculars for easier spotting.
- Use a zoom lens.
- Focus on natural behaviors like grooming or eating.
- Be patient—they often roll over or raise shellfish above the water.
- Morning light often provides beautiful reflections.

Sea otters are wonderfully photogenic and often stay in one area for several minutes.



Best Time to See Sea Otters

May

Excellent.

June

Outstanding.

July

Outstanding.

August

Outstanding.

September

Excellent.

Sea otters remain active year-round, making them one of Alaska's most reliable wildlife sightings during cruise season.



Interesting Behaviors

Sea otters are known for:

- Using rocks as tools.
- Floating on their backs while eating.
- Wrapping themselves in kelp.
- Holding paws while resting to avoid drifting apart.
- Grooming constantly to keep their fur insulated.

Their dense fur contains nearly **one million hairs per square inch**, the thickest fur of any animal on Earth.



What to Bring

Bring:

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

✓ Sunglasses

Sea otters often stay visible long enough for excellent photographs.

★ Premium Travel Group Tip

Unlike whales, sea otters often remain on the surface for extended periods. When your ship enters a calm bay or protected cove, spend a few minutes scanning the water around kelp beds. Once you find one otter, you'll often discover an entire raft floating nearby.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Humpback Whale Guide
 - Orca Guide
 - Harbor Seal Guide (*future guide*)
 - Steller Sea Lion Guide (*future guide*)
 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Kenai Fjords National Park Guide
 - Glacier Bay National Park Guide
 - Seward Cruise Port Guide
 - Valdez Cruise Port Guide
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Fun Facts

- Sea otters have the **densest fur of any animal**, with up to **one million hairs per square inch**.
 - They can consume **25–30% of their body weight every day**.
 - Sea otters don't have a thick layer of blubber like seals and whales. Instead, they rely on their incredibly dense fur to stay warm.
 - They often keep a favorite rock tucked into a loose fold of skin under their forearm to use as a tool.
 - A group of resting sea otters is called a **raft**.
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Why Are Sea Otters So Special?

Sea otters are much more than adorable wildlife—they're a keystone species that helps keep Alaska's coastal ecosystems healthy. Their playful behavior, intelligence, and unique habits make them one of the most entertaining animals to watch. Whether they're floating peacefully in a kelp forest or cracking open shellfish on their chest, sea otters provide some of the most memorable wildlife encounters you'll experience in Alaska.



Joe's Logbook

I'll admit it—every time I see a sea otter, I can't help but smile.

There's just something about watching them float on their backs, casually eating lunch or wrapping themselves in kelp, that reminds you not all of Alaska's wildlife has to be big and intimidating. Sometimes the smallest moments become the most memorable.

One thing I always tell travelers is to keep looking at the water even after you've seen a whale. Sea otters are easy to miss at first because they look like small dark shapes bobbing on the surface. But once you spot one, you'll often notice several more nearby.

If you're lucky enough to see a mother with her pup riding on her chest, take a moment to simply enjoy it. It's one of the sweetest wildlife experiences Alaska has to offer, and one you'll probably remember just as much as seeing a whale breach or a bear catch a salmon.