

★ Alaska Sea Star Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Colorful Stars of the Sea



One of the most colorful and fascinating creatures found along Alaska's coastline is the **sea star**, commonly called a **starfish**. Despite the popular nickname, sea stars are **not fish at all**. They are echinoderms, making them close relatives of sea urchins and sand dollars.

Alaska's rocky shorelines and tide pools are home to dozens of sea star species in a remarkable variety of colors, including brilliant orange, deep purple, red, pink, blue, and mottled patterns. These slow-moving marine animals play an important role in keeping coastal ecosystems healthy by feeding on mussels, clams, barnacles, and other invertebrates.

Exploring a tide pool filled with sea stars is one of Alaska's most enjoyable family-friendly wildlife experiences.

★ Quick Facts



Scientific Group:

Sea stars (*Asteroidea*)

Common Species in Alaska:

- Ochre Sea Star
- Sunflower Sea Star
- Leather Sea Star
- Mottled Sea Star

Size:

- Most species range from **4 inches to over 3 feet** across, depending on the species.

Diet:

- Mussels
- Clams
- Barnacles
- Snails
- Sea urchins
- Dead marine animals

Sea stars use hundreds of tiny tube feet to move and capture food.

Where Can You See Sea Stars?



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Excellent places to find sea stars include:

- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Resurrection Bay
- Prince William Sound
- Sitka
- Ketchikan
- Glacier Bay National Park
- Kodiak Island
- Rocky beaches and tide pools throughout coastal Alaska

Low tide provides the best opportunities to observe them.

★ They Aren't Really Fish



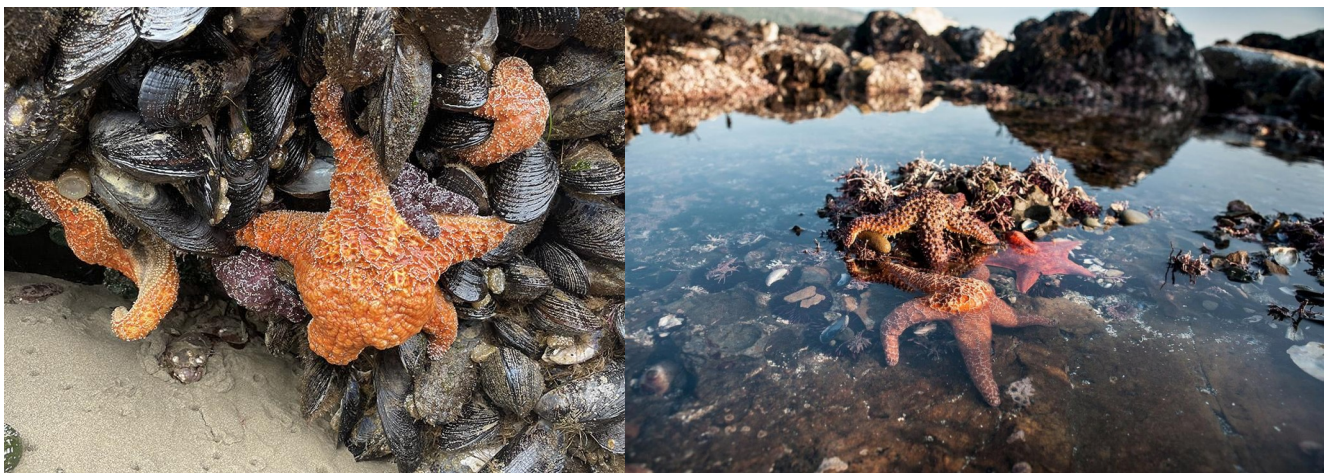
Although many people call them **starfish**, scientists prefer the name **sea star** because they aren't fish.

Unlike fish, sea stars:

- Have no backbone.
- Breathe through tiny structures on their skin.
- Move using tube feet.
- Can regenerate lost arms.

Some species can even regrow an entirely new body from part of a single arm if enough of the central disk remains.

Amazing Tide Pool Life



Sea stars are among the highlights of Alaska's tide pools.

You'll often find them alongside:

- Sea anemones
- Mussels
- Barnacles
- Hermit crabs
- Small fish
- Sea urchins

Tide pooling is a wonderful activity for families and nature lovers alike.



Can Cruise Travelers See Sea Stars?

Yes!

Sea stars are most often seen during:

- Shore excursions
- Tide pool walks
- Coastal hikes
- Kayaking adventures
- Small boat wildlife tours

While they're not visible from the deck of a large cruise ship, they're common during many nature-focused excursions.



Photography Tips



For the best photos:

- Visit during low tide.
- Photograph without removing sea stars from the water.
- Include surrounding tide pool life.
- Use natural light whenever possible.
- Be careful not to disturb fragile marine habitats.

Remember: **Look, photograph, but don't touch.**



Best Time to See Sea Stars

May

Excellent.

June

Outstanding.

July

Outstanding.

August

Excellent.

September

Very Good.

Sea stars can be observed throughout Alaska's cruise season whenever tide conditions are favorable.



Interesting Behaviors

Sea stars are known for:

- Regenerating lost arms.
- Moving with hundreds of tiny tube feet.
- Turning their stomachs inside out to digest prey.
- Clinging tightly to rocks during changing tides.
- Living for decades in some species.

Their feeding process is one of the most unusual in the animal kingdom.



What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Waterproof shoes
- ✓ Polarized sunglasses
- ✓ Tide schedule (if exploring independently)
- ✓ Curiosity

Tide pools are full of surprises if you take the time to look closely.



Premium Travel Group Tip

If your Alaska itinerary includes a tide pool excursion, move slowly and look carefully. It's amazing how many fascinating creatures reveal themselves when you take your time. Sea stars are often the first thing people notice, but they're just one part of an incredible miniature ecosystem living between the tides.



Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Giant Pacific Octopus Guide
 - King Crab Guide
 - Sea Otter Guide
 - Harbor Seal Guide
 - Kenai Fjords National Park Guide
 - Glacier Bay National Park Guide
 - Ketchikan Cruise Port Guide
 - Sitka Cruise Port Guide
 - Alaska Marine Life Guide (*future guide*)
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Fun Facts

- Sea stars aren't fish—they're **echinoderms**, closely related to sea urchins.
- Most species have **five arms**, but some have **20 or more**.
- They move using **hundreds of tiny tube feet**.
- Many species can regenerate lost arms over time.

- The Sunflower Sea Star was once one of the largest sea stars in the world, reaching **over 3 feet across**.
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Why Are Sea Stars So Special?

Sea stars remind us that some of Alaska's most fascinating wildlife is found in the smallest places. Their brilliant colors, unique biology, and important role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems make them a favorite discovery during tide pool adventures. Whether you're exploring a rocky shoreline or joining a guided nature walk, finding a sea star is a wonderful reminder that Alaska's natural beauty extends far beyond its mountains and glaciers.



Joe's Logbook

Sea stars taught me one of the biggest lessons about Alaska—sometimes you need to slow down.

It's easy to spend your trip looking for whales, bears, or eagles, but if you stop for a few minutes at a rocky shoreline during low tide, you'll discover an entirely different world. Every tide pool seems to have its own little community of colorful marine life, and sea stars are usually the stars of the show.

One thing I always remind travelers is to enjoy these amazing creatures responsibly. Take plenty of pictures, but leave them exactly where you found them. Tide pools are delicate ecosystems, and every sea star plays an important role.

Some of the best memories from Alaska don't come from the biggest wildlife—they come from taking the time to appreciate the little things that many people walk right past.