



Alaska Wildlife You Can See From Your Cruise Ship

Amazing Wildlife Encounters Without Leaving the Ship



One of the biggest surprises for first-time Alaska cruisers is just how much wildlife they can see **without ever stepping off the ship**. While shore excursions certainly offer incredible opportunities, some of the most memorable wildlife sightings happen while you're relaxing on deck, enjoying your balcony, or simply looking out a lounge window.

Cruise ships travel through some of the most wildlife-rich waters in North America, and captains often slow down or make announcements when whales, bears, or other animals are spotted nearby.

The best advice? Spend as much time outdoors as you can. Alaska's wildlife doesn't follow a schedule, and some of the most unforgettable moments happen when you least expect them.



Humpback Whales



Humpback whales are among the most frequently spotted animals from cruise ships.

You're likely to see:

- Breaching whales
- Tail flukes before deep dives
- Bubble-net feeding (occasionally)
- Mothers with calves
- Groups feeding together

Best Areas:

- Icy Strait Point
- Glacier Bay
- Inside Passage
- Kenai Fjords
- Prince William Sound

Orcas (Killer Whales)



Although less common than humpbacks, orca sightings are unforgettable.

Watch for:

- Tall dorsal fins
- Family pods
- Fast swimming
- Hunting behavior

Best seen in:

- Icy Strait
 - Glacier Bay
 - Prince William Sound
 - Kenai Fjords
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Sea Otters



Sea otters are one of the easiest marine mammals to spot.

Look for:

- Floating on their backs
- Wrapped in kelp
- Mothers carrying pups
- Rafts of resting otters

Most common in:

- Kenai Fjords
- Sitka
- Seward
- Prince William Sound



Harbor Seals



Harbor seals are especially common near glaciers.

Watch for:

- Seals resting on floating ice
- Curious heads popping above the water
- Mothers with pups during summer

Best viewing:

- Glacier Bay
- Tracy Arm
- Endicott Arm
- Hubbard Glacier



Steller Sea Lions



You'll often hear them before you see them!

Look for:

- Large groups on rocky islands
 - Loud barking
 - Swimming near shorelines
 - Navigation buoys crowded with sea lions
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Bald Eagles



Bald eagles are common throughout Southeast Alaska.

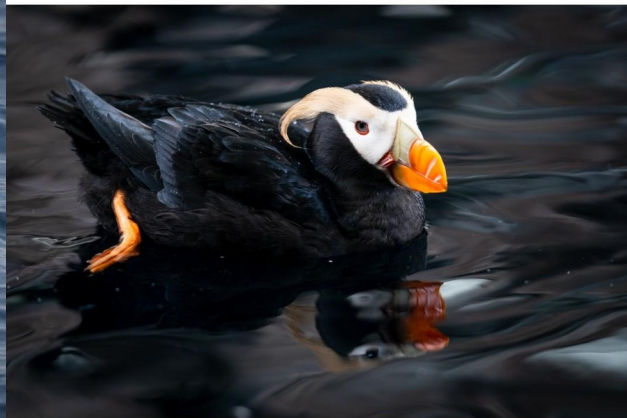
Watch for:

- Eagles perched in tall spruce trees
- Eagles soaring overhead
- Birds fishing along shorelines

They're among the easiest wildlife sightings on an Alaska cruise.



Puffins



Puffins are smaller and require a careful eye.

You'll usually spot them:

- Floating on the water
- Flying low over the ocean
- Nesting on rocky cliffs

Binoculars make a huge difference.

Dall's Porpoises



These energetic marine mammals love cruise ships.

Watch for:

- Bow riding
- Fast swimming
- Rooster-tail splashes
- Small pods racing alongside the ship

They often appear suddenly.

Jellyfish



When the water is calm:

Look straight down.

You may spot:

- Moon jellies
- Lion's Mane Jellyfish
- Crystal jellies

Many passengers walk right past them.



Can You See Bears?



Yes—but it's much less common.

Occasionally you'll see:

- Brown bears walking beaches
- Black bears along shorelines
- Bears near salmon streams

Bring binoculars for the best chance.



Best Viewing Locations on the Ship



The best places include:

- Open promenade decks
- Upper observation decks
- Bow viewing areas (if accessible)
- Your private balcony
- Panoramic observation lounges

Avoid spending the entire day indoors—you never know when wildlife will appear.



Tips for Wildlife Viewing

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Polarized sunglasses
- ✓ Warm layers
- ✓ Patience

And most importantly...

Keep looking!

Wildlife can appear at any time.



Premium Travel Group Tip

One of my favorite places to be during an Alaska cruise is on an outside deck while the ship is sailing between ports. Many travelers head indoors once they leave port, but that's often when whales, porpoises, sea otters, and bald eagles begin to appear. Some of the best wildlife sightings of your entire cruise may happen while you're simply enjoying the journey.



Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Best Places to See Wildlife Guide
 - Wildlife by Month Guide
 - Wildlife Photography Guide
 - Humpback Whale Guide
 - Orca Guide
 - Sea Otter Guide
 - Harbor Seal Guide
 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Glacier Bay Guide
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Fun Facts

- Many cruise captains will **slow the ship** when whales are spotted, giving guests more time to enjoy the experience.
 - Naturalists onboard many Alaska cruises help identify wildlife and explain interesting behaviors.
 - It's possible to spot **whales, sea otters, seals, bald eagles, puffins, and porpoises all in the same day** without leaving the ship.
 - Binoculars often reveal wildlife long before it's visible to the naked eye.
 - The journey between ports is often just as rewarding for wildlife viewing as the ports themselves.
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Why You Should Always Keep Watching

One of the greatest joys of an Alaska cruise is realizing that the adventure doesn't pause when the ship leaves port. Every stretch of coastline, every glacier, and every open channel offers the possibility of an unforgettable wildlife encounter. Whether it's a humpback whale breaching in the distance, a curious sea otter floating nearby, or a bald eagle soaring overhead, Alaska rewards travelers who simply take the time to look.



Joe's Logbook

Some of my favorite Alaska memories didn't happen during an excursion—they happened while the ship was sailing.

I've learned that many people head inside after leaving port to grab lunch or relax, but I usually do the opposite. I find a spot on an outside deck with a cup of coffee, keep my binoculars close, and just watch the water. More often than not, something amazing appears.

One of the things I love about cruising Alaska is that the journey itself is part of the destination. You don't have to book an excursion to experience incredible wildlife. Sometimes all it takes is being in the right place at the right time and remembering to look up from your phone.

That's one of the reasons Alaska is so special—you never know when nature is about to put on a show.