



Harbor Seals of New England & Eastern Canada Wildlife Guide

Meet the Playful Marine Mammals of the Atlantic Coast



One of the most delightful wildlife encounters during a **New England & Canada cruise** is spotting a **Harbor Seal** resting on rocky islands or curiously watching from the water. With their large expressive eyes, whiskered faces, and playful personalities, harbor seals are among the most commonly seen marine mammals along the northeastern coast of North America.

Unlike whales, harbor seals spend much of their time close to shore, making them easier to observe from cruise ships, shore excursions, coastal parks, and waterfront walking trails. Whether they're basking in the sunshine or popping their heads above the water to investigate passing boats, harbor seals are always a favorite with travelers.

These adaptable marine mammals are an important part of the coastal ecosystem and one of the easiest wild animals to spot during your journey.



Meet the Harbor Seal



Harbor seals are true seals, meaning they lack external ear flaps and move on land by wriggling on their bellies.

Adults typically measure:

- **5–6 feet (1.5–1.8 meters)** long
- **180–300 pounds (80–135 kg)**

They are recognized by:

- Round head
- Large dark eyes
- Short snout
- Long whiskers
- Spotted gray, brown, or tan coat

Each seal has a unique pattern of spots, making individuals easy for researchers to identify.

Where to See Harbor Seals



Harbor seals are widespread throughout the region.

Excellent viewing locations include:

Maine

- Acadia National Park
- Bar Harbor
- Casco Bay
- Penobscot Bay

New Brunswick

- Bay of Fundy
- Grand Manan Island

Nova Scotia

- Cape Breton
- Halifax Harbor
- Eastern Shore

Québec

- Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park
- Gaspé Peninsula

Newfoundland

- Gros Morne National Park
- Trinity Bay
- Bonavista Peninsula

They're often seen resting on rocky ledges exposed during low tide.



Best Time to See Harbor Seals



Harbor seals can be seen throughout the year.

Best viewing:

Late Spring through Early Fall

During these months:

- More seals haul out on rocks.
- Weather improves for wildlife viewing.
- Boat excursions operate regularly.

Low tide often provides the best viewing opportunities.

Life Along the Coast



Harbor seals spend their days:

- Hunting for fish
- Resting on rocks
- Swimming through coastal waters
- Raising pups
- Avoiding predators

Although they appear slow on land, they're graceful and agile swimmers.

What Do Harbor Seals Eat?



Their diet includes:

- Herring
- Cod
- Mackerel
- Flounder
- Squid
- Crustaceans

Harbor seals are skilled underwater hunters and can remain submerged for **20–30 minutes** while searching for food.



Wildlife Photography Tips



For memorable photos:

- Use binoculars or a zoom lens.
- Photograph seals at low tide.
- Capture reflections in calm water.
- Watch for curious seals popping up near your boat.
- Never approach resting seals too closely.

Giving seals plenty of space helps prevent unnecessary stress.



Seeing Harbor Seals During Your Cruise



Harbor seals are among the easiest marine mammals to see during a cruise.

Keep watch near:

- Rocky islands
- Harbor entrances
- Coastal cliffs
- Protected coves
- Low-tide rock ledges

You may spot them from the deck of your ship without leaving the vessel.

⚠ Seal Safety



If you encounter seals ashore:

- Stay at least **150 feet (45 meters)** away.
- Never feed or touch them.
- Keep dogs leashed and away from seals.
- Avoid disturbing resting animals.
- If a seal lifts its head repeatedly or moves toward the water because of your presence, you're too close.

Respecting wildlife ensures seals can rest and care for their young without interruption.

★ Premium Travel Group Tip

Harbor seals are naturally curious. If you're on a small wildlife cruise or kayaking excursion, you may notice a seal quietly surfacing nearby to observe you. Enjoy the moment, but let the seal decide how close it wants to come. Some of the best wildlife encounters happen when you simply remain calm and let nature take the lead.



Continue Exploring New England & Canada Wildlife

Continue your wildlife adventure with our related guides:

- Humpback Whales Guide
 - Fin Whales Guide
 - Minke Whales Guide
 - Atlantic Puffins Guide
 - Bald Eagles Guide
 - Moose Wildlife Guide
 - Dolphins Guide (*coming soon*)
 - Wildlife Photography Guide (*coming soon*)
 - Wildlife You Can See from Your Cruise Ship (*coming soon*)
-



Fun Facts

- Harbor seals can **hold their breath for up to 30 minutes** while diving for food.
 - Their whiskers are incredibly sensitive and help detect the movement of fish underwater, even in murky conditions.
 - Seal pups can swim within **hours of being born**, though they continue nursing for several weeks.
 - Harbor seals are excellent divers, typically reaching depths of **300–500 feet (90–150 meters)** while hunting.
 - Unlike sea lions, harbor seals **cannot rotate their rear flippers beneath their bodies**, which is why they wriggle on land instead of walking.
-



Why You'll Love Seeing Harbor Seals

Harbor seals bring a sense of fun and curiosity to any coastal adventure. Whether they're lounging on sun-warmed rocks, swimming effortlessly through quiet coves, or peeking above the water to watch passing boats, these charming marine mammals have a way of making people smile. They're often one of the first wild animals travelers encounter along the New England and Atlantic Canadian coast, making every sighting a memorable part of the journey.



Joe's Logbook

One of the things I enjoy most about harbor seals is how curious they seem to be.

Unlike some wildlife that disappears the moment people arrive, harbor seals often do the opposite. You'll be standing on the deck of your ship or sitting quietly in a small excursion boat when suddenly a whiskered face pops out of the water as if it's checking out the visitors.

Those moments always remind me that wildlife experiences don't have to involve the biggest animals to be memorable. Sure, everyone hopes to see whales, but watching a harbor seal quietly observe you from just offshore can be just as special.

If you're cruising through Maine, the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia, or Newfoundland, keep an eye on rocky islands and quiet coves during low tide. There's a good chance you'll spot a few seals stretched out in the sunshine, completely at home along one of the most beautiful coastlines in North America.

Sometimes the smallest wildlife encounters become the ones you remember most.  