

BOOK #005

The Smart Traveler's Whale Watching Guide

Chapter 2 — Meet Alaska's Whale Species

Imagine hearing someone excitedly shout, "There's another one!" As everyone looks toward the water, a tall black dorsal fin slices through the surface. A few minutes later, a humpback whale lifts its massive tail before diving beneath the waves. Alaska is one of the few places where you may encounter several different whale species during a single vacation.

Humpback Whales

Humpbacks are Alaska's most famous whales. Known for spectacular breaches, tail slaps, and bubble-net feeding, they migrate thousands of miles each year to feed in Alaska's nutrient-rich waters.

Orcas (Killer Whales)

Orcas are actually the largest members of the dolphin family. They travel in family groups called pods and are easily recognized by their striking black-and-white coloring and tall dorsal fins.

Gray Whales

Gray whales are among the longest migrating mammals on Earth. They are most often seen during spring migration but can occasionally be spotted during Alaska cruises.

Minke Whales

Smaller and more elusive than humpbacks, minke whales are quick swimmers and are often recognized by their pointed snouts and graceful movements.

Fin and Blue Whales

These giants are less commonly seen but occasionally appear in Alaska's offshore waters. A sighting of either species is considered especially memorable.

How to Tell Them Apart

Watch for differences in size, dorsal fins, tail flukes, and behavior. Every sighting is unique, making whale watching exciting no matter how many times you visit Alaska.

Aimee's Insider Tip

Don't worry if you can't identify every whale you see. Your guides and naturalists are incredibly knowledgeable and love explaining what you're observing. Listen to their stories—you'll leave with a much deeper appreciation for Alaska's marine life.