

BOOK #006

The Smart Traveler's Alaska Wildlife Guide

Chapter 1 — Alaska's Marine Mammals

Imagine standing on the rail of your cruise ship as someone points toward the water. A humpback whale surfaces in the distance while a curious sea otter floats on its back nearby. Moments later, a playful harbor seal pops its head above the water before disappearing beneath the waves. Alaska's coastal waters are full of life, and every day brings the possibility of a new wildlife encounter.

Humpback Whales

These gentle giants are the stars of many Alaska cruises. During the summer they migrate to Alaska's nutrient-rich waters to feed, where they are often seen breaching, tail slapping, or bubble-net feeding.

Orcas (Killer Whales)

Orcas are the largest members of the dolphin family and are recognized by their striking black-and-white coloring. They travel in close family groups called pods and can sometimes be seen from both cruise ships and shore excursions.

Sea Otters

Sea otters are among Alaska's most beloved animals. They often float on their backs while eating shellfish or wrapping themselves in kelp to keep from drifting away while resting.

Harbor Seals & Sea Lions

Harbor seals are frequently spotted resting on icebergs or rocky shorelines, while Steller sea lions gather on buoys and rocky outcroppings, often announcing their presence with loud barks.

Porpoises & Dolphins

Dall's porpoises are famous for racing alongside ships, creating distinctive rooster-tail sprays as they swim. Lucky travelers may also spot Pacific white-sided dolphins in some coastal waters.

Where to Look

Keep watch while sailing through the Inside Passage, Glacier Bay National Park, Stephens Passage, and around Icy Strait Point. Spending time on deck with binoculars greatly increases your chances of spotting marine mammals.

Aimee's Insider Tip

Don't spend every sea day indoors. Grab a warm drink, head outside, and simply watch the water. Some of the most unforgettable wildlife moments happen while your ship is quietly sailing between ports.