



ALASKA

Alaska cruise: Inside Passage vs. Gulf itineraries

The two main Alaska cruise formats look similar on the brochure. One is an easy round-trip; the other sees twice as much glacier. Here's how to choose.

Prepared by Demo Advisor · April 20, 2026

ADVISOR TIP

Demo content — illustrative only. This is a showcase of Compass features, not travel advice. Verify anything you'd actually act on.

Nine out of ten Alaska cruises sold are either an Inside Passage round-trip from Seattle/Vancouver or a one-way Gulf of Alaska crossing between Vancouver/Seattle and Whittier/Seward. They're both great, but they're different trips — one is simpler to book, the other sees more.

At a glance

WEATHER

BEST TIME

Mid-June through
August

AVG HIGH

62°F (17°C)
summer days

AVG LOW

48°F (9°C) summer
nights

RAINY SEASON

Rain any month —
bring a layer

The two formats

Inside Passage (round-trip)

7 nights, round-trip from Seattle or Vancouver.
Typically visits Juneau, Skagway, and Ketchikan, with a scenic day at Tracy Arm or Endicott Arm fjord.

Best for: first-timers, families, anyone who wants simple logistics.

Gulf of Alaska (one-way)

7 nights, Vancouver → Whittier (Seward). Same ports as Inside Passage PLUS Hubbard Glacier or College Fjord — a full extra scenic day.

Best for: glacier-focused travelers, people adding a land tour to Denali.

What you'll need

DOCUMENTS NEEDED

- ☐ Passport OR government-issued photo ID + birth certificate (closed-loop from U.S. port). Passport strongly recommended.
- ☐ Cruise line boarding pass (via app or printed)
- ☐ Credit card for onboard account
- ☐ Travel insurance policy (highly recommended — weather delays happen)
- ☐ Warm layers (yes, in June)
- ☐ Medications in carry-on

Port days at a glance

Juneau

Mendenhall Glacier, whale watching, or the tram up Mount Roberts. If you do one thing, do the whale watching.

Skagway

White Pass railway (iconic), gold rush history, or a day trip to the Yukon. Tiny town, easy to walk.

Ketchikan

Salmon capital. Misty Fjords flightseeing is the splurge. Creek Street is cute but touristy.

What to pack

PACKING LIST

- ☐ Waterproof shell (not "water resistant")
- ☐ Warm fleece or thin down layer
- ☐ Broken-in waterproof walking shoes
- ☐ Warm hat and gloves (shoulder seasons)
- ☐ Binoculars
- ☐ Camera with zoom — humpbacks don't pose up close
- ☐ Motion-sickness preventative if prone

Tipping

TIPPING GUIDE

Cabin steward	Included in daily gratuity
Dining staff	Included in daily gratuity
Bartender	18% auto-added + \$1/drink if exceptional
Shore excursion guide	\$10–20 per person
Specialty dining	20% if exceptional

FAQ

Should I add Denali?

Yes, if you have the time. 3–5 nights of post-cruise land tour turns a cruise into a proper Alaska trip. Cruise lines sell the combo.

Will I see bears?

Possibly from the ship, almost certainly on a land excursion. Ketchikan's Neets Bay and Juneau's Pack Creek are two known spots.

Is June really warm enough?

Highs in the 60s, wet some days. It's never tropical but it's not tundra either. Layers solve it.

Do I need a passport?

Not technically for closed-loop from Seattle, but we strongly recommend one. If anything goes wrong and you need to fly home from Vancouver, you'll need it.

[Compare Alaska sailings →](#)