

# Things to Do in Juneau, Alaska: Top Attractions and Adventures



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Juneau, Alaska's capital city, is one of the unique [\*US destinations\*](#) where lush rainforests meet glacier-carved fjords and vibrant coastal culture. Unlike many state capitals, Juneau is accessible only by air or sea, giving it a remote and adventurous feel. Travelers come here for dramatic landscapes, wildlife encounters, and outdoor experiences that showcase Alaska's natural beauty.

From the massive Mendenhall Glacier to the rich waters of Gastineau Channel, Juneau offers unforgettable scenery and activities for every type of traveler. Visitors can hike through temperate rainforests, go whale watching in icy waters, or explore the city's historic downtown full of local shops and Alaskan cuisine.

What makes Juneau especially appealing is the combination of wilderness and culture in one compact area. You can enjoy glacier trekking in the morning, spot humpback whales in the afternoon, and dine on fresh seafood in a local restaurant

by evening. This guide highlights the best things to do in Juneau, helping travelers plan an immersive, action-packed visit to Alaska's capital.

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## Top Things to Do in Juneau

From glaciers and fjords to rainforests and wildlife, Juneau offers a variety of [\*unforgettable experiences to do in Alaska\*](#) for every traveler.



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### 1. Take a Glacier and Fjord Cruise

Cruising through Juneau's fjords and glaciers is one of the most iconic ways to experience the region. These tours navigate deep fjords and channels, passing towering cliffs, cascading waterfalls, and tidewater glaciers that calve into the water. Travelers often spot seals resting on icebergs, seabirds diving for fish, and, occasionally, humpback whales feeding near the surface. Experienced guides provide commentary about the region's geology, glacial formations, and the local marine ecosystem, making the journey both scenic and educational. Cruises range

from a few hours to full-day excursions, offering visitors an intimate look at Juneau's dramatic coastal landscapes.

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## **2. Ride the Mount Roberts Tramway**

The Mount Roberts Tramway is a must-do activity for visitors who want panoramic views without strenuous hiking. The tramway lifts travelers from downtown Juneau up to the alpine summit, offering sweeping vistas of the city, Gastineau Channel, and the surrounding islands. At the top, visitors can explore short walking trails, observation platforms, and interpretive exhibits about the region's flora, fauna, and cultural history. Seasonal guided tours offer further insight into local wildlife and the environment. Families, photographers, and travelers seeking a relaxing yet rewarding experience often find the tramway the perfect combination of accessibility and breathtaking scenery.

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## **3. Visit the Alaska State Museum**

The Alaska State Museum is a cultural and historical gem in Juneau, offering visitors an in-depth look at Alaska's rich past. Exhibits cover Tlingit and other indigenous cultures, Russian colonial history, the gold rush era, and the state's natural environment. Interactive displays, educational demonstrations, and carefully curated collections make the museum appealing to travelers of all ages. Visiting the museum gives context to the landmarks and landscapes explored throughout Juneau, helping travelers understand how the region's culture, wildlife, and geography are interconnected. It is an ideal stop for those interested in learning about Alaska beyond its outdoor adventures.

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## **4. Go Summer Dog Sledding on Glaciers**

Even during summer, Juneau offers guided dog sledding experiences on nearby glaciers. Visitors ride sleds pulled by Alaskan huskies across snowy fields, often

learning about the history of mushing in Alaska. Guides explain sled dog training, navigation techniques on icy terrain, and the role of dogs in local culture and exploration. The tours provide both adrenaline-pumping excitement and educational insights into a tradition that is iconic to the state. Summer dog sledding allows travelers to experience a winter activity in an off-season setting, making it a unique and memorable adventure for visitors of all ages.

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## **5. Explore Glacier Gardens Rainforest Adventure**

Glacier Gardens combines natural beauty with horticultural innovation in Juneau's temperate rainforest. Visitors stroll through hanging gardens, vibrant flower displays, and interpretive trails, learning about native and imported plant species. Guided tours highlight how the rainforest thrives in the coastal climate and its importance for local wildlife. The attraction is family-friendly, offering peaceful walks, photography opportunities, and educational insights into Alaska's unique ecosystem. Glacier Gardens provides a refreshing alternative to glaciers and fjords, allowing travelers to explore the lush, green side of Juneau while gaining a deeper understanding of its ecological diversity.

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## **6. Take a Flightseeing Tour Over Juneau**

Flightseeing tours provide an unparalleled perspective of Juneau and its surrounding landscapes. Small aircraft take visitors over towering glaciers, fjords, and rugged mountain ridges, giving a sense of the immense scale of the region. Some tours include glacier landings, where travelers can step out onto the ice and experience the alpine environment firsthand. Guides explain local geography, glacial formation, and natural history while pointing out wildlife from above. Flightseeing offers a thrilling adventure for photographers, outdoor enthusiasts, and travelers looking for a unique and memorable way to see Alaska's dramatic wilderness from the air.

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## **7. Join a Helicopter Tour**

Helicopter tours allow travelers to reach remote areas around Juneau that are otherwise inaccessible. Flights often venture to hidden glaciers, alpine valleys, and icefields, providing an exhilarating experience combined with stunning views. Guides share information on glacial movement, local ecosystems, and geology, making the trip both educational and adventurous. Many tours offer optional glacier landings for an up-close experience of Alaska's frozen landscapes. Helicopter adventures are ideal for thrill-seekers and photographers alike, offering a combination of adrenaline and awe-inspiring scenery while showcasing some of the most pristine areas in Southeast Alaska.

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## **8. Go Whale Watching in Auke Bay**

Auke Bay is a prime location for observing humpback whales, orcas, and other marine wildlife. Guided tours bring visitors close to feeding whales, allowing for incredible photography and observation opportunities. In addition to whales, travelers often see sea otters, porpoises, and seals in their natural habitat. Guides provide detailed commentary on whale behavior, migration, and the local marine ecosystem, making the experience both thrilling and informative. Whale watching in Auke Bay is seasonal, with the summer months providing the most consistent sightings, making it one of the most memorable wildlife experiences in Juneau.

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## **9. Hike in Tongass National Forest**

Tongass National Forest, one of the largest temperate rainforests in the world, surrounds Juneau with lush trails, waterfalls, and diverse wildlife habitats. Hikers can explore moss-covered forests, streams, and alpine viewpoints while spotting black bears, deer, and bald eagles along the way. Guided hikes often include education about local plants, animal tracking, and the ecosystem's role in supporting the surrounding environment. Trails vary from easy strolls to more challenging treks, providing options for all levels of travelers. Exploring Tongass

allows visitors to immerse themselves in Alaska's vibrant natural landscapes without leaving the Juneau area.

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## **10. Observe Salmon Runs at Mendenhall and Auke Creek**

During summer, salmon migrate upstream to spawn, attracting wildlife and visitors alike. Bald eagles, black bears, and other predators can often be seen hunting along the rivers, providing dynamic and memorable wildlife viewing. Walkways and observation platforms at Mendenhall and Auke Creek allow travelers to safely watch the salmon run while learning about their life cycles and ecological importance. Seasonal programs and interpretive signage offer educational insights, connecting visitors with the local environment. Salmon runs create an impressive natural spectacle, blending wildlife observation with understanding Alaska's critical river ecosystems.

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## **11. Kayak Through Fjords and Channels**

Kayaking in Juneau offers a hands-on adventure along calm fjords, channels, and coastal waters. Paddlers navigate past glaciers, islands, and sea cliffs while encountering seals, otters, and seabirds. Guided trips provide safety instruction, environmental insights, and wildlife identification, ensuring an educational as well as adventurous experience. Kayaking allows visitors to explore areas inaccessible to larger boats, giving an intimate perspective of the region's landscapes. Whether for exercise, photography, or simply connecting with nature, kayaking provides a unique way to experience Juneau's waterways.

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## **12. Glacier Trekking Adventures**

Glacier trekking lets visitors explore icy landscapes safely with the guidance of trained experts. Tours on Mendenhall Glacier and surrounding fields provide hands-on experience of crevasses, ice formations, and glacial ridges. Guides

explain glacier formation, movement, and environmental significance while ensuring safety with crampons and protective gear. This activity combines adventure, physical activity, and education, offering travelers a close-up look at one of Juneau's most iconic natural features. Trekking on glaciers provides unforgettable memories, spectacular photo opportunities, and a deep appreciation for Alaska's dynamic landscapes.

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### **13. Eagle and Bird Watching Tours**

Juneau is a haven for bird enthusiasts, especially for bald eagles, puffins, and other seabirds. Guided tours focus on spotting species, understanding their behaviors, and learning about local ecosystems. Tours often combine boat and land observations, giving visitors multiple vantage points. Seasonal variations, including nesting and migration periods, provide unique wildlife experiences. Bird watching is both relaxing and educational, offering travelers an opportunity to observe Alaska's diverse avian population while enjoying serene natural surroundings.

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### **14. Glacier Ice Caving**

Glacier ice caves near Juneau provide a rare and striking adventure. Visitors explore tunnels and caverns formed naturally within glaciers, learning about glacial processes, seasonal changes, and ice formations. Guides ensure safety while explaining the science behind the ice caves, making it both educational and thrilling. Ice caves offer a completely different perspective of glaciers, allowing travelers to walk inside these frozen environments and experience the textures, colors, and scale of Alaska's icy landscapes firsthand.

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### **15. Forest and Coastal Wildlife Observation**

Beyond structured tours, Juneau offers numerous trails and coastal paths for wildlife observation. Visitors often encounter river otters, seals, deer, and occasionally black bears in their natural habitats. Guided experiences provide context on animal behavior, seasonal patterns, and conservation efforts. Walking through these areas gives travelers a quiet, immersive connection to the natural environment, highlighting Alaska's biodiversity and pristine wilderness. This activity complements glacier and fjord adventures, giving a holistic nature experience for travelers seeking both education and scenic enjoyment.

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## **Best Time to Visit Juneau**

The ideal time to visit Juneau is from May to September, when the weather is milder, daylight lasts long, and most outdoor activities are fully accessible. Summer brings temperatures ranging from 50°F to 70°F (10°C-21°C), making it perfect for glacier cruises, whale watching, and hiking in the rainforest. This is also peak season for wildlife viewing, including salmon runs, bald eagles, and humpback whales.



**Spring (April-May):** Spring offers fewer crowds and a chance to see early blooms in Glacier Gardens and the surrounding rainforest. Wildlife is active, and many seasonal tours start reopening after winter.

**Fall (September-October):** This season brings cooler temperatures, fewer visitors, and vibrant autumn colors across Tongass National Forest and nearby trails. Some cruise and tour operators begin scaling back, but it's still a great time for photography and quiet exploration.

**Winter (November-March):** This season is cold, with temperatures often below freezing and frequent snow. While most outdoor tours are limited, winter offers unique experiences such as dog sledding, northern lights viewing, and snowshoeing. Travelers should note that many attractions, including some ferries and glacier cruises, are closed or operate on a reduced schedule.

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## **Travel Tips for Visiting Juneau**

Planning ahead can make your trip to Juneau smoother and more enjoyable, especially when navigating its weather, outdoor activities, and seasonal travel patterns:



## **Prepare for Rain and Changing Weather**

Juneau has a coastal climate, and rain is common throughout the year. Even during summer, light showers can occur unexpectedly. Packing a waterproof jacket, layered clothing, and sturdy walking shoes will help you stay comfortable while exploring glaciers, hiking trails, and outdoor attractions. Dressing in layers is especially helpful because temperatures can shift quickly between cool mornings, mild afternoons, and chilly evenings.

## **Book Popular Tours Early**

Many travelers visit Juneau during the cruise season from May to September, which means popular activities can fill up quickly. Whale watching tours, glacier helicopter flights, and guided kayaking trips are some of the most sought-after experiences. Reserving tours in advance ensures you secure a spot and gives you more flexibility when planning your itinerary.

## **Plan Around Cruise Ship Schedules**

Juneau receives multiple cruise ships on busy summer days, which can increase crowds at major attractions like Mendenhall Glacier and downtown shopping

areas. If possible, visit popular spots early in the morning or later in the evening when cruise passengers are less concentrated. Checking daily cruise ship schedules can also help you choose quieter times to explore.

### **Bring Binoculars and a Camera**

Wildlife sightings are one of the highlights of visiting Juneau. Travelers often see humpback whales, bald eagles, sea lions, and occasionally bears in the surrounding forests and waters. Bringing binoculars allows you to observe wildlife from a safe distance, while a camera helps capture the dramatic scenery of glaciers, fjords, and mountain landscapes.

### **Use Local Transportation or Guided Tours**

Downtown Juneau is compact and walkable, but many attractions are located outside the city center. Sites such as Mendenhall Glacier, hiking trails in Tongass National Forest, and whale watching departure points often require transportation. Renting a car, using shuttle services, or joining guided tours can make it easier to reach these destinations.

### **Respect Wildlife and Natural Areas**

Juneau's natural environment is home to diverse wildlife, and visitors should always observe animals from a safe distance. Never feed wildlife, and follow local guidelines when hiking or kayaking in areas where animals may be present. Staying on marked trails and practicing responsible travel helps protect both visitors and the fragile ecosystems of Southeast Alaska.

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## **Conclusion**

Juneau stands out as one of Alaska's most unforgettable destinations, offering a remarkable combination of glaciers, wildlife, rainforests, and cultural history. Whether you are kayaking along scenic channels, watching humpback whales in Auke Bay, hiking through Tongass National Forest, or learning about Alaska's heritage in local museums, the city provides experiences that connect travelers

directly with the natural beauty of the Last Frontier. With so many adventures and scenic opportunities, Juneau rewards visitors who take time to explore both its outdoor landscapes and its cultural attractions.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is Juneau best known for?**

Juneau is best known for its glaciers, whale watching tours, and access to the vast Tongass National Forest. The city also serves as Alaska's capital and offers a mix of outdoor adventures and cultural attractions.

### **What are the top things to do in Juneau for first-time visitors?**

First-time visitors usually enjoy glacier cruises, whale watching in Auke Bay, riding the Mount Roberts Tramway, hiking in Tongass National Forest, and exploring the Alaska State Museum.

### **When is the best month to visit Juneau?**

July and August are often considered the best months because the weather is relatively mild, wildlife viewing is excellent, and most tours and attractions are fully operating.

### **Can you see whales in Juneau?**

Yes. Humpback whales and orcas are frequently spotted in the waters around Juneau, especially from May through September. Whale watching tours provide the best opportunities to see them up close.

### **How many days should you spend in Juneau?**

Most travelers spend two to three days in Juneau. This allows enough time to visit glaciers, take a wildlife tour, explore downtown, and enjoy a few outdoor activities.

### **Is Juneau walkable for tourists?**

Downtown Juneau is walkable and easy to explore on foot. However, many popular attractions such as Mendenhall Glacier and nearby hiking trails require transportation.

### **Can you see the northern lights in Juneau?**

It is possible to see the northern lights in Juneau during winter months when skies are dark and clear. However, locations farther north in Alaska generally offer more consistent viewing conditions.

### **What wildlife can you see in Juneau?**

Visitors often see humpback whales, sea lions, bald eagles, harbor seals, sea otters, black bears, and salmon depending on the season and location.

### **Is Juneau worth visiting if you are not on a cruise?**

Yes. While many travelers arrive by cruise ship, Juneau is also a great destination for independent travelers who want to explore Alaska's landscapes, wildlife, and outdoor activities at their own pace.

### **What should you pack for a trip to Juneau?**

Pack waterproof jackets, layered clothing, comfortable hiking shoes, and a camera. Weather can change quickly, so being prepared for rain and cooler temperatures helps you enjoy outdoor adventures comfortably.