Juneau, Alaska

A state capital you cannot drive to, a glacier twelve miles from downtown, and a whale rule that is actually federal law.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Juneau is a docked port with two city-owned cruise berths, capped by agreement at five large ships and 16,000 lower berths a day. Mendenhall Glacier is 12 or 13 miles from downtown depending on which US Forest Service page you read, and costs $5 per person from 1 May to 30 September, free for visitors 15 and under. Approaching within 100 yards of a humpback whale is unlawful under 50 CFR 216.18.

Facts checked against official sources on 24 September 2026

THE WHALE

We came off the fjord in the morning and went whale watching in the afternoon, which in hindsight was a greedy amount of Alaska for one day, and I would do it again.

Here is the honest version of whale watching. You spend a long time looking at flat grey water while a very cheerful guide tells you about what you might see. You get cold. You start to wonder whether you have been had.

And then the water breaks somewhere you were not looking, and the whole boat swings around, and it is the best thirty seconds of the entire cruise.

There is no way to guarantee it and anybody who tells you otherwise is selling something. But I got mine.

Book it from your phone

Tours in Juneau: the bookings Granny uses, one scan away.

Point your phone camera at a code. Your phone opens the booking page. No camera app? Type the web address printed under the code.

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Check the official source

Rules, prices and hours change. Scan to open the official page and confirm before you go. These are not paid links.

Tram status
Goldbelt Tram

Mendenhall fees
US Forest Service

Getting to Mendenhall
US Forest Service

Full guide online: photos, live prices and the latest updates at **aicruisegranny.com/port-juneau**

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Getting ashore	Ships dock. The City and Borough of Juneau operates **two city-owned cruise ship docks** downtown, taking vessels up to **1,100 feet**, completed in 2017. Private docks and lightering areas also exist.
How busy	Capped by agreement at **no more than five large ships a day**, and **16,000 lower berths a day**, dropping to 12,000 on Saturdays
The road out	There isn't one. Alaska's transportation department calls Juneau *"the largest community on the North American continent not connected to the continental highway system."*
Mendenhall Glacier	12 or 13 miles from downtown, depending which Forest Service page you read
Auke Bay	Statter Harbor is **about 12 miles by road** from downtown, per the city. Many whale tours leave from out that way.
Documents	Alaska is a US state. Domestic stop.

At the Juneau Cruise Docks (downtown waterfront) cruise port: what's there

Port facts checked on 30 October 2026. Shops, prices and opening hours change, so check on the day.

Juneau is not a port with a pool and a margarita stand at the end of the pier. It is a real working waterfront where the docks sit right against downtown, so "staying at the port" here really means the Seawalk, the tram base, the library and a few blocks of shops. When I was here in July 2018 we headed straight out whale watching, so I can't vouch for the dock area first-hand. If I were spending the day close to the ship, I'd stroll the Seawalk, pick up maps at the visitor centre and keep it easy. One big note for 2026: the Goldbelt Tram has been closed since an accident on 30 April, so check before you plan around it.

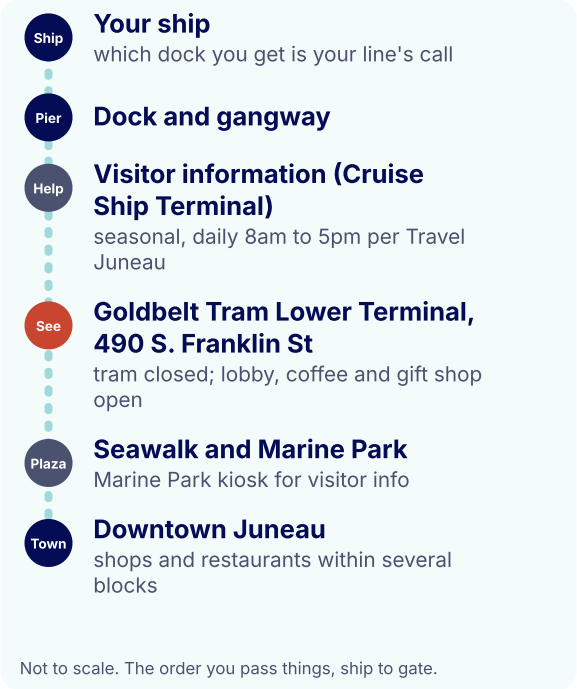
See the official port map

The port side publishes its own map. We link to it rather than copy it, so you always see the current layout. Open it before you sail and save a screenshot to your phone. Map by City and Borough of Juneau, Juneau Downtown Business Association, Travel Juneau.

aicruisegranny.com/go/juneau-port-map

From the ship: Downtown docks: South Franklin Dock, Cruise Ship Terminal, Intermediate Vessel Float, Alaska Steamship Dock

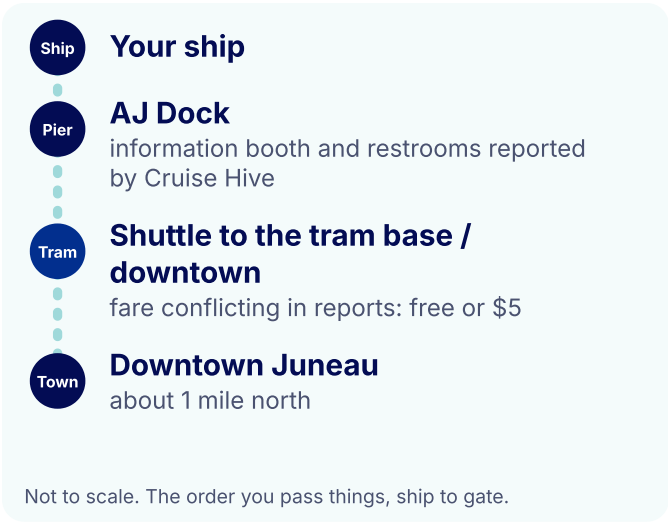
The cluster of berths along South Franklin Street and Marine Way, right against downtown. The City and Borough of Juneau runs two city-owned cruise berths (up to 1,100 ft, completed 2017); private docks also operate. The city caps calls by agreement at five large ships a day.



Our own simple drawing, not the port's map.

From the ship: AJ Dock

The southernmost berth, about a mile south of downtown, cut off from the other docks by an industrial stretch. KTOO reports passengers either take a shuttle or walk about 10 minutes through the industrial area. A Seawalk extension to the AJ Dock is approved in principle but construction is likely years away (KTOO, August 2025).



Our own simple drawing, not the port's map.

Free things to do inside the port

Juneau Seawalk Free — A wide boardwalk along the water, opened in stages since 2017, running from South Franklin Street north to Overstreet Park, with sculptures and evening lighting (reported by The Points Guy, October 2026).
Starts at the downtown docks
Access: Described as wide and accessible.

Whale statue at Overstreet Park Free — The big bronze humpback at the north end of the Seawalk; marked on Travel Juneau's downtown map.
North end of the Seawalk

Patsy Ann statue Free — Juneau's famous bull terrier who used to greet the steamships; on Travel Juneau's downtown map.
Downtown waterfront

Goldbelt Tram Lower Terminal lobby Free — Even with the tram closed, the operator says the Lower Terminal is open with Raven About Coffee, carving and weaving demonstrations, shopping and visitor amenities. Browsing and watching the artists is free.
490 S. Franklin Street, at the base of the tram cables

Visitor information and free maps Free — Travel Juneau's volunteer-staffed centres hand out free walking and hiking maps.
Cruise Ship Terminal and Marine Park kiosk

Downtown Juneau Public Library Free — On top of the Marine Parking Garage on the waterfront, with a stained-glass mural. Cruise Hive reports free Wi-Fi with no password or time limit (not confirmed on the library's own page).
292 Marine Way

Pools and beaches

No beach or pool at the docks — Juneau's docks are a working waterfront. There is no port beach or pool.

Food and drink

Raven About Coffee — Coffee shop inside the Goldbelt Tram Lower Terminal, open even while the tram is closed.
490 S. Franklin Street

Downtown restaurants — Most of downtown's shops and restaurants sit within several blocks of the piers (The Points Guy).
South Franklin Street and beyond
Access: Several streets climb steeply away from the waterfront.

Shopping

Goldbelt Tram gift shop — Gift shop in the Lower Terminal, reopened shortly after the tram stopped (Juneau Independent, July 2026).
490 S. Franklin Street

South Franklin Street shops — The street that runs alongside the docks is lined with souvenir and jewellery shops.
Opposite the docks

Worth paying for (and what it costs)

Goldbelt Mount Roberts Tram (closed) — Normally climbs 1,800 ft in about six minutes from the waterfront. Closed since an accident on 30 April 2026; the operator's site says it is temporarily closed while assessments continue, with no reopening date. No 2026 ticket price published while closed.
490 S. Franklin Street, steps from the docks
Access: No published wheelchair policy.

Restrooms, Wi-Fi, money and help

Visitor information, Cruise Ship Terminal Free — Travel Juneau's busiest visitor centre, open daily 8am to 5pm in the summer cruise season.
Cruise Ship Terminal (Dock D)

Marine Park visitor kiosk Free — Seasonal walk-up information kiosk, daily 8am to 5pm in cruise season.
Marine Park on the waterfront

Restrooms Free — Cruise Hive reports clean, accessible restrooms at the Franklin Dock and facilities at the AJ Dock. Travel Juneau's map has a restroom symbol but the location is not legible in the PDF text.
Franklin Dock; AJ Dock
Access: Reported accessible at Franklin Dock.

Library (Wi-Fi, a quiet seat) Free — Downtown branch on top of the Marine Parking Garage. Phone (907) 586-5249; hours are on the city's branch page.
292 Marine Way

Port Wi-Fi — Cruise Hive reports no free Wi-Fi at the Franklin Dock terminal itself; use the library.

Getting out of the port

Taxis — Taxi pickup at the Cruise Ship Terminal and AJ Dock (Cruise Hive). The Points Guy (October 2026) puts fares at typically at least $30 each way to Auke Bay and $45 to Mendenhall Glacier. Uber and Lyft also operate.
Cruise Ship Terminal; AJ Dock

Mendenhall Glacier shuttles — The Forest Service names private shuttle companies running from the cruise docks to the glacier (12 to 13 miles). The glacier charges a $5 per person fee from 1 May to 30 September; 15 and under free.
Downtown dock area

AJ Dock shuttle — Shuttle from the AJ Dock to the tram base / downtown. Cruise Hive says it costs $5 and is not complimentary; The Points Party cites Travel Juneau as saying it is free. Ask your ship.
AJ Dock

City bus — Public bus about $2 a ride as of 2025 (The Points Party); the transit centre is on Travel Juneau's map.
Downtown Transit Center

Tour meeting points — Shore tours generally meet at the dock area; your tour voucher names the spot.

A whole day without leaving the port

If I were spending the whole day close to the ship in Juneau, I'd start at the visitor centre in the Cruise Ship Terminal for a free map, then walk the Seawalk north toward the whale statue at Overstreet Park, taking it slow and stopping on the benches. I'd poke my head into the Goldbelt Tram Lower Terminal for coffee and to watch the carvers and weavers, even though the tram itself isn't running. If the rain sets in (and in Juneau, it might), the library on top of the Marine Parking

Garage is a warm, dry place to sit. Lunch would be somewhere on South Franklin, a few blocks from the gangway. And if you want the glacier, a shuttle or tour from the docks is the way, not your feet.

At the port with a cane, walker or wheelchair

- Ships dock in Juneau, no tender at the main berths. Which dock you get matters: the downtown docks are right against town, while the AJ Dock is about a mile south through an industrial area.
- The Seawalk is described as wide and accessible (The Points Guy), but streets climb steeply from the waterfront.
- Cruise Hive reports accessible restrooms and paved paths with ramps at the Franklin Dock.
- The Goldbelt Tram has no published wheelchair policy, and it is closed in 2026 anyway.
- Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center is reached from the parking lots by stairs, elevators and a ramp, per the Forest Service.
- No published wheelchair or scooter rental at the docks.

More on cruising with mobility & health needs. Rules differ by cruise line, so check with yours.

Questions about the port

▼ Can you walk from the Juneau cruise port to downtown?

Yes from the downtown docks, which sit right along South Franklin Street. The AJ Dock is about a mile south through an industrial area, so most people take the shuttle from there.

▼ Is the Mount Roberts Tram open in 2026?

No. The Goldbelt Tram has been closed since an accident on 30 April 2026 and the operator lists no reopening date, though the Lower Terminal coffee shop and gift shop are open.

▼ Is there free Wi-Fi at the Juneau cruise port?

Not reliably at the dock itself. The downtown public library at 292 Marine Way, right on the waterfront, is the usual free option.

Where the port facts come from: Travel Juneau: Downtown Juneau map (PDF) (30 October 2026); Travel Juneau: 2017 walking map (PDF) (30 October 2026); Travel Juneau: Volunteer program (visitor centre locations and hours) (30 October 2026); Goldbelt Tram: home page (closure notice, Lower Terminal) (30 October 2026); Juneau Independent: Goldbelt Tram reopening date still uncertain (22 July 2026) (30 October 2026); City and Borough of Juneau: Library, About (30 October 2026); KTOO: Seawalk extension connecting all of Juneau's cruise ship docks (21 August 2025) (30 October 2026); Cruise Hive: Juneau cruise port guide (30 October 2026); The Points Guy: Beginner's guide to visiting Juneau on a cruise (20 October 2026) (30 October 2026); The Points Party: A day in Juneau off a cruise ship (23 October 2026) (30 October 2026)

The tramway is closed

> **Check this before you plan your day.** As of today the operator's own website says: *"The Goldbelt Tram is temporarily closed as assessments continue."* No reopening date is published. The Lower Terminal lobby is still open daily 8am to 6pm for coffee, gifts, Chilkat weaving demonstrations and totem carving.

When it runs, the Goldbelt Mount Roberts Tramway is the thing people do in Juneau when they have a short call: the base station is at 490 S. Franklin Street, which the operator describes as *"just steps off the cruise ship dock,"* and it climbs **1,800 feet** in about **six minutes** in two cabins of 60 passengers each.

We could find **no published accessibility or wheelchair policy** for the tramway. Its accessibility, FAQ and visit pages all return errors. If that matters to you, the number is (907) 463-3412 and you will have to ask.

Mendenhall Glacier

The glacier is the other big Juneau day, and the Forest Service publishes the practical details.

Distance	One Forest Service page says **approximately 13 miles** from downtown Juneau and the cruise ship docks. Another says **approximately 12 miles**. Both are official. We are not going to invent a tiebreaker.
Fee	Visitor passes required **1 May to 30 September**: **$5 per person daily**, or **$15 for a season pass** including one guest. **Visitors 15 and under are free.** America the Beautiful, Senior and Military passes accepted.
Getting there	The Forest Service names two private shuttle companies running between the cruise dock and the glacier, and then says plainly: *"The Forest Service does not recommend any business in particular."*
Visitor Center access	*"The Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center is accessible from the parking lots by stairs, elevators, and an easy ramp."*
Grounds	Open year round, 6:00am to midnight

Visitor Center hours: three official answers. One Forest Service page says summer daily 8:00am to 7:30pm. Another says summer daily 9:00am to 6:00pm. A Forest Service news release gave a third pattern for 2025 entirely. All three are USFS. The phone number is 907-789-0097, and on this one we would actually call.

A food closure order is in effect right now. Forest Service Order 10-05-33-26-12 runs from **10 August 2026 through 31 October 2026** and prohibits possessing or storing food or refuse, and consuming food or open beverages other than water, within the mapped Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center area except in one designated zone. It is a Class B misdemeanour carrying up to $5,000 for an individual and up to six months. Do not pack a sandwich for the glacier without checking where you are allowed to eat it.

Worth knowing for planning: the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area was closed entirely from **7 August 2026** under an emergency order after a glacial lake outburst flood from Suicide Basin, with the Visitor Center targeted to reopen on 14 August. That order has expired. But Suicide Basin floods are a recurring annual hazard, so if you are sailing in August, check the Tongass alerts page before you commit to a glacier excursion.

The whale rule, which is law

People think the whale-watching distance is a courtesy. In Alaska it is a federal regulation, 50 CFR 216.18, and it applies within 200 nautical miles of Alaska and in inland state waters.

It is unlawful to **approach within 100 yards** — 91.4 metres — of a humpback whale, by any means *including interception*. It is unlawful to cause a vessel or object to approach within 100 yards. And it is unlawful to disrupt normal behaviour: rapid changes of direction, prolonged diving, evasive swimming, abandoning habitual areas. Vessels must *"operate at a slow, safe speed when near a humpback whale."*

Separately voluntary, from NOAA: a 30-minute observation limit per whale or group, not encircling or trapping them, approaching from behind rather than head on, and never feeding them.

WHY THIS IS GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

It means the captain who will not creep closer for your photograph is not being difficult. He is staying out of federal trouble, and he is the reason there are still whales there to look at.

It also means: bring a zoom, or accept that the memory is better than the picture. Mine is terrible and I do not care.

MY VERDICT

Juneau is the port where you actually have to choose. Glacier, or whales, or the tramway when it reopens — on a normal port call you are not doing all three well.

If it is your first Alaska cruise and you only get one, I would take the whales, because the glacier photographs beautifully and the whale does something to you.

If you are travelling with someone whose knees have opinions, take the glacier. The Visitor Center is reachable by ramp and elevator and the Forest Service says so in writing, which is more than most places give you.

Questions people ask about Juneau

Is the Mount Roberts tramway open?

Not as of today. The operator's own site says the Goldbelt Tram is temporarily closed while assessments continue, with no reopening date published. The Lower Terminal lobby remains open 8am to 6pm daily. Check goldbelttram.com before you plan around it.

How far is Mendenhall Glacier from the cruise dock?

Two US Forest Service pages give different figures: one says approximately 13 miles from downtown Juneau and the cruise ship docks, the other says approximately 12 miles from downtown. Both are official and we have not resolved which is current.

Is there a fee at Mendenhall Glacier?

Yes, from 1 May to 30 September: $5 per person daily or $15 for a season pass that includes one guest. Visitors 15 and under are free, and America the Beautiful, Senior and Military passes are accepted.

How close can a whale-watching boat get to a whale in Alaska?

No closer than 100 yards to a humpback whale. That is federal law under 50 CFR 216.18, not a guideline, and it covers approaching by any means including interception. Vessels must also operate at a slow, safe speed near whales.

Can you drive to Juneau?

No. The Alaska Department of Transportation describes Juneau as the largest community on the North American continent not connected to the continental highway system. You arrive by sea or by air.

Where these facts come from

- City and Borough of Juneau, Docks and Harbors (https://juneau.org/harbors)
- City and Borough of Juneau, harbour facilities (https://juneau.org/harbors/facilities)
- City and Borough of Juneau, port capacity agreement (https://juneau.org/newsroom-item/city-and-borough-of-juneau-and-cruise-lines-agree-on-port-capacity-guidelines)
- Goldbelt Mount Roberts Tramway, official site (https://www.goldbelttram.com/)
- Goldbelt Tram, current closure update (https://www.goldbelttram.com/goldbelt-tram-update/)
- US Forest Service, Mendenhall Glacier fees and passes (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/tongass/offices/mendenhall-fees-and-passes)
- US Forest Service, getting out to Mendenhall Glacier (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/tongass/offices/getting-out-mendenhall-glacier-visitor-center-recreation-area)
- US Forest Service, Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/tongass/offices/mendenhall-glacier-visitor-center)
- US Forest Service, Mendenhall Glacier VC Unit food closure order (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/tongass/alerts/mendenhall-glacier-vc-unit-food-closure)
- eCFR 50 CFR 216.18, Alaska humpback whale approach regulation (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-II/subchapter-C/part-216/subpart-B/section-216.18)
- NOAA Fisheries, Alaska humpback whale approach regulations (https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/alaska-humpback-whale-approach-regulations)
- Alaska DOT&PF, Juneau Access project (https://dot.alaska.gov/juneauaccess/)

Ports change their rules and their prices. Check the official pages above before you sail.

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