Tracy Arm Fjord

Nobody gets off. That is the whole point, and it may still be the best morning of your cruise.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Tracy Arm is scenic cruising, not a port: the ship sails up a thirty-mile fjord in the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness, part of the Tongass National Forest, and back out again without anyone going ashore. On 10 August 2025 a landslide of up to roughly 100 million cubic metres above South Sawyer Glacier generated a tsunami inside the fjord, and the USGS says the area remains hazardous with further rockfall expected.

Facts checked against official sources on 24 September 2026

THE MORNING I GOT UP AT SIX ON HOLIDAY

I am not a six in the morning person. On a cruise I am especially not a six in the morning person. But the night before, somebody said get up for Tracy Arm, so I set an alarm like a fool and I went up on deck in the cold.

It was the right decision and I have never once regretted it.

The water goes an unreal jade green. The walls come up on both sides so close you feel like you could touch them, and the ship just eases along in near silence. There are waterfalls coming down the rock everywhere you look, more than you can count. And then chunks of ice start appearing, and one of them is *blue*, and everyone on that deck makes the same noise at the same time.

Bring the warm coat up with you. You will not want to go back down for it.

Book it from your phone

Planning for Tracy Arm Fjord: 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.

Travel insurance

Compare cruise travel insurance plans side by side before final payment.

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Flights, hotels and cars

Fly in the day before and book the hotel and rental car in one place.

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aicruisegranny.com/go/travel

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.

Tongass alerts
US Forest Service

2025 landslide
USGS

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

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What it is	A **thirty-mile glacial fjord**, in the Forest Service's own words, cutting into the Coast Mountains
Who runs it	The **Tracy Arm–Fords Terror Wilderness**, Tongass National Forest, US Forest Service, Juneau Ranger District
Since when	Designated wilderness under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, **Public Law 96-487, 2 December 1980**
Where	About **50 miles south of Juneau**
The glaciers	Two steep-walled fjords ending at **three of the most southerly tidewater glaciers in the Northern Hemisphere**. South Sawyer Glacier sits at Tracy Arm's head.
Going ashore	Not on a big ship. This is scenic cruising. You watch it from the deck.

John Muir called it "*a wild, unfinished Yosemite.*" The Forest Service still quotes him, and having stood on that deck I would say he was not overselling it.

The thing you need to know before 2026: the landslide

This is the single most important current fact about Tracy Arm, and I have not seen a cruise site mention it, so here it is straight from the United States Geological Survey.

On **Sunday 10 August 2025, at 5:26 in the morning Alaska time**, a landslide of up to roughly **100 million cubic metres** of rock — about 130 million cubic yards — came off the mountain above the terminus of **South Sawyer Glacier**, around 80 miles south-southeast of Juneau.

It generated a tsunami inside the fjord. The preliminary runup on the opposite shore was **470 to 500 metres**, which is 1,500 to 1,600 feet. At Sawyer Island the wave reached at least 30 metres. Tide gauges all the way up in Juneau registered 36 centimetres above normal. Nobody was hurt. Kayakers camped nearby lost their gear.

> **And this is the part that is still live.** The USGS says the area **remains hazardous**: "*continued rockfall and smaller-scale landslide events from the exposed landslide scar are expected and could impact the water, potentially causing future local tsunami.*" That is a current official statement, not history.

What we could **not** verify, and will not pretend to: whether any cruise line has pulled Tracy Arm from its itineraries because of it. There is no Forest Service closure order for Tracy Arm, Fords Terror or Sawyer Glacier on the current Tongass alerts page, and the USGS statement does not mention vessel restrictions. If your itinerary lists Tracy Arm, ask your line directly whether they still intend to enter, and be prepared for a substitution.

Why your captain might turn around early

Ice. The fjord can choke with it, and a ship the size of yours does not push through ice to give you a better photograph.

The Forest Service has a signed agreement with vessel operators, and it says something people usually get backwards. Operators of vessels carrying **more than 250 passengers agree to avoid scheduling operations in Endicott Arm**, and go in only if it becomes necessary because of ice or safety, minimising their wake if they do. Vessels over 250 passengers may not enter Fords Terror at all.

So when you hear that ships "divert to Endicott Arm and Dawes Glacier when Tracy Arm is full of ice," understand that the Forest Service's own position is that large ships should be avoiding Endicott Arm, not treating it as the backup plan. Both things are happening. We are telling you what the official document says.

The seals, and why the ship slows down

Those flat pans of ice are harbour seal nursery. Mothers haul out on them to have their pups, and a ship's wake that tips a floe can put a pup in freezing water.

There are two official numbers for the same water, from two different agencies, and we are going to give you both rather than picking one:

NOAA Fisheries	**500 yards** from seals in glacial fjords, year round. Voluntary, but strongly recommended, and written to help vessels stay on the right side of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Established in 2015 after research found 100 yards was not enough.
US Forest Service agreement	**100 yards** minimum from hauled-out seals, reduce speed approaching, accelerate gradually leaving so the wake does not rock the icebergs.

And between **15 May and 30 June**, pupping season, NOAA asks vessels in Tracy Arm to stay more than **1,250 yards** — about three quarters of a mile — from the glacier, and to stop three quarters of a mile out when the ice is thick.

If you sail in June and your ship stops further from the glacier face than you expected, now you know why. It is not the captain being cautious for the sake of it.

> **Humpbacks are federal law, not a guideline.** Under 50 CFR 216.18 it is unlawful to approach within **100 yards** of a humpback whale in Alaskan waters, by any means, including drifting into one. Vessels must operate at a slow, safe speed near them. More on that on our Juneau page.

MY VERDICT

Set the alarm. Whatever time they tell you, set it.

This is the part of an Alaska cruise that you cannot buy, cannot upgrade to and cannot book. It happens whether you are on deck or asleep, and the only thing that decides which one you get is whether you were willing to be cold and early for two hours.

Coffee, the warmest coat you brought, and a spot on the forward part of an open deck. That is the whole plan.

Questions people ask about Tracy Arm

Do you get off the ship at Tracy Arm?

Not from a large cruise ship. Tracy Arm is scenic cruising: the ship sails up the fjord, turns and sails back out, and you watch from the decks. It is a designated federal wilderness with no town, no pier and no terminal.

What time does the ship reach Tracy Arm?

Early. On our July sailing the ship was well up the fjord by 6:50 in the morning and at the glacier around 8:00. Your line will announce its own timing the night before, and it is worth setting an alarm for.

Is Tracy Arm still safe after the 2025 landslide?

The USGS says the area remains hazardous and that continued rockfall from the exposed landslide scar is expected and could cause future local tsunami. There is no US Forest Service closure order for Tracy Arm on the current Tongass alerts page. Ask your cruise line directly what it intends to do on your sailing.

Why did my ship go to Endicott Arm instead of Tracy Arm?

Usually ice. The Forest Service agreement with vessel operators contemplates large ships entering Endicott Arm when it becomes necessary due to ice or safety concerns, although

the same agreement asks operators of vessels over 250 passengers to avoid scheduling operations there.

Why is the iceberg blue?

Dense, old glacier ice with the air squeezed out of it absorbs red light and reflects blue. Freshly turned-over bergs show it most strongly.

Where these facts come from

- US Forest Service, Tongass National Forest Wilderness (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/tongass/wilderness)
- US Forest Service Alaska Region, Wilderness (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/wilderness)
- US Forest Service, Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness Best Management Practices, Agreement Regarding Vessel Operators (PDF) (https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-A13-PURL-gpo87860/pdf/GOVPUB-A13-PURL-gpo87860.pdf)
- US Forest Service, 2019 edition of the vessel operator agreement (https://www.fs.usda.gov/media/262464)
- USGS, 2025 Tracy Arm landslide-generated tsunami (https://www.usgs.gov/programs/landslide-hazards/science/2025-tracy-arm-landslide-generated-tsunami)
- NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Harbor Seal Approach Guidelines in Glacial Fjords (PDF) (https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2025-08/Alaska-Harbor-Seal-Approach-Guidelines-Brochure_July-2025.pdf)
- NOAA Fisheries, frequent questions on the harbor seal guidelines (https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/marine-life-viewing-guidelines/frequent-questions-alaska-harbor-seal-approach-guidelines)
- 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)
- US Forest Service, Tongass National Forest alerts (https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/tongass/alerts)

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

About the "I" on this page. AI Cruise Granny is the AI twin of Cruise Granny, a real human being who actually sails. Every experience written here in the first person is hers. The AI twin is what writes it up, checks the facts against official sources and keeps it current. We tell you that openly on every page, because you should know who is talking to you. More about how this works.
