

Ketchikan, Alaska

Your first Alaska port, most likely, and the one that decides whether you packed the right coat.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Ketchikan is a docked port. The City of Ketchikan publishes four Panamax-sized berths on the downtown waterfront, while the Ketchikan Visitors Bureau describes Piers 1 through 4 plus Doyon Landing. Ward Cove is a separate facility about 5.5 miles from downtown. NOAA's 1991 to 2020 normal for Ketchikan is 149.54 inches of rain a year, so a hooded rain jacket matters more than an umbrella.

Facts checked against official sources on 24 September 2026

WHAT I REMEMBER ABOUT KETCHIKAN

We came in early and I was up on deck for it, still in my robe, coffee in hand, and the town just appeared out of the fog underneath a green wall of a mountain. Little painted houses up on stilts over the water. It did not look like anywhere I had been in the Caribbean, and it did not look like anywhere in the Lower 48 either.

Later that morning we were out on the road east of town and there was a **bear**. Right there on the rocks at the edge of the water, going about his morning. Everybody on that bus went dead quiet, which I did not expect. Nobody screamed, nobody did anything silly. We just watched him.

That is what I would tell you about Ketchikan. It is the port where Alaska stops being a brochure.

Getting ashore	Ships dock downtown. The City of Ketchikan publishes four Panamax-sized berths, numbered Berth I through Berth IV , running along the downtown waterfront.
The other dock	Ward Cove is a separate facility, not downtown. The Ketchikan Visitors Bureau puts it about 5.5 miles from downtown . If your itinerary says Ward Cove, you are taking a ride into town.
Rain	The NOAA normal for 1991 to 2020 at Ketchikan Airport is 149.54 inches a year . In 2023 it actually recorded 175.54 inches.
Time zone	Alaska Time, an hour behind the US West Coast
Documents	Alaska is a US state. This is a domestic stop.
Getting around	A free downtown shuttle bus runs May to September. Municipal buses run hourly, seven days a week, \$2 adult. Taxis publish \$3.70 to drop and \$3.50 per mile.

Two official sources, two different answers. The City of Ketchikan says four berths, numbered with Roman numerals. The Ketchikan Visitors Bureau says "*Piers 1 through 4, and Doyon Landing, which typically accommodates smaller overnight ships*" — which is five, with Arabic numerals. Doyon Landing does not appear anywhere on the City's port pages. We are not going to pretend we can settle that for you. Both are official; click through and read them yourself.

About that rain

Nearly **150 inches a year** is the official normal, and that is not a gimmick the town invented to sell umbrellas. It is the NOAA number from the station of record at the airport.

So here is the practical version. Bring a rain jacket with a hood, not an umbrella, because your hands will be busy and the wind will take it. Bring shoes you do not mind getting wet. And do not cancel your plans because it is raining, because if you only go out in Ketchikan on the dry days you may never go out at all.

One genuinely useful thing, and it is in the town's own words: the Creek Street boardwalk "*can be wet or slippery, especially during rainy weather.*" That is the Visitors Bureau saying it, not me. Wet wood plus a slight downhill plus a cane is exactly the combination that ruins a day.

Creek Street

This is the postcard: a wooden boardwalk built out over Ketchikan Creek on pilings, lined with painted buildings that used to be something quite different from the gift shops they are now.

The Visitors Bureau puts it "*just steps from the waterfront*" and says you get there from downtown "*via sidewalks and stairways*." That word **stairways** is the one to notice.

In July and August the creek fills with spawning salmon, and Alaska Department of Fish and Game names the planks of Creek Street specifically as a good spot to stand and watch them going upstream. Fish, not bears — we come back to that below.

What nobody publishes. We could not find an official source for the walking distance in feet from any berth to Creek Street, the walking time, the grade of the hill, whether there are stairs on the boardwalk itself, or whether any funicular or tram serves it. The Visitors Bureau's own Creek Street page does not mention one. If someone quotes you a confident number, ask them where it came from.

Where the bears actually are

This matters because people get it backwards, and I would rather you knew before you spent a port day on it.

Downtown is a fish-viewing site, not a bear-viewing site. Alaska Department of Fish and Game lists downtown Ketchikan for watching salmon run up the creek, best May through September and peaking in July and August. It does not list bear viewing there.

The Visitors Bureau's named bear spot near town is **Herring Cove**, and it publishes exactly the things you need to know:

- It is **about 8.6 miles south of downtown**, fifteen to twenty minutes by vehicle.
- **The public bus does not go there.**
- Cell phone service "*is often unavailable*."
- Those 8.6 miles are along a busy highway, which the Bureau says "*makes it unsuitable for walking or biking from town*."
- Arrange your taxi back **before** you go out.
- Black bears come for the salmon runs, and "*wildlife sightings are seasonal and not guaranteed*."

That last line is the honest one. We got lucky. You might not.

WHY I AM TELLING YOU THE BORING PART

No cell service, no bus, a busy road you cannot walk, and a taxi you have to arrange in advance. That is four separate ways to end up stranded eight miles from your ship on the one day it really matters.

Book it as a tour, or go with a driver who is waiting for you. This is not the port to improvise in.

Bear safety, from the state of Alaska

Alaska Department of Fish and Game publishes this, and it is worth reading before you go anywhere near a salmon stream:

- *"Making noise (sing, clap, talk) while you travel will reduce your chances of surprising a bear."*
- Keep your belongings with you or in bear-proof storage.
- If you meet one: face the bear, wave your arms, talk to it calmly. If it approaches, stand your ground. **"Never run from a bear."**

The things people actually do here

Great Alaskan Lumberjack Show	420 Spruce Mill Way. The show's own site says it is <i>"just 1 Block from the Downtown Cruise Ship Docks."</i> That is the business's own claim, not the city's.
Totem Heritage Center	601 Deermount Street. City-run. Open 8:00am to 5:00pm daily, May through September.
Saxman Totem Park	In the community of Saxman, about 2.5 miles south of downtown , roughly five minutes by road. Outdoors, open year-round.

MY VERDICT

Ketchikan is the easiest of the Alaska ports to do well on foot, and the hardest to do well in the wrong shoes. If your ship docks downtown you can have a genuinely good day without booking anything, because the town starts where the gangway ends.

If your ship is at Ward Cove, plan the day properly. Five and a half miles is not a stroll.

Questions people ask about Ketchikan

Will I see a bear in Ketchikan?

Maybe. The Ketchikan Visitors Bureau says plainly that wildlife sightings are seasonal and not guaranteed. Black bears come to Herring Cove, about 8.6 miles south of downtown, during the salmon runs. Downtown itself is listed by Alaska Department of Fish and Game as a place to watch salmon, not bears.

Do I need a passport for Ketchikan?

No. Ketchikan is in Alaska, which is a US state, so it is a domestic stop. If your Alaska cruise also calls at Victoria, British Columbia, that stop is in Canada and has its own document rules.

How much does it rain in Ketchikan?

The NOAA normal for 1991 to 2020 at Ketchikan Airport is 149.54 inches a year. In 2023 the station recorded 175.54 inches. Bring a hooded rain jacket rather than an umbrella.

Is Ward Cove the same as the downtown Ketchikan dock?

No. Ward Cove is a separate facility that the Ketchikan Visitors Bureau places about 5.5 miles from downtown. If your ship berths there you will need transport into town. No official source publishes the shuttle operator, frequency, cost or accessibility.

Can I walk to Creek Street from the ship?

The Ketchikan Visitors Bureau describes Creek Street as just steps from the waterfront, reached from downtown via sidewalks and stairways. It does not publish a distance or a walking time, and it warns that the boardwalk can be wet or slippery in rain.

Where these facts come from

- City of Ketchikan, Port of Ketchikan (<https://www.ketchikan.gov/port>)
- Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, Cruise Travelers (<https://www.visitktn.com/cruise-travelers/>)
- Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, Creek Street (<https://www.visitktn.com/plan/places-to-discover/creek-street/>)
- Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, Herring Cove (<https://www.visitktn.com/plan/places-to-discover/herring-cove/>)
- Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, Getting Around (<https://www.visitktn.com/plan/getting-around/>)
- NOAA NCEI, Ketchikan Airport Local Climatological Data (PDF) (<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/pub/access/cebrequests/2023lcdannual/01202313KTN.pdf>)
- Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Downtown Ketchikan viewing (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=southeastviewing.ketchikandowntownketchikan>)
- Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Ketchikan wildlife viewing guide (PDF) (<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/viewing/pdfs/ketchikan.pdf>)
- US Forest Service, Bears of Alaska (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/animals-plants/animals/bears-alaska>)
- City of Ketchikan, Totem Heritage Center (<https://www.ketchikan.gov/maps/location/TotemHeritageCenter>)
- Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, Saxman Totem Park (<https://www.visitktn.com/plan/places-to-discover/saxman-totem-park/>)
- eCFR 49 CFR 71.11, Alaska standard time zone (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-A/part-71/section-71.11>)

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

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