

Skagway, Alaska

Six blocks of gold rush town, a railway built in 1898, and a mountainside the town is spending \$28 million to hold up.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Skagway has four cruise berths. The Municipality of Skagway states that Railroad Dock pier access remains restricted because of an active slide zone, with alternative disembarkation by tendering at Railroad Forward and bussing from Railroad Aft. On the White Pass and Yukon Route railway, the trains that turn at the 2,865-foot summit are published as requiring no passport, while any train ending in Canada requires one.

Facts checked against official sources on 24 September 2026

WHY I WOULD GO BACK TO SKAGWAY TOMORROW

Of the whole Alaska trip, the White Pass railway is the day I talk about.

You get on an old wooden rail car with a stove in it and windows that open, and the thing starts climbing. And it keeps climbing. You go over a bridge that seems to be attached to nothing, past a gorge with a river at the bottom of it that looks a very long way down, and the trees get shorter and then stop altogether.

And then you are at the top and there are flags — the American flag, Alaska, the Yukon, Canada — standing in a scraped-bare landscape of rock and scrub. That is the border. You are at the border, in a train, in the rain, and it is wonderful.

I did not have to be able to walk far to do any of it. That mattered to me more than I expected.

The docks	The Port of Skagway's own schedule uses five codes: RRF Railroad Dock Forward, RRA Railroad Dock Aft, BRD Broadway Dock, ORE Ore Terminal Dock, AMH Alaska Marine Highway Dock
Which one walks to town	The municipality's own plan describes a sidewalk from the Broadway Dock to 1st Avenue and Broadway , which is the foot of the main street
The shuttle	SMART bus, dock to downtown, daily 7am to 9pm, wheelchair accessible . (907) 612-0902.
The railway	White Pass & Yukon Route. Cruise passengers " <i>board the train on the pier alongside your ship.</i> " Depot at 201 Second Avenue.
The summit	Milepost 20.4, 2,865 feet — and the railway states plainly it is " <i>the official border between the United States and Canada</i> "
Documents	Depends entirely on which train. See below. This one catches people out.

The rockslide, and what it means for getting off your ship

This is current, official and easy to miss when you book.

The Railroad Dock sits beside an active slide zone. The mountainside moved significantly in **autumn 2022** and a natural disaster was declared. The Municipality of Skagway's own project page currently states:

"Pier access remains restricted; alternative disembarkation includes tendering at Railroad Forward position and bussing from Railroad Aft position."

Read that again if you have mobility issues. If your ship is assigned Railroad Forward, getting ashore in Skagway may mean a **tender** — a small boat, a moving gangway, and steps. Skagway is not a port most people expect to tender at. Ask your line which berth you are assigned, and if the answer is RRF, ask what the arrangement is on your date.

The scale of it: the municipality says the situation affects "*approximately 535,000 passengers and 225,000 crew members yearly.*" The fix is a FEMA grant of **\$19.9 million** against a total project cost estimated at **\$28.4 million**, to excavate unstable rock at the apex of the North Slide and avert a catastrophic failure that could generate a tsunami at the port.

Where it stands: Phase 1 is design and engineering, sitting at 10% conceptual design with a 65% plan review document posted, with a contractor appointed in October 2025 and a public open house held in June 2026. The project page says **Phase 1 is expected to be completed in 2027**. The municipality's own fact sheet says Phase 1 should wrap up **by 2026**. Two municipal documents, two answers; neither is dated, and we are not going to guess.

Separately, a Port Director update dated **7 May 2026** says a rockslide safety maintenance project was **completed** — scaling, lower draped mesh bolt repairs, cable tensioning, final slope inspections and debris removal — to support continued operational safety at the Railroad Dock. That update does not discuss the tendering arrangement either way.

The White Pass railway, and the passport question

Get this one wrong and you do not board. The railway draws the line at whether your train **ends in Canada**, not at whether it touches the border.

White Pass Summit Excursion	40 miles round trip, 2.5 to 2.75 hours, turns at the summit. "No passport required."
Steam Summit Loop	40 miles round trip, 3 hours. "No passport required."
Journey to Inspiration Point	36.6 miles round trip, 2.5 hours, turns at Mile 17. "No passport required."
Fraser One Way Service	27.7 miles one way into British Columbia, 1.75 hours. "Passport required."
Bennett Scenic Journey	120 miles round trip to Carcross, Yukon. 8 hours. "Passport required."

So yes: the Summit train physically reaches the international boundary at Milepost 20.4 and the railway still publishes "no passport required," because you do not get off and you do not clear Canadian customs. Any train that continues to a Canadian stop is a different matter.

We would still take the passport. It weighs nothing, it lives in the safe the rest of the week, and it removes an entire category of problem. Note also that the railway's own excursions index lists the Summit Excursion at 2.75 to 3 hours while the product page says 2.5 to 2.75. Same railway, same trip, two figures.

Accessibility on the railway, in its own words

Summit Excursion	<i>"This excursion is wheelchair accessible. However, space is limited in lift-equipped cars."</i>
Inspiration Point	Wheelchair accessible, limited lift-equipped space. <i>"Please let us know when reserving your seats if you or anyone in your party will require the lift to get onto the train."</i>
Fraser Service	<i>"All Fraser Service trains are wheelchair accessible."</i> Limited lift-equipped space.
Steam Summit Loop	<i>"This train is not equipped with a wheelchair lift."</i>

That last row is the one to circle. The steam train is the romantic one, and it is the one without a lift. The railway does not publish a step count or step height for boarding any of its cars, so if a high step is your issue rather than a wheelchair, you will have to ask.

Season and price for 2026: the Summit Excursion runs **30 April to 7 October 2026** at \$155 adult, \$77.50 for children 3 to 12, infants free. Reservations 1-800-343-7373, Monday to Friday 7:00am to 3:00pm Alaska Time.

The town itself

Historic district	Six blocks of downtown Skagway are a National Historic District. The National Park Service manages more than 20 buildings in and just outside it.
NPS visitor center	In the restored 1898 rail depot at 2nd and Broadway . Programs and facilities wheelchair accessible; service animals welcome. 907-983-9200.
Moore House and Jeff. Smiths' Parlor	Both close for the season in early October . Hours vary; check at the visitor center the day of your visit.
Gold Rush Cemetery	1.9 miles from 1st and Broadway. This is the only walking distance the municipality prints on its own map.
Municipal visitor center	205 Broadway, in the 1899 Arctic Brotherhood Hall. (907) 983-2854.

What Skagway does not publish. No dock-to-Broadway distance in feet or miles for any berth. Nothing about Broadway's boardwalk surfaces or curb cuts. Nothing on whether the Ore Dock walks to town. And no official statement on whether the Railroad Dock tendering applies to every ship or only some. We asked the documents; they do not say.

MY VERDICT

Skagway is the best value port day in Alaska, and the railway is why. It is expensive and it is worth it, and it is one of the very few big-ticket excursions anywhere that a person with limited walking can genuinely do — as long as you pick the diesel train and tell them when you book.

Two warnings and then I will stop. Check your berth assignment, because Railroad Forward may mean tendering. And if you want the steam engine, know that it is the one without the lift.

Questions people ask about Skagway

Do I need a passport for the White Pass railway?

Only if your train ends in Canada. The White Pass Summit Excursion, the Steam Summit Loop and the Journey to Inspiration Point are all published by the railway as "No passport required," even though the Summit train reaches the international boundary at Milepost 20.4. The Fraser One Way Service and the Bennett Scenic Journey both say "Passport required."

Is the Skagway Railroad Dock open?

The Municipality of Skagway's current project page says pier access remains restricted because of the active slide zone above it, and that alternative disembarkation includes tendering at the Railroad Forward position and bussing from the Railroad Aft position. Both positions still appear on the 2026 cruise schedule. Ask your cruise line which berth your ship is assigned.

Can you walk from the Skagway cruise dock into town?

The municipality's own transportation plan describes a sidewalk running from the Broadway Dock to 1st Avenue and Broadway. It does not publish a distance in feet or miles from any dock. The SMART bus connects the docks to downtown daily from 7am to 9pm and is wheelchair accessible.

Is the White Pass train wheelchair accessible?

The Summit Excursion, Inspiration Point and Fraser Service trains are published by the railway as wheelchair accessible, with limited space in lift-equipped cars, and the railway asks you to say so when reserving. The Steam Summit Loop is not: the railway states that train is not equipped with a wheelchair lift.

How high is the White Pass summit?

2,865 feet, at Milepost 20.4, which the railway states is the official border between the United States and Canada.

Where these facts come from

- Municipality of Skagway, 2026 cruise ship schedule (PDF) (<https://www.skagway.org/media/89686>)
- Municipality of Skagway, 2026 cruise ship calendar (<https://www.skagway.org/portofskagway/page/2026-cruise-ship-calendar>)
- Municipality of Skagway, BRIC Grant: Rockslide Mitigation Project (<https://www.skagway.org/administration/page/bric-grant-rockslide-mitigation-project>)
- Municipality of Skagway, Port Director Update, 7 May 2026 (PDF) (<https://www.skagway.org/media/90776>)
- Municipality of Skagway, Skagway 2030 Comprehensive Plan, draft transportation chapter (PDF) (<https://www.skagway.org/media/27586>)
- Municipality of Skagway, downtown SMART bus map (PDF) (<https://www.skagway.org/media/46541>)
- White Pass & Yukon Route, Summit Excursion (<https://wpyr.com/excursions/product/summit-excursion/>)
- White Pass & Yukon Route, Steam Summit Loop Excursion (<https://wpyr.com/excursions/product/steam-summit-loop-excursion/>)
- White Pass & Yukon Route, Fraser One Way Service (<https://wpyr.com/excursions/product/fraser-one-way-service/>)
- White Pass & Yukon Route, White Pass international border (<https://wpyr.com/sights-sounds/places/white-pass-international-border/>)
- White Pass & Yukon Route, dock information (<https://wpyr.com/company-info/dock-info/>)
- National Park Service, Klondike Gold Rush NHP hours (<https://www.nps.gov/klgo/planyourvisit/hours.htm>)
- National Park Service, Skagway Historic District (<https://www.nps.gov/klgo/learn/historyculture/skagwaydistrict.htm>)
- Skagway Visitor Department, getting around (<https://www.skagway.com/plan-your-trip/travel-transportation/getting-around/>)

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.](#)

AI Cruise Granny · aicruisegranny.com · Facts checked 24 September 2026. Verify prices and rules before you sail.