

Understanding the Day

No Glacier Bay permit? Your ship still gets a glacier day — and it's no consolation prize. One-way sailings steam for Hubbard, North America's largest tidewater glacier; Seattle round trips thread Endicott Arm to Dawes. Either way, nobody goes ashore: the ship is the excursion.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Which One You'll Get

Check the itinerary line: one-way Gulf sailings most often visit **Hubbard** (Disenchantment Bay, near Yakutat); Seattle round trips usually run **Endicott Arm** in the morning and dock in Juneau that same afternoon.

How Close?

The ice decides. On clear-water days ships hold within roughly half a mile of the face; heavy floes can keep the hold farther out. Captains promise the attempt, never a distance — and typically rotate the ship so every side gets the view.

On Deck Early

Endicott mornings start before breakfast — ships enter the fjord around dawn. Dress like November: layers, hat, gloves. The narration is your ship's naturalist here (park rangers only board inside Glacier Bay).

GOOD

Balcony With Room Service

Best for: Comfort lovers, cold dodgers, romantics

- ✓ The rotation swings the face past your rail
- ✓ Narration carried on the stateroom TV
- ✓ Hot coffee, zero crowds

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

Bow & Forward Decks

Best for: Photographers, first-timers, the bundled-up

- ✓ Many lines open the bow for glacier days — listen for it
- ✓ Hot soup and cocoa carts are a proud deck tradition
- ✓ Claim rails 45–60 minutes before arrival

Layer up — the glacier makes its own weather.

BEST

The Small-Boat Close-Up

Best for: Bucket lists, shutterbugs, ice chasers

- ✓ Many lines sell a catamaran that meets the ship mid-fjord
- ✓ It rides closer to the face than the big ship can go
- ✓ Offered on select sailings — we check yours

Capacity is a few dozen, not a few thousand — book early.

What to Watch For

GOOD

The Approach

At Endicott: thirty miles of sheer granite, ribboned with waterfalls, past the narrows of Fords Terror. At Hubbard: the ice thickens across Disenchantment Bay until the six-mile face fills the horizon.

BETTER

The Iceberg Nurseries

Those floes are floating maternity wards — NOAA counts the harbor-seal gatherings on this glacial ice among the largest anywhere. Early-summer ships may hold a touch farther off for the pups. Binoculars find them.

BEST

The Calving

Hubbard is advancing — NASA credits a vast snow basin in the Saint Elias peaks — so its face stays under pressure, and guides report ice falling often. You'll see the splash before the boom arrives.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

Ears First, Then Eyes

Calving announces itself — a rifle-crack, then the fall. Face the sound and hold your camera up.

Overcast Is a Gift

Glacier ice swallows every color but blue, and soft cloudy light lets that blue glow. Don't mourn a gray sky.



A cruise ship holds before Hubbard's six-mile face — ice towering roughly 30 stories



Hubbard from the deck on a blue-sky day — our own photo

Key Considerations

A note on the famous one: the classic Tracy Arm run to the Sawyer glaciers has been on pause since a 2025 landslide, and ships now favor neighboring Endicott Arm — same wilderness, same granite, an equally active glacier at the end. We check the current routing when we book you; the guide you're holding covers the day you'll actually get.

Deck craft: the ship rotates at the face, so cabin side doesn't decide your day. Rails fill 45–60 minutes out; wind chill over moving water can feel like the 30s in July, and the see-it-first spots are forward and high. Then do what the veterans do — one hot drink, one warm layer more than you think, and patience aimed at the loudest part of the ice.



"White thunder" — when the face lets go, the boom rolls across the bay



Endicott Arm from a balcony — waterfalls ribbon the granite the whole run in



Harbor seals ride the floes near tidewater glaciers — the bergs are their nursery

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The Day, In Order

IF YOUR DAY IS HUBBARD

- **Yakutat Bay**
- **Disenchantment Bay**
- **The six-mile face**

The turn toward the ice
Malaspina's dead end, 1791
An hour or more, rotating

IF YOUR DAY IS ENDICOTT ARM

- **Holkham Bay, before breakfast**
- **The 30-mile fjord**
- **Dawes Glacier**
- **Juneau by afternoon**

"Sum Dum" — the boom of ice
Waterfall walls; Fords Terror narrows
The frozen dead end
Two adventures, one day

DON'T FORGET

Endicott mornings start before breakfast, and Hubbard fills the rails early. Set an alarm. The ice will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

The permit lines don't own the wonder: Hubbard is bigger than anything in Glacier Bay and still growing, and Endicott Arm is designated wilderness end to end.

Dress like it's November, claim your rail, and listen for the thunder.

ETA will help you choose the right experience based on your travel style.

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Did You Know?

The Galloping Glacier. In 1986 Hubbard surged across the mouth of neighboring Russell Fjord and sealed it into a lake — trapped seals made the news worldwide — until the ice dam burst that October in what the USGS calls the largest glacial-lake outburst flood ever recorded. It happened again in 2002.

The Glacier That Grows. While most of the world's ice retreats, Hubbard has been advancing for more than a century — NASA credits a snow basin so vast that roughly 95 percent of the glacier is still gaining ice.

Shakespeare's Snowfall. Ice takes roughly four centuries to travel Hubbard's 70-plus miles — the bergs calving today began as snow around Shakespeare's lifetime.

A Bay Named Disappointment. Spanish explorer Malaspina nosed in here in 1791 hunting the Northwest Passage, found a wall of ice instead, and named it Disenchantment Bay in his frustration.

Fords Terror. The side inlet off Endicott Arm honors a Navy surveyor named Ford, who rowed the narrows at slack tide in 1889 — and spent hours trapped when the current came roaring back.