

Understanding the Port

Sitka faces the open Pacific, and it shows: sea otters rafting in the kelp, a Fuji-shaped volcano on the horizon, onion domes over the main street, and totem poles in the rainforest — the whole sweep of Alaska's story in one very walkable town.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

Big ships dock at a terminal about five miles north of town; a free shuttle runs 10–15 minutes to downtown — and the **last one leaves 30 minutes before all aboard**. Smaller ships tender straight to the downtown waterfront.

Money & Phones

US dollars and your phone works like home, with two local twists: city sales tax shows up at the register, and signal fades fast once you're out on the water. Download tickets before the boat.

Getting Around

From the shuttle drop at Harrigan Centennial Hall, everything downtown is on foot — Lincoln Street one block, the cathedral minutes, Castle Hill and the Totem Trail an easy stroll. Rideshare is new and scarce; don't build the day on it.

GOOD

Totem Trail & Castle Hill

Best for: Walkers, history lovers, photographers

- ✓ Eighteen totems on a flat rainforest loop — free
- ✓ Castle Hill, where Alaska changed flags in 1867
- ✓ St. Michael's green domes over Lincoln Street

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

Raptors & Rescued Bears

Best for: Families, wildlife lovers, rainy days

- ✓ A working eagle hospital with a flight-training hall
- ✓ Orphaned brown bears at a rescue center south of town
- ✓ Covered viewing at both — Sitka rain approved

Each is a short ride out — tour, taxi, or local bus.

BEST

Sea Otter & Wildlife Cruise

Best for: Bucket lists, binocular people, every age

- ✓ Otters are the near-certain star; whales feed all season
- ✓ Enclosed catamarans with naturalists aboard
- ✓ Puffins, sea lions — sometimes a shoreline bear

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

The Walking Town

Russian America and Tlingit history share one main street: a cathedral rebuilt icon-for-icon after the 1966 fire, the hill where the flags changed, and the park where Kiks.ádi warriors defended their homeland in 1804.

BETTER

The Rescue Centers

The Raptor Center rehabs a hundred-plus injured eagles a year for release to the wild; Fortress of the Bear raises orphaned cubs that had no other path. Real missions, honest viewing, and both work in the rain.

BEST

Sitka Sound by Boat

Some of the richest water most cruisers will ever float on — the flagship catamaran tour is billed as a repeat "Shore Excursion of the Year" as voted by cruise passengers, and operators report sighting rates near 99%.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

The Otters-Raptors-Bears Combo

One booking through your line stitches the boat and both rescue centers together — Sitka's whole wild side in a single day.

Lunch Off a Truck

Follow the locals to the fresh-fish trucks around Lincoln Street — black cod tips beat a sit-down lunch on a short port day.



Crescent Harbor's fishing fleet, steps from downtown Sitka



St. Michael's Cathedral anchors Lincoln Street — a landmark of the Russian era

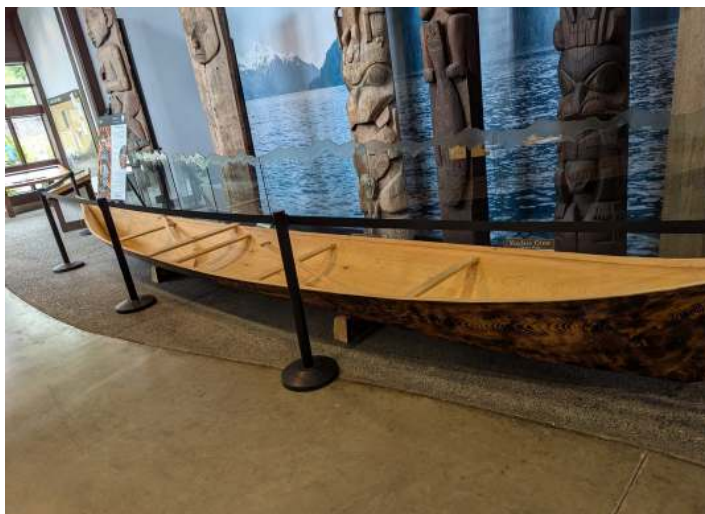
Key Considerations

The five-mile gap between dock and downtown runs on the free shuttle — and the last one leaves **thirty minutes before** all aboard, so work backward from that clock, not the ship's. When a free shuttle reservation is offered for your sailing, take it: reserved riders board first while the standby line waits out the morning crunch.

Fishing charters carry six anglers apiece and sell out first — months ahead in summer. And Sitka fronts the open Pacific: pack the rain shell, and if your heart is set on flightseeing around the volcano, keep a plan B in your pocket. Small planes wait on weather here.



Mount Edgecumbe — the long-quiet, Fuji-shaped volcano across Sitka Sound



Inside the totem hall at Sitka National Historical Park — our own photo



Heraldic poles in the park's collection — ours too

Photos: two are Ernst Travel Agency originals. Via Wikimedia Commons: Joe Mabel (CC BY-SA 4.0), David Baron (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Port Orientation

FROM THE DOWNTOWN SHUTTLE DROP

● Harrigan Centennial Hall	Russian folk-dance matinees most ship days
● Lincoln Street	One block up
5–10 min on foot	
● St. Michael's Cathedral	Icons saved from the 1966 fire
● Castle Hill	Where the flags changed, 1867
10–15 min on foot, via the Sea Walk	
● Sitka National Historical Park	Free, flat Totem Trail
● Sitka Sound Science Center	Touch tanks & salmon ladder
By taxi, tour, or local bus	
● Alaska Raptor Center	Eagle hospital, visitors welcome
● Fortress of the Bear	Orphaned-cub rescue, covered decks
By boat	
● Sitka Sound wildlife tours	The signature day

DON'T FORGET

Confirm your all aboard time — and the last downtown shuttle, which leaves 30 minutes earlier — before you leave the ship.
Set a phone alarm. The ship will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

Sitka is the port that rewards walkers: Russian domes, Tlingit totems, and the hill where Alaska changed hands, all inside a mile — with the coast's most reliable otter water offshore.

Come for the history, stay for the kelp. Either way, watch the shuttle clock.

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

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Did You Know?

Capital of Russian America. For six decades this small town ran Russia's American empire — so cosmopolitan in its heyday it was dubbed the "Paris of the Pacific."

The Tires in the Volcano. On April Fools' Day 1974, a local prankster helicoptered some 70 old tires into Mount Edgecumbe's crater and lit them. The Coast Guard flew out — and found a giant APRIL FOOL stamped in the snow. Billed as one of the greatest pranks ever pulled.

Biggest City in America. Technically. By area, Sitka is the largest incorporated city in the U.S. — bigger than the state of Delaware — with fewer than 10,000 residents.

The Icon Rescue. When fire took the cathedral in 1966, townspeople of every faith ran in to save its centuries-old icons. The rebuilt church holds them still.

Polar Bear Cousins. Genetic studies found the brown bears of Sitka's island chain carry traces of polar bear DNA — a souvenir of an ice-age mingling.