

Understanding the Port

Whittier is where one-way cruises begin or end — a few hundred people, one 2.5-mile tunnel to the outside world, most of the town living in a single building, and a fjord full of glaciers out the back door. You won't spend a port day here. Spend the turnaround day well instead.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

Two cruise facilities: the original in-town terminal (Princess, Holland America) is a flat 5–10 minute walk from the harbor shops; the newer head-of-the-bay terminal (Norwegian's brands) is its own facility with line-run transfers. Ships often dock in the middle of the night.

The Tunnel

One lane, shared by cars and trains, alternating direction roughly every half hour — and it closes overnight. It's billed as North America's longest combined rail-highway tunnel, and it is the only road in or out. Build it into every plan.

Getting to Anchorage

About 60 miles: roughly 90 minutes by cruise-line coach (plus tunnel timing), or the scenic summer train that stops across from the in-town terminal. No taxis, no rideshare — nobody improvises transport in Whittier.

GOOD

The Harbor Triangle

Best for: Spare hours, walkers, photographers

- ✓ Otters and seals in the small-boat harbor
- ✓ The WWII story at the Prince William Sound Museum
- ✓ Begich Towers — the town that lives in one building

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

Blackstone Bay by Boat or Paddle

Best for: Shorter windows, families, first paddles

- ✓ A shorter glacier cruise into Blackstone Bay
- ✓ Guided intro kayaking past a 6,000-bird kittiwake wall
- ✓ All of it steps from the gangway

Check departure times against your ship's clock.

BEST

The 26 Glacier Cruise

Best for: Turnaround days, glacier collectors, everyone

- ✓ Five-plus hours, College and Harriman Fjords
- ✓ An early-afternoon departure timed to ship turnarounds
- ✓ Hot meal, narration, and luggage handled

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

The Strangest Town in Alaska

Media have billed Whittier everything from "the strangest town in Alaska" to "the weirdest town in America" — walk the harbor, see the tower nearly everyone calls home, and decide for yourself in an hour.

BETTER

A Short Walk Up

The Horsetail Falls trail climbs about a mile of steps and boardwalk to a platform over town and fjord — the payoff is the view, not the falls. Berry brush in late summer means bears; make noise.

BEST

Prince William Sound

The marquee day cruise threads Esther Passage to College and Harriman Fjords — a wall of named glaciers you can't see from any road, purpose-timed so cruise passengers can do it between ship and transfer.

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

Book the Glacier Cruise Through Your Line

Same boat, but the line owns the timing risk and the luggage logistics. On a turnaround day, that's worth everything.

Halibut at the Harborside Shack

The light-batter fish and chips at the harbor's fish shack has been the Whittier move for decades. Eat outside, watch for otters.



Whittier from above — ship, harbor, and the tower most of the town calls home



Begich Towers — built by the Army in the 1950s, now home to most of Whittier

Key Considerations

Flights out of Anchorage are the trap: your line publishes a minimum flight time for disembark day — roughly ten hours after the ship's scheduled arrival is the current pattern — and the tunnel's timed openings add their own rhythm to any drive. The safe play: early-afternoon-or-later flights, and let us check your line's current rule when we book.

Embarking? Ships typically sail in the evening, so an early arrival buys you a real afternoon: the tightly-timed glacier cruise books luggage storage and all, or spend the spare hours in Anchorage and ride the line's transfer in. The Portage-side sights — the wildlife conservation center, Portage Glacier — sit on the *other* side of the tunnel, best folded into the transfer rather than chased from town.



Blackstone Glacier meets the sea — tidewater-glacier cruises leave right from Whittier's harbor



The tunnel portal — cars and trains take turns through one 2.5-mile bore



The small-boat harbor from a ship's rail, mist included at no charge

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Port Orientation

FROM THE IN-TOWN TERMINAL

● Harbor Triangle shops & cafes	Flat 5–10 min walk
● Prince William Sound Museum	The WWII secret-port story
● Begich Towers	Photo stop — people live here
● Buckner Building ruin	View from outside ONLY
Short walk up	
● Horsetail Falls platform	~2 mi round trip, steps & boardwalk
From the harbor, by boat	
● Blackstone Bay glaciers	The shorter cruise or kayak day
● College & Harriman Fjords	The 26 Glacier marquee
Through the tunnel (timed openings)	
● Anchorage & the airport	~60 mi — coach or summer train

DON'T FORGET

Confirm your all aboard time — and the tunnel's opening schedule, if you're driving — before you leave the ship.
Set a phone alarm. The ship will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

Whittier is a doorway, not a destination — but it's the strangest, most story-rich doorway in cruising, with a world-class glacier day parked right beside the gangway.

Master the tunnel, respect the flight math, and the turnaround day becomes a highlight instead of a hallway.

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

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Did You Know?

The Town Under One Roof. By most counts, well over three-quarters of Whittier lives in the 14-story Begich Towers — post office, store, clinic, church, city offices, and a tunnel so schoolkids commute indoors all winter.

The Ruin Next Door. The abandoned Buckner Building was the Army's original "city under one roof" — mess hall, theater, bowling alley, jail. Today it's a fenced, forbidden relic where bears den in spring. Photograph it; never enter it.

Born a Secret. Whittier began as a hidden WWII port — ice-free, mountain-walled, and, the story goes, blanketed in clouds that helped hide it from enemy planes.

No Road Until 2000. Until the rail tunnel opened to cars in June 2000, you reached Whittier only by boat or train. It's still billed as North America's longest combined rail-highway tunnel — and it locks its doors every night.

Sixteen Feet of Weather. Whittier averages on the order of 16 feet of precipitation a year — among the wettest towns in America. A dry embarkation day is a bonus, not a plan.