
Whale Watching Tours

The Nemuro Strait off the Rausu coast is a rich feeding ground for whales, and the large mammals frequent these waters during most of the year. Visitors to Rausu can observe killer whales (April–July,) sperm whales (July–September,) and other species on whale watching tours.

Signs of whale activity

Tour boat crews monitor the ocean surface for signs of whale activity, which may include whale fins breaking the water, spray from blowholes, and a whale’s “tailprint.” Upon spotting these signs, captains steer tour boats to a close but safe distance to observe the whales.

Whale blowholes

Whales cannot breathe underwater, so they must come to the surface at regular intervals to recycle the air in their lungs. Depending on the species, whales can stay underwater for a few minutes to around 40 minutes. They use their blowholes to breathe in and out several times before lifting their tails and diving back below the surface. Spotting blowhole spray means there is a chance to see a whale’s tail break the surface.

Whale tailprints

Even after a whale disappears beneath the surface, it leaves behind a “tailprint.” This is technically known as a flukeprint, and it is a smooth, glass-like patch of surface water that lingers for a short time after the tail strikes the water. The “print” offers a clue as to the size of the whale.

Tour details

Tours generally run between late April and October. There are several whale watching companies running tours in the Nemuro Strait. Visitors should check the individual companies’ promotional material or ask at the tourist information counter.