

Highlights

- Grizzly and Black Bear Viewing
- Humpback Whales
 - Hot Springs
- The Elusive Spirit Bear
- Visiting Native Villages and Big Houses

BACKGROUND

The central coast region of British Columbia's scenic and intricate shoreline has a long history. Stretching from Vancouver Island, north along the mainland coast, it forms a significant section of the famous "Inside Passage" route to Alaska - a name that started with the gold rush of the 1800's. Many of the gold seekers stayed on the coast, attracted to the plentiful resources of fishing and the lush forests. Native peoples have lived along this coast for at least 10,000 years, and built a renowned culture based upon these same fish and trees. Unfortunately, diseases spread from the first European settlers, decimated the old villages, and now the native peoples are centered in a few, small coastal villages - Bella Bella, Klemtu, and Hartley Bay. It was only in the last few years with the introduction of the name "Great Bear Rainforest", that this magnificent wilderness has deservedly found itself in the spotlight of international attention.



Bluewater Adventures

GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST

Islands and intricate waterways beneath towering mountains... lush, coastal temperate forests... wilderness alive with eagles, ravens, salmon, bears and wolves... ten thousand year old native cultures...

Adventure into this remote wilderness, seeking wildlife, meeting native guides and learning why the Great Bear Rainforest is one of the last gems on the Pacific Coast.



PROTECTION

Up until recently, the remote wilderness of the BC central coast - now called the Great Bear Rainforest - had largely been forgotten in the public eye and large forestry companies planned to harvest the prized lowlands of this public forest. In 2001 significant portions of the Great Bear Rainforest were proposed for protection through the cooperative efforts of First Nations, forestry companies, conservation groups and government. In 2006, the BC government announced 20% of the area would be protected in new Conservancies jointly managed with First Nations. With continued public support these initiatives will be completed and protect some of the most unique wildlife and wilderness on this incredible coast. While made famous by the healthy population of grizzly and black bears - and the genetically unique Spirit Bear - this area is also home to other terrestrial and marine animals - several species of salmon, wolves, whales, mountain goats, sea lions, seals, and pine marten. The protection of this area not only seeks to protect bears, it protects an entire rich ecosystem.



HISTORY

First Nations people have a long history on this coast. Archaeologists have discovered native middens dating back some 9,000 years at Namu, one of the most ancient sites of human habitation on the northwest coast. Bella Bella, located on the famous "Inside Passage" is the centre of Heiltsuk native culture. This small coastal village was once the site of an early Hudson's Bay Company trading post. It is also located near historic Dean Channel, where Alexander Mackenzie became the first European to reach the Pacific Ocean traveling overland on aboriginal "grease trails". He preceded the better-known expedition of Lewis and Clark by 12 years! Rendered eulachan oil - or 'grease' - was an important trade item and the grease trails were trade routes linking coastal native people with those of the interior. Hartley Bay is the home of the Gitga'at (Tsimshian) First Nation, and Klemtu is the home of the Kitasoo/Xaixais.

NATIVE CULTURE

We visit and explore this incredible area with permission from the local Gitga'at, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais, and Haisla First Nations. In the concept of eco-tourism visitors respect local cultures and share a portion of revenues with local communities. Bluewater Adventures fully supports this concept and has committed to Protocol Agreements with all these First Nations. We plan to spend a day with local Gitga'at guides who will share their culture and history as they guide us to their favourite bear viewing sites. We also make efforts to visit the newly built Big Houses in Klemtu or Hartley Bay.



ECOLOGY

The description "Great Bear Rainforest" was created because the region holds the largest remaining areas of original coastal rainforest left on the entire Pacific coast. The name refers to the significant populations of black, grizzly and Kermode bears that are supported by the abundant salmon runs for food; and the lack of human development. It is a long, convoluted maze of narrow waterways and fiords. Emerald forests of western hemlock and red cedar cloak lush river valleys and broad estuaries. Although it is biologically abundant and diverse, this area is also ecologically fragile.

WOLVES

The Rainforest is home to a significant population of gray wolves. Scientific studies presently underway suggest they may be genetically distinct from their inland cousins. Wolves are known to be shy animals - we often see only tracks or remains of their previous meal. However, we are fortunate to spot them on occasion and you can bet we will always be looking...

NATURAL HISTORY

We venture ashore daily to walk river estuaries, forests and beaches. As we travel, we will be looking for whales and other marine life. People with a keen interest in natural history will thoroughly enjoy this trip. A highly experienced naturalist will accompany the trip and provide talks, slide shows, and lead shore excursions. With the help of interested trip members we will keep a list of the birds, plants and animals we see during the trip.





MARINE MAMMALS

During our voyage there are excellent chances of seeing various species of marine mammals. Campania Sound and Whale Channel are good areas for viewing humpback whales. We often see spectacular humpback behaviours such as breaching and a cooperative feeding technique called ‘bubble-net feeding’. As well, we sometimes encounter the infamous orca (killer whale).



BIRDS

This area has a very rich and varied bird population. You'll be amazed at the number of bald eagles, ravens and various species of gulls that gather at the estuaries to feed on the spawning salmon. A variety of other birds, such as the common merganser, black oystercatcher, American dipper, and Steller jays are also common visitors of the rainforest rivers.

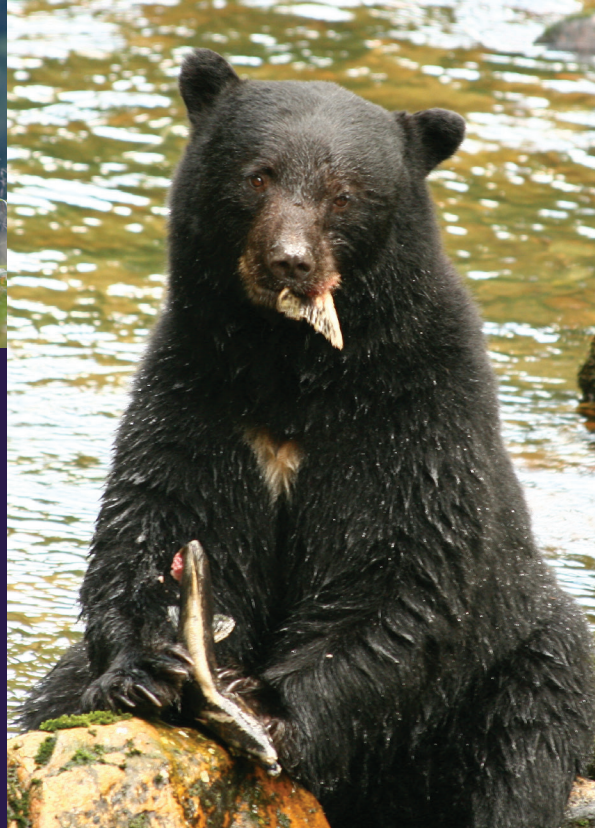
KERMODE “SPIRIT” BEARS

These primeval forests are the only habitat of the Kermode or “spirit bear”. An elusive and rarely seen wonder, the Spirit Bear is a genetic throwback - a black bear with a “recessive” gene for snow-white fur. Princess Royal Island is one of the few areas on the coast where one can find the Kermode. Only 10% of black bears in the area are white, so though we expect to see black bears, it will require good luck and perseverance to spot a Spirit Bear.



BEARS

This area is home to the magnificent grizzly bear, a species that requires large areas of habitat undisturbed by human activity. These great bears, once roamed across North America but due to the advance of civilization, diminished food supply and continued hunting, they are now threatened in their remaining range. Weighing in at more than a quarter of a ton, grizzly bears sit at the top of the food chain and are a critical part of this coastal ecosystem. These bears are drawn to the estuaries of large coastal rivers to feast on the salmon moving upriver to spawn. They depend on these salmon to survive. The Great Bear Rainforest supports one of the last sustainable populations. We plan on exploring up remote coastal fiords and expect to see these majestic creatures. Scientists have recently discovered that bears and salmon provide the major source of fertilizer in the coastal forest. Evidently, each bear may distribute the remains of 700 fish, providing 1600 kilograms of natural, nitrogen-rich fertilizer, thus, a Sitka spruce may grow to be three times larger near a salmon spawning stream.



ITINERARY

Our daily plans are flexible to accommodate the surprises that we encounter each trip, the requirements of tide and weather, and the interests of the group. With so many opportunities to be “wowed”, it’s hard to predict what unique moment will be your favourite memory.

Day 1 - We meet at the top of the Municipal Dock on the Bella Bella waterfront and leave mid-day to begin our adventure. *Note: some departures begin/end in Prince Rupert.*

Days 2-7 - Over the next 6 days, we will travel to a number of areas around the Central Coast such as Campania Sound and Whale Channel - excellent areas for spotting humpback whales and Steller sea lions. We may go ashore in the Gitga’at (Princess Royal Island) Conservancy. We will cruise over to Bishop Bay to enjoy a relaxing dip in the hot springs and spend a day with a Gitga’at native guide, taking us to his favourite bear viewing area. With patience and some luck we will see black bears and the elusive, white Spirit Bear! We may visit the First Nations village of Klemtu or Hartley Bay to see their ceremonial Big Houses. We will voyage deep into the coastal mountains to explore the Fiordland Conservancy where, beneath towering rock bluffs and waterfalls, we will search remote estuaries to see grizzly bears feeding on spawning salmon.

Day 8 - We arrive in Bella Bella late morning. Participants can catch the Pacific Coastal Airlines late afternoon flight back to Vancouver.



The Great Bear Rainforest

Vancouver Island