



# Bluewater Adventures

GWAII HAANAS NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

## Highlights

- Canada's Galapagos
- The Wilderness of the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve
- Totem Poles/Haida Culture at SGang Gwaay World Heritage Site
  - Whales in Hecate Strait
  - Hotsprings Island

## HAIDA GWAII

The Islands of Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands) are one of the richest biological and cultural areas in North America. Aboard our 68' sailing vessel, we will cruise the waters of this remote archipelago seeing ancient Haida villages, an incredible abundance of wildlife and outstanding wilderness scenery. Our trips primarily explore the eastern and southern shores which lie within the *Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site*. In June 2010 Canada's first marine protected area was announced surrounding the islands.

*Gwaii Haanas* is an incredible area with over 100 islands, beautiful forested creek walks, rugged headlands, and protected passageways between towering mountains. Thousands of seabirds nest on the islands. Theories suggest that parts of Haida Gwaii escaped the last ice age, forming a glacial refuge for certain plants and animals. How else to explain the presence of plant species found nowhere else in the world and the noticeably different sub-species of bird, fish and mammal? Haida Gwaii provides a remarkable evolutionary showcase - hence, their description as the "Canadian Galapagos".



Selected one of National Geographic's  
Tours of a Lifetime!  
"50 of the Worlds Best Trips" – 2007

Our crew are experienced sailors and naturalists with extensive knowledge of Haida Gwaii. They will help you learn about the diverse natural history and about issues that made preservation of Gwaii Haanas a vital environmental battle for more than a decade. In 1987, the 'South Moresby' wilderness was protected by joint agreement of the Haida Nation and the Canadian government, and is now known as the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site. This was a significant step, protecting the fragile ecological and cultural sites for the future. The number of visitors is now limited, and only a select group of companies and guides are permitted to bring visitors to Gwaii Haanas. We often go ashore in smaller groups to minimize our impact, and follow the management guidelines that have now been developed. Bluewater Adventures is proud to have been one of the original companies that helped develop an ethical and ecological Code of Conduct for Gwaii Haanas - a model of responsible operation across North America.



## MARINE MAMMALS

These islands lie perched on the outer edge of the continental shelf. From the western shore, the Pacific Ocean drops off to incredible depths. Upwelling nutrients provide the essential ingredients for plankton - the base of the food chain - and form a rich feeding area for many marine mammals. Blue, sperm, minke, sei, gray, fin, humpback and killer whales (orca) all historically frequented these waters. Local whaling severely effected these populations in the 1900's. Now humpback and fin whale populations are rebounding and we often encounter these fascinating creatures. Harbour seals are seen either swimming near shore or hauled out on beaches. In early summer, several thousand Steller sea lions congregate at Cape St. James - at the southern tip of Haida Gwaii - to mate and give birth to their pups. It is quite a sight to see a large male Steller weighing over a ton.

## LAND ANIMALS

The Queen Charlotte Islands black bear is the largest black bear in the world. Through isolation from their mainland cousins these black bears have developed a larger lower jaw because of frequent foraging and feeding along the shoreline. Black-tailed deer and raccoons are introduced species to the islands, and though we may enjoy seeing them, ecologically they are both causing problems. Without natural predators, their populations are expanding to the detriment of other species. Bird colonies are seriously at risk to raccoons. The cedar tree - foundation of the Haida culture - is disappearing from the overbrowsing of the deer.



## HAIDA CULTURE

Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) is home to the Haida - one of the most culturally rich and developed groups of people to inhabit early North America. The Haida name for the southern islands, Gwaii Haanas, appropriately translates as "islands of beauty" or "place of wonder". Among the southern islands are many ancient villages - K'uuna (Skedans), Cumshewa, T'annu and SGang Gwaay (Ninstints). These sites contain the remains of the great long houses and the best remaining examples of original totem poles in the world. The United Nations has recognized the cultural value of these sites and designated SGang Gwaay as a "World Heritage Site, of importance to the history of mankind". Many totem poles still stand in the old Haida village of K'uuna (Skedans), or can be found fallen and decomposing in the grass. K'uuna illustrates the ideal village location for the Haida - situated between two beaches, providing access and escape for canoes - and was one of the villages that inspired Emily Carr's totem paintings. At T'annu, the forest is struggling to reclaim the giant wood beams of the old longhouses, now under the shadows of trees and advancing moss. Giant Sitka Spruce grow right out of the old cedar beams.

We usually cannot visit all the old Haida sites, choosing our stops as interest and trip focus require. The old villages are now uninhabited. However, each summer the Haida have Watchmen at several of the old villages to protect their heritage and greet visitors. For many people, the highlight of their trip is the opportunity to listen to a Haida story and learn about the traditional and modern Haida way of life. It is a unique opportunity and wonderful experience found almost nowhere else on the coast. At some special sites, such as Windy Bay, there are giant cedars and spruce. We will see trees that still remain living after the Haida stripped bark for clothing and baskets. From our naturalists, and encounters with Haida we will learn about the art, legends, customs and food gathering methods of the Haida people. We will gain an understanding of how the Haida related intimately to their environment to produce a unique and highly evolved art form.





## BIRDS

The annual spring plankton bloom in Haida Gwaii provides a rich influx of food into the ecosystem and supports breeding colonies of up to one million seabirds. Interesting birds will be with us throughout these trips. Some of the more colourful species include tufted puffins, horned puffins, rhinoceros auklets, black-footed albatross, black oystercatchers, and pigeon guillemots. With such abundant bird life, raptors, such as the peregrine falcon, are common in Haida Gwaii. The concentration of bald eagle nests along the coast is second only to Admiralty Island in Alaska. Our constant companions will be the smaller seabirds such as ancient murrelets, marbled murrelets, common murres, phalaropes, and gulls. On Limestone Island, seabird research is being conducted by the local Laskeek Bay Conservation Society. Every May, they band tiny ancient murrelet chicks and adults to learn about the natural history of this fascinating species. With the help of all interested trip members we will keep a list of our daily wildlife sightings.

## TREES & PLANTS

Haida Gwaii is home to some remarkable "old-growth" forests with giant stands of sitka spruce, western hemlock, western red cedar and yellow cedar. The coastal rain forests of the Pacific Northwest - reaching a zenith in these islands - hold the largest accumulation of biomass (living matter) on the planet, even more than tropical rain forests. The forest floors are deeply carpeted with hundreds of species of mosses, salal bushes, huckleberry, and ferns. One of the fascinating ecological aspects is that the alpine zone almost reaches the ocean in many areas here. Hikes from the shore up to these alpine areas reveal meadows and bogs richly carpeted in grasses, herbs and brightly coloured flowers such as buttercups, alpine lily and Newcombe's butterweed.



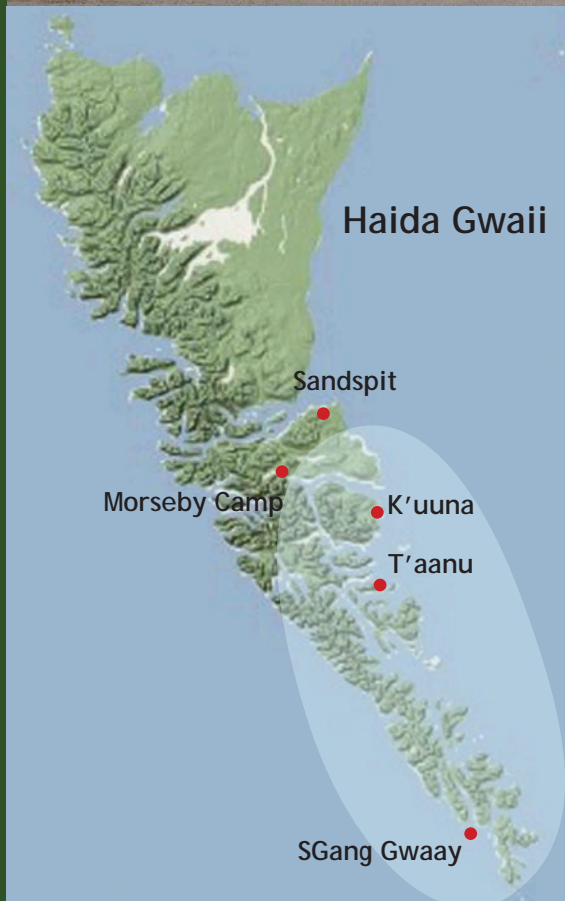
## WILDERNESS

A sailing voyage to Gwaii Haanas provides the rare opportunity to explore a pristine wilderness region. These islands are an isolated archipelago, difficult to reach and rarely visited. Access is possible only by boat or charter floatplane. We travel ashore in our inflatable zodiacs which enable us to pull right up on to the shoreline. We will walk beaches that may have seen no other footprints that year and may even find Japanese glass fishing floats that have washed ashore. We will anchor in secluded bays and expect to see few other people as we explore this remarkable wilderness area.



## INTERTIDAL LIFE

Tidal changes of up to 23 feet between high and low tide create remarkably rich shoreline marine life. A highlight of the Gwaii Haanas/South Moresby region is Burnaby Narrows, a 150 foot wide channel connecting the waters of Juan Perez Sound and Skincuttle Inlet. This intertidal area has been described as the most productive aquatic zone in North America. With our naturalist we will explore intertidal areas to find many varieties of sea stars, giant barnacles, mussels, clams, snails, urchins, crabs, sponges, chitons, sea cucumbers, nudibranchs and a wealth of other colourful and interesting creatures. We often float through the shallow waters observing the myriad variety of life just beneath the surface. The incredible richness of ocean life around these islands truly amazes one. We may do some fishing and hope to supplement the regularly prepared shipboard feasts. Canadian saltwater fishing licenses are required to fish and must be obtained prior to departure.



## ITINERARY

On all our voyages we intentionally keep our itineraries flexible to take advantage of wildlife sightings, weather and tides, and the interests of the group.

Arrival Day - Guests fly into the Sandspit Airport from Vancouver (Air Canada) the day before their trip starts - not included in price. Overnight at the Sandspit Inn - included in price.

Day 1 - Breakfast at Sandspit Inn. On most departures we then transport you to Graham Island for a tour of the Haida Heritage Centre and a traditional Haida lunch. In the afternoon we travel to Moresby Camp to board Island Roamer, enjoy dinner and start our voyage.

Days 2 - 7 - We will spend our time exploring the eastern and southern shores of Moresby Island. Daily activities include wildlife watching, shore excursions to explore ancient Haida villages, old growth forests, beautiful creeks and shoreline, and intertidal zones. We aim to spot humpback whales, porpoise, dolphins, sea lions and orca. We'll search the shoreline in hopes of spotting a few Gwaii Haanas black bears foraging for food and we will be amazed by the myriad of intertidal creatures found in the nutrient-rich channels.

Specific highlights planned include: T'aanu, Burnaby Narrows, Rose Harbour, UN World Heritage Site of SGang Gwaay, Hot Springs Island, windswept Skedans (K'uuna). Depending on time, crew will show many other fascinating highlights of the islands.

Day 8 - Mid-morning departure at Moresby Camp. The charter bus will meet participants and return them to the Sandspit Airport to catch afternoon flights back to Vancouver.

*\*If your tour is a 9 day tour, there will be more time spent at above places.*

## HAIDA HERITAGE CENTRE

On most departures we visit the Haida Heritage Centre, opened in July 2007. Fronted with six traditional totem poles, the Centre is a series of longhouses connected by interior walkways that give the feeling of a traditional Haida seaside village. Inside the longhouses you will find the Haida Gwaii Museum, a gift shop, cafe, canoe house, performing house, carving shed and artisans' workshops. This Centre enables the Haida to preserve and share their past and present with visitors from around the world.



**BLUEWATER  
ADVENTURES**

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