

Bluewater Adventures

NORTH COAST/KHUTZEYMATEEN

Highlights

- Grizzly Bear Sanctuary
 - Marine Mammals
 - Coastal Birds
 - Petroglyphs
 - Glacial Fjords

BACKGROUND

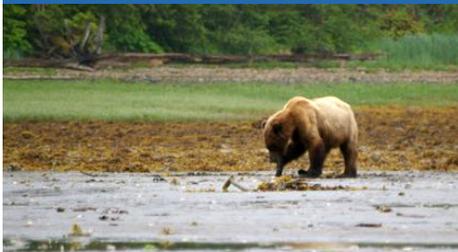
The North Coast of British Columbia forms the northern end of the Great Bear Rainforest and adjoins the border with Alaska. Ranging from outer islands to deep fjords beneath the snow-capped Coast Mountains, this a beautiful land of dense Sitka spruce rainforest, full of wildlife and scenic passages is protected from the rigors of the open ocean. Whales are common and the lack of human presence provides wonderful habitat for the coastal bears and wolves. River estuaries support important spawning grounds for many species of salmon, upon which the area's many grizzlies depend. There are some spectacular outer beaches and island-studded anchorages perfect for kayaking and exploring.

The Khutzeymateen Inlet is one of the jewels of the North Coast. As one of British Columbia's most northern glacial fiords, the Inlet has characteristic steep cliffs, thick forests and rich estuary ecosystems. This is the perfect backdrop for the awe-inspiring grizzly bear. The Khutzeymateen Valley, located at the end of the inlet, is Canada's only grizzly bear sanctuary and is home to one of British Columbia's most important coastal bear populations. Khutzeymateen or K'tzim-a-Deen is a Tsimshian word meaning "a confined space of salmon and bears" - a suitable description.



We are extremely fortunate to have access to both the Khutzeymateen Conservancy and the sanctuary by boat and the opportunity to focus on grizzly bear viewing in one of the most famous bear viewing sites in Canada.

Guests will be amazed by the variety of wildlife we see, and the rugged wilderness and scenic beauty of this coast. Anchoring each night in a different, secluded anchorage, we are under way for only a few hours between stops giving us time to explore and fully appreciate all that we encounter.



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 trophy hunting, they are now threatened in their remaining range. Fortunately for the bears of the Khutzeymateen they are protected, as the headwaters of the Inlet are Canada's only Grizzly Bear Sanctuary. Covering an area of 45,000 hectares, scientists estimate there are about 50 grizzlies protected by the no-hunting restrictions of the sanctuary. The protected area has recently been expanded to include the entire Inlet as the Khutzeymateen Conservancy.

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. Every spring bears leave hibernation and feed on the new vegetation growing around waterways. We have the opportunity to view these bears in the early summer as they are actively feeding on sedges that contain a substantial amount of protein. Estuaries will often look like someone has tilled the soil, but in fact it is simply the bear foraging for root vegetables that feed them until the berries arrive.

Later in the season the bears are drawn back to the estuaries to feast on the salmon moving up river to spawn. Scientists have recently discovered that bears and salmon provide the major source of fertilizer in the coastal forest. 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. The combination of turning over the soil and then depositing fertilizer in the form of dead salmon, is essential to the health of these estuaries and the other animals that depend on the plant and animals found here.

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. A variety of other birds, such as the common merganser, black oystercatcher, American dipper, Steller jays, phalaropes and pigeon guillemots are also common visitors of the rainforest.



FIRST NATIONS

Tsimshian First Nations have lived in this area for thousands of years. There are two villages along our route; Lax Kw'alaams, which was once a Hudson Bay Company trading post called Port Simpson and Metlakatla, which became a model Christian community under Reverend Duncan during late 1800's. They were fortunate to have avoided the smallpox outbreak that ravaged many native communities along the coast. Petroglyphs are native rock carvings that symbolize mythological creatures and decorate sites of historical significance. Venn Passage near Metlakatla has an amazing collection of petroglyphs.



Today, local First Nations are increasingly involved in the co-management of resources in their traditional territories. The Khutzeymateen, for example, is jointly managed by BC Parks and the Tsimshian First Nation. These communities have been affected by the decline in fishing and forestry on the coast, and eco-tourism is seen as a beacon for the future.

Bluewater Adventures has taken the initiative to sign a Protocol Agreement with the Metlakatla First Nation that respects their historical territory, rights and privileges. The agreement also commits Bluewater to act as stewards of the area and to financially support the development of the local tourism experience.





MARINE MAMMALS

The waters of the North Coast are frequented by a variety of marine mammals, such as seals, sea lions, humpback whales and the infamous orca, or killer whale. Next to humans, orca are the most widely dispersed mammal on the planet and can be found in every ocean. On our coast orca are divided by whale researchers into three types - residents, transients and offshores. Resident orca travel in large groups and feed mostly on salmon. Transient orca travel alone or in small groups, and hunt other marine mammals. Scientists have recently confirmed that transient orca are a genetically distinct species, having separated from the resident orca over 500,000 years ago. In approximately the last 20 years researchers discovered a third group of orca that live off the BC coast- offshores. These orca travel in large groups and thought to spend most of their time in the outer waters with the occasional visit to the coastline. In 2010 researchers were able to prove what they suspected about the diet of offshore orca - sleeper sharks, a large deep water shark. All three groups of orca travel in family units called “pods”. These whales can travel miles every day and most are often close to shore. We could encounter them anywhere and anytime during the trip, so keeping a good eye out for a “spout” can make the difference.

Dall’s porpoise are another marine mammal we may encounter. These porpoise are the fastest whales in our ocean and they will often come over “bow ride” while we are underway. Steller sea lions can be found hauled out along the rocky shores. Males can weigh up to 2000 lbs! Stellers have been placed on the endangered species list in western Alaska, and scientists are only now learning why the population is declining so fast.





SAMPLE 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 for spectacular scenery and wildlife, it's hard to predict what unique moment will be your favourite memory.

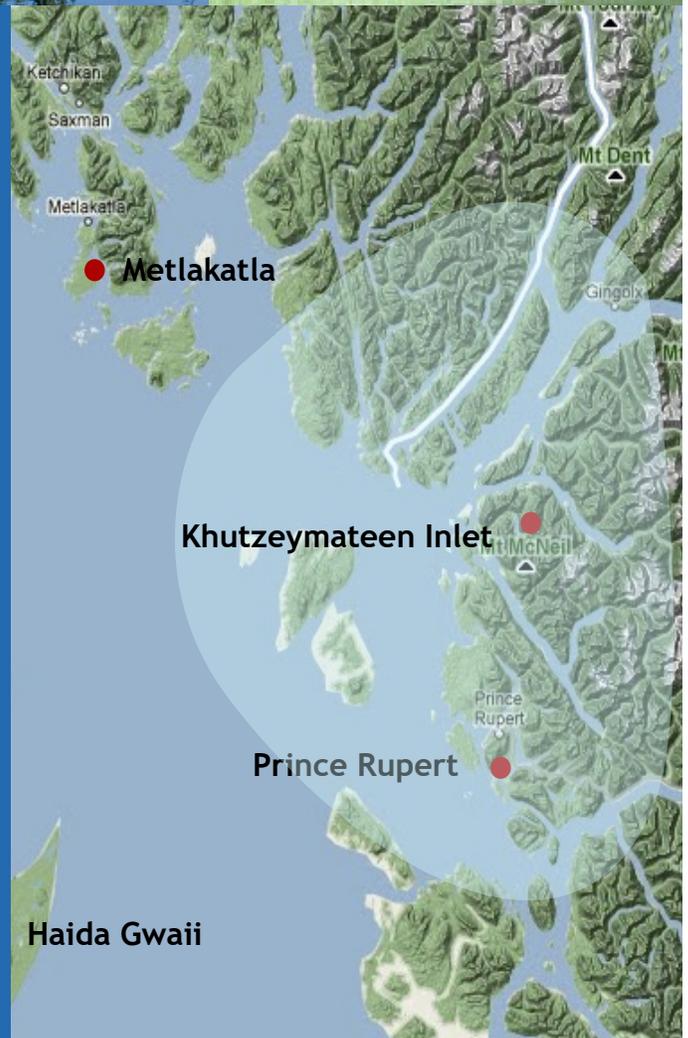
Trip Start - Day 1 - We will meet on the Prince Rupert dock and depart Prince Rupert harbour for the beauty of Chatham Sound and its collection of islands.

Day 2-3 - We explore the islands of Chatham Sound. Porcher, Stephens and Dundas Islands are the largest in the area. We will walk remote beaches, hike up to a view point and search for sea lions, orcas and humpback whales. There are some lovely areas to explore by kayak or zodiac.

Day 4-5: Khutzeymateen Inlet - , and proceed by zodiac to see the famed grizzly bears of Khutzeymateen Inlet. We spend one day on the search for bears in Ksi X'anmaas (Kwinimass River) Conservancy and two days bear viewing in the Khutzeymateen/K'tzim-a-deen Grizzly Sanctuary when the tides are right.

Day 6 - From fiord-like Portland Canal, we now return to the outer islands and lower topography of Chatham Sound. Remote Green Island still has light keepers manning the lighthouse and living on the tiny island. If the weather allows, we may go ashore for a visit.

Day 7: We return through narrow Venn Passage to Prince Rupert. Venn Passage has an incredible collection of petroglyphs - native rock carvings - including the famous 'Man who fell from heaven'. Accompanied by a local Tsimshian Guide, we plan to see these ancient carvings and learn of their history. We will tie up in Prince Rupert by midday.



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