

Day 1: Vancouver, BC / Fly to Sandspit, Haida Gwaii

Our journey begins in Vancouver, British Columbia, with a scheduled flight to the tiny airport in Sandspit (K'il Kun in the Haida language), one of several small towns on Haida Gwaii. This remote island group lies roughly 60 miles off the northwest coast of Canada, near the BC/Alaska border. And while Haida Gwaii is served by ferry on an 8-hour crossing of the Hecate Strait, our arrival by air is much quicker and more comfortable. Our Nat Hab Expedition Leader meets you at the airport and accompanies you on the short transfer to Northern Shores Lodge where we check in on arrival.

Originally known as Xaadala Gwayee, or the "islands on the boundary of the world," the archipelago is perched on the edge of the continental shelf—the last landmass in this latitude of the North Pacific Ocean until you reach the Kamchatka Peninsula in Siberia. Protected by the turbulent waters of the shallow strait dividing the islands from the mainland, the Haida people lived free of invasion for millennia, until European contact in the late 18th century. Though the Haida never ceded their land in a treaty, in 1853 it was formally annexed by British colonial authorities and renamed the Queen Charlotte Islands, which held until the Haida name was restored in a historic reconciliation agreement in 2010 between the BC government and the Haida nation.

This evening, gather for a welcome dinner, an introduction to islands and the Haida Gwaii Visitor Pledge, and an orientation to all the adventures to come.

Day 2: Skidegate Landing / Haida Heritage Center / Moresby Island—Board Sailboat

After breakfast, we check out and transfer to the ferry landing at Alliford Bay for the half-hour crossing to Skidegate on Graham Island. Our first stop is the acclaimed Haida Heritage Center at Kay Llnagaay, which provides an introduction to Haida culture, a foundation we will build upon during the course of our trip. Our visit includes a guided monumental pole tour, with a chance to meet contemporary carvers, plus free time to experience the rest of the museum at your own pace. Six traditional totem poles, intricately hand-carved canoes and a series of longhouses evoke the feeling of a traditional Haida seaside village.

A special lunch is in store at Keenawaii's Kitchen, hosted by local Haida elder Roberta Olsen. Roberta crafts beautifully plated courses that showcase traditional Haida foods and the seasonal abundance of Haida Gwaii. After lunch, take an interpretive walk with Parks Canada staff along the Spirit Lake Trail to learn about the local flora & fauna, as well as some Haida folklore.

This afternoon, we catch the ferry back to Moresby Island and transfer by shuttle to meet the S/V Island Solitude or S/V Island Odyssey, our floating home for the next eight nights (your vessel is determined by your departure date). The one-hour drive on an active forest service logging road can sometimes be bumpy, but we may be gifted with sightings of black bears and Sitka black-tailed deer along the way. Once we arrive at Moresby Camp, we are transported by Zodiac to meet the anchored yacht. After introductions with the skipper and crew and a safety orientation, dinner is served aboard. We spend our first evening anchored nearby, ready to depart early the next morning for the marine wilderness.

Days 3–9: Exploring Nature & Culture in the Marine Wilderness of Haida Gwaii

Aboard our deluxe sailboat designed for cruising BC's protected coastal waters, we spend most of our time exploring the remote eastern and southern shores of Moresby Island, with much of our trip taking place in Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area and Haida Heritage Site. This protected zone, accessible only by boat or floatplane, encompasses a third of Haida Gwaii's landmass and the labyrinth of bays, coves and fjords that indent it.

The landscape is an ethereal montage of wild sandy beaches, sheltered inlets, boggy plateau, and lush rain forest at the base of imposing mountains. Haida Gwaii's nutrient-rich cold waters are tempered by warm currents that nurture a proliferation of marine life. As we sail, keep an eye out for Steller sea lions, harbor seals, Dall's porpoise, Pacific white-sided dolphins, orcas and numerous whale species, especially humpbacks that feed here. In addition, K'iid Xyangs K'iidaay (also known as Burnaby Narrows) is one of the richest intertidal zones in the world, teeming with bright sea stars and other colorful creatures revealed during the twice-daily fluctuations of the 24-foot tides. Floating through these waters at low tide offers a wondrous view on a vast array of marine species.

On shore, search for endemic mammals that evolved as a result of the archipelago's isolation from the mainland during the last ice age, with pockets of unglaciated terrain. Among them are pine marten, river otter, Haida ermine, and the Haida Gwaii black bear, the largest of its kind in the world with an over-developed skull and strong jaws to crush sea urchin shells and salmon bones. So many unique species and subspecies developed in this evolutionary hotspot that Haida Gwaii is often called the Galapagos of the North.

Some 1.5 million seabirds breed in the islands of Haida Gwaii, attracted by concentrations of forage fish and plankton. We frequently spot long-distance pelagic species, and many year-round residents are found on land, including unique subspecies such as the endangered Haida Gwaii northern goshawk, a raptor whose population has fallen to fewer than 50 adult birds. Bald eagles are prolific, and we're also sure to spy tufted or horned puffins. During daily excursions on foot and by small boat, our naturalist Expedition Leader helps to identify coastal plants, birds, animals and marine life. We also explore the protected waters and shorelines from stable sea kayaks, for an eye-level view. Each evening, we move to a different secluded anchorage to spend the night.

Though it often feels like we are alone in a primeval wilderness, Haida people have lived on these islands since time immemorial, and this rugged landscape offers a rare glimpse into more than 12,000 years of human habitation. Our journey through Haida Gwaii's natural history is a cultural journey, too, as Haida Watchmen welcome us to the ancient village sites of T'aanuu Llnagaay (Tanu), K'uuna Llnagaay (Skedans), and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of SGang Gwaay (Anthony Island/Ninstints). These on-site guardians share their knowledge of traditional culture and bring their ancestors' traditions to life under weathered memorial poles and the remains of multi-level longhouses dug into the earth.

If weather permits, we will also visit Hlk'yah GawGa (Windy Bay) on Lyell Island, the site of the first Haida pole raised in 130 years. This 42-foot monumental cedar Legacy Pole was carved by Jaalen Edenshaw and raised in 2013 to honor the 20th anniversary of the Gwaii Haanas Agreement between the Canadian government and Haida Nation to protect the archipelago's natural and marine resources. We may also have a chance to visit G_andll K'in Gwaay.yaay (Hot Spring Island), whose pools have slowly returned since draining after an earthquake struck Haida Gwaii in 2012.

Day 10: Moresby Camp—Disembark / Sandspit / Fly to Vancouver

Returning to Moresby Camp, our marine odyssey trip finishes late this morning, with disembarkation around 11 am. The shuttle van will transport us to the Sandspit Airport in time for lunch at the airport restaurant—Shingle Bay Bistro—and a chance to pick up a few last-minute souvenirs at the gift shop before our afternoon flight back to Vancouver.