

The Gwaii Haanas Explorer

Instructional Photo Tour 2019





The *Gwaii Haanas Explorer* Instructional Photo Tour 2019 combines professional photography instruction with 7 full days of nature & wildlife photography chock-full of spectacular subjects in an absolutely stunning environment. You will be provided with the opportunity, the conceptual and creative tools, and the techniques needed to to photograph some of the most dramatic wildlife and landscape photography British Columbia's Pacific coast can provide. And we'll do all this while traveling through and around the islands and islets of Gwaii Haanas aboard a comfortable and spacious 71-foot sailboat, the *Ocean Light II*.

The Region – And Our Expedition At A Glance. The Haida Gwaii archipelago (formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands) consists of 2 main islands and a myriad of smaller ones 120 kilometres off the northwest coast of British Columbia. Prior to 1977 the natural and cultural wonders of Moresby Island, the southerly of the two large islands, were little known except to a handful of biologists and archaeologists and, of course, the Haida people. In 1979, some of the first ecotourists were brought to the area and began to discover the never-ending magic of the place the Haida refer to as Gwaii Haanas, meaning, “*place of wonder*”. In 1988 the *Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve* was created and with it a massive region and almost countless

islands were protected. In 2010 the creation of the *Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve* extended the protection into the surrounding waters, effectively protecting Gwaii Haanas from mountain peak to ocean floor. This all-encompassing protection – combined with the geographically isolated but very rich biological systems – makes Gwaii Haanas a globally-unique natural treasure.

What are some of the things that make Haida Gwaii – and particularly Gwaii Haanas – so incredible? They possess a biological and cultural mix that is duplicated no where else on earth. South Moresby (the largest island of Gwaii Haanas) has one of the richest Temperate Pacific Marine Zones in the world and has a coastline that is ideal to sail/cruise along due to the convoluted shoreline and countless islands. The area's biological treasures include towering forests of sitka spruce and red cedar carpeted by thick mosses, scenic bonsai bogs and alpine forests. What about the wildlife? Here's some "headline facts" that help put a perspective on the faunal treasures of Gwaii Haanas:

- About 750,000 seabirds breed within Gwaii Haanas
- The highest number of eagle nests per kilometer of shoreline in the world is found here
- The highest breeding density of Peregrine falcons in the world are in Gwaii Haanas Park
- Gwaii Haanas harbours the largest breeding colony of Steller Sea Lions on the west coast
- Burnaby Narrows in Gwaii Haanas Park contains the highest levels of living material (biomass) of any intertidal zone in the world
- Grey, Humpback, Minke and Killer whales all inhabit the waters of Gwaii Haanas and are frequently seen
- Fin whales may be encountered off the southern tip of Gwaii Haanas
- Sperm and rare Blue whales may even be encountered (most commonly along the western coast)
- Owing to its geographic isolation (Gwaii Haanas is often referred to as "*The Galapagos of the North*") the islands contain a minimum of 39 distinct sub-species of plants and animals found nowhere else

A Smoky Sentinel. Bald Eagles are a ubiquitous part of the landscape on the BC coast. Gwaii Haanas has the world's highest known breeding density of Bald Eagles. This adult eagle was photographed during the summer "smoke season" of 2018. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca





on earth, including 7 endemic mammal species and 3 endemic bird species. There are even 15 species of stickleback fish inhabiting Haida Gwaii are found no where else on earth.

- The Black Bears of Haida Gwaii have the largest average body size of any population on the planet!

The second treasure of the Queen Charlottes is the Haida heritage. The Haida inhabited the islands for more than 10,000 years and habitation sites of various vintages are easily visible. Weather permitting, we will visit Windy Bay (Hlk'waah), Burnaby Narrows, T'anuu, and Sgan Gwaii (Ninstints), the hallmark of historic sites with its large standing totems.

This is a Tour of Exploration! The *Gwaii Haanas Explorer Instructional Photo Tour 2019* is a true tour of photographic exploration. We'll explore the islands, islets, channels and inlets of Gwaii Haanas (by sailboat, Zodiac®, and foot!). While we will spend time in some of the ancient Haida

village sites, our primary focus will be on the natural wonders of Gwaii Haanas.

This is a multi-faceted trip, focusing not on any single species of wildlife, but on *all* the inhabitants of this rich ecosystem. While the wildlife is an integral part of this trip, it's important to know that we will be approaching this trip *with an attitude of finding and capturing any form of natural beauty and natural art we can find*. This may include many species of wildlife and birds, intertidal scenes, landscapes, seascapes, and more!

2019 Dates: July 5-14, 2019, including arrival and departure days. July 7-14 aboard the *Ocean Light II*.

2019 Price: \$6699 CAD plus 5% GST.

2019 Trip Start and End Points: The photo tour starts and ends in Sandspit, BC.

What's Included?

- All meals and accommodation beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- All transfer services (i.e., van & zodiac or boat) after meeting with our group on the evening of Day 1
- Float plane transfer at one (or both) end(s) of the trip to increase your total time in Gwaii Haanas Park
- A full day of professional-level wildlife photography instruction, with special emphasis given to the unique wildlife and other subject matter we will encounter on this trip.
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Ocean Light II*
- A highly-experienced skipper and a professional photography guide
- A great cook and crew
- Use of Zodiac® and kayaks and all associated safety gear (life jackets, etc.)
- Jaw-dropping scenery, fascinating wildlife, and wonderful photo ops!

What's NOT Included?

- Your transportation and accommodation expenses associated with getting to the tour's start point (Sandspit, BC)
- Gratuities for skipper and crew of the *Ocean Light II* (not mandatory but always appreciated!)
- Personal belongings and equipment
- Any extra personal expenses incurred because of weather, logistical delays, or missed flights.

What To Expect?

- Photographic instruction designed to take *your* wildlife and nature photography skills to the next level (along with a lot of tips on photographing the species and scenes you'll encounter on this trip).
- Temperatures ranging from cool (daytime highs of about 17C) to very

Male Steller Sea Lion – Up Close and Personal!



Nikon D3 with 200-400mm f4 @ 330mm. 1/1600s @ f4. ISO 400
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warm (daytime highs of about 25°C); rain showers are possible but usually short-lived (and sunny skies are common at this time of year)

- Calm seas for the bulk of the trip, with a few short-term bouts of moderately rolling seas
- Moderately long hours of daylight
- Excellent wildlife AND landscape photography opportunities
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!

Photo Tour Leader: Brad Hill

Accommodation: Prior to boarding the Ocean Light II we will be staying at Jags Beanstalk in Skidegate, BC.

This trip is being offered in association with *Ocean Light II Adventures*. While in Gwaii Haanas we will be staying on their beautiful *Ocean Light II* sailboat, a 71-foot ketch.

Please be aware that it is likely be asked to share a berth on the *Ocean Light II*. This will be dependent on the make-up of the group (e.g., the number of couples attending, gender mix of the participants, etc.).

Sample Itinerary

NOTE: The itinerary of this tour is designed for flexibility. This allows us to react to the ever-changing distribution and abundance of wildlife and fluctuating weather conditions. Here's *an example* of how our time



together will likely look! This is only a *sample* itinerary and how we actually spend our days may differ from this proposed route and schedule.

Day 1 – July 5, 2019.

Participants must arrive at our start point in Skidegate, BC. Most will likely fly into Sandspit, BC and then take a shuttle van to Skidegate. Overnight in Skidegate at Jags Beanstalk.

Day 2 – July 6, 2019.

Day of photography instruction at the beautiful Haida Gwaii Museum. Overnight in Skidegate at Jags Beanstalk.

Day 3 – July 7, 2019.

Early float plane transport to Gwaii Haanas and the *Ocean Light II* sailboat. After a brief orientation on safety features and “boat life” we’ll begin our exploration!

Days 4 to 9 – July 8-13, 2019.

We’ll spend our days seeking and photographing the natural and cultural treasures of Gwaii Haanas. Our exact route and daily itinerary will be determined by weather, the distribution and abundance of our target species, and the wishes of our group.

During the evenings we will anchor among the numerous islands and bays of the archipelago. Here we may see a Black Bear foraging through the rich intertidal or Great Blue Herons fishing atop the abundant kelp beds. These islands may provide us the opportunity to paddle one of the *Ocean Light II* kayaks and explore our calm protected anchorage.

Day 10, July 14, 2019.

Our journey will end in Sandspit and you will depart with memories and photographs of a spectacular area abundant with the wonders of nature.

Fabulous Forests. Old growth forests plus pristine streams combine to create a form of striking beauty found in fewer and fewer places on our planet.
Nikon D3s with 24-70mm f2.8 @ 27mm. 3.0s @ f16. ISO 200.



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Fitness Requirements of Participants

This photo tour requires a moderate level of physical fitness and good mobility. We will be hiking while on this trip and we will be shooting images from the deck of the sailboat, from within a Zodiac®, and on shore. To participate in this trip you should be able to perform the following tasks:

- ***Be able to hike up to 2-3 km (up to 2 miles) on uneven, slanted and potentially slippery terrain and/or over some obstacles that could be up to a meter or slightly more high (e.g., large fallen logs) – all while carrying your own camera gear.*** In most years our best Spirit Bear photography ops come from selected locations on islands. Access to these locations is by walking only.
- ***Be able to easily move between the sailboat and the Zodiac®.*** This involves climbing up or down a 5' vertical ladder.
- ***Be able to easily move from the Zodiac® and a beach and/or rocky shoreline.*** This involves being able to climb over an obstacle (the side of the Zodiac!) approximately 1 meter high to or from a surface that may be unstable or slippery. This requires some balance and mobility.
- ***Shoot your camera from within a Zodiac®.*** This involves multiple tasks, including shooting your camera while sitting on the pontoon of the Zodiac® or while sitting on the floor of the Zodiac®. In some cases you may find that the most convenient way to shoot will be while kneeling (on your knees) on the bottom of the Zodiac®. This is the reason knee pads are included as optional items on the gear list. Note that tripods can **not** be used within the Zodiac® and while it is theoretically possible to use a monopod in the Zodiac®, few photographers find it practical. The obvious consequence is that you must be able to **hand-hold the camera/lens system** that you will be bringing and using on this photo tour.

On some occasions it WILL be possible to stand in the Zodiac® when shooting, but you will be shooting while sitting or kneeling far more frequently. A degree of flexibility and/or suppleness can make your time in the Zodiac® far more productive and enjoyable!



Our Ethical Stance – *Wildlife FIRST!*

Wildlife conservation is the primary reason for our involvement in wildlife photography. As such, *we place the welfare and value of our subjects above the value of any photograph of them.* This philosophy is embodied in our *Wildlife FIRST* rules of conduct that guide our actions during all our photo tours. These four simple ethical rules state that:

1. We engage in *PASSIVE* wildlife photography only. This means we strive to capture images of wildlife behaving as naturally as possible and without the use of “set-ups”, contrivances, or any actions that could guide the subjects toward desirable settings and/or backdrops or elicit specific “poses”.
2. We do nothing intentional to alter or influence the behaviour of our subject(s) for the purposes of photography. This means we do not

engage in any form of luring or baiting (or any other form of food supplementation). Additionally, we will not use any form of sound to alter the behaviour of the subject for the purpose of photography (including using predator and/or prey calls, vocal clicking, or making any other sound to encourage the subject to look at us).

3. We always allow the wildlife subject – regardless of the species – to determine the distance it is comfortable with between itself and us. This principle not only serves to reduce the stress on the subject, but it also allows photographers to capture the subject behaving in a more natural, and often more interesting, fashion.
4. We strive to always consider both the individual and collective effects our photographic activities can have on our subjects. This includes being aware of the total time spent with the subjects. This means we will often break contact and withdraw from the subject, especially if there is any indication that our presence is impacting on the subject's behavioural routine (including activities such as feeding, resting and/or sleeping, caring for its offspring, etc.). This consideration is always important and may become even MORE important if multiple photographers or groups of photographers are working with the same subject.

Those participating in our photo tours are expected to conform to these rules of photographer conduct.

For more information about this amazing trip contact Brad Hill at:
seminars@naturalart.ca

Sunrise Solitude. The quiet waters in the interior of the Haida Gwaa Archipelago provides opportunity for some great (and peaceful) recreational opportunities. Nikon D3s with 70-200mm f2.8 @ 185mm. 1/1250s @ f8. ISO 200.



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Just Steller Action! Steller Sea Lions live in a "high energy" environment that makes for challenging photography. And it also makes for some of the most exciting action shooting that wildlife can provide!

Nikon D5 with 180-400mm zoom @ 410mm. 1/1600s @ f6.3. ISO 720. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



