

The Khutzeymateen Explorer 2023



The *Khutzeymateen Explorer Photo Op Photo Tour 2023* is geared toward the intermediate to advanced wildlife photographer who is strongly interested in photographing the Grizzlies of the Khutzeymateen but also wants the opportunity to see and photograph some of the other great subjects found in the northern section of the Great Bear Rainforest. This one-of-a-kind photo tour begins with 3 full days photographing grizzlies in the famous Khutzeymateen Grizzly Sanctuary. We'll then spend another two days with grizzlies – and possibly coastal Gray Wolves – in a second remote coastal inlet and estuary system. Following that – and while en route to our trip's end point in Prince Rupert – we'll cruise the inlets and islands on the northern BC coast in search of Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, Stellar Sea Lions, coastal Gray Wolves, Black Bears, River Otters, a plethora of seabirds, and great, great seascapes and landscapes! This Khutzeymateen-Great Bear combination trip offers the best of the beautiful British Columbia coast!

The Khutzeymateen Grizzly Sanctuary. The 39,000 hectare (96,000 acre) Khutzeymateen Grizzly Sanctuary is Canada's only Grizzly Bear sanctuary and is located at the tip of a long inlet on the northern coast of British Columbia. There are no roads, settlements, or even campsites in the region – it is true pristine wilderness. The bulk of the sanctuary is closed to the public and only two professional guides are allowed to lead very small groups into the heart of this globally unique ecosystem. The inlet is home to about 50 resident grizzlies, with many more passing through during the year. This remote piece of wilderness is set within one of the planet's few remaining completely intact temperate rainforests and offers a stunning, backdrop to observe and photograph wild grizzlies as they interact with one another as they have for time immemorial. The bears themselves grant visitors with a very rare privilege: they allow humans completely into their rich and behaviourally diverse daily lives.

Ghost of the Coast. Coastal Gray Wolves are not rare in the Khutzeymateen, but their secretive nature makes them a challenge to see or photograph. Nikon D4s with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/500s @ f5.6. ISO 350. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



You'll be one of under 200 people – and far, far fewer photographers – annually gifted with the intimate experience of sharing the lives of the Grizzlies of the Khutzeymateen.

Once we leave the Khutzeymateen we'll begin touring the northernmost portion of the the largest tract of temperate coastal rainforest left on planet Earth – the Great Bear Rainforest. Here the coastal mountains meet the Pacific Ocean – the area is cut by hundreds of steep-sided inlets/fjords and there are countless islands. This region of the Great Bear is true wilderness and is rarely visited by humans. It is stunningly beautiful in itself. And, it is literally teeming with wildlife, including Grizzly Bears, Black (and Spirit) Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, Wolverines, Sea Otters, American Martens, Bald Eagles, Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, Sea Otters, Harbour Seals, Steller Sea Lions, many species of waterfowl and seabirds, and more! The photographic opportunities on this Khutzeymateen-Great Bear Rainforest combination photo tour will be absolutely amazing.

To explore and photograph the Khutzeymateen and surrounding rainforest we'll use a 60-foot Gulf Commander expedition power boat (the *Afterglow I*) as our floating basecamp and “exploration vessel”. We'll also be using a motorized inflatable Zodiac® to assist us in exploring the nearshore areas and many islands and inlets.

About the Photography “Style” On This Photo Tour. On this trip – as on our other photo tours – this is a “*photography in true wilderness*” experience. This means we will spend most of our time in isolated and remote wilderness and away from other humans (and other photographers). We'll have to “track down” our subject matter without the help of other outfitters, spotters or real-time online apps listing recent sightings. Additionally we'll have no “set-up” situations where we can set up in a specific location ahead of time and with the knowledge that a certain species will predictably appear and pose for us! The advantage of our “*photography in true wilderness*” approach is that it produces a far more unique and personalized experience and it can often lead to more original and compelling photos. A possible downside is that it means we don't know the

The Sentinel - Khutzeymateen Inlet
Nikon D3s with 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/1250s @ f5.6. ISO 200.



While the Khutzeymateen is most famous for its Grizzly Bears, it also offers dramatic scenery and the opportunity to photograph other species, including Bald Eagles, River Otters, and sometimes even Coastal Wolves!

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specifics of the shooting conditions ahead of time and thus may put more onus on the photographer to make snap technical and creative decisions in a field setting. This means it may challenge – and encourage you to expand – your photographic skills more than other photo tours do!

Our Wildlife Subject Matter: While this is a *photography-in-true-wilderness* trip, we are definitely headed into a target-rich environment! Grizzlies are the dominant terrestrial mammal in this region and our primary target, but there are many other species that we may encounter and, when the opportunity presents itself, photograph.

Here's a quick run-down of both our “*most likely*” wildlife subjects and our “*less likely but possible*” wildlife subjects:

A. Most Likely Subjects (50% or greater probability of encounter):

- Grizzly Bears
- Black Bears
- Humpback Whales
- Bald Eagles
- Harbour Seals
- Great Blue Herons
- Harlequin Ducks
- River Otters
- Herring Gulls
- American Mink
- Canada Geese
- Steller Sea Lions
- Asst'd songbirds
- Asst'd shorebirds
- Common Loons

B. Less Likely But Possible Subjects (<50% probability of encounter):

- Killer Whales
- Coastal Gray Wolves
- Steller Sea Lions
- Dall's Porpoises
- American Marten
- Fin Whales
- Elephant Seals
- Pacific White-sided Dolphins

2023 Dates: June 18-24, 2023.

2023 Price: \$6,999 CAD plus 5% GST.

Going Down! A "natural" monochrome of a Humpback Whale diving deep in the Great Bear.

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Nikon D500 with Sigma Sport 120-300mm f2.8 @ 270mm. 1/1250s @ f4.5. ISO 800.

What's Included?

- Float plane transportation into the Khutzymateen
- All food and accommodation beginning on Day 1 of the tour (see Itinerary for details)
- A highly-experienced bear guide and professional photography guide
- A great cook and crew
- Jaw-dropping scenery, fabulous bears, and a great mix of other wild-life!

What's Not?

- Transportation between your home and Prince Rupert, BC
- Personal belongings and equipment as per "Clothing & Equipment List"
- Any meals and accommodation in Prince Rupert prior to Day 1
- Excess baggage charges from airlines
- Any extra personal expenses incurred because of weather, logistical delays, or delayed departures of chartered or scheduled aircraft
- Any gratuities for the crew of the *Afterglow*

What To Expect?

- Cool weather (daytime highs of about 15-18C or 59-65° fahrenheit); rain showers are likely but usually short-lived (and sunny skies are NOT uncommon at this time of year)
- Totally calm water at our floating basecamp but with the possibility of some rolling water during the 2nd half of the photo tour.
- Very long hours of daylight (giving us ample time in the field)
- Unsurpassed wildlife photography opportunities
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp
- Great camaraderie and a true “bucket-list” experience!

Sample Itinerary

This is only a sample itinerary and how we actually spend our days during the photo tour may differ from below. Several factors interact to influence how we spend each day, including the location and abundance of the wildlife, the timing of the tides (we can only access some areas – such as the channels in the various estuaries – during high tides) and, of course, the weather. All of these factors change day-by-day.

Day 1 – June 18, 2023.

Arrive in Prince Rupert. Make your way to the Highliner Hotel & Conference Centre to check in and stow your gear. Official check-in time is 3 PM, but if your room is ready before that they will let you check in earlier. You can stow your luggage with them while waiting to check-in. If you arrive early in the day feel free to sightsee or check the town out. Plan on



The Welcoming Committee. Steller Sea Lions can be seen throughout the channels and inlets of the Great Bear Rainforest, but large groups like this are more commonly encountered on the outside and more exposed islands and coastlines.

Nikon D800 with Nikkor 70-400mm f2.8 @ 200mm. 1/1000s @ f8. ISO 400

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Stalking the Shoreline.

Nikon D4 with Sigma Sport 150-600mm zoom @ 180mm. 1/400s @ f11. ISO 2200.

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assembling in the lobby of the Highliner at 6 PM for an informal “meet & greet”. Shortly following you’ll head out for dinner together.

Day 2 – June 19, 2023.

Early breakfast at the hotel, followed by an early float plane trip into the Khutzeymateen. Following meeting the crew and guides of the *Afterglow* and allocating the cabins, we will spend as much time as possible out in the Zodiac® photographing grizzly bears.

Days 3 & 4 – June 20 & 21, 2023

We will spend the majority of these in the Zodiac® viewing and photographing bears. Depending on the tides, our time will find us in some area of the inlet viewing and photographing what could be any number of animals, including grizzly and black bears, seals, eagles and herons. At dusk, after the evening’s activities, you will return to the boat to enjoy a hot drink and dinner while reflecting on the day’s events (and reviewing your images!). Late on June 21 we will move the *Afterglow* partway down the Khutzeymateen Inlet to view additional bears and stage ourselves for an early morning trip out of the inlet early the next morning.

Rough-housing in the Kutz!



Nikon D5 with Nikkor 180-400mm f4E @ 560mm. 1/2000s @ f5.6. ISO 2000

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Days 5 & 6 – June 22 & 23, 2023

We'll spend these days in the Kwinamass Bay and estuary – another hot spot for observing and photographing Grizzly Bears and other wildlife. With luck and good karma we may also find coastal Gray Wolves in this remote location.

Day 7 – June 24, 2023.

We'll now shift into Great Bear Rainforest and marine mammals mode as we travel from the Kwinamass back to Prince Rupert. We'll be on the lookout for Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, Dall's Porpoises, Pacific White-sided Dolphins, Stellar Sea Lions and more! We should have time for a Zodiac® excursion during the day to explore some of the quiet bays of the northern BC Coast. We should arrive back in Prince Rupert mid-to-late afternoon. We'll then disembark from the *Afterglow* and be left with lots of great memories and photos!

Our Ethical Stance – *Wildlife FIRST!*

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

1. **Ethical wildlife photographers should engage in *passive wildlife photography* only.** This means striving to capture images of wildlife behaving as naturally as possible and without the photographer taking any actions to guide the subject(s) toward desirable settings and/or backdrops or elicit specific “poses”.
2. **Ethical wildlife photographers should do nothing *intentional* to alter or influence the behaviour of their subjects for the purpose of photography.** This includes not intentionally influencing their distribution in space or their behaviour. This translates into not engaging

The Tree of Life. Bald Eagles are always great subjects, but finding them perched in settings like this is like a photographer's dream come true!



Nikon D4s with Nikkor 400mm f2.8 VR. 1/640s @ f7.1. ISO 1800
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in any form of luring or baiting (or any other form of food supplementation). Additionally, it extends to not using any sound to alter the behaviour of the subject for the purpose of photography, including using predator and/or prey calls, song or vocalization playbacks, vocal clicking, or making any other sound to cause the subject to alter its ongoing behaviour and look at the photographer.

3. While conforming to and working within any legal guidelines determining minimum allowable approach distances, **ethical wildlife photographers should allow the wildlife subject – regardless of the species – to determine the subject-to-photographer distance it is comfortable with.** This principle serves to reduce stress on the subject and also allows the capture of photographs of the subject behaving in a more natural, and often more interesting, fashion.
4. **Ethical wildlife photographers always consider both their *individual and the overall collective effects* photographic activities can have on the subject(s).** This includes being aware of *your total time spent with the wildlife subject(s)* and, whenever possible, *the total time spent with the subject by all photographers utilizing the subject.* In practice this means the photographer may have to withdraw from the subject and cease photographic efforts of it, especially if there is any indication that his or her 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 simultaneously or sequentially sharing the same subject(s).

All photographers participating in my photo tours are expected to conform to these ethical rules.

All images in this trip compendium and the Natural Art Images website (www.naturalart.ca) were captured following these *Wildlife FIRST* rules of photographer conduct.

For more information about this amazing trip contact Brad Hill at:

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Grizzly Cub – Brown on Green! Grizzlies of both sexes and all ages are found in the Khatzeymateen. In most years females avoid bringing first year cubs into the estuary owing to the threat posed by large male bears.







