

The Khutzeymateen Summer Explorer

Exploratory Photo Adventure 2025



Think of this all-new tour as an exploration of the northernmost portion of the world-renown Great Bear Rainforest, with a healthy dose of the amazing Khutzeymateen Grizzlies thrown in for good measure! On this exploratory photo adventure we'll board the *Afterglow* in Prince Rupert BC and travel south and west into the outer islands of the Great Bear Rainforest while searching for Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, and other marine mammals. We'll then head north towards the Khutzeymateen Inlet while searching for marine mammals, coastal Gray Wolves, Black Bears (and more) on the coast line and many islands of the region. We'll follow that up with a minimum of two days in the Khutzeymateen Inlet and Estuary viewing and photographing the region's spectacular grizzly bears during the late summer salmon run. Next on our agenda will be heading south while visiting several islands and more spectacular coastline – and continuing to search for dramatic photo ops of marine mammals, bears, wolves and more! This trip is about exploration, great wildlife diversity, fantastic land- and seascapes, AND spectacular grizzly bears!

The Great Bear Rainforest. The portion of the British Columbia mainland coast that stretches from Rivers Inlet in the south up to the Alaska border in the north is often referred to as “The Great Bear Rainforest”. At over 64,000 square kilometers (25,000 sq. mi.) it is the largest tract of temperate coastal rainforest left on planet Earth. Here the coastal mountains meet the Pacific Ocean – the area is cut by hundreds of steep-sided inlets/fjords and there are countless islands. The more inland portions of the Great Bear Rainforest (AKA the “*Inner Great Bear*”) are characterized by thick forests cut by steep-sided inlets – here thick rainforest literally meets salt water! Another characteristic feature is the presence of wide, fertile estuaries where inland rivers and streams drain into the inlets and fjords. These estuaries are wildlife viewing and wildlife photography hotspots!

Those portions of the Great Bear Rainforest more directly facing the Pacific Ocean (AKA the “*Outer Great Bear*”) are more wind- and “sea-swept” and include many islands and islets with more stunted tree growth and are generally more open than the forest of the Inner Great Bear. Many sections of the shoreline even have long, sandy beaches!



Launching The Attack. Although not our primary subject matter, the Khutzeymateen offers excellent opportunities to photograph Bald Eagles.

Follow-the-Leader – Coastal Gray Wolf Style! While normally shy, reclusive and rarely seen, on some of the outer islands of the Great Bear live and play on white-sand beaches. Here an adult wolf is being chased by three of its pups-of-the-year.



Nikon Z9 with Nikkor Z 800mm f6.3S. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 3600

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Both faces of the Great Bear – *the Inner and Outer* – are true wilderness and stunningly beautiful! They are rarely visited by humans. And both faces share many fascinating wildlife species, including Grizzly Bears, Black (and Spirit) Bears, coastal Gray Wolves, Wolverines, American Martens, Bald Eagles, Humpback Whales, Killer Whales, and Harbour Seals.

The *Outer Great Bear* adds several additional wildlife species to this already strong list – here Steller Sea Lions, Sea Otters, more whale species (such as Fin Whales), and many additional species of waterfowl and seabirds are commonly seen.

The Khutzeymateen Grizzly Sanctuary. Created in 1992, 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 and remote 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 – only two professional guides have licenses to lead very small groups into the heart of this

majestic and 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, verdant 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 voluntarily allow humans completely into their rich and behaviourally diverse daily lives.*

Our planned route for this photo tour will have us visiting both the “*Outer Great Bear*” and, when in the Khutzeymateen, the “*Inner Great Bear*”. With this unique mix of coastal habitats we'll have a very diverse collection of wildlife subject matter to work with – along with spectacular land- and seascapes.

To explore and photograph this vast region we will use a 60-foot Gulf Commander expedition power boat as our floating basecamp and then travel into the depths of the sanctuary using a motorized inflatable Zodiac®.

About the Photography “Style” On This Photo Tour. On this trip – as on my other photo tours – this is a “*photography in true wilderness*” experience. This means we will spend the bulk 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 (i.e., there is no “network of sightings” for us to plug into!). 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 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! 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
- Killer Whales
- Harbour Seals
- Bald Eagles
- Great Blue Herons
- Harlequin Ducks
- Herring Gulls
- American Mink
- Canada Geese
- Asst’d shorebirds
- Asst’d songbirds

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

- River Otters
- American Marten
- Wolverine
- Sea Otters
- Coastal Gray Wolves
- Fin Whales

Seeking Natural Art! While finding and working with several species of “charismatic megafauna” is a big part of our experience, we’ll be approaching this trip with an attitude of *finding and capturing any form of natural beauty and natural art we can find.*



Rough-housing in the Khutz!



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

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2025 Dates: August 23-31, 2025.

2025 Price: \$8499 CAD plus 5% GST.

What's Included?

- All meals and accommodation in Prince Rupert beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Afterglow*
- A highly-experienced bear guide and professional photography guide
- A friendly and energetic boat manager and cook
- Jaw-dropping scenery and fabulous bears!

What's Not Included?

- Transportation between your home and Prince Rupert, BC
- Personal belongings and equipment
- 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 15-23°C or 59-73° fahrenheit); rain showers are likely but often short-lived (and sunny skies are NOT uncommon at this time of year)
- Mostly calm seas, but with some short-duration bouts of rolling water
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!
- A truly unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience!

Accommodation?

- While in Prince Rupert (night of August 23) we will be staying at the Highliner Hotel & Conference Centre.
- While in the Great Bear Rainforest we will be staying on the *Afterglow* boat, a 60-foot Gulf Commander power boat. Please be aware that it is likely you will be asked to share a berth on the *Afterglow*.

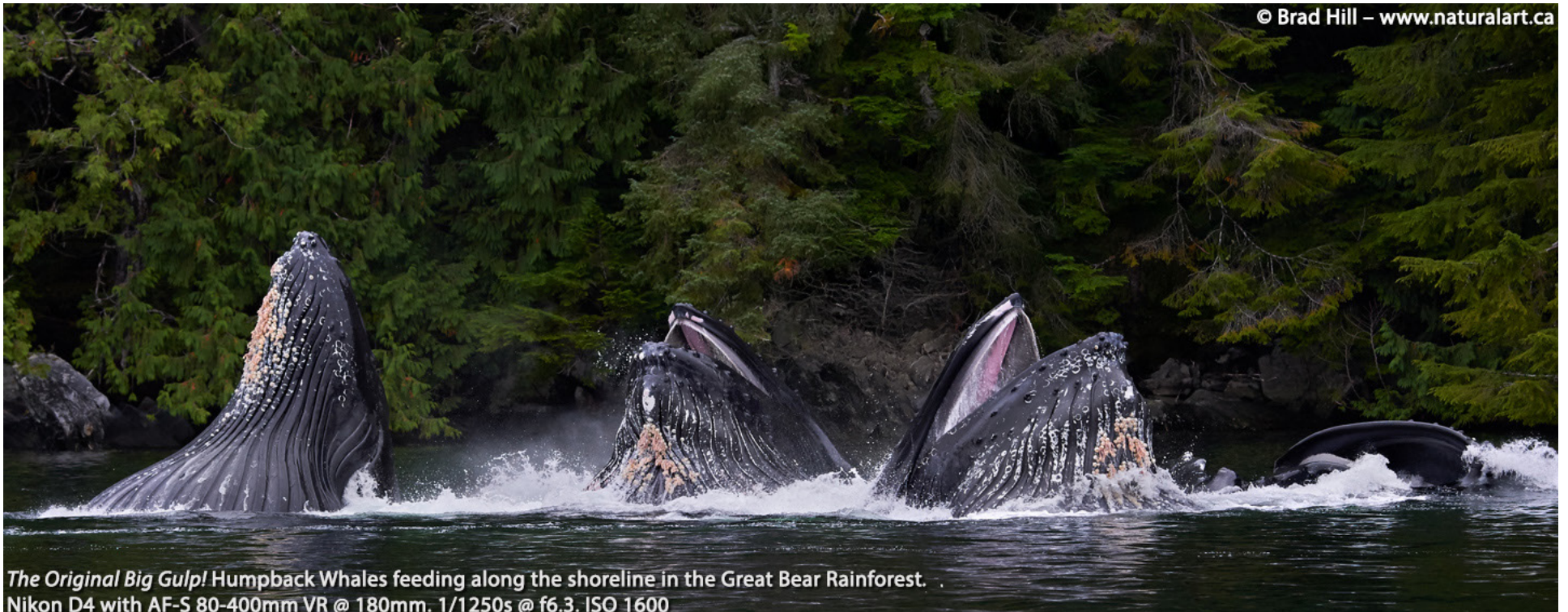
Sample Itinerary

This is only a sample itinerary and how we actually spend our days may differ somewhat from this proposed schedule. Three factors interact to influence how we spend each day – the distribution and abundance of wildlife, weather conditions, and the timing of the tides (we can only

access some areas – such as the channels in the Khutzeymateen Estuary – during high tides). All of these factors change day-by-day.

Day 1 – August 22 or 23, 2025 (your choice!)

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 assembling in the lobby of the Highliner at 6:30 PM on August 23rd for our first official group activity – an informal “meet & greet”. Shortly following this we will head out for dinner together.



Day 2 – August 24, 2025.

A not-so-early breakfast at the hotel, followed by a relaxing morning! We'll grab a lunch together and board the *Afterglow* at the Cow Bay Marina at 1:30 PM. After meeting the crew and completing a safety orientation we'll head out on our adventure. From Prince Rupert we'll motor south and west to Porcher Island, keeping all our eyes peeled for both Killer and Humpback Whales. And, we'll be scanning shorelines for Black Bears and coastal Gray Wolves. That night we'll set anchor in Welcome Harbour.

Day 3 – August 25, 2025.

Today will be a short voyage north to Butler Island, leaving us with a lot of time to search for whales, Steller Sea Lions, Black Bears, and coastal Gray Wolves. And, we should have many species of sea birds vying for our attention the entire day!

Day 4 – August 26, 2025.

Today we'll head north again and head up Chatham Sound and spend time at Lucy Island and/or Dundas Island. Again marine mammals will be our main focus this day, but we'll also be scanning shorelines for both Black Bears and coastal Gray Wolves.

Days 5 & 6 – August 27-28 (ish), 2025.

Now it's time to head into the long Khutzeymateen Inlet and our time with Grizzly Bears will begin! We'll spend at least two nights near the top end of the inlet (in and around the Khutzeymateen Estuary). Both Pink and Chum salmon should be running at this time so with luck we'll be able to photograph Grizzly Bears fishing and feeding on them!



Checking His Route. From a young age Grizzlies are extremely comfortable swimming, and will swim long distances in the coastal inlets of BC.

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/2000s @ f4. ISO 720. Wide-area AF with SD = Animal

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Rust On Rust – Great Blue Heron in Flight. Although the sub-species of Great Blue Heron found on BC's coast is considered to be endangered, they are quite commonly seen on almost all of my BC coastal photo tours.



Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/2000s @ f4. ISO 1400. Wide Area AF with SD = Animal

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Days 7 & 8 – August 29-30 (ish), 2025.

We'll leave the Khutzeymateen Inlet and head south towards Prince Rupert. We'll leave lots of time to pursue photo ops along the way that could include sessions with Humpback and/or Killer Whales, coastal Gray Wolves, and Black Bears. We'll likely anchor at Pearl Harbour on the night of August 30 where Sea Otters have been encountered in past years.

Day 9 – August 31, 2025.

After breakfast together on the *Afterglow* we'll have a short run back to Prince Rupert and our adventure together will conclude when we disembark the *Afterglow* at around 10:30 AM (leaving you time to catch the afternoon flight back Vancouver). You'll be left with great memories and

enough images to keep you busy for many weeks, months, and years to come!

My Ethical Stance – Wildlife FIRST!

Wildlife conservation is the primary reason for my involvement in wildlife photography and for running photo tours. 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 collective actions during all my photo tours. These four simple ethical rules state that:

1. **Wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* should engage in *passive* wildlife photography only.** This means striving

Northern River Otters are among the assemblage of carnivores found along the entire BC coast. I photographed this curious otter in the Khutzeymateen Estuary during my "Grizzlies of the Khutzeymateen" Instructional Photo Tour in June of 2024.



Nikon Z9 with Nikkor Z 800mm f6.3S. 1/400s @ f6.3. ISO 1000

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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. **Wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* 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 and time or influencing their behaviour. This translates into NOT engaging 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, **wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* 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. **Wildlife photographers who place wildlife welfare *FIRST* 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).

We *will* be adhering to these 4 rules during all my BC coastal photo tours.

All images in this trip compendium and on 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:

seminars@naturalart.ca.



Sea Otter @ Rest. Sea Otters were extirpated from the entire BC Coast but are now enjoying a strong recovery. They are just beginning to repopulate the northern BC coast, so while it is possible we'll see and photograph them, it isn't likely. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S. 1/1600s @ f3.2. ISO 1250



Cautious But Curious – Coastal Gray Wolf Pup. This young wolf was romping on a beach with its siblings on one of the outer islands of the Great Bear Rainforest when we encountered it. It was exceptionally interested in us but still a little wary!



Grizzly Cub – Brown on Green! This image was captured while in a Zodiac® in the Khutzeymateen Inlet in the spring of 2014. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca
Nikon D4s with Nikkor 400mm f2.8G. 1/500s @ f3.2; ISO 250.



Autumn Sunrise in the Great Bear. While most photographers travel to the Great Bear Rainforest to see and photograph the wildlife, the scenery and the landscape photography can be spectacular.







