

Autumn in the Great Bear Rainforest

Exploratory Photo Adventure 2026

The *Into the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Adventure 2026* offers 9 days of exploring and photographing one of the last great wildernesses on earth – the incomparable Great Bear Rainforest. This trip is about both exploration AND about photography – and having a great time! We'll travel by boat, Zodiac®, and by foot into the heart of the Great Bear, always keeping an eye out for great photo ops of our “targeted” species, including Grizzly Bears, Black Bears, the rare white Spirit Bear, coastal Gray Wolves, Humpback Whales, landscapes, and more. And, we'll do it all from our very comfortable and spacious mobile base camp – an 18-meter Gulf Commander power boat – the *Afterglow*.

The Region – And Our Expedition At a Glance

The portion of the British Columbia mainland coast that stretches from Rivers Inlet in the south to the Skeena River 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 forest 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!



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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The 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 portions of the shoreline even have long, sandy beaches!

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 even more species to this strong list – here Steller Sea Lions, Sea Otters, additional whale species (such as Fin Whales), and many species of waterfowl and seabirds are more commonly seen, adding even more faunal diversity to our adventure! Because we’ve added an extra day and night to the 2026 version of this trip we’ll have more route options available to us and a greater ability to visit hotspots in both the *Inner and Outer Great Bear*!

About The Spirit Bear. The almost mythical Spirit Bear is a rare, white-phased form of the American Black Bear. The subspecies of Black Bear found within the Great Bear Rainforest is *Ursus americanus kermodei* – the Kermode Bear. All the black bears in the Great Bear Rainforest (of any coat colour) are Kermode Bears. But not all Kermodes are white – only the rare Spirit Bear possesses the “signature” white coat.

Spirit Bears are not albinos. The white coat colour is caused by a recessive gene and only those bears with two copies of the gene (one inherited from the mother and one inherited from the father) have white coats. Bears that possess one copy of the recessive white coat gene and one copy of the gene for a “normal” coat have typical black coats and are carriers of the trait. The white coat colour of Spirit Bears can theoretically be found in Black Bears anywhere, but they are exceptionally rare in all parts of the Black Bears’ range. The one exception is on a small portion of the British Columbia coast where, for reasons that are only poorly understood, between 10 and 20 percent of the bears are white!

A Tour of Exploration! The *Into the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Tour 2026* is a true tour of photographic exploration. We'll explore the inlets, bays and old-growth forest of the spectacular mid-coast of British Columbia. We'll walk trails and beaches, explore creeks, and search for the unique mix of subject matter that only the Great Bear Rainforest can provide! The photographic opportunities on this tour are always absolutely amazing. Due to potentially extreme weather conditions and rough terrain, and to increase our chances of seeing a Spirit Bear, we may utilize native-built viewing platforms in certain situations.

This is a multi-faceted trip, focusing not only on the bears, but on *all* the inhabitants of the Great Bear Rainforest – and the entire ecosystem in which they thrive. While the bears are an integral part of this trip, 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 terrestrial and marine wildlife and birds, intertidal scenes, landscapes, seascapes, and more! *If your sole goal is to photograph bears (to the exclusion of other subject matter you will be presented with), this may not be the trip for you.*

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 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

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*.



Nikon D2Xs with Nikkor 200mm f2.0 VR. 1/400s @ f6.3. ISO 100
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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):

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Black Bears | • Grizzly Bears | • Spirit Bears |
| • Harbour Seals | • Humpback Whales | • Steller Sea Lions |
| • Bald Eagles | • Herring Gulls | • Dall's Porpoises |
| • Surf Scoters | • Harlequin Ducks | • Common Loons |
| • River Otters | • American Mink | • Great Blue Herons |
| • Asst'd songbirds | • Asst'd seabirds | • Asst'd shorebirds |

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

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| • Killer Whales | • Coastal Gray Wolves | • Sea Otters |
| • Minke Whales | • Fin Whales | • American Marten |
| • Elephant Seals | • Wolverine | • Marbled Murrelets |
| • Sandhill Cranes | • Pacific White-sided Dolphins | |

2026 Trip Start and End Points: The photo tour begins and ends in Terrace, BC.

2026 Dates: September 21-30, 2026, including arrival and departure days. Aboard the *Afterglow* and in the Great Bear from September 22-30, 2026.

2026 Price: \$11,899 CAD plus 5% GST.

Fishing – It's a Wet, Wet Job!



Nikon D850 with Sigma 120-300mm f2.8 @ 300mm. 1/1250s @ f3.2. ISO 3200
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What's Included?

- All meals and accommodation in Terrace, BC beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- Transport by van to Kitimat to meet the *Afterglow* at the beginning of the trip, and from Kitimat to the airport at the end of the trip
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Afterglow*
- A highly-experienced bear guide and professional photography guide
- A great cook and crew
- Use of Zodiac® and all associated safety gear (life jackets, etc.)

What's Not Included?

- Transportation between your home and Terrace, BC at the beginning of the trip and from Terrace, BC to your home at the end of the trip
- Personal belongings and equipment
- Any meals and accommodation in Terrace prior to Day 1
- Any extra personal expenses incurred because of weather, logistical delays, or missed flights
- Any gratuities for the crew of the *Afterglow*

A Romp of River Otters! Northern River Otters are common throughout the Great Bear...but they can be a challenge to photograph!



Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/400s @ f6.3; ISO 2000

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What To Expect?

- Cool weather (daytime highs of about 12-17°C); rain showers, with the possibility of heavy rain
- Mostly calm seas, but with some short-duration bouts of rolling water
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!
- Amazing photo ops and great camaraderie
- A truly unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience!

Photo Tour Leader: Brad Hill

Accommodation: While in Terrace you will be staying at the Best Western Hotel.

While in the Great Bear Rainforest we will be staying on the *Afterglow* boat, an 18-meter Gulf Commander power boat. Please be aware that it is likely you will be asked to share a berth on the *Afterglow*.



A Sea Lion's Worst Nightmare! Although Killer Whales can be found throughout all the inlets and channels of the Great Bear Rainforest, they are more common on the outer islands closer to the open Pacific. During the 2023 edition of the *"Into the Great Bear Rainforest"* photo tour we were lucky enough to witness and photograph a pod of Transient Killer Whales attacking sea lions at a haul-out rock. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor 120-300mm f2.8E @ 240mm. 1/2500s @ f5. ISO 1250



Sample Itinerary

The itinerary of the *Into the Great Bear Rainforest Exploratory Photo Adventure* is designed for flexibility. This allows us to react to the ever-changing distribution and abundance of wildlife and fluctuating weather conditions. Here's *one example* of how our time together may look!

Note that we have several route options available to us and the actual route we'll follow will be determined by weather conditions, any recent information on wildlife distribution and abundance, and a desire to minimize travel time (and maximize time in the field). The *intended* route we have chosen provides us with opportunities to explore both faces of the Great Bear – the *Inner* and the *Outer Great Bear*. Please keep in mind this is only a *sample itinerary* and how we actually spend our days may differ.

Day 1 – September 21, 2026

Arrive in Terrace. Make your way to the Best Western Hotel 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 Best Western at 6:30 PM for an informal “meet & greet”. Shortly following we'll head out for dinner together.

Day 2 – September 22, 2026

Early breakfast, followed by van pickup at 7:15 AM for our one-hour trip to Kitimat and the *Afterglow*. Once we board the boat we'll meet the crew and guides of the *Afterglow*, allocate cabins, have a brief orientation, and then we'll begin our journey into the Great Bear Rainforest. Our intended route will immediately take us into the “*Inner Great Bear*” where photographic opportunities can abound! The narrow channels we'll travel through are home to Humpback and Killer Whales, Elephant Seals and countless seabirds. End of day should see us stopping in a secluded anchorage where we'll be able to watch for wildlife from the deck of the *Afterglow*.

Days 3 through 8 – September 23-29, 2026

Expect each day to be full and very different from the previous one! We'll mix marine mammal viewing from the *Afterglow* and from the Zodiac® with visiting coastal streams and estuaries in search of carnivores that will visit them to feed on salmon. While we'll opportunistically work with any subject matter we find, we will place emphasis on finding Grizzly and Black Bears (including Spirit Bears), Humpback and Killer Whales, Steller Sea Lions, and Bald Eagles. The subject matter we may "opportunistically" work with (as we encounter them) could include Harbour Seals, Fin Whales, Dall's Porpoises, coastal Gray Wolves, Great Blue Herons, Sea Otters, Northern River Otters and more. Plus, of course, great sea- and landscapes!

During these days we will spend time shooting from the *Afterglow*, the Zodiac®, and land-based locations we will be hiking to. And *we'll be constantly adjusting our schedule* – and possibly our route – based on weather conditions, tides, and the ever-changing distribution of our "prey". Remember – *whales have tails, bears have feet, and eagles have wings – and they can all MOVE!* 🐾

Day 9 – September 30, 2026

Breakfast on the *Afterglow* at an anchorage about 4 hours outside of Kitimat, BC. We'll spend the morning watching for wildlife as we organize our gear for our departure from the boat. We will pull up to the dock in Kitimat at approximately 1 PM. Shortly thereafter our time together in the fabulous Great Bear Rainforest will draw to an end – but you'll be left with many fabulous memories and photographs!

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.



Face-to-Face! Close encounters with female grizzlies with cubs are always thrilling (and even chilling!) experiences! © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca
Nikon Z9 with Nikkor 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/400s @ f4. ISO 2500



The Original Big Gulp! Humpback Whales feeding along the shoreline in the Great Bear Rainforest.
Nikon D4 with AF-S 80-400mm VR @ 180mm. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 1600

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 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).

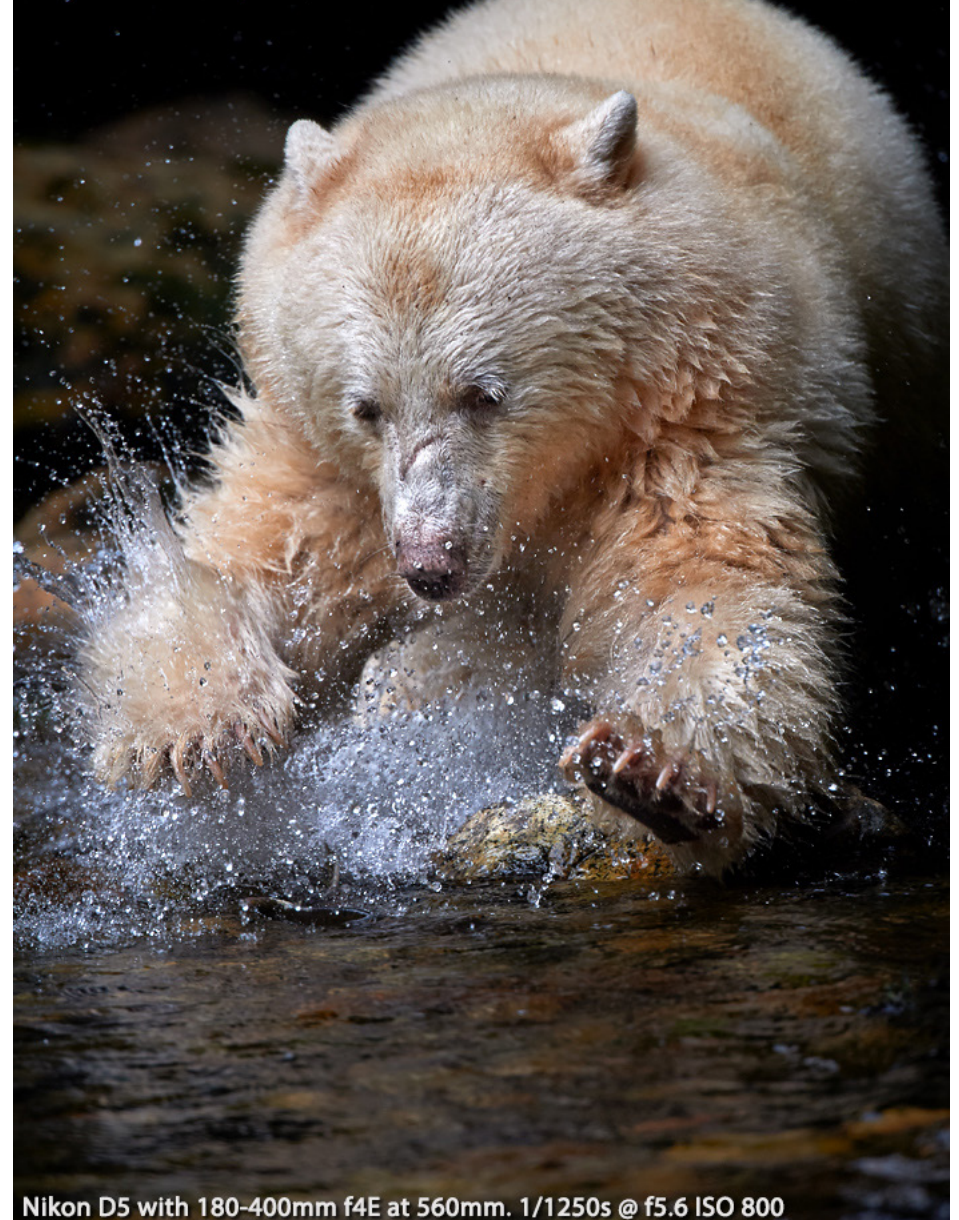
We *will* be adhering to these 4 rules during this photo tour.

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

The Pounce – Fishing Spirit Bear! All Black Bears in the region are of the *Kermodei* subspecies but only those with two recessive genes for the white coat become all-white Spirit Bears. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Nikon D5 with 180-400mm f4E at 560mm. 1/1250s @ f5.6 ISO 800



The Humpback Ballet. Humpback Whale numbers have been on the rise in recent years in the channels and inlets of the Great Bear Rainforest. The whales are commonly seen during my photo tours – but capturing a breach shot is a special and rare treat!

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor 120-300mm f2.8E @ 300mm. 1/2500s @ f3.2. ISO 640. © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

The "Inner" Great Bear – River Meets Ocean @ Sunrise! Coastal estuaries occur where rivers drain into the ocean – and are where bears, wolves, and many other wildlife species are commonly found in the spring and summer. We'll visit several estuaries during our *Great Bear Rainforest* photo tour!



Black-on-Black – Emerging from Shadows.



Check out my cool super-sensitive front paws! Sea Otters have amazingly sensitive front paws that can distinguish between barnacle-encrusted rocks and barnacle-encrusted bivalves (food!) even when the water is so murky that there is zero visibility. Sea Otters have recently re-colonized the region after a nearly century-long absence and are now spreading to more and more locations in the Great Bear Rainforest.



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.



The "Outer" Great Bear – *Big Beaches, Big Skies*. The open spaces of the outer coast (and "Outer" Great Bear) is in almost stark contrast to the "tighter" and darker "Inner" Great Bear Rainforest. By including both faces of the Great Bear we increase the diversity of wildlife we can encounter and the types of landscapes and seascapes to see and photograph.





Into the World of the Wolf! Although secretive and only rarely seen, the coastal Gray Wolves found in the Great Bear Rainforest have a major ecological impact on the ecosystem.
© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 800mm f6.3S. 1/1250s @ f6.3; ISO 4500.