

The Khutzeymateen Explorer

Photo Op Photo Tour 2024



Natural Art Images
The Photography of Brad Hill

The *Khutzeymateen Explorer Photo Op Photo Tour 2024* 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.

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.



Fully Focused! 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 @ f5. ISO 1600. Wide-area AF with SD = Animal

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

A Ghost on the Coast! Coastal Gray Wolves are quite common in the Great Bear Rainforest. But, with their secretive nature what isn't common is actually seeing or photographing one! © Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



Nikon D5 with Sigma Sport 500mm f4. 1/1250s @ f6.3. ISO 1800.

Once we leave the Khutzeymateen we'll begin touring the northern-most 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 are always 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

Searching the Shoreline. Northern River Otters are commonly seen in both the rivers feeding the Great Bear Rainforest and in the intertidal zones of the region's many inlets



Nikon D5 with Nikkor 180-400mm f4E @ 560mm. 1/1600s @ f5.6; ISO 3200

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

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! 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

2024 Dates: June 18-24, 2024.

2024 Price: \$7299 CAD plus 5% GST.

What's Included?

- Float plane transportation into the Khutzeymateen
- 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 cameraderie and a true "bucket-list" experience!

Accommodation?

- While in Prince Rupert (night of June 14) we will be staying at the Highliner Hotel & Conference Centre.
- Once in the Khutzeymateen we will be staying on the *Afterglow*, a spacious 60' Gulf Commander expedition power boat.

Sample Itinerary

This is only a sample itinerary and how we actually spend our days may differ somewhat from this proposed schedule. Several factors interact to influence how we spend each day, including the location and abundance of the wildlife, the timing of the high and low 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 daily.

Day 1 – June 18, 2024.

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 for an informal “meet & greet”. Shortly following you’ll head out for dinner together.

Day 2 – June 19, 2024.

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, 2024

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.

Common along almost the entire BC coast, Harbour Seals are frequently seen in the Khutzeymateen. And, they make excellent subjects and can lead to interesting and unique photographs!



Nikon D500 with Nikkor 500mm f5.6E PF lens. 1/800s @ f5.6; ISO 900

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca



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

© Brad Hill – www.naturalart.ca

Days 5 & 6 – June 22 & 23, 2024

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, 2024.

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 around lunch time. 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 own 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. 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”.

Rough-housing in the Khutz!



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. While respecting any legal guidelines on minimum approach distances, *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 and minimize the impact that our own photographic activities – *and the overall impact of all photographic activities* – have on the subject(s). This includes being aware of our total time spent with the wildlife subject(s) and, whenever possible, *the total time*

spent with the subject by all photographers utilizing that same subject. In practice this means I (or we) will often break contact and withdraw from the subject and leave it in peace, especially if there is any indication that our presence is impacting on the subject's behaviour (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

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





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.







