

# Grizzlies of the Khutzymateen

## Instructional Photo Tour 2024





**T**he *Grizzlies of the Khutzeymateen Instructional Photo Tour 2024* combines pre-trip professional photography instruction with 4 full days of photographing grizzlies in the most breathtaking environment imaginable. You will be provided with the opportunity, the conceptual and creative tools, and the techniques needed to capture fantastic images of North America's top land-based carnivore – the Grizzly Bear.

**Photography Instruction.** The instructional component on this photo tour will take place in the weeks before the trip. Starting in 2022 I have taken the pre-trip photography instruction online, allowing you to take in the sessions in the comfort of your home. And, by going online and offering the instruction in the weeks before the trip you'll have time to reflect upon and digest the material long before you are face-to-face with the subjects. The two online sessions will be of benefit to all levels of photographers – from enthusiastic novices through to seasoned professionals. I'll discuss both the technical and creative aspects of wildlife photography as well as the specifics and logistics of photographing

wildlife and scenery within the Great Bear Rainforest. While the instructional material will be agnostic with respect to camera brand and camera style (e.g., mirrorless vs. DSLR) it will be assumed that most participants will be bringing either digital SLR's or mirrorless cameras.

**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 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



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



Second Thoughts? This young grizzly seems to be having second thoughts about its decision to wade across this creek!

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Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/1000s @ f4. ISO 500.

privilege: they allow humans completely into their rich and behaviourally diverse daily lives.

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.

To explore and photograph this spectacular valley we will use a 60-foot Gulf Commander expedition power boat (the *Afterglow I*) 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 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 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 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
- 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):

- Killer Whales
- Coastal Gray Wolves
- Humpback Whales
- River Otters
- American Marten
- Wolverine

**2024 Dates:** June 14-19, 2024.

**2024 Price:** \$6699 CAD plus 5% GST.

**What's Included?**

- Pre-trip online professional photography instruction
- All meals and accommodation in Prince Rupert beginning on the evening of Day 1 (see Itinerary)
- Float plane transportation both into and out of the Khutzeymateen
- All food and accommodation while aboard the *Afterglow*
- A highly-experienced bear guide and professional photography guide
- Jaw-dropping scenery and fabulous bears!

**Gentle Giants.** After decades of respectful treatment by humans, most of the Grizzlies in the Khutzeymateen show their natural gentle disposition.  
Nikon Z 9 with Nikkor Z 400mm f2.8S @ 560mm. 1/2500s @ f5. ISO 5000.



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*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](http://www.naturalart.ca)



## ***What's Not Included?***

- Transportation between your home and Prince Rupert, BC
- Personal belongings and equipment as per "Gear Lists"
- 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 often short-lived (and sunny skies are NOT uncommon at this time of year)
- Calm water in the inlet – seasickness isn't an issue on this trip

- Very long hours of daylight (giving us ample time in the field)
- Unsurpassed Grizzly Bear photography opportunities
- Hearty, healthy and delicious food
- Always warm, always dry floating basecamp!

## ***Accommodation?***

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

*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

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## Sample Itinerary

*This is only a sample itinerary and how we actually spend our days may differ somewhat from this proposed schedule.* Two factors interact to influence how we spend each day – the location of bears and the timing of the tides (we can only access some areas – such as the channels in the estuary – during high tides). Both of these factors change day-by-day.

### ***Day 1 – June 14, 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 this we will head out for dinner together.

### ***Day 2 – June 15, 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 the bears. Photography instruction during our time in the Khutzeymateen will be offered very informally and will largely be based on the questions and photographic issues faced by the participants. Note that it is very difficult to offer any instruction when actually working with the bears as we will have to remain as motionless and quiet as possible.

### ***Days 3 through 5 – June 16-18, 2024.***

In the Khutzeymateen. *Very* full days of bear photography!

### ***Day 6 – June 19, 2024.***

Breakfast on the *Afterglow* followed by our return float plane trip back to Prince Rupert. After which you’ll be left with many amazing memories and photos!



## Our 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. 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. 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.



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

***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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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](http://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](mailto:seminars@naturalart.ca)







*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](http://www.naturalart.ca)  
Nikon D4s with Nikkor 400mm f2.8G. 1/500s @ f3.2; ISO 250.

















