## Outline itinerary

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## Dates and Prices

Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) (tour code CAN01) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

## Focus
Grizzly Bears, whales, other mammals and birds.

## Grading
Grade A - Day walks only.

## Highlights
- Watch Grizzly Bears catching salmon from a remote floating lodge in the ‘Great Bear Rainforest’
- Black Bear, Sea Otter & Grey Wolf all possible
- View the Orcas of Johnstone Strait
- Explore the temperate rainforests of the Pacific Rim
- Humpback Whale, Grey Whale & Dall’s Porpoise
- Birds including Harlequin Duck & Tufted Puffin
- Wander through the towering Douglas Firs of Cathedral Grove
- Led by an expert naturalist guide
Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

It should also be noted that all whale-watching cruises are dependent on the weather and do not run in extreme conditions.

Introduction

The province of British Columbia in the west of Canada embraces vast areas of wilderness and spectacular scenery and plays host to a large and diverse range of wildlife. On this tour we will travel through a variety of different habitats, giving us an outstanding chance of seeing Orcas and Grey Whales, Sea Otters and Black Bears, as well as enjoying some excellent birdwatching. From Vancouver Island we will travel to Nekite Valley on the mainland. Our destination is the Great Bear Rainforest, a remote and temperate coastal rainforest which is home to several threatened species and one of the last strongholds of the Grizzly Bear. Here, in a true wilderness environment, we will stay on a floating lodge from which we will be able to travel a short distance to witness one of the most exciting wildlife spectacles in the world – Grizzly Bears congregating to fish for salmon, together with their retinue of attendant Bald Eagles.

Day 1

Vancouver

We will depart from London Heathrow on board a scheduled flight to Vancouver on the west coast of Canada, arriving this evening. On arrival at the airport, we will transfer to our hotel for the night in the nearby town of Tsawwassen, a short distance from the Vancouver Island ferry. Whilst some members of the group might prefer to retire to bed straight away, those still feeling energetic after the long flight might like to venture out for a stroll.

Days 2 – 4

Ucluelet

This morning we will catch the ferry across the Strait of Georgia to Vancouver Island. The journey will take approximately two hours. From the decks of the ferry we will be able to look out for our first seabirds and cetaceans. These may include Rhinoceros Auklet, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, Common Loon (Great-northern Diver), Glaucous-winged Gull, Red-necked and Western Grebes and Surf Scoter. Bald Eagles are common in the area and if we are fortunate we may even catch sight of a group of Dall’s Porpoise or perhaps a pod of Orcas, which often ply the waters of the Strait of Georgia in the summer and early autumn.

On arrival we will begin our long drive to the west coast of Vancouver Island. Passing through the pastoral Coombs area towards Port Alberni, the landscape becomes progressively more rugged and the forest more dense. Port Alberni is the region’s commercial centre and the gateway to the Pacific Rim National Park. Following the road west, we pass Sproat Lake and travel through the spectacular mountain scenery of the Mackenzie Range and along the lush rainforests of Kennedy Lake until we reach the coast and our destination of Ucluelet. The picturesque district of Ucluelet is located on the southern tip of the 'Long Beach Unit of the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and we will spend the next three nights based near this former fishing village.
situated a short distance from the wave-pounded rocks of Amphitrite Point. We will have two full days to explore this spectacular area.

The Pacific Rim region of the island is renowned for pristine beaches and spectacular wilderness and for its excellent whale watching opportunities. The immense strength and unpredictable nature of the Pacific Ocean dictates the nature of the landscape from the surf-swept shore of Long Beach to the dense, old-growth forests of Clayoquot Sound. The Pacific Rim National Park Reserve protects a nationally significant coastal environment and contains outstanding examples of temperate coastal rainforest, beaches and coastal marine life. Composed of three units, Long Beach, the Broken Group Islands and the West Coast Trail, the park spans more than 130 kilometres of shoreline.

Ucluelet is on the main migration route of the Grey Whale and is one of the best areas in the world from which to observe these magnificent creatures. Every year some 21,000 Grey Whales make the quite incredible 10,000 mile round journey from their breeding grounds in the sheltered bays of Baja California (Mexico) north to the Bering Sea off Siberia. Here they spend the summer feeding before returning to Mexico again in the autumn. This amazing journey takes them past the west coast of Vancouver Island in the spring and late autumn, although most years a number of the whales remain in the Ucluelet/Tofino region for the summer, rejoining the other whales on their return journey. Sightings are often good in September as these residents bask on the surface, replete from their summer feeding and we will take a trip out in the hope of seeing some of these magnificent creatures. We also have a good chance of seeing Humpback Whale, Harbour Porpoise, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua), Wandering Tattler, Black Oystercatcher and, if fortunate, perhaps the beautiful Tufted Puffin. It is also not unknown to encounter the odd Minke Whale or even a transient pod of Orcas. However, these latter sightings are rare and we would require a great deal of luck!

During our stay in the area, we will go out by boat on a dedicated trip in the hopes of seeing Black Bear. The Black Bear is still flourishing in British Columbia and we have an excellent chance of observing them from the water, as they forage for food in the inter-tidal zones. Over the past few years an increasing number of our groups are also seeing Wolves from this particular boat trip!

We will also be able to spend some time walking along the forest trails of the national park. Birdwatching in woodlands in the autumn is never easy but with perseverance we have a good chance of finding species such as Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bushtit, Steller’s Jay, Hutton’s Vireo, Varied Thrush, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Black-throated Grey Warbler and perhaps Sooty Grouse. Various noisy squirrels also inhabit the woods and, with luck, we may come across a Mule Deer or even a Black Bear!

Day 5

Zeballos

This morning we will leave Ucluelet, retracing our steps back towards the east coast and then northwards towards the small community of Zeballos. It is a very long drive that will take us most of the day but we will stop en route to admire the scenery, birdwatch and take lunch. Our route will take us back cross Vancouver Island and then north along the coast to Campbell River, one of several ‘Salmon Capitals of the World’ we will pass through during the tour! From here the road curves inland past numerous small lakes and through spectacular mountainous scenery. A few miles north of the community of Woss we leave the tarmac and turn west onto a gravel road for the final hour of the journey. The village of Zeballos is located on the north-western
side of the island at the end of a long curving inlet. With the exception of a few hikers and canoeists who venture here in the summer, the community is still very much off the main tourist route and survives on a combination of fishing and logging. It is neither fishing, logging nor canoeing that brings us here, however, for Zeballos is the most reliable place on Vancouver Island to look for the Sea Otter. These endearing creatures have spread into the nearby inlets from Nootka Sound where they were re-released a few decades ago. We overnight in a comfortable guesthouse.

Days 6 – 7

Port McNeill

Following an early breakfast we will make our way down the short distance to the harbour to board our flat bottomed ‘otter-watching’ skiff. The trip usually lasts around three hours and heads out along the inlet, through spectacular mountain scenery to an area favoured by the otters, 30 minutes or so from the town. Sea Otters were finally extirpated from Vancouver Island during the last century but were then re-released back into Nootka Sound (in the 1970s) on the north-western coast. Since then they have been steadily spreading southward and are now present off Zeballos in impressive numbers; indeed previous Autumn tours have enjoyed sightings of over 100 individuals including several rafts of over 20 animals! There can be few more endearing sights in the natural world than a group of Sea Otters resting on their backs, feet in the air enjoying the early morning sun. Black Bears are also frequently seen on this boat trip as are Humpback Whales and a wide variety of migrating birds, especially if the weather conditions permit a visit to the mouth of the inlet. One lucky Naturetrek group in 2011 even saw a Cougar!

Around midday we will leave Zeballos and drive to Port McNeill, a journey of around two hours. Port McNeill is situated on the Johnstone Strait, an area which is known to be one of the most accessible and predictable places to view Orcas. We will stay here for two nights. On one of the days we will travel the short distance to Telegraph Cove to join our whale watching boat. In addition to the Orcas, we will have an excellent chance of seeing Harbour and Dall’s Porpoises, Pacific White-sided Dolphin, Harbour Seal, Steller’s Sealion and possibly, if we are extremely fortunate, Minke, Humpback or Grey Whales.

We will tailor our activities according to our whale watching schedule but we will have some time to dedicate to birdwatching. Birdlife in the area is plentiful and should produce such species as Rhinoceros Auklet, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, Red-throated Loon (Diver), Red-necked Phalarope, White-winged and Surf Scoters, Belted Kingfisher, Western and Red-necked Grebes, Pelagic, Brandt’s and Double-crested Cormorants, Surfbird, Black Turnstone and Black Oystercatcher amongst others. If time permits, we might decide to take a ferry trip to one of the nearby islands (Cormorant or Malcolm Island) or perhaps explore the Quatsch River Estuary near Port Hardy. There should also be the opportunity for a quick visit to nearby Telegraph Cove, a former fishing and salmon cannery community, which is now home several whale-watching operators and an interesting whale museum.

Days 8 – 10

Great Bear Lodge

Now our adventure really starts! We will make our way to our departure point at Port Hardy, which is about 45-minute drive from Port McNeill. Here we will board a float plane (the flight is approximately 35 minutes) for our spectacular journey to Great Bear Lodge, situated 50 air miles from Port Hardy. If you have never been in a float plane before this will be a memorable experience! The views from the plane are breathtaking as we fly over
a myriad of forested islands and hills but only from the air does it become clear how much of the land has fallen
prey to the relentless march of the logging machine. The rich waters of Queen Charlotte Strait are home to
Orea, Pacific White-sided Dolphins and Humpback Whales. Sightings from float planes are surprisingly good
and the pilots often divert from their normal course if a pod of whales are in the area! Landing on the water is
unexpectedly smooth and as we taxi up to the landing dock, the friendly hosts of the lodge will be waiting to
welcome us.

Great Bear Lodge is quite unique. Nestling against a backdrop of snow-clad peaks, forested hillsides and
spectacular waterfalls, our base for the next three nights is a floating lodge truly in the middle of nowhere! The
focus of activity is the communal area housing the sitting room, kitchen and dining area. We will no doubt make
our way straight to the sitting room for an orientation talk given by one of the local resident naturalists at the
lodge. Coffee and biscuits will be waiting to warm us while we listen to a very comprehensive talk on the lodge's
activities, an outline programme for the next few days and most important of all as you are in bear country, the
differences between the Black and Grizzly Bear and the safety precautions you should follow during your stay.

The lodge is made up of several wooden buildings constructed on floating pontoons and accommodates a
maximum of 16 guests in comfortable twin bedded rooms each with a private bathroom. The sitting room is
available for guests to use and the staff are very willing to light the fire in here in the evenings. There is no finer
way to end the day than to sit by a crackling fire in front of a picture window and watch the sun setting (or the
moon rising!) over the mountains ringing the lodge, whilst the water laps gently outside. The lodge has an
extensive natural history library so you might like to relax with a book or sit outside on the wooden deck
enjoying the scenery with a glass of wine! You certainly will not go hungry during your time at the lodge!
Delicious home cooked gourmet meals are produced in the kitchen by endlessly cheerful staff, fresh (and organic
where possible) produce being brought in by float plane and boat. Breakfasts consist of juice, cereals, fruit, toast
and really any form of cooked breakfast that you might care for (all made on request), lunches are normally
lighter – possibly delicious home made soup and rolls or sandwiches and fruit. Dinner is the main social event
of the day, where guests get a chance to mingle and discuss the day's sightings over main dishes, a selection of
vegetables or salad and normally a very mouth watering pudding! Complimentary carafes of house wine are
provided for dinner. The guides and lodge staff normally eat with you and are happy to share their seemingly
endless supply of local stories and to give you a taste of how people live in this remote and challenging
environment. Delicious smells emanating from the kitchen during the rest of the day result in piles of tasty
cookies that you will not be able to resist even if you think you have no spare inch left! At night the silence is
almost deafening as you lie in bed, with just the creaking of the pontoon to disturb you.

We will have a full programme of excursions during our stay at Great Bear but we will not outline any set day-
by-day itinerary, this will largely depend on weather conditions at the time and recent wildlife sightings. One of
the main highlights of our stay, however, will undoubtedly be the opportunity to watch the Grizzly Bears fishing
for salmon. The lodge has three hides and two open viewing decks located along the Nekite River and the staff
will choose one according to where the bears have been most active. Estuary sites are reached by boat, while
river sites are reached by a small bus. The viewing blinds have been constructed with the photographer in mind
and are comfortable places from which to view the bears. There is a rough gravel road through the woods that
the bus will follow, a rather bumpy but fascinating journey as our guide will show us the various berry bushes the
bears feed on as we pass and sometimes stop to show us the paw print of a recent traveller along the same trail.
The river scenery is spectacular, with vistas hidden by overhanging branches and the water rushing over rocks
and boulders on its way. We will make our way to one of the viewing blinds overlooking the river. Just below us the bears will be ignoring our presence as they are busily engaged in catching the salmon. Outstanding photographic opportunities will present themselves and it will be hard to tear ourselves away from this incredible spectacle. Bald Eagles dot the riverside trees intently watching for any scraps that might be left by the bears whilst Goosander and the occasional American Dipper pick take their share of the scraps or salmon eggs.

Visitors are offered two Grizzly Bear viewing sessions a day, one in the morning and one later in the day. The bears are normally most active in the early morning and late afternoon, so the sessions are planned accordingly. A typical viewing session lasts three hours. Most visitors will choose to be up and about soon after dawn – even then you will be fortified with good coffee and freshly baked pastries! Brunch will be served in the late morning.

The guides will then offer a 'mystery activity' from early to mid-afternoon. One of the most popular is the interpretive rainforest walk with the local naturalist, examining the bear signs and the general ecology of the area.

A wonderful time to go out is in the early morning after the mists begin to rise. Sometimes the water can be as still as a mill pond and the tree-lined shores are reflected on the glass-like surface. To sit quietly with just the sound of the birdsong puncturing the silence, whilst the surface is perhaps broken by the odd playful seal cavorting with a friend is something you will treasure for ever. You could not get much further into the wilderness than this and the stresses of our busy life back home fade blissfully into the distance. The Great Bear Rainforest, where our lodge is situated, is also home to an exciting range of other animals and we might catch sight of River Otters, Black Bears, Mink or even a Grey Wolf if we are very fortunate. Birdlife will not be ignored and we will hope to see Marbled Murrelet, Barrow's Goldeneye, migrating waterfowl and waders and numerous Bald Eagles.

In mid-afternoon we will venture out for a second bear viewing session before relaxing in the lodge before our excellent dinner. If the night is clear, it is well worth going out after dinner to view the amazing stars which seem to light up the night sky.

The Grizzly is North America's second largest land predator after the Polar Bear. However, numbers have declined drastically over the years and they are now seriously at risk of becoming an endangered species. The bears who frequent the coastal habitats are particularly at risk as the logging companies are encroaching further and further into their environment. The issue is becoming a controversial one as more and more environmentalists join the gathering cry for sanctuaries to be set up in British Columbia banning logging and hunting.

A Grizzly can weigh up to 500 kilograms and although it has the stomach of a carnivore, its diet is primarily vegetarian. It spends many hours each day browsing on vegetation, roots and berries supplementing its menu with insects and grubs (and of course fish when the time is right!) and the range of a male Grizzly can exceed a massive 200,000 hectares in the mountainous areas. The characteristic large hump over its shoulders is a muscle mass used to power the front legs as it digs for roots and grubs. When winter comes the bears dig an underground den where they may hibernate for up to six months. The government estimates that up to 13,000 Grizzlies are still in British Columbia but environmentalists state that the number is closer to 6,000 or even as low as 4,000; the bears do not inhabit Vancouver Island. The only other region in Canada that holds significant numbers is the Yukon.
The Black Bear is still flourishing in British Columbia, with estimated numbers ranging from 65,000 to over 150,000 – some 10,000 live on Vancouver Island alone. They are smaller than a Grizzly, with the largest weighing up to 300 kilograms, they eat less and are better able to adapt to a variety of habitats. The main way to tell the two apart is the shape of their face, with that of the Black Bear being more angular whilst the Grizzly has a distinctive “dish shaped” face. Colour is not a reliable way to tell the two apart with Black Bears also having brown, grey, blonde or cinnamon coats as well as black.

Bald Eagles will be numerous and good photographic opportunities can sometimes present themselves as the eagles skim close to the lodge diving towards the water in search of a meal.

**Day 11**

The dawn breaks on a sad day! After one last bear viewing session this morning, we will have to leave our wilderness paradise and new found friends behind us and return reluctantly to civilisation. Our return float plane will allow us final glimpses of the spectacular scenery as we make our way back towards Port Hardy on Vancouver Island. We will drive the short distance back to Port McNeill where we will spend the night.

**Day 12**

Today we have a long drive ahead of us and we will make an early start, driving back down the scenic east coast, stopping for some birdwatching en route. Bidding farewell to Vancouver Island, we will board our ferry for the return journey across the Strait of Georgia back to Tsawwassen for our final night in Canada.

**Day 13**

Since our flight back to the UK is not due to leave until the early evening we have the day to enjoy some last minute BC birding. This morning we will make the 20 minute drive north to the Reifel Bird Sanctuary, without doubt one of the best birdwatching sites in the Lower Vancouver area. The Reifel Reserve, as it is known locally, is tucked into the mouth of the Fraser River and is part of a vast complex of mudflats, reedbeds and wet meadows that makes up the Fraser River Delta. The reserve attracts huge numbers of migrating and over-wintering waders, waterfowl and passerines. Most of the earlier migrants will have left by now but they should have been replaced by the later species such as Yellow-rumped Warbler, Golden-crowned Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and Fox Sparrow. If we are fortunate to coincide with high tide then freshwater scrapes will be full of wading birds including both species of dowitcher, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Western, Least and Pectoral Sandpipers plus the chance of a few more unusual species such as Baird's or White-rumped Sandpipers.

At this time they may be joined by a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, a mid-September Asian rarity that now turns up annually at Reifel. Ducks will have started to arrive in large numbers and the first of the Snow Geese should be feeding out on the marshes. Raptor numbers will also be on the increase and we will need to keep our eyes open for Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel and Rough-legged Hawk; our 2001 tour even found a Prairie Falcon. The park rangers may know of a roosting Great Horned Owl or Saw Whet Owl and we would hope to see the family of Sandhill Cranes that have made Reifel their home.

There is unlikely to be much time on this tour to fully explore Vancouver so you might like to consider extending your holiday by a few days. We would be delighted to assist with any extension ideas you may have.
Late in the afternoon we will return to Vancouver Airport in time to catch our mid-evening flight to London's Heathrow Airport.

Day 14

Arrive London

We are due to arrive back at London Heathrow around lunchtime.

Grading

This tour is graded A. This is a gentle holiday with mostly easy walks on flat terrain. Trails within the Pacific Rim National Park are mostly boardwalks, but do include a lot of steps. Your time at Great Bear Lodge will include a rainforest walk. Although this is mostly along a wide old logging road, it does head off into the forest for 50 metres or so where the terrain is rough (this walk is optional). NB: clients should also able to climb the steps into the small float planes. For further information please contact the Naturetrek office on 01962 733051.

Weather

British Columbia has one of the mildest climates in Canada with warm summers and relatively mild, but wet, winters. The average daytime high temperature in September is 18ºC, but the nights can get much cooler. Although September can be a pleasantly warm and sunny month in the Pacific Northwest, you should remember that the coasts and mountains are swathed in temperate rainforest so the occasional wet day should be expected!

Focus

This is a general wildlife tour focusing on Grizzly Bears, whales, other mammals and birds. Please note that when not watching mammals (which can be elusive at times and most active in the early morning and evenings) our group will enjoy birdwatching and appreciating the beautiful scenery of the Pacific Northwest of Canada.

Group size

The Naturetrek group will be capped at a maximum of 10 clients plus tour leaders.

Food & accommodation

We will be staying in comfortable hotels and motels throughout the tour, all rooms with private facilities. In the Great Bear Rainforest we will be staying at Great Bear Lodge, a floating wilderness lodge in a spectacular setting. The rooms at the lodge have their own private bathroom. Single rooms are generally unavailable at the lodge but can be arranged for the rest of the tour at the supplement price outlined in our brochure or on our website.

All food is included in the price of the tour with the exception of dinners taken whilst in Vancouver/Twassassen. This will give us the choice of sampling some of the excellent local restaurants and you should allow £30-£40 for this depending on your appetite. House wine is included in the price whilst you are at Great Bear Lodge.
Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Canada. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the FCO website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/canada or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

Mammal & bird lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. Alternatively, you are very welcome to call us with a credit card number or book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk.

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