



Northern Vancouver Island: Whales, Totems & Grizzlies

Sample Itinerary

Start & Finish: Port McNeill, BC

Vessel: SV Island Odyssey

7 days

Note: This is intended as a Sample Itinerary. Please do not book flights based on information listed in this document as changes are possible. You will be provided with an Arrivals and Departures Itinerary once all details have been confirmed. Please contact us with any questions.

At the northern end of Vancouver Island lies a protected maze of islands and waterways, full of wildlife, beautiful scenery, and the history and traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw people (Kwakiutl). Kwakwaka'wakw is the collective name for all people who speak the language Kwakwala, including the 'Namgis, Kwakiutl, Mamalilikulla, Da'naxda'xw, and many other Nations who have lived on the northern part of Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland, and the islands in between for at least nine thousand years.

The Pacific Ocean funnels into the protected waters of Johnstone Strait creating strong tidal currents, and incredibly nutrient-rich waters. Millions of salmon, returning to spawn in the mainland rivers, must converge to pass through the Strait. Johnstone Strait is considered by researchers as the best place in the world to see Orca (killer whales), as they come to hunt the salmon – the preferred food for Northern Resident Orca. In addition, we expect to see humpback whales, porpoise, and a variety of bird and plant species as we explore the protected islands of the Broughton Archipelago. This trip includes a search for grizzly bears up Knight Inlet!

SAMPLE ITINERARY

On all our voyages we intentionally keep our itineraries flexible to take advantage of wildlife sightings, weather and tides, and the interests of the group.

Arrival Day into Port McNeill

From the Port Hardy airport, it is about a 35-minute taxi ride to Port McNeill. Please note that there can sometime be unforeseen weather delays when travelling in coastal regions; most commonly fog. To ensure that the group can set sail on time, we advise you to arrive the day prior to the trip and spend the night at an accommodation of your choice.

Day 1 – Trip Start

This trip starts and finishes in Port McNeill, BC. Guests will be met by crew in the morning at the top of North Island Marina. The dock is located on the Port McNeill waterfront, west of the Visitor Centre (turn left when facing the water at the intersection of Beach Drive / McNeill Road). Upon boarding the vessel, cabins will be assigned, and an introductory safety briefing will be completed.

We have chosen Port McNeill as the starting point for this voyage because it is the closest port to Johnstone Strait, the core Orca watching area. Not only is the area famous for orcas, but humpback whales are also commonly in the area and Dall's porpoise may come over to the boat to play on the bow wave. We hope to have multiple encounters with whales during the trip; each experience is different!

During our daily shore or small boat excursions our onboard naturalist will help identify different coastal plants, animals, birds and marine life. Interested participants can help keep a species list for the trip. There will be plenty of time to explore the protected waters using our stable sea-kayaks. Each night we anchor in a secluded anchorage.

BLUEWATER ADVENTURES SAMPLE ITINERARY – NORTHERN VANCOUVER ISLAND

Days 2 – 4

Our focus these days will be on the waters of Johnstone Strait and nearby Queen Charlotte Strait where we hope to discover a pod (or group) of whales. If we're lucky, we may see some exciting behaviours, such as foraging for salmon, spy-hopping, and breaching (leaping clear of the water). Guests will learn about the behaviour of these fascinating creatures, listen to them calling on the ship's underwater microphone, and learn how to identify individual animals. Keep watch for the larger spout of a humpback whale – they are known to feed well into fall on the BC coast before their migration south.

Walks in the coastal forest provide opportunities to see big trees and learn about the forest plants. With a good low tide, we may explore the shore for different species of colourful sea stars, anemone, and algae. If we have a good wind, we expect to raise the sails and enjoy the silence and beauty of sailing.

We will visit the modern Kwakwaka'wakw community of Alert Bay to visit the *U'Mista Cultural Centre* and see a fascinating collection of potlatch masks.

Day 5 – 6

We will spend time exploring among the islands of the Broughton Archipelago Marine Provincial Park searching for different species of marine mammals, exploring remote beaches, and observing a variety of sea birds. Pine Island, at the western end of Queen Charlotte Strait, has one of the largest seabird nesting colonies on the coast.

The trip now shifts as we travel deep into the Coast Mountains up a beautiful fiord called Knight Inlet (Tsawatti). Extending nearly 60 miles, Knight Inlet is surrounded by snow-capped peaks and some of the most remote wilderness on the coast. Grizzly bears require vast areas of wilderness to survive. Starting in August, salmon return to spawn up the rivers and creeks and this essential source of food concentrates the bears along the river in the best places to fish. We hope to see bears at the mouth of the river, and often see bears walking the shore.

At the entrance to Knight Inlet is the abandoned Kwakwaka'wakw village of Memkumlis (sometimes known as Mamalilaculla, Meem Quam Leese or Mimquimlees). Time permitting, we may explore this village site to discover evidence of an ancient and rich heritage.

Day 7 – Trip Finish

We return to Port McNeill late morning to complete our voyage. Guests can plan to catch **afternoon flights** departing from Port Hardy back to Vancouver.