

INDEPENDENT KAYAKING TRIP PLANNING PACKAGE



This document was created to help those planning independent kayak trips on Haida Gwaii, within Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, and covers many of the questions kayakers often ask us. For more information on recommended routes, trip planning and rentals, please consult the Moresby Explorers webpage at www.MoresbyExplorers.com

STEPS TO PLANNING YOUR TRIP:

STEP 1: Determine if you are experienced enough to take on a kayak trip independently into Gwaii Haanas.

Gwaii Haanas is not a beginner kayaking destination. Your group must feel confident in being able to read marine charts and tide tables, listen to the VHF marine weather forecasts, and put all of those together (along with your own observations) to choose appropriate paddling routes each day and to help ensure a safe trip. If you don't feel that you are quite up to the challenge of paddling independently, we work closely with several excellent kayaking tour operators offering expedition trips in Gwaii Haanas. For more information on these companies, refer to our website: www.moresbyexplorers.com/kayak-services

STEP 2: Look at a map!

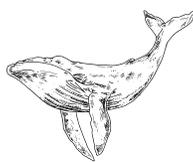
Determine a general route or area, keeping in mind your group's experience level. Use our website for some generally recommended itineraries.

STEP 3: Contact us.

Consult our website transport schedule to get an idea about our dates and availability. Then, call our office or email to confirm dates and pickup/drop-off locations booked into our booking system. If you require kayak rentals, you can also ask about availability. We will provide this document, along with our "Conditions of Transportation and/or Rental" agreement, as well as our waiver. We'll have you sign the agreements and waiver online, or upon your arrival to Haida Gwaii, please read through both before arriving.

STEP 4: Book your travel to the islands.

Ensure you arrive at LEAST one day before your drop-off transport and at LEAST one day after your pick-up.





STEP 5: Pay your deposit.

Pay your 25% deposit on your transportation and rentals to fully confirm the booking. This can be done online or by calling our office.

STEP 6: Make your Parks reservation.

Call the Gwaii Haanas Parks Canada office in Skidegate to make your Parks Canada reservation and pay for your Parks Canada pass. Their reservation system usually opens in April.

STEP 7: Determine where you'll take the mandatory Parks Canada orientation.

The orientation takes approximately 1.5 hours, provides current safety information and traveller protocols, and introduces visitors to the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

At the orientation, you will also receive the mandatory permit for travel within Gwaii Haanas. You can either attend the Gwaii Haanas orientation at the unique Haida Heritage Centre in Skidegate (contact the Gwaii Haanas office or check the Gwaii Haanas trip planner for the schedule) or at our office in Sandspit, based on staff availability and provided that you book in advance.

Note that the orientation CAN NOT be done on the morning of your transport; you must do it the day before. They have been allowing remote orientations since 2020. They may still be doing these. Please contact Parks Canada for information.

STEP 8: Before you head out:

Check-in at our office to confirm final details, pay your balance, and talk about the approximate pick-up time and exact pick-up location. We'll want to know where you plan to be on your pick-up day, including backup plans for if another group occupies that campsite or if you can't make it that far due to weather or other factors (we're happy to give you ideas for camps).





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can I get to Sandspit?

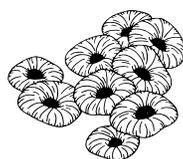
By Ferry - There is a ferry service from Prince Rupert to Haida Gwaii (6 hours) and a ferry service from Port Hardy to Prince Rupert (15 hours). These routes get very busy in the summer, so try to book as far in advance as possible, especially if you are taking a vehicle. Visit www.BCFerries.ca for more information.

When you arrive on Haida Gwaii, you will need to take another small ferry from Skidegate Landing (where the ferry from Prince Rupert docks) to Alliford Bay (20 minutes), where you will need to drive for about 15 minutes into Sandspit. There is limited transportation into Sandspit from the ferry if you do not have a vehicle. The main options are to arrange a taxi service ahead of time (you won't find any taxis waiting at the terminal) or catch a ride in with someone on the ferry.

By Air - Air Canada offers flights between Vancouver and Sandspit once or twice a day, depending on the time of the year. For more information, visit www.AirCanada.ca

Pacific Coastal offers flights between Vancouver and Masset (at the north end of the islands) once a day. For more information, visit www.pacificcoastal.com

Bumped Luggage: There seems to be an ongoing issue with "bumped" bags for people flying into Sandspit, which continues to cause difficulty for guests. Most of the summer, there is only one flight per day, and if the flights are full for several days in a row, bumped luggage often takes several days before it finally arrives. As we've seen this ruin guests' trips, we strongly suggest arriving with at least one full day between your arrival and trip departure, especially as it also gives you a buffer in case of missed/delayed flights. If you plan to arrive the day before your departure, we strongly suggest bringing your absolute essentials in your carry-on bag.





Do I need marine charts/tide tables for my trip and if so, where can I purchase them?

Yes, both marine charts and tide tables are essential for your trip. Please ensure you understand and have experience interpreting marine charts and tide tables. You should know how to use a compass and chart together to find your way in poor visibility (such as thick fog). Do NOT rely solely on a GPS. We are not licensed to sell or rent marine charts, so you will need to purchase them before arriving. The Sandspit Visitor Centre is the only licensed dealer in Sandspit, but please call them ahead to ensure they have the charts you need in stock, as they have a limited selection (250-637-5362). Buying ahead of time also allows you to study the charts, plan potential routes, mark areas of interest etc. Tide tables can be found online.

Note, we find the Prince Rupert tide tables to be the most accurate for the Gwaii Haanas area, so that is what we use and recommend. Hard copies of the tide tables can also usually be found at the Sandspit Visitor Centre.

Do I need a marine VHF radio?

Absolutely, and we will not transport you into Gwaii Haanas if you do not have one. VHF radios are the primary method of communication within Gwaii Haanas and your only resource for weather updates. We do offer VHF rentals if you do not have your own. Transport Canada requires VHF operators to have their ROC-M certification.

What will the weather be like?

The weather in Haida Gwaii is very unpredictable. We have no true prevailing wind direction, and there is no particular time of day which is predictably windy or calm. In the summer, about 40% of the wind comes from the South East (low-pressure system) bringing rain, about 40% comes from the North West (high-pressure system) bringing sun, and about 20% comes from other directions between systems. Because of all the bays and inlets, the wind seems to come from all orders no matter what the weather report tells you. One of the most significant weather hazards is the speed with which the weather changes. It can be flat on one side of a point and quite rough on the other. It can be flat calm, and in a few minutes, the wind and waves pick up to dangerous levels.

Environment Canada gives a marine weather report every 6 hours with a 24-hour forecast and a guess at the next few days. You can listen to this marine weather forecast on the VHF radio.





What should I wear while paddling? What should I bring?

Plan to dress for wet, mild, coastal weather. There is a good starting point for packing on the Gwaii Haanas [website](#). One of the commercial-guided kayaking companies, [Ocean Sound Kayaking](#) has a great resource on what to wear and what to pack. Note this is a gear list for a GUIDED kayak trip, so obviously, you would need camping gear as well on an independent trip. However, it is an excellent start for ideas on what to wear.

What should I wear on the zodiac transport?

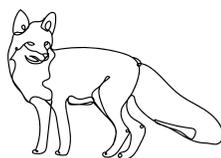
We travel on fast, stable Hurricane Zodiac boats, perfectly suited to the variable weather and sea conditions around Haida Gwaii. These vessels are open to the elements, so you must dress in warm clothing and raingear. You should wear warm, layered clothing, preferably synthetic (like fleece) or wool, and if possible, avoid cotton as it is very cold when wet. You should also bring a warm hat, sunglasses and gloves. We provide an additional raincoat to throw over your other layers while travelling on the boat, but it is essential to have your own raingear as well. When you get on and off the boat, you will have to step into the water, so be prepared with waterproof footwear or footwear that you do not mind getting wet.

Where can I purchase fuel and/or stoves?

Our Outdoor Gear Store in Sandspit carries a variety of MSR stoves, MSR ISOpro fuel canisters, and Superfuel (a white gas equivalent). Please call us for pricing and availability. Supervalu grocery store and Bridgeview Marine also carry fuel such as plain white gas and small propane bottles; however, we recommend calling them ahead of time to confirm availability.

Where can I purchase a saltwater fishing licence?

There is nowhere to purchase a fishing license in Sandspit, so plan to buy and print before arriving. Licenses can be purchased online at: <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/licence-permis/index-eng.htm>. Fishing tackle and gear can be purchased at Bridgeview Marine, which is about a 30-minute walk from our office and B&B. Note, Gwaii Haanas is closed to shellfish harvesting because of the risk of shellfish poisoning. Several areas are closed to fishing and harvesting for various conservation efforts. A map of the closures will be provided in your orientation.





Do you offer any luggage storage?

We have gear storage shed beside our Seaport B&B where clients can leave excess luggage. You can also leave bags at our gear shed at Moresby Camp (where we launch the Zodiacs). Storage is unlocked and at your own risk (but we've never had any problems!)

Where can I get groceries?

In Sandspit, there is one grocery store (also the liquor store)– Supervalu (250-637-2249). They are open Monday – Saturday until 6 pm in the summer and until 4 pm on Sundays. They are closed on holidays. As they only receive stock once a week, selection can be limited, so plan to be flexible.

Where will I find water, and how much water do I need to bring?

You will need to use your marine charts to determine where to find streams to collect water or simply watch for streams along the shorelines. Water sources are prevalent, and you should be able to find a place to fill your water each day. However, smaller streams may dry up during the summer, so always carry a reserve of water between campsites, and make sure to bring your own water when visiting Watchmen sites. If you don't find water at the beach, try following dry stream beds into the forest, and you will probably find water there (streams often run under the gravel on the beach). Your daily quantity will vary from person to person but should be enough for drinking, cooking, washing etc. All water will need to be treated. Health Canada recommends boiling your water for at least one minute at sea level.

What do I need to know about bears?

Black bears are found throughout Gwaii Haanas, and they are opportunistic feeders who will take advantage of any food source left accessible to them by visitors. Because of this, Gwaii Haanas's policy is to hang all food and toiletries so that there is NO chance a bear can gain access – the recommendation is at least 5 metres high and 2 metres out from the closest branch. There are no food lockers within Gwaii Haanas, and hanging devices are not provided, so please come prepared with the necessary materials.





Is this a suitable place to plan an independent kayaking trip with children?

Gwaii Haanas can be a great place for adventurous families to make life-lasting memories! Due to its remoteness, there are several things to consider when deciding if it's the right fit for your family. You've hopefully come to realize by this point that Gwaii Haanas is EXTREMELY isolated. Help is not easily accessible, nor usually very fast, so we strongly recommend that you choose a sheltered route with limited distances required and very limited or no significant crossings or exposed sections of coast if you are travelling with children. Please call us to discuss our recommendations!

We also strongly suggest travelling in double kayaks, with one adult and one child per boat. One person can still paddle a double, so your trip can continue if the child becomes tired or injured. We also recommend the children have previous paddling experience and previous experience in backcountry camping and being in remote environments.

The Zodiac transportation portion of your trip requires sitting on an open, fast-moving boat for very long periods (anywhere from 2-6 hours, depending on your transport locations). It can be very cold, wet and bouncy. You should be prepared with oodles of warm clothing, good rain gear, and snacks to keep your kids happy, warm and dry.

Any advice for planning a trip with a larger group?

When planning a group trip, it's always best to choose a group "leader" who will be the primary person communicating with us and coordinating the whole booking process. This person can then be the one to email us with questions or changes after you have planning meetings, and can then forward our response to the rest of the group. While this helps avoid us being bombarded with calls and emails asking the same question from every person in the group, it keeps the overall booking process much more organized, with one person as our main point of contact.

When coordinating payment, while it is more straightforward if one person pays the entirety of the deposit and balance, we can certainly make it work for individuals or couples to pay separately if necessary. If the group chooses to pay separately, it is very helpful for the group leader to email us with a broken-down list of the other group members' names and what they are responsible for covering.





For example:

John and Mary Smith –

- Transport to Burnaby Narrows
- Transport from Rose Harbour
- Renting 1 double kayak
- Covering cost of the VHF rental for the group

Mike Brown –

- Transport to Burnaby Narrows
- Transport from Rose Harbour
- Renting 1 single kayak

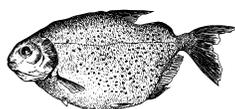
This way, when individuals call to pay deposits, we have the list which makes it very clear what portions they are covering. When contacting us, please make clear which group booking you are part of (the group leader's name).

We always recommend groups include at least one double kayak into their plans, as trips can be spoiled due to injuries or illness that prevents a person from travelling in a single. Please ensure that EVERYONE in your group attends the mandatory orientation. No orientation, no transport.

I'm bringing my own vehicle, what should I do with it?

If your vehicle is capable on gravel roads, a good option may be driving it to Moresby Camp (where we load and launch our Zodiacs). You can drive there in advance and camp for the night, or follow our van out on the morning of your transport. Especially for larger groups, this eliminates having to unpack your gear from your vehicle and make it fit in our van. There is a large, gravel parking lot at Moresby Camp where vehicles are often left. We have never heard of any issues with vandalism or theft.

If you want to leave your vehicle in Sandspit, we have a backfield where clients can leave their vehicles while out on the trip. Note, this option DOES NOT work with logistics if you are catching the first ferry across from Graham Island on the morning of your transport.





What can I expect on the morning of my drop-off transport?

We depart our office by around 7:30 am, so if you are going to meet us at our office, you'll need to be there by then. If you have gear to load in the van, please be there at least 15 minutes early. We will then drive through town, doing pickups at other accommodations if necessary. It is then an hour's drive out to Moresby Camp, where we keep and launch our boats.

Please have all of your gear organized, labelled and waterproofed. We will attempt to keep your gear separate, but our transport boats often have several groups booked on them, so it's VERY important to have your gear labelled and recognizable. While we have some dry storage under the seats of the boats, space is minimal, so it's better to plan for things to be out and exposed, and hence, somehow waterproofed.

Packing kayaks are much easier if you have many small bags instead of a few large ones; a few methods of keeping these bags together are running a rope through all the bags or putting them in a larger duffel or garbage bag. You may want to keep your large bag with you for the trip so you can use it to carry gear up and down long beaches, or if you prefer, we can always bring the extra bag back to Moresby Camp and leave it in our gear shed until you return. At Moresby Camp, we will go over your kayak rental and fit you with a PFD (if you are renting). There will be time to put on your warm gear for the boat ride, but please have it handy and easily accessible. It is a good idea to have snacks convenient and accessible as well.

Our departure time from Moresby Camp depends on several factors, including how quick and organized the groups are, but when we have lots of kayaks to tie on the Zodiac, it can take half an hour or so just to get the Zodiac loaded, not to mention fuelling, launching, etc. This means you will usually not arrive at your drop-off location until sometime in the afternoon, depending on how far south you are getting dropped off.

The transport boats try to be as efficient as possible, so while a bathroom break may be possible for longer stretches, there is no time for other stops (such as Watchmen sites).





What can I expect on the day of my pick-up transport?

Be at the campsite that you agreed on with us before you left. If that doesn't work out (for example, another group was camped there), you can go to a prominent, easy-to-see beach in the same area where our boat will be able to spot you. Please have your radio on channel 6 by late morning. If the boat is travelling past you to drop off or pick up other groups further south than you, we will attempt to get in touch on our way by to give you a rough idea of when we'll be back up. Due to radio limitations, this is not always possible, so you should plan to be ready for the time frame we discussed before heading out on your trip, but don't be surprised if the timing changes due to factors beyond our control. Please have the majority of your gear packed up and ready to be quickly loaded on the Zodiac when we show up. If the weather is poor, it's definitely okay to leave a shelter (tarp or tent) up with some additional gear out to keep warm, comfortable, and occupied. While we will be trying to be as efficient as possible on transports, it's not an issue to wait 15 minutes for you to finish packing your tarp, etc., if it kept you warm and dry while waiting!

If it's getting late in the day, and you haven't heard from us, please attempt to contact the boat on channel 6. If you are unable to get ahold of anyone on there, you can try calling our office on "Morex Repeater" channel (on rental radios) to see if we can give you an update. If, for some reason, you are unable to get in touch with the boat or the office, please contact the Coast Guard on channel 16. Explain it is a non-emergency but that you have been unable to reach us.

They may then be able to contact our office and relay a message to you with an update on the situation.

What time will my pick-up be?

Many factors influence your pick-up time, so while we will try to give you a rough estimate of the timeframe before you head out on your trip, this time may change due to factors like additional bookings, weather etc. We'll do our best to give you a general idea (for example, late morning, early afternoon, early evening etc.) before you head out on your trip.





What if we do not reach our planned destination?

You should try hard to avoid this challenging situation with proper planning and realistic travel plans. Still, it does happen once in a while, usually because of extremely bad weather or injury. If partway through your trip, it appears that you will not reach your planned destination, please start trying to contact us to arrange an alternative pick-up location. The best way to contact us would be using your VHF radio or Satellite phone to contact our office. If you're unsuccessful this way, you can try to pass a message with one of our boats or through a Watchmen site (keep in mind that the message wouldn't get passed on until one of our boats happens to visit that particular site). Regardless of how you can pass on the message, please ensure you are VERY specific and clear with your party's name, the number of people in your party, your pick-up date, and your new desired pick-up location.

Note that there may be additional costs if you change your plans after confirming with us. If you are picked up further north than initially agreed, the cost of transportation will likely not be reduced. If you are picked up further south than initially agreed, additional charges may be greater than the standard cost per person we advertise.

However, we will always try our best to accommodate you, and we certainly won't leave you stranded if you cannot paddle as far as expected!





Important numbers:

Moresby Explorers Office 1 250 637 2215 / 1 800 806 7633

Parks Canada Office 1 877 559 8818

Queen Charlotte Visitor Centre 250 559 8316 Sandspit Visitor Centre 250 637 5362

What are some additional resources for planning my trip?

Boat Camping Haida Gwaii by Neil Frazer

Moresby Explorers Webpage – www.moresbyexplorers.com

Gwaii Haanas Trip Planner - www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/bc/gwaiihaanas/index.aspx

Local Visitor Centres –

- Queen Charlotte Visitor Centre – 250 559 8316
- Sandspit Visitor Centre – 250 637 5362

For any further questions please reach out to us:

email: info@moresbyexplorers.com

phone: (250) 637-2215 or 1-800-806-7633

website: www.moresbyexplorers.com

- THANK YOU AND HAVE A GREAT TRIP! -

