

# Kayaking with Orcas in Canada



## Highlights

What can be more exhilarating than sea kayaking? Try sea kayaking in waters rife with killer whales. This 6-day kayaking & whale watching trip runs in the Johnstone Strait, a sheltered channel of water running along the north coast of Vancouver Island in Canada. There can't be many things out there that beat seeing a 2 metre dorsal fin piercing the waters near you with an explosive blow!

The Johnstone Strait is an approximately 70-mile long expanse of water cut into Vancouver as a result of glacial activity millions of years ago, and is a physically beautiful place to explore. The channel is unique in its standing as the best place in the world to observe orcas (killer whales). 250 salmon-eating "northern resident" orcas congregate in Johnstone Strait each July through Sept to feast on salmon runs. These orcas are a subspecies that are endemic to the area. Many scientists also gather in the Strait to study these particular orcas.

The term 'killer whale' is a double-misnomer, since it is actually a species of dolphin, and orca-related human deaths are so isolated they're pretty much negligible. In reality, they are gracious and gentle creatures and while kayaking, you may even experience curious orcas swimming around you.

There are two main aspects of the trip which will get the blood pumping for any adventure tourist - camping in the amazing Canadian wilderness and getting the chance to see killer whales up close. But that's only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. While here, there is also a strong chance of seeing bald eagles hunting for wild salmon and dolphin playing in the waters, in addition to the seals and sea lions. The food on the tour is also praiseworthy, comprising largely of sea food (not involving any of the above!) and other delicacies cooked fresh at each campsite.

And to top it off, what could be better than waking up to a view of snow-capped mountains punctuating the horizon beyond the rain forests?

## Is it for me?

There are a few limitations imposed on the trip with regards to physicality. Ideally you are over 14 and under 70, physically fit and not overweight. Although you don't need previous kayak experience (it's an easy and fun skill to learn), you'll find the tour easier if you have a degree of upper body fitness. The kayaking is neatly broken up into two hour blocks during the day with hiking and rambling interspersed throughout, so the tour is nicely paced.

The kayaks provided are top of the range and generally doubles, although there are a few singles available.

If you're nervous about swimming with killer whales, don't be - in the many years people have been kayaking in the Johnstone Strait there hasn't been a single act of aggression shown by the orcas towards humans, nor have there been any accidental bumps from the animals.

## Accommodation

You'll be staying at campsites in various locations for each night of the tour, all stocked with quality equipment (incorporating quality tents, seating and self-inflating foam pads.) You'll get a nice balance between staying in the wilderness of the outdoors with all the benefits of cosy indoor accommodation. The Canadian summer nights are absolutely perfect for campfire entertainment and story-swapping, an activity heartily encouraged during the trip.

Prices from  
**1,005** GBP (6 days) per person

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The food is prepared by your experienced hosts at each campsite, usually cooked in a Dutch oven and always using fresh and local ingredients (typical dishes include seafood dishes baked salmon and savoury meals such as vegetable lasagne.) While sitting around the campfires there will be wine on offer, which will feel well deserved after a long day of adventuring.

## Itinerary

**Day Preceding Tour:** Arrival in Port McNeill by vehicle or by air (via Port Hardy before taxi to Port McNeill.) There us an evening orientation meeting in the hotel lobby at HaidaWay Motor Inn, where you will meet your guides and prepare for an early start.

**Day One -** In the morning, the group will take a taxi to the launch site, listen to an orientation on kayaking and safety, and begin paddling to the first camp.

**Days Two to Five -** After breakfast you'll be kayaking through orca territory and exploring the adjacent channels and islands. There are three different camps, so the expedition may not move camp every day, but you will kayak on each day of the tour. On average you'll be kayaking for two hours in the morning after breakfast, stop for lunch and short hike or natural history talk on a beach, and spend another two hours kayaking and exploring before arriving at camp by the afternoon.

Evenings and dinner will be spent in a waterside camp, with a chance of orcas swimming up to the shore at any time. Tides can be 14 feet in this part of the world, so everyone will participate in carrying gear and kayaks to and from the campsites as a team.

**Day Six:** After breakfast and breaking camp, you will spend the day kayaking to our take-out at Telegraph Cove, stopping for lunch along the way. You'll then take a taxi to Port McNeill in the afternoon after unpacking the kayaks - it is recommended that you overnight in Port McNeill and join the guides for a lovely farewell dinner with your group where you'll all get the chance to share your experiences of the tour.

**Please Note:** Although there is a superb chance we'll see orcas throughout the week (best in the world), the frequency and proximity of sightings are ultimately determined by the orcas' travel patterns.

## Details

### Getting there

International flight to Vancouver BC, then Pacific Coastal Air from there to Port Hardy, then short taxi ride to Port McNeill

### Price includes

Price quoted is for the 6-day itinerary which includes Canada's sales tax (currently 6%) and paid by visitors and residents alike. Price includes skilled professional guide services, dry bags, neoprene shoes, camping equipment including tents, sleeping bags, liners, and sleeping pads and all meals from lunch on the first day to lunch on the last day.

### Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

### Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed