

Regional Guide – General

Great Bear Rainforest

Spanning over 6.4 million hectares along the central and northern coast of British Columbia, the Great Bear Rainforest is one of the largest remaining tracts of temperate rainforest on Earth. This remote and pristine region features a mosaic of moss-draped old-growth forests, salmon-rich rivers, fjords, estuaries, and granite cliffs rising straight from the sea.

Rich in biodiversity and deep in cultural heritage, the Great Bear Rainforest is home to numerous Indigenous communities whose stewardship has protected these lands and waters for millennia. Nations such as the Gitga'at, Kitasoo/Xai'xais, Heiltsuk, and Nuxalk live in close connection with this ecosystem, guided by traditional knowledge and modern governance agreements that ensure the preservation of their territories for future generations.

On this journey aboard *Cascadia*, we'll weave through coastal inlets, drop anchor in quiet coves, and explore rain-soaked islands. Expect moments of profound stillness and awe—towering cedars cloaked in mist, salmon leaping upstream, and waterfalls cascading from mossy cliffs. Zodiac excursions, forest walks, and cultural visits allow for intimate exploration of this uniquely powerful landscape.

Indigenous Presence and Cultural Significance

The Great Bear Rainforest lies within the traditional territories of more than two dozen Indigenous Nations. Coastal communities in this region maintain enduring cultural and spiritual ties to the land and sea, expressed through art, ceremony, governance, and stewardship practices.

Guests may have the opportunity to visit Indigenous communities and cultural sites, where welcome protocols, storytelling, and land-based teachings are shared with respect. Totem poles, big houses, and smokehouses stand as living reminders of the region's deeply rooted traditions.

The values of reciprocity, kinship with nature, and ancestral law continue to guide leadership today. Indigenous Nations have played a pivotal role in landmark conservation agreements and are shaping a vibrant and sustainable future for the region through collaborative land use planning and cultural revitalization.

Haisla and Gitga'at Nations

Based in Kitamaat Village near the Douglas Channel, the Haisla Nation is a vital voice in coastal British Columbia. Their traditional territory includes the Kitlope Valley—the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest in the world—and surrounding fjords and waterways.

Haisla culture is grounded in environmental stewardship, cedar carving, and oral tradition. The Nation continues to integrate traditional knowledge with modern governance to pursue community well-being and self-determination. Recent initiatives include land use planning in the Kitlope Heritage Conservancy and the Cedar LNG Project—the world's first Indigenous-majority-owned liquefied natural gas facility. These undertakings reflect a dynamic vision for a sovereign, resilient future rooted in Haisla values.

Further south, the Gitga'at Nation, whose ancestral home is the village of Hartley Bay, maintains a strong relationship with both land and sea. Gitga'at territory spans rich estuaries, old-growth forests, and the core habitat of the rare white “Spirit Bear” (moksgm'ol). The Nation is a leader in marine stewardship, conducting regular monitoring of whale migration, sea otter recovery, and vessel traffic impacts in their territory.

Gitga'at matrilineal society and deep spiritual connection to place are central to community life. Cultural continuity is supported by initiatives such as language revitalization, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and eco-guardianship programs. Visitors are often struck by the warmth of welcome in Hartley Bay and the Nation's enduring commitment to sustainability and cultural pride.

Together, the Haisla and Gitga'at exemplify the diversity and strength of Indigenous governance and guardianship along the wild and storied coast of the Great Bear Rainforest.

Conservation & Ecology

The Great Bear Rainforest is recognized globally as a model for collaborative conservation. Following decades of advocacy, Indigenous Nations, the BC government, and environmental organizations negotiated agreements that now protect approximately 85% of the forest from industrial logging under an ecosystem-based management plan.

This thriving ecosystem supports iconic species such as the rare white “Spirit Bear” (a genetic variant of the black bear), coastal wolves, cougars, and all five species of Pacific salmon. These salmon are a keystone species—supporting bears, eagles, whales, and enriching the forest itself through nutrient cycles.

As expedition guests, we follow a low-impact travel model aligned with local protocols. Responsible exploration is not only a privilege—it's a commitment to protecting this rare wilderness for generations to come.

Development Controversy near Terrace, BC

Terrace and nearby areas have recently become a focal point in Canada's ongoing dialogue around land rights, development, and Indigenous governance.

The Coastal GasLink pipeline, built to transport natural gas to the LNG Canada facility in Kitimat, has sparked both support and protest. While some elected First Nations councils have signed benefit agreements, opposition from hereditary leadership—particularly of the Wet'suwet'en Nation—highlights tensions over unceded territories and consent.

In 2024, Gitanyow hereditary chiefs initiated a blockade in response to environmental concerns and exclusion from key decision-making processes. These events reflect broader questions around sovereignty, environmental protection, and reconciliation.

Travellers in the region are encouraged to remain curious, empathetic, and respectful of the diverse perspectives held by local communities.