GRIZZLIES, GLACIERS & GHOST TOWNS
Of Northern British Columbia & Southeast Alaska

TRIP OVERVIEW

Our "Grizzlies, Glaciers & Ghost Towns" tour will take us well off the beaten path to discover places others only dream of. It will combine exciting outdoor adventures with opportunities to relax and renew the soul during a truly transformational experience.

British Columbia and Southeast Alaska present a maze of fjords, channels, rivers, forests and glaciers with some of the most spectacular scenery in North America. Wildlife viewing in this region is unsurpassed with grizzly bears, black bear, white Kermode bear, wolves, coyotes, lynx, fox, moose, mountain goat, seals, sea lions and many species of porpoise and whales.

In addition to the rich wildlife and natural landscapes are the fascinating ghost towns and pioneer settlements that first put this region on the map. Native nations here date back much further and proudly display their clan crests through elaborately carved figures on the world's oldest totem poles.

Soaring Spirits camp, located on the legendary Skeena River, will be the centerpiece of our tour and base camp for three nights. Surrounded by majestic mountains, and with five million wild salmon swimming past its shores, eagles soaring overhead and white 'Spirit Bears' grazing in nearby meadows - this is a place to truly set your soul free.

Soaring Spirits camp facilities are as inspired as the location. Large canvas wall tents with beautiful Northwest Coast house frontal designs, serve as camp accommodation. A beautiful post-and-beam dining hall, overlooking Frog Mountain, will be the warm and cozy site for wonderful meals featuring wild salmon, berries, mushrooms and endless bounty from the camp's large organic garden. If you're a salmon fishing fanatic, there's no better place to be.

But the adventures offered on this trip extend well beyond the shores of the Skeena River. We will explore alpine meadows of wildflowers, one of the largest ice fields in North America, lava beds from the most recent volcanic eruption in Canada and hidden communities on the coast few people have ever seen. We will overnight in historic buildings like North Pacific - the oldest cannery on the Canada's west coast, and we will be welcomed into the houses and communities of people who have known this place as home from the beginning of human time.

If there is a better way to experience this Great Land, we've yet to hear about it!

ITINERARY

Day One

NOTE: Guests are encouraged to arrive in Vancouver a few days early if they would like to take in some of the world-class sights of Vancouver and nearby Victoria. There are also options to do this at the end of your trip.

- From Vancouver we board a 1.5-hour flight to Prince George and transfer another 1.5 hours by bus to Fort St. James on the beautiful shores of Stuart Lake.

- Fort St. James (pop. 2,209) is at the heart of British Columbia, geographically and historically. Located at the southern end of 100-kilometer-long Stuart Lake, the town sits directly in the middle of the province. Founded by Simon Fraser in 1806, the fort was only the second European settlement west of the Rockies.

- We check into Stuart Lake Lodge with bright cabins overlooking the lake and enjoy a delicious group dinner and trip orientation session before bedtime.

- Overnight: Stuart Lake Lodge, Fort St. James

Day Two

- The sun rises three hours later here than Michigan so everyone should be well rested when we sit down for a home cooked breakfast before setting off on our day's adventures.

- Our first stop is Fort St. James National Historic Site, a quiet backwater today, but at one time the capitol of New Caledonia – an administrative region that included all of British Columbia, Washington State and Oregon!

- Meticulously restored to the year 1896, the site consists of six hand hewn log structures, including a Trade Post stocked with furs and Hudson Bay blankets, a General Warehouse full of antiquated sundries, a Food Cache filled with dried salmon and cured hams, and an Officers Dwelling where the aroma of homemade goodies baked in a wood cook stove fill the air.

- Guides in period costumes welcome visitors to each site, sharing stories of the past and engaging in activities from fleshing a moose hide, to harvesting the garden and sampling homemade molasses cookies.

- Following a delicious lunch we drive west (3-hours) to Smithers, B.C. where we will explore spectacular twin falls pouring down from a hanging glacier. Later we'll visit the engaging local museum before enjoying a delicious dinner in the little community of Telkwa.

- It's a short drive from here to the comfort of our beautiful lodge for the night in the idyllic countryside north of Smithers.

- Overnight: Log Pile Lodge, Telkwa

- We next drive to Moricetown, where we will watch Wet'suwet'en native fishermen netting and gaffing salmon from the roaring falls of the Bukley Canyon, using techniques that have been in practice here since the retreat of the great Ice Age. A fascinating cultural centre overlooking the site has displays of fish traps dating back 10,000 years.

- Just an hour's drive further west; we arrive at the Soaring Spirits Camp on the banks of the legendary Skeena River where the towering peaks of the Seven Sisters Mountains rise to a breathtaking 9,000 ft.

- Here everyone will be assigned to a luxury canvas wall tent prior to a welcome feast and opening Council Fire.

- Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp, Kitwanga

Day Four

- Sunrise over the Skeena River is a sight not to be missed, as the hanging glaciers of the Seven Sisters Mountains turn red with the rising sun.

- A beautifully crafted summer cookhouse/dining hall will be our gathering place for breakfast and become the focal point for our native food cooking course this morning, offered by master local chef Val Morgan.

- Those less interested in culinary skills can fish for salmon at the confluence of Boulder Creek and the Skeena River, or pick wild berries for jams. Today is a day to totally unwind and settle in to the majesty of this land and the traditional pursuits of the Gitksan native peoples.

- After a delicious lunch there will be time to explore the nearby forest, pick edible mushrooms, sketch or paint the sublime landscape, or just totally relax with therapeutic traditional Thai massage.

- Following a superb salmon dinner, created by our own 'native' chefs with organic vegetables and fruit from the camp garden and the wilds, we will gather around the warm glow of the Council Fire for an evening of native legends and 'eagle feather' sharing.

- Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp

Day Five

- This is a grand day for adventure as we rise early and enjoy a big breakfast before setting off to canoe the legendary Skeena River, known to the Gitksan native people as the Ksan – the “River of Mists”.

- We will travel by bus one hour to Kispiox, a beautiful Gitksan village at the confluence of the Kispiox and Skeena Rivers, to view a dramatic display of ancient totem poles.

- Anyone that wants to wet their fishing line here at the confluence of the Skeena and Kispiox Rivers can boast of fishing the world’s best steelhead river.

- Next we drive a short ways to Old Hazelton, a near ghost town today, but at one time a thriving center for gold rush stampeders and pack trains of mules that hauled cargo throughout northern British Columbia.

- Across the Skeena River from Old Hazelton is the legendary site of Temlaxam, a pre-IceAge metrolpolis that once was the Camelot of Northwest Coast civilizations.

- Ksan, a recreated Gitksan village, at the confluence of the Bukley and Skeena Rivers, offers a fascinating glimpse into that period with re-created longhouses and dazzling artifacts crafted long before European contact.

- After exploring the many longhouses here and the excellent museum, we will have a safety briefing at the riverbank before embarking on our canoe voyage.

- The (2-3 hour) canoe journey from Ksan to Kitwanga, along the ancestral highway of the Gitksan and Tsimshian, will offer vivid insights into a time when this was the principal mode of travel in these parts.

- A picnic lunch will be enjoyed on a sand bar along the way, and there will be excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing along shore. Bald eagles, black bear, coyotes, beaver, mergansers, Canada geese and ducks are commonplace here.

- The canoe journey will end in Kitwanga where there will be an opportunity to see native smokehouses curing salmon, and view more ancestral totem poles before returning a short distance to camp.

- Hereditary Wolf Chief, Jim Angus will honor the group with his presence this evening at a traditional Gitksan dinner feast and will share teachings around the Council Fire to close out an amazing day.

- Overnight: Soaring Spirits Camp

Day Six

- Today, right after breakfast, we bid a fond farewell to Soaring Spirits Camp and board a bus for the 2-hour drive north to Hyder, Alaska. Along the way we will make a short stop in Kitwankool to view the worlds oldest and most intricately carved totems poles.

- The drive through the Coast Mountain Range from Meziadin Junction to Stewart, B.C. is considered one of the most beautiful routes in North America.

- We will stop often to marvel at the scenery and view Bear Glacier sweeping down out of the Coast Mountains almost to the edge of the highway.

- After checking in to our historic lodge perched on the edge of the Stewart estuary, we will enjoy a buffet lunch and then cross the border to the virtual ghost town of Hyder, Alaska.

- Once a booming mining town during the Gold Rush, Hyder today is a sleepy Alaskan backwater that embraces the pioneer Alaskan spirit better than most towns in the State.

- Hyder's real claim to fame, however, is nearby Fish Creek where a boardwalk allows for safe and intimate viewing of grizzly bears and other animals preying on the world's largest chum salmon.

- We will have several hours here to watch for grizzlies emerging from the forest to catch salmon, along with black bears and wolves that also frequent the site. With so many spawning salmon, bald eagles, mergansers, beaver, and songbirds attracted to Fish Creek, there is no end to the excitement.

- Returning to our lodge across the border in Stewart, B.C., we will enjoy a superb dinner at the famous Bitter Creek Café before settling in our lounge to share after dinner drinks and tales of our day's adventures. Movie buffs will note that part of the set for "Insomnia" – filmed in Stewart and starring Al Pacino and Robin Williams, has been incorporated into our lodge.

- Overnight: Ripley Creek Inn, Stewart

Day Seven

- It's all about "Grizzlies & Glaciers" today, so we get an early start right after breakfast.

- We will stop again at Fish Creek for grizzly viewing on our way to the Salmon Glacier as early morning is one of the best times to catch action, like big bruins fighting over a favored fishing spot.

- Salmon Glacier, sweeping down from the Alaska/Canada border, is one of the largest ice fields in North America and it just gets more and more awe inspiring as we drive up the mountain to a sweeping viewpoint.

- Alpine flowers are abundant at this high elevation so anyone that missed out on the Hudson Bay Mountain hike will still have an opportunity to view them here.

- Once again, there will be an opportunity for a hike; this time to the very toe of the glacier where we may encounter barren ground grizzlies grazing peacefully on the rich alpine vegetation.

- Returning back down to sea level, we will have one last opportunity to view the wildlife action at Fish Creek before returning to our lodge on the Canadian side of the border.

- Following another wonderful dinner, a long boardwalk over the Stewart estuary invites us for a relaxing stroll to view the sunset. Here at the head of Portland Canal – the longest fjord on the B.C./Alaska coast, we can look down the mountain-lined channel to see the boundary separating Alaska from Canada.

- Overnight: Ripley Creek Inn

Day Eight

- It's time to bid a fond farewell to Portland Canal and head back inland through the dramatic Coast Mountains.

- We will stop at Meziadin Lake and the Nass River for some scenic breaks during the 2-hour drive to the Nass Valley.

- Now we enter a completely different and alien landscape. Three hundred years ago a colossal volcanic eruption completely buried three Nisga'a villages in the Nass Valley and there has been very little colonization by plants over the lava flow since that cataclysmic event.

- We will stop at Gitwansilk, an ancient Nisga'a village spared by the flow of lava, to enjoy a picnic lunch. A pedestrian suspension bridge crosses the Nass River here and a trail leads to a fish wheel, an ancient native technology that harvests salmon simply by harnessing the power of the river.

- Leaving Gitwansilk we cross the great lava flow and follow a beautiful scenic corridor back to the Pacific Coast.

- The Nisga'a village of Gincolith is our destination. Situated in a pristine wilderness setting beside the sea near the mouth of the Nass River, this little community has only had a road to the outside world for a few years.

- We will be welcomed into the community here with a traditional feast in the Big House and lodged at a Nisga'a family B&B.

- Anyone with fish fever should be able to connect with salmon running up the Gincolith River, just a short stroll from your B&B.

- Overnight: Lavinia's B&B, Gincolith

Day Nine

- Today we enjoy a delicious homemade breakfasts at our B&B and prepare to embark on a charter boat for a day of adventure at sea.

- The waters around Gincolith are incredibly rich in marine resources - salmon, halibut, cod, snapper, prawns and Dungeness crab, so we can try our hand at landing a good catch for dinner.

- Preying on this bounty are huge coastal brown bears, bald eagles, seals, sea lions, porpoise and killer whales. With any luck at all we should be in for a great day of wildlife viewing.

- Lunch will be served picnic-style aboard our vessel as we cruise through a coastal wilderness far removed from the cruise ship crowds.

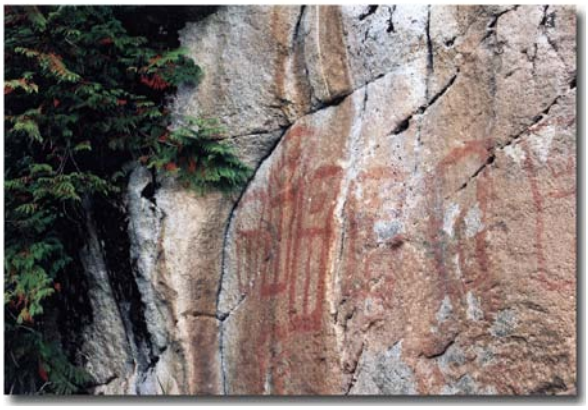
- Returning to the wharf with our catch, we will have time to visit the community fish hatchery and stroll along the waterfront before dinner.

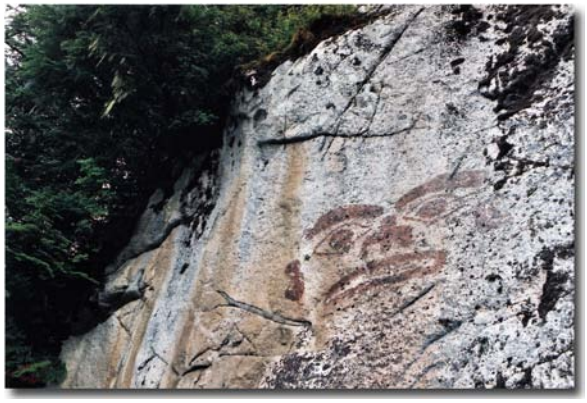
- Our last night in Gincolith will feature our ‘catch of the day’ and other seafood delicacies from the bounty of the surrounding sea. It doesn’t get any fresher!

- Overnight: Lavinia’s B&B

Day Ten

- We've got a long drive today, so we set off from Gincolith right after breakfast.
- Our first stop will be the interpretive center at Nisga'a Lava Beds Provincial Park.
- After an orientation here we will have a chance to explore the lava beds along footpaths that lead us to lava tubes, ancient tree casings and waterfalls that mysteriously emerge from the forest, then disappear into the volcanic landscape.
- Lava Lake, created by the ancient flow when it dammed a river, is a picturesque place to stop and a beautiful swimming location for those that can handle the chilly water.





- Driving on another hour to Terrace, we will stop at a fine restaurant for lunch before continuing our drive down the lower Skeena River to the coast.

- The drive from Terrace to Prince Rupert has received a 5-star rating in the Michellin Guide as one of the most scenic routes in North America. As the highway follows the river through the Coast Mountain Range – the largest granite complex in the world – it is like driving through a one hundred-mile long Yosemite Valley.
- We will stop at a beautiful old growth forest grove beside a river to view towering Sitka spruce, red cedar and western hemlock trees that have been nourished for thousands of years by nutrients from spawned out salmon.

- By late afternoon we arrive at North Pacific Cannery near the mouth of the Skeena River. This is the oldest cannery on the coast and is now preserved as a National Historic Site; it offers a fascinating glimpse into a bygone era.

- We will tour the Japanese, Chinese, Native and White crew-boss residences and view a cannery line in full operation.

- Dinner will be served in a quaint restaurant perched on pilings over the sea before we retreat to our historic quarters for the night.

- Our tour leader, Thom Henley – author of the book "River of Mist, Journey of Dreams" - will recount tales from the region in the lounge of our lodge.

- Overnight: North Pacific Cannery

Day Eleven

- The last full day of our trip offers something for everyone, depending on personal preference.

- It's just a short drive from North Pacific Cannery to the port town of Prince Rupert where we will enjoy a big breakfast before setting off on our day's adventures.

- Some may choose to just relax and soak in the atmosphere of our quaint B&B perched right on the wharf in historic Cow Bay. Delightful little coffee shops, sushi bars, restaurants and souvenir shops are just steps from our lodging. Just a short stroll away is the excellent Museum of Northern British Columbia, and beautiful city parks with spectacular harbor views.

- Those itching for more adventure can rent kayaks to explore the islands and bays of one of the world's most beautiful harbors, or book passage aboard a whale watching cruise in Chatham Strait – one of the best locations on the coast to see the acrobatic humpback whales.

- Those that have not had their fill of grizzly bear viewing, and extra money burning a hole in their pocket, can book charter flights to the Khutzamateen, the world's only sanctuary set aside specifically for coastal brown bears.

- Anyone wanting to learn more about the Tsimshian – the first peoples of this coast, can arrange for a more economical tour to ancestral village sites where pictographs carved into the shore rocks and longhouse remains evoke images of the ancient past.

- We will all join up this evening for a fabulous farewell dinner party at a fine restaurant overlooking the harbor before retiring to our private B&B on the wharf for a group party into the wee hours.

- Overnight: Eagle Bluff B&B, Prince Rupert

Day Twelve

- It's Autumn Equinox and time for change as we head our own ways home. Those in a hurry will find convenient flights from Prince Rupert to Vancouver and connecting flights back to Michigan. We will arrange transport to the airport and see you on your way.

- Those wishing to linger longer have options in all four directions. Passenger trains depart daily from Prince Rupert, traveling East over the Canadian Rockies and all the way to Chicago or Sault Ste Marie. It's the long road back to Michigan but a grand one!

- If you've never ventured North deep into Alaska there's service from Prince Rupert aboard the Alaska Marine Ferry to Ketchikan, Juneau, Sitka, Haines and Skagway. All of these destinations offer connecting flights to Anchorage and Fairbanks, and there's no better time to go for a fall color tour to Mount Mc Kinley!

- Looking for more adventure in B.C.? Consider catching the B.C. Ferry to Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) a day-cruise West of Prince Rupert. This archipelago of 150 islands has the greatest expanse of protected wilderness on the Pacific Coast and local residents that are sure to charm. They say that three people on a 100-mile stretch of beach here is an outrageous invasion of privacy.

- Finally, consider taking the 10-hour cruise South through the protected waters of the Inside Passage to Vancouver Island. The voyage is the same route the big cruise ships sail at a fraction of the price. Once on Vancouver Island you can visit Telegraph Cove with it's amazing Bones Museum and orca rubbing beaches, see the towering trees of Cathedral Grove and snuggle into a charming B&B in the Garden City of Victoria.

- Whatever your choice, you are unlikely to forget our 12 magical days together.