



# Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

*Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.*

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## CANADA

**Date - August 2013**

**Duration - 35 Days**

### **Destinations**

Vancouver - Vancouver Island - Victoria - Tofino - Ucluelet - Clayoquot Sound - Mount Washington - Strathcona Provincial Park - Campbell River - Bute Inlet - Knight Inlet - Port Hardy - Bella Bella - Shearwater - Klemtu - Great Bear Rainforest - Bella Coola - Tweedsmuir Provincial Park - Vancouver - Capilano Suspension Bridge Park - Grouse Mountain - Winnipeg - Churchill - Hudson Bay - Winnipeg - FortWhyte Alive

## Trip Overview

Although I have visited Canada a great deal and have viewed the annual salmon run at a number of different destinations, for some time I have been planning one extended trip that will enable visitors to see all three native bear species, black bear, brown bear and polar bear, as well as the kermode bear, a white subspecies of the black bear. This was a trial run for that trip, as I researched almost every major bear destination on Vancouver Island and the British Columbia coast, before travelling to Churchill on the Hudson Bay, where I wanted to search for polar bears before the main tourist season commenced. In addition to the various bear activities, I spent a great deal of time looking for wildlife independently and taking marine tours to assess which companies employed the most knowledgeable guides and offered the best expeditions. Like most of North America, wildlife viewing in the regions that I visited is mixed, as it is relatively easy to see the larger superstar animals that operators, and therefore tourists, concentrate on, but there is little infrastructure in place in terms of looking for other animals. The national parks across both Canada and the United States are of course a wonderful resource, but the guided activities within them are generally poor unless you are simply happy to learn about the scenery or are not interested in seeing anything much smaller than a bison. Most of the national park guides



have learnt a great deal about the flora and geology of their particular area, but they have no expertise in terms of finding animals and there are also very few genuinely skilled independent guides across the continent who specialise in finding rare species. Most of these are actually hunting guides and the obsessive hunting mentality, particularly in terms of killing keystone predator species for fun, obviously does not help those of us looking for wildlife simply to appreciate the immense beauty of animals in their natural habitat. Although poaching occurs, when you are on a safari in Africa, you are generally looking for animals in well protected reserves, but this attitude is not prevalent across much of North America and it is considerably more difficult to find an animal within an area in which it is periodically hunted. To date, I have therefore usually selected specific locations to look for specific species, as opposed to being able to recommend one incredible park or reserve where it is possible to encounter numerous animals relatively easily and at fairly close quarters. I was hoping to rectify this to some extent in British Columbia and spent much of my trip looking beyond the bears and the whales with a view to producing a tour that would allow guests to not only observe these magnificent creatures, but to also enjoy a diverse range of wildlife across a variety of contrasting habitats. I believe that I succeeded to some degree, but a lot of my sightings were fleeting and, unless you were extremely fortunate or had an infinite amount of time, you would probably still need to move further inland in order to produce a more complete picture of the wildlife of this enthralling continent. That said, if bears and marine mammals are your passion, then this tour is already fairly difficult to beat, as both black and brown bears and a variety of whales, dolphins, seals and sea lions are routinely encountered, against some of the most spectacular scenery imaginable. When you add polar bears in Churchill and the possibility of kermode bear at Klemtu, then you are already looking at one of the finest specialist



tours on the planet and even Alaska cannot compete in terms of the variety of bears on show here. Vancouver Island was the ideal starting point for this trip, as the ferry journey to Swartz Bay provides a real flavour of an outstandingly scenic region and within a couple of hours I was out on the water at Victoria watching killer whales and an adorable sea otter, which was probably female given the rather chewed state of its nose. I love how effortlessly killer whales are seen here and it is always a real highlight of any trip to spend time observing these mesmerising hunters and learning how they interact. Marine mammals in general are abundant around Vancouver Island and on several tours at Victoria, Tofino, Ucluelet and Campbell River I encountered humpback, minke and grey whale, Pacific white-sided dolphin, both harbour and dall's porpoise, harbour seal and steller and California sea lion. When I say encountered, I do not mean one brief sighting, as most of these animals were seen regularly and often within close proximity of the boat. One humpback whale, which we had not seen previously and had no idea was in the area, breached within no more than 20 metres of us and on another occasion I watched a humpback breaching and fluking continuously for the best part of an hour. I was twice fortunate enough to observe the almost bewildering acrobatic displays of massive pods of pacific white-sided dolphins and you know that the sighting is a good one, when you have no idea in which direction to point your camera and have to simply stand back and admire one of nature's great spectacles. The black bears at Tofino and Ucluelet are also observed by boat and I spent many happy hours watching several bears foraging along the seashore and effortlessly flipping huge rocks to feed on the exposed crabs. You can approach to within a few metres of the bears without disturbing them from the water, but my most memorable experience with this smaller bear species was during a hike at Stathcona Provincial Park, when I walked into a clearing and found myself staring at a



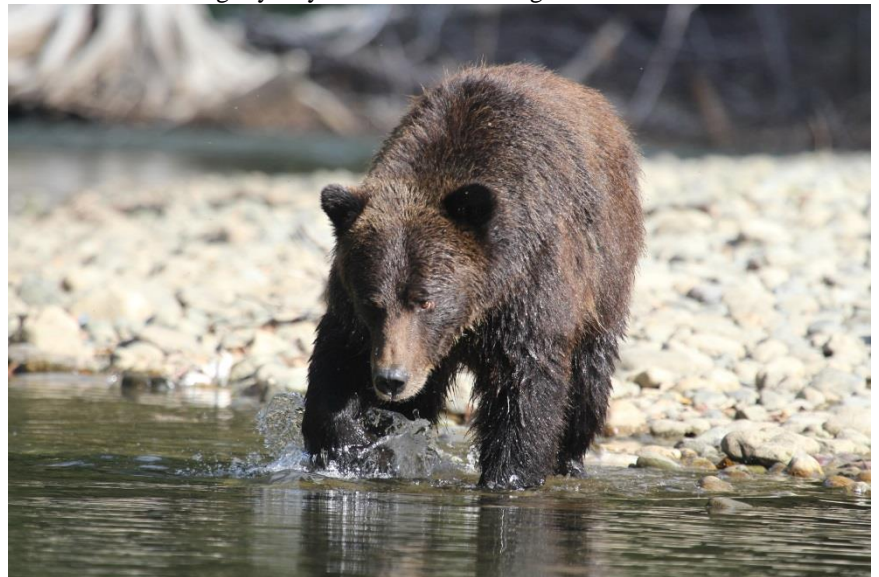
a mother with two young cubs. I am not sure how either of us would have reacted had this been a grizzly, but black bears are not usually aggressive and the mother turned on her heels before I even had time to raise my camera. She actually did me a favour, for as she ran, with me finally taking some pictures and her cubs doing their best to keep up, a large male red deer broke cover and I had already spent several fruitless hours looking for this animal. I saw four more later in the trip as I drove to Port Hardy, as well as large



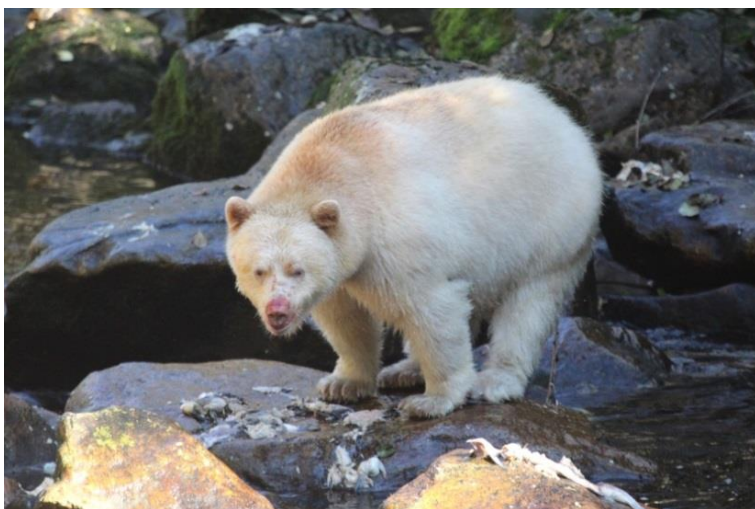
numbers of mule deer at several locations, but I had less success with other species on Vancouver Island and was a little disappointed with only American mink, raccoon, muskrat, eastern cottontail rabbit and grey squirrel to show for dozens of hours walking and spotlighting. Although I had to leave the island to see brown or grizzly bear, as they only occur on the mainland, my first two excursions, to Bute Inlet and Knight Inlet, were both taken whilst I was staying at Campbell River. Bute Inlet was approached by boat and was just for a few hours, but Knight Inlet is further afield and I took a short seaplane flight and stayed on a floating lodge for four days. Perhaps surprisingly given the disparity in duration, both trips were equally memorable, for although I saw more bears at Knight Inlet, I did not use the viewing stands at Bute Inlet and was instead able to walk along the riverbank with a

guide, watching and photographing several grizzly bears hunting and eating salmon just a few metres away. Seeing these immensely powerful animals on foot adds another dimension to the encounter and at one point two cubs began playing tug of war over a huge salmon that their mother had partially eaten and then discarded for them to squabble over. The lodge at Knight Inlet is very well situated in a gorgeous location and the grizzly bears were abundant during my stay. When not watching them from the two main bear

stands, both of which overlook ravishing stretches of shallow river and are ideal for observing hungry bears feasting on the floundering salmon, I went kayaking to the tidal flats and watched yet more bears feeding on the protein-rich sedge grass, which forms a large part of their diet until the salmon begin to run each year. Harbour seals are viewed daily and I also saw another mink and my first pine martens of the trip, when a pair scampered across a wooden bridge that is crossed on the drive to the stands. It is intriguing watching so many bear congregate in one area, particularly how the mothers with cubs avoid the huge males and how these males interact when they come face to face. There was some bluster and a couple of mock charges, but there was so much food available, in the form of several thousand stranded salmon, that the bears were all extremely relaxed and too full and lethargic to contemplate any serious aggression. The rich pickings were so easy, the bears could even afford to be choosy and I watched one female kill four large salmon in a row only to discard them all in the water and begin eating a fifth. Not surprisingly, the dead salmon attracted a large number of birds and on one memorable, if slightly macabre occasion, a raven suddenly turned on a seagull that it had been feeding



perfectly contentedly beside and snapped its wing in a matter of two ferocious pecks. The raven proceeded to kill and begin eating the seagull until it was scared away from the carcass by a massive bald eagle, which had obviously also had its fill of salmon and began devouring the dead bird. I guess there is only so much salmon that even these animals can abide and I know from personal experience that I ate less and less of these unfortunate creatures as my tour progressed, as seeing, and particularly smelling, hundreds of putrefying fish on a daily basis, somewhat dulled the appetite for them. After a successful and highly enjoyable stay at Knight Inlet, I took the floatplane back to Campbell River and proceeded to drive to Port Hardy, from where I would leave Vancouver Island for the last time and make my way to an area of the Great Bear Rainforest near Klemtu. This section of the trip had been designed to see whether it was possible to add another bear type to the tour, the kermode or spirit bear, which is



actually a white subspecies of the black bear. The answer, at least currently, is yes, as I visited a stretch of river where one of these ghosts of the forest is regularly observed and only had to wait a couple of hours for the bear to emerge. Although I spent a magical



hour watching this rare and beautiful creature gorging itself on salmon, this was the only kermode bear that I saw in six full days here and I spent almost every daylight hour out in the field searching in a number of different areas. One sighting of any rare animal per trip is of course fine, but I have a slight concern that the local guides are relying on this solitary bear to some degree and that there is not a great deal of effort being made to ensure that guests have other opportunities to see this animal, should this particular bear move on or fail to make an appearance for several days. I would therefore always recommend, unless visitors are happy to just take a chance and to spend time exploring another stunningly attractive area, that recent sightings are checked carefully with the lodge that the guides operate from and that I used as a base. There are also plenty of other animals here and I saw both black and grizzly bear during my stay, as well as another marten whilst watching the kermode bear and a variety of marine mammals during the boat transfers to each daily destination, including several humpback whales. Wolf and wolverine were encountered before I arrived and indeed I saw a great deal of evidence of wolf when walking along the shoreline, predominantly, fresh tracks from early in the morning and numerous partially eaten salmon, as wolves cannot tolerate a parasite that the fish carry in some stretches of water and consequently only eat the head. Unfortunately the guides do not really get you out early enough here to have a really good chance of seeing these sublime creatures and it would be more a matter of good fortune to encounter one. To save some travelling time I chartered a boat to reach my next destination, Bella Coola, the gateway to Tweedsmuir Provincial Park and the Chilcotin Plateau. I had two main intentions at Bella Coola, the first was to research how the bear viewing here compared to the more regularly visited locations around Vancouver Island and the second was to spend long hours in the field to see how many individual mammal species I could find now that I was back on the mainland. I was reasonably satisfied with both outcomes, as the grizzly sightings here were just as amazing as those previously experienced and I was finally able to track down a few different animals, although certainly not easily and not as well as I would have liked in some cases. Most of the bear viewing is centred around the Atnarko River and the lodge that I based myself at run drift boat trips, which get you extremely close to the bears and at eye level. They also have an excellent viewing stand overlooking a picturesque stretch of river, where I spent several idyllic hours and from where wolves have also been photographed. Picturesque does not



actually even begin to do the scenery and views here justice, as the Bella Coola Valley, and the plateau above that leads to Williams Lake and ultimately the Canadian Rockies, is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful regions on earth. Even when I was not enjoying any success with the wildlife, I always had the consolation that I was searching a truly exquisite landscape and that I was very unlikely to be disturbed, as the steep drive up the 'Freedom Highway' towards Chilcotin, leads to vast tracts of true wilderness, where you can walk all day, multiple days in fact, without encountering another human being. Fortunately, I was able to encounter a few animals and the highlight was certainly the wolf that I spotted whilst driving along the Chilcotin Plateau. The entire event lasted less than ten seconds, and I was sorry that it did not occur while I was on foot, but it was still an incredible thrill to watch a large black wolf emerge from the vegetation at the side of road and cross in front of me, before disappearing like a spirit into the night. For me wolves are the ultimate representation of true wilderness and I never grow tired of seeing them or of spending hours searching when I am within their territory. My time in and around Bella Coola was fairly productive and the Chilcotin Plateau was certainly the place for canines, as I saw four red foxes and a solitary coyote whilst driving at night and even managed to get fairly close to one of the foxes when I abandoned the car and approached on foot. Other successes included another black bear on foot, an otter swimming past a grizzly viewing platform, a moose at great distance in my spotting scope, two hoary marmots and several yellow-pine chipmunks,



red squirrels and pikas, a small mammal that looks like a rodent, but is actually a member of the rabbit family. Because the area is so huge and there is only so much ground that you can cover on foot, I decided to take a scenic flight over Hunlen Falls and past the Rainbow Range, partly to view these impressive natural wonders and also to see how much wildlife I could spot from the air. After asking the pilot to look in the best areas and to fly as low as possible, we eventually found another lone moose, three caribou and half a dozen mountain goats, littered, rather unsurprisingly, at extreme elevations along the side of two different massifs. Excluding brief visits to Capilano Suspension Bridge Park and Grouse Mountain, whilst I killed time between flights at Vancouver, my stay in British Columbia ended at Bella Coola and it was now time to see whether I could complete the ultimate bear circuit and see polar bears out of season at Churchill. Perched on the western banks of

the Hudson Bay, Churchill is the mecca for polar bear enthusiasts, as large numbers of these majestic and formidable creatures congregate around the bay each year, waiting impatiently for the pack ice to form so that they can begin hunting the seals that will sustain them through the winter. Previously if you wanted to combine the salmon run and polar bear season, you were generally advised to visit another destination in between for at least two weeks, usually the Rocky Mountains to ensure that the polar bear



season had commenced in earnest and that you would be able to take the famous tundra buggy tours that operate out of Churchill. This was sound advice, as the delay generally ensured that enough bears had descended on Churchill to more or less guarantee sightings and two or three weeks in the Rockies is certainly no hardship if you have the time and funds available. However, most people do not have that amount of spare time and not everyone wants to visit the Rockies in the autumn, although they are actually extraordinarily beautiful at that time of year. In addition, Churchill is incredibly busy during the peak tourist period and I believe that, unless you are visiting one of the remote wilderness lodges away from town, it makes more sense to travel to Churchill just before the season starts, as there are generally bears around and you can explore the tundra more or less on your own. In this way it would be possible to view all three bear species in no more than two weeks and you have the added bonus of almost exclusive access to the largest land predator on earth. Fortunately, this is the way that it worked in practice, as my confidence was rewarded with multiple sightings of nine different bears, ten if you count the one being flown by helicopter from the local 'bear prison' back to the wild, including a mother with cub, three feeding together on a whale carcass and another viewed on foot from no more than twenty metres, with no fences or barriers between us. Wildlife viewing does not get a great deal better than this and it was an immense privilege to spend so much quality time with these hugely impressive animals. On one occasion my guide and I spent two hours watching a single bear trying to find a comfortable position to sleep on some rocks and on another we stood smiling as this apex killer rolled around in the sun, scratching its back with all four legs in the air. Although the scenery around Churchill is not classically beautiful, the landscape has a captivating, haunting quality and the burning autumnal colours across the tundra, perfectly frame a succession of equally enchanting animals. In the bay itself I was lucky enough to see a pod of more than 40 beluga whales feeding, as well as a lone bearded seal, neither of which I had expected at this time of year. As I searched further inland towards the boreal forest I spotted two distant caribou and at night, after five weeks of scanning ponds, I finally came across the first and only beaver of the trip, a single animal swimming back towards its dam. On one occasion I watched two new species together, but unfortunately, at least for the doomed lemming, the other animal was an arctic fox and the chase did not last very long. I encountered six arctic foxes in all, as well as red fox, arctic hare and snowshoe hare when I went spotlighting each evening. Churchill was my last major destination, but I had a few hours available in Winnipeg waiting for the flight home and spent them strolling around FortWhyte Alive, a combination of recreational park and environmental education centre a few kilometres from the airport. I did not expect a great deal in terms of wildlife and was pleasantly surprised to find several ground squirrels and chipmunks, as well as three white-tailed deer, my last animals of an eventful and ultimately hugely successful trip.











No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Lone black wolf on the Chilcotin Plateau at night.
2	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>	One individual on the Chilcotin Plateau.
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Two individuals and one pair on the Chilcotin Plateau and three individuals at Churchill.
4	Arctic Fox	<i>Alopex lagopus</i>	Six individuals at Churchill, including one catching and eating a lemming.
5	American Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>	Probably over 30 in total on Vancouver Island and along the British Columbia coast.
6	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	Over 70 across British Columbia.
7	Polar Bear	<i>Ursus maritimus</i>	Nine individuals at Churchill, including a mother with cub.
8	Kermode Bear	<i>Ursus americanus kermodei</i> ssp	Subspecies of the black bear, one seen near Klemtu.
9	American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>	Two at a bear platform at Knight Inlet and one near Klemtu, whilst watching the kermode bear.
10	American Mink	<i>Neovison vison</i>	Two running along the shoreline, one at Tofino and one at Knight Inlet.
11	North American Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	One swimming past a bear stand at Tweedsmuir.
12	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>	One on a boat tour at Victoria and maybe twenty on cruises at Tofino and Ucluelet.
13	Northern Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>	One in a car park in Ucluelet and one on a boat tour at Campbell River.
(14)	American Bison	<i>Bison bison</i>	Managed herd at FortWhyte Alive in Winnipeg.
15	Mountain Goat	<i>Oreamnos americanus</i>	Small herds and individuals on a scenic flight to the Rainbow Range and Monarch Icefield.
16	Caribou	<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>	Two females towards the boreal forest at Churchill and three on the Rainbow Range flight.
17	Moose	<i>Alces americanus</i>	One individual through a scope on the Chilcotin Plateau and another on the Rainbow Range flight.
18	Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Large numbers on Vancouver Island and a few on the mainland.
19	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	One at Strathcona and four on the drive to Port Hardy.
20	White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	Three wild in the woods around FortWhyte Alive.
21	Eastern Cottontail	<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i>	Several on Vancouver Island, including about fifteen at Buttertubs Marsh near Nanaimo.
22	Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>	Two beyond the Northern Studies Centre at Churchill, on the road towards the boreal forest.
23	Arctic Hare	<i>Lepus arcticus</i>	Over ten around the Northern Studies Centre at Churchill.

24	American Pika	<i>Ochotona princeps</i>	Several on the 'Hill' drive between Tweedsmuir and the Chilcotin Plateau.
25	American Beaver	<i>Castor canadensis</i>	One at night towards the boreal forest at Churchill.
26	Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus tridecemlineatus</i>	Common at FortWhyte Alive in Winnipeg.
27	Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Squirus carolinensis</i>	Common on Vancouver Island.
28	Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	Several around Tweedsmuir.
29	Douglas's Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus douglasii</i>	Three at Capilano Suspension Bridge Park in Vancouver.
30	Hoary Marmot	<i>Marmota caligata</i>	Two briefly on a hike in Tweedsmuir.
31	Yellow-pine Chipmunk	<i>Tamias amoenus</i>	Several on hikes at Tweedsmuir.
32	Least Chipmunk	<i>Tamias minimus</i>	Three at FortWhyte Alive in Winnipeg.
33	Black-tailed Prairie Dog	<i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>	Small wild colony approaching FortWhyte Alive.
34	Richardson's Collared Lemming	<i>Dicrostonyx richardsoni</i>	Two at Churchill, including one being killed by an arctic fox.
35	Muskrat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	One swimming at Buttertubs Marsh near Nanaimo.
36	Meadow Vole	<i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i>	Two at one of the bear viewing areas near Klemtu.
37	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Probably around twelve on boat tours around Vancouver Island.
38	Common Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	One on a marine tour at Victoria.
39	Grey Whale	<i>Eschrichtius robustus</i>	One on a marine tour at Ucluelet.
40	Beluga Whale	<i>Delphinapterus leucas</i>	Pod of around 40 in the Hudson Bay.
41	Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>	At least 60 at various points between Vancouver Island and the mainland.
42	Pacific White-sided Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus obliquidens</i>	Two large pods and some smaller ones on boat trips at Campbell River.
43	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	Multiple sightings around Vancouver Island.
44	Dall's Porpoise	<i>Phocoenoides dalli</i>	Multiple sightings around Vancouver Island.
45	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Common at almost every coastal location.
46	Bearded Seal	<i>Erignathus barbatus</i>	One individual swimming in the Hudson Bay.
47	Northern Elephant Seal	<i>Mirounga angustirostris</i>	One individual swimming on a boat tour near Klemtu.
48	Steller Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>	Abundant at various coastal locations.
49	California Sea Lion	<i>Zalophus californianus</i>	Common at various coastal locations.











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