



S K I L S

The Haida Gwaii Challenge

Program Description

This adventure takes us around the exposed and beautiful West Coast of Graham Island in the Haida Gwaii archipelago. We leave from the community of Masset on the north coast and paddle through uninhabited wilderness for 19 days until we reach the community Daajing Giids on the south coast. It promises a fusion of natural wonders and cultural immersion, creating an unforgettable experience for travellers seeking the ultimate exploration. Enveloped by old-growth rainforests and towering trees, the coastline offers a majestic backdrop, inviting you to explore lush landscapes brimming with biodiversity. The waters teem with an abundance of marine life and as you traverse the rich waters along the west coast of Graham Island, you'll find yourself in a world-renowned fishing paradise.

Prepare to dive deep into the super-rich culture of the Haida Nation. Immerse yourself in age-old traditions, stories, and artistry as you interact with locals and learn about their profound connection to the land and sea. We will kayak to several former Haida village sites and admire the remains of totem poles, including a rare triple pole.

And let's not forget about the culinary delights that await you. We will fish and forage as we travel so you can indulge in amazing food prepared with local ingredients, tantalizing your taste buds with the flavors of the region.

What sets this trip apart is its rarity and remoteness. Navigating around Graham Island via the west coast is a feat few kayakers have accomplished, adding an extra layer of excitement and adventure to your journey. Revel in the thrill of exploration as you paddle through pristine wilderness, far from the beaten path. Discover the magic of this hidden gem in the Pacific Northwest.

We will help you with the logistics. We will be driving from Ucluelet with a van and trailer so we can transport your kayak and some gear to Haida Gwaii if you drop it at the SKILS base at least three weeks prior to the expedition. You can also choose to rent a kayak from the SKILS rental fleet (<https://skils.ca/rentals/>).

We ask that everyone arrives in Masset at least a full day before the expedition starts, in case of any flight delays, missing luggage or other unforeseen circumstances. Masset is rich in Haida culture, with opportunities to admire Haida carvings, to shop and to talk to artists who make traditional goods. You may also chose to visit nearby attractions North Beach or Tow Hill.

You can fly to Masset Airport with Pacific Coastal Airlines and we will pick you up from the airport on and bring you to your accommodation. You can also take the ferry from Prince Rupert, or fly to Sandspit with Air Canada. Sandspit is on Moresby Island but there are regular ferries to Graham Island. We can pick you up 2 days before

your expedition or 1 day before the group meeting in Sandspit or Daajing Giids (formerly known as Queen Charlotte City or at the ferry at Skidegate. We will arrange a pickup schedule with the other participants.

The afternoon and evening before the expedition, the group will meet to discuss the weather, packing, and have a cultural interpretation session with local indigenous people to share their knowledge and culture.

On day 1 of the expedition, we will start from Masset. We will pick up the participants from their accommodation and take them to the starting point). From Masset we will head west and go around Graham Island and explore the surrounding islands over the next 19 days. Highlights include the wild, remote and beautiful coastline, curving sandy beaches, great fishing, and former Haida villages. Our final destination will be Daajing Giids (formerly known as Queen Charlotte City). We can drop you at the ferry terminal or at Sandspit airport the day after the trip.

Program Overview

Prerequisites

Interested candidates should have extensive (over 50 days) previous sea kayaking overnight experience and have some significant experience in dynamic waters such as strong currents, swells up to 3 metres and wind of up to 20 knots. You must be able to paddle for up to 6 hours per day (with breaks) at a speed of 3 knots. If you can not maintain this speed for up to 6 hours this program is not for you. We will be paddling in significant swell so if you are susceptible to sea sickness this is not a trip for you.

Candidates must have Paddle Canada Level 3 skills certification from a reputable provider, or equivalent experience .

If you do not meet these prerequisites, and are still interested in this challenging program, we may be able to provide you with some training beforehand. We will be camping for an extended period of time, which means this program is intense as well as mentally and physically demanding.

Participants older than 64 years old will need medical clearance from their doctor.

Program Outline

Following is a general outline for the Haida Gwaii Challenge.

Depending on weather, group needs, and conditions, the schedule will change. This advanced expedition has an open itinerary to ensure flexibility.

The course will incorporate workshops, food harvesting sessions, travel and exploration as the location and conditions dictate.

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
2 days before departure in the field June 22, 2025	Arrive in Haida Gwaii Pick ups available from Masset, Sandspit, Daajing Giids or Skidegate to your accommodation in Masset. Accommodation and meals at your own expense.		
Day 1 June 23, 2025	Explore Masset in your own time. Accommodation and meals at your own expense.	Group cultural interpretation and awareness with local Haida Gwaii indigenous people	Discussing packing and the weather. Share goals and expectations.
Day 2 June 24, 2025 Departure in the wilderness	0830am Grpup Meeting Packing and Departure from Masset	Travel by kayak Lunch is the first meal provided by SKILS	Camp setup and gourmet food.
Day 3–Day 20 June 25–July 12	Travel around Graham Island and surrounding islands		
Day 20	Arrive in Daajing Giids (formerly known as Queen Charlotte City).		Accommodation and evening meal at your own expense
Day 21	We can provide transportation to the ferry terminal in Skydegate or Sandspit airport		

Our Location

The coastline stretching around Graham Island will be our classroom. This stretch of coastline is very remote. Not to be overlooked is the opportunity to see terrestrial and aquatic wildlife on a grand scale as we paddle in a very rich environment. Below is the map illustrating the proposed route for the trip. The route may vary depending on weather conditions or human factors. We intentionally did not share some of our secrets spots on this map.



Participation

Packing and unpacking the boats, carrying them to and from the beach, and setting up and breaking camp will be a group effort. The old adage ‘many hands make light work’ holds true as always. There will also be lots of rest and relaxation time. If you’re handy around the kitchen, if you want to catch fish, harvest berries or plants to eat, or would like to learn about cooking on trip, help chopping vegetables and preparing for our

meals will always be welcome. As well, pitching in to help with cleanup after meals is greatly appreciated. We find that if everyone chips in a little with some of the chores, the tour is more enjoyable and eventful for all, as the guides have more time to do what they do best—guide. That means more time to explore and more time to take in the scenery.



Program Safety

Ocean kayaking and camping are not without risk. Certain sea kayaking rules and camping techniques must be agreed to and observed by all members of the tour to maximize the safety and enjoyment of all participants and minimize our impact on the ecosystem. We will discuss these rules, why they are necessary, and what contingency plans we will use in the event of an emergency, at the beginning of our time together.

In the event of an evacuation, participants are responsible for their evacuation costs. We highly recommend getting travel insurance.

The Elements

The weather is variable at all times on the west coast; during the expedition we can expect sun, rain and wind in varying amounts. Please come prepared. The water temperature varies from 12 degrees to 16 degrees Celsius. Bring warm clothing and immersion gear. Rubber boots and a good rain jacket and pants are highly recommended. Please test any new equipment before the trip and make sure that wrist gaskets are not too tight.

Your Guides

SKILS staff members are industry leaders and professionals with extensive guiding and instructional experience and certification. For profiles on each of our staff members, please visit our website at www.skills.ca.

Ratios and Group Size

Our minimum group size is 4 participants and 2 guides; our maximum group size is 8 participants and 2 guides.

Program Logistics

Accommodation

You will need to make your own accommodation arrangements in Masset for the night before the program starts and optionally after the program finishes in Daajing Giids. Masset and Daajing Giids are popular tourist destinations, so make certain you reserve your accommodation well in advance.

Transportation

You are responsible for transportation to Haida Gwaii. Once in Haida Gwaii, SKILS will carry the kayaks, the participants and the equipment. We will help you with the logistics. At least three weeks prior to the expedition, you can drop some gear and your kayak at the SKILS Base in Ucluelet. We will bring your kayak and gear to Haida Gwaii for you. You can also choose to rent a kayak or equipment from SKILS rental fleet (<https://skils.ca/rentals/>). The day before the expedition, we will pick up the participants at Masset Airport and bring them to their accommodation providers they selected. Pacific Coastal Airlines has flights to Masset airport. The day after the trip finishes, we can drop the participants at Sandspit airport or the Skidegate ferry terminal. Air Canada has flights to Sandspit airport. If SKILS transported your kayak and gear to Haida Gwaii, your gear and kayak will be back in Ucluelet no more than 6 days after the end of your trip.

Following is a list of links to help you plan your transportation.

- **Air Canada**
 - 1.888.247.2262 (in North America)
 - www.aircanada.com
- **Pacific Coastal**
 - (604) 663-2872
 - www.pacificcoastal.com
- **BC Ferries**
 - 1.888.BCFERRY (1.888.223.3779) from anywhere in North America
 - 1.250.386.3431 from outside North America
 - www.bcferrries.com

Meals

We are looking forward to surprise you with our gourmet food. SKILS will provide nutritious meals each day, beginning with lunch on the first day of your trip and finishing with lunch on day 19. Our meals are specially designed to be delicious, nutritious, and transported with us in our kayaks with minimal refrigeration. We will frequently harvest fresh fish, berries and plants on our trip for some tasty meals.

What SKILS Will Provide

The cost of the program includes highly experienced and certified guides and camping fees. You can rent kayaks from our fleet for a low fee. Please let us know if you need to rent a kayak from SKILS via this link: <https://skils.ca/rentals/>

Cooking Gear

- Stoves
- Fuel
- Lighters
- Pots and pans
- Cooking utensils
- Cutting boards
- Cups
- Bowls
- Plates
- Cutlery
- Washing basins
- Pot scrubbers

- Dishwashing soap

Safety and Group Gear

- First aid equipment
- VHF Marine Radio
- Repair Kit
- Signaling flares
- Large group tarps
- Reference library of wildlife and cultural books

Food and Water

- Drinking water in portable containers
- Nutritious meals and snacks

What You Need to Bring

Following is a list of gear that you will need on the course. Most items are required, however, an * indicates the item is optional.

Paddling Gear

- Sea kayak (at least 17 feet long)
- Paddle
- Sprayskirt
- ULC approved PFD with foam (Personal Flotation Device) Inflatable PFD not allowed.
- Whistle
- Hand pump
- Tow line or throw line (buoyant heaving line at least 15 meters in length)
- Paddle float
- *Spare paddle
- *Sponge for drying out hatches



If you are providing your own kayak and paddling gear for your program, your sea kayak must meet the following requirements: (1) it is suitable for open sea conditions; (2) it has positive buoyancy when capsized with no leaks; (3) it is able to adequately carry gear as required for the program; (4) it has perimeter lines; (5) and it is at least 17 feet long; can NOT be a wooden or thermoform kayak. Please note: recreational kayaks that do not meet the above requirements are not suitable for our program. If you have questions about the suitability of your kayak, please contact us. We have many suitable kayaks in our fleet and will be happy to match you up with an appropriate kayak for this program if you are concerned about the suitability of your own craft.

Camping Gear --- If you are paddling with a friend, we encourage you to share a tent as some campsites have limited space.

- Compact Tent
- Sleeping bag – 3 season bag – we recommend synthetic insulation
- Sleeping mat
- Tarp for your tent with thin cord (strongly recommended)
*camp chair

Toiletries

- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Sunscreen and lip balm with high SPF protection (25 +)

- Toilet paper
- *Biodegradable soap
- *Camp towel
- * Pads and/or Tampons or moon cup

Immersion Clothing

- Wet suit and paddling jacket or dry suit. You will be paddling in this gear for extended periods of time, so make sure it fits well.
- Neoprene booties or other immersion footwear
- Paddling gloves or poggies

Personal Clothing

The following is a guideline to assist with your packing; feel free to bring more or less as you feel necessary. Please avoid cotton as it keeps you cold when it's wet. Please wear clothing designed for outdoor use and made from Merino wool, silk or synthetic materials such as Capilene, polyester, polypropylene, or nylon.

Torso

- Rain Jacket
- 1-2 fleece or wool sweaters/jackets
- 2 pair long jane/john tops
- 1-2 T-shirts
- 1 wind breaker
- Storm Cag is optional but recommended

Legs

- Rain Pants
- 1-2 pair pants – At least one should be made of nylon
- 1 pair fleece or wool pants
- 1 pair long john/jane bottoms
- 1 pair shorts

Feet

- 2-3 pair warm sock made with synthetics and/or wool
- 1 pair camp shoes – Sneakers work well
- 1 pair of flexible rubber boots
- 1 pair sport sandals or shoes that can get wet
- *2 pair liner socks – Polypropylene or wool are common materials

Head

- 2 wool or fleece caps
- 1 Brimmed hat or baseball cap

Hands

- 1 pair of fleece or wool gloves
- *cycling gloves for paddling to prevent blisters

Miscellaneous Gear

- Headlamp or Flashlight with extra batteries
- Sunglasses with good UV protection with retriever strap
- Water bottle
- Mandatory Insect repellent
- Small day pack or fanny pack for carrying camera, water bottle, etc. on short hikes.
- Spare garbage bags and zip locks
- Bathing suit
- Rocky beach warning. Some beaches are rocky and hiking sticks are recommended if you have some balance/mobility issues.
- VHF Radio if you have one
- *Notebook with pencils &/or pens
- *camera
- *Pocket Knife
- *bug net/bug repellent
- *Small personal first aid kit
- *Moist towelettes for a quick cleanup
- *Good Book
- *Binoculars
- *Earplugs for light sleepers
- *Games such as cards
- *Buff to protect your face from the sun

If you need to rent gear such as kayaks, kayaking gear, tents, sleeping bags, or sleeping pads, you can make arrangements with SKILS; please visit <https://skils.ca/rentals/>

Packing your gear

You will need to waterproof at least your clothing and sleeping bag. Depending on how watertight your kayak is, you can pack the rest of your gear loose or in zip locks inside nylon stuff sacks. Here are two packing methods that work well. In fact, we usually use a combination of the two when we pack. Remember to leave room for group gear. All your front hatches will be dedicated to group food and gear. You will also have a 10 litres water bladder inside your cockpit. The rear hatches of your kayak will be dedicated to your personal gear.

Dry Bag Method

Dry Bags are especially designed for paddle sports and are available at most sporting goods stores. Depending on the closure system they do not always keep all the water out. Test them in the shower before the trip. You will need two 20 litre bags for your sleeping bag and bulky clothing and 2 or 3 10 to 15 litre bags for your other clothing and gear. We will provide you one 5 and one 20 litre drybag on the first morning of your trip. Let us know if you need more dry bags.

Stuff Sack with Garbage Bag Liner Method

This is the tried and true method of years gone by. Line a stuff sack with a garbage



bag. Pack as normal. Squeeze the air out before twisting the garbage bag top. Don't tie the garbage bag or use twist ties. Simply tuck the twisted end down into the stuff sack before drawing the top closed. This technique is reliable but not durable, so make sure you bring extra bags with you. You can improve the durability of this system by adding a 2nd stuff sack into the garbage bag creating a plastic sandwich. This method takes up less room than dry bags and makes the kayak easier to pack.

Medication

Please note that you will require a current tetanus shot (a tetanus shot is valid for 10 years). This is very important, as tetanus is a naturally occurring bacterium that lives in the soil. If you do not have up-to-date tetanus inoculation, you may contract tetanus through a scratch or cut and require immediate evacuation. A simple tetanus shot, easily accessible at most medical facilities, removes the risk of contracting tetanus.

Please be sure to inform us of any medical conditions we should be aware of. Please duplicate and separate any medications you will need during your program, and give your duplicated medications to your instructor, who will carry them. This will provide an additional source of medications should the primary set become wet, damaged, or lost. If you are prone to any health disturbances, e.g., easily infected cuts or severe migraines, please remember to bring any preventive medications. If you have any questions about medications, contact your doctor.

Swell or wind waves can be encountered on the ocean. If seasickness is of concern to you, your doctor or pharmacist may be able to recommend medication to help. Also, anti-nausea (drug-free) Gravol Ginger, candied ginger as well as wristbands work well for many people. Be sure to let us know if you anticipate that seasickness will be a problem for you.

Preparing for Your Program

Kayaking requires some upper body strength and endurance. We recommend that you get out kayaking several times prior to your program. If you feel you could use some upper body conditioning before your trip, exercising with light weights can be quite helpful. Concentrate mainly on shoulder strengthening exercises, focusing on endurance rather than strength.