

# Vancouver getaway: Exploring the magic of Haida Gwaii

by Jennifer Foden

Haida Gwaii – formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands (until 2010 when it was renamed as part of a reconciliation protocol between the province of British Columbia and the Haida people) – is an archipelago off the west coast of B.C. approximately 1,200 kilometres north of Vancouver. It's easy to see why Haida Gwaii – comprised of remote islands, centuries-old totem poles and vast, wildlife-rich rainforests – is often referred to as "[the edge of the world](#)." The natural beauty and rich culture here is just magical. [Photo courtesy of Destination BC/Brandon Hartwig]

## Getting there

Despite having a small population (less than 5,000 people), there are two airports on Haida Gwaii – Sandspit and Masset. [Air Canada](#) flies daily from Vancouver to the former, [Pacific Coastal Airlines](#) offers regular flights to the latter. In the summertime, [West Coast Resorts](#) offers a charter flight on Wednesdays and Sundays. The flight is just over an hour. If a road trip is more your style, you can take an eight-hour ferry ride between Prince Rupert and Queen Charlotte.



## Checking in

The Haida Gwaii tourism website has a [complete directory](#) of places to lay your head – from camping and RV parks to guesthouses and lodges. If you're looking for an all-inclusive experience, the brand new, 100 per cent Haida owned and operated [Ocean House](#), located on the vacant western shoreline of Peel Inlet, not only offers beautiful accommodations, but daily meals, return airfare and plenty of activities, such as hiking, boating excursions, cultural tours and more.

## What to do

Haida Gwaii is an outdoor adventurer's paradise. [Hike](#) in the lush, green rainforest. [Fish](#) the Pacific Ocean for salmon and halibut. [Spot wildlife](#) – from whales and deer to eagles and bears – in their natural habitat. Weave your way through the 150 islands that make up Haida Gwaii in a [kayak, canoe or zodiac](#). Go [surfing](#). Explore the area's endless beaches. Take a [helicopter](#) or seaplane ride over the archipelago and appreciate the area's beauty. Soak in the [natural hot springs](#).

Just when you thought nothing could rival the area's natural, secluded beauty – you'll find that the main reason to visit Haida Gwaii is the culture, which dates back over 13,000 years. The Haida people are beyond friendly, happy to share their stories and history. An absolute must-see is [SGang Gwaay](#), a Haida heritage site in Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve. This secluded UNESCO World Heritage Site contains the remains of a Haida village, complete with centuries-old totem poles and cedar longhouses. Note that this area is only accessible by boat or seaplane, so it does require some planning in advance.

Also, be sure to check out the beautifully designed [Haida Heritage Centre](#) in Skidegate, filled with vibrant totem poles, art, canoes and artifacts. Some of the area's Haida owned and operated lodges, such as [Ocean House](#) and [Haida House](#), have onsite cultural programming, where guests can meet Haida interpreters and artists. Meet (and learn from!) a master weaver, carver, painter, singer or storyteller.

Guudang.ngaay k'iina ýanjuugwang gud 'láa (happy travels!)

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