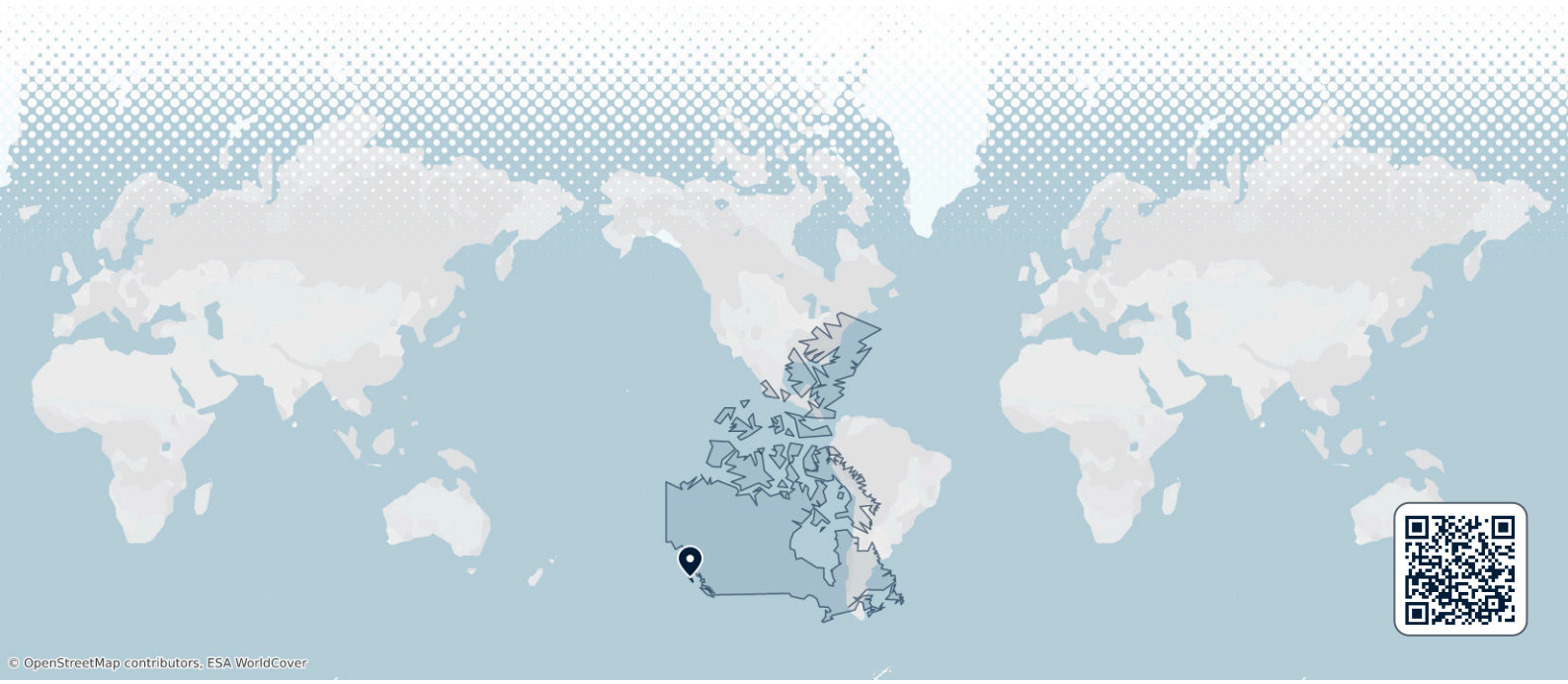


# Haida Gwaii

British Columbia · Canada

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



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## Overview

Haida Gwaii is a remote archipelago off the north coast of British Columbia. It is the homeland of the Haida Nation. The islands were known as the Queen Charlotte Islands until 2010. Today the Haida name is used, and Haida culture is part of daily life across the islands.

People come for old rainforest, empty beaches, wildlife and Haida art and history. The islands are far from everything, and the pace is slow. A trip suits visitors who want quiet, nature and respectful learning about Haida culture. Plan at least five nights. Gwaii Haanas in the south needs extra days and advance booking.

## When to visit

Summer is the best time. June to September has the longest days, the calmest weather and the most open tours and lodges. Gwaii Haanas is busiest in these months. Spring and autumn are quieter, with fewer services. Winter is wet and stormy, and many visitor services close.

It rains often in every season. Bring waterproof clothing and warm layers even in July.

| MONTH | CONDITIONS | DAY °C avg / max | NIGHT °C avg / min | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | Poor<br>Poor for watersports | 6° / 10°<br>Feels like 1° | 4° / -3° | 21 rainy days · Dry air |
| February | Poor<br>Poor for wildlife watching | 6° / 9°<br>Feels like 1° | 3° / -2° | 17 rainy days · Dry air |
| March | Poor<br>Poor for watersports | 7° / 10°<br>Feels like 2° | 3° / -1° | 21 rainy days · Dry air |
| April | Poor<br>Poor for hiking | 9° / 12°<br>Feels like 4° | 5° / 2° | 19 rainy days · Dry air |
| May | Fair<br>Fair for hiking | 11° / 16°<br>Feels like 8° | 7° / 4° | 16 rainy days · Dry air |
| June | Good<br>Good for hiking | 14° / 18° | 10° / 7° | 15 rainy days · Dry air |
| July | Good<br>Good for hiking | 16° / 20° | 12° / 10° | 14 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds |
| August | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 17° / 21° | 13° / 11° | 15 rainy days · Dry air |
| September | Fair<br>Fair for hiking | 15° / 18° | 12° / 9° | 18 rainy days · Dry air |
| October | Poor<br>Poor for hiking | 12° / 15°<br>Feels like 8° | 8° / 5° | 21 rainy days · Dry air |
| November | Poor<br>Poor for watersports | 8° / 12°<br>Feels like 3° | 5° / 1° | 22 rainy days · Dry air |
| December | Poor<br>Poor for watersports | 6° / 10°<br>Feels like 1° | 4° / -1° | 22 rainy days · Dry air |

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

## Top sights

- A Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay is the best first stop. It is a Haida cultural centre with a museum, carving house and totem poles, at Skidegate. It is also a good place to learn about Haida history before you travel further.
- Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site covers the southern islands. The Council of the Haida Nation and Parks Canada manage it together. It has old villages, hot springs, kelp forests and coastline. There are no roads, so you reach it by boat or floatplane.
- B SGang Gwaay World Heritage Site is a Haida village site in the far south of Gwaii Haanas. It has standing mortuary and house poles. Haida Watchmen look after it in the visitor season. Treat it as a sacred place.
- Naikoon Provincial Park covers the northeast of Graham Island. It has long sand beaches, dunes and forest. Tow Hill gives views over the beach and the north coast.
- Agate Beach, near Tow Hill, is a place for long beach walks. Many visitors look for small agates along the tide line.
- Daajing Giids and Skidegate are the main communities on the south of Graham Island. They have galleries, small shops and views over Skidegate Inlet.




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## What to experience

- Join a Haida-led or Haida-guided cultural tour. The Heritage Centre runs daily tours in summer, in groups of up to 25. Book ahead.
- Watch carvers at work in the Carving House at the Heritage Centre.
- Take a boat, floatplane or kayak trip into Gwaii Haanas with a licensed operator. Allow several days if you can.
- Walk Agate Beach at low tide and look for agates along the shore.
- Walk up Tow Hill for the view over the north coast.
- Spend a slow day in the forest and on the shore. Bring binoculars for eagles and seabirds.

## Where to explore

- Prince Rupert is the ferry port on the mainland.
- Vancouver Island has the Inside Passage ferry link to Prince Rupert, from Port Hardy.
- Vancouver is the main flight gateway.

## Getting there

- **By ferry**: BC Ferries sails year-round (less often outside summer) from Prince Rupert to Skidegate Landing on Graham Island. The crossing takes about 7 hours. Reservations are essential, especially in summer. An Inside Passage ferry links Port Hardy on Vancouver Island with Prince Rupert.
- **By air to Sandspit**: Air Canada flies from Vancouver International Airport (YVR) to Sandspit (YZP) on Moresby Island. A small ferry (about 20 minutes) links Moresby Island to Graham Island.
- **By air to Masset**: Pacific Coastal Airlines flies from the South Terminal at Vancouver International Airport (YVR) to Masset (ZMT) in the north of Graham Island.
- **From Prince Rupert by air**: Inland Air flies from Prince Rupert to Masset, Daajing Giids and Sandspit.
- **From Vancouver**: Most visitors fly. Driving needs the long route north to Prince Rupert and then the ferry.
- **Into Gwaii Haanas**: There are no roads. Access is by boat or floatplane, on a guided trip or on a self-guided trip with a reservation.

## Getting around

- **Public transport**: Very limited. Do not plan to cover the islands without your own transport.
- **Car**: The best way to see Graham Island. Rental offices are in Daajing Giids, Masset and Sandspit. Book early in summer.
- **Taxi and shuttle**: Taxis and airport shuttles run on request. Arrange pick-ups in advance, especially for late flights and ferries.
- **Ferry between islands**: A small ferry connects Graham Island and Moresby Island, about 20 minutes each way. Check the schedule before you go to Sandspit.
- **Boat and floatplane**: Needed for Gwaii Haanas. Licensed operators run day trips, kayak trips and multi-day boat trips.
- **On foot and by bike**: Distances between communities are long. Walking is best within towns and on beaches and boardwalks.

Plan ahead for ferries and flights. For Gwaii Haanas, see Parks Canada: Gwaii Haanas.

### Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

**Low**

Communities are small and far apart, so most visitors need a vehicle.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

**Low**

Distances are long and the weather is wet, so cycling suits experienced riders only.

## Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** Yes on Graham Island. Sights and communities are spread along one main road, Highway 16, which runs about 100 km from Skidegate to Masset.
- **Fuel and supplies**: Stations and shops are few. Fill the tank and buy groceries in Daajing Giids or Masset before long drives.
- **Roads**: Some roads to beaches and trailheads are gravel or logging roads. Drive slowly. Deer and bears can be on the road, especially at dusk.

# Food & drink

Seafood is the main local food. Halibut, salmon and prawns appear on menus in season. Eating places are small and few. Many close early or in the off-season, so check opening times and book ahead for dinner.

Daajing Giids and Masset have the main cafes, shops and grocery stores. If you stay in a remote lodge or cabin, bring food from a town first. The Heritage Centre has a small bistro.

## What to eat & drink

### DINNER

**Tourtière**
A savory meat pie, traditionally made with pork, beef, or game, especially popular in Quebec.

### SNACKS & STREET FOOD

**Poutine**
Fries topped with cheese curds and hot gravy, originally from Quebec and now popular nationwide.

**Bannock**
A simple fried or baked bread with roots in Indigenous cooking, found in many regional variations across the country.

**Montreal-style Bagel · Bagel montréalais**
A smaller, sweeter, denser bagel than the New York style, boiled in honey water and baked in a wood-fired oven.

**Maple Syrup · Sirop d'érable**
Syrup tapped from maple trees, mainly in Quebec and Ontario, used on pancakes and in baking and savory dishes alike.

### SWEETS & DESSERTS

**Butter Tart**
A small pastry shell filled with a sweet, gooey butter, sugar, and egg filling, sometimes with raisins or pecans.

**Nanaimo Bar**
A no-bake dessert bar from British Columbia with a chocolate-crumb base, custard filling, and chocolate topping.

### DRINKS

**Caesar**
Canada's signature cocktail: vodka, Clamato juice (tomato and clam broth), and spices, served with a celery stalk.

**Canadian Whisky**
A lighter, smoother style of whisky than Scotch or Bourbon, often blended with rye.

**Ice Wine**
A sweet dessert wine made from grapes frozen on the vine, produced mainly in Ontario's Niagara region and British Columbia's Okanagan Valley.

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## Safety & health

Haida Gwaii is very safe for visitors. The main risks are weather, remoteness and the sea.

- **Remote medical care**: A hospital and health centre is in Daajing Giids. Serious cases need air transfer to the mainland. Carry your own medicines and any first-aid supplies you need.
- **No phone signal**: There is no mobile service in Gwaii Haanas and in many parts of the islands. Tell someone your plans. Carry a satellite messenger on backcountry trips.
- **Weather and water**: Rain, wind and fog can change plans at short notice. Sea conditions can delay boats, floatplanes and ferries. Leave extra days at the end of your trip.
- **Wildlife**: Black bears live on the islands. Store food securely when camping.
- **Respect for sites**: Do not touch or move poles, house remains or grave sites. Follow the directions of Haida Watchmen and guides. Ask before you photograph people.

## History

The Haida have lived on these islands for thousands of years. Villages stood along the coast, with large cedar houses and carved poles. Haida canoes, art and trade were known along the whole coast.

In the 1800s, newcomers brought diseases such as smallpox. The Haida population fell sharply. Many villages were left empty, and survivors moved to Skidegate and Old Massett. The standing poles at SGang Gwaay World Heritage Site come from this time and show how the old villages looked.

In 1985, Haida people blocked logging on Lyell Island. This led to the protection of the south, and to the 1993 agreement that created Gwaii Haanas under shared Haida and federal management. In 2010 the islands were officially renamed Haida Gwaii.

Today Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay shows Haida art and culture as a living tradition. Its canoe house holds a canoe made by *Bill Reid*.

## Country facts

Quick practical facts for Canada at a glance:

CURRENCY
**CAD $**

EMERGENCY
**911**

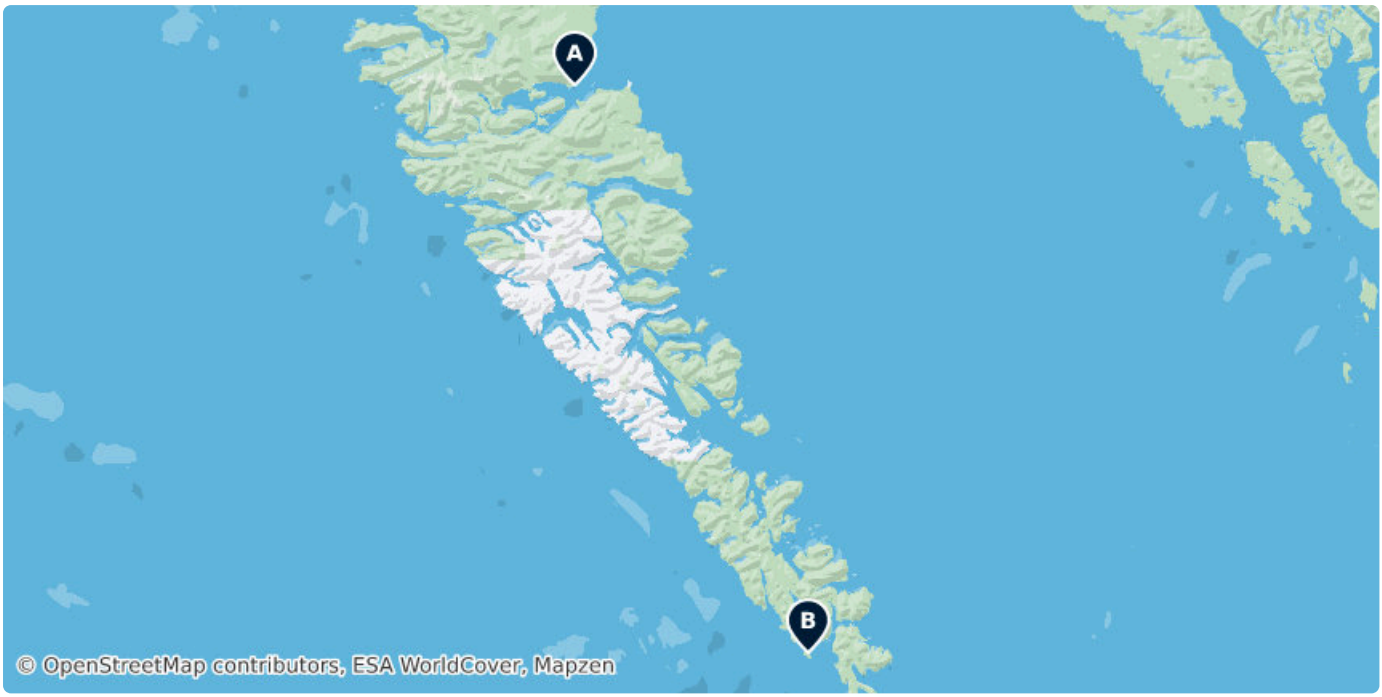
ELECTRICITY

Type A / Type B
120 V · 60 Hz

LANGUAGES
English, French

TAP WATER
**Safe to drink**

# Top sights






## A Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay

Cultural centre and museum of the Haida people, built as five cedar longhouses and opened in 2007. It houses the Haida Gwaii Museum, a performance house, a canoe house and a carving shed.

Second Beach Road 2, V0T 1S1 Skidegate, CA
(53.24818, -131.99726)

| | |
|---|---|
| Sep-Apr Tu–Sa | 10:00–17:00 |
| May-Aug Mo–Sa | 10:00–17:00 |

haidaheritagecentre.com, 250-559-7885



## B SG̱ang Gwaay World Heritage Site

Remote Haida village site on Anthony Island whose totem poles still stand where they were carved. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site within Gwaii Haanas.

V0T, Canada (52.09824, -131.21669)

## DATA SOURCES

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