

Image © Bluewater Adventures



Being a Bear Viewing Guide is so Much More Than a Summer Job

By Eric Boyum
Ocean Adventures Charter Co. Ltd.

Is it just a summer job? In my opinion, no. Perhaps you have just landed a job at one of the lodges or charter boats that take people from all over the world to see bears. Maybe you have just enrolled in the Assistant Guides course with the CBVA, or have just completed it. Whatever the case may be, you are about to join a family of people that care deeply about bears!

Once you have experienced these magnificent animals, they become part of your soul, part of who you are. I believe the bears share themselves with us because somewhere in their own souls they know that we can help them as a species.

Commercial Bear Viewing Association Spring / Summer 2011

Bear Viewing Guide Training

By Grant MacHutchon
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Photo credit: Ocean Adventures

since 2005 and we have had many great opportunities to interact with bears during these courses, but this grizzly bear made a surprise appearance in front of us then proceeded to exhibit several behaviours we had just been discussing during lecture.

As it continued to advance toward us, I started to wonder if someone in our group was actually going to have to take charge. I was not too concerned about our safety, however, as we were a large group and we were right beside the bus. Besides, I was standing at the back of the group!

The young grizzly bear was steadily advancing toward us, so I half jokingly said, "Who's in charge of this group anyway?"

In the back of my mind I was thinking "What a wonderful teaching opportunity!"

I've been teaching 2-3 day Assistant Bear Viewing Guide training courses for the **CBVA**



Photo credit: Bluewater Adventures

There is a paradox here, however. On one side of the coin, there are people who are very passionate and willing to do everything they can do to help bears. On the other side, we are all part of the human race and we are responsible for the main threats to the bears existence and survival. As long as the seemingly unquenchable thirst for our planets natural resources continue, the bears survival will remain threatened.



Photo credit: Bluewater Adventures

How can we all help to ensure the bears survival?

1. Rally with others to stop a pipeline and keep oil tankers off our coast.
2. Walk more, or bike, or drive a more fuel efficient vehicle.
3. Call an environmental organization and find out how you can help stop the trophy hunting of our bears and other wild animals.
4. Save our salmon! Write letters to government calling for the creation of larger, interconnected protected areas.
5. Support First Nations with their environmental goals and tourism initiatives. They have always held the highest respect for bears within their culture.
6. Make wise, sustainable choices while shopping. The power of the consumer to

When the bear first saw us it was acting curious, but as it advanced it began to look a little more determined. It eventually decided this was far too big a group to tangle with, so it moved off the road back into the forest.

“What were you feeling about the situation?” I asked the group. “What behaviours did you notice?” “What would you have done if you were guiding clients rather than being here with your peers?” This very real bear experience gave us the opportunity to discuss the bear’s behaviour, what we could learn from its body language, what relative safety risk the bear presented, how we would handle a client group in the same situation, and what we might share with the clients about the bear and its ecology. All of this while standing within a picturesque coastal forest!

This situation clearly illustrated to me the beauty of teaching the Assistant Bear Viewing Guide training course at an actual bear viewing location rather than in a classroom back in the city. It gives student guides an opportunity to learn by actually interacting with bears and seeing how the bears respond to human presence.

Just as importantly, it gives me an opportunity to reinforce one of the main goals of the CBVA and its guide training, that is to have safe and enjoyable experiences watching bears, but to minimally disrupt the bear’s normal behaviour and minimize any impacts on them.

The priorities of bear viewing under the **CBVA Best Practices Guidelines** are the safety of guests and the safety and health of bears and other animals. The CBVA Assistant Bear Viewing Guide training program has evolved considerably since it was first made available in 2005 and now includes a well established curriculum and comprehensive training resource manual. It is complemented by the more dynamic CBVA Best Practices Guidelines, which evolve with greater experience of CBVA member companies, new research, and innovative new ways to view bears but still be respectful of their needs.



Photo credit: Leanne Carey

It has been my pleasure to teach nearly 100 aspiring bear viewing guides over the last six years. In my mind, it has made the commercial bear viewing industry much more consistent in their approach and more respectful of the bears whose continued presence and well being are critical to the future of the industry.

Member Profile

About Jamie Scarrow

By Jamie Scarrow

I began my career as a wildlife guide thirteen years ago when I accepted a job at Knight Inlet Lodge, a remote wilderness destination in coastal British Columbia. The lodge offers world-class grizzly bear viewing adventures and is set amid the

effect change is unequalled!

- 7. Educate your friends and gain their support.
- 8. Organize a rally or a fundraiser.

There truly are so many ways we can all help!



Photo credit: Bluewater Adventures

Excitement is building for all of us once again as the bear viewing season is only a few months away! The images we hold dear of a mother and cubs feeding in the new sedge grass of spring, fuels our preparations for the season.

Once the guests begin to arrive from all over the world, it is time to share your passion for these great animals. Share your new found knowledge and understanding of the biology and behavior of bears. Learn the habits that give each bear it's individuality - and share these with your guests! Educate your guests to the threats that are facing the bears and let them know what they can do to help.

Your job has placed you in a very important position. Your efforts will be rewarded with countless amazing experiences. You are an ambassador for the bears and they are counting on you to advocate for them. Always remember that being a bear viewing guide is so much more than just a summer job!

Current CBVA Members

Our member companies offer trips throughout British Columbia to view grizzly (*Ursus arctos*), black (*Ursus americanus*) and spirit bears (*Ursus americanus kermodei*) in remote wilderness settings. With many years and thousands of hours of incident-

snow-capped peaks of Canada's most beautiful fjord.

At first I thought it would just be an interesting summer diversion but grizzlies, guiding and Knight Inlet took hold of my soul and it ended up being a dream job and the beginning of a lifelong career. After two seasons viewing the magnificent grizzlies, I really felt the need to start documenting what I was seeing and I picked up my first camera.

Guiding in Knight Inlet has allowed me to spend countless hours with the bears and I've learned a huge amount about this glorious landscape and the magnificent creatures that inhabit it in that time. Bears in particular are highly misunderstood. Of course all bears are potentially dangerous, but if treated with respect and given a wide berth, they can be very placid animals. They are highly intelligent and can be quite playful and even comical, both on an individual level and when interacting with other bears. This is the side of their nature that I choose to portray in my pictures.



Photo credit: Sherry Kirkvold

Photography has become a real passion for me and I've been fortunate to have worked with many film crews and professional photographers over the years. My most memorable experience was just two years ago when I helped the BBC with filming on an episode of Nature's Great Events entitled "The Great Salmon Run".

I was in the water with the videographer just a few feet from the bears while they searched for salmon. It was an exhilarating experience but not as frightening as you would think. Understanding animal behaviour is of utmost importance when photographing wildlife, as is having the patience to wait for just the right moment. By reading the bears' body language and taking our time we were able to get close to these well-known individual grizzlies.

Working in Knight Inlet was a turning point for me and has led to other great opportunities in guiding around the world. For five winters (the off season at Knight Inlet) I headed to Churchill, Manitoba, famous as one of the best places to sight polar bears. From the safety of a giant Tundra Buggy visitors can watch the bears gathering along the coast of Hudson Bay as they wait patiently for the sea to freeze so they have a platform to hunt for seals.



Photo credit: Natalie Bowes

For the last four years I've been heading south to Antarctica where I work as a naturalist on board expedition ships taking guests to see the wonders of the white continent. It has been an amazing privilege to visit Antarctica. I've made 39 trips and the penguins, icebergs and glaciers never cease to amaze me.

I'm very blessed being a guide; the outdoor office really can't be beat and I've been to places that I would never have thought

free viewing in the company of wild bears, our members are justifiably the leaders in this industry.

Bluewater Adventures
Bute Inlet Adventure Tours
Great Bear Nature Tours
Grizzly Bear Ranch
Knight Inlet Lodge
Maple Leaf Adventures
Mothership Adventures
Ocean Adventures
Ocean Light II Adventures
Running Bear Adventures
Spirit Bear Adventures
Tide Rip Tours
Tweedsmuir Park Lodge

This e-news was completed by the office team at Bluewater Adventures.

possible. When I'm outdoors watching wildlife I find it easy to be perpetually happy - even if it's raining or 20 degrees below freezing - but I'm not immune to the pressures that the natural world is under. I try to be an ambassador for conservation and express beauty and importance of some of the world's most fragile ecosystems and most vulnerable animals through my photography. In this way I hope I can make a difference and in some small way educate those who see my photos.

My next step in life will have me combining my expertise in the guiding and travel industry with my passion for photography. I've recently started up my own photography tour business which will allow me to continue to guide and travel but spend much more time at home. I love photography, I love guiding and I love to teach, so come join me on a tour soon!

www.jamiescarrow.com
www.wildfocus.com

Jamie Scarrow is one of British Columbia's premier wildlife photographers and his work has been published in notable magazines such as National Geographic and Nature Conservancy.

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