



Bear Viewing Guidelines

The following guidelines have been developed to ensure the conservation of bears and their natural behaviour, and the safety and quality of the viewing experience for humans. These guidelines should be used in association with the Commercial Bear Viewing Association guidelines, however in any instances where the guidelines conflict, these guidelines will take precedence. These guidelines must be followed by all bear viewers.

1. *General Viewing Guidelines*

- 1.1. Kitasoo/Xai'xais territory is home to both grizzly and black bears. Bear viewing and travelling on shore can be dangerous and is not recommended unless you are with a guide or have the appropriate training, experience, and local knowledge.
- 1.2. Bear viewing in groups of four or more is recommended.
- 1.3. Prior to viewing, visitors should research or otherwise understand bear behavior, best practices for food and waste management, bear safety, and what to do if an encounter with a bear should occur.
- 1.4. At all times while viewing bears, watch for subtle cues indicating that a bear may be becoming stressed such as:
 - standing up to look at your group and/or vessel
 - stopping feeding
 - moving into cover and back out repeatedly
 - directly looking at your group and/or vessel (not a scan, but a direct look and then a return to feeding)
 - a yawn or scratch apparently out of place
 - appearing nervous or uncertain
- 1.5. If viewers witness a bear exhibiting signs of stress or alarm without resuming normal behaviour, back off and maintain a distance of 100m, or end the viewing session with that particular bear and leave the area as soon as it is safe to do so.
- 1.6. There is a significant difference between a stressed bear and an angry or aggressive bear. Learn to identify the different behavioural cues of a stressed bear, or an angry or aggressive bear. If any of the following signs are observed, it can indicate that the bear is angry and that the viewing party may have missed the early warning stress signs:
 - growling,



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- snapping/popping jaws or teeth,
 - running away/toward observer,
 - pacing,
 - chuffing (also referred to as “huffing”),
 - ears laid back,
 - stamping feet
- 1.7. Angry/aggressive bears must be left alone. The time of year can affect bear behavior (eg. mating season and critical feeding times).
- 1.8. Pursuit viewing or stalking is not permitted. If a bear does not come closer to the group or leaves the area once viewing commences, the group may not pursue the bear to achieve closer viewing. Do not “corner” bears or cut off its intended route of travel. Bears must have an escape route.
- 1.9. Report any irresponsible or unsafe behavior to the Guardians and/or BC Parks Rangers.

2. Group Management

- 2.1. Group sizes for all viewing, both land-based and water-based, are not to exceed 16 people. In most places, smaller groups (4-8) are more appropriate.
- 2.2. Always be aware of where your group is situated and how you may be impacting the bear(s). Be predictable if visiting an area more than once and use designated trails and viewing areas where they exist. If unsure, do not go ashore.
- 2.3. Viewers are to stay in a single cohesive group. Bears are apt to perceive a greater threat from the proximity of two or more groups. A single cohesive group is safer and will have a lower impact on bears.
- 2.4. All packs/bags must always be kept with the group.
- 2.5. Groups should always remain together, alert, and quiet while viewing bears. Make every effort to appear non-threatening - never yell, whistle or otherwise attempt to attract the attention of the bears. Keep movements slow and deliberate to lessen the chances of spooking bears or causing them stress.
- 2.6. Do not hide from bears. Keep in the open where bears can choose to avoid you. Hiding from bears increases the likelihood that you will have a surprise encounter, which can end in an injurious incident.



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3. *Water-Based Viewing*

- 3.1. Watercrafts will strive to remain at a distance of 50 metres from the bear(s) to allow for accurate assessment of appropriate viewing distance.
- 3.2. At no time will a watercraft approach a bear closer than 30 metres (approximately 100 feet). However, there may be instances when a watercraft is stationary or drifting silently and a bear's movement brings it to a distance closer than 30 metres. No matter what the circumstance, always set an acceptable and safe boundary for their group.
- 3.3. If a bear shows any sign of stress it is recommended to maintain a distance of 100 metres or more and leave the area if the bear continues to display a negative reaction.
- 3.4. When leaving a viewing session, watercrafts will depart the scene in as unobtrusive a fashion as possible.
- 3.5. Watercrafts within the viewing zones should proceed slowly, at 5km (3 knots)/hour or less. Keeping your outboard motor at a steady pace on slow idle will be less likely to disrupt bears.
- 3.6. The use of jet boats for bear viewing is discouraged.
- 3.7. No more than two small vessels (*e.g.* motorized inflatable watercrafts, dingys, skiffs, kayaks or canoes) should be in the same viewing area at one time. If there is more than one vessel, these should stay grouped or rafted together and comprise in total no more than 14 people. Care must be taken to not surround or crowd a bear when there is more than one vessel.

4. *Land-Based Viewing*

- 4.1. Land-based viewing is not recommended.
- 4.2. A distance of at least 30 metres must be maintained from bears at all times. If a bear approaches, back off slowly and maintain 30 metres of distance or stand up and make your group known.
- 4.3. Groups should walk along established trails where they exist. Caution should always be used, as a group could come across a bear unexpectedly. Should bears be present along the route or proximal to the viewing area, viewers must pull back until the area is clear, or leave.
- 4.4. If a bear shows signs of being angry/aggressive the group should carefully leave the area. People must stay in a close group while on land.



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5. Food

- 5.1. Extraordinary effort will be made to avoid food-conditioning of bears in and around bear viewing areas. It is not recommended that bear viewers bring food into viewing areas. Users are recommended to return to their vessels to eat meals. Food and garbage must be stored so that it is not accessible to bears. If food is onsite, people must use care and common sense in the designated viewing area. No food or packs may be left unattended anywhere in the viewing area. Food wrappers, bags, and other garbage must be kept in packs and removed from the site when the visitors leave. Under no circumstances are bears to be fed or exposed to human food, whether deliberately or by accident.

6. Pets

- 6.1. Pets are not permitted in parts of some protected areas and are not recommended in areas where land or water-based bear viewing takes place.
- 6.2. Do not bring pet(s) ashore if a bear is on-site and remove pet immediately if a bear is observed in the area.
- 6.3. Pets must always be on leash and under control.
- 6.4. Owners should direct pets to deposit waste in intertidal areas (ie. below high tide) to remove any trace of scent. Owners must collect and remove solid waste.

7. Human Wastes

- 7.1. "Leave No Trace" guidelines should be followed. This means all human waste, including toilet paper, must be removed from the site. The best solution is for users to return to their vessels to use the closed containment toilets onboard their vessels. For urination needs, the area below high tide might be used judiciously.

8. Noise

- 8.1. Groups shall maintain quiet levels of conversation while bear viewing or waiting for bears to appear. Noises such as shouting, whistling or loud talking may scare away the bears and will cause bears unnecessary stress. Portable radios should be tested in advance to ensure the volume is set low.

9. Bear Deterrents: Bear spray, Noise-makers, and Firearms

- 9.1. All groups should carry immediately accessible bear spray and be knowledgeable about its use. Eye wash bottles or water should be kept on hand in case of contact with spray discharge and used to flush the affected area.



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- 9.2. Any use of bear spray, whether deliberately or accidentally discharged, should be reported to Kitasoo/Xai'xais Guardians and/or BC Parks Rangers as well as any other users in the area. The active ingredient in bear spray can act as a bear attractant after it has been deposited on the ground.
- 9.3. Bangers and other noise-makers are known to be less effective than bear spray and are not recommended. The use of screamers is prohibited.
- 9.4. Firearms may not be carried while bear viewing. No deterrent is 100% effective, but compared to firearms, proper use of bear spray is the best method for self-defense, and for preventing injury to the person and animal involved.