



Introduction

Sii.ngaay 'laa • Sáŋgee 'láa! *Good day!* Welcome to the Haida Gwaii Visitor Orientation. We want to share with you the origins of our people and your role as a guest in our homelands. While visiting Haida Territories, we ask for your respect to our Air, Ocean, Lands and People. The respect you give will be returned as you learn about our history that reaches back before Raven brought light to the world.

1. Haida Origins

Haida origins are credited to several hundred **Nang SGáanuwee** *Supernatural Beings*. They created our lands, waters, and ways of life. Our oral records reveal the true beginnings of Haida Gwaii and our people. Prior to European contact, our ways of life developed through living on the land and connection with other coastal peoples, creating relationships that have continued to this day.

a. **Xuuya Kaagang.ngas** *Raven Travelling*

- i. Much of what we see today on Haida Gwaii was created by **Nang Kílslaas** *The One Whose Voice is Obeyed* (also known as Raven). Known to transform into anything, **Nang Kílslas** is not limited by gender or animal. You will often see depictions of them in Haida carvings or paintings in various forms, including making appearances as a pine needle, a human child, and a woman. We show **Nang Kílslaas** great respect for teaching our people many lessons about caring for Haida Gwaii.

b. **Early Trade**

- i. While North America became populated, our people traded with many coastal nations including Ts'msyen, Nisga'a, and Heilstuk, extending downwards to what is now known as California and beyond. Through intermarriage and exchange of traded items like copper, mountain goat wool, and oolichan grease, coastal relationships were, and continue to be, very important. Our oral records also account for interactions with peoples across the Pacific, noting times of trade between the Japanese, Russian, and Polynesian peoples whose records align with ours.

2. Even After All That We Survived

As our guests, it is important that you know the realities of colonization and the history of genocide and forced assimilation that occurred here and throughout Canada. Anyone you speak with on Haida Gwaii could be directly impacted by these historical traumas, and we ask that you be sensitive to these matters when listening and learning. The following timeline speaks of a very dark period, and it's necessary in order to learn the true history of Canada.

a. **Fur Trade**

- i. As Europeans began to explore, more trade relationships formed. Focus was gradually taken away from harvest cycles and trade relationships with the other



coastal nations. Because of the fur trade, our *kuu sea otters* left Haida waters, and only recently they have started to return, though not in their original numbers.

b. Disease and Decimation

- i. Before disease broke out on Haida Gwaii, we had hundreds of clans and villages populating the Islands in the tens of thousands. Several diseases, such as smallpox and measles, began to impact Haida numbers in the early 1800s. A wave of smallpox in 1862 decimated our people to near extinction taking over 95% of our population. Our oral records of the intentional introduction of smallpox have been reaffirmed in Tom Swankey's recent publications, including work that has been vetted by the Haida Nation. Through evidence found in captains' logs and journals of government officials such as Francis Poole and James Douglas, this disease outbreak has been confirmed as an act of biological warfare.

c. Indian Act

- i. The Indian Act was created in 1876, approximately ten years after smallpox was introduced. This Act segregated our people (and all other Indigenous peoples within so-called Canada) onto what were called "reserves," which still exist today. The reserves on Haida Gwaii were placed on top of the existing villages of *HlGaagilda Skidegate* and *Gaw Tlagée Old Massett*. Amendments to the Act, including the Potlatch Ban, the Residential School System, and the Sixties Scoop continued to force assimilation by outlawing cultural practices and taking children away from their homelands and families. Because a Residential School was not built on Haida Gwaii, our children were taken as far as Vancouver Island and Alberta, some of whom never returned home.

3. Resurgence and Resilience

Through all that has been done to assimilate our people, we have remained deeply rooted to the lands and waters of Haida Gwaii. The strength of our ancestors has guided us to care for our Territories and has kept our people and ways of life breathing.

a. Watchmen Program

- i. The Haida Gwaii Watchmen formed in 1981 to protect and care for the sensitive and important Haida village sites located around the Islands. With increasing visitor numbers to Haida Gwaii, the role these Watchmen play is imperative in keeping our villages safe and undisturbed.
- ii. There are still hundreds of village sites around Haida Gwaii, and it's important to be careful in all areas during your travels. Nearly every stretch of beach could be an ancient village site where human remains and their personal belongings could lie. Our Haida Ways of Being include respecting ancestral remains and letting everything return to the Earth.

b. Athlii Gwaay Lyell Island

- i. In November of 1985, our nation took a stand to reject the relentless industrial logging practices in the Haida Heritage site of *Gwaii Haanas Islands of Beauty*.



Haida Law was upheld to protect the integrity of our lands and waters at **Athlii Gwaay**. Seventy-two people were arrested, of those sixty-six were citizens of the Haida Nation, the other six were Indigenous and Canadian allies who were invited to stand on the line with our people. The court hearings and efforts collectively resulted in a halt to logging in **Gwaii Haanas**. Through the creation of the Gwaii Haanas Agreement, we “agreed to disagree” with the government of Canada about who owns the land, but both decided that **Gwaii Haanas** would be protected for future generations.

4. Haida Governance

Our Nation continues to abide by governance under our **K'uul Jaad** • **K'ul Jáad** *matriarchs* and **Kilslaay** • **Kilslaay** *chiefs*. Additionally, the Hereditary Chiefs Council, made up of Potlatched Hereditary Chiefs of Haida Gwaii, provides the Council of the Haida Nation with guidance and advice on important matters to protect the Nation's culture.

a. Hereditary System and Potlatching

- i. To begin to understand Haida governance, we start with the role of our **K'ul Jáad**. These women are often the oldest of a clan or family and are the record keepers and decision makers. Because Haida society is matrilineal, this lineage flows through the women in the family. The moieties are Eagle, born from the ancestress **Jiila Kuns** *Volcano Woman*, and Raven, born from the ancestress **SGuluu Jáad** *Foam Woman*. Each of the Eagle and Raven moieties hold several distinct clans within them. The **Kilslaay** work under the guidance of the **K'uul Jaad**, being the voice for their clan and carrying out the decisions made. For a **Kilslaay** to take their rightful place they must do so in a public setting of a '**waahlGahl** *potlatch*, where witnesses are invited and paid for their attendance. This has also been a form of redistributing wealth; ensuring that no one is excessively poor or rich. In fact, the most incredible act of wealth seen at any '**waahlGahl** is shown in how much a **Kilslaay** can give a way, increasing their social wealth and prestige.

b. Council of the Haida Nation and Band Councils

- i. The Council of the Haida Nation is the elected government of the Haida Nation and functions in accordance with the Constitution of the Haida Nation. “The CHN was formalized in 1974 to protect Haida Rights, Title, and lands, waters, and air. Today, our government continues to strive for full independence, sovereignty and self-sufficiency of the Haida Nation.”
- ii. The council consists of a President and Vice-president elected by popular vote, and twelve regional representatives from four electoral regions. Go to the Council of the Haida Nation's website to learn more about the history, governance, and elected representatives.



- iii. Old Massett Village Council (OMVC) and Skidegate Band Council (SBC) are elected by their membership and perform the function of a village government under the Indian Act. Councils are responsible for the well-being of the communities and enact legal policies and programs in the areas of Capital, Education, Membership, Health, Social Development, among others. Village Councils are accountable to each respective community's membership and to the Constitution of the Haida Nation through the Haida Accord.

c. Haida Rights and Title

- i. The Haida Nation collectively holds Hereditary and Aboriginal Title and Rights to Haida Territories and the cultural and intellectual property rights of the Haida Nation. All people of Haida ancestry are citizens of the Haida Nation. The Haida Nation has an active title case asserting Haida Gwaii lands and waters and the surrounding ocean. Today, we maintain governing powers and exercise inherent rights in our Territories. Over half of Haida Gwaii is protected and the Haida Nation has co-management agreements with the Government of Canada and Province of British Columbia. To this day, our nation has existing peace treaties with neighboring nations to ensure protection of our shared waters and the beings within them.

5. Haida Language

Place name restoration is extremely important to Haida sovereignty and health. In 2010 our Nation hosted a potlatch called "Giving Back the Name with Respect." This event was created to officially give the name *Queen Charlotte Islands* back to the crown, and restore the original name of Haida Gwaii to our Islands. This same effort can be seen all over Haida Gwaii today with local communities, streets and landmarks named in our language, and the original names of points of land and bodies of water also being restored, most recently in partnership with BC.

a. Dialects

- i. Throughout the orientation you may have noticed the two main dialects of our Haida Language; **Xaad Kíl**, spoken in **Gaw Tlagée Old Massett** and **Xaayda Kil** spoken in **HIGaagilda Skidegate**. There is also a third dialect spoken by our Kaigani Alaska Haida relatives. There are many sub dialects unique to each clan, so depending on who you speak with, you may hear different variations of the language throughout your visit. The Haida language as a whole is considered a "language isolate" meaning it does not derive from any other language families. There are currently less than 10 fluent Elder speakers and a new generation of adults, youth and children committed to keeping the language alive.

6. Visiting Haida Gwaii



Now that you have learned a bit about our history, it's time to start planning your trip! It's important to be well prepared for the ever-changing weather on Haida Gwaii, as well as staying aware of your potential impact to our ecosystems while visiting. We encourage our visitors to book with local businesses and tour operators who know our lands and waters. To help you plan for the best experience possible, here are some of our Haida Ways of Being used in the Haida Gwaii Visitors Pledge:

a. Yahguudang • Yahguudáng *Respect for all Beings*

Yahguudang is the backbone to the Haida Ways of Being. We show respect to all things. Much of the flora and fauna of our Islands is unique to Haida Gwaii, guided and protected by **Kálga Jáad Ice Woman** during the last glacial retreat. We continue to monitor and respect all the beings of Haida Gwaii to ensure they remain and our ways of life flourish. You can help by:

i. Following all Haida Gwaii COVID-19 protocols

- Go to the Council of the Haida Nation website for the latest update on safety measures
- Carry your own supply of masks, reusable or single use
- Wash hands frequently and sanitize before and after entering public spaces
- If you are not feeling well, please stay home until it is safe for you to travel and consider getting a negative COVID-19 test before traveling
- We request visitors to be fully vaccinated before arriving on Haida Gwaii

ii. Acknowledging Haida title throughout Haida Gwaii, including rights

- Knowing and respecting that you are a guest to Haida Territory
- Acknowledging that Haida citizens carry the inherent right to govern and steward Haida Gwaii.
- We encourage you to try learn and use the proper **Xaad Kil** and **Xaayda Kil** names for our communities (see Haida Language References at the bottom of our website)
- Honour and be mindful to Haida protocols. Some are outlined in this orientation, but you may come across others in local signage, museum visits, or conversations with local people. Examples include:
 - Showing respect to those who have passed on to the Spirit World by not entering or photographing local cemeteries
 - Haida protocol and provincial laws state to keep away from caves

iii. Speaking kindly and listening thoughtfully



- Sharing Haida history is a sensitive matter, and some people carry intellectual property that cannot be shared. Our local storytellers and historians may only share with you what is comfortable and appropriate.
- iv. **Walking, driving, parking and camping only where permitted**
 - **HiGaagilda Skidegate** and **Gaw Tlagée Old Masset** are not open for camping
 - Before entering a trail, make sure it is intended for visitor use -not all trails are maintained properly and could be dangerous
- v. **Keeping a safe distance from wildlife**
 - The Haida Gwaii **taan black bear** are a unique subspecies that only exist here and are pillars to the health of our forests and waters. For these reasons, the Haida Nation has declared this keystone species off limits to hunting. Stand with the Haida Nation's decision and always keep a safe distance from **taan**.
 - Keep a safe distance from **kun whales**, remember: "See a spray stay away!" and follow federal regulations to stay at least 100m away

b. Ad kyaanang • Ahl kyáanang tláagang Ask Permission First

Before visiting Haida Gwaii it's important that you have planned ahead and are well equipped! No matter if you are hiking, boating, kayaking or camping, there are many ways to prepare for a safe and enjoyable trip. This includes:

- i. **Accepting that not all areas and events are open to visitors**
 - Potlatches and ceremonies aren't part of Haida Gwaii's tourism, so please do not attend unless you have been invited by the host
- ii. **Be prepared!**
 - Book accommodations and restaurant services in advance
 - Acquire necessary rain gear, PFDs, proper footwear and supplies of food and water
 - Familiarize yourself with local tide charts, maps, and local safety signage
 - Keep emergency kits handy and be prepared for potential earthquakes or tsunami evacuations
- iii. **Asking permission before taking pictures of people and places**
- iv. **Ensuring I follow all official orientations and guidelines**
 - Before taking a trip to Gwaii Haanas make sure you have taken the orientation and paid required fees



- Before fishing- read and sign the **Tsíinee Tla'anda - Chiinaay Tllxanda - A Code of Conduct for Recreational Fishing on Haida Gwaii**
- Updating all necessary harvesting permits and vehicle or boat licenses

c. Tll yahdah • Tll yahda To Make it Right

To ensure everyone is doing their part to correct and prevent harm done to the Air, Earth, Ocean, and People of Haida Gwaii, it's important to make things right when we make mistakes. Haidas have followed this law for millennia, by being a visitor to Haida Gwaii we ask that you follow this rule with us and here are some ways you can help:

i. Accepting responsibility if I do wrong

- **Tll Yahdah** reminds us that if we do something wrong, it is our own responsibility to make it right, we are all humans and may make mistakes
- Encourage your friends and family to do their part

ii. Being mindful of my environmental footprint and my impacts on the earth, air and water

- Turn off all idling engines to avoid unnecessary air or water pollution
- Honour the water provided to us all and being careful not to waste it
- Reduce and repurpose, as often as possible and note that recycling facilities on our remote Islands are limited

iii. Leaving everywhere I visit cleaner than when I arrived

- Keeping a clean campsite, disposing of all garbage properly, and securing food as to not attract wildlife
- Ensuring all campfires are properly put out before leaving

**d. Gina 'waadluuxan gud ad kwaagid • Gin 'wáadluwaan gud ahl kwáagiidang
Everything Depends on Everything Else**

This reminds us that no matter how much time a person spends on Haida Gwaii, we are all part of a very intricate web of life. Beachcombing, harvesting, boating and driving all have a ripple effect on the various habitats and ecosystems of our lands and waters so it's important that we all tread lightly!

i. Taking only what is given to me and leaving behind rocks, feathers, sand, and artifacts

- This also includes agates, driftwood and shells
- If you think the item is of interest or significance, you can take a photo, mark down the GPS coordinates and contact the Haida Gwaii Museum

ii. Respecting Haida Gwaii's bounty, I will only take what I need to feed myself today

- A long-standing Haida Way of Being is to only take what you need
- Protecting the clam beds by keeping motorized vehicles away from the beach



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Haida Gwaii Visitor Orientation

iii. **Supporting local businesses and giving back where I can**

- Being so remote, our local business owners greatly appreciate the contributions made by our visitors.

Without Haida Gwaii, Haida citizens and Ways of Being do not exist. We appreciate all of your respectful actions as you visit our homelands. **Haawa** • **Haw'aa** for taking this orientation and to those who choose to follow the Haida Gwaii Visitor Pledge.

Have you signed your Haida Gwaii Visitor's Pledge yet? Visit <haidagwaiipledge.ca>!