

# Piggy-Back Paddlers

by Kerry McPhedran

## Not a camper? Check out Mothership kayaking from historic Columbia III.

"The Columbia is coming!" was the welcome cry along B.C.'s coast early in the last century, when a series of stout ships operating under the Anglican church's Columbia Coast Mission served isolated logging camps, lighthouses, floating homes and First Nations villages, bringing medical help, religious services, Christmas parties and cartoons (an enticement to visit the dentist). Today the cry still goes up, but from kayakers as they paddle around a remote rocky bluff to see the waiting Columbia III, a handsomely restored 21-metre vessel now operated by the Campbell family as Mothership Adventures.

**Why this company:** To explore the pristine wilderness destinations of Desolation Sound, Broughton Archipelago, Johnstone Strait and the Great Bear Rainforest from the comfort of a mothership, knowing that after a day's kayaking there are hot showers, freshly brewed organic coffee, Fern's gourmet dinners with wine in a cozy salon - and a dry bed in one's own cabin.

Comfort and security for novice kayakers aside, a mothership also equals unique experiences for hard-core sea kayakers. The ship repositions daily for a greater variety of wilderness than camping kayakers can hope to cover. Columbia can also easily access remote stretches of rugged coastline and steep-sided, glacial-carved fiords expedition kayakers avoid (knowing there is nowhere to camp or haul out in an emergency). "We never backtrack," says Ross Campbell, former coastal logging helicopter pilot and current owner/captain, who knows just where to position guests for their best chance to see pods of 30 orcas in the Broughton Archipelago or beachcombing bears in the seldom-visited Great Bear Rainforest. And while most guests want to paddle rain or shine, they can always opt to stay on board with a book from the ship's well-stocked library, or to chat with Ross in the wheelhouse as he navigates the many islands and inlets, always remaining out of sight and hearing of the paddlers.

**Details pay off:** Personal kayaking gear is neatly stowed under cover on the aft deck; a mini-crane system quickly retrieves the double Necky kayaks from the roof; professional sea kayak guides Miray and her partner Luke, born and bred on the West Coast and passionate about their work, help guests embark off the broad stern swim grid - managing the tricky balance between professional service and relaxed informality just right. As one visitor put it: "First class people running a first class operation."

Day trips can include paddles up river estuaries past lush grassy meadows, lake swims, walks to abandoned native villages, picnic lunches and fresh crab feasts. Wildlife is everywhere. Brightly coloured intertidal life clings to the surf-swept rocks; sea otters and seals play in the kelp beds; osprey and eagles laze overhead and, with luck, wolves or a grizzly lope along a beach. At night, a Celtic tune or two from Luke and Miray and much laughter at anchor in a remote cove, lulled by the cradle that is Columbia III.

**Who should go:** Beginners and up.

**Tips:** Book Vancouver to Bella Bella flight early - for cheaper fare (and to guarantee a seat). Take *waterproof* not *water repellent*, rain gear; technical inner clothes wick sweat.

**Basics:** June to October, depending on destination (e.g., Great Bear Rainforest -August and September only). Departures from Campbell River, Port McNeill and Bella Bella. All-inclusive rates (gear, accommodation, guides, meals, wine) run from \$1,900 for four nights to \$2,850 for six. Themed tours (historical, photographic, natural history) run two, four or six nights (\$690 to \$2,850). 1-888-833-8887; mothershipadventures.com

