




Itinerary 24: Exploring Northern BC's Indigenous Heritage

Northern British Columbia is a vast landscape of mountains and rivers, ancient forests and fjord-cut coastline. It's also rich in the history and culture of the Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan, Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Haida and other First Nations who have called this area home for thousands of years. This six-day journey is an immersion into ancient art and legends, untouched wilderness, and thriving modern communities.

COVID considerations for summer 2021

Currently, most (if not all) First Nations communities in northern British Columbia are asking visitors to refrain from visiting their communities to help avoid any spread of COVID. While these restrictions could change at some point in the summer of 2021, these communities are still closed to visitors as of today, May 15, 2021. Additional notes are added, below, where certain areas or places of access are allowed.

Day 1: Terrace

Fly from Vancouver to Terrace's [Northwest Regional Airport](#)  on Central Mountain Air, Air Canada or Westjet.

Pick up a rental car at the airport and take a short drive east to [Kitselas Canyon National Historic Site of Canada](#) (open May to October). Overlooking a narrow part of the Skeena River, this strategic spot has been settled for at least 5,000 years. Visit the carving shed and themed longhouse before taking a short interpretive trail through the forest to see petroglyphs and a viewpoint over the Skeena River.

Back in Terrace, check out the [Terrace Heritage Park Museum](#) and browse local shops and galleries for First Nations art. Options include historic George Little House, Gemma's Gifts & Souvenirs, and the [House of Sim-Oi-Ghets](#) in nearby Kitsumkalum.

For dinner, enjoy a curry at the Hot House Restaurant, Japanese food at Blue Fin Sushi, or southwest fare (with a northwest twist) at Don Diego's. For overnight options, [Kermode Tourism](#) has more accommodation options.

Day 2: The Nass Valley and the Nisga’a Memorial Lava Bed Park

From Terrace head north on Highway 113 into the Nass Valley, home of the Nisga’a people. Also called the Nisga’a Highway, this scenic route winds through mountain valleys, along rivers, and past lava beds — a legacy of Canada’s most recent volcanic eruption which dramatically altered the landscape 250 years ago.

You can explore this eerie moonscape in depth at the [Nisga’a Memorial Lava Bed Park](#), about 100 km (60 mi) north of Terrace. Pick up a self-guided auto tour map at the Park Visitor Centre and learn about the park’s cultural and natural heritage. You can also canoe or kayak in Lava Lake, hike along several short interpretive trails, or join a guided walk to a viewpoint overlooking the volcanic cone.

From the park, continue another 40 km (25 mi) to the village of Laxgalts'ap, on the Nass River estuary. This village of about 500 people is home to the [Nisga'a Museum, or Hli Goothl Wilp-Adokshl Nisga'a](#). This striking modern building (open May to October) houses the Ancestors’ Collection — more than 300 masks, robes, blankets and other artefacts which were returned to the Nisga’a from museums across Canada and now rank among the world’s leading collections of Northwest Coast First Nations art.

Stop for lunch, or an overnight stay, at any of the nearby Nisga’a villages. The communities of Gitlakdamix (New Aiyansh), Gitwinksihlkw (Canyon City), Lakalzap (Greenville), Kincolith and Nass Camp all offer food and accommodation. Alternatively, head back to Terrace for the night.

COVID considerations for summer 2021

As of mid-May, all communities in the Nass Valley are currently closed to visitors due to COVID precautions. It is unclear whether the communities will open up to visitors this summer. That being said, the [self-guided auto tour](#) through the Nass Valley is currently open and visitors are able to drive through these communities (and visit stops in between these communities) so long as they don't stop within the communities, themselves.


Day 3: Kitwanga – the Hazletons – Smithers

From Terrace, head east on Highway 16, past the spectacular peaks of [Seven Sisters Provincial Park](#), to Kitwanga (Gitwangak), where the [Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site](#) commemorates a key 18th century battle.



A few minutes north on Highway 37 (the Stewart Cassiar Highway) is the Gitanyow Historical Village and Interpretive Centre, home to one of the oldest and largest collections of totem poles in British Columbia.

This grouping of poles was made famous by Canadian artist Emily Carr when she travelled to this area in 1928.

Returning to Highway 16, travel another 55 km (34 mi) east to New Hazelton and cross the Hagwilget Canyon Bridge, a single lane steel suspension bridge over the Bulkley River, to Old Hazelton. Founded in 1866, this riverside village is one of BC's oldest towns.

A highlight of Hazelton is the Ksan Historical Village and Museum  (open May through September; main building is accessible, but the longhouses are not) where seven longhouses recreate a Gitksan village that stood on the same riverbank site for centuries. Each of the houses, set in a row facing the river, reveals a different aspect of Gitksan culture, from feast traditions to tales of the distant past; the on-site museum has a wealth of artifacts on display.

About half an hour further east along Highway 16 is [Widzin Kwah Canyon](#) (also known as Moricetown), where, in summer, you can watch skilled Witsuwit'en fishers catch salmon using traditional gaff poles and dip nets. The Widzin Kwah Canyon House Museum (open May through September) offers Witsuwit'en cultural tours and houses artifacts as much as 6,000 years old.

Continue east on Highway 16 to Smithers, an attractive alpine-themed town at the base of Hudson Bay Mountain. Some good overnight options include the [Prestige Hudson Bay Lodge](#)  and [Aspen Inn and Suites](#) . Check out [Tourism Smithers](#) for more options of places to stay.

COVID considerations for summer 2021


As of mid-May, the communities of Gitanyow, Old Hazelton, and Witset are currently closed for visitors. While you can make stops along the highway at viewpoints and parks, please refrain from driving into these communities until they've announced they are open for visitors.

Days 4: Smithers to Vancouver



From Smithers, enjoy the scenic 2.5-hour drive to Terrace and your flight back to Vancouver.

*****Optional Two-Day Side Trip: Prince Rupert**

If you have a few more days, consider an excursion to the seaside town of Prince Rupert. From Terrace, make the 90 minute drive along Highway 16, or kick back and enjoy the scenery on [VIA Rail's](#) year round Skeena service. Between June and September, the train makes the two-hour run between Terrace and Prince Rupert three times a week (**only once per week in 2021**). You can spend two or three nights in Prince Rupert and return to Terrace by train.

Set on an island at the mouth of the Skeena River, Prince Rupert is known for its deep natural harbour and rich First Nations heritage. The best introduction to the local Tsimshian culture is a visit to the world renowned [Museum of Northern British Columbia](#) . This waterfront longhouse-style building is home to one of BC's finest collections of coastal First Nations art and technology, from intricate bentwood boxes to intriguing archaeological finds. Artifacts at the museum reveal at least 10,000 years of settlement in the area, once one of the most populated parts of North America. From the museum, it's a short stroll to the waterfront shops, galleries and eateries of the charming Cow Bay shopping district.

The coastal wilderness north of Prince Rupert is home to a wealth of wildlife, including a large and healthy population of grizzly bears. [Khutzeymateen Provincial Park](#), Canada's first grizzly bear sanctuary, is accessible only by boat or float plane and offers a rare chance to see these animals in their natural habitat. [Khutzeymateen Wilderness Lodge](#), located in the sanctuary, offers day trips from May to mid-July and overnight lodge-based tours from May to mid-September. Availability is limited and reservations are essential.

Prince Rupert has a wealth of [overnight options](#), including the waterfront [Crest Hotel](#) , [Inn on the Harbour](#) , [Cassiar Cannery Guesthouses](#) at the Skeena River mouth.