



Frequently Asked Questions

Whale Watching in Vancouver BC

Q: Are reservations required?

A: Pre-booking is required to hold your spots.

Q: How far in advance do I have to book?

A: Often four to five days in advance is enough notice for the larger semi-enclosed vessels. The Lightship only has twelve seats and tends to book up quickly. If you know when you want to go, book your trip. You may cancel 48 hours prior to departure without penalty if your travel plans change.

Q: Where do the trips leave from and how do I get there?

A: We are located 40 minutes from downtown Vancouver, in Richmond, just south of the airport. If you have your own vehicle, we offer free all day parking. Driving directions and directions to the parking lot will be emailed to you upon booking. Another option is to make reservations on our Orca Express Transport, we pick up from nine locations in downtown Vancouver.

Q: How should I dress? What should I bring?

A: We recommend all guests dress warmly in layers it is always colder on the water. Pack a lunch or snack, remember you may be out on your trip for 5 hours. Bring sunglasses, sunscreen and your camera. If you are on the open zodiac wear at least three layers of clothing and running shoes or similar footwear (flip flops not recommended). We provide you with a Cruiser suit, hat and gloves.

Q: What is the difference between the open boat and the semi covered boat?

A: All our vessels are zodiac style which means they ride on top of the water rather than pounding through it offering a stable, comfortable ride. Both boats travel in relatively the same areas, travel at similar speeds and you view the whales from the same distance. Some passengers consider the smaller open zodiac to be a more thrilling, adventurous experience. We compare the Explorathor vessel to a Cadillac and the Lightship 1 to a Convertible. All our boats have washrooms onboard.

Q: Do you see more whales on the morning or the afternoon trip?

A: Whales are spotted equally in the mornings and afternoons. We offer two trips daily to accommodate our guests' travel schedules. In the spring and fall restricted daylight hours mean we can only take one trip per day.

Q: Why is the trip 3 to 5 hours long?

A: Each trip is a unique experience as we look at wild animals in their natural habitat- sometimes they are close to our departure point and other times we have to travel further to get to them. The trip length is determined by where the whales are found.

Q: What are the chances of seeing whales?

A: The chance of seeing Orcas varies with the seasons. We work with a network of whale watching operators and share sighting information which gives us a sighting success rate of about 90%. We typically travel through the Gulf and San Juan Islands. Passengers typically see a variety of wildlife including, seals, sea lions, porpoises, eagles and more.

Q: What if we don't see whales?

A: We offer a return guarantee if you do not see whales on your trip; come again for free until you do with no expiry date! This pass is not transferable and has no cash value.

Q: How close do we get to the whales?

A: Vancouver Whale Watch observes the guidelines established by the Pacific Whale Watch Association (PWWA). We are allowed to get within 100 meters (100 yards) of the whales. At this distance you get an excellent view of the whales.

Q: Can I bring my camera?

A: Yes, definitely. It won't get wet if you are on the Explorathor. On the Lightship you can keep your camera in your suit pocket, under your suit or for larger cameras there is dry storage under your seat.

Q: I have young children do you recommend this activity for them?

A: We consider whale watching a family activity and children are certainly welcome on our trip. Keep in mind that the trips can be 5 hours long. Children are required to remain seated while the boat is in motion.

Q: What if it is raining?

A: We can still go out on our semi-covered vessel if it is raining, however, we do watch the weather carefully and occasionally we do have to cancel or postpone a trip if it is too windy. When a trip is cancelled we do our best to contact you in the morning to give you the opportunity to reschedule.