

## Grizzly bears by day, mineral pools by night: Inside British Columbia's wildest fall getaway

After safaris, whale sharks and orangutans, seeing grizzly bears in their natural habitat became my most memorable wildlife adventure yet. Here's how to experience it yourself.



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Naturally Pacific Resort's new October getaway package lets travelers see grizzly bears in the wild. (Zoe Hasenfratz/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

A massive grizzly bear lumbered along the Orford River, her cub trailing close behind as they searched for food. From my perch in a viewing tower, I knew I was safe, yet I was close enough to see her shiny, curved claws and smell her musty fur. A jolt of fear and exhilaration took my breath away as I took in the raw power of one of North America's most intimidating predators.

You might expect an encounter this wild and remote to require sleeping in a tent or giving up a few creature comforts. But later that night, I was tucked into a plush bed at [Naturally Pacific Resort](#), still processing the once-in-a-lifetime experience of seeing grizzly bears in the wild.

This is exactly what I want from a travel adventure: an experience that makes me feel intensely, thrillingly alive and connected to the mesmerizing creatures that share our planet—along with the opportunity to relax deeply and let some stress melt away. On a recent trip to Campbell River, an overlooked destination on the eastern coast of Vancouver Island, I didn't have to choose between the two.



Every wildlife lover should see grizzly bears in their natural habitat in British Columbia. (Courtesy Campbell River Whale Watching and Adventure Tours)

Guided by members of the Homalco First Nation, I spent a day in the wilderness spotting at least half a dozen grizzlies, along with orcas, sea lions, and bald eagles. That evening, I traded the adrenaline rush for a decidedly more restorative experience back at the resort. It's that perfect balance of adrenaline and zen that drives my favorite travel experiences.

Now, Naturally Pacific Resort has bundled both sides of the experience into its October Grizzly Getaway, which pairs a two- or three-night stay with one or two full-day, Indigenous-led grizzly tours. Here's what it's like to experience one of British Columbia's wildest fall adventures—and why Campbell River deserves a closer look.

**Inside the travel package that lets you see grizzly bears**



You can get surprisingly close to grizzly bears on this tour. (Zoe Hasenfratz/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

If seeing grizzly bears in their natural habitat is on your travel bucket list, Naturally Pacific Resort's [October Grizzly Getaway package](#) makes the adventure easy to plan. Available for stays from October 1–20, 2026, the package pairs a two- or three-night stay at the stylish property with a full-day grizzly bear viewing excursion (and an option to add a second day of bear watching too!). The package offers combined savings of more than \$700 compared with booking each component separately.

The timing couldn't be better. Fall is when grizzlies gather along the region's rivers and coastal inlets to feast on salmon ahead of winter. While wildlife sightings are never guaranteed, the odds of seeing the grizzlies if you book this package are high. [Campbell River Whale Watching and Adventure Tours](#), which operates the excursions, reports seeing bears on 93 percent of its tours.



The boat ride itself is a worthwhile travel experience. (Sara Kempner/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

But the experience involves far more than simply arriving at a river and waiting for a bear to appear. After boarding a passenger vessel in Campbell River, you'll spend the next couple of hours cruising through narrow passages and coastal inlets surrounded by forested islands and mountains. An onboard naturalist points out wildlife and shares stories about the region along the way. On my trip, we saw incredible wildlife almost immediately, including bald eagles, sea lions, and a pod of orcas within the first 30 minutes of the tour. That alone would have made this an amazing travel experience—but we still had bears ahead.



You can also see whales on your way to the grizzly bear habitat. (Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

We eventually reached Orford Bay, where Homalco First Nation guides welcomed us into their traditional territory. We spent about 20 minutes exploring a small museum focused on grizzlies and Homalco culture, where we even got to hold a bear claw. Then, we boarded small buses to begin the ultimate adventure.

It didn't take long to get our first grizzly sighting. Just ahead of us on a logging road, we spotted two cubs and their mother. Everyone on the bus gasped and grabbed their cameras—but the best views were still ahead.



A group of travelers looks for grizzly bears from a viewing platform. (Tyler Bruce/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

Over the next two hours, our guides took us from one elevated viewing platform to another, where we waited quietly for the bears to emerge. They never left us disappointed. We watched mothers fish alongside their cubs, bears chow down on freshly caught salmon and massive grizzlies lumber along the riverbank in all their glory. Despite the abundance of sightings, the thrill never wore off. Every time another bear appeared, the entire group seemed to hold its breath.

The Homalco guides added context that made the sightings feel even more meaningful. They taught us that roughly 50 grizzlies inhabit the area and that, despite their fearsome reputation, about 80 percent of their diet consists of vegetation. They also shared insights into the Homalco First Nation's enduring relationship with these lands, waters, and animals—a perspective we wouldn't have gotten by simply searching for bears on our own (not that we would have—that would be too dangerous!). The entire experience felt like a National Geographic documentary brought to life.



Each grizzly sighting was just as thrilling as the one before it. (Liron Gertsman/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

I've been on safari in Africa, [let falcons perch on my arm in Ireland](#), and got up close with orangutans and vipers in Borneo. I've even swum with whale sharks in the open water off the Riviera Maya. Yet of all the wildlife adventures I've experienced, seeing grizzlies in the wild was by far the most memorable. If you're into wildlife, grizzly watching in British Columbia is an experience worth building an entire fall getaway around.

## Restore yourself at Naturally Pacific Resort

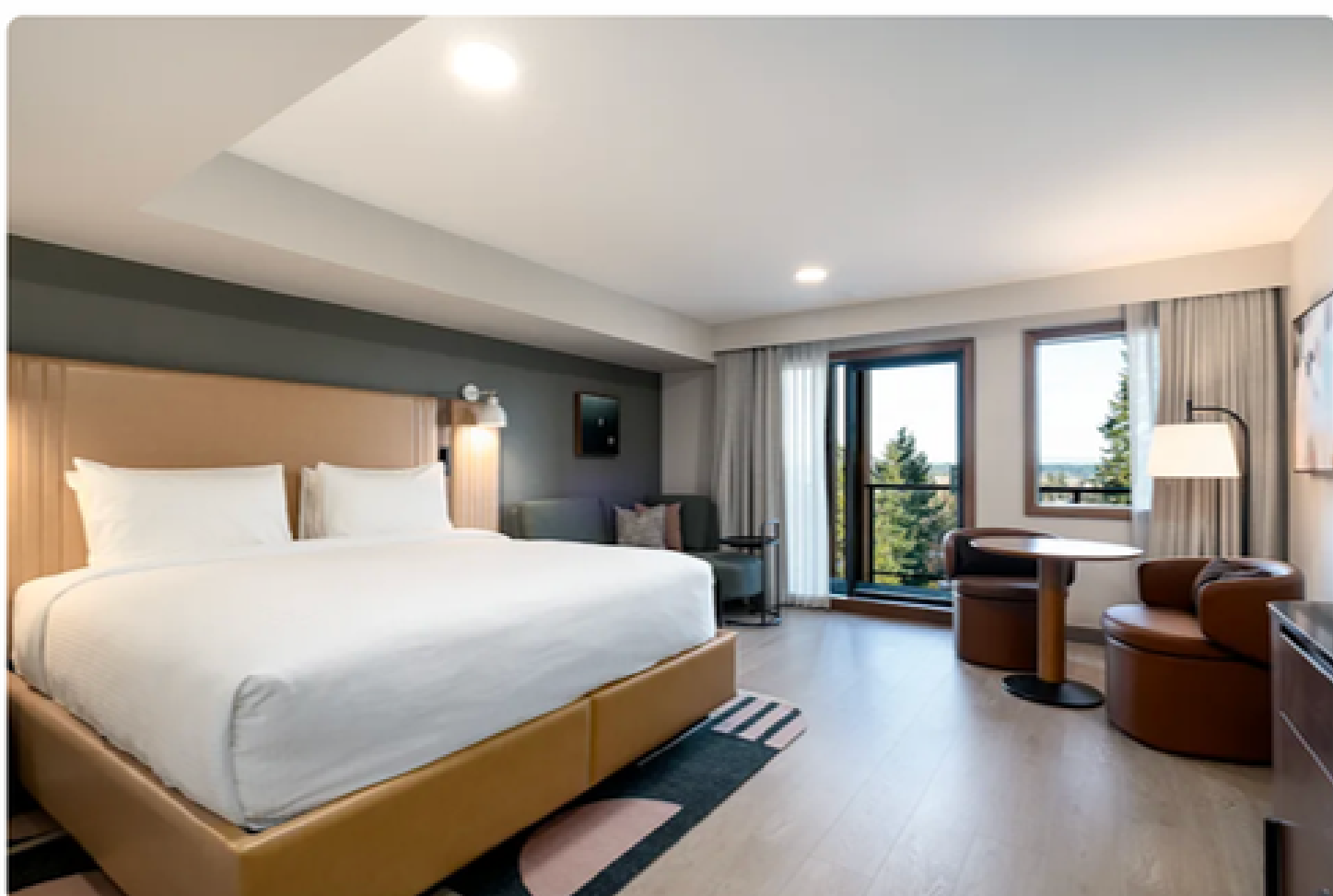


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Naturally Pacific Resort in Campbell River, BC (Michael Vanarey/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

The boat trip back to Campbell River likely offered just as many interesting wildlife sightings as the journey out, but I wouldn't know. Once the adrenaline wore off, I napped through most of the return trip. By the time we reached shore, I was grateful that I'd be able to truly unwind and reflect on the grizzly watching experience at [Naturally Pacific Resort](#).

Opened in 2024, the 100-room resort feels unexpectedly polished for a property that's so close to epic adventures in the great outdoors. The design lands somewhere between Art Deco glamour and a contemporary Pacific Northwest lodge. Island-sourced wood brings warmth to the interiors, while photographs from a Victoria artist in the common areas showcase the wild British Columbia scenery that guests come here to experience.



A cozy guest room at Naturally Pacific Resort. (Michael Vanarey/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

That understated luxury flows through the guest rooms. Plush beds and soothing lighting help set the stage for sleep, but what impressed me most was just how quiet and dark the rooms became at night. My usual [hotel-induced insomnia](#) was nowhere to be found at Naturally Pacific Resort. Many of the rooms also overlook the emerald fairways of Campbell River Golf Club, which looks beautiful at sunset.

The real reward after a day in grizzly country, however, awaits at Immersion Spa + Wellness. Its seven treatment rooms are named after trees, continuing the resort's connection to nature. Guests can book a restorative treatment (choose from massages, facials, and body care), soak in the warm mineral pool, or experiment with the high-tech Experience Showers—Italian-made facilities that combine aqua therapy with relaxing lights, sounds, and scents.

There are plenty of places to unwind outside the spa, too. Six outdoor fire pits invite guests to settle in with a drink and swap stories about the day's adventures. The resort also has an outdoor hot tub and a heated indoor pool with glass walls that open to the fresh air.



Pool at Naturally Pacific Resort (Shawn Talbot/Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort)

Campbell River has plenty to keep you well fed, but I recommend starting at Naturally Pacific Resort. The property grows some of its own ingredients in the Pacific Patch, an impressive 22,500-square-foot garden tucked behind the resort. You'll find that seasonal produce dominating the menu at [Carve Kitchen + Meatery](#), its signature restaurant. As you might expect from a restaurant with "meatery" in the name, the menu features a mix of steaks, pork, fish, and chicken, all dressed up with seasonal veggies and flavors. But as a [vegetarian traveler](#), I was pleasantly surprised by the plant-based options, too, like the cashew and mushroom savoy cabbage roll.



Carve Kitchen + Meatery at Naturally Pacific Resort (Leila Kwok)

For something more casual, Naturally Pacific offers two other worthwhile dining options. Head to the driving range for stone-baked pizzas and other shareables at [Velocity Lounge](#). Or enjoy barbecue al fresco at the [Sunset Terrace Patio + Grill](#).

## Leave time to explore Campbell River



Leave time to explore the beauty and bounty of Campbell River on your grizzly watching vacation. (Courtesy Destination Campbell River/Bluetree Photography)

As tempting as it may be to stay at the resort, Campbell River is worth exploring, too. Start with its culinary scene. [Freya](#) is an absolute must-visit—the bakery and coffee shop takes four days to make its legendary 27-layer croissants and uses a sourdough base for all its laminated pastries. [Beach Fire Brewing](#) is another great choice for beers and bites after bear watching.



Croissant at Freya bakery in Campbell River, BC (Joni Sweet)

And if the grizzlies didn't give you enough adrenaline, you can continue your wildlife adventure by snorkeling with salmon (after all, Campbell River is considered the salmon capital of the world). Every fall, thousands of the fish swim from the ocean into the area's rivers—and if you're so inclined, you can slip on a wetsuit, flippers, and goggles from [Ocean Fix Dive Centre](#) and join the salmon for part of the journey.

Fair warning: Snorkeling with salmon is no leisurely float. The fast-flowing, freezing-cold current jostles you over a rocky riverbed while salmon that look enormous underwater dart past your mask. If that sounds more terrifying than thrilling, there's no shame in staying on shore. But it's worth knowing that grizzly viewing is far from the only unique wildlife experience you can have here.



Seeing grizzly bears in the wild is the ultimate travel adventure. (Courtesy Naturally Pacific Resort/Zoe Hasenfratz)

Campbell River is often treated as scenery to admire from the decks of Alaska-bound cruise ships passing through Discovery Passage. But Naturally Pacific Resort's bear-viewing package makes a compelling case for staying awhile. Over just a few days, Campbell River gave me the chance to watch grizzlies feast on salmon, spot orcas from a boat, soak in a mineral pool, and unwind beside a fire. It was thrilling, restorative, and unlike any other trip I've taken. This is one destination that belongs on every wildlife lover's bucket list.