

Ocean Ecoventures: Tourism for Passionate People

Simon Pidcock grew up in the marine industry—specifically, in a wooden boat repair yard on the West Coast. He spent his younger years sailing, competing professionally as a member of the Canadian Youth National Team; and guiding his boat—acquired at the age of four—along the waters surrounding Vancouver Island.

In 2003, seeking to transform his passion for exploring the ocean into a lifelong career, Simon bought a boat, refitting it himself (did we mention he's a shipbuilder, too?). Ocean Ecoventures was born and, in its first year, built a loyal following among guests eagerly seeking small-group eco-tours showcasing the region's diverse wildlife and picture-perfect natural attributes. The next year, acknowledging his customers' strong desire to see and learn about whales, Simon incorporated dedicated whale watching into his tours. By 2018, business was booming and Simon purchased a fourth boat to add to his fleet.

Ocean Ecoventures has flourished into one of the most reputable eco-adventure operations on the West Coast. In addition

to family-focused day excursions, the company recently introduced multi-day journeys, including the first-of-its-kind Salish Sea Orca Explorer, a two-night glamping adventure in the Gulf Islands. The tour showcases some of BC's best assets: wildlife viewing; hiking in Gulf Islands National Park Reserve; browsing the Saturday Market on Salt Spring Island; and camping on Rum Island, formerly used as a hideaway for rum-runners during the Prohibition Era, and now directly in the path of annual whale migrations.

Though no other tourism operation in BC runs overnight Gulf Island tours, Ocean Ecoventures is truly distinguished by its staff: in a team of 12 employees, 10 are accomplished photographers, marine biologists, and conservationists. Collectively, the team share a similar goal: supporting the preservation of ocean life and capturing stunning images and video that help to fuel grassroots change.

Attracted to Simon's focus on sustainability over profits, personalized service over mass bookings, the company's guides prioritize education in their excursions,

providing guests with easy-to-implement changes that can have a powerful impact on ocean eco-systems.

One such guide is Gary Sutton, lead captain and operations manager of Ocean Ecoventures. When Gary was a child, he encountered a dolphin along a Florida seawall; the instant connection he felt with the animal sparked a lifelong passion for marine wildlife. He took a job at the Vancouver Aquarium and worked as a naturalist for a Vancouver-based whale watching company; during that time, he gained notoriety across the region for his stunning wildlife photography. His work caught Simon's attention, and he offered Gary a job captaining one of Ocean Ecoventure's boats. Gary accepted, and ever since has guided guests across the Salish Sea, sharing his wealth of

knowledge about marine mammals and the surrounding region. During his time off, he travels to Alert Bay to support some of the world's leading whale researchers—in fact, Gary is known throughout the Western Seaboard as a leading expert at identifying individual killer whales.

Simon's company is a shining example of the sheer diversity of passions, skill sets, and backgrounds found in BC's tourism industry. Ocean Ecoventures is more than a tourism operation: the team is also working every day to save marine animals, such as killer whales, that are at-risk for extinction. Now isn't that a clear indication that **#BCTourismMatters?**

