

PADDLE WITH PURPOSE

You wobble, rock, and push yourself off the beach. Although ungraceful at first, you now glide away from shore onto an unbroken layer of liquid glass. Looking down through the cool, clear water, you see the pebble bottom slowly moving further and further away. After basking briefly in the serenity of the moment, you slice through the glass with your paddle, and your journey begins.

This is the reality of kayaking in [Xaana Kaahlíi Skidegate Inlet](#) when you are blessed with a good weather day. [Xaana Kaahlíi](#) is the narrow channel that runs between Graham and Moresby Islands, dividing the landmass of Haida Gwaii in half. It is a popular kayaking area for paddlers of all skill levels. It is a place of immense beauty, and like all places on Haida Gwaii, has history and culture woven throughout its very existence. The beauty and richness of culture in this area attracts many visitors. But with increasing numbers, it is crucial to look at the effects that these activities may have and prioritize the preservation of the cultural integrity and pristine shorelines of [Xaana Kaahlíi](#) above all else.

The beauty of [Xaana Kaahlíi](#) is immeasurable, and so is its value to the Haida Nation. As Gaahlaay Lonnie Young, Hereditary Chief of the [Kaayahl `Laanaas](#) clan whose territory includes parts of [Xaana Kaahlíi](#) said “Trust has to be earned”. Sadly, in the past, there have been times when visitors have come to Haida Gwaii and treated places with disrespect. Gaahlaay explains, “[Visitors went to Xaayna and removed signif-

icant artifacts, even headstones from the graveyard.] Experiences like that sour some of our people about letting others go there.”

Education is a powerful tool in combatting harmful actions such as those described by Gaahlaay. There are resources available to visitors, including the Haida Gwaii Visitor Orientation and the Haida Gwaii Pledge. The Orientation provides information on the history of Haida Gwaii and its people and offers valuable insight into how to act with [Yahguudang Respect](#) while visiting Haida Gwaii. The Haida Gwaii Pledge gives you a chance to show [Yahguudang](#) by pledging to follow the Haida Ways of Being that are outlined in the Orientation. Accessing these resources prior to your visit is a great way to demonstrate your commitment to being a respectful guest on these lands and waters.

Another step being taken to enhance protections for [Xaana Kaahlíi](#) is the development of a kayak route within the Inlet. The Council of the Haida Nation (CHN) is working with the Province of British Columbia and BC Marine Trails to investigate this possibility, focusing on ways to mitigate

cultural, ecological, or social harm while promoting safety and sustainability for visitors coming to experience this beautiful area. The proposed kayak route would provide kayakers with clarity on places where you are welcome to visit or set up camp for an overnight stay and identify areas that are deemed too sensitive to visit. It is expected that guidelines and other resources related to this project will start rolling out ahead of the 2024 kayaking season.

Aside from making yourself familiar with these resources prior to your trip, the most important thing you can do as you paddle through the waters of [Xaana Kaahlíi](#) is bear in mind the history of the lands and waters that you are traversing. Let [Yahguudang](#) guide your experience. Take in the sights, smells, and sounds with reverence. It is a gift for all of us to experience Haida Gwaii, and for that we can be grateful.

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