

Coronavirus Announcement

March 14, 2020

This letter conveys one of the most significant and difficult decisions I've made since I started kayaking on Haida Gwaii in 1981.

My decision:

Due to Coronavirus, I am cancelling the entire 2020 Butterfly Tours and Evolution Guide School season. Each registered participant will be offered a full refund of their payments made to Butterfly Tours and Evolution Guide School.

Risk management:

The decision to cancel is based on the same risk management principles I apply to all aspects of guiding. These principles originate in the assessment of both probability and consequence.

Social distancing and avoiding non-essential travel are key components of an effective global pandemic response. All the tours, expeditions and courses I offer are non-essential. They all require travel and include long periods of time spent in close proximity with other people.

Coronavirus has demonstrated its capacity to vector exponentially through human populations, with devastating results. When a threat of harm is increasing exponentially, the most effective time to act is when it feels too early. Applying incremental linear solutions has little useful effect; it wastes both time and limited resources.

Proactively cancelling is the most effective way to manage the risk of contagion.

In fairly recent history, the Haida people were decimated by smallpox and other communicable diseases.

I am unwilling to lead groups on Haida Gwaii during (or shortly after) a global pandemic. Visitors could unknowingly deliver an illness that may spread and prove fatal to vulnerable sectors of the local population. Guides could become asymptomatic transmitters between trips.

Haida Gwaii has limited medical resources. The two small hospitals could become overwhelmed while treating infected locals during an outbreak. Adding more people would increase the potential for transmission and could place additional burdens on an already overwhelmed small rural medical system. For these same reasons, wilderness medical evacuations could be significantly delayed during an outbreak.

I've spent several days intensively researching and consulting before reaching this decision. I've had a long, detailed discussion with an expert in wilderness tourism risk management. Everything we considered eventually pointed toward one appropriate course of action: Preemptive cancellation.

I also consulted a legal academic who specializes in critical thinking and asked this person to try their hardest to conceive of a satisfactory reason to not cancel. Their best attempt was unconvincing.

Other considerations:

I recognize and regret that this cancellation is likely to initiate associated financial setbacks for most registered participants, as well as the many individuals and businesses that I work so closely with. This unfortunate consequence of my decision was certainly weighed carefully, as I know there are financial ripple effects that will roll outward from this initial impact.

I am essentially forfeiting my entire 2020 earnings to implement this decision.

I sincerely apologize for the additional financial burden this decision will have on all affected.

There are numerous reasons I've chosen to announce the cancellation now, rather than avoiding cancelling, or cancelling later. For this pandemic, rather than engaging in hesitant and delayed reaction, I consider it more appropriate to apply firm, decisive preemptive action so that I can provide as much notice as possible to all participants, guides and transport providers, as well as the Rose Harbour accommodation and meal providers.

Cancelling now means I can provide each participant with a full refund of the payments provided to Butterfly Tours and Evolution Guide School.

Cancelling now provides the opportunity for registered participants to take some time to change their plans and arrangements, while not suffering from Coronavirus symptoms. My understanding is that several airlines are currently waiving rescheduling fees due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

Several registered participants have already mailed cheques to my Sechelt address. Once I collect my postal mail, I will email each participant to confirm their cheque has been received and shredded. Participants are asked to email me with the full name of each person registered, and the dates of the trip, in order to initiate a refund of their deposit.

It will take me several days to fully process all refunds. My accounts have daily transfer limits, so the process must be staggered to avoid surpassing these limits.

I will ensure that each person is fully refunded.

Thank you for your patience while I systematically go through the refund process.

Update: April 2, 2020

The above decision was difficult for me to reach during the days prior to my initial announcement on March 14. Now that so much additional evidence has been revealed, it seems like a much less difficult decision. I hope we have all responded early enough and fully enough to make a significant difference in flattening the curve of this pandemic.

This will be the first summer in forty years that I won't migrate to Haida Gwaii to go kayaking. The "Butterfly way" has always been a distinctly alternative approach to kayak touring. The well-being of participants has been, and continues to be, an uncompromised priority. This year, that priority is delivered at the expense of the entire season.

It's too early to predict what 2021 will hold. Haida Gwaii will be there. I hope we can each enjoy travelling through the Islands in the future.

I have regular email and phone access. You are welcome to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Gord Pincock