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My life with bears

Jamie Scarrow is one of British Columbia's premier wildlife photographers and his work has been published in notable magazines such as National Geographic and Nature Conservancy. Here, he talks about his work at the Knight Inlet Lodge in Canada and his aspirations for the future.

I began my career as a wildlife guide thirteen years ago when I accepted a job at Knight Inlet Lodge, a remote wilderness destination in coastal British Columbia. The lodge offers world-class grizzly bear viewing adventures and is set amid the snow-capped peaks of some of Canada's most beautiful coastal scenery.

At first I thought it would just be an interesting summer diversion but grizzlies, guiding and Knight Inlet took hold of my soul and it ended up being a dream job and the beginning of a lifelong career. After two seasons viewing the magnificent grizzlies, I really felt the need to start documenting what I was seeing and I picked up my first camera.

Guiding in Knight Inlet has allowed me to spend countless hours with the bears and I've learned a huge amount about this

glorious landscape and the magnificent creatures that inhabit it in that time. Bears in particular are highly misunderstood. Of course all bears are potentially dangerous, but if treated with respect and given a wide berth, they can be very placid animals. They are highly intelligent and can be quite playful and even comical, both on an individual level and when interacting with other bears. This is the side of their nature that I choose to portray in my pictures.

Photography has become a real passion for me and I've been fortunate to have worked with many film crews and professional photographers over the years. My most memorable experience was just two years ago when I helped the BBC with filming on an episode of *Nature's Great Events* entitled 'The Great Salmon Run'.



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For the last four years I've been heading south to Antarctica where I work as a naturalist on board expedition ships taking guests to see the wonders of the white continent. It has been an amazing privilege to visit Antarctica. I've made 39 trips and the penguins, icebergs and glaciers never cease to amaze me.



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I'm very blessed being a guide; the outdoor office really can't be beaten and I've been to places that I would never have thought possible. When I'm outdoors watching wildlife I find it easy to be perpetually happy – even if it's raining or 20 degrees below freezing – but I'm not immune to the pressures that the natural world is under. I try to be an ambassador for conservation by expressing the beauty and importance of some of the world's most fragile ecosystems and most vulnerable animals through my photography. In this way I hope I can make a difference and in some small way educate those who see my photos.



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My next step in life will have me combining my expertise in the guiding and travel industry with my passion for photography. I love photography, I love guiding and I love to teach, so come and join me at Knight Inlet Lodge and enjoy some of the most fabulous bear-watching on the planet.

I was in the water with the videographer just a few feet from the bears while they searched for salmon. It was an exhilarating experience but not as frightening as you would think. Understanding animal behaviour is of utmost importance when photographing wildlife, as is having the patience to wait for just the right moment. By reading the bears' body language and taking our time we were able to get close to these well-known individual grizzlies.

Working in Knight Inlet was a turning point for me and has led to other great opportunities in guiding around the world. For five winters (the off season at Knight Inlet) I headed to Churchill, Manitoba, famous as one of the best places to sight polar bears. From the safety of a giant Tundra Buggy visitors can watch the bears gathering along the coast of Hudson Bay as they wait patiently for the sea to freeze so they have a platform to hunt for seals.



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1. A bear takes a nap in the shade during a warm summer day (Jamie Scarrow)
2. Jamie standing in front of a Department of Fisheries and Oceans sign, Knight Inlet
3. A penguin chick investigates Jamie's colourful jacket (Jamie Scarrow)
4. Two polar bears wrestle in Churchill, Manitoba (Jamie Scarrow)
5. Jamie takes to the water in a kayak
6. An inquisitive bear during the BBC filming of Nature's Great Events (Jamie Scarrow)
7. The scenery surrounding Knight Inlet Lodge
8. Knight Inlet Lodge

FACTfile

A 14 day trip to Canada taking in Vancouver and Vancouver Island, including a three night stay at Knight Inlet Lodge, costs from £3,280 per person. For more information on how to include Knight Inlet Lodge in your tailor-made itinerary please call our Canada country specialists on 01993 838 700.

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