

## *Mother Orcas*

This image shows a mother orca with her calf. Orcas start breeding at age fourteen or fifteen, and give birth sixteen to seventeen months later. Female orcas can live to be 80 - 90 years old, so this orca is about a fifth of the way through her life. Once the calf is born, it will stay in its mother's pod for life. This shows how important family and social structure are to the Southern Resident Killer Whales, as well as a calf is to its mother.

While on a whale watching tour in the San Juan Islands, a group of orcas came close enough to our boat that we could've reached out and touched them. Then, they came back that close again. My experience with this was amazing because, just like a mother orca, all orcas are very protective of their family members. It was amazing because the orcas trusted us enough to come so close to our boat that we could've reached out and touched them. It didn't feel like that would ever happen in the wild, only in a zoo or in a sea aquarium, but it did, and it happened to us. Having a group of orcas come up close to the boat has happened to this company five or six times, except for the whales coming back again in the same tour. That has never happened before, and that made me feel even more excited and lucky than we already were.

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