

Kayaking: Explore, Paddle, Enjoy



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Kayaking is a water sport that will allow you to venture into lakes, rivers, and oceans. It will bring you closer to nature in an exhilarating way and allow you to explore and enjoy it on a whole different level.

Kayaking can be done anywhere enough water is to be found, e.g. rivers, lakes or the ocean.

It can be combined with fishing and diving and can also be used in rescue missions.

What Is Kayaking?

A kayak is a small boat on which you sit and then move forward by using a double-bladed paddle.

The kayaker sits facing forward with their legs in front of them, and they move the kayak by using the paddle by pulling it front-to-back on the one side and then the same on the other side.



A kayak sits low in the water and most often have space for only one person. Tandem kayaks are available in the event of two people wanting to kayak together, and there are even kayaks available for three paddlers.

Most kayaks are manufactured with a closed deck, but sit-on-top kayaks as well as inflatable kayaks are also available and are becoming more popular than before.

Kayaks differ in size and design based on the activity it is used for. You get kayaks for whitewater, the ocean, competitive racing as well as for fishing and surfing.

Since there are so many different ways to kayak it is appealing to a lot of people. Kayaking is **beginner-friendly and suitable for those wanting to have a relaxed,** active time out in nature well as having the option for the super fit and thrill seekers to do extreme challenges.

History Of The Kayak

The Kayak was formerly known as the hunter's boat since that was what it was initially designed for hunting and fishing. It was first made probably about 4000 years ago by the Inuit people (formerly known as the Eskimos) who lived in the northern Arctic areas.

Construction materials used for building the frame of these boats were driftwood or whale skeleton, and the body was created by using the animal skin, most popularly seal skin.

The kayak gave the hunter the ability to stealth pray by sneaking up behind them before catching them.

Europeans started to use the kayak for recreational reasons during the mid-1800's. German and French men were the first to start kayaking in a competitive way.

Adolf Anderle was the first person to kayak down Salzachofen Horge in Austria in 1931 and this is where modern-day white-water kayaking has apparently started off.

The Berlin Olympic Games included Kayak races for the first time in 1936. Kayaking only became a mainstream sport in the US in the 1970's although it was practiced before then as well. Today there are more than ten whitewater kayaking events in the Olympic Games, and it is considered as an international type of watersport.

Modern Kayaks

Materials used today to manufacture kayaks are polyethylene plastic, fiberglass, inflatable fabrics such as PVC or rubber and then the more expensive, extremely light, carbon fiber.

The price of a kayak is based mostly on the material used. Plastic kayaks are the entry-level kayaks for beginners since they are the cheapest and also buoyant and lightweight.

Fiberglass kayaks are what most professionals use. They are much more expensive but also much more durable than plastic. They are also lightweight and fairly sturdy. If you are serious about kayaking, this is probably what you would end up with.

The inflatable kayak is popular for its transportability since it can be fitted in a rucksack and be carried on your back. Their price range varies greatly from affordable to pricey.

They are the best buy for recreational kayakers and are commonly used for fishing as well as for general transport internationally. They are not difficult to steer due to a small turning circle, and even beginners can master them.



Difference Between A Canoe And A Kayak

There is often confusion about the difference between canoeing and kayaking. Canoeing is often used as a broad term to describe both, but this is not entirely correct.

Canoes and Kayaks differ in terms of the boats' design, equipment used and technique.

Design

Sitting in a canoe means you are either sitting on a bench or your knees, whereas with a kayak you sit flat with your legs stretched out in front of you.

The sides of a canoe are generally higher than a kayak.

Equipment

With canoeing, a single-bladed paddle is used to propel yourself forward, and the paddle is also shorter.



Technique

Naturally, since the paddles are different for canoeing and kayaking, the techniques differ as well. With canoeing, you use the single bladed paddle in alternating strokes on either side of the canoe.

Kayakers grip their paddles in the middle and push the water with a twisting technique to move themselves forward. They push first to the right and then the left blade along either side of the boat. The twisting technique optimizes pushing power and decrease wind resistance.

Different Styles And Types Of Kayaking

Recreational Kayaking

Recreational kayaking is done by anyone wishing to spend time on the water. This is mostly done on a lake or steady stream.

These kayaks have a larger cockpit opening which makes it easier to get into and out of the boat. **They have more stability in the water** due to the wider hull and are shorter boats, mostly less than twelve feet long. This makes them slower, but they are lighter to carry.

Since they have a wider body, they are more difficult to keep in a straight line, and they usually can't carry a lot of cargo. They are usually made from cheaper materials like plastic which keeps them affordable.

Sea Kayaking

Sea kayaks are used to paddle in the open waters of the ocean or on lakes. They can be used for sea journeys of either a few hours or even for trips of several weeks due to their ability to take more cargo on board.

Sea kayaks have a covered deck and have the ability to add a spray deck. They have quite a flat hull to increase stability in the ocean waves and they are fairly long. This makes them faster and more stable, but less maneuverable. The longer length also gives you greater distance per stroke which is useful when paddling long distances.



The deck of the sea kayak has an interior storage space for gear, food, water, etc., and includes hatches to make it easily accessible. They usually have attachment points on the deck for deck lines which can be used in self-rescue situations or for securing equipment on deck.

Whitewater Kayaking

Whitewater kayaking takes place on a whitewater river, meaning a river with lots of rapids. The rapids can measure from mild to extreme. This is the most extreme form of kayaking and needs a lot of skill and specialized techniques in order to conquer the water.

With a whitewater, kayak maneuverability is your main goal, and therefore they are shorter in length than other types of kayaks.

Their hulls are more rounded. This is to create less contact with the water surface and makes rolling easier. With less connection, you also have a smaller surface area to manage, and this increases your maneuverability.

Essential gear for whitewater rafting is a buoyancy aid, helmet, and a spray deck. Many paddlers prefer a nose clip since it is inevitable that your boat will tip. Usually, a wetsuit or dry suit is needed.

Surf Kayaking

The Surf Kayak or the Surf ski is used in the surf and for following waves in the ocean. It emerged in the 1960's.

They are used all over the world not only for surfing the waves but also **for life-saving and for ocean competitions.**

They are long, narrow, lightweight and have a foot pedal controlled rudder. Their fin clusters at the back of the boat are similar to those of a surfboard. They have hard edges and a flat hull. It is a kind of like being seated on a big surfboard.

There are two categories of surf kayaks. The first is High-performance sea kayaks which have four fins to allow high speeds and easy cutting in on waves. The second is the International class that is designed without fins and they offer a smoother ride.

Since you will get soaked while riding it, surf kayaks are usually used in countries like South Africa, Australia, California, and Hawaii since they have warmer waters. In cooler areas, paddlers need to wear wet or dry suits to keep their body temperatures up.

Sports Kayaking

Competitive kayaking has become much more common, and there are different ways of competing.



The most popular race is Slalom racing. You go downstream at a fast speed while going through a series of “gates.” These “gates” are poles hung from cables above the river. Neither the kayak or your body is allowed to touch the gates.

River racing is different from Slalom racing in that there are no gates involved. Rapids from Grade 1 to Grade 5 (most difficult) can form part of this. The winner is the one who finishes in the shortest time.

Freestyle kayaking is quite different and the aim is not to finish first. Basically, your kayak remains still while you do all kinds of gymnastic moves and acrobatic tricks on it. A panel of judges grades all the contestants and decides on a winner. The kayak used for this is very short with a broad base.

Kayak Fishing

Fishing kayaks are becoming more popular due to their affordability and easy maintenance compared to motor boats. They have broad bases to increase stability on the water and to lessen overturning.

Many of the fishing kayaks can be fitted with added outriggers that provides even more stability. They work by increasing the surface area of the boat that is in contact with the water and attach to both sides of the kayak.

When Should You Go Kayaking, Is Winter Kayaking A Thing?

Most people prefer to kayak in the warmer parts of the year since you will inevitably get wet while kayaking. Thus, you should dress for the water and not the air temperature.

That being said... kayak enthusiasts agree that paddling through winter ice formations on a crystal-clear day is a rewarding venture. This is possible to do as long as you have the right equipment and your safety checks are in order.



General rules for winter kayaking:

- ❗ This is only for experienced kayakers
- ❗ Never go out alone
- ❗ Don't go out when the air temperature is below 15 degrees Fahrenheit: The water will freeze too quickly on your kayak and gear
- ❗ Dress properly: Dress for immersion. Dry suit, life vest, neoprene hoods, gloves, shoes, etc.
- ❗ Take extra clothing, a hot water flask and emergency gear with you
- ❗ Watch out for ice build-up on your deck, especially around the spray deck and handle.
- ❗ Beware of pack ice which can block your access to the shore
- ❗ Know the signs of hypothermia so you can notice it in yourself and your partner in time

Preparing For Kayaking

Three main things to consider before going into the water is warming up, taking the right gear with you and knowing where you are going.

Warm Up Exercises

Shoulder, elbow and wrist injuries are the most common injuries in kayakers. Low back strains are also seen frequently. Warming up properly **will not prevent all injuries, but it does decrease the frequency of them.**

There are many different warm-up routines, and as long as you take care to include the above body areas when warming up, you can't go wrong.

Here is an example of such a routine where you start warming up on land and finish in your kayak.

Land Based Warm Up

- Start off with light jogging for 5-10 minutes to get your body ready for the stretching.
- Effective stretches are angled pushups, reverse lunges (with trunk rotation), inverted hamstring stretching, pectoralis, biceps, and triceps stretch.

Kayak Based Warm Up

- Do some light paddling, boat control, and stroke drills for about 5 minutes.
- Now focus on shoulder flexion and extension, shoulder circles and wrist circles.

The Right Gear

To paddle, you need the right equipment. Here is the list:

- + **The right kayak** - For beginners, it is best to start with a recreational kayak which is shorter and has a larger cockpit. If you are worried about getting stuck in the cockpit when capsizing, go for a sit-on-top kayak.
- + **The right paddle** - Your paddle length is relative to your body length. Thus, a taller person would need a longer paddle. A spare paddle is a good idea when going on a long trip.
- + **Buoyancy aids** - This can be a life-saving device. It differs from a life jacket since it allows more movement around your neck and arms.
- + **Helmet** - This is generally advised since it protects your head not only from your paddle but also against your boat in a capsizing situation.
- + **Water shoes** - Wet shoes are made from neoprene with rubber soles that make walking on slippery surfaces easier. You can wear trainers, but they will get heavy and soggy from the water.
- + **Protective clothing** - This is weather dependable. In summer if your paddling on flat water you do not need special clothes. Most kayakers usually still wear a dry top though. In colder weather a wetsuit or even a dry suit is necessary. Dry suits are waterproof suits which you wear over your normal clothes. Kayaking gloves are also a good idea to protect your hands.
- + **Spray deck** - This is a waterproof skirt which wraps around your cockpit and keeps water out. This is not essential for beginners, but is of big use as you progress.
- + **Rope bag** - This is for rescue purposes where you can throw a rope to another kayaker who might be in trouble.
- + **Knife** - Also for emergency situations. A kayaking knife is made with a plastic sheath so prevent unnecessary accidents.
- + **Dry Bag** - This is to keep an extra set of clothes or your phone and keys dry.



Knowing The Route

It is important to know where you are going; otherwise, you won't know how long it would take to get back or where you would need to be picked up in the event of traveling down the river.

It is also important to know the skills needed for the specific expedition as you don't want to be caught up in rapids that are above your skill level.

It is advisable not to go kayaking alone, but rather in a group. If you do go alone it is important that someone on land knows where you are going and what your planned arrival time back home is.

Risk Factors To Consider When Kayaking

Risk factors involved with kayaking has mainly to do with common injuries, misjudging your abilities and failure to wear protective equipment like buoyancy aids and helmets.

Common injuries for kayakers include upper extremity soft tissue injuries like sprains, strains, and tendonitis of the shoulder, elbow or wrist. Lower back strains are also common, and therefore it is important to do core strengthening exercises and have the right warm-up techniques.

Heat stress, dehydration and sunburn is also common, but can be avoided with proper protection in terms of clothing worn, sun block and drinking enough water.

Beginners are more susceptible to injuries due to a lack of skill and should not attempt routes that are above their abilities.

Hypothermia is a potentially lethal complication but can easily be prevented with the right gear. Drowning is, of course, a risk, as with all other types of water sports, but it is rare amongst kayakers.

Simple Kayak Maintenance Tips

Most kayaks are really low maintenance, but it is important to take care of it to ensure that it will last you many years to come.

Cleaning Your Boat After Your Trip

The simplest way to clean your kayak is by rinsing it down with fresh water. While salt from the ocean can cause corrosion on the metal and rubber parts, freshwater from dirty rivers or polluted lakes can be contaminated with germs. It is a good idea to wash your kayak down with a mild soap solution a few times a year.



Storage

UV rays will not only discolor your kayak over time, but it will become less supple on the water and can cause structural damage. Plastic boats are more prone to this type of damage, but even fiberglass boats will suffer.

We advise that you keep your boat out of the sun when not in use and store it indoors. You can also consider spraying a protective UV spray once a year over the hull for the UV exposure while on the water.

Polyethylene or plastic kayaks can develop dips or dent over time on the hull. Most of the time this happens under the cockpit and a simple solution is to leave to kayak in the sun for a few hours. The sun's heat will loosen the plastic and this will help the kayak to return to its original shape.

Folding and inflatable kayaks can develop small tears or holes that need to be fixed. It is important to let them air-dry completely before storage.

Conclusion

Kayaking might change your life by taking you to explore places you have never seen. It will simultaneously relax and challenge you, and you will have a sense of achievement as you become more skilled.

We have prepared a Fishing Kayak Buying Guide for you, as well as Inflatable Kayak Buying Guide, to facilitate your decision when buying a new kayak.

It is best to try out as many kayaks as you can before you buy, so you know which works best for you.

Why not pick up a paddle and go find out for yourself?