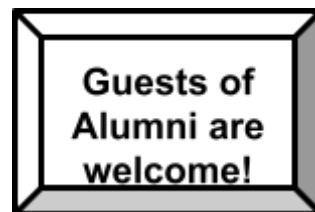


New Zealand Sea Kayaking

Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand

March 10 - 17, 2026



Features

- Six days sea kayaking in a dynamic ocean environment
- Seven nights accommodations in paddle-up, ocean-side lodges
- Approximately 50 miles of paddling, weather and conditions dependent
- Spectacular coastal scenery and wildlife
- Paddle single and/or double kayaks
- A mix of served and self-prepared meals

Cost: \$3,495

Pre- and post trip lodging included

Minimum Age: 18

Historic Age Range: 30-80

Max group size: 12 participants

2 instructors

Trip Description

NOLS first started exploring the South Island of New Zealand in 2002 and hasn't stopped yet! Initially drawn to the rainforests, mountains, and grasslands of one of the world's outdoor capitals we quickly realized its magical ocean environment too. Now, many years later, we invite our Alumni and their guests to explore Marlborough Sounds with NOLS on this incredible trip.

Join NOLS for a ~50 mile ocean kayaking trip through New Zealand's sea-drowned valleys. This lodge-to-lodge expedition travels through beautiful and remote bays during the days and paddles into oceanfront lodges each night. With the emphasis removed from camp setup and gear hauling, you will be able to spend lots of time exploring the coastline by kayak and on foot.

Tucking into the coves along this coastline you'll find bird and sea life that are unique to this environment. This is a largely undeveloped area where you will learn about its plant and animal diversity and how it is being used by human inhabitants. The Sounds are a popular area so there'll be the chance to interact with other people as they recreate and work.

We'll sleep in a variety of rustic and character-filled lodges. Our meals are a combination of self-catered and lodge-provided. This trip will visit four different lodges along the way and share space with other visitors and outdoor enthusiasts. All bedding is provided by the lodges so we don't have to pack nearly as much to be comfortable and can keep our gear piles light.

Expect 5-7 hours of paddling when we change lodges and good length day paddles on other days. Weather may swing from inclement and choppy to sunny and calm. The paddling is appropriate for all skill levels as the NOLS instructors will work with everyone at their own level to build kayaking

skills. Depending on weather and enthusiasm, there will be opportunities for extra paddling on most days, either to work on skill development or explore a bit more.

A fantastic part of alumni trips is the group itself. NOLS alumni and their guests are an interesting crew, with diverse professional and personal backgrounds. Expect plenty of camaraderie, laughter, learning, and shared responsibility on this trip.

Trip Environment

Marlborough Sounds is a dynamic ocean environment that brings together geographical and climate diversity into a package that allows for incredible paddling. The waters are more protected than the open ocean, so there isn't as much space for large waves to build. Additionally, the land helps to break up wind patterns and provide sheltered areas where paddling is still possible even in big blows. These are helpful features of the area, but by no means do they guarantee that paddling will happen every day. Instructors will help to build assessment skills in the group and make daily decisions about the appropriateness of getting on the water.

Ocean conditions will invariably change while you are spending a week in New Zealand. Glassy, smooth mornings can give way to choppy waves in the afternoons. Paddling can feel easy and relaxed at times and challenging at others. This is part of the fun of the ocean environment and instructors will ensure that no one is in over their head.

This is a biodiverse area where you can expect to see exceptional fauna as you paddle. Sea kayaking puts you in the environment of many of these animals without disturbing them so with some luck you will see dolphins, orca, penguins, and many native birds. Wildlife is considered one of the highlights of the Sounds and a reason for many visitors to make the journey.

Temperatures in late February tend to hover in the mid 60s as highs and drop down into the upper 40s at night. As with many ocean climates, when the sun is shining it is very pleasant and if the sun is hiding behind some clouds it might feel a bit chilly.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Every day's patterns are ruled by the weather and tides. While the days could change significantly, our rough pattern will remain the same.

In the mornings, we'll usually gather to enjoy a relaxed breakfast together as a group. Simple breakfasts are typical for this trip, some will be prepared at our lodge and others will be from supplies we bring along.

After cleaning up, we'll get packed and dressed before reviewing the day's plan and heading out. On the water the team paddles together, stopping for water, snack breaks, stretch and bio breaks, and lunch as needed. Paddling days will vary, but will generally be around 3-7 hours on the water.

When we arrive at our lodging for the night, instructors will check the group in and sort out bunks. Some participants might re-group for optional hikes or other activities, and others will change from paddling clothes into comfortable clothing for lounging around the lodges. Most people bring warmish casual clothes and light fleece or puffy jackets for the evenings.

Dinner for the group will be either provided by the lodge, or prepared together as a group. At times cooking and cleaning duties will be shared and we ask everyone to pitch in. After dinner, groups often enjoy card games or socializing. Most participants find themselves in bed much earlier than in their front-country lives.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies. New Zealand customs will not allow anything that isn't commercially sealed and also bans some specific items. Make sure you check the current regulations before landing.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including sea kayak paddling skills, chart reading, and travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal "classes" are few and mostly optional but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion— this is an ocean expedition.

About Marlborough Sounds

The Marlborough Sounds makes up a 1500 square mile area of sounds, islands, bays, and peninsulas. Human history dates back to at least the Māori who used the area extensively starting in the mid-1300s. Europeans first explored this area via Captain Cook in the 1770s.

Since those times, the Sounds have never experienced significant development or population growth. Fishing and whaling have had intermittent influence over the area while tourism is currently the primary occupying industry.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

March 6/7	Your travel will likely start around this time. You will lose a day as you cross time zones to get to New Zealand.	
March 9	Arrive in New Zealand on this day. We will meet for an orientation meeting in the hotel lobby area at 7 p.m.	Lodging at the Rutherford Hotel in Nelson provided by NOLS
March 10	Pick up at 7:30 a.m. to be transferred to the NOLS campus for breakfast, gear issuing, and final trip preparation. We will depart for the Marlborough Sounds and have lunch on the road before boarding a water taxi with our kayaks to get to our starting point.	Lodging at the Portage
March 11	Kayak orientation and introduction classes and a day trip to practice skills.	Lodging at Hopewell Lodge

March 12	Paddle 10-12 miles	Lodging at On the Track Lodge
March 13	Layover day with optional hiking or day paddle	Lodging at te Rawa
March 14	Paddle 10-12 miles	Lodging at te Rawa
March 15	Layover day with optional day paddle or hiking	Lodging at Clova Bay Cribbs
March 16	Paddle 14-15 miles	Lodging at Clova Bay Cribbs
March 17	Water taxi pick up in the morning and shuttle back to the NOLS New Zealand campus. Clean and drop gear before heading back into Nelson for showers and dinner.	Lodging at the Rutherford Hotel in Nelson, with dinner arranged by NOLS NZ.
March 18	Onward or homebound travel	

Trip Logistics

Getting to Nelson

Most participants will fly directly into Nelson (NSN), which is the easiest option. Nelson flights tend to connect through Auckland on the North Island.

If you have more time, flights into Christchurch (CHC) can be significantly less expensive. From Christchurch you can book a separate, domestic flight, rent a car, or take a bus. It isn't a short drive, but you get to see a fair amount of the South Island that way.

Crossing the International Dateline will add a calendar day to your travel. Most flights to New Zealand arrive 2-3 days after they depart the United States. This is an important detail to build into your planning and personal logistics.

Lodging

The trip tuition includes lodging in groups of 2 or 3 in Nelson (akin to tenting in the field, we'll group you in single gender rooms in town if you are traveling on your own). If you arrive early or want to stay in the area after the trip, [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) or [hotels.com](https://www.hotels.com) are both good tools.

Palms Motel
5 Paru Paru Road
7010 Nelson, New Zealand
<https://www.palmsnelson.co.nz/>

During the trip, accommodations will be at Lodges along the coast. The comfort level of these accommodations varies as will the room breakouts. At all locations we will make an effort to give couples, families, or friends traveling together private rooms and other participants will be in single gender rooms of two or mixed gender bunk style rooms that have many beds. All accommodations will be comfortable environments where sleeping bags, pads, and other types of camping items are not needed.

Storage of Personal Belongings

You will be able to store luggage and travel clothes at either the hotel or the NOLS New Zealand Campus before we head out on the trip. These items will be kept in a secure area and will be available again when we get back to the campus. Luggage stored will not be accessible during the trip.

Currency

New Zealand uses the New Zealand dollar. We recommend using an ATM to get the best exchange rate. If you are interested in purchasing alcohol with your meals at the lodges, we recommend bringing a small amount of money along on the trip. Alcohol is an extra and not included in the tuition.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Tipping

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required,

recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Passport / Visa

As of 1 October, 2019, U.S. citizens (and citizens of other visa waiver countries) entering New Zealand are required to obtain a New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority before traveling to New Zealand.

For a list of all countries this applies to, see:

www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/apply-for-a-visa/tools-and-information/general-information/visa-waiver-countries.

To obtain a New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority, and for more information, see the following webpage:

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/apply-for-a-visa/about-visa/nzeta>

Your application for a New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority will take up to 3 working days (week days) to process. We recommend applying at least 2 weeks before you are due to commence your travel.

When entering NZ you should declare that you are entering as a tourist. You will need to show onward travel arrangements (i.e., return ticket) to a country that you have the right to enter. In some cases, immigration officials will ask for proof of access to funds (NZ\$400 per person per month of stay) along with proof that your “accommodation” (i.e., your NOLS course) has been paid for. Acceptable evidence of sufficient funds can be demonstrated in the form of a credit card statement, bank statement, cash (not recommended), or travelers checks.

For up-to-date information or clarification please see the NZ Immigration website at:

www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/visit/visitors

You do not need a student visa to participate as a student on a NOLS course. If you declare yourself as a student this will merely cause unnecessary hassle for you. The word “student” to New Zealand Immigrations means you are in New Zealand to study at a university. You are a “participant” on an outdoor course.

Electricity stuff

You will have regular access to power plugs on this trip and be able to plug in and charge your devices. To do this, you will need a Type 1 adapter.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Things to do in/around Nelson

- [Take a day trip \(or longer visit\) to the Abel Tasman one of many operators is Wilson's.](#)
- [Hire a bike or e-bike from one of the many bike shops in Nelson and take in a section of the Great Taste Trail or the other bike trails on offer in the Nelson region.](#)
- [Nelson Provincial Museum](#)
- [Take a walk up the center of NZ](#)

Equipment List - available for rent “yes” Not available for rent “X”

This trip visits NOLS New Zealand, you can rent or purchase any gear you need there

Group Gear Provided by NOLS			
Kayaks, both doubles and singles	Dry bags for your personal gear	First Aid kits, emergency communication	PFDs (Personal flotation device)
Paddles	Spray Skirts	Local Charts	Spray/Paddle Jackets

Upper Body Clothing		
Equipment	Rent	Notes
Base layer (light or midweight)	X	Synthetic or wool

Top layer (fleece jacket, or puffy)	Yes	Heavy weight fleece or a medium weight puffy layer. If you feel the cold you may wish to bring an additional light-weight fleece.
Long sleeve shirt	X	Important for sun protection, synthetic or wool
Wind shirt (optional)	Yes	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	X	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable
T-shirt (1-2)	X	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports bra or tank (2-3)	X	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Warm hat	X	Synthetic or wool
Sun hat	X	Baseball cap or full brim
Gloves or mittens	X	Medium weight, windproof/waterproof can be nice
Lower Body Clothing		
Base layer (Light or mid)	X	Optional: Synthetic or wool
Wind/Hiking pants	Yes	Breathable nylon wind pants or lightweight hiking pants
Shorts	X	Nylon, quick dry shorts
Rain Pants/Paddle Pants	X	Waterproof pants for rainy times in camp or as additional layer in the kayaks
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	X	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine
Footwear		
Paddling footwear	X	A pair of shoes to paddle in that can get wet, closed toe.
Beach Sandals or Sneakers	X	Something to wear at the end of the day
Socks (2-3 pairs)	X	½ crew to crew length wool socks
Miscellaneous Personal Gear		
Plastic trash bags (1-2)	X	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof items in your kayak
Hydration system	X	2 Liters capacity or more. Bladders with 3 Liters are great
Spoon, bowl, mug	X	12+ oz bowl w/ lid, plastic spoon, lightweight mug
Lip balm (1-2)	X	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	X	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	X	100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark
Sunglass Retainers	X	Something to keep your sunglasses on your head while kayaking
Headlamp	X	Might be useful on occasion

Toiletries	X	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. Ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Bug Spray	X	1-3 oz, sand flies can be bad
Optional Items		
Book or e-reader	X	Bring something fun to read
Camera	X	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual clothes	X	Shirt/pants/skirt for dinner or hanging out around the huts
Ear Plugs	X	Communal sleeping may be a little noisy sometimes!
Swimwear	X	There are lots of opportunities to swim. Swimming in underwear and hiking shorts is fine, but if you prefer swimwear bring it.
Pack towel	X	If you like to dry-off after swimming