

Prince William Sound Sea Kayaking - Adult Course Description

Join a group of motivated adults looking to expand their outdoor skills and deepen their connection with the wilderness. Learn the basics of sea kayaking while you practice being a leader on an expedition, exploring the stunning coastline of Prince William Sound. If you want to get away on an expedition that's beyond a guided adventure, then this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 14 days
- Route length: 75-100 miles
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Average age: 32 / minimum age: 23
- Watercraft used: single and double kayaks
- Terrain: coastal sea kayaking and possible travel near tidal glaciers
- Opportunities for day hikes
- Possibility of fishing for salmon, rockfish, and halibut (route-dependent)
- Wildlife you may see: whales, porpoises, sea otters, seals, sea lions, sea birds, starfish, and anemones

- 250-pound participant weight limit (this is a function of the kayak's weight carrying capacity)

Overview

Prince William Sound offers a spectacular and varied natural history; it is a place for observation, exploration and discovery. Visiting some of the last, great tidewater glaciers is a must for anyone's bucket list. The variety of the landscape is compelling and the sea teems with life. You'll work hard paddling with all your gear for the expedition stowed in your boat, and you'll play hard as well. This expedition will maximize time in the more remote parts of Prince William Sound by taking a chartered landing craft in and out of the field.

You will start by learning the foundational skills needed to paddle in a protected ocean environment, including an introduction to kayak equipment, paddle strokes, chart reading and wet exits. As the group becomes more comfortable with the environment, you will advance to more complex topics ranging from reading tides and ocean currents

to weather to assessing marine hazards. Do not be surprised to find yourself sitting in a class about local geology, rainforest botany or sea mammals, or participating in a discussion on different leadership styles and expedition behavior. This expedition is by no means a vacation or a guided tour, but rather an opportunity to exercise and hone your leadership and outdoor skills with your peers. Fishing for Alaska Wild Salmon can also be a true highlight. By the end of the course, you'll have the experience to accomplish your own coastal expeditions.

Land Acknowledgment

We recognize that our journey takes place in the traditional homelands of the Alutiiq, Chugach, and Eyak peoples, who have stewarded these lands and waters for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence, place names, and stories reflect the deep connection between these Indigenous communities and Prince William Sound, where traditional village sites and seasonal use areas are tied to the abundant resources of the region. Today, this land continues to hold great cultural, spiritual, and subsistence significance for Alaska Native peoples. We honor and respect their enduring relationship with this landscape.

Wilderness Study Area Information

Our expedition primarily operates within the boundaries of the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area, part of the Chugach National Forest. This 1.9 million-acre area was designated by Congress under the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and is managed to preserve its wilderness character. Since the 1970s, Prince William Sound has been recognized for its exceptional wilderness value, leading to federal efforts to protect its unique landscapes. The Wilderness Study Area ensures that this extraordinary region remains wild and remote, maintaining its potential for future inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. As we journey through these waters, we embrace the responsibility to uphold the integrity of this wilderness and the rich cultural heritage it represents.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

The weather in this area can change from day to day. You should expect highly variable weather that changes quickly from hot sunshine to rain or snow. Precipitation is very common here. It is not unusual to experience rain for more than half of your course. Prolonged storms can prohibit paddling for multiple days.

Wildlife

The area your course will travel through is home to black bears. NOLS, in collaboration with bear biologists, has developed specific practices to minimize the risk of a bear encounter. Your instructors will teach these practices to you and you will have to follow them every day. Bear avoidance practices may include carrying bear deterrent pepper spray, meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites, not having food in tents, and practicing proper food storage.

Remoteness

Remoteness adds to the challenges of this course. There are no roads in this area. Weather and other factors may prohibit helicopters from flying or boats landing, which may delay evacuation of a sick or injured group member. Prudent route selection and continual adherence to risk management practices—a constant theme in our instruction—is how we manage the inherent risks of wind and waves, rocky shore-lines, fog, currents, open crossings, animals, cold water and long stretches of exposed coastline. The consistent practice of risk management techniques and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members will help make your expedition in these wild, beautiful mountains healthy and enjoyable.

Learning Goals at NOLS

NOLS courses teach wilderness and leadership skills on expeditions and in classrooms. You will apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning culture with high expectations. Your course will provide you with the opportunity for a positive, transformative experience intended to inspire you and empower you to act.

We craft NOLS courses so graduates will be able to assume leadership roles; live and travel in the outdoors; act with confidence and competence; respect and collaborate with others on expeditions, on teams and in communities; care for themselves and others; understand their strengths, habits, and areas for growth; function under difficult circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively; connect with natural places; and appreciate living simply.

We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.