

Pacific Northwest Sea Kayaking

Course Description

Enjoy the thrill of traveling the wild coasts of Canada under your own power and master sea kayaking skills on this month-long course. If you want to challenge yourself on the water and grow as a leader, this expedition is your gateway to a lifetime of adventure.

Features

- Duration: 30 days
- Average group size: 10 students / 2 instructors
- Average age: 20 / minimum age: 16
- Watercraft: single and double sea kayaks
- 250-pound participant weight limit (this is a function of the kayak's weight carrying capacity)
- Skills: coastal navigation, reading tides and currents, paddling and boat handling
- Varied coastal environment: inland waters, fjords, bays, coves, island archipelagos
- Opportunities for on-shore exploration
- Opportunity for students to travel in small groups independent of instructors (based on instructor discretion)
- Notable wildlife: bears, wolves, seals, and whales

Overview

On this course, you'll explore the stunning coast of the Pacific Northwest in British Columbia, Canada. You'll master the skills you need to travel competently in an ocean environment, develop your leadership skills, and learn about local ecology. By the end of the course, you'll be prepared for a lifetime of adventures on the water.

You'll start out practicing the fundamentals of sea kayaking in more protected waters, including paddling and rescue techniques, chart reading, and "wet exits." Once you master the basics, you'll head out onto more exposed, open coastlines and move on to advanced topics, including tides, ocean currents, and the assessment of marine hazards. As you gain proficiency in ocean travel, you'll also develop essential backcountry living and Leave No Trace skills and become a more effective leader and team member.

You'll spend your days exploring coves, islands, and fjords along the coast and nights camping on remote beaches. On the water, you might spot seals or whales, and inland, you might catch a glimpse of bears or wolves. Surrounded by open water and coastal wilderness, you'll get an unparalleled introduction to expedition sea kayaking on this course.

Independent Student Group Travel

At the beginning of the course your instructors will travel with you to teach travel skills including navigation, leadership, risk assessment, and decision-making. As you develop competence, instructors will gradually give you more responsibilities. Once you gain proficiency and demonstrate competence to your instructors, you may paddle in student-led groups without instructors for up to a day at a time—we call this independent student group travel.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

This area has a maritime climate and the weather can be variable. Wet and windy weather and rough seas are not uncommon in addition to experiencing flat, calm waters.

Remoteness

For the duration of your course, you'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be days away. All NOLS instructors maintain wilderness medicine certifications and are equipped with well-stocked first aid kits to provide care in the event of an emergency.

Wildlife

The area your course will travel through is home to grizzly and 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 include carrying bear deterrent pepper spray, meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites, not having food in tents, and proper food storage. In some situations in grizzly bear country, the minimum group size is generally four people. You will live, travel, and take care of personal necessities with a group of your peers always close by. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course, one of the most challenging aspects of living in grizzly bear country.

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.