Sea Kayaking - Alumni

Prince William Sound, Alaska
July 29 - August 4, 2026



Features

- Six nights and seven days in the field
- Paddle single and double kayaks
- Paddling near tidewater glaciers
- ~40 mile paddling route
- Abundant Alaskan wildlife
- Coastal & intertidal exploration
- Great fishing

Cost: $2,795
Minimum Age: 16

Historic Age Range: 16-81
Max group size: 12 Participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

This kayaking adventure is a great trip for all levels of paddlers and a great way to introduce friends and family to NOLS. Prince William Sound—the environment for this expedition—offers a spectacular and varied natural history. On a sea kayaking trip you will get to explore not only marine and terrestrial terrain but see the area that links them and supports life in its own unique manner. The Sound is a place for observation, exploration, and discovery and you will have time for all. For seven days, you'll paddle beneath towering glaciers, past wooded coves, and camp on the uniquely Alaskan rock, gray wacky. The sea teems with life—whales, porpoises, sea otters, seals and sea lions. Seabirds wheel in the sky overhead and tidal pools with starfish, anemones, and other small creatures dot the shorelines. The hardest part of this trip is choosing what to spend time letting your senses soak in.

The first day of the trip is a busy one, beginning at 7:00 AM in front of the Alaska Railroad Station in Anchorage. From the railroad station we will drive to NOLS Alaska headquarters located 50 miles north of Anchorage near Palmer. You will then get to know your instructors as well as the other expedition members. The morning will be spent issuing equipment for the entire trip. Then, we will drive to Whittier in the afternoon, make final preparations, and take a water taxi out to our first camp. The first night, we will be camping in the backcountry.

The next 5 days will be spent kayaking in Prince William Sound. The specific route is determined by your Instructor team in the days before the trip as weather forecast and tidal heights affect the plan. Every day is a paddling day, maximizing time spent on the water in this iconic area. You will get tuned in to the unique skill sets of backcountry travel and living in this environment of constant daylight.

Throughout the trip you will spend time exploring the zone where the ocean meets the land. This area’s influence extends beyond its physical space as it influences the daily patterns of all life along the coast, including kayakers. Tide pooling, marine ecology, animal observation, and even eating some seaweed are common activities while you are onshore in between paddles. On the water, we

like to stay close to shore where we can observe this same environment from a different perspective. Crystal clear water allows us to peer into the underwater home that so few people ever see and watch seals swim around underneath our kayaks.

On the last day, you will be picked up by a water taxi and taken back to Whittier, concluding your time on the water. Cleaning gear, returning rentals, showering, and sharing stories will wrap up back at the NOLS campus before you head back into Anchorage for onward travel.

Please do not book flights that leave earlier than 10pm on the last day. Flights after 10pm are appropriate for your return home after the trip.

Trip Environment

The weather on Prince William Sound can change from day to day. Overcast and cool days are the norm for summer, as is lots of rain. You can expect it to rain or drizzle for at least half of the course. Storms can prohibit paddling and ground the course at a beach for a few days. There are times when you will be wet, cold, and tired, but you will learn to manage these situations, and maybe even smile as you do. Sunny, warm summer days are a welcome break.

You will primarily be in black bear habitat. 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, and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence when moving through areas where visibility is poor.

Remoteness adds to the challenges of this course. There are no roads. Weather and other factors may prohibit or delay aircraft or boats from reaching the course, which may delay an 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.

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

Days start out with a group prepared breakfast followed by a refresher of the plan for the day. You will then likely break camp, move boats down to the water, pack them up, and start paddling.

Each day will typically involve 4-8 hours of kayaking. The paddling difficulty is typically weather dependent and plans will often change based on that large variable. You will encounter some currents from the large tides that breathe life in and out of the Sound.

You will be working hard throughout the day and it is important to remember that lunch starts when breakfast is over and ends at dinner. Snacking and eating informally throughout the entire day is more typical than an organized lunch time.

Dinners will be prepared by the group and you'll eat communally before enjoying an evening with your trip mates. Evenings will also include establishing and reviewing the plan for the next day.

Tenting on this trip will be akin to our standard NOLS Expeditions. You will likely be sharing space with people you have not met before. We will try to keep our tents single-sex unless you are a couple or ask to tent with another person in particular. We try to provide a comfortable amount of living space for Alumni trips, but sharing a tent almost always feels small for anyone more accustomed to a bedroom.

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.

Curriculum

Instructors hold both formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects and skills that will enhance your ability to travel in a coastal environment long after your trip ends. These begin with the basics— camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques, and sanitation— which are the foundation for any wilderness sea kayak expedition. Instructors will cover kayaking curriculum beginning with paddle strokes, paddle signals, group travel, and will then move on to hazard assessment, reading water, and rescue techniques. The expedition format emphasizes hands-on learning and application of new skills in a variety of situations.

Safe travel, outdoor living, and sea kayak skills are taught throughout the trip. The teaching progression depends on the group's abilities and weather conditions on the trip. Objectives include:

- Competent launchings and landings in various conditions
- Paddle Signals
- Basic-paddling strokes: forward, reverse, sweep, draw, low and high braces
- Basic self and assisted rescues
- Coastal hazards: wind, waves, weather, currents, tides and coastline geography
- Responsible group travel and use of safety equipment
- Coastal navigation

About Alaska

Nicknamed "The Last Frontier," Alaska became the 49th state in 1959. It is the largest state, the most northern point of the US, the most western point, and, because it crosses hemispheres, the most eastern point.

The state's name, derived from the Aleut word "Alyeska," speaks to the heritage and history of the state. Originally populated by tribes who crossed the Bering Strait land bridge, descendents today still occupy parts of Alaska. The Athabaskans, the Aleuts, and the Tlingit are examples of tribes who still live in Alaska today, although their numbers dwindle. The Russians were the first to colonize the territory in the 17th century. The Spanish also worked to colonize Alaska in the later part of the 1700s. The United States bought the land from Russia shortly after the Civil War, and it was initially mainly occupied by the military. Today, Alaska is still one of the least populated states in the US.

Alaska is home to a diverse environment and climate. Home to a boreal forest, glaciers, mountains, and volcanos, it is extremely varied. Alaska has 17 of the 20 highest peaks in the United States. A volcano chain in Alaska is part of the Ring of Fire near Hawaii. And there are more active glaciers and icefields in Alaska than the rest of the inhabited world. It is extremely diverse!

And although Alaska has one of the smallest economies of the US, it has one of the highest per capita incomes because of fishing, natural gas, and oil. Alaska is highly dependent on tourism during summer months and the presence of the military.

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 trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

July 28	Depending on your location and connections, many participants will travel to Anchorage (ANC) on this day. Lodging is your responsibility.
July 29	7 a.m. – Meet at the Alaska Railroad Station in downtown Anchorage at 1st & C Streets. NOLS will shuttle the group ~50 miles to the NOLS Campus in Palmer, AK. You will then organize your gear, pack your bags, drive to Whittier, and load up a water taxi that will take you to your first campsite.
July 30-August 3	Paddle and explore the Prince William Sound of Alaska!
August 4	Meet our water taxi for a ride out, load boats and travel back to the NOLS Campus for clean up, showers and dinner before shuttling to Anchorage. Do not plan to fly out before 10:00 pm this evening.

Travel Logistics

Pre-trip Lodging

We recommend B&Bs as a very comfortable lodging option in Anchorage. Based on past student experience, we recommend the following locations. Price and services offered vary. Space may be limited so call early for reservations.

Alaska House of Jade
907.337.3400
Web site – alaskahouseofjade.com
Email – alaskahouseofjade@ak.net
Hosts – Zack and Krista Walker

Coastal Trail Bed & Breakfast
907.243 .5809
Email - info@coastaltrail.com
Hosts - Derek and Sherry Tomilson

Anchorage Walkabout Town
866.279.7808
Web site – anchoragewalkabout.com
Email – walkaboutak@gmail.com
Hosts – Terry and Sandy Stimson

Anchorage fills up during the summer, so we suggest you make reservations well in advance.

Getting to Alaska

Most major airlines service Anchorage (ANC). Please check their individual websites for current information. The Alaska Time Zone is 4 hours behind Eastern, 3 hours behind Central, 2 hours behind Mountain, and 1 hour behind Pacific.

Taxis to downtown Anchorage from ANC cost ~$30. Most hotels provide shuttles.

If You Are Delayed On Arrival Day

If your arrival to Anchorage is delayed and you are not able to make the pick up at the train station, please call the NOLS Alaska Office at 907.745.4047 or call the NOLS Alumni Office at 800.332.4280.

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.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal belongings and vehicles may be stored at the NOLS facility for the duration of your trip. All of your personal belongings that you leave at our base in Palmer will be brought to you in Anchorage at the end of the trip. Due care will be taken to prevent theft or damage of your personal belongings. NOLS does not assume any liability for lost, stolen or damaged personal property while stored at a NOLS facility or elsewhere. NOLS will not honor any personal claim for property loss while in our care.

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.

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.**

Your tuition includes meals starting with breakfast on the first morning through dinner on the last day, all group equipment, camping gear (tents, stoves, kitchens, etc.), kayaking gear, safety equipment, instruction, permits, and transportation.

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.

Equipment List

Available for rent "yes"
Not available for rent "X"

Shared Group Equipment—NOLS will supply		
Tents	Compass	Maps
Bear Spray	Fishing Gear	Trowel or shovel
GPS	Repair Kits	Reference books
Cooking gear/spice kits	Soap and hand sanitizer	First Aid kits
Kayaks	Paddles	PFD's and spray skirts

Upper Body Clothing		
Equipment	**Rent**	**Notes**
T-Shirt (1-2)	X	Synthetic or wool
Base Layer (mid-weight)	X	Long-sleeve top, synthetic or wool
Sports bra or tank (2-3)	X	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Mid-Layer	X	Wool or synthetic, expedition weight
Top layer	Yes	Fleece or a medium weight puffy jacket
Rain Jacket	Yes	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable
Paddle Jacket	Yes	It is smart to have a separate rain jacket for in camp and paddle jacket for on the water.

Fleece/Wool Gloves	X	Warm gloves made of fleece or wool.
Baseball Cap or Sun Hat	X	Sun protection of your face and ears.
Wool or Fleece Hat	Yes	A warm hat made of wool or fleece.
Optional Items		
Fleece or Insulated Vest	X	Lightweight fleece or other synthetic
Wind Shirt	Yes	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell. Pullover or zip-up style
Lower Body Clothing		
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	X	Men's briefs or boxers in Capilene or wool are recommended. Women should wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine
Hiking Shorts or pants	X	Nylon, quick dry shorts
Wind Pants	Yes	Nylon wind pants or lightweight hiking pants
Base Layer (mid-weight)	Yes	Synthetic or wool
Rain Pants	Yes	A sturdy waterproof pant. Coated nylon or breathable fabrics like Gore-Tex® are great.
Optional Items		
Mid-Layer (fleece pants or puffy pants)	Yes *fleece	Mid- or heavy-weight bottoms that fit comfortably over the base-layer bottoms.
Footwear		
Dry Pants and Shoes	Yes	Waist high dry pants will keep you warm and dry while in and out of the water. Our rental comes with rubber neoprene shoes.
Wet Shoe	X	Neoprene shoes or tennis shoes with neoprene socks for paddling
Socks (3-4 pairs)	X	½ crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised.
Camp Shoes	X	Think lightweight and closed toe. Crocs are great.
Packs and Bags		
Equipment Bag	Yes	Large duffel bag for keeping gear organized in camp, we recommend renting this.
Zip duffel bags (2-3)	Yes	Smaller duffels for packing into kayaks, we recommend renting these.

Plastic Trash Bags (3)	X	2 mil/33 gallon bag for waterproofing
Optional Items		
Ditty Bags (2-3)	Yes	Small nylon or net bags for organizing
Sleeping Gear		
Sleeping Bag (20 degree)	$25	Synthetic fill, we rent 0 and 20 degree bags
Compression Stuff Sack	$5	For your sleeping bag
Sleeping Pad	$3 *foam	We sell Therm-A-Rest inflatable pads.
Miscellaneous Items		
Hot Drink Container	X	Insulated mug or thermos
Bowl	X	A bowl (12+ oz) with a secure lid.
Spoon	X	Lexan spoons are light and durable.
Hydration System (2)	X	At least 2 liters (64 oz.) carrying capacity is required. Must have one water bottle.
Sunscreen / Lip Balm	X	SPF 30 or greater.
Sunglasses / Retainers	X	Lenses should be dark and 100% UV resistant. Retainers are useful.
Bandanas (1-2)	X	Useful for a variety of purposes.
Glasses and Contact Lenses	X	Bring spare glasses or contact lenses.
Headlamp	X	LED headlamp preferable. Not 100% needed in July.
Lighter	X	
Personal Hygiene Articles	X	Travel size
Hand Sanitizer	X	A 2 oz. bottle, alcohol-based is preferable.
Watch	X	Water–resistant. An alarm is helpful.
Optional Items		
Notepad	X	A small, lightweight pad is fine. We sell NOLS waterproof expedition journals.
Pen or Pencil (1-2)	X	Bring some spares.
Coffee	X	Bring if you enjoy coffee for yourself in the morning. Coffee is not supplied by NOLS.
Camera	X	Compact camera with protective case.

Buff	X	Great multi-functional headwear
Insect Repellent	X	A small bottle or tube. No aerosol spray cans.
Mosquito Headnet	X	Mesh head net with drawstring
Umbrella	X	An instructor favorite