

Anything with a Paddle is Fun

by Joanne Schwartz

Paddling is easy to learn. Most sailors who buy their first kayak as a shore boat quickly realize that paddling becomes a goal in itself. The exercise, the quiet exploration of shorelines, and the sleek sensation a part of the motion of the ocean attract many who love the sea. But which type of craft is right for you? Here's a guide. Rental prices are those common in Southern California. Sea or touring kayaks are generally 14-19 ft. long, with a keel running the entire length of the bottom. They hold upwards of 150 lbs. of gear and are great for day, overnight or long distance touring. Paddlers sit in a cockpit covered by a spray deck so the ride is dry and comfortable. Single person, double and even triple kayaks are available in fiberglass, polyethylene ("plastic") or wood. Folding models which pack into a bag for carrying on airplanes and storing where space is scarce are also very popular. These skin (Hypalon, canvas or Cordura) and frame (aluminum alloy or wood) kayaks work like a back-packing tent, but you end up with a sea worthy craft rather than a dome. Most touring kayaks are very sea worthy and can be paddled in open oceans as well as on calm rivers and lakes. Sea kayaks generally cost \$900-\$2600, with many at about \$1200. They rent from \$8 per hour to \$45 per day with doubles to \$65 per day.

Open top kayaks are sculptured platforms to sit upon while you paddle. They are generally shorter and wider, with singles 10-15 ft long by 26-30 in wide. These playful kayaks are great for short day trips, surfing waves and paddling in fun Class I and II whitewater. Outfitting open top kayaks consists of adding seat pads, backs and sometimes hatches and rudders for comfortable paddling and thigh straps for safety and control in the surf. Singles cost between \$350-\$700 and doubles a bit more. They rent from \$6 per hour to \$30 per day, with doubles to \$45 per day.

Whitewater kayaks are short, 12-13 ft. long, with a very rounded bottom and no keel. They are designed to be highly maneuverable in wild white water rivers and in the surf. Whitewater kayaks are somewhat less stable and take more skill to handle than touring kayaks. The ride is thrilling and worth the effort for those who crave excitement. Specialized, ultra low volume boats provide extreme maneuverability and allow crowd pleasing paddling tricks in moving water. Whitewater kayaks, generally made of polyethylene they run \$550-\$850, or sometimes of fiberglass for about \$1200. They rent for \$25-35 per day. Surf Skis are longer yet, often 18 ft.-21 ft, and very narrow. They are designed for racing and paddling on very flat water. Some are strong enough for use in rolling waves. Surf skis are open-top, just sit on and go! They generally lack storage areas but are outfitted with skegs or rudders. Most are less stable than any other boat described here, although there are a few stable, much less speedy exceptions. They run \$800-\$2800 and rent for \$30-45 per day.

Wave Skis are from 7 ft. to 9 ft and are like surf boards with indentations for feet and the paddler's seat. They might have tri-fin thruster systems like short surf boards or be finless for a "free style" ride. Wave skis allow paddlers to surf any break frequented by board surfers and to do many of the same moves on the waves. They provide the ultimate sit-down-with-a-paddle performance surfing experience. Made from either fiberglass or polyethylene, they cost \$450-\$1450 and are rarely available for rent.

Canoes are the traditional open top boats used by North American Indians, early fur traders and most any youngster in summer camp. Canoes are especially attractive for families with small children, dogs or large ice chests since they are designed to carry large loads. They come in models for solo or tandem paddling in either white water river or calm water conditions. Canoes are constructed from fiberglass, aluminum, polyethylene, Royalex, wood and other materials and cost \$350-\$2000. They rent from \$35-\$45 per day, or sometimes as little as \$15 each for big numbers of older aluminum canoes.

Other specialty boats include surf kayaks with flat planning bottoms, Olympic-style racing canoes and kayaks, Slalom River racing canoes and kayaks, inflatable kayaks, rafts, outrigger canoes for team racing and rowing shells. These are rarely available for rent except the larger, more expensive river rafts and kayaks.

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