

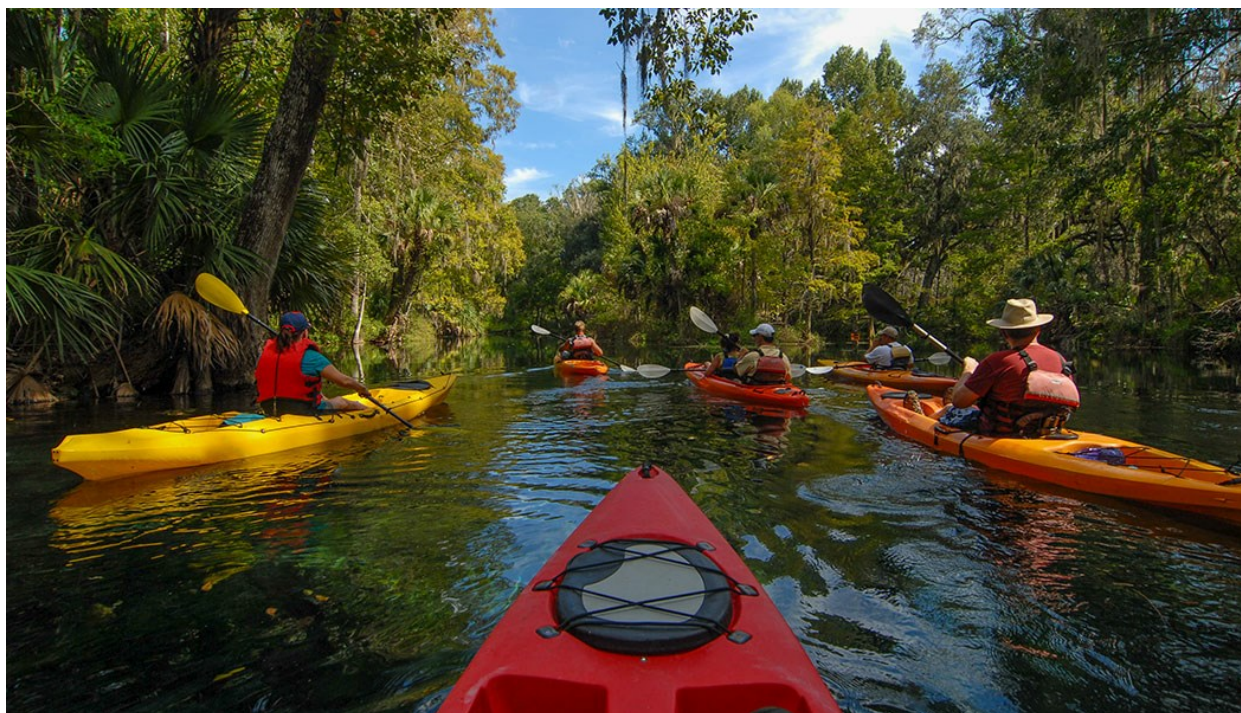
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## Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits

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### Summary

- Both canoeing and kayaking involve paddling a small craft through water.
  - The best way to learn how to paddle is to join a local club – contact Canoeing Victoria for further information.
  - Make sure your preparation and skills are adequate for the paddling activity you have planned.
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Both canoeing and kayaking involve paddling a small craft through water. They are low-impact activities that can improve your aerobic fitness, strength and flexibility. Canoeing and kayaking can be done as a hobby, a competitive sport or as a fun activity on holidays. You can paddle on rivers, lakes and the sea.

### Difference between canoe and kayak

While 'canoe' and 'kayak' are often used interchangeably, a few basic differences include:

- Canoe – this is an open vessel and the person either sits or kneels inside the canoe and uses a single-bladed paddle to push the craft through the water.
- Kayak – this is an enclosed vessel and the person sits inside the kayak with legs extended and uses a double-bladed paddle.

There are exceptions – some canoes may be enclosed and some kayaks may be open depending on their intended use.

### Types of paddling activities

In most cases, the craft is adapted or designed to fit the demands of the intended environment. Some of the

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different types of canoeing and kayaking activities include:

- Flatwater recreation – this is what most people imagine when they think of canoeing or kayaking. You can take a gentle paddle down a calm river, do some sightseeing in calm ocean waters or explore an inland lake system.
- Sea kayaking – this is paddling in the sea. Sea kayaking is becoming a popular water sport in Australia.
- Sailing – the canoe or kayak is fitted with a sail.
- Surf kayaking – the kayak is typically fitted with a fin, rather like a surfboard.
- Sprint racing – this is a sprint race across calm water.
- Ocean racing – this is a race in white water (ocean). This discipline requires extreme skill and fitness.
- Marathon racing – this is a lengthy race, for example, down a long river such as the Murray.
- Slalom – the person must, against the clock, negotiate a white water course. This includes steering around obstacles (typically, poles suspended over the course).
- Canoe polo – two teams of five players each must compete to score the most goals using a water polo ball.
- Freestyle – is a whitewater canoe discipline where the paddler performs a range of acrobatic tricks and manoeuvres on a river feature such as a wave or hole.
- Wildwater – is the ultimate combat, human versus river. Athletes must manage a 4.5 metre-long, 11 kilogram, very unstable, composite craft down a river anywhere from flatwater up to grade 4 rapids.

### **Health benefits of canoeing and kayaking**

Canoeing and kayaking are low impact activities that can improve your aerobic fitness, strength and flexibility. Specific health benefits include:

- Improved cardiovascular fitness
- Increased muscle strength, particularly in the back, arms, shoulders and chest, from moving the paddle
- Increased torso and leg strength, as the strength to power a canoe or kayak comes mainly from rotating the torso and applying pressure with your legs
- Reduced risk of wear-and-tear on joints and tissues, since paddling is a low impact activity.

### **Other benefits of canoeing and kayaking**

Some other good reasons to paddle include:

- Kayaking and canoeing can be peaceful and meditative or can be exhilarating – depending on where and how you do it.
- Paddling is a great way to enjoy our waterways.

### **Preparing for canoeing and kayaking**

General tips for beginners include:

- Join a club – the best way to learn how to paddle is to join a local club. Contact Canoeing Victoria for further information. While it's possible to learn a great deal about the sport through reading, lessons will improve your technique, reduce your risk of injuries and help you become more aware of safety issues when on the water.
- Be a competent swimmer – since paddling involves the occasional tip into the water, make sure you are a competent swimmer. If necessary, brush up on your swimming technique.
- Try before you buy – paddling can be an expensive pastime. Consider borrowing or hiring equipment at first until you are sure that you enjoy canoeing and kayaking enough to pay for a full kit.

### **Basic kit for canoeing and kayaking**

The exact requirements of a full kit differ slightly depending on the type of paddling you plan to do and the demands of the waterway, but a basic kit should include:

- canoe or kayak
- appropriate paddle
- personal floatation device (PFD), such as a life vest or jacket. **This is mandatory when paddling in Victorian waters**
- helmet
- wetsuit
- wetsuit booties
- appropriate clothing
- spray deck, which is a cover that helps to keep water out of the craft.

### **What to take when canoeing and kayaking**

Items you should take with you when you paddle include:

- first aid kit
- repair kit
- drinkable water
- small pack of high energy foods
- dry clothes contained in a waterproof bag
- mobile telephone inside a waterproof container.

### **Sea kayaking – extra equipment**

The risks of sea kayaking call for extra safety equipment. In addition to the basic kit and items listed above, a sea kayaker would need:

- waterproof torch that floats
- bilge pump and bailing device
- distress signal devices such as orange smoke sticks, red flares, parachute distress rocket or dye markers
- compass
- spare paddle
- marine radio.

### **Health and safety suggestions for canoeing and kayaking**

General suggestions include:

- Learn how to paddle from experienced teachers. Contact your local club.
- Know how to use your first aid kit. Take a first aid course if necessary.
- Make sure your preparation and skills are adequate for the planned paddling activity.
- Be visible to other crafts. Put reflective tape or fluorescent paint on your helmet, life jacket and canoe or kayak.
- Always wear your personal floatation device and helmet.
- Make sure you know about potential hazards in the proposed waterway. Seek local knowledge if paddling in a location for the first time, consider air and water temperature, currents, tides and wave action.
- Check weather conditions before you paddle.
- Don't paddle alone. Always tell someone about your plans, including where you intend to paddle and when you expect to be back.

- Dress for the conditions. Apply 30+ SPF sunscreen (or higher) to all exposed areas of skin.
- Avoid dehydration. Take plenty of water to drink.
- Keep your equipment in good repair.

### Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- Bureau of Meteorology Tel. 1196 – for latest weather forecasts
- Canoeing Victoria Tel. (03) 8846 4120
- Victorian Sea Kayak Club
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- Transport Safety Victoria – Maritime Safety Tel. 1800 223 022
- Sports Medicine Australia
- Tel. (03) 9674 8777 – for first aid courses

### Things to remember

- Both canoeing and kayaking involve paddling a small craft through water.
- The best way to learn how to paddle is to join a local club – contact Canoeing Victoria for further information.
- Make sure your preparation and skills are adequate for the paddling activity you have planned.

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