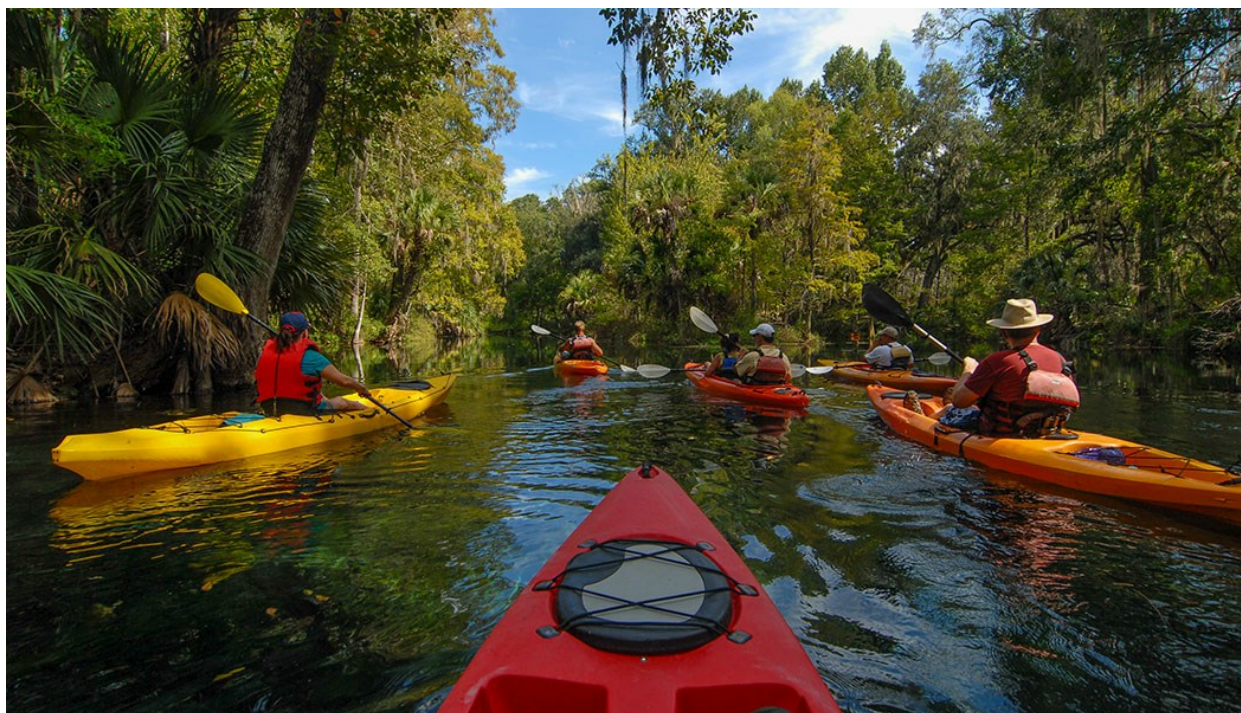

Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits

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

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.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Smartplay

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