



Lifeboats

STAY SAFE IN YOUR KAYAK



Every year, over 1M people take part in kayaking and canoeing activities in the UK. A large proportion of these activities are inland but in recent years the RNLI has seen a significant increase in canoeing and kayaking incidents.

While many participants of the sport undertake plenty of training and ensure they carry all the relevant safety equipment, there has also been a significant increase in more casual users taking up kayaking. With discount shops and online stores selling cheap entry-level kit, including inflatable kayaks, people that don't have any previous experience on the water are trying out the sport for the first time.

To ensure you, your family and friends stay safe while enjoying your paddling experience, here are some basic top tips and kit recommendations.



BE PREPARED!

Top tips

Whether you're planning a casual paddle around the harbour or off on a 30km trek around rugged coastline, **all kayakers should follow these top tips:**

ALWAYS

- undertake suitable training in how to use all of your equipment
- learn and practise techniques to get back onboard your kayak should you capsize
- ensure you are a confident swimmer and can swim a minimum of 50m in the sea
- ensure your kayak and equipment are well maintained and ready for the water
 - check the hatches and drain plugs are secure and watertight, paddle is in good condition, seat is firmly attached and all gear secured safely
- wear a suitable approved personal flotation device (PFD) 
- ensure your PFD fits correctly and all the straps are done up securely and use crotch straps if fitted
- wear suitable clothing for the season and conditions, such as a suitable wetsuit/drysuit and layered clothing; wear a hat and gloves in cold conditions
- carry a suitable means of calling for help (waterproof and fully charged VHF radio or flares)
- take a drink and snack with you (energy bars, dried fruit, nuts, chocolate)
- check the weather and tides before you depart
 - be aware of wind strength, especially offshore winds (where the wind is blowing out to sea)
- paddle in a group, where possible
- tell someone back on land where you are going and what time you will be back. Advise the local Coastguard of your planned journey. Sign up to HM Coastguard's Voluntary Safety Identification Scheme (CG66).

KAYAKING IN SHELTERED WATERS

Kayaking in sheltered waters is a great way to gain experience but it's easy to underestimate the potential hazards. Even in sheltered waters such as within a harbour or within close proximity to a beach and when the wind is not blowing out to the sea, we recommend that *in addition* to following our top tips, you also ensure you carry a whistle attached by a suitable length cord to your PFD. If kayaking in surf you'll need to take extra care.

Surf kayakers

- should always wear a helmet
- uncontrolled kayakers can be harmful in the surf environment as they are heavy
- keep away from other water users, especially swimmers
- use beach zones where they are set up – look out for black and white chequered flags that indicate the area for hard surfcraft.

KAYAKING BEYOND SHELTERED WATERS

In addition to following the top tips, if you are kayaking anywhere beyond sheltered waters, take the following recommended equipment:

- whistle with a suitable cord attached to your PFD
- selection of flares including a day/night flare attached to the PFD
- VHF radio (waterproof and charged)
- fully charged mobile phone in a suitable dry bag (for back-up to the VHF)
- paddle with a leash (attached to kayak)
- split/spare paddle
- pump/hand bailer
- waterproof torch with working batteries
- waterproof GPS
- waterproof compass
- waterproof watch

- tow rope (be aware of its uses, ensure it is functional and keep within easy reach onboard)
- a trip plan, and small map and chart
- emergency knife attached to PFD
- basic first aid kit
- sunscreen/sunglasses/sun hat
- spare clothes
- exposure bag.

SIT-ON-TOP FISHING KAYAKS

- do not overload your kayak with fishing kit – it is harder than you think to right a kayak with lots of kit on deck
- navigation aids, rod holders and other equipment should never be on deck when surfing or landing in surf due to the risk that they may get lost or cause injury
- anchors should only be used in areas with little or no current – a capsized while at anchor, especially if you are not attached to the kayak, will result in you becoming separated from the kayak even when there is only a small current running.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET IN TROUBLE OR CAPSIZE

- call for help using your VHF radio, flares or both
- if you fall in, remember to keep a tight grip on the paddle – on a sit-on-top kayak this should be leashed to your kayak
- never attempt to swim to shore, always stay with your kayak; by staying with the kayak you make a larger target for the search and rescue groups to see
- even if you can only get your body partially out of the water you will significantly increase your survival time
- **while it's tempting to self-rescue by swimming for it, it has to be your very last option.**

For more information contact:

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