



Sea Kayaking in the Polar Regions

The experience of kayaking in the humbling wilderness of Antarctica and the European Arctic is guaranteed to stir your soul. Paddle between brash ice and icebergs of all shapes and sizes, or drift quietly as you unobtrusively watch wildlife, absorbing the majestic scenery that makes up our polar regions.

'Getting out amongst it' is our philosophy, and that is exactly what we do. Weather permitting, the kayaking activity is normally available anytime the other expeditioners go out.

Rather than travelling large distances, our aim is to see as much as possible. We paddle anywhere between 5-15 km / 3-9 mi. (2 to 4 hours) per outing, sometimes taking a snack and a flask of hot chocolate to enjoy on our excursion.

Each group of up to 10 kayakers (per guide) generally visit the same wildlife sites as our fellow expeditioners. However, the size of our kayaks means that we also have the opportunity to access areas that are often not accessible by Zodiacs.

When we visit the polar regions, the elements play an important role. It is important that you have an adventurous attitude and understand that our kayaking time will be affected by the weather that we experience.



Required experience

For most polar trips you should be an intermediate paddler, active in the outdoors and have an adventurous spirit. In South Georgia however, conditions can be more varied and you require solid paddling experience in ocean swell and wind.

You do not need to be an expert or know how to roll. However, you are required to be able to swim and you should have experience in a wet exit and assisted re-entry. You should also be proficient at putting on a spray skirt by yourself, and be comfortable paddling on seas with up to half a metre swell. It is also important that you gain some practice getting into a kayak from a pier, wharf, or deep shoreline where you can't step into the kayak from standing position. All this can easily be practiced at home before your trip. You should paddle in a variety of weather conditions to prepare for a polar kayaking trip.

Our guides do not offer instructional classes for beginners. Therefore, the kayaking option is unsuitable for complete novices. If your experience is limited, we'd encourage you to call us to discuss your suitability. There is often ample time to gain the required experience before you depart. We may be able to recommend a reputable sea kayak operator in your area for some tuition prior to the trip.

Please note: Your guide will assess your ability on the initial paddle, and if you have insufficient experience, he or she reserves the right to restrict your participation in rougher conditions.

Fitness requirements

You should be fit enough to paddle for up to three hours at a time, and climb between moving Zodiacs on the water. Regular exercise is recommended, as the fitter you are the more you will enjoy the experience. The more paddles you can do before the trip, the better (we recommend at least 3 to 4 outings prior to your voyage).

Number of outings per voyage

Sea kayaking is offered in place of regular shore excursions. We aim to paddle as often as possible. Depending on the voyage, we generally aim to paddle twice per day.

Group size

Our guide to paddler ratio is 1:10 and we provide an accompanying safety Zodiac.

There are 26 places available in Antarctica, 20 in South Georgia and all Arctic trips except in Franz Josef Land where the maximum is 16 kayakers.

Age limit

Kayakers should be aged 14 or over.

Our Guides

Our guides have many years of kayaking experience in the polar regions. The guide will lead the group on each excursion, explaining facts about the wildlife and other highlights as we come across them.

The Kayaks

We primarily use Point 65 plastic kayaks. 5.2 metre long doubles and Whiskey 16 Tour and Sea Cruiser singles.

Single kayak use will be at the guide's discretion, depending on group numbers and individual experience. They are all a sit-in style, well-suited for day trips and launching quickly from the ship.

The kayaks are quite stable and we generally launch in deep water from our specially-designed floating kayak platform behind the ship or alternatively, from Zodiacs. We will always paddle back to the ship in deep water unless conditions are too rough and return to the ship by Zodiac.

In the unlikely event of a capsizing, the guide will assist by righting the kayak and stabilising and pumping it out. Paddlers will re-enter with the guide's help, or with a support Zodiac. With drysuits and warm clothing underneath we are comfortable in cold water for up to half an hour. Note that the kayaks have separate compartments with bulkheads, so they float after a capsizing.

Booking allocation:

Each kayaking place is for one person only.

Passengers are unable to 'share' a kayaking place as the kayaks and drysuits are customised for each individual at the beginning of each voyage.



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Equipment included

- Rudder and skeg kayaks
- Werner paddles
- Safety equipment
- Male and female PFDs
- 15-litre dry bag
- Neoprene boots (available sizes 4-14)
- Male and female goretex dry suits with waterproof socks attached
- Pogies (insulated mittens that attach to your paddle)

What to bring

You will be required to bring your own clothing to wear under your dry suit. We recommend:

- Thermal top and bottoms: one light-weight and one medium- to heavy-weight. Wool is excellent.
- Two pairs of pile or polar fleece pants

- Gloves: two pairs, one thin and one thick. Note: pogies are provided for use during kayaking but we recommend a pair for underneath and/or on shore landings during the activity.
- Socks: Heavy thermal socks (2 pairs)
- Headgear: Warm cap, beanie or balaclava
- Swimsuit or polypropylene underwear to wear under your thermals
- Waterproof sunscreen blockout and lip balm
- Sunglasses with side visors and tie or string for attaching them to prevent loss
- Water bottle: 1 to 2 litre capacity. Note: complementary water bottles available upon request.
- Waterproof binoculars: Recommended for wildlife viewing from the kayak
- Dry bags, waterproof bag or Pelicase for camera/phone.

Wind, ice and weather

During summer the air temperature in the Antarctic Peninsula, Greenland and Spitsbergen are generally above freezing but can range from -4°C / 24.8°F to 41°F . The water temperature in the polar regions is close to freezing. Combine this with winds that sweep off the glaciers can make paddling a chilling experience. In South Georgia, paddlers may encounter stronger winds and swells than those experienced in Antarctica. Scotland, Iceland, Norwegian coasts are warmer with water temperatures around 12°C / 53.6°F .

If the weather changes during our outing we will head back to the ship and perhaps join a shore excursion. The ship's captain, expedition leader and kayak guide always maintain close contact to ensure a safe paddling experience.

Activity Surcharge

The Sea Kayaking activity is available for an additional surcharge and includes guided excursions and kayaking equipment. Please refer to our website for the cost of kayaking on your chosen voyage.



Frequently asked questions

Can I carry anything in the kayak?

Yes, you will be supplied with a drybag for extra clothing, binoculars and anything that needs to be kept dry. You should also carry a water bottle. You are also welcome to bring along your own 5-10 litre dry bag for personal items.

Can I bring my camera?

Yes, but we highly recommend a waterproof camera or phone, or a good quality waterproof case. Pelican cases are highly recommended for good cameras. The kayak hatches are not large and will not take a Pelican case larger than the 1400 model. A 1300 model is better suited if your camera and lens combination fit. However, you may be able to strap a larger case onto the back deck of the kayak.

What if the weather changes during an outing?

We do not attempt to paddle too far away from the ship - the emphasis is on experiencing the destination rather than travelling long distances. Your guide will be in constant radio contact with our ship captain and expedition leader and if we need to return to the ship a Zodiac can be called.

What about paddling through ice?

The kayaks are made with a hard plastic and are easily paddled through small patches of brash ice. We maneuver around the larger ice chunks and floes.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance including emergency evacuation coverage, is mandatory on all Aurora Expeditions voyages. You will need to ensure that your insurance policy covers you for your activity and any related equipment. An additional policy or premium may be required to ensure you have adequate coverage. Please contact Aurora Expeditions if you need assistance with your insurance policy.

Can I share my kayaking place?

No. Each kayaking place is for one person only. Passengers are unable to 'share' a kayaking place as the kayaks and dry suits are customised for each individual kayaker at the beginning of each voyage.

What if I decide I don't want to paddle?

Outings are not mandatory and you are given the opportunity to paddle as much or as little as you like. However, we do encourage you to get out as much as you can! Please note that the activity surcharge is non-refundable and we are unable to assist you if change your mind once on board. If you decide to fully cancel your participation in the activity during the voyage, please be aware that you will not be entitled to a refund - neither partially nor fully. Contact our team for further details on our kayaking cancellation policy.

For more information please contact your travel agent, or Aurora Expeditions on:

Australia and New Zealand

AU: 1800 637 688 | NZ: 0800 447 042
reservations@auroraexpeditions.com.au
auroraexpeditions.com.au

United Kingdom and Europe

Freecall: 0808 189 2005
reservations@auroraexpeditions.co.uk
aexpeditions.co.uk

United States and Canada

Freecall: + 1 833 826 5828
reservations@aurora-expeditions.com
aurora-expeditions.com