

Kayaking the Waters of the South Coast



by Vicki
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Last summer, I started giving consideration to getting into kayaking. It's something I always wanted to do but never made the time to pursue. Being a lifelong coastal Massachusetts resident, I grew up swimming, sailing and enjoying our local beaches, so I knew it would be a natural fit...I just had to get out there and try it.

I bought a used kayak, but I invested in a new paddle and most importantly, a life jacket, or personal flotation device (PFD) specific to kayaking. It zippers up the front, has mesh pockets and tends to sit above the waist allowing me freedom to paddle. Although I am an experienced swimmer and tend to kayak in flat coastal waters, I always wear it.

I invested in a pair of fingerless gloves, which allow me to have a firm grip on the paddle, and a small, dry bag for carrying a camera, cell phone (which I won't answer) and a dry towel. I wanted to keep this sport simple and not overload on accessories. Since my car has a multipurpose roof rack, I load the kayak on top and tie it down. I do need help with this maneuver, as the kayak is not overly heavy, and luckily, it is not hard to find at any public boat ramp.

The basic act of kayaking is quite simple, but sometimes the trickiest maneuver is getting in or out of the kayak gracefully (or at least successfully enough to move onto the

next step). As with any small boat, you begin by stepping into the middle of the open area, known as a cockpit, and lowering yourself in quickly, but with control. If you are launching from a beach, you will most likely be in about six inches or more of water, so some waterproof footwear makes sense.



Kayaking is a great way to get out on the water while getting some exercise.

Once you are in the kayak, position your legs forward with your feet on the brackets and your knees slightly bent. Most kayaks have “pegs,” which are adjustable. I find them very helpful because you are able to brace your lower body to give you stability for the upper body movement of paddling. Once in the kayak, you may need to push off the bottom with your paddle if it is shallow or get a manual push from someone nearby.

Paddling is a series of alternate strokes produced by dipping the blade of the double-ended paddle just under the surface of the water and pulling back. You can vary the depth and pull of each stroke, which allows you more control. You steer the kayak with your paddling by modifying paddle placement and direction of force on the water. Kayaks are pointed at both ends, so they glide nicely in response to your paddling. Since any water sport requires good judgment, stay in shallow water in a protected area while you learn the initial skills of kayaking. Better yet, take an introductory lesson.

In Westport, Osprey Sea Kayaking Adventures, located on Old County Road, offer instruction, rentals and sales in kayaking and related paddle sports for all ages and skill levels. According to their website, www.ospreyseakayak.com, their location offers the perfect spot for instruction and adventures on the water:

“Our shop in Westport, Massachusetts, is located at the Head of the East Branch of the Westport River. The Westport River is known for its picturesque rural landscape, easy paddling, and great birding (we have New England’s largest concentration of breeding ospreys). We’re located within minutes of pristine salt marshes, protected bays and harbors, and the open waters and waves of Buzzards Bay and The Elizabeth Islands.”

As a Dartmouth resident, I can launch my kayak at the Apponagansett boat ramp, where I can leave my car as long as I have a resident sticker, which costs \$35. This is a great deal to be able to access the waters north of the Padanaram bridge, which are perfect for novice kayaking. The sunsets are beautiful and on Wednesday nights in the summer, outdoor concerts at the Apponagansett beach can be enjoyed on the water, from the comfort of your kayak.



Kayaking is an inexpensive way to enjoy the natural beauty of our area.

There are numerous locations in Dartmouth that offer kayak launching and easy access to flat water. The Russells Mills

Landing on 50 Horseneck Road (just past Davol's Country Store) is open year round at no charge, and has a canoe/kayak launch for access to the Slocum River. Paskamanset Park (879 Russells Mills Road) is a newly opened park with a canoe/kayak launch, from which you can access to the Paskamansett River.

If you are looking to kayak with other people, the Lloyd Center in Dartmouth offers a great schedule of canoe and kayak trips, including equipment and tour guides. Coming up in June, they are offering a Full Moon's Women's Canoe trip and a Slocum River kayak tour. Events like these offer a great way to relax in the natural environment, meet new people, and get some exercise as well. Visit their website at www.lloydcenter.org for more information and registration.

Kayaking's popularity is growing as people realize it is a fairly inexpensive recreational pursuit that can be enjoyed close to home with friends and family. Explore your region with a kayak to gain a fresh perspective on the natural beauty the South Coast area has to offer.