

# Course Description

## Southeast Alaska Sea Kayaking

### Features Of This Course:

- Paddling route: 150 to 250 miles
- Field days: 28
- Travel in Tongass National Forest
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Opportunities for hikes in old growth forest
- Travel in both single and double kayaks
- Exploration of spectacular tidal zones
- Good fishing
- Chance of rain throughout the course
- Minimum Age: 16

### The Expedition

The wilderness of Southeast Alaska offers spectacular and varied natural history. The seas teem with life and nearby beaches offer sanctuary to many animals. Courses often see whales (orcas and humpbacks), sea lions, seals and sea otters. The Tongass National Forest harbors black bear, wolf, Sitka black tail deer, moose and river otters. Tidal flats and tide pools offer endless opportunities for discovery. The majority of the course is spent paddling along Kuiu Island. The island is one of Alaska's major migratory flyways and there is ample opportunity to observe many of America's western birds. Southeastern Alaska's waters are full of opportunities for those who like to fish. Halibut and salmon are abundant.

You'll work hard paddling with all your gear for the expedition stowed in your boat, but you'll play hard as well. You'll learn the skills you need to paddle in an ocean environment long after the end of your course. These skills begin with the basics—camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, *Leave No Trace* techniques, and sanitation—skills that are the foundation for wilderness sea kayaking.

You'll move into the sea kayaking curriculum beginning with paddle strokes, tides and ocean currents, weather, marine hazards, rescue techniques and wet exits. You may practice Eskimo rolls, but this is at the discretion of your instructors. Throughout the course, the instructors hold both formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects. As the course progresses and students become more comfortable with the environment, the teaching emphasis shifts to skills: paddling techniques, rescues, ocean hazard evaluation, and fishing. Do not be surprised to find yourself sitting in a class about local geology, tides, rain forest botany or sea mammals. Discussions on different leadership styles and expedition behavior will undoubtedly be covered as well.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a “cook” group during the course. These small groups help you disperse the impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll get lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn these new skills. Before you know it, you'll be savoring homemade pizza and cinnamon rolls—gourmet delicacies that you made from scratch on a single-burner stove.

### Student Independence

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts.

### Independent Student Group Travel

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initially travel groups, usually four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructor will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. If you demonstrate the necessary competencies in risk management, outdoor skills and teamwork to the instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you move from camp to camp. We call this daily independent student travel and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for the outcome while still



having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of the NOLS support systems.

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually four to six students each). With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day independent student-led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. Each Student Expedition group will carry an emergency communication device that will allow students to initiate an emergency response in the event of a serious emergency. In most cases students will have a personal locator beacon, but in some situations they will have a satellite phone, cell phone, radio or possibly another type of device. The instructors with a satellite phone, or additional communication capability, may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

### **Weather and Other Challenges**

Southeast Alaska has a maritime climate and the weather can be variable. The lush rainforest found along the coast is a result of the abundance of rain. You can expect it to rain or drizzle for at least half the time. Storms can prohibit paddling and ground the course at a beach for a number of days. It is a beautiful area, but can be harsh and it demands respect. There are times when you will be wet, cold and tired, but you will learn to manage these situations and maybe even smile as you do so. Sunny, warm days are a welcome exception.

Identifying and managing the hazards of wind and waves, rocky shore-lines, fog, currents, open crossings, animals, cold water, and long stretches of exposed coastline will be a constant theme in instruction. The consistent practice of risk management and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members will help make your expedition in this coastal environment healthy and enjoyable.

The group will learn to work together, and as you learn about and depend upon each other for support and comfort, strong friendships can develop. Learning to be a contributing member of an expedition can be a challenge with immense personal rewards. Leadership and teamwork will be stressed on this sea kayaking course. It takes a lot of commitment to the group and a willingness to set aside personal goals at times for an expedition to succeed. Just as you need to be physically fit you also need to be mentally ready to take on the challenges and to have a blast.

### **Personal Electronics**

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices including personal tracking devices (e.g. SPOT), while in the field. Additionally, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc). Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

### **Fitness Recommendations**

Almost continual daylight provides for long, busy days; your fitness goals should focus on being able to sustain a moderate level of exertion for hours on end rather than “quick sprint” fitness. Walking for a few hours on uneven terrain with a light to moderate backpack is a simple way to prepare.

Focus on a well-rounded routine that emphasizes stamina, endurance, flexibility and strength. Finally, don't ignore the need for balance; this will serve you well in the kayak and on slippery shorelines where the ability to quickly find your center of balance as you move from one step to the next will enable you to dance, rather than stumble your way through. For more information, please see the Physical Conditioning page of your enrollment packet.



## Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels, and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent to accomplish the following outcomes:

### Risk Management, Judgment and Decision-making

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible actions that promote the health and well being of self, others and the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the dangers in a cold water environment
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to negotiate or avoid hazards
- Formulate and put into effect an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Learn and apply the basic first aid skills appropriate to this environment
- Display an awareness of weather and sea conditions appropriate for responsible travel
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion

### Leadership

At NOLS, we define leadership as “timely, appropriate actions that guide and support your group to set and achieve realistic goals. Great leaders create an environment that inspires individuals and groups to achieve their full potential.” On this course, the emphasis will be on gaining competence as a foundation for leading in the backcountry. We expect each student’s leadership ability to grow by accomplishing the following:

- Gain an understanding of the four types of leadership: self-leadership, active followership, designated leadership and peer leadership.
- Demonstrate a willingness to grow in each of NOLS’ seven leadership skills:
  1. Gain outdoor skills competence and thus be a better leader in the outdoors.
  2. Demonstrate positive expedition behavior, by serving the goals of the group.
  3. Tolerate adversity and uncertainty with a positive attitude.
  4. Actively cultivate your self-awareness as an outdoors person and a leader.
  5. Work to understand the leader’s vision and when appropriate develop your vision as a leader. Follow through with appropriate action to help the group achieve its potential.
  6. Improve your judgment and decision-making skills, learning the pros and cons of various decision-making styles on the continuum between directive and consensus.
  7. Practice effective communication skills from active listening to public speaking.
- Gain understanding of your own signature style of leadership.

### Outdoor Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in remote areas within a framework of personal health and care of the environment and the equipment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Live comfortably in a maritime environment; learn how to dress for a variety of conditions, camp and cook with a minimum of impact
- Responsibly explore the shore and coastal forest by foot
- Practice the principles of coastal seamanship as it relates to sea kayaking
- Demonstrate a respect for and care of all personal and expedition equipment

### Environmental Studies

An integral part of every NOLS Sea Kayaking Course is to raise students’ awareness of their effect on self, others and the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Consistently perform sound minimum-impact living and travel skills by following the Leave No Trace principles; be able to extrapolate the knowledge to new environments
- Display an understanding of the history, facts and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues
- Demonstrate a basic knowledge and respect for local cultures
- Use basic observation and interpretive skills to demonstrate an understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world above and below the water



## **Sea Kayaking Skills**

The necessary skills for responsible travel by sea kayak are taught throughout the course. The teaching progression is dependent on students' abilities and the weather conditions experienced on each particular course. Objectives include the ability to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the following:
  - 1) Competent launchings and landings in various conditions.
  - 2) Paddle Signals.
  - 3) Basic paddling strokes; forward, reverse, sweep, draw, low and high braces.
  - 4) Basic self and assisted rescues.
  - 5) Coastal hazards; wind, waves, weather, currents, tides and geography of the coastline.
  - 6) Responsible group travel and use of safety equipment

## **Transfer of College Credit**

NOLS cannot guarantee that credits from courses are transferable. Transfer of credits is at the discretion of the receiving school and depends on the comparability of curricula and accreditation.

