

# Course Description

## Australia Backpacking & Sea Kayaking

### Features Of This Course

- NOLS core curriculum
- Backpacking in the Australian outback
- Paddle with marine creatures- dolphins, turtles. Maybe manta rays & dugongs.
- Hiking route approx. 130 km (85 miles)
- Snorkeling & fishing over small coral reefs
- Off-trail hiking in rugged country
- Course length of 45 days
- Possible independent student travel options
- 12-20 days kayaking, 20 -28 days hiking
- Unique Australian flora and fauna
- Minimum age: 18
- Sea Kayaking among Islands
- Average Age: 20
- Kayaking route approx. 120km (80 miles)
- Average Group Size: 12 Students: 2 Instructors

### The Expedition

The Australia Backpacking and Sea Kayaking Combination Course involves 45 days spent in the outdoors, exploring the land and sea "Down Under", developing skills in sea kayaking and hiking, meeting people, pushing yourself and having fun.

The backpacking section is set in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, one of the most rugged and remote parts of Australia. The Kimberley hiking sections travel in the gorgeous King Leopold Ranges. You will be traveling over Aboriginal and public station (ranch) lands and will have opportunities to learn about the environment, history and land management issues.

The sea kayaking section is held in the Dampier Archipelago, a group of 42 Islands in the Pilbara. Traveling by sea kayak allows us to travel and explore the marine environment and coastline of a remarkable place steeped in history both Aboriginal and European. The islands boast the most prolific rock carving sites in the world, and waters that are home to many marine creatures including turtles, dolphins, manta rays, reef sharks, dugongs and whales. These ancient lands provide ideal opportunities for teaching a wide variety of expedition skills. This is an exciting course in spectacular territory!

After one or two days of course preparations at our base in Broome, you will travel to your course area (a full day's drive). The 45 day course is divided into two sections: approximately 12-20 days of sea kayaking in the Dampier Archipelago; and 20-28 days of backpacking in the King Leopold Ranges. Your course may paddle or hike first and the length of sections may vary in response to seasonal conditions. The varied hiking terrain includes cobbled riverbeds, rocky and sparsely vegetated plateaus, spinifex, slab rock, lush vegetation and steep gorges. Water supplies range from permanent clear running water (with swimming holes) to smaller water holes – you might carry your water to camp on some days. Both regions are home to a wide variety of birds, mammals and reptiles.

Throughout the course you'll have classes and learn through experimentation. You will also be expected to teach classes to help develop your own teaching styles and presentation skills. You'll learn that the backcountry demands good judgment to ensure safety. Learning first aid skills and hazard assessment are constant themes in our instruction. You'll learn about teamwork and leadership. You'll be given opportunities to lead your peers, and you will gain valuable insights into what it takes to make an effective leader, follower and communicator. You'll learn to become proficient at Leave No Trace traveling and camping techniques, group management and traveling and navigating with map and compass. Cooking and baking with stoves, and outdoor hygiene and sanitation methods will also be addressed. You'll learn about the Australian outback environment and culture. Flora and fauna identification, astronomy and weather awareness, environmental and cultural issues, and marine biology, are all part of the experience. By the end of your course you will have gained an appreciation for wilderness expeditioning that few others will ever have.



A typical day on your course starts early (ie. 7am) to take advantage of the cooler mornings. On most days you will start the day with packing up camp and moving to your next campsite. Traveling by sea kayak as a full course or hiking in smaller groups of 4 to 6, could take a few hours to all day depending on group goals and terrain. When you arrive at your predetermined meeting point you will review the days travel, debrief student leadership teams, then set up camp. You will generally meet later for classes, discussions and activities, choose new leaders and plan for the following days activities. You will then cook dinner with your “cook group”, a group of two to three fellow students before meeting for an evening activity or retiring to bed under the stars. Most days will be full, spent breaking and setting up camp, cooking, traveling and having classes, but with guidance from your instructors you’ll be shown ways to make personal time so you can reflect on your experience.

Finally you will finish your course back in Broome, where we will clean up and re-organize and end the course.

### **Weather and other challenges**

Located 21 degrees south of the equator, this area lies just within the tropics and has the requisite tropical weather and heat. As this is ‘dry season’, you may not see cloud for weeks, but it has rained on us at that time of year. At night it can get cool inland, getting down to less than 5°C (40°F), and during the day temperatures can get hotter than 30°C (90°F). Dehydration, sunburn, heatstroke and other related heat injuries will always be a major concern especially on the sea. Learning to live and work in this environment safely and with a smile is a foundation of outdoor leadership.

Padding days can be long and committing, especially when crossing between islands. You may be exposed to strong winds and cold spray (other days will probably be gorgeous). If the winds are too strong, we will stay on shore and focus on land based activities. It is possible that we may be ‘winded in ‘ for a few days. Marine hazards include a variety of venomous creatures and you will be taught how to avoid and/or treat encounters with these.

Hiking in the ranges can be tough. Often, you’ll be off-trail hiking over rugged and rocky uneven terrain, and through sharp spinifex grass. You’ll work hard and you might ache after hours of carrying your pack. Throughout your course, you’ll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. This degree of remoteness will influence personal risk taking attitudes on the course; deliberate thought is necessary before every action. Tropical environments present a wide variety of unique challenges, ranging from hot conditions to strong storms to friendly bush-flies and mosquitoes.

Throughout the course we are in areas that are habitat for a variety of venomous snakes. These pose a very real danger but it is one that can be managed with appropriate camping and traveling practices. Living with snakes is largely a matter of common sense and understanding the animals’ habits in order to minimize the possibility of an encounter. Other rare, but potential hazards include two mosquito borne viruses, Ross River Virus and Australian Encephalitis. With the use of mosquito repellent, long clothing, mesh tents, and other avoidance techniques, you will be able to keep your exposure to mosquitoes to a minimum.

### **Behavior on the Expedition**

Each person’s values, beliefs and actions affect those of the rest of the group. Balancing these is an important part of “expedition behavior”. We want you to have a positive and safe learning environment. Therefore we expect all students to respect the values and beliefs of other members of the expedition. The best expedition members have positive attitudes, take every opportunity to apply new skills and ideas and are motivated to work hard with people they have never seen before. They care about others, put the welfare of the group before their own, and understand that an expedition succeeds when all its members complete each day safely. To help ensure a safe and healthy environment for all, we ask that people not smoke. NOLS will not tolerate harassment or the use of drugs and alcohol on any course. If you feel that your values, or beliefs, are not being respected by NOLS’ staff or students, it is essential that you speak up so any issues are addressed.

### **Student Independence**

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (that is unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This includes 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 of four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, your instructor will encourage you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you will be able to travel in student-led groups without instructors throughout the day, meeting with the whole course to camp at night. 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 three to six students each). With instructor input, student leaders will be selected and each group will 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 1 to 5 days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. The instructors may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for solo (if applicable) on this course. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities the students may chose to fast during solo. Rations will be available to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency

## **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.

If you have questions, please feel free to call the NOLS Admission office at 800-710-NOLS. You should also view the photos and videos of NOLS Australia at the following web addresses:

[http://www.nols.edu/videos/australia\\_videos.shtml](http://www.nols.edu/videos/australia_videos.shtml)

<http://www.nols.edu/courses/locations/australia/>

**As a result of this course we expect each student to become an independent wilderness traveler and leader.**

## **Course Objectives**

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels, environmental conditions, and logistics. Working within this context, it is our intent to accomplish the following objectives:

## **Risk Management**

NOLS teaches wilderness visitors to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently demonstrate an awareness of personal limits, with particular consideration for the remoteness of the expedition.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards encountered by the expedition, including, but not limited to, loose rock, high rivers, cliff edges, sun exposure and harmful animal.
- Consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards.
- Describe an emergency plan for a remote expedition.
- Demonstrate the ability to perform basic emergency procedures to support a patient until help arrives.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion.



## **Leadership Curriculum**

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, acceptance of others, and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

### **Expedition Behavior**

- Demonstrate sound expedition behavior.

### **Vision and Action**

- Be able to craft a travel plan for a multi-day small group expedition.

### **Communication**

- Effectively communicate on interpersonal and group levels.

### **Competence**

- Master the wilderness living and travel skills of this course.

### **Judgment and Decision Making**

- Demonstrate good judgment and decision-making skills.

### **Self-Awareness**

- Understand personal tendencies, strengths and weaknesses as a leader.

### **Tolerance for Adversity**

- Demonstrate a positive attitude and tolerance for adversity and uncertainty.

## **Outdoor and Backpacking Skills**

NOLS students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal health and care of the environment.

By the end of the course each student is expected to:

- Consistently practice Leave No Trace camping and traveling skills.
- Be punctual and organized.
- Do their share of camp chores.
- Cook nutritious meals and exhibit good hygiene.
- Learn to travel and navigate competently using map and compass.
- Dress appropriately for the conditions.
- Participate in the logistical preparation and cleanup necessary for an extended expedition.

## **Environmental and Cultural Awareness**

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. Additionally, this expedition offers an opportunity to experience Australian natural heritage and culture through classes, discussions, written exercises and activities. We expect each student to:

- Demonstrate an understanding and respect for the course environment.
- Show an active interest in learning about Kimberley ecosystems, and local flora and fauna.
- Display a basic knowledge of Australian culture and history.
- Discuss the history, facts, and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues.
- Reflect upon the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life.

## **Sea Kayaking Skills**

NOLS students learn sea kayak skills to effectively camp and travel in a marine environment. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate effective basic paddle strokes including forward, reverse, sweeps, ruddering, stopping, draws.
- Demonstrate effective braces and rolling.
- Demonstrate self and assisted rescues; and towing procedures.
- Demonstrate efficiently kayak packing.
- Demonstrate safe launches and landings.

