

Paddle safely

Whether you're an experienced sea kayaker or just dipping your paddle in the water for the first time, you need to know the hazards in your area and make sure you and your gear are up to the job.

» Let's start with the gear

Get advice from an experienced kayaker, an instructor, and/or a specialty kayak store before buying your boat. Choose one that's right for you, your family and the places you'll be paddling.

A huge range of kayak types are available, including recreational, sit-on-top, sea, fishing, double and specialty kayaks and canoes.

Below is a basic sea kayak and equipment:

» Wear a PFD

Wearing a lifejacket or PFD (personal flotation device) is essential when you're kayaking, as things can go wrong very quickly, even if you're not going far from shore. There are specialty PFDs available, which are more comfortable, but the essential thing is to make sure it's the right size for you and that you always wear it.



» Carry emergency comms equipment

You'll need at least two types of emergency communications equipment that will work when wet. Attach them to your PFD, so you can call for help if you end up in the water. PLBs (distress beacons) and VHF radios are highly recommended, and a cellphone in a plastic bag is useful as a back-up. Emergency flares, a whistle, signal mirror and a light are all recommended.

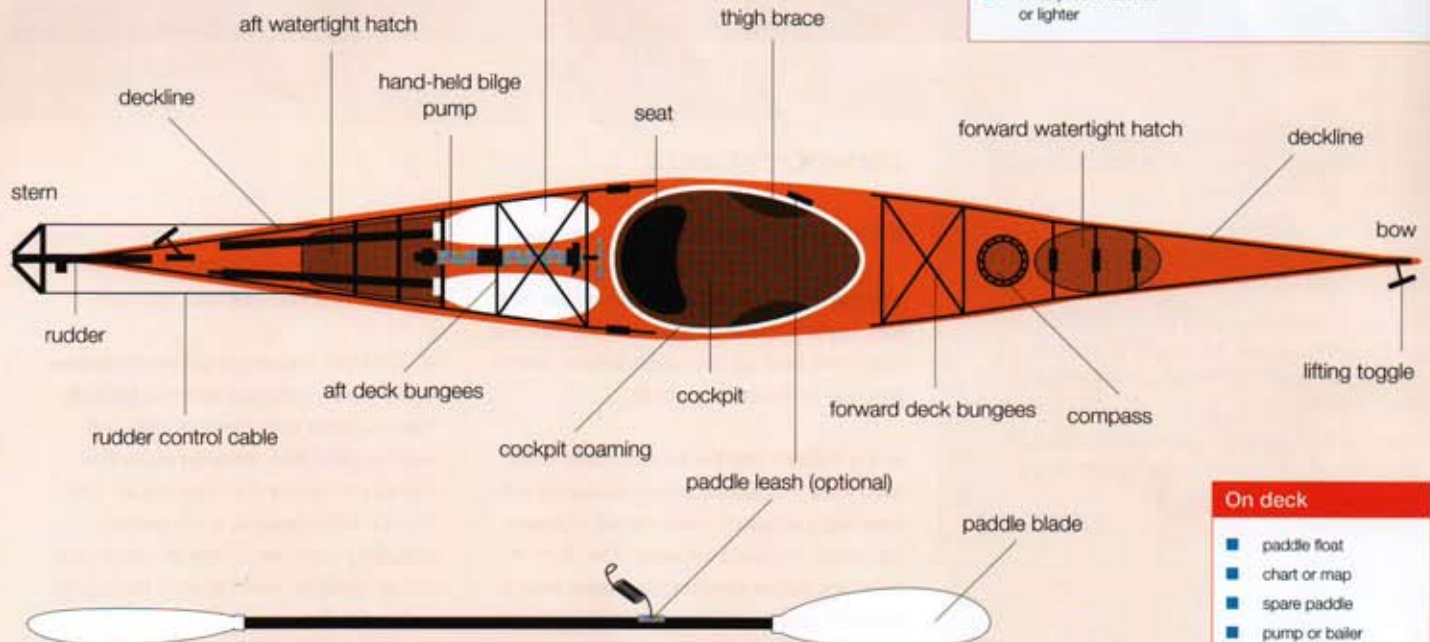
» Stay visible

Make sure you can be seen by others on the water. Kayakers have a great view of the world in front of them, but are not easily seen by others out on the water. All your gear should be as visible as possible – your kayak and clothing should be in bright (preferably contrasting) colours. A chopper guard flag and a day glow cap or hat is highly recommended.

Inside the kayak

- bulkheads, which form waterproof compartments
- footrests or rudder pedals

spare split paddle
(at least one between two paddlers)



In the boat

- waterproof torch
- emergency food
- change of warm, dry clothes in a dry bag
- thermal space blanket or survival bag
- waterproof matches or lighter
- sunscreen
- first aid kit
- survival kit
- repair kit
- water/drink bottle

On deck

- paddle float
- chart or map
- spare paddle
- pump or bailer



Stay visible out on the water. Choose a brightly coloured kayak and gear.

Use light at night. Maritime rules require you to carry a torch to prevent collision and wearing a head torch will allow your arms to be free to paddle. Mounting an all-round white light (or a red, green and white sector light) on your rear deck above head-height means you will be visible from all directions. Reflective tape attached to your kayak and paddle will reflect any ambient light.

» Dress to get wet

Kayaking is a water sport, so make sure that you're going to be warm and comfortable if you get wet. Multiple light layers of synthetic or merino clothing will give you more flexibility. In colder weather, a wetsuit, waterproof outer jacket and wetsuit booties are a good idea, along with a warm hat or balaclava. A sunhat with chin tie is useful if it's warm, along with a cord for glasses/sunglasses too.

Know your own limits and the limits of your kayak

» Before you head out

Get experience. Join a local kayak network or club, take a course, and/or paddle with a buddy or a group of experienced kayakers. There's also safety in numbers, so going out with a group is a great way to gain experience, with a designated group leader to keep an eye on everyone. Double kayaks are also a great way to learn, especially when kids are starting out. Start out in sheltered waters and stick close to shore until you gain experience.

Know the rules of the road on the water.

You need to know which international, national and local navigation bylaws apply to you, including collision prevention rules, rules about the identification of vessels (lights) and lifejacket wearing. Check your local navigation bylaws as they may have specific rules relating to kayaks, especially around lifejacket wearing and display of lights.

Let someone responsible know where you're going and when you expect to be back.

You can use a 2 minute form to record your trip intentions, along with an overdue action time. If you change your plans, let your contact person know, so an unnecessary search doesn't get set in motion.

Check the weather before you decide to head out. Check the marine weather forecast for wind speed and direction, sea state, any gale warnings, or expected changes in the weather. If you're new to kayaking or the area, talk to Coastguard or other paddlers about local conditions. Check tide times and a chart for the area you're in. **If in doubt, don't go out.**

» While you're out

Practise in sheltered waters. Make sure you know: how to operate your kayak, including adjusting pedals, so the rudder works correctly; paddle strokes (forward, backward, stop, turning and support strokes); how to operate the emergency communications equipment you carry; how to self-rescue if you capsize and how to rescue another paddler.

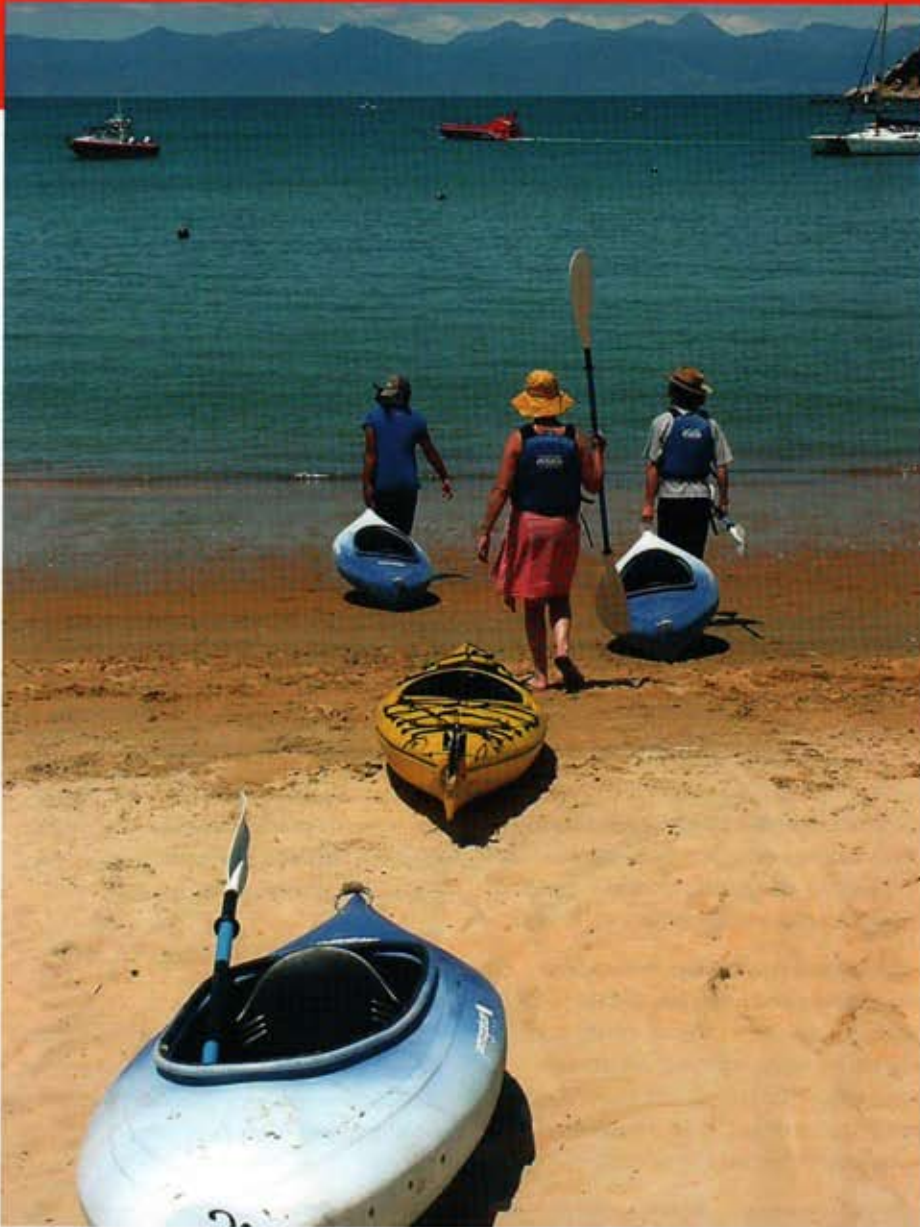
Practise capsizing in calm water and leaving the cockpit (wet exit). There are several ways of getting back into your kayak on your own, depending on your craft.

» If you capsize in open water

Stay with your kayak or canoe. It is more visible than a paddler swimming in the water and will provide more buoyancy than your PFD. Get back on/in your kayak if you can.



Kayaker with high visibility lifejacket, headgear and 'chopper' guard flag.



There are several ways of getting back onto your kayak, depending on the type of kayak, whether you have a strap or paddle float and your strength. For a sit-on-top kayak, the most common way is to position yourself alongside the kayak, reach across to the other side of the kayak and then with a kick of your legs pull yourself on, so your stomach is over the centre of the kayak, then roll yourself onto your bottom and back into your seat.

Practising capsizing and reboarding in calm conditions is the best way to ensure you will know what to do. Dressing to stay warm if you end up in the water is also a must. If you and your kayak are brightly coloured, you will also be easier to spot in the water. Wearing a lifejacket will significantly increase your chances of survival if you unexpectedly end up in the

water. See the *LOOKOUT!* safety feature "Survive in cold water" in issue 12 for survival tips and techniques.

Keep alert for other vessels. Always be on the lookout for approaching vessels. Never assume an approaching vessel has seen you. Keep clear of shipping lanes, or cross in tight formation by the shortest, most efficient route, checking clear passage. Turn away quickly if a vessel is on a collision course. High visibility and contrasting clothing and a bright hat and chopper flag will help you stay visible during the day, with lighting essential if you're paddling at night.

Stay safe and have fun. If you're comfortable out on the water, you'll enjoy your paddle more. Wear sunblock and a sunhat, warm clothing if needed, stay hydrated and carry food on board.

Other useful info:

Kayaking – Paddling to be seen

A two-page overview of what you need to know about kayak visibility (available on the MNZ website: maritimenz.govt.nz).

Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers (KASK)

KASK promotes safety standards, deals with issues of coastal access and protection, organises sea kayak forums around the country, and publishes "A Basic Guide to Safe Sea Kayaking", "The Sea Canoeist Newsletter" and "The KASK Handbook".

Kayak safety module – a quick online safety module from Coastguard Boating Education Service (CBES) to help you get acquainted with kayaking basics (available at cbes.org.nz, visit <http://learning.cbes.org.nz/>)

Sea kayak short course – CBES also offers a three-hour sea kayak course covering sea kayaks, equipment, communication, emergencies, planning, weather, rules, and navigation.

Wearing a lifejacket and carrying ways of communicating on your person will help you stay safe.



A floating grab bag with things that will help in an emergency situation could prove invaluable.