

# POLAR SEA KAYAKING

## QUESTIONS MOST OFTEN ASKED

The experience of kayaking in 24-hour daylight, with the pastel hues of the High Arctic as the backdrop, or kayaking in the humbling wilderness of Antarctica or Greenland, is guaranteed to refresh your soul. Our quiet presence makes kayaks the ideal craft for watching wildlife unobtrusively in a non-threatening manner, as we paddle beside colonies of seabirds or past seals sleeping on icefloes. In the Arctic we watch for polar bears and walrus. In the Antarctic we paddle past penguin colonies, and whales sometimes surface and blow nearby.

We will have the opportunity to paddle between ice floes, brash ice and icebergs in all shapes and sizes. Our excursions from the ship and shore landings are selected for wildlife, historical and scenic value. Cruising in our own private group of about 6 to 12 paddlers, we will generally visit the same sites as the Zodiacs but be more independent and perhaps access areas not appropriate for Zodiacs. If the ship's schedule allows, it may be possible to do an extended day trip, taking our lunch with us. Sea kayaking in the polar regions requires an adventurous attitude as the wind and elements play an important role. To make the most of your trip, it is essential that you TAKE THE TIME TO PREPARE FOR IT.

***If you intend to participate in the sea kayaking option on this voyage, please complete and return the Sea Kayaking Booking Form appended to this document as soon as possible. This is necessary to confirm your participation in the sea kayaking option. Note that spots are limited and that your experience will be checked.***

### **How experienced do you have to be?**

You should be an intermediate paddler, active in the outdoors and have an adventurous spirit. This should not be your first sea kayak experience and you should be able to get in and out of your kayak with assistance. You do not have to be an expert or know how to roll. However, you should have practiced a wet exit and assisted re-entry before the trip. This can easily be practiced in waist deep water at home, with a friend's help or under tuition. You should also recognize that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. You need to be proficient putting a spray skirt on yourself. Try to rent a kayak locally before leaving home if you feel you need some additional experience or seek out a local operator for some paddling tuition. We could be paddling in winds and will not have any opportunity to instruct before our first paddle. We often begin our first paddling session from the shore and after that will be launching directly from the ship so you should be comfortable paddling on seas that could have up to half a metre swell. Generally the water surface ranges from glassy calm to a 30-40 cm wind chop, so do practise in a variety of conditions.

***Even 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. Your guide will assess your ability on the initial paddle and, if you have insufficient experience, he or she may not allow you to participate in rougher conditions.***

### **How fit do you need to be?**

You should be fit enough to paddle for up to 3 hours, able to climb up and down a 2 metre vertical ladder and climb between moving zodiacs on the water. You should be doing some regular exercise as the fitter you are the more you will enjoy the experience. The more paddles you can do before the trip, the better.

### **How far will we paddle?**

It depends on the weather and ice conditions, but outings can range from 5 to 15 km. On average we aim to paddle about 8 km per session and at most, we could end up 8 to 10 km from the ship. We would only paddle further if the ship is moving to meet us. We will not be aiming to paddle big distances, but will seek out the most interesting things to view. We carry radios and are in constant contact with the ship.

### **How long will we paddle for?**

The paddling time varies, depending on how long the ship spends at each spot and how much the group wants to paddle. Generally the excursions will be 2 to 4 hours, but we may be out for up to 6 hours. We would expect to have 8 to 12 paddling excursions during the Arctic and Greenland voyages and between 5 to 8 in the Antarctic. We may go out twice in one day as the 24-hour daylight allows some beautiful evening paddles. If we are out for more than two hours we will endeavour to get out on shore and stretch our legs.

### **Is there a minimum age?**

Kayakers should generally be aged 16 or over at the time of the trip. We may consider children aged 14-15 in exceptional circumstances depending on their size and kayaking experience. This is entirely at the discretion of Aurora Expeditions.

### **Will there be a guide?**

Yes, there will be an experienced kayak guide on the ship who accompanies all the kayak excursions. In addition there will be a Zodiac inflatable rubber boat in radio contact nearby.

### **What kind of kayaks do we use?**

We generally use 5-5.2m Rainbow plastic doubles and have a few single kayaks. These are hard shelled, and well suited for day trips and launching quickly from the ship. The guide will paddle a single kayak but any other use of singles will be at the guides discretion and is influenced by the group numbers and individual abilities.

### **How stable are they?**

The kayaks are quite stable and for our first paddle we try and start in shallow water along shore where you can gain a feel for them. If conditions are calm we may start from the ship in deep water. We will always paddle back to the ship in deep water unless conditions are too rough.

### **Can they tip over?**

Yes – it is possible but unlikely. In the event of a capsize you would self-rescue by righting the kayak, pumping it out, and re-entering it with the guide's help, or maybe using a Zodiac for support. It only takes a few minutes to pump out enough water for the people to re-enter. With dry-suits and appropriate clothing underneath we are comfortable in cold water for up to half an hour.

### **Can the kayaks sink?**

No, the kayaks have separate compartments with bulkheads, so they can float with the cockpit full of water.

### **How do we get into the kayaks from the ship?**

Down a short ladder off the back of the ship to a Zodiac tied alongside, then into the kayak. Alternatively, if it is rough or too windy, we take the kayaks to shore by Zodiac and enter from there. You should be agile enough to climb a two metre rope ladder with assistance and practise getting into a kayak from a pier, wharf, or deep shoreline where you can't step into the boat from standing on the bottom. Your guide will stabilize the kayak while you get in.

### **Will there be surf and swell?**

We are not likely to be doing surf landings but could be paddling in a small swell or wind chop. We may paddle in up to 20 knot winds. If the winds are too strong and we can't find sheltered paddling, we will join the shore party in the Zodiacs.

### **Can I carry anything in the kayak?**

Yes, you will be supplied with a dry-bag for extra clothing, binoculars and anything you want to keep waterproof. You should also carry a water bottle. You are welcome to bring along your own 5-10 litre dry bag for personal things.

### **Can I bring my camera?**

Yes, but we highly recommend a waterproof or disposable camera, or waterproof housing for use in the kayak. Onshore you are welcome to use an SLR camera but will need to provide a waterproof case or bag for it. Pelican cases are highly recommended for good cameras, but a small dry-bag with a t-shirt wrapped around the camera may suffice for smaller 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 Pelican case onto the back deck of the kayak.

### **Do we need any special clothing and equipment?**

Yes, we use dry-suits for safety. These are included in the surcharge you pay for kayaking. PLEASE NOTE: the suits will be inspected when they are dispensed and also when they are returned. If the seals are damaged through lack of care you may be charged for repairs.

(The drysuits are expensive and the latex and neoprene seals which keep them dry are fragile and must be treated sensibly and carefully. If the seals are badly damaged we often have to bring the suits back to Australia for repair so PLEASE PAY ATTENTION WHEN YOU ARE SHOWN HOW TO USE YOUR DRY SUIT. Typically suits can be damaged by shoving sharp fingernails, watches or rings through the seal). Additional clothing suggestions are given in our kayak clothing and equipment list at the end of this document. All kayaking and safety equipment is supplied. Please pay particular attention to the footwear suggestions.

### **How big is the group?**

We limit the group size to a maximum of ten to twelve kayakers plus your guide.

### **What if it gets too windy while we're paddling or if I get tired?**

We will be in radio contact with the ship and Zodiacs. If the weather appears to be changing we will head back to the ship or to shore if need be. The ship's captain, expedition leader and kayak guide will all maintain close contact to ensure a safe paddling experience. If someone needs to return to the ship a Zodiac can be called.

### **What about paddling through ice?**

The kayaks are made with a hard HTP blow-molded plastic and are easily paddled through small patches of brash ice. However, we maneuver around the larger ice chunks and floes.

### **How do we get back aboard the ship?**

In calm seas we generally unload from the kayaks to a Zodiac that is tied to the back of the ship. We then climb a 2 metre rope ladder to the deck of the ship where you are assisted on board. In adverse conditions we may load into Zodiacs from shore and transport the kayaks back to the ship.

### **Is the wildlife dangerous?**

**Arctic** - While on shore, all passengers must be accompanied by a staff member carrying a rifle. Several staff members carry flare guns and rifles that will be used to discourage polar bears if necessary. While paddling we maintain a safe distance from bears and walrus.

**Antarctic** - The larger marine wildlife consists of penguins, seals and whales. Occasionally we may spot leopard seals or killer whales but, in our experience, they generally steer clear of our kayaking groups. Nesting skuas on land can be aggressive in defending their eggs and chicks so it is wise to give them a wide berth.

## POLAR KAYAKING CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

In addition to the general voyage clothing list, we have specific clothing requirements for paddling in Polar Regions. Read both lists carefully and if you have any questions please contact us. As we may not paddle every day you also need to be prepared for shore landings by Zodiac.

The air temperatures in the **Antarctic Peninsula** in summer months are generally above freezing but can range from  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . However the water is close to freezing and combined with winds which sweep off the glaciers, the wind chill while paddling can be much cooler. We will make use of sheltered areas to paddle in and dress accordingly but it is best to be prepared for heavy weather so please read these suggestions carefully.

Arctic conditions are a little warmer, with **Spitsbergen** and **Greenland** summer air temperatures of  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+10^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and water temperatures ranging from 0 to  $+5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . We generally paddle in sheltered fjords, but it is best to be prepared for deteriorating conditions at any time.

### Kayaking

All kayaking equipment will be provided: paddles, life jackets, kayaks, dry suits, safety gear and pogies (insulated mitts that attach to your paddle and help keep your hands warm). We supply one 20 litre dry bag for spare clothing while you are paddling.

We use stable plastic double kayaks sturdy enough to cope with the small patches of ice we sometimes encounter. We will customise them aboard ship and familiarise ourselves with them before paddling. The kayaks have bulkheads and waterproof hatches and we supply dry bags to carry some spare clothing on our day trips.

**Dry bags** can be used for cameras but salt water is absolutely final in destroying cameras and lenses. If you wish to guarantee your camera will be 100% waterproof we recommend a Pelican case. These have a rubber seal and can be kept on the deck of the kayak providing they are not too large. The pelican 1400 case is about the largest size that will easily stow on the kayak but a 1300 size is more suited. Throwaway waterproof cameras or more expensive waterproof cameras are a good option for paddling and then you can keep your better camera stored in a dry bag or Pelican case until on shore. Zip lock bags are not a good alternative for SLR cameras but may suffice for small point-and-shoot cameras if they are double bagged.

**Drysuits** are provided and included in your sea kayak surcharge. They are a waterproof nylon suit with snug latex rubber seals on your wrists and neck and integrated dry sock. These keep you dry in the unlikely event of a capsizing and with thermal underwear worn underneath, maintain your body warmth more effectively than a wetsuit. They are also more comfortable to paddle in than a wetsuit. We require details of your height and weight to ensure correct sizing.

**Note:** the suits will be inspected when they are dispensed and also when they are returned. If the seals are damaged through lack of care you may be charged for repairs.

(The drysuits are expensive and the latex and neoprene seals which keep them dry are fragile and must be treated sensibly and carefully. If the seals are badly damaged we often have to bring the suits back to Australia for repair so PLEASE PAY ATTENTION WHEN YOU ARE SHOWN HOW TO USE YOUR DRY SUIT.

**Note:** normal kayaking spray jackets are not acceptable as they do not keep you dry in the event of a capsizing. However a two-piece drysuit is fine and you are welcome to bring your own suit if you have one. Ski clothing outerwear is not suitable for paddling.

**Thermal underwear** - medium to heavyweight usually suffices for the bottoms (or pile pants) but heavyweight is recommended for the top (synthetic or wool thermals are preferred for paddling and cotton is not suitable) - two pairs are recommended. A pile vest is useful for maintaining torso warmth without overheating, but is optional. Layering is a good idea.

If you suffer from the cold you may choose to wear a lightweight thermal top with a heavier weight thermal on top of that. A heavy pile jacket (200 or 300 wt) is too warm underneath a dry suit top but a light pile jacket (100 wt) may suit on a cold day. You may opt for light pile pants instead of the thermal bottoms but a thermal bottom and pile pants combination is probably too warm and bulky for paddling.

**Socks** - Heavy thermal socks (2 pairs). The hull of the kayak gets quite cold and you need heavier socks than for walking, as your feet move around less. You should bring several spare socks in case your feet get wet or cold. Most of our dry suits have an integral dry sock that covers your feet.

**Footwear** – We have a supply of Chota close fitting waterproof, neoprene boots that come up to your knees, on the ship. These have a low profile and are well suited while in the kayak but are not very comfortable for walking at length on shore. Because most of our dry suits now have a waterproof sock attached you can wear a normal wetsuit boot while paddling by putting your wool sock on underneath the dry suit. We also have a supply of regular gumboots onboard ship or you can bring your own. We will need to carry spare socks and other footwear if you spend much time on shore as walking in neoprene boots is not very comfortable. . Please note your foot size on the experience form. If you are buying gumboots remember to get them one size larger than normal so you can fit an extra pair of socks or felt liner or felt inner-sole inside.

**\*Special Note:** if you have particularly large calves the Chota boots which fit snugly may not fit so you would be advised to buy a pair of ankle high wetsuit boots that fit you.

**Headgear** - Warm cap, beanie or balaclava. One that covers your ears is preferable and if it is wool, a tight weave is better in the wind. If you do not use a balaclava then a scarf or neck gaiter is useful to keep the cold off your neck. It is good to have two hats so if one gets wet while paddling you have a spare. It is very important you have sun protection (+30) for your face. A hat with a brim that will fit on top of your beanie is a good idea. Make sure it has some tie-down strings. If we were to paddle in rainy conditions a waterproof hat is useful.

**Hands** –We supply pogies (a waterproof paddling mitt). Heavy latex rubber kitchen gloves are useful to bring. A lightweight pair of polypropylene gloves underneath is ideal in conjunction with the rubber gloves or with the pogies. These can be kept in a dry bag while paddling. Wetsuit gloves can be used while paddling but are not as useful on shore, and the pogies are warmer. Bring additional mitts as per the regular clothing list. You will likely get any gloves that you use paddling wet – so bring an extra pair of thin polypropylene gloves. Ski gloves are not suited for paddling as they are too bulky but are fine for when you are ashore.

**Swimsuit** - or polypropylene underwear for under your thermals.

**Waterproof sunscreen blockout and lip balm** - A skin moisturiser is useful in the evenings as the wind and dry air can cause chapped skin quite quickly.

**Sunglasses** with side visors and tie or string for attaching them to prevent loss.

**Water bottle** – 1-2 litre

**Waterproof binoculars** – highly recommended for wildlife viewing from the kayak.

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## SEA KAYAKING BOOKING FORM

To ensure you have safe, enjoyable paddles you should be of an intermediate standard and have an adventurous attitude. This should not be your first sea kayaking experience. You do not need to be an expert. However, you should have practiced a wet exit and assisted re-entry before the trip, and recognize that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. We have little opportunity for practise before we commence paddling, so we highly recommend that you have done some kayaking recently and in a variety of conditions.

**Please read our Q&A for more information on the kayaking.**

Please note that on your initial paddle your guide will assess your ability and, if you have insufficient experience, they may not allow you to participate in rougher conditions. Even 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 fill in this booking form accurately and return it to us as soon as possible. This is required to confirm your spot. \*\***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Trip Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### SEA KAYAKING EXPERIENCE

1. Have you paddled sea kayaks? \_\_\_\_\_ Whitewater kayaks? \_\_\_\_\_ Surf ski? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you paddled in single kayaks? \_\_\_\_\_ Double kayaks? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you have your own sea kayak? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Would you call yourself a: Beginner \_\_\_\_\_ Intermediate \_\_\_\_\_ Expert \_\_\_\_\_

5. Have you done any sea kayak courses? Please list them outlining when and where.

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6. Have you paddled in open ocean waters - ie. outside harbours and estuaries? Where? Please indicate what type of paddling you have done.

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7. Have you paddled in windy conditions ie. 10-15 knot winds or more? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you paddled in cold water before?

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9. How many times (approximately) have you paddled in the last two years?

0 times \_\_\_\_\_ 1-5 times \_\_\_\_\_ 6-20 times \_\_\_\_\_ 20 times \_\_\_\_\_

**Please let us know your height and weight and foot size so we may ensure the kayaks are appropriate, and to properly fit your Polar drysuits.**

Height: \_\_\_\_\_ Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ Foot Size \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_