

San Juan Island Kayaking General Information

A warm “hello” and thanks for joining us on one of our tours! The following information should help answer any questions you may have about the San Juan Islands, sea kayaking or your Outdoor Odysseys tour.

The San Juans generally have great summer weather. In fact, the islands average 50% less precipitation than Seattle. This is due to the rain shadow effect of the Olympic Mountains to the south and west. Prickly pear cactus grows on several islands in the archipelago - a true testimonial to the dryness of the region! During summer months, expect moderate to warm daytime temperatures in the upper 60's and 70's with evening temperatures in the 50's.



The San Juan Islands offer relatively easy access to some fascinating marine mammals. Orca whales are consistently found from late May through October feeding on the migrating salmon passing through Haro Strait. The orcas consist of 3 pods and number over 86 individually identified whales. We also may have opportunities to observe Minke whales, harbor seals, Dall's porpoise and river otter. Our trip is designed to lead us into close encounters with wildlife without disturbing them in their natural environment.

In terms of birds, the archipelago hosts over 290 different species of birds, which use the islands and surrounding habitat for breeding, nesting, and fall and winter migrations. The San Juans also host one of the largest bald eagle nesting populations in the continental United States.

Our trip is designed to provide participants with numerous “hands-on” opportunities to observe, study and learn more about the fascinating marine mammals and birds that are found in the Salish Sea ecosystem. Quiet and unobtrusive, double kayaks provide the perfect means for exploring the myriad forms of sea life we encounter.

To increase your appreciation of the wildlife and birds that you will be encountering, your naturalist/guide will share his/her knowledge throughout the trip. These informal sessions will focus on a variety of topics such as basic bird identification, marine mammal biology and behavior as well as basic kayak navigation, how to negotiate tides and currents, etc. We will also practice responsible wilderness ethics such as leaving a site cleaner than when we arrived.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS: Surrounded by the crystal-green waters of Puget Sound, the San Juan Islands are composed of approximately 350 rocks and islands. The clear waters, rocky shorelines, strong currents and diverse intertidal zones provide a spectacular environment for viewing wildlife as well as providing “hands-on” opportunities for learning how to sea kayak. Typical vegetation includes a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees including the striking red barked Madrona. The shoreline varies from basaltic rock to mixed sand and gravel

beaches. Bounded by the Cascade mountain range and snowcapped Mt. Baker to the east and the Olympic range to the south, the San Juans are an idyllic sea-kayaking destination.

If we experience poor weather the guides may adjust the paddling route to a more sheltered one or may choose to remain in a protected area until the front passes through. If we get some precipitation on our tour (hey, after all, this is the Northwest!) I think you'll find that paddling a kayak in the rain can be fun and dryer than you think. Your lower body is protected from the elements because you are sitting in the enclosed cockpit of the kayak. The upper half is covered with both a spray skirt and life jacket affording extra protection from the waist up. You'll keep warm because you're working your arm and shoulder muscles as you paddle.



Paddling in a saltwater environment allows one to respond to the timeless pull of tide and current. These currents can be strong and complex in one area and weak in others. The changing currents are part of the fun and adventure of paddling! Your guides will discuss how to predict and effectively paddle through tidal currents. The water temperatures range from 45 to 52 degrees.

Camping areas in the San Juans consist of marine state parks and local county parks. The campsites all have outhouses, fire pits and picnic tables. Potable water is available on some but not all of the islands we camp on. No shower facilities are available.

When is the best time to paddle in the San Juan's? June and early July are generally the best months for seeing Orca whales. The islands tend to be less crowded but offer a greater probability of getting rain (or "heavy mist" as we locals sometimes say.) Mid-July and August generally offer the best weather but campsites can be more crowded and powerboat traffic is at its peak.

The advantage of paddling in September is that there are fewer crowds and the weather is usually good but the days are shorter. Migratory birds are starting to come in, making it nice for birding. Orcas and bald eagles may not be as plentiful in September, although that equation can be highly variable.

On one of our trips in late September the L pod (the largest of the three resident pods of orcas)



swam within 30 yards the group. Then, during the middle of all this excitement a mature bald eagle flew overhead. Exciting stuff! Needless to say our guests loved it . . . Whichever month you choose to paddle in the San Juans you can be assured of having a great paddling experience.

SAFETY /PADDLING CONSIDERATIONS: For obvious reasons, safety considerations are an important part of any organized trip. All our guides have current Standard and CPR training and carry an expedition level First Aid kit. We also carry

towropes and either VHF radios or cell phones for emergency use.

Sea kayaks are stable and easy to paddle. It is a sport that any person with a respect for nature and a spirit of adventure can enjoy. Anyone reasonably fit and in good health will enjoy paddling. Beginners are welcome on all our outings. We use double kayaks on our tours because they are safer and more stable. They are also more efficient than single kayaks because two people are working and paddling together.

Our pace will vary depending on daily weather, tidal and current conditions. Most of the time a relaxed paddling cadence will suffice with an occasional need for strenuous paddling due to strong wind or current conditions. We average 7-9 miles a day - a nice pace allowing for exploring and time for a leisurely lunch.

THE QUALITY OF YOUR GUIDES PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE ENJOYMENT OF YOUR PADDLING EXPERIENCE

Outdoor Odysseys feels very strongly that the quality and maturity of the guides on your trip is an important factor in determining the overall fun and enjoyment of your San Juan vacation. We place a premium on hiring guides that are personable, mature and experienced. In a business that has a high turn-over rate (outdoor guides tend to be kinda' independent and free spirited) we have been very fortunate to keep and retain our guides.

In terms of skills, we look for guides that are safety oriented, knowledgeable regarding all aspects of kayaking, have an interest and background in natural history and are experienced in the outdoors. Most importantly, they genuinely like and enjoy people!

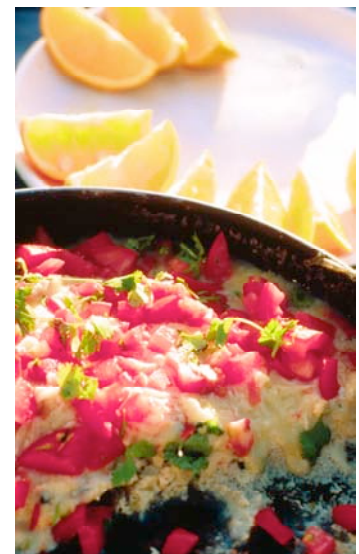
OUTDOOR ODYSSEYS PROVIDES: All camp arrangements, all meals on the 2, 3 and 5 day tours, drinks such as coffee and bottled wines, sea kayaks and associated gear, group camp and kitchen equipment, tents, safety equipment, expert guiding and leadership.

NOT INCLUDED: Personal camping gear, sleeping bag and pad, gratuities to guides (strictly optional), or insurance of any kind. If you want to bring your own tent you are certainly welcome to do so. If you wish, you're welcome to bring a special snack to share with the group.

CAMARADERIE AND "FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD..."

The sport of sea kayaking is a really fun, active way to experience the numerous forested islets of the San Juan archipelago. And at the end of an exciting day of exploring and viewing wildlife you can look forward to an evening of good company and superbly prepared food. Outdoor Odysseys goes to great lengths to provide tasteful meals that will enhance your enjoyment of the wilderness experience. What could be better in life than watching the sunset from your campsite while savoring a glass of wine and enjoying delicious Northwest cuisine!

One of our trademark specialties is Dutch oven cookery. (None of our guests are thrilled with the prospect of lugging a heavy Dutch



oven around in their kayak until they see what great tasting food these puppies are capable of producing!) We use Dutch ovens for savory main dishes as well as for creating delicious desserts. If you are unfamiliar with “D.O.” cookery, you’ll become a believer after this trip! With the exception of some seafood or poultry, all our meals are vegetarian.

Our dinner fare includes smoked salmon pesto fettuccine, a spicy vegetarian Thai dish consisting of lightly sautéed red and yellow peppers mushrooms and snap peas, freshly made spinach lasagna and a layered Mexican casserole that contains cheese, tortillas, refried beans, chilies and mole sauce. Desserts include berry/apple crisp, gingerbread topped with freshly made whipped cream and rich fudge brownies.

Examples of our lunches include burritos, tabouli, humus and bagels w. cream cheese replete with our special spread. Lunches always include plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit as well as cookies or some other Northwest treats such as Almond Roca.

Breakfasts are served with fresh fruit and include French toast, blueberry or apple pancakes, hot cereal and muesli. Our breakfasts are always washed down with good cups of steaming hot coffee or tea. (Having our roots in Seattle, “Home of Starbucks Coffee” makes us especially sensitive to a good cup o’ java.

TRIP LOGISTICS OR "HOW THE HECK DO WE GET TO THE SAN JUANS?"

TRANSPORTATION: Friday Harbor, located on San Juan Island, is accessible from Seattle, Vancouver or Victoria by air, tour boats, Airporter Van to Anacortes and via the Washington State ferries. If you’re flying on one of the small island carriers it is critical that you book flights far in advance to assure room.

If you are driving or coming by bus you’ll need to get to the Anacortes Ferry Terminal. There is no reservation system for the ferries so if you plan on taking your vehicle onto the island make sure you get there 2-3 hours in advance. A much better alternative is to park your car and walk on to the ferry, saving both time and money. If you are a foot passenger make sure you allow a good hour to buy your ticket, park your car and carry your gear to the passenger departure area.

If you are flying in to the Seattle-Tacoma (Sea-Tac) Airport many of our guests take advantage of the **Sea-Tac to Anacortes Airporter Van**. It will take you right to the Anacortes ferry landing from the airport. At the ferry terminal simply buy a walk-on ticket (cheap!) and take the ferry to Friday Harbor on San Juan Island. If you’ve booked hotel reservations at one of the places we recommend once you get off the ferry your lodging is less than a block away. Is this easy or what! You may also take a passenger-only boat from Seattle (see the Victoria Clipper information below) with daily runs from Seattle to Friday Harbor.

HELPFUL TRAVEL INFORMATION:

1. [Airporter Van](#) - 800-448-8443 - Shuttle service between the Anacortes ferry terminal and Sea-Tac airport in Seattle
2. [Kenmore Air](#) - 800-543-9595 - Floatplanes to Friday Harbor)
3. [Victoria Clipper](#) - 800-888-2535 - One departure daily from Seattle

4. [Washington State Ferries](#) - 800-843-3779 or 206-464-6400 - The only way to get your vehicle to the islands. The ferry route goes from Anacortes to Friday Harbor and then on to Sydney, BC on Vancouver Island

HELPFUL LODGING INFORMATION:

The first three bed and breakfasts listed are located in Friday Harbor and are all within 3 blocks of the ferry landing. For additional lodging options on San Juan Island visit the [San Juan Visitors Bureau](#).

1. [Bird Rock Hotel of Friday Harbor](#) – 800-793-4756
2. [Harrison House](#) - 800-407-7933
3. [Tucker House](#) – 800-965-0123

Camping & Hostel Options:

1. [Wayfarer's Rest Hostel](#) - 360-378-6428 - Clean shared and private rooms within walking distance of the ferry.
2. [San Juan County Park](#) - 360-378-2992 - Campsites located on the west side of San Juan Island on the water where we launch most of our trips. Shuttle from Friday Harbor available.
3. [Lakedale Resort](#) - 800-617-2267 - Privately owned campground with showers and small store. Shuttle available from town.

IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS regarding the trip don't hesitate to give us a call or drop us a line...



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October to the end of May - **206-361-0717**
June through September - **360-378-3533**
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2009 recipient of National Geographic Adventure Travel Magazine's "200 Best Adventure Travel" Outfitter's Award. We have been offering quality, hand-crafted kayak tours for 24 years featuring personable guides, small groups and the gentle art of Dutch oven cookery on our overnight tours.

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