

RUSSIAN FAR EAST SEA KAYAKING

QUESTIONS MOST OFTEN ASKED

Kayaking in the Russian Far East is guaranteed to be an expedition and adventure of discovery. It is remote, the weather is unpredictable, the landscapes are spectacular, and the wildlife is abundant. Our ship acts as a floating base camp for kayak excursions and shore landings, selected for their cultural, wildlife 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. The coastlines offer a maze of sea kayaking opportunities from tiny island outcrops to towering bird cliffs or volcanic craters. Perfect sanctuaries for nesting seabirds; fish and marine mammals. Each day brings new challenges and wondrous experiences to our small band of kayakers.

Sea kayaking among the remote corners of the Kuril Islands, Kamchatka Peninsula, Commander Islands, Chukotka, Bering Strait and Wrangel Island requires an adventurous attitude as the wind, elements and ocean currents 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 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 without 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 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, fog, or current 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 a 1 metre swell with variable surface conditions, 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 and able to 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 on Wrangel Is), 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 9 to 14 paddling excursions during the Russian Far East voyages. We may go out twice in one day as the long 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 16-17 ft. Prijon plastic double and single kayaks. These are hard shelled, 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 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 we 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 or dry tops 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?

Generally the kayaks will taken off the ship on a zodiac and secured behind the ship. We then use a 2nd zodiac which can be tied alongside and enable us to transfer to our kayaks.

Will there be surf and swell?

We may have small surf landings but will not be landing in any rough conditions as we can always return to the ship. We could be paddling in some swell, wind chop or currents, however. We can

paddle in up to 15-20 knot winds but 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?

The water temperatures vary significantly as you move further north up into Bering Strait. For most of the paddling on the Kuril Islands and Kamchatka Peninsula a good kayaking Sprayjacket is generally sufficient. Waterproof trousers would be recommended on a rainy day. However a hiking rain jacket is not appropriate and occasionally on a cold day a dry suit might be more comfortable. For that reason we have dry-suits on board for safety. These are included in the surcharge you pay for kayaking. And will be mandatory on the Wrangel Island trip.

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 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 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.

How do we get back aboard the ship?

In calm seas we generally unload from the kayaks to a Zodiac and then transfer to the gangway. In adverse conditions we may load into Zodiacs from shore and transport the kayaks back to the ship.

Is the wildlife dangerous?

Brown bears are seen frequently in the Kurils and Kamchatka and polar bears on Wrangel Island so it is important to follow your guides instructions on shore. While paddling we maintain a safe distance from bears and walrus.

RUSSIAN FAR EAST- KAYAKING CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

In addition to the general voyage clothing list, we have specific clothing requirements for paddling in the Russian Far East. Read both lists carefully and if you have any questions please contact us. Of course, you also need to be prepared for shore excursions by Zodiac.

The air temperatures in summer months can range from 0°C to 20°C. We generally paddle in sheltered areas, but it is best to be prepared for deteriorating conditions at any time, and the wind chill while paddling can be cool. The water temperatures can range from 0 to +4°C around Wrangel but 7-12°C in the Kurils and Kamchatka. Please read these suggestions carefully.

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. We will customise them aboard ship and familiarise ourselves with them before paddling. The kayaks have bulkheads and waterproof hatches where you can carry 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 capsize 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: a normal kayaking spray jacket is recommended to bring for both the Kuril or Kamchatka trips as the water is warmer and many of the days are warm enough that we don't require a drysuit. Ski clothing is not suitable for paddling. Dry suits will be used for the Wrangel trip.

Thermal underwear - medium weight usually suffices for the bottoms and 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 for paddling.

Socks - Heavy thermal socks (2 pairs). The hull of the kayak gets quite cool 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. The dry suit (if worn) does not cover your feet.

Footwear – If you have your own neoprene wetsuit boots, they are a good option and easy to exchange for hiking boots or walking shoes on shore in the Kuril Islands and Kamchatka. We have some regular gumboots onboard ship or you can bring your own. You will need to carry spare socks and other footwear if you spend much time on shore as your feet may get wet. Please note your foot size on the experience form. *Note: We will have some waterproof socks for the Wrangel Island trip where the water is colder.

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. 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) for cold days. 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 on very cold days. 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 glove are not suited for paddling as they are too bulky but are fine for when you are ashore on the Wrangel trip.

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 litres

Waterproof binoculars – you may wish to bring these for wildlife viewing from the kayak.

AB 27/9/08

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 or know how to roll. 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, he or she 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.

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

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

8. Have you paddled in cold water before?

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, 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 _____